THE BUELL EARLY CHILDHOOD LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

Buell Fellows Biographies
11th Cohort
2018-2019
Elena Bacmeister

Hello 2018-2019 Buell cohort colleagues! I’m Elena Bacmeister, a former librarian with masters degrees in Liberal Arts and Library Science and a background in data management and cataloging. I’m grateful to my four children for leading me into this second career in early childhood education. Like many of you, I started out volunteering as a classroom aide. In 2009, my family and our rambunctious dog relocated to Colorado from Columbia, MD. I was hired by Boulder County Head Start as a bilingual teaching assistant, then was promoted to family services, where I’ve worked for the past four years. While at Head Start, I’ve completed the Child Development Associate and Family Services credentials. I’ve worked as a literacy teacher in the “Ready! For Kindergarten” pilot program, and co-taught a bilingual literacy group for parents after completing training sponsored by the Colorado Humanities MotherRead/FatherRead program. Through an initiative of the Early Childhood Council of Boulder County, I became a Brazelton Touchpoints Community and Individual Level Trainer to promote consistent approaches for parents, children, and their teachers. In 2015, I graduated from the Institute of Public Service in Boulder County and currently serve on a Cross Divisional Work Group to support integrated services for families. Last year I completed a mentorship program working on a data management project to improve tracking services, referrals, and parent engagement outcomes.

My mother, who immigrated to this country, and my husband, who emigrated from Mexico as a child, have shown me the resiliency navigating a foreign cultural system requires, firsthand. Serving families in our program has been a great privilege and seeing how parents and children not only persever, but thrive, despite great challenges, is humbling. Families face many barriers which go beyond language. The resulting cost that these barriers place on them, on their children, and on us, as a society, are significant and real. I’m truly honored to be a part of this group and excited to learn from each of you how, together, we can make a difference for parents and young children in Colorado.
Sarah Beisner

Sarah Beisner is a passionate leader in the field of early childhood education and special education. Sarah started her work with children in the fall of 1999 when she was hired as a teacher assistant in an integrated preschool program. It was there that she found her passion for working with children and decided to pursue the field of early childhood as a profession. She completed her associates of science in early childhood education at Pueblo Community College before continuing her education with Adams State University with a BA in Elementary Education. Sarah chose to stay in the early childhood field and continued to work as a preschool teacher and center director until her oldest child was ready for school. After giving birth to a child that had an array of medical and educational needs, Sarah decided to continue her education and received a MA in Early Childhood Special Education from the University of Northern Colorado.

Sarah currently works as an early childhood special education teacher for Pueblo County School District 70. She has been an employee of the district since 2007. She also provides developmental intervention for children birth to 3 years old through Colorado Bluesky’s Infant Toddler Program on top of working full time with District 70. She also serves on the board of STARS Spectrum as Secretary. STARS Spectrum is a non-profit organization for children with high functioning autism. She has provided fundraising support and organized community events to promote STARS over the last two years.

In her spare time, Sarah enjoys reading, painting, crafting and continuing her education. She is supported by her husband and three beautiful children as she takes the next steps furthering her career. The family enjoys fishing on the lake, playing board games, and playing with the family dogs. Sarah is looking forward to learning and expanding her knowledge base in the field of leadership as applied to early childhood education as she enters the Buell Leadership Program.
Claudeth Castellanos was born in Guatemala, Central America. She has been married for 26 years and has two children. In 2000, when her younger child was born, she decided to open a licensed daycare in her home in California. It was then when she fell in love with early childhood education and decided to take classes at the University of California, Riverside Extension. She obtained a certificate in Early Childhood Studies from this university in 2005.

Since moving to Colorado with her family in 2006, Claudeth has worked in different early childhood programs serving young children. She earned her BS in Science, major in Applying Social Science from CSU-Global in 2015. She is currently serving her community working as the Spanish Services Librarian at the Loveland Public Library. She provides a variety of programming in the library and outreach services throughout the city to meet informational and recreational needs and interests for adults and children, with an emphasis on bilingual English/Spanish language programs and services.

