

***To improve lives by mobilizing the caring power of our community.***

## **WELD COUNTY'S EARLY CHILDHOOD COUNCIL ANNUAL EVALUATION JULY 1, 2021 - JUNE 30, 2022**

### **Executive Summary**

Weld County's Early Childhood Council (WCECC) works to create an environment where all children are valued, healthy, and thriving. The WCECC is a community partnership dedicated to improving the wellbeing of all children in Weld County by focusing on the critical growth and brain development period from pre-birth to eight years of age to promote school readiness and lifelong success.

WCECC is a Weld County community collaborative that was formed in 2000 and is led by United Way of Weld County (UWWC). The concept of this collaboration originated after the Colorado Children's Campaign presented their annual "Kids COUNT" report to community members in Weld County; their findings demonstrated continuing decline in the wellbeing of Weld County's children and the urgent need for action. At the same time, United Ways all over the world were changing their model from raising and distributing funds to bringing local communities together to tackle their greatest challenges. United Way of Weld County leaders recognized this opportunity to coordinate a focused collaborative effort to make real changes for young children.

In 2007, Colorado House Bill 1062 authorized the creation of the Colorado Early Childhood Councils. The intent of the Councils as stated in the legislation was to "improve and sustain the availability, accessibility, capacity, and quality of early childhood services for children and families throughout the state." According to the legislation, these Councils were established "for the purpose of developing and ultimately implementing a comprehensive system of early childhood services to ensure the school readiness of children five years of age or younger in the community." Weld County's commissioners, having witnessed the work this UWWC-led collaborative had accomplished over the past seven years, endorsed it to serve as Weld County's Early Childhood Council.

Of the 1.2 million children living in Colorado, 83,129 call Weld County home (as of 2019). Weld County lies within the relatively flat northeastern portion of Colorado; with a total area of 4,017 square miles, it is the third-largest county in Colorado by area and is larger than Rhode Island, Delaware, and the District of Columbia combined. Among the 64 counties in Colorado, Weld County ranks ninth in total population; a little over a third of the population lives in Greeley, the county seat. Weld County's child population has the second fastest rate of growth in the state, a situation that presents both opportunities and challenges; the Colorado state demographer forecasts Weld County as one of the areas with the highest child population growth between 2018 and 2030, with growth estimated at 20-57%.

Poverty is one of the most important factors affecting a child's life. 9.8 % of children under 18 in Weld County live in poverty, down from 14% last year. 49.5 %, of school-aged youth qualify for free or reduced lunch, a 4.5% increase from the previous year. In Eastern Greeley and Evans (Greeley is

the county seat), the percent of children under 18 in poverty jumps to 25% – or nearly one in three children, down 3% from the previous year. Much of the county’s poverty is related to a rapidly growing population, an ever-increasing cost of housing, and a job base that often does not pay a living wage.

Other influences (some of which are related to income) on a child’s life: 22% of births in Weld County are to single women, and 13.9% are to women without a high school diploma/GED, both down 1% from the previous year. About one in five pregnant women do not receive early prenatal care, 5.5% of women smoked during pregnancy in 2019, down 1.2% from the previous year. The child abuse and neglect rate is 11.6 per 1,000 or 5.5%, down from 7% from the previous year. 21% of Weld County children are overweight or obese.

Race and ethnicity play an important role in a child’s future as well. Weld County’s graduation rate is 86.9% for all students, but it drops to just 82% when looking solely at Hispanic students (29% of Weld County residents identify as Hispanic, a number that is increasing). Greeley is home to refugees from a multitude of countries as many families move from the nearby resettlement city of Denver to Greeley for job opportunities. In fall 2021, 14% of Weld County students were English language learners.

