



WESTSIDE  
CHILDREN'S  
CENTER

'14  
—  
'15

# ANNUAL REPORT

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Heather Carrigan  
CEO

“The stories illustrate the humanity of WCC families and the length and depth of our staff’s involvement with them, something numbers just can’t quite capture.”

Why do we tell stories?

Each year, we share with you the stories of some of the children and families who make up our vibrant WCC community. The stories are a celebration of families’ hard work, and a testament to their strengths, struggles, and triumphs. The majority of the children we serve come from families living in deep poverty; for others, it’s suffering abuse or neglect that delivers them into WCC’s charge. Recognition of their tenacity is well-deserved, when low-income children start kindergarten 14 months behind and one in seven children in California is reported to child protective services before age 5. Their strength is reinforced by the dedication and expertise of our staff. Over the past year, our passionate, highly-trained child development and child welfare staff delivered 193,906 hours of high-quality early education, more than 4,000 hours of intensive child protective services, and hundreds of hours of services to promote families’ health and well-being. I’m deeply grateful for each

and every hour and the stories they make possible.

We share these stories to give you, our supporters, a sense of the enormity of what your contributions can do for a child’s or a family’s trajectory. The stories illustrate the humanity of WCC families and the length and depth of our staff’s involvement with them, something numbers just can’t quite capture. It’s the Home Educator who works with a pregnant mom until her child is off to preschool, providing year-round education, nutrition, and family engagement activities that emphasize literacy, social-emotional competency, and physical and mental well-being. It’s the In-Home Outreach Counselor stepping in and stepping up for a family who has come in contact with child protective services and is weathering one of the most difficult times of their life. It’s the social worker who puts in tireless hours partnering with a loving foster-adoptive family to ensure one more child has the safe, nurturing home he needs to thrive.

Of course, numbers are also crucial. We collect and employ data to rigorously examine and inform our interventions. This year, for example, we provided 831 developmental screenings, going above and beyond contract requirements to screen children in all of our programs in all developmental domains, including social-emotional growth. We worked with researchers at Children’s Hospital Los Angeles to analyze the data, and found that, had we not provided this additional layer of screening in the social-emotional domain – a lynchpin of short- and long-term success in school and life – the initial screening would have missed nearly 50 percent of children who needed more social-emotional support. WCC staff are now using these findings to tailor their curricula and interventions to boost social-emotional skill development. Numbers are also important in providing context for the stories we share. As you’ll read in our Child Well-Being Index (pages 10-11), inspired by Harper’s Index, children remain society’s most vulnerable population. We ask our readers to remember these difficult-to-fathom facts to frame the journeys of the smiling children and families we introduce to you each year.

Finally, we tell stories because the importance of the storytelling

process itself is often underappreciated. When we tell stories about adverse experiences or challenges we’ve faced, we chip away at their power and loosen their grip on us. For the families we work with, storytelling can be therapeutic, a way to buffer the trauma they and their children have endured, and an opportunity to take pride in what they’ve overcome. For staff, storytelling re-inscribes what their work is worth. By sharing stories with colleagues, and with you, WCC staff are recognized for their devotion

“We are members of a national community, for example, where 22 percent of children live in poverty.”

and expertise, along with being afforded another opportunity to reflect on what their work means to them.

In truth, storytelling is important to us all. We make meaning of ourselves and our experiences by telling stories. We build connections between our own lives and the lives of those we’re not likely to come across, allowing us to develop empathy for people whose experiences might otherwise seem foreign. We realize how and where we fit into a

greater context. We are members of a national community, for example, where 22 percent of children live in poverty, and where 30 percent of children under 5 living in underserved areas have untreated cavities — see our Child Well-Being Index for the potential devastating consequences of something so seemingly mundane. We are also members of a community where a mother like Tanya, whose story we share on pages 6-7, can find the support and strength to end an abusive relationship and become the parent she knows she can be, or where a child like Abraham (pages 4-5) has ready access to developmental screenings, services, and advocacy, in addition to the highest-quality early education.

We are knitted together by the stories we tell. When we share stories, we deepen our connections, until we are so tightly woven, it’s impossible to rise without bringing everyone with along.