Claudeth also works as a parent educator for Berthoud Parents as Teachers. In this program, she works with families with children from prenatal through kindergarten utilizing the evidence-based Parents as Teachers model. She provides home visiting services focused on healthy child growth and development through parent-child interactions, development-centered parenting, and family well-being.

She is grateful and honored for the opportunity to be part of the 11th cohort of the Buell Early Childhood Leadership Program.

When she is not working, Claudeth enjoys reading, running, and traveling with her family.
Kristin Davidson has been the Coordinator of Douglas County Libraries Book Start program since January 2017. She started her career with Aurora Public Schools as a Preschool Facilitator in 2011. Kristin is certified in Cradling Literacy, Nurturing Parenting Program, child curriculum 2015, Bright By Three, and completed the CLASS tool assessment PDIS Credential Level 3. She is bilingual in Spanish.

She earned her bachelor’s degree in Language, Literature, and Culture from Colorado State University in 2009. She immersed herself in the Spanish culture by spending a semester abroad in Acala, Spain. Kristin became director qualified after completing an additional 30 credits of college coursework at Arapahoe Community College in 2011.

In 2018, she became a Parents as Teachers Educator with the Arapahoe County Early Childhood Council. Kristin currently serves five families with twice monthly home visits. She is dedicated to nurturing young children’s development and providing resources, materials, and activities to support families in being their child’s first teacher.

Kristin enjoys spending time with her fiancé, Kevin and two dogs, Brewer and Odin. When they are not out walking around the neighborhood, the dogs spend their time running around her parent’s backyard while Kristin and her father foster along a hive of honey bees. Bee keeping has been a wonderful hobby for the past three years. She is extremely popular with her friends and neighbors during honey-harvesting season.

Kristin is delighted to continue her learning through the Buell Early Childhood Leadership Program and looks forward to all the possibilities that await.
Liliana Flores Amaro

Liliana is a proud northeast Denver native and daughter to a family that immigrated to the United States from Mexico in search of the American Dream. Her first memories of education were sitting alongside her maternal abuelita, who in spite of the fact that she herself had only a second grade education, helped her first granddaughter learn that words, sounds, and symbols can be written down by introducing her to pen and paper. As a daughter of immigrants, she understands the value of navigating complex social and educational systems. She is the first in her family to graduate with a high school diploma. Liliana also graduated from Colorado College with a BA in Anthropology and a double minor in Spanish and American Cultural Studies. She obtained a master’s degree from the University of Colorado Denver in partnership with the Boulder Journey School Teacher Education Program.

She is currently a faculty member at University of Colorado Denver working with teachers across the state through the alternative licensure program, ASPIRE to Teach. Most recently, she worked at Clayton Early Learning as an infant teacher. She has also worked at Denver’s Early Childhood Council and Qualistar Colorado supporting many teachers and directors in child care programs and schools in their journey towards higher quality care and education. She has been a volunteer, intern, and lead teacher in private and Head Start classrooms serving infants, toddlers, preschoolers and their families.
Liliana Flores Amaro, cont.

Liliana is passionate about understanding the systems that impact young children’s education and care in order to help them have the best possible life outcomes. She is interested in learning about and finding leverage points both inside and outside of traditional systems that change the paradigm and interrupt the opportunity gaps for and by the communities we live in and serve.

Her passions also include food justice and the immigrant and Latin@ movements. She is a recipient of a Permaculture Design Certificate and a graduate of the Circle of Latina Leadership. She is currently the Board Chair of the nonprofit, The GrowHaus, an indoor urban farm and education center in the community of Elyria-Swansea, the neighborhood where she grew up and continues to live in today. She is also on the National Western Center’s newly initiated Authority Board which will be overseeing and managing the re-imagined and expanded 250-acre campus. In her free time, Liliana likes to spend time exploring the beauty and bounty of Colorado with her husband, Jose, and their extended families. She also has a mini urban farm; an ever-expanding garden, chickens and goats and their two dogs, Rhino and Rexy.
Stacy Fujieda

I am an Air Force brat by birth, and have called many states and countries home, but Hawaii is where my heart, and family, is. I attended the University of Northern Colorado for my undergrad and fell in love with Colorado. Back then I thought that I wanted to teach secondary English. Going through the education program, I quickly became jaded with the red tape and finished my degree solely in English liberal arts.

