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## Booster club

### CPCD provides preschoolers and families with the head start they need

By [Kirsten Akens](#)

At one end of the emptied-out conference room is a blur of movement: nine tiny ballet dancers, three teen instructors, and a whole lot of pastel pink.

At the other: a grandfather, pointing his toe in front of him to encourage his 4-year-old grandson — one of two boys in the group — to do the same.

Kay Caddy never anticipated that this is where he would be, or what he would be doing, at 67. He'd already retired from the military and a law enforcement career. But about two years ago, when his fiancée's daughter got incarcerated, the couple ended up with five children to raise.

Child Protective Services referred the family to [Community Partnership for Child Development](#), the local early childhood education nonprofit that manages three core programs for about 2,000 children annually: Head Start, Early Head Start and the Colorado Preschool Program.

"Head Start," Caddy says, "was a godsend for us."

**Twins Cesar and Katalina** are the youngest of the five, who range from 4 to 10. The two share intensely dark eyes, shy smiles, a preschool teacher and now ballet lessons at CPCD's main west-side building every other week.

When the children landed at the couple's home, Caddy says he was unsure of what it would take to make ends meet. So he enrolled in as many of the organization's programs as he could — from health and financial education workshops to wellness and parenting classes.

"Our program focuses on a two-generation approach," explains Amie Bennight, CPCD communications manager. "So it's more than just free preschool. It is supporting and helping the parents and families just as much. ... Children get medical and dental exams and screenings ... and there's referrals to all sorts of other community programs."

Each family is paired with a CPCD advocate, a dedicated staff person who visits the home to check in, set goals, and explain all of the no-cost services. And although CPCD specifically serves newborns to 5-year-olds, advocates do provide referrals for older siblings.

"We had a library program, I think a month ago, where they could see hedgehogs and things like that," Caddy says. "We made sure we took all the kids, all five of them for that. We hear about things for the two kids, but all five kids get to go. And some of the people here actually remember the older ones from years past."

Explains Bennight: "Teachers know the families, and as other siblings come through the program, they're familiar with the situations. ... They know that what they're doing is critical to the lives of families in our community."

She pauses, then adds, "We are still only able to serve about 1 in 5 children that need our services."

**About 92 cents** of every dollar that CPCD receives in donations goes to services for families, Bennight says. And some of the engagement programs they're able to offer are thanks to community volunteers.

Take that ballet class. Julia Gaubatz and Jinni Kwon, both decade-long dancers at Samuel Ballet School, and their friend Tori Johnson, wanted "to share the arts with some kids that might not have had the opportunity," as Gaubatz says.

"Especially with ballet," she says, "it's a really expensive thing to do, even at a young age."

So the three 15-year-olds solicited local businesses to donate all of the necessary gear for the children — from leotards and shoes to ballet-themed coloring sheets and crayons for a mid-class art break. Now they're volunteering their time.

"[Ballet] is a completely new environment for them," Johnson says. "It's something they haven't seen before, so it might spark an interest that will lead to something in the future, or they'll realize, 'Oh, this isn't for me, but it was a really fun activity.'"

About 250 families applied for the biweekly, hour-long class. "We're teaching 17 right now," Gaubatz says, adding with a laugh, "and that's a handful."

But also impactful.

"You can see they're improving so much, so quickly. If any of them really wanted to do it, I believe that they could," Gaubatz says.

**Growth is something** Caddy sees on a regular basis, too — from ballet positions to numbers and letters.

"Cesar and Kata are now writing their first names and [working] on their last name. And just to see their letters forming, how they started out writing backward ... [their teachers] work with them every day so it just becomes natural for them. And it's wonderful."

Bennight explains that school readiness and preparing children for kindergarten is a key part of CPCD's programs. "There is a preschool curriculum that we follow. It's the gold standard, which teaches all the academic elements, but there's also social-emotional development that is critical at this stage in life that supports them for growth and success once they do start


kindergarten, and moving forward."

"It's giving them a little more independence, too," Caddy says.

"And confidence," Bennight notes. "If you think about what they have experienced emotionally at their age just with the family dynamics, that's significant. And to have structure and have a social-emotional support not just for them, but for your family, is powerful."

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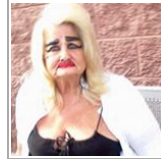
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