Heather Carrigan





“ Without regular screenings, roughly 70 percent of children who are struggling developmentally will not be identified before age 5. ”

**Yanira met Abraham when he was a silly, smiley 8-month-old.**

His parents, Delmi and Rudy, had enrolled the family in WCC’s home-based Early Head Start (EHS) program, where once a week, a Home Educator would turn their living room, backyard, or wherever they were learning that day into a classroom.

As the family’s teacher and main source of support, Yanira would bring learning games for Abraham plus tools and lessons for Delmi and Rudy to help support Abraham’s growth. Her first task, though, was to assess Abraham’s development to make sure he was on track.

Without regular screenings, roughly 70 percent of children who are struggling developmentally will not be identified before age 5. Early intervention for these children is critical; by age 17, one in six children across the country will have one or more developmental disability. In Yanira’s assessment of Abraham, she found he was struggling with gross motor development – he couldn’t pull himself up to stand like other kids his age. Left unaddressed, the delay could prevent him from being able to navigate his environment and develop other lifelong skills. She suggested WCC’s Disabilities Coordinator evaluate him to determine whether he’d need extra services to support his growth.

Abraham’s parents turned down the offer. The stigma around developmental disabilities, plus a common lack of knowledge about child development, often keeps parents from agreeing to evaluations or services for their kids. Yanira, on the other hand, knew how important it was to intervene early. She pushed on with teaching Rudy and Delmi about child development, and began incorporating more activities to

promote Abraham’s ability to move. He loved spinning the wheels on his stroller, so Yanira turned it upside down to prompt him to pull himself up. She taught Delmi to massage Abraham’s legs and encouraged the family to take walks in the park. Soon, Abraham was pulling himself up, then taking wobbly steps, and eventually walking on his own.

While Abraham had caught up to his peers in physical movement, he still didn’t speak as much as other 13-month-olds. He was also aggressive toward them; physical communication was the only way he could express himself. This time, when Yanira recommended an evaluation, Delmi and Rudy had no second thoughts. Months of learning about child development and watching Abraham’s progress told them it was critical to act now.

“Once his parents had the knowledge,” Yanira said, “it made a big difference.” WCC’s Disabilities Coordinator evaluated Abraham and helped him get services to address a speech delay. On top of his weekly visits with Yanira, he began working with a speech therapist at a school for children with individualized

family service plans (IFSPs), or plans that detail services and goals, while WCC staff continued to help Rudy and Delmi learn to support Abraham’s development at home. His parents started talking to him more, and reading to him every day. With all the extra support, Abraham began stringing words together, and using sentences, rather than hitting, to communicate his feelings.

It wasn’t only Abraham who was growing, though. When Delmi first enrolled in the program, she told Yanira she felt lonely. Other than her husband, she had no support network. “You’re my only friend,” she told Yanira.

Social isolation is common among parents of young children. It’s a risk factor for child abuse, and like chronic stress, it can also lead to long-term health conditions like heart disease and diabetes. Yanira encouraged Delmi to bring Abraham to socialization, a monthly gathering for WCC’s home-based EHS children and their families to play and learn together. Delmi got to know the parents of Abraham’s peers, and like her son, she started talking about her experiences. She had been lonely before she came to WCC, she told them. She didn’t know much about child development. She hadn’t realized the potential consequences of letting a developmental delay go unaddressed.

Now, as Delmi watches Abraham run around the playground, chatting about Iron Man and his favorite foods in Spanish and English, the family’s growth is unmistakable. The energetic 3-year-old is even teaching English words to his monolingual mom, who’s heading back to school for ESL classes so she can better advocate for her son and for her herself.

**Now, both Abraham and Delmi speak with confidence.**

# FINDING A VOICE TO BEAT THE ODDS





Photo / Guido Buidani

# Family Preservation:

## A New Chapter Begins



**Like any mother, Tanya wanted her children to do well, feel safe, and know they were loved.**

"I've always wanted to do everything for them," Tanya said. She signed daughters Jessie, 10, and Cassie, 7, up for swimming, ballet, and hip-hop, and took them to a reading program at the library each summer. Even after she gave birth to baby Lola while in an abusive relationship with Lola's father, who was later incarcerated for domestic violence, Tanya still wanted the best for her girls. She hoped Lola's father would change, so they could be together again when he was released.