I managed a bookstore for a few years and then discovered the Boulder Journey School. I completed my masters through their internship program and was inspired. Early childhood was where the action was! All of my jobs through high school and college involved young children. Why did I think that teaching high schoolers was what I wanted? The teacher education program, and the Reggio approach itself, showed me where I was meant to be.

I’ve taught in many different schools and have been a director, both in Hawaii and here in Colorado. I’ve worked with all ages from infants through Pre-K and adore aspects of each stage. The learning is different but always important.

In this stage in my life, I have a desire to implement a true social justice framework in early childhood education. What does equity look like in the classroom? In the school community? In the lives of young children? How do we create a space where children thrive and then go into the world with a mind toward social equity?

In my spare time, I enjoy hanging out with my wife, Rebeca, and our two daughters, Isa and Maya. We moved back to Colorado two years ago, and are having a great time exploring this awesome state.
Erin Gager

Erin has worked at Denver’s Early Childhood Council, a non-profit organization that supports early childhood systems, programs, and professionals, since 2012. She started shortly after graduating with a BA in anthropology from the University of Michigan. In those six years, she has cultivated her passion for community-led systems change and is dedicated to supporting Denver’s young children, their families, and the professionals who serve them. Erin’s main role at the Council was to support early childhood educators as Manager of Professional Development. In this role, she gained a breadth of experience in adult-learning best practices, guiding professionals through complex systems, program budgeting, evaluation, and cross-organization collaborative efforts. She plans to continue assuring that the expertise and diversity of early childhood professionals are honored and supported by programs, systems, and policies in her new role as Senior Manager of Workforce Solutions. This new role focuses on how to leverage data, evaluation, and technology systems to support the early childhood workforce. Erin is thrilled to be a part of the Buell Early Childhood Leadership Program to gain new skills and connections so her work can ensure every professional is met where they are and empowered to get where they want to be.

A born-and-raised Coloradan, in her spare time Erin enjoys most outdoor activities, such as hiking, climbing, skiing, and enjoying a drink on a patio.
Rachel Hansard

Hello! My name is Rachel Hansard and I am a preschool teacher at Gilpin Elementary in Black Hawk, Colorado. Black Hawk is a small, rural mountain community and I feel very fortunate to live and work in such a beautiful area. I grew up in Michigan where I attended college at the University of Michigan-Flint. While there, I had the opportunity to work with a very diverse population of students in the Flint public schools. I was also introduced to the Reggio philosophy while attending the University of Michigan-Flint.

I came to Colorado three years ago to be part of the Boulder Journey School graduate program and also to learn more about the Reggio teaching philosophy. I fell in love with the state of Colorado during that time and decided this was home for me. I have been working in early childhood education for close to 20 years in various early childhood environments including: universities, private schools and, currently, public schools.

I am very honored to be part of the Buell Early Childhood Leadership Program and to continue my journey in early childhood education!
Hi, my name is Amy Harman. I am very excited to join the Buell Fellowship in the 11th cohort! I am a long-time resident of Colorado, having grown up in the Boulder/Gunbarrel area since age 4. My parents were outdoor enthusiasts, always taking us on hiking, camping or ski adventures! This has carried over to my own true love of the outdoors and my complete admiration of our beautiful Colorado mountains. I love to ride my road bike, ski, hike and camp, especially with my family. I am happiest watching my son playing in his baseball games!

I also love to share the joys of our wonderful planet and local community with my preschoolers. I have worked in early childhood as an educator for over a decade. I am currently the Owner-Director of Wildflower Preschool, which I opened in 2013. I love working with our staff, children and families each day. We are blessed to have so many wonderful people as a part of our community. I love that there is never a dull moment in my day!