A lack of available child care slots is one of the most pressing challenges Weld County’s families are facing. In 2019, there were about 16,800 children under age six with all available parents in the workforce, yet there were only about 6,500 licensed child care slots in child care centers, homes and preschools – creating a critical child care desert. Between 2011 and 2018, over 70 Weld County home providers closed their doors, leading to a 32% reduction in home child care providers and a 10% reduction in center care. When there isn’t child care available, parents are forced to leave the workforce or children don’t receive adequate care. Data from the 2016 Weld County Community Health Survey conducted by the Weld County Department of Public Health and Environment shows that 11% of households with children have had to quit, not take, or change jobs due to child care problems. Among parents age 18-34, that increases to 17%. Additionally, the cost of child care in Colorado is the third highest in the nation – infant care accounts for 20% of a median family income, while that percentage becomes 50% of a single mother’s median income. 5% of Weld County residents reported needing but not obtaining child care financial assistance, likely due to it not being available. Those with less than a high school diploma, those at the lowest income levels, and those who identify as Hispanic were the populations in greatest need (all around 8%).

Many of the above circumstances influence a child’s success in school and consequently in life. For the 2019 Colorado standardized tests, just 39% of fourth grade students met or exceeded expectations in English Language Arts – a whopping 61% are not reading and writing at the expected proficiency by fourth grade. To ensure our communities have the leaders and professionals who will better our future, Weld County will need to rally together to help our children thrive today.

## Methodology

Weld County's Early Childhood Council is one of 35 councils statewide that coordinate early childhood service delivery. We work to improve the system and the coordination of services for children in Weld County using the Colorado Early Childhood Framework to guide our work. This framework focuses on three domains: family support and education, health and wellbeing, and early learning. WCECC has added a fourth domain as well, communication and advocacy. We take a holistic approach to a child by supporting all four domains – some directly and others by working with community partners. Our work is guided by community needs assessments and is data-driven.

## Descriptions of Goals

Long-term indicators of success include:

- Local resources for health, development, mental health, education, and family support are easily accessible for Weld County families.
- Weld County community partners actively participate to form a safety net of services that ensures all children and their families receive the help they need.
- Early childhood professionals receive training opportunities in best practices to increase their knowledge, skills, and the quality of care provided.
- Weld County children enter school ready to learn and continue to succeed as they progress, as demonstrated by the critical milestones of reading proficiently by fourth grade and graduating on time.

As we work toward these long-range goals, short-term goals for the 2021-2022 year included:

- Family Support & Education: Increase coordination of resources to provide access to information about young children's overall wellness and development for parents.
- Health & Wellbeing: Work with community partners to increase awareness of nutrition, physical activity, and mental health services available in the county.
- Community Awareness & Advocacy: Link public engagement/awareness efforts about early childhood issues, priorities, and challenges, and share/implement with stakeholders.
- Early Learning & Development: Outreach to informal and formal care environments to promote school readiness for all.
- Systems Building: Build a seamless system between parents, families, child care providers, and service providers to deliver early childhood services in the areas of early care and education, family support, mental health, and health.
- Colorado Child Care Assistance Program:
  - Increase the percentage of child care programs with access to slots for CCCAP subsidies.
  - Increase Colorado Shines Quality Rating and Improvement System engagement (level 2 or higher).
  - Increase the number and percentage of CCCAP eligible children being served in a high quality program (levels 3-5).
  - Promote the Colorado Shines Quality Rating and Improvement System and the Early Learning and Development Guidelines at least once a month.
- Increased child care capacity through, local, state and federal dollars.