Nearly half of all women in the U.S. experience psychological aggression by an intimate partner in their lifetime;

more than one in three experience sexual or physical violence. Children who are exposed to domestic violence are 15 times more likely to be physically or sexually assaulted than their peers. They're also at risk for a host of behavioral and emotional challenges, especially if their trauma goes untreated.

To Tanya, the domestic violence and parenting classes she was ordered to attend by the court sounded like punishment.

"I was confused," she said. "In that moment, I felt like I didn't do anything wrong." Even worse was the devastating prospect that she might lose her daughters. WCC's In-Home Outreach Counselor Karla listened to Tanya's frustrations and fears. It was Karla's job to reinforce what Tanya was learning in her classes, as well as use WCC's resources to support the family in whatever ways they needed.

**“ Nearly half of all women in the U.S. experience psychological aggression by an intimate partner in their lifetime. ”**

Karla helped the struggling mom-of-three get school supplies and bunk beds for Jessie and Cassie with funds through WCC. She showed her how to handle stress by modeling responses to the daily challenges of being a single parent. She also introduced the family to the WCC community. In the fall, Tanya and the girls attended WCC's Annual Children's Arts Festival community day. A couple months later, they took in a local performance of The Nutcracker with tickets donated to WCC.

Helping Tanya build her support network was crucial to ensuring the girls' safety. Social isolation is one way abusers exert control over their victims;

it is also a risk factor for child abuse. In her parenting classes and discussions with Karla, Tanya started to realize that if she wanted to keep her children safe and ensure they were successful, she needed to do the same for herself. "It really changed my way of thinking," Tanya said. "I had to become more of a parent."

With Karla's support, Tanya ended her relationship with Lola's father. She refocused her energy on her daughters, spending more time playing in the park and going to church with them. And when a developmental screening revealed Lola had a gross motor delay, Tanya took up all the activities Karla recommended to support Lola's growth, like laying on the floor with her to encourage crawling. Within a few months, Lola had the confidence and skills to physically explore her environment – a crucial milestone that builds the foundation for cognitive, social-emotional, and language development.

Tanya went on to meet several milestones of her own. After 10 months of domestic violence and parenting classes, she graduated and closed her family's case with the court. She enrolled in school and is taking child development classes, inspired by the progress she and her family have made with WCC's help. This summer, she plans to teach her kids to extend their learning beyond the classroom by volunteering at the LA Zoo.

Tanya knows the hard work isn't over – being a parent, after all, is a lifelong and beyond-full-time job – but now, she's confident she can handle whatever challenges might come her way.

**“It doesn't matter if you're a single mom or single dad, anything's possible,” Tanya said. “Just love yourself, and love your kids.”**



# BIG HEARTS of Summer 2015



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- Jennifer Nordstrom
- Patty Penske

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- Nancy Bertrando
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- Laura Hein
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### Collector

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- Prime Healthcare Services
- Sony Pictures Entertainment

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- The Cotsen Family
- CPEhr
- Lauren Shuler Donner and Richard Donner

- Adrienne Grant and Paul Jennings
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- Linda Stamer

More than 400 children and their families attended **Westside Children's Center's 21st Annual Children's Arts Festival** on Saturday, October 18, 2014. The family-focused community day was packed with exciting (and educational!) activities, from flower pot painting and planting to mask-making, storytelling, and more. Children also had the opportunity to scale a rock wall and boogie alongside parents, teachers, and WCC staff in high-energy Zumba and hip-hop dance lessons. WCC and our community partners provided families with free health and education resources, including access to special education services, help with finding medical care, and nutrition tips and tools through fun activities like book giveaways and healthy snack-making demonstrations. A big thank you to the outstanding sponsors, community partners, and volunteers who joined WCC staff to learn and play with our community.