Through this leadership program, I hope to discover new avenues to follow toward advocating for young children, families and professionals in the early childhood profession. I am always up for a challenge and for making new friends. I look forward to meeting you!
Kathryn Harris

Kathryn V. Harris is President and CEO of Qualistar, a statewide nonprofit that elevates the quality of early childhood education in Colorado. During her tenure, Kathryn has restructured Qualistar’s business model to align with the Early Childhood Colorado Framework, which is a strategic, wraparound approach used by public and private stakeholders to build systems that support every child. This model recognizes that Qualistar’s work is multiplied when the organization collaborates with community partners across the domains of Family Support and Education, Health and Well-Being, and Learning and Development. To build and strengthen systems, Kathryn utilizes her professional background in fundraising and corporate consulting to engage the business community, develop strong mutually beneficial nonprofit partners and effectively influence policymakers.

Kathryn began her career in consulting at Accenture, where she worked with large Fortune 100 Financial Services companies, including Bank of America and Wachovia, to deliver complex technology programs with consistency and predictability. Next, Kathryn took her ability to manage multiple initiatives, lead programs and excel in a corporate environment to the nonprofit sector, working as executive director of the Grand Foundation for eight years. She has held leadership and donor development positions at Generation Schools Network and Rose Community Foundation.

As a mother of twin 17-year old boys born premature, she is an advocate for students with learning differences, for early childhood mental health and for social/emotional supports in schools. She also knows firsthand the benefit of high-quality early care and education during a child’s first five years of life.
Pam Kage

Pam Kage has been in the early childhood field since 1996. As a young mother with two small children, she began a family childcare home and was blessed to be able to provide for her family while spending her days with young children. She worked for a non-profit family center for 13 years and while getting to experience a variety of focus areas and initiatives, she began to feel a pull towards early childhood. She has worked in early childhood as a coach, facilitator, observer in a variety of tools, program manager and trainer. She has been a lifelong student, obtaining an associates in psychology in 2015, bachelor’s in early childhood in 2017 and is now pursuing a masters.

She has lived in Colorado since she was five and moved to the northeastern corner in the early 80’s. Although not to be confused with a “country” girl, she is definitely a small town girl and enjoys the fact that the local gas station attendant or grocery carry out (yes we still have those) knows your name and asks about your children. Although spontaneous travel has become one of her empty-next past times, her roots and heart are in rural Colorado. She has two adult daughters and became a first time “Grammie” in November of 2017. Pam loves spending time with her large extended family, playing games, road trips, reading and sipping coffee on her front porch as the sun is coming up in the morning.
Sydney Kalin

Sydney is excited to be joining the ranks of the Buell Fellows! She is a Colorado native—she was born in Boulder and grew up in Longmont and Littleton. She attended Metro State and received a BS in Human Services, with a concentration in Domestic Violence Counseling. During and after college, Sydney worked at Mount Saint Vincent, a residential treatment facility and volunteered at RAAP (now Blue Bench) as a hotline and hospital volunteer. After a few years as an in-home infant/toddler nanny, she participated in the Teacher Education Program at Boulder Journey School in 2009-2010 while completing her masters in Early Childhood Education at the University of Colorado at Denver. In 2010, Sydney joined the founding teacher team at Denver Green School, where she created, directed, and taught the ECE program for seven years. After a brief stint as director at a small Jewish preschool in Greenwood Village, she has recently joined the Early Learning School at the Denver Jewish Community Center as Assistant Director.

Sydney has been lucky enough to participate in Speak Up for Kids Day in both 2017 and 2018 and feels very strongly about advocacy of all kinds—beginning with teaching children to advocate for themselves from an early age. When she’s not at school, you can find her doing yoga, working in the garden, or spending time with her husband Wade and their dog, cat, and three chickens.
Stephanie Martin

Stephanie Martin of First Impressions started coordinating the early childhood system in Routt County through Routt County's Early Childhood Council in 2005. Ms. Martin earned her Bachelor of Science in Human Development and Family Studies at Auburn University and a Master of Science in Early Childhood Education from Jacksonville State University.

Before moving from Alabama to Colorado, Stephanie's early childhood education background consisted of being a preschool teacher. In moving to Steamboat Springs in 2002, Ms. Martin taught preschool and higher education as an adjunct instructor for Colorado Mountain College's Early Childhood Education Program. As the Program Administrator for First Impressions, teaching ECE classes is an extremely rewarding position, especially through keeping a connection with teachers in the field who work every day in the areas that First Impressions supports.