## Statement of Progress

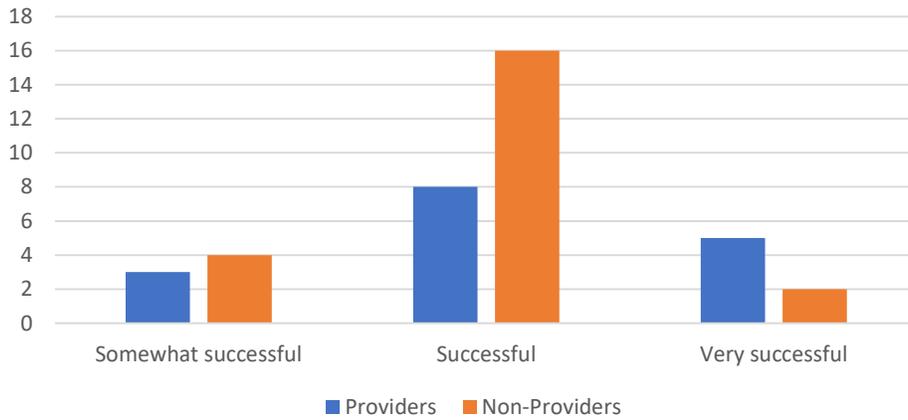
- Family Support & Education: Increase coordination of resources to provide access to information about young children’s overall wellness and development for parents.
  - 109 caregivers were given support on a wide spectrum of skills necessary for raising a well-developed child through our Bright by Three program.
  - 305 books, clothing for 83 children and 564 oz of formula were distributed to families.
  - The Covering Weld Diaper Bank currently has 10 partner agencies. A temporary location has been secured through spring of 2023. 550 caregivers are currently clients of the diaper bank. About 450 of those clients receive services each month, with an additional 250+ clients served by partner agencies. During the 2021-2022 program year, 493,564 items were secured; 275,902 diapers were distributed; 7,051 packages of wipes were distributed; 1,294 rash creams were distributed.
  - Over \$140,000 in funding from the State of Colorado was received thanks to Senate Bill 21-027, specifically for diapers, wipes, and rash creams.
  - 20 new car seats were distributed to caregivers who participated in early literacy, parenting, or safety programs for at least 4-6 weeks.
  - Rack cards advertising our online “Roadmap4Kids” are available in all UCHHealth facilities in Weld and Larimer counties.
  - Over 100 families were referred to early literacy, safety, or parenting support programs by our Family Support staff.
  - During 2021, 7,960 contacts were made with 211 Colorado in Weld and the other seven northeast Colorado counties, a decrease of 9% from the previous year 211 Colorado connects families to multiple resources including child care, housing and food support, utility assistance, and more.
  - The annual Northern Colorado Children's Festival was held in the spring at a new location. 600 families and 1,200 children attended. 64 agencies participated providing activities and sharing services for children and families. Every child received a brand new book
  - 18 families received support through their employer offsetting the cost of child care. This assisted 24 children in child care.
  - WCECC worked with businesses to promote family friendly workplace practices. Two companies applied for the State of Colorado Emerging and Expanding Grant to provide child care for their employees.
  
- Health & Wellbeing: Work with community partners to increase awareness of nutrition, physical activity, and mental health services available in the county.
  - WCECC supported community partners to provide services and connections for the well-being of the whole child. Over 40 community partners, child care providers, parents, and businesses sit on the early childhood council and various committees to ensure alignment, address gaps in service, and keep each other informed.

- Community Awareness & Advocacy: Link public engagement/awareness efforts about early childhood issues, priorities, and challenges, and share/implement with stakeholders.
  - The Roadmap4Kids, created in April 2018, had 3,448 website hits this year, an increase of 29% from the previous year.
  - 1,762 materials for the Roadmap were distributed to 29 partners and their clients, compared to 92 partners and 6,557 promotional materials the previous year.
  - Over 2,000 School Readiness Calendars were given to parents of three and four year olds to help them be prepared for kindergarten.
  - The WCEDD monthly newsletter reached over 500 early childhood providers and advocates.
  