21st  
ANNUAL

# CHILDREN'S ARTS FESTIVAL

**B**ig Hearts of Summer 2015 brought celebrating for a cause to the Jonathan Beach Club in Santa Monica on May 7, where guests sparked a sizzling dance floor and enjoyed stellar performances by Queen Nation and DJ Carolus. The event raised more than \$500,000 to support WCC's vital programs for thousands of vulnerable children and their families – all this thanks to the profound generosity of our sponsors and dedicated planning committee, led by Event Co-Chairs Carla du Manoir, Jennifer Nordstrom, and Patty Penske. WCC is so grateful for everyone who made this fantastic evening possible.





# CHILD WELL-BEING INDEX

Number of U.S. states ahead of California on overall child well-being: **37**

On education: **37**

On economic well-being: **48**

Percentage of children living in poverty in the U.S.: **22**

In California: **23**

In Los Angeles: **33**

Percentage of poor Californians living in families with at least one working adult: **78**

Number in millions of U.S. individuals who earn a living by caring for children under age 5: **2.2**

Average annual income in the U.S. of a full-time child care professional: **\$21,710**

Of a parking lot attendant: **\$30,315**

Average lifetime cost per person with an intellectual disability: **\$1,306,687.79**

Percentage of children in California under age 6 who do not receive screenings for developmental delays: **73**

Factor by which a child of parents without high school diplomas in the U.S. is more likely to be at high risk for developmental delays: **2**

Percentage of poor fourth-graders in California who scored below proficient reading level: **84**

Percentage of low-income households in California that are food insecure: **38**

In Los Angeles County: **40**

Fraction of California children aged 0-18 who did not receive preventative dental care in the past year: **1/4**

Percentage of children under age 5 with untreated cavities living in underserved communities in the U.S.: **30**

In Los Angeles County: **72**

Age at which Maryland resident Deamonte Driver died in 2007 of an untreated tooth infection: **12**

Portion of women treated for depression between the year before and the year after pregnancy: **1/7**

Portion of Early Head Start mothers suffering from depression: **1/2**

Chances that a girl in foster care will become pregnant by age 19: **1 in 2**

Percentage of children born to teen mothers in California who are reported for abuse or neglect: **25**

Number of children in California who are reported for abuse or neglect before age 5: **1 in 7**

Percentage of infants in California who remain in their home after substantiated abuse or neglect: **53**

Portion that will be re-reported for abuse or neglect within 5 years: **6/10**

Fraction of children who are aged 0-5 in foster care in Los Angeles County: **2/5**

Percentage of children under age 5 on Los Angeles County's child welfare caseload who do not attend public early care and education programs: **87**

Percentage of children entering foster care in California who will not find a permanent home (e.g. reunited, adopted) within 12 months: **64**

Number of U.S. children who aged out of foster care in 2014 without a home: **22,392**

Portion of youth that becomes homeless within two years of aging out of foster care: **1/5**

That becomes incarcerated: **1/4**

Fraction of California State Prison inmates who are former foster youth: **1/7**





## ONE YEAR LATER:

# MORE DANCING, NEW WORDS, AND A FAST-APPROACHING FUTURE

It's been nearly three years since then-5-day-old Trinity first met her parents, Steve and Lisa, and nearly one year since WCC introduced you to this foster-adoptive family of three in our 2013-14 Annual Report.

Fast forward to 2016 and Trinity is busting moves like the Jabbawockeez dance crew – “think 80s break dancing,” Lisa said, “or as Trinity calls it, ‘robot.’ She loves to dance and will pull us from what we are doing to the middle of the

living room for a dance party.”

Thanks in part to the WCC staff who connected the family to physical and occupational therapy, swim class, and infant massage, Trinity developed physical mobility to match her inquisitive mind. She's also an artist, like her photographer mother, though her current favorite medium is finger paint. And she's constantly picking up new words to express everything she wants to say: when Trinity heard Dixon, the family's 8-year-old German Shepherd/Husky mix, sneeze, she

exclaimed, “Oh! He startled me.”

Trinity's parents are just as startled by her whirlwind growth. As she heads toward celebrating her third year in life with her loving family, Steve and Lisa are looking into how to transition her from her day care to preschool.