Beginning in the fall of 2011, Ms. Martin began working with the Routt County Bridges Initiative and co-facilitated three sessions of Getting Ahead in a Just Getting by World. This program has now morphed into Routt to Work and Stephanie supervises the part-time coordinator. Stephanie also serves as supervisor for the part-time coordinator of the Fatherhood Program of Routt County and the Colorado Preschool Program Coordinator for the Steamboat Springs School District's Colorado Preschool Program. For fun, Ms. Martin enjoys spending time with family, traveling with her husband, reading, and outdoor activities.
Chris Miller

I joined the Denver Preschool Program (DPP) in April 2015 as the Director of Quality Initiatives, overseeing the organization’s strategies to improve the quality of the approximately 250 preschools it partners with. Since fall 2017, I have also been a Nurturing Fathers Program facilitator. Prior to joining DPP, I was the Manager of Quality Improvement Initiatives at Denver’s Early Childhood Council and the Denver Preschool Program Operation Specialist at Qualistar Colorado. Before entering the ECE field in late 2011, I worked in the local nonprofit public health and community outreach fields. I believe our society has an incredibly long way to go before we can truly say we are fulfilling our espoused value of equity. Building an equitable, high-quality ECE system is just one of many critical issues we must address in order to accomplish that vision.

After moving a handful of times during my childhood both nationally and internationally while my father was in the military, I grew up mostly in Monument, CO, just outside of Colorado Springs. I earned a BS in Architectural Engineering from the University of Colorado at Boulder, but decided to pursue a different career path after completing a year as an AmeriCorps VISTA after graduation. I currently live in southeast Denver with my spouse and two children, a three-year-old son and one-year-old daughter, and my free time is mostly spent playing with them and pretending I’m a kid again! I’m excited for the year ahead to learn the course content as well as from each member of the cohort.
Katie Narvaez

My name is Katie Narvaez and I am a Colorado Native through and through. I was born and raised in the Roaring Fork Valley, spending nearly all of my childhood in Glenwood Springs. After graduation, I attended University of Northern Colorado in Greeley with my goal set on a career in elementary education. I fell in love with my early childhood classes and switched my focus from elementary to birth through 8. After graduation my husband, infant daughter and I found our way back to “the valley” to be closer to family. While I spent the first few years as a stay-at-home mom and primary care giver to my first child, who had significant special needs, I eventually held part-time positions as a preschool teacher, and Early Intervention family coordinator. As our family grew, my journey took me to full-time positions as a Part C case manager for my local Community Centered Board, Program Manager for Raising A Reader Aspen to Parachute and Education Manager for a national association. I currently work in Eagle County as the Early Head Start Supervisor, Disabilities Coordinator and Parent and Community Engagement Coordinator. It’s a challenging role, but one that I love. I have a passion for early childhood and working with the families in our community to better understand their needs and connect them to resources. I believe my time with the Buell Early Childhood fellowship will not only benefit myself, but my community as well. I am so excited to see the positive ripple effect that my time with this program will have.

In my free time, you can find me raising my family in the house that I grew up in in Glenwood Springs. I love watching my son play high school basketball and my eight-year-old daughter being her creative self, participating in art or theater classes. My husband and I enjoy hiking, gardening, cooking and (mostly) working on our long to-do list for our 1930’s log house.
Mary Nelson

Mary Nelson is the Executive Director at the Denver Cooperative Preschool (DCP). DCP is a cooperative, play-based early childhood community founded in 1960. The school works as a resource not only for young children, but for their families, providing opportunities for involvement through volunteering, parent education, and community events. Mary holds a BA in Psychology from the University of Notre Dame, an MA in Educational Psychology from the University of Colorado Denver, and is a graduate of the Stanley British Primary Teacher Preparation Program.

