

APPENDIX F: CASE STUDY

from *Supporting Families, Children, and the Caregiving Workforce:
A Local Financing Toolkit for Colorado*

Local Early Childhood Initiative Case Study: Strong Start San Miguel County

Community: San Miguel County (Telluride and Norwood Areas)

Size/Type of Community:

- Total population (2021): 8,076
- Children age 5 and under (2021): 315
- Rural/resort mountain, high-value vacation homes in and around Telluride impacting property values of the county

Source: [KIDS COUNT! In COLORADO 2023 Report](#)

Year Tax Established/Reauthorized and Vote: 2017, approved with almost 63% YES vote

Tax Type: Property tax, .75 mill, approximately \$5.40/\$100,000 of assessed value

Approximate Revenue Generated Annually: \$600,000/year

How Revenue is Allocated or Spent:

- Capacity-Building: Increase the number of children that child care providers can serve at one time, funds used to “sustain existing child care centers, especially infant care.”
- Workforce Development: Efforts are focused on recruitment, training, and retention of early childhood professionals; funding used for professional credential recognition grants; scholarships for continuing education; and professional development training.
- Quality Improvement: Strong Start seeks to improve the quality of early childhood care and education programs and facilities distributed through grants.
- Financial Assistance to Families: Help families pay for licensed early care and education programs for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers.
- Other: The program continues ongoing evaluation and administration.

Governance:

- The Early Childhood Council, [Bright Futures for Early Childhood and Families](#), has a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with San Miguel County to manage the Strong Start Program.
- Bright Futures makes funding requests for specific program elements. Once they have decided what funding is required for a specific program component (e.g., financial assistance), a request is made to the BOCC to fund that component. Bright Futures maintains separate bank accounts and financial statements for the Strong Start Program.
- A Bright Futures staff sits on the Early Childhood Advisory Panel (ECAP), which is the advisory board for the Strong Start Program: one County Commissioner, one Early Childhood Council Representative (Council Director), Telluride and Norwood Schools Superintendents, and a community member. ECAP meets quarterly and approves the funding allocations before funding requests are made to BOCC.



Sunset Provision: None

Evaluation: There is a third-party evaluator contracted who works closely with program administrator to collect quantitative and qualitative data.

Origin Story and Champions:

- The EC Council, [Bright Futures for Early Childhood and Families](#) (Kathleen Merritt) and local philanthropic leadership from the [Telluride Foundation](#) (Paul Major) both played key roles.
- In 2007, there was an initial failed attempt where polling was not conducted and the focus was on school readiness.
- The 2017 campaign focused on economic development and workforce support.
- In 2017, polling was conducted in advance of the decision to go to ballot. Also, funding priorities were determined, but revenue allocation amounts were intentionally not assigned to allow for implementation flexibility.
- They decided to go to ballot in June 2017; it was referred to the ballot by County Commissioners in September 2017.
- The 2017 campaign was fast and inexpensive, spending about \$10,000 total

Other Notes/Key Lessons Learned and Insights:

- Plan for Campaign: Polling was essential—let public opinion research determine whether to go to ballot and how to frame the message, a key aspect. The campaign was run by a small, core group of volunteers who managed a larger “action team” that made presentations, sent text messages and emails, etc.
- Maintain Flexibility in Funding Allocations: Determine funding priorities, but maintain as much flexibility as possible in revenue allocations to be nimble and move money around. Flexibility was essential during COVID as more “capacity-building” support was allotted to keep providers in business.
- Set a Reserve Policy: Because there wasn't a detailed policy plan and funding allocation in place before going to the ballot, almost a full year was spent planning. As a result, a healthy reserve fund was built and corresponding management policy was determined.

Community Contacts for Further Information:

- <https://www.strongstartstrongcommunity.org>
- coordinator@strongstartstrongcommunity.org

Sources:

Conversation with Kathleen Merritt and Cathy Barber

News Articles:

- 2018 Program Budget: https://www.tellurideneews.com/news/article_4f6f323e-8f98-11e8-a14f-afed21dfb222.html
- 2017 Campaign: https://www.tellurideneews.com/news/article_d02d1bfe-9a23-11e7-b450-b71220ffaf8d.html