Aspen Community Foundation (ACF) created the Cradle to Career Giving Network in 2016, with the support and encouragement of Laura and Gary Lauder. The Network is comprised of philanthropists who are dedicated to making a difference in the lives of children and families in the Aspen to Parachute region. Each member contributes at least $5,000, which is matched by the Lauders, automatically doubling the amount of money raised.

The Giving Network convenes four times a year, giving members the opportunity to engage deeply in the challenges facing our region’s young people. Meetings feature talks by experts and practitioners working to improve youth outcomes, as well as program updates from ACF staff members. Meetings also provide a platform for discussions about promising solutions and give members a chance to engage first-hand with nonprofit service providers. The culmination is a group decision on how to allocate the pool of funds within Cradle to Career’s focus areas.

About Cradle to Career

ACF launched Cradle to Career in 2012 to address the quiet crisis facing the region’s children. Profound opportunity gaps persist between our low-income children and their more affluent peers. The gaps manifest in lower academic achievement, higher rates of depression, and less hopefulness.

ACF’s vision for Cradle to Career consists of three focus areas:

- **Secure the Start**, with the goal that all youth experience healthy development and enter kindergarten ready to learn;
- **Thriving Youth**, with the goal that all youth build the social and emotional competencies they need to thrive; and
- **Envision the Future**, with the goal that all youth succeed academically and graduate from high school prepared for college and career.

Using the strategy of Collective Impact, ACF convenes stakeholders to identify aspirational yet achievable goals, and to develop, implement, and continually improve an action plan that is designed to strengthen the ecosystem for youth success. ACF serves as the backbone for collaboration among our three counties, four school districts, dozens of nonprofits, 14 municipalities, 75 businesses as well as 20,000 children and their families.

Since 2016, more than $1,000,000 in Giving Network investments have advanced youth outcomes in kindergarten readiness, youth social and emotional wellbeing, and post-high school success. Funding has primarily supported:

- School-based Family Resource Centers
- Preschool tuition assistance for families in need
- Preschool teacher education
- Training for home childcare providers
- College scholarships for first-generation students
- College and career counseling for high school students
- Career-focused training programs for high school students
The following sections highlight some of the Giving Network’s major investments in Cradle to Career, from 2016 to 2021.

Secure the Start
Goal: All youth experience healthy development and enter kindergarten ready to learn.

Research shows that the first years of life are essential for lifelong health and wellbeing. Early experiences—especially interactions with caregivers—help to form neural pathways, establishing the architecture of the brain. At the same time, stress in early life can negatively affect brain development and long-term functioning. Ensuring that children have access to safe, high-quality care environments provides the foundation to advance all youth outcomes, from Cradle to Career.

Care of children comes in many forms; each plays an important role in supporting healthy development. Childcare centers provide high-quality care that is carefully regulated and provided by trained staff, yet their cost and limited availability present barriers to access for many families. As a result, most children under five who spend time away from their parents do so in informal, home-based settings. The care provided by Family, Friends, and Neighbors—also called FFN providers—is a comforting, lower-cost alternative for families who cannot access formal care, or who may be concerned about placing very young children in those settings. However, the quality of FFN care can suffer when there is a lack of information about best practices and community resources.

The Giving Network has supported several methods for improving the access and quality of childcare, advancing the Cradle to Career goal of kindergarten readiness for all children.

Preschool Tuition Assistance
The high costs of childcare are a burden for all working families, but for those with low incomes, tuition fees can make high-quality care inaccessible. The Giving Network invested $50,000 in preschool tuition assistance, opening access to high-quality education for 50 of the most vulnerable families from Basalt to Parachute. Childcare subsidies boost affordability and access to care, incentivize high-quality care, and infuse the system with financial resources.

Early Childhood Education Teacher Scholarships
The child care sector is facing a national workforce crisis, and local providers are feeling the effects. By supporting the professional development of teachers, scholarships boost the recruitment and retention of early childhood educators in our region. The Giving Network’s grant of $30,000 to Colorado Mountain College provided scholarships for 30 early childhood educators to increase their expertise, thereby increasing the quality of children’s learning experiences.

Increased Quality of Family, Friends and Neighbor Care
For families with limited incomes and those who need care outside of regular business hours, informal FFN childcare may be the only option. The Giving Network made a significant investment in coaching and training of unlicensed FFN caregivers with a grant of $140,000 to Early Childhood Network. The grant provided weekly coaching sessions for 40-50 providers caring for 150-200 children, with a focus on safe environments and stimulating activities. Increasing the quality of home-based care environments supports vulnerable children in building the skills and knowledge necessary for kindergarten.