“They say days as a parent can be long but the years are short,” Lisa said. “It is unbelievable how true it is. You get to enjoy each milestone and in the blink of an eye, she's on to the next one.”



## HARVEST Festival

Children at our Early Education Center learned about seasonal changes and explored sensory activities during harvest festival, a weeklong, educational celebration of fall. On the last day, parents were invited to dress up in costume and join activities to help their children develop their sensory systems, fine and gross motor skills, and more. Everyone had a blast bowling with pumpkins, digging through spaghetti “worms,” and trick-or-treating for educational goodies.



# FAMILY PORTRAIT & ACTIVITY DAYS

More than 300 children and parents took part in our semi-annual family portrait and activity days, where families had their photos taken by Windward School student photographers. What did one parent say was the best part of it all?

**COMPARTIR LA MAÑANA CON MI FAMILIA – SHARING THE MORNING WITH MY FAMILY.**



## Thriving through literacy

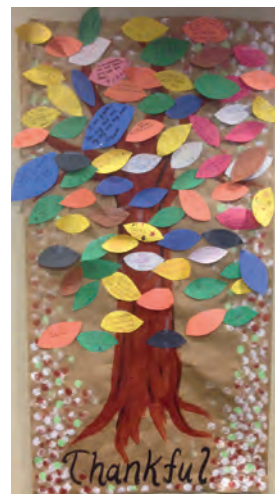
More than 20 Junior League of Los Angeles volunteers hosted a Thrive Through Literacy event for dozens of children and their families at our Early Education Center. Volunteers engaged WCC children in fun activities around the book *The Pout-Pout Fish*, including a group reading and visits to arts and crafts, healthy snack-making, and exercise activity stations. All the children took home gift bags full of prizes, books, and their very own copy of *The Pout-Pout Fish* to continue their literacy adventure at home.

# FAMILY FESTIVAL IN THE PARK

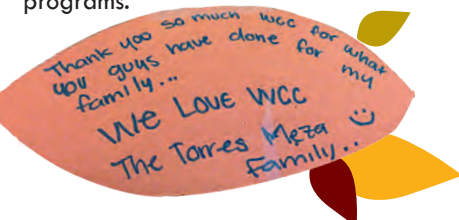


To help prevent the devastating effects of social isolation, and to encourage parents to support their children's development, WCC brought together families enrolled in our network of home-based education providers for a fun evening of learning and games in the park. Parents and children read together, made music and art, and took home prizes, books, and handmade keychains featuring open-ended questions, like “Can you think of another way...” and “What did you do first?,” to keep the learning going at home and all year long.

# FALL CELEBRATION DINNERS



Hundreds of children and families came out to enjoy the delicious food prepared and served by our generous Windward School student and parent volunteers at our two fall celebration dinners, one that paired volunteers with their WCC reading buddies and another open to all families in WCC's programs.





# VOLUNTEERS 2014/2015

You support our teachers, organize supply drives, staff events, care for our organic learning garden, raise much-needed funds, and so much more – we couldn't be more grateful.

**Thank you for your continued dedication to WCC!**

## Individual Volunteers:

- Kemi Akenzia
- Betsy Alkaly
- Rami Alkaly
- Claire Altman
- Sebastian Bae
- Charlie Balot
- Sharon Balot
- Isabelle Berrent
- Paige Blum
- Rebecca Boyle
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- Brian Burnett
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- Joel Krogstad
- Jackson Kurtz
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- Patty Marks
- Lauren May
- Georgia Messinger
- Iris Mink
- Hannah Mittleman
- Samantha Molina
- Charlie Moore
- Destiny Moore

# VOLUNTEERS 2014/2015

Total Volunteer Hours for FY 14-15: **9,014**

Total Volunteers for FY 14-15: **702**

(Volunteers from 7.1.2014 through 6.30.2015)