- Early Learning & Development - Outreach to informal and formal care environments to promote school readiness for all.
  - Colorado Reading Corps served 335 children at 15 Greeley/Evans School District school sites. 31 students were served in the Johnstown/Millken Weld RE-5J school district. 65% of children in Greeley and 77% of children in Johnstown/Millken are exceeding target growth rate, meaning they are catching up with their grade-level peers.
  - The partnership with Weld Child Care since 2018 has increased child care capacity and quality while serving our most vulnerable children in Weld County. This work resulted in awareness at 22 events and 2,257 combined outreach efforts. This compares with 27 events and 916 outreach efforts the previous year. 72 orientations were given to support individuals navigating the early childhood care provider pathways. 101 providers/community members attended the annual speaker training. The topics included “Be Positively Connected,” “Illuminating the Possibilities of Home Visitation,” and “The Antidote to Trauma, YOU.”
  - There are 231 (a net increase of 5 providers from the previous year) licensed child care providers (5 centers, -2 homes) in Weld County.
  - Overall 21 programs closed their licenses; 4 child care center, and 17 regular family child care homes. All programs that closed were a Level 1 in Colorado Shines.
  - 15 licensed child care providers opened their doors for business with 120 new child care slots available. There have been 400 new child care slots created since 2018. Another 42 individuals are in the cue and actively working towards completion of their licenses moving into the 2022-2023 fiscal year, an increase of 15 from the previous year. With the support of Weld Child Care, these providers have been able to start up with quality learning materials, safety materials, and scholarships that fills gaps that other grants do not support.
  - Weld County Early Childhood Council works to increase quality in child care environments to promote school readiness for all. Colorado Shines is the quality rating improvement system for all licensed child care providers. In Weld County, 7 (6 the previous year) providers are a Level 5, 23 providers are a level 4, 5 are a level 3, 58 (an increase of 15) are a level 2, the remaining 183 are a level 1. All 21 programs that closed were a level 1 in Colorado Shines, a 53% reduction in last year’s closing rate.
  - \$1,107,076 in investments were sub-granted to child care providers across Weld County. These assisted 59 child care providers and 1,635 children in over 12 zip codes and 13

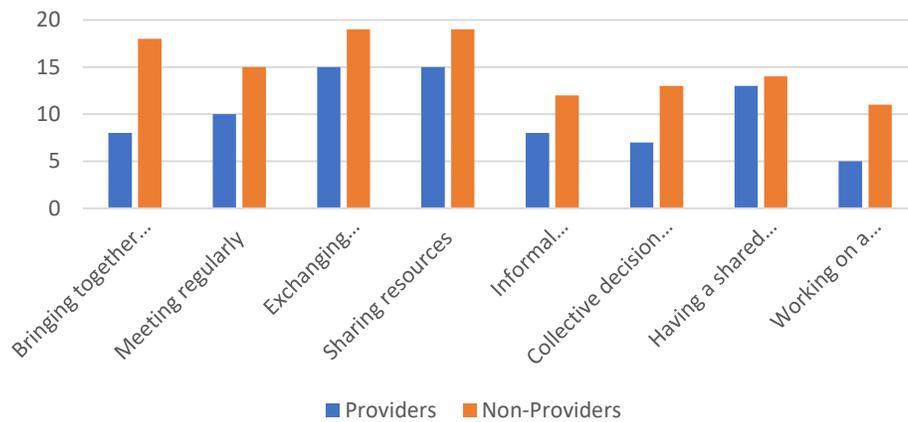
municipalities. Over \$800,000 was from the State of Colorado Emerging and Expanding Grant program and was used to increase infant and toddler slots. The remaining was in capital improvement, quality improvement materials, and quality improvement coaching through the Colorado Shines Quality Improvement Program. 199.5 hours of child care professional development clock hours were facilitated, down 48 hours from the previous year.