Increased Quality of Licensed Family Childcare
Licensed, home-based childcare programs provide a much higher proportion of care in western Garfield County than elsewhere in the region. Ensuring high quality in these programs has a direct impact on the kindergarten readiness of children in the Garfield Re-2 and Garfield 16 school districts. The Giving Network invested $40,000 in the childcare licensing program of the Garfield County Department of Human Services. This support enabled the program to make small grants to 20 home-based childcare providers caring for up to 80 children, enabling them to meet and exceed state-mandated quality standards.
provide wrap-around supports to children and families, the Giving Network’s grants allowed the FRC to add laundry facilities. This addition provides an invaluable support to homeless children in the area, boosting their self-esteem and their school attendance.

Garfield Re-2 School District, $90,000
The Giving Network responded to an urgent need in Re-2 with a grant that allowed the School District to launch its first FRC. The FRC will fill a gap in the community service infrastructure in central Garfield County, supporting families in Rifle, Silt, New Castle, and surrounding communities.

Roaring Fork School District, $67,000
Roaring Fork is home to a large number of families in need of support, and its FRC has responded with innovative programs. The Roaring Fork School District collaborates with nonprofit organizations providing in-school health services and mental health counseling to students of all ages, making its FRC a hub for a broad range of essential services provided “in-house.” Combined with the FRC’s referrals and case management services, these partnerships create a robust model of family support.

Aspen Family Connections, $60,000
Despite the perception of abundance, students in the Aspen School District face challenges and barriers that prevent them from achieving their goals. Aspen Family Connections helps families with urgent needs such as economic assistance and helps connect them to resources including academic and extra-curricular support, social/emotional and mental health counseling, and legal advice and mediation. AFC supports families in whatever way they need to keep them stable and keep the students engaged in school.

Thriving Youth
Goal: All youth develop the social and emotional competencies they need to thrive.
Young minds need a foundation of support and nurturing in order to learn. Cradle to Career works to advance comprehensive youth wellness, with the understanding that wrap-around support systems are the most effective strategy for helping families work through difficult times. These supports ensure that children can stay engaged in school and overcome barriers to learning.

School-Based Family Resource Centers
The Giving Network has made a significant investment in school-based Family Resource Centers (FRCs) throughout the Aspen to Parachute region. FRCs provide comprehensive support to children and families, including food, economic assistance, mental health support, and a lifeline to community resources. The Giving Network’s investments in FRCs ensure that centers in all four school districts can adapt to the challenges of COVID-19 and meet children’s and families’ increased needs.

Garfield 16 School District, $170,000
The FRC in Garfield 16 serves the region’s most underserved communities. Very few nonprofit organizations serve the Parachute-Battlement Mesa area. The Giving Network’s investments ensure that the Garfield 16 FRC can meet the urgent needs facing its youth. In addition to increasing the center’s capacity to
Envision the Future

Goal: All youth succeed academically and graduate from high school prepared for college and career.

As they embark on life after high school, young people face a daunting array of options. Learning about these options first-hand is a pressing need—but also poses a difficult challenge. Cradle to Career works to help students understand their options, learn about college as well as career training programs, and make a plan for life after high school.

Expanding Career Academies

Youthentity is a nonprofit organization providing Career Academies for high school students to explore potential career paths hands-on. Students choose between year-long programs in Structure Design and the Building Industry; Culinary Arts and Hospitality Management; and Animal Care and Health Occupations. Each provides enriching experiences, empowering youth to make informed choices about the future while also earning high school credits. The Giving Network's investment of $120,000 allowed Youthentity to develop and expand the Career Academies, strengthening the program despite COVID’s challenges.

Trek Pathways Program

The Trek Pathways program provides a “school to work” connection for academically disengaged students in the Garfield Re-2 School District. Counselors in Coal Ridge and Rifle high schools developed the program as an accessible way for at-risk students to earn credits and build practical career-building skills. In addition, 50 local businesses offer internships or job shadowing opportunities to Trek Pathways enrollees. The Giving Network's $35,000 grant provided guidance and training for up to 50 students at high risk of dropping out.

Colorado Opportunity Scholarship Initiative

The Colorado Opportunity Scholarship Initiative (COSI) combines tuition assistance and student supports, so that every Colorado student has access to postsecondary opportunities. The program is designed to support the completion of degrees or certificates necessary to enter the workforce in the student's chosen field. The Giving Network's investment of $60,000 provided scholarships for up to 80 students entering their second year of college.

GlenX Career Expo

The Career Expo was founded on the belief that every high school student needs more opportunities to learn about career choices and the post-secondary education they will need to pursue which can include college, trade/vocational school, certifications, career tech training, internships, and apprenticeships. The Giving Network granted $15,000 for the events that provided 2,800 students the opportunity to meet with 250 businesses at the Career Expos held in Glenwood Springs and Rifle.
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To learn more and to view the Giving Network video go to aspencommunityfoundation.org/about-2/giving-network/

For more information and to join the Giving Network, email stephanie@aspencommunityfoundation.org or call 970-925-9300