Mary has been a member of the DCP cooperative community since 2009, and has served as a parent, board member, Assistant Director, and Executive Director. Prior to joining DCP, Mary had a diverse array of experiences including working in a mother-infant attachment research lab, supporting children on the autism spectrum and their families, teaching in a juvenile detention center, and working as a classroom teacher in both elementary and early-childhood programs.

Community-based education is at the heart of Mary’s educational philosophy, and she believes deeply in the power of collaboration between children, their families, and the school community. Working closely with families is one of Mary’s strengths, and she has a passion for supporting parents in realizing their vision for the child’s education.

Outside of her work at DCP, Mary enjoys spending time with her husband, Andy, and their three children. She is also an animal lover and shares her home with her three dogs and three chickens.
Inspired by the teachers around me growing up in Indiana, I had planned to be an early childhood special education teacher since I was a young child. I began volunteering in primary grades resource and intensive classrooms in high school and chose the Early Childhood Special Education, BS program at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee in part because of its focus on practicums in the first two years of study. After graduating summa cum laude from Vanderbilt, I spent two years teaching English as a Foreign Language and working with teachers as a coach in the Peace Corps. I served in Moldova, lived with a host family for two years, spoke Romanian with some fluency and met my spouse, another Peace Corps volunteer.

Following Peace Corps, I moved to Washington DC where I taught Head Start within DC Public Schools for two years. Feeling a call back to the midwest, my husband and I moved back to Indiana where I completed my master’s degree at Indiana University-Bloomington and taught a variety of grades including preschool, kindergarten and fifth grade. Ten years ago we made the move to Broomfield, Colorado and feel perfectly suited to our quiet, older neighborhood. Here I have worked in Early Intervention, Part C services in the Denver Metro area and for Boulder Valley School District as an ECSE at Child Find and now as a preschool teacher. I sought out the Buell Early Childhood Leadership Program to hone my skills as a leader who works towards equity in services and access to quality early childhood intervention and education for all children and families.

My two children and I walk to school together each day where I teach preschool and they attend second and fourth grade. As a family we love to travel, cook, hike and camp, take care of our small backyard menagerie (chickens, rabbits, cats and a dog) and talk about what books we are reading.

Julia Pfitzer

11th Cohort of Buell Fellows: 2018-2019
Crystal Redner

Mother of three, wife, aunt, friend, boss, coworker, educator and caregiver are just a few words to describe myself. I am Crystal Redner and I live in Cheraw, Colorado. We live on a farm with many, many animals, including, dogs, cats, chickens, ducks, sheep, potbelly pig, donkey, sheep, rabbits, fish, gerbils, mice, and guineas. My husband, Todd has three sons, and we also have three children. We have been married for 10 years. We enjoy traveling and exploring new places. Together we are raising six children. Our oldest son, Trevin, 9, is the joy of our lives. He has Prader Willi Syndrome and has taught us so much about ourselves and how we should be living our lives. Cora, 8, is a sassy, independent, spit fire. She naturally must be, being that she is the only girl in the mix. (I know, tough, tough spot to be in). Our baby is Tage, 3, he is the funniest, most energetic, loveable little explorer. My three step-sons are 26, 19, and 18.

I have always been employed in the education field. I started out with my director’s license at the age of 16. I worked in childcare for five years. The last year that I was in early childhood, I was hired to open new centers, get them running and then I would move on to the next center. I went to Adams State College to get a BA in Elementary Education and an emphasis in Early Childhood Education. I then began teaching in the elementary setting for 16 years. I taught 3rd grade through 6th grade. I also taught technology, reading and math/science. I loved teaching technology, which led me to get my master’s degree in Technology in Education.
Crystal Redner, cont.

After I left elementary education, I took my current job, as Director of Childcare for Bent County. This was the first time I had opened a center from scratch and stayed throughout the whole process. I have loved every minute of this new adventure. It has given me so many new skills and a totally new respect for administrators. The most unique part of my job is that my childcare center is in our nursing home. This has been the most rewarding experience for both the elders and the children. I could not have imagined the vast educational experiences provided from having a nursing home and daycare together in one building. I have now been with Bent County for 2.5 years. I also just started the EQIT Instructor class as well, which will enrich my experience.