- 70.8% (221/312) children who utilize CCCAP are currently receiving child care in a high quality program (level 3-5). This is down 26% and 114 children from the previous year.
  - In order to increase the number of high quality CCCAP slots, the number of providers accepting CCCAP needs to increase as well.
  - 128 Licensed child care programs have contracts to serve children receiving the CCCAP subsidy, up by 14 over last year. However, only 36 are actively participating in CCCAP which is down by 6 programs. The mean CCCAP enrollment is 311 which is down by 28 children. Those providers participate serve a mean average of 339 children. Of these children, 70.4%, an increase of 2%, are in a Level 3-5 rated program.
  - 43 child care providers were awarded a total of \$13,675 in scholarship funding to promote early childhood workforce development.
  - 87 individuals, impacting 721 children, completed the Expanding Quality in Infant and Toddler (EQIT) care 16-week course offered which is offered in English and Spanish. EQIT is for those who are working with infants and toddlers.
  - In 2021-2022, 30 providers caring for 97 children graduated from two cohorts of the PASO Institute. To date, 334 Weld County providers have graduated from PASO. 24 PASO providers applied for and received their Child Development Associate (CDA) credential.
- **Systems Building:** Build a seamless system between parents, families, child care providers, and service providers to deliver early childhood services in the areas of early care and education, family support, mental health, and health.
    - The annual WCECC survey was sent out in May/June to assess the council's impact, partnerships, infrastructure, and ability to meet our strategic goals. The survey was sent to 102 council members and child care providers participating in Colorado Shines. 18 of 43 council members and 17 of 59 child care providers took the survey for a total response rate of 34%. Key results are below.

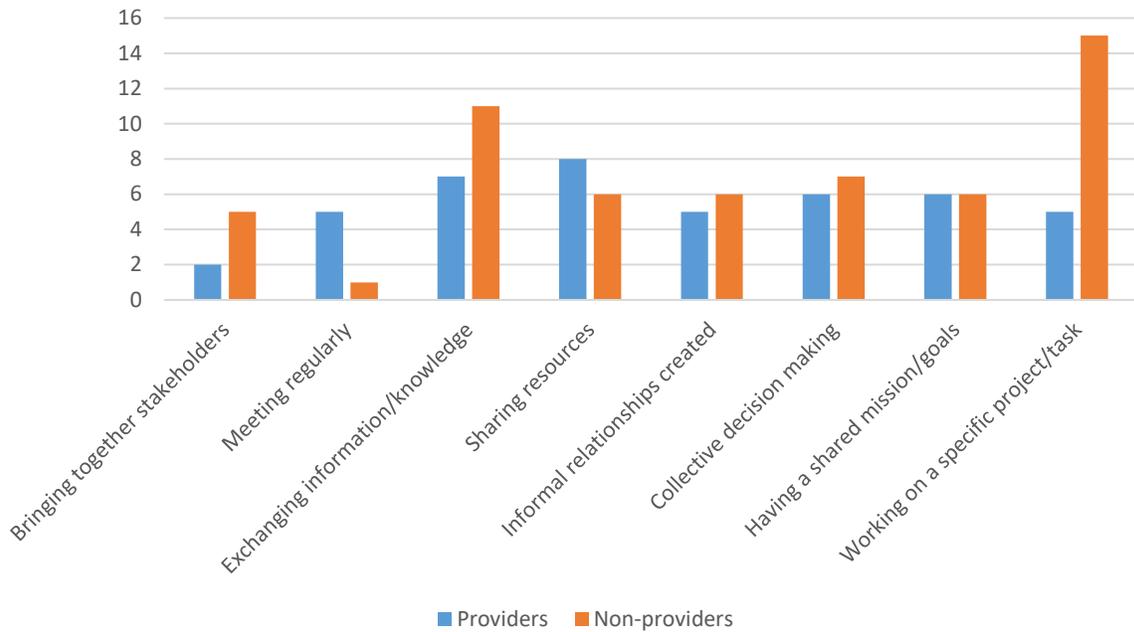
### In your opinion, how successful has WCECC been at reaching our goals?



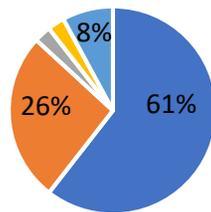
### What aspects of collaboration contribute to this success?