- Alejandra Morales
  - Anna Morello
  - Alexandra Mork
  - Erika Munoz
  - Gaia Murphy
  - Kaitlin Musante
  - Claire Nordstrom
  - Jack Nordstrom
  - Riley Nordstrom
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  - The Willows Community School
  - UCLA
  - USC
  - Venice High School
  - Wildwood School
  - Windward School
- A huge thank you to the students, parents, and faculty from our school partners for everything you've done throughout the year:**
- Brentwood School
  - Cal State Dominguez Hills
  - Crossroads School
  - Culver City High School
  - Curtis School
  - Harvard-Westlake
  - John Adams Middle School
  - John Thomas Dye
  - Loyola High School
  - Loyola Marymount University
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  - Park Century School
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  - Agape International Spiritual Center
  - Arts Festival Event Volunteers
  - Generation of the Future
  - Junior League
  - Kappa Kappa Gamma LA Alumni Association
  - Teach for America
  - The Bruin Belles
  - The Goodwill Ambassadors
  - Young Hollywood Council

## FY 14/15 Special Volunteer Groups



# ANNUAL REPORT /

JULY 1, 2014 - JUNE 30, 2015

Westside Children's Center (WCC) is dedicated to breaking the cycles of intergenerational poverty, abuse, and neglect by providing high-quality early education programs, interventions for families at risk of abusing or neglecting their children, foster care and adoption services, and a range of critical, integrated supports, including pediatric health consultations, disability screenings and advocacy, bilingual domestic violence classes, mental health services, and more. Using a dual-generational approach, WCC ensures that children have the skills they need to increase their life choices and lead fulfilling lives.

## EARLY EDUCATION

Westside Children's Center's early education programs, which include a California State Preschool, an Early Head Start, and an Early Head Start-Child Care Partnership, provide high-quality early education for more than 500 children ages 0 to 5 from very-low-income families at our state-of-the-art early education center, through our network of licensed home-based education providers, and in individual family homes. WCC maintains a low staff-to-child ratio in our inclusive, bilingual classrooms to ensure every child's healthy social-emotional, cognitive, and physical development. Our highly-qualified educators and child development specialists design developmentally appropriate and individualized lessons with a STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) and literacy focus, and deepen their skills with regular professional development. Children receive a healthy breakfast, lunch, and snack and spend time exploring in our organic learning garden. Our programs prioritize family engagement and involve parents in their children's learning and growth through volunteer opportunities, parent counseling, and access to our comprehensive services.

## CHILD WELFARE

WCC has four contracts with the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) to

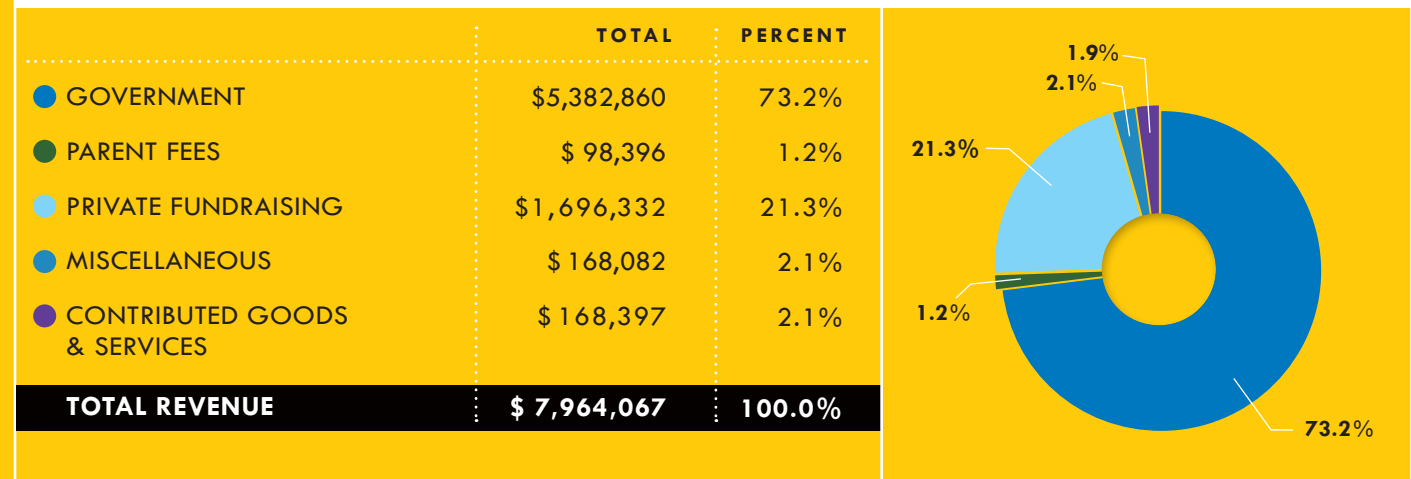
provide intensive Family Preservation, Prevention and Aftercare, and Foster Care and Adoption services to more than 600 families annually. Our highly-trained staff works with families to protect children who have been or who are at risk of being abused or neglected through individual and family counseling, including substance abuse, mental health, and domestic violence psychoeducational counseling; parent-child education; and extensive case management. We also recruit, train, and support loving foster and foster-adoptive parents who create nurturing, educationally rich homes for children of all ages.

