

LaLa's Land of Learning

A Provider Success Story from Yavapai County



LaLa's Land of Learning

- Opened 2019
- ADHS Licensed Child Care Center
- For infants to school-age
- Prescott Valley, Yavapai County
- \$200,000 Grant

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“The building was built in 1999 and hadn’t been updated in 20+ years. There were layers of paint, old cafeteria flooring, and fluorescent lights everywhere.” — Esmeralda Mata-Church

Esmeralda Mata-Church taught for 12 years before beginning her child care journey opening a family child care home in her rental house in 2014. By 2019, she had grown her child care business into LaLa's Land of Learning, a licensed center able to serve up to 70 children. When COVID hit, Esmeralda feared she would lose everything, but she was determined to serve her Prescott Valley families. This determination paid off when funding opportunities emerged to support child care providers, including LaLa's Land of Learning.

“My goal is to provide a second home for the kids—to make it comfortable for them and a place where it is open, warm, and loving,” said Esmeralda. They have built an early care and education environment where children bound through the door excited to learn, and teachers are ready to meet the unique needs of each child, caring for infants through school-aged children.

LaLa's Land of Learning used a \$200,000 grant to complete much needed updates to the facility which was purchased in April 2022. Esmeralda quickly prioritized needs for her facility and gathered wish lists from each teacher, ensuring every classroom got something for enrichment and learning.

Being located in an area with limited access to child care, Esmeralda's contractor worked quickly to complete all the projects. The team installed new epoxy flooring resistant to wear and tear and dimmable LED lights to help with naptime and reduce energy costs. The whole facility received a fresh coat of paint with village

themed murals in many places. Esmeralda also increased security with the addition of two cameras and a security door.

One of the biggest impacts has been the bathrooms. A complete renovation lowered toilets and sinks to appropriate child heights, making them more accessible for the kids. New touchless water faucets, soap dispensers, and hand dryers have been a hit with teachers and kids alike while reducing the spread of germs. The kids love their increased independence and privacy, and teachers have gained back precious minutes in their day.

Esmeralda reimagined the entire outdoor space, using the grant to install turf and remove sand from the 3,900-square-foot playground. The contractor turned Esmeralda's vision for outdoor classrooms into a magical pre-k playground with five unique learning areas and a meandering bike track. Each learning area has its own pergola and activity center.

Even with the improvements made possible through the grant, LaLa's Land of Learning still has needs, highlighting the necessity for continued investment in Arizona's child care providers. Esmeralda noted, “I tracked every penny on my spreadsheets and had to really think about the longevity of everything we purchased.”

The impacts of the grant go beyond the physical transformations. “Our teachers have such pride in the new materials and spaces,” Esmeralda said. “It is energizing for them to see the kids so excited.”



Arizona Child Care Infrastructure Grant

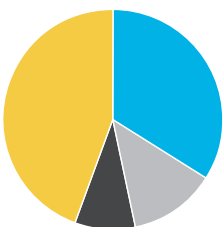
Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) is one of the country's largest community development organizations, helping forge vibrant, resilient communities across America. In 2022-23, the Arizona Department of Economic Security (ADES) and First Things First (FTF) awarded \$65 million to LISC Phoenix for child care infrastructure grants, training, and technical assistance. This funding came from the Child Care Stabilization Grants appropriated in the American Rescue Plan (ARP) Act of 2021. Child care providers received nearly \$60 million to rapidly improve and expand their facilities increasing access to high-quality early childhood learning environments statewide.

The need was substantial: Arizona providers submitted 969 applications requesting more than \$176 million in funding in just two weeks. Providers from 14 of Arizona's 15 counties applied.

Equity was a focus: Child care providers located in low-to-moderate income areas with limited access to child care were the first priority. Additional priorities included providers caring for infants and toddlers, children with disabilities, and children who receive child care assistance through the ADES, as well as providers with waitlists and those open nights and weekends.

Ultimately, 478 sites received grants with an average award of \$124,750.

Statewide

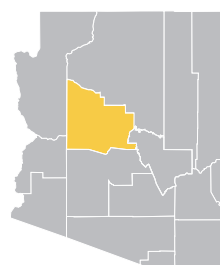


Grants Awarded by Provider Type

- 323 ADHS Licensed Centers received \$52,615,115
- 88 ADHS Certified Group Homes received \$4,312,397
- 63 ADES Certified Family Child Care Homes received \$1,600,000
- 4 Tribal Providers received \$1,103,048

Total: \$59,630,560

Yavapai County



Highlights

- 15 applications requesting \$3,575,000
- 15 grants awarded totaling \$2,925,000
- 45 new child care slots created
- 87% of grantees increased quality of outdoor play space
- 1 in 5 grantees increased classroom(s) size
- 1 in 5 grantees installed antimicrobial surfaces