### What aspects of collaboration would you like to see more of?



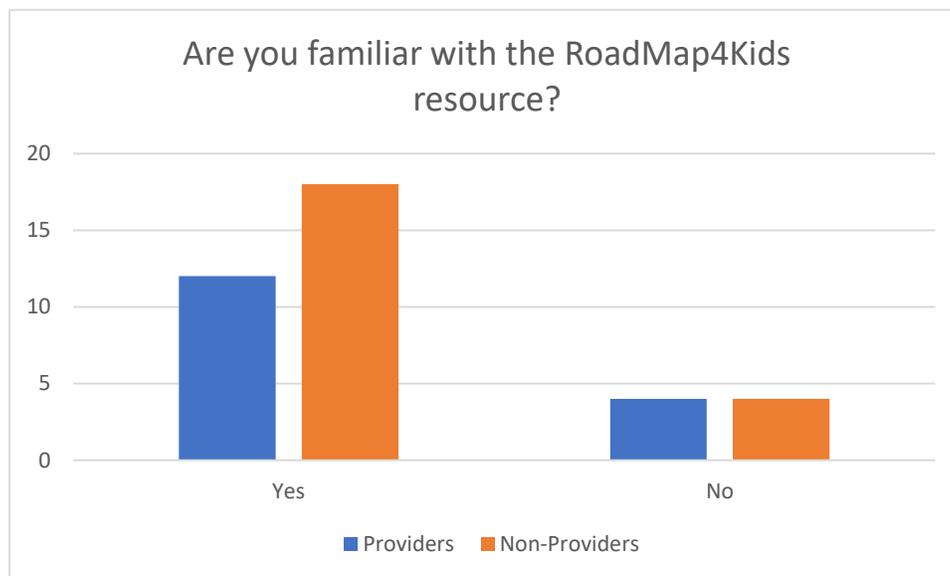
During the past 12 months, approximately how many partnerships or connections with other organizations have you created because of your contact with Weld County's Early Childhood Council?



- 1-3 partnerships/connections
- 4-6 partnerships/connections
- 7-9 partnerships/connections
- 10-11 partnerships/connections
- 12+ partnerships/connections

Who do you think needs to be at the council table?

- Local municipalities



- Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R)
  - Recruit and retain licensed child care programs, particularly in areas of the state that have been identified as child care deserts as defined by the Office of Early Childhood and child care desert mapping.
    - 15 family child care providers opened their doors for business, serving 120 new families.
    - 40 individuals are currently pursuing child care licensure.
  - Provide technical assistance and resources to eligible child care programs, to ensure optimal awareness and engagement in statewide initiatives, such as the Colorado Shines Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS), Professional Development Information System (PDIS), and the Targeted Quality Improvement Program (formally CSQI).
    - CCR&R worked to encourage provider engagement with QRIS, PDIS, and CCCAP. Weld County has seven Colorado Shines level 5 rated programs. An increase of one from the previous year.
  - CCR&R works alongside community partners, public agencies, and private entities including faith-based and community-based child care providers, to better understand the local market and increase the supply and quality of child care services.
    - CCR&R works closely with Mile High United Way, sharing updates, vacancies, and additional information as requested. Mile High United Way gave referrals to 149 people requesting child care.
  - Implement the requirements of the Colorado Child Care Disaster Plan as defined in the state plan mandated by the Child Care and Development Block Grant of 2014 (S. 1086).
    - The disaster plan, templates, and state information is shared on UWWC’s website; 185 people visited the page this year. It is a licensing requirement that all providers have a plan in place.
  - Collect data, provide information on the supply of and demand for child care services in Weld County, and enter such information within the Colorado Shines Technology System.

- All provider updates were limited to those done by the providers in the update portal to meet the criteria for grants offered through the Colorado Office of Early Childhood.