## COMPREHENSIVE SERVICES

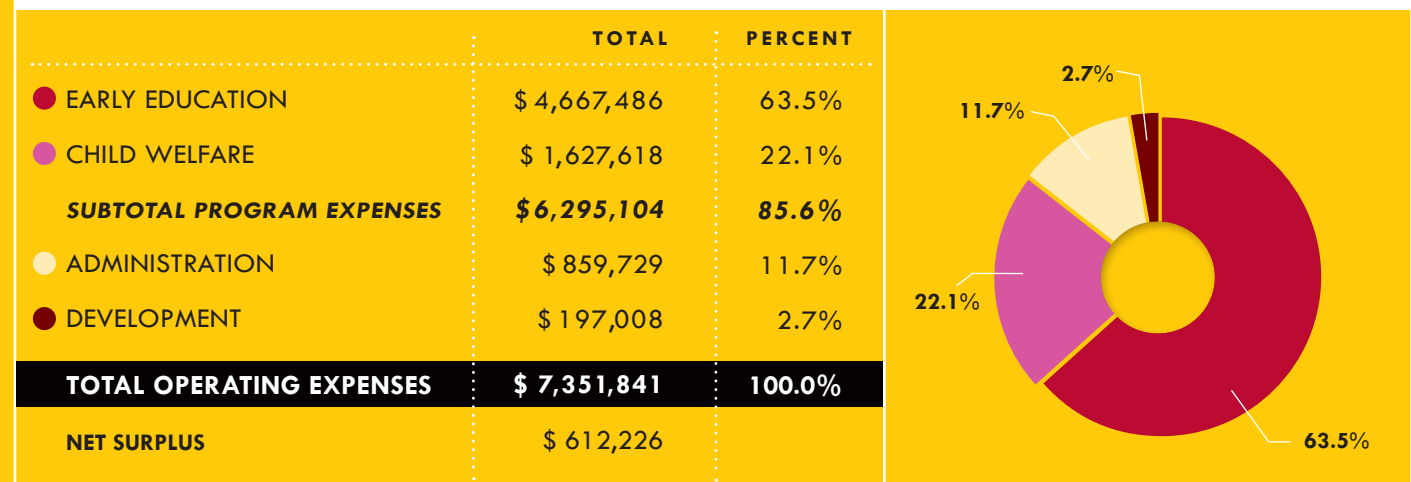
WCC provides all children in our programs with an array of vital, integrated supports, including disabilities screenings and special needs advocacy, pediatric and mental health consultations, vision and hearing screenings, bilingual parenting and child development classes, workforce development and financial literacy, and access to our full-time public health nurses. We also connect families with other organizations in our robust network of community partners, including Venice Family Clinic, St. Joseph Center, Latino Resource Organization, and Miriam's House. WCC's dual-generational approach ensures all children grow up with the foundation to succeed in school and life.

JULY 1, 2014 - JUNE 30, 2015

## REVENUE 6/30/2015



## EXPENSES 6/30/2015





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We also count on the generous in-kind support that helps keep our programs running. Every donation is vital to the work we do. Please feel free to contact us at 310.846.4100.





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OF A SOCIETY'S SOUL THAN THE WAY IN  
WHICH IT TREATS ITS CHILDREN. ”

-Nelson Mandela

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