### **Key Strategies**

- Coordinating the efforts of Weld County organizations working in early care and education through the Early Childhood Council.
- Provision of direct service programs when a gap in service(s) are identified and WCECC has the capacity to respond.
  - Bright by Three and Bright by Text: from birth to three, short visitations helping parents understand childhood development, parenting best practices, and available community resources.
  - Child Care Provider Support through coaching, professional development and quality improvement materials to increase their Colorado Shines level of care provided.
  - Covering Weld Diaper Bank: free diapers and wipes for parents in need, while simultaneously connecting parents to needed resources. There are 10 membership organizations serving families.
  - Expanding Quality in Infant and Toddler Care: a 48-hour curriculum to improve child care quality and increase the number of licensed providers.
  - Family Business Solutions: works with local businesses to create family friendly work environments and facilitates employer-sponsored child care financial assistance.
  - Northern Colorado Children’s Festival: an annual one-day, free event for parents, caregivers, and their children to engage in a variety of hands-on, quality, educational activities helping connect parents to resources.
  - PASO Institute: teaches Spanish-speaking home-based providers childhood development and child care best practices and connects them with resources, continuing education, and other providers.
- Locally managing several grant-funded initiatives to provide a seamless web of support for children and families in Weld County such as Colorado Shines Quality Improvement, Systems Building, Buell Foundation, and many more.
- Providing advocacy at the state level when there is an opportunity for change that aligns with the UWWC and WCECC mission and guiding values.

### **Next Steps/How Strategies Change**

For 2022-2023 WCECC will continue the work detailed in our statement of work as well as the strategic plan. Planned changes in strategy will be:

- Continue to support the early childhood workforce through grants, stimulus dollars, and other opportunities that become available.
- Support the planning of universal preschool for fall 2023 implementation.
- Update the early childhood strategic plan for Weld County.
- Increase the number of Covering Weld Diaper Bank partner agencies to 15.

- Secure a permanent location for the Covering Weld Diaper Bank to receive larger deliveries.
- Continue to integrate United Way of Weld County’s early childhood collective impact process within the WCECC work.

## Success Stories

- “It was through our involvement with the WCECC that we connected the partnership between North Range Behavioral Health’s Family Connects and the High Plains Library District which has allowed the library district to work with mentors on how to present literacy skills to families who might not see the library as ‘for them.’ It has also allowed High Plains to work with the mentors to bring other language story times to our libraries.” – *a council member*
- “My center has been VERY blessed to receive grants through WCECC. Thank you. During COVID it was very hard to get some supplies. They helped us in order to maintain a healthy and safe environment.” – *a child care center*
- “The Covering Weld Diaper Bank was chosen by HomeAid Colorado’s Builders for Babies program to be a 2022 diaper drive recipient. On June 17 we picked up 37,900 diapers and 320 packages of wipes from their distribution site at Dick’s Sporting Goods Park. These diapers, all in larger sizes, will get us through the next month or two! We are very grateful for the generosity of the Builders for Babies participants.” – *Covering Weld Diaper Bank staff*
- “I was able to transfer my nutritionist degree from Columbia to the United States and now am very active with the Cooking Matters program at the Weld County Health Department with the hopes of soon being offered a position.” – *a PASO Institute graduate*
- “The inspection went well—thanks! Now I am just waiting for processing. Thank you for all the information on grants and increasing my quality level. I will be sure to start my Level 2 classes and start the applications as soon as I am licensed. Again, I cannot thank United Way enough for all the educational, financial, and general assistance—what a true blessing.” – *a recently licensed child care provider*
- “Thank you so very much, this is a dream come true! I am so excited to start this new adventure.” – *a recently licensed child care provider*
- “I am crying tears of joy and gratitude! Thank you so very much! This has been an incredibly difficult year for our family and this will make such a difference in the lives of the children that I care for.” – *a child care provider*
- “It is such a relief; United Way exists to help out with stocking our programs with needed safety materials and answering all our questions!” – *a child care provider*