I am so excited and honored to be part of this new endeavor and what learning and resources it brings.
Jennifer Sanchez McDonald

Jennifer grew up in many suburbs of southern California, enjoying the vast natural opportunities and her passion for animals, especially horses. She participated in 4-H, Quarter Horse shows and rodeos. She graduated from Cajon High School in 1993 and went to Dodge City Community College. A few years later, opportunities arouse for her family to relocate to southern Colorado with the Burlington Northern-Santa Fe Railroad. She left college to assist her family with the move and now calls Colorado her home.

In 1996, she attended Trinidad State Jr. College, studying nursing and completed the Practical Nursing Program. In fall of 1998, she became a Licensed Practical Nurse. Over the years, Jennifer has had the privilege of working in diverse medical fields such as Obstetrics/Gynecology, Geriatrics and Family Medicine. Working in rural health care, access to overall health and well-being was very limited. Social determinants often were seen as a strong factor for many chronic health conditions. She began assisting families with patient assistance programs for medications, referrals to specialists and often made calls to insurance companies for prior authorization of services. Her passion and dedication led to management of a rural health clinic in 2004. During the next several years, the clinic increased access to medical providers, services and brought in technology, leading the clinic in becoming a quality medical site. In 2011, the rural health clinic merged, leaving uncertainty about the future.
Jennifer Sanchez McDonald, cont.

Shortly after the merge, Jennifer became the Council Coordinator for the Huerfano-Las Animas Counties Early Childhood Advisory Council. Early Childhood Councils are legislatively charged with increasing and sustaining the quality, accessibility, capacity, and affordability of early childhood services for young children 0-5 years and their families across three domains: early care and education, family support, and overall health and well-being. Her journey working with children and their families continued, but with a little twist. Over time, she has learned new skills, became an advocate, grant writer and mentor. In 2017, she received her Bachelor of Science, major in Human Services from Colorado State University Global. Her aspiration is to strengthen her skills, open doors to new opportunities, increase partnerships and collaboration leading towards increasing access, quality and equity across early childhood services in rural Colorado.

Jennifer enjoys the rural lifestyle with her fiancé and children. The majority of their time is spent on the ranch, watching their children compete in sports or 4-H or enjoying the vast natural opportunities Colorado offers.
Cassie Sorrells

Cassie grew up in the hills of West Virginia, where she gained her BA in Multidisciplinary Studies, with concentrations in Biology, Anthropology, and Linguistics. An undergraduate volunteering experience at a preschool in Guatemala made it apparent that her future lay in working with, and for, young children. After college, she worked with children in a number of roles and locations, including teaching English as a Second Language to young learners in Spain, and working at a farm-based Montessori program in Ohio. Ultimately, she settled here in Colorado to pursue her master’s in Education and Human Development through the University of Colorado Denver.

Cassie is currently a Mentor Teacher at Boulder Journey School, a Reggio-inspired early childhood program known for its dynamic approach to learning, as well as its role as a local and global advocate for children’s rights. She also serves on the Early Childhood Professional Development Advisory Committee, where she is helping to coordinate the implementation of Colorado’s Early Childhood Workforce 2020 plan.

Above all else, Cassie considers herself an advocate for young children, their families, and their teachers. Through the Buell Early Childhood Leadership Program, she is looking forward to expanding her knowledge and collaborating with other passionate early childhood professionals, all the while acting as a voice that calls for respect for the competence of young children.

Outside of the sphere of early childhood education, you can find Cassie cooking, reading, doing yoga, or hiking with her border collie, Emma.
James Stetson

I am a Youth Services librarian for the rural Montrose Regional Library District. For the past 13 years I have lived on the Western Slope serving youth in various capacities: wilderness instructor, youth group leader, Sunday School teacher, substitute teacher, classroom educator, and new children’s librarian. Having seen other Buell fellows go through this program I am excited for the opportunities that will come for me to grow as a person and a leader. Just as exciting for me are the skills I will gain to better identify needs in this stretch of Colorado and help connect folks so they can serve one another’s needs and strengthen the spirit of community.
The Buell Early Childhood Leadership Fellows are agents for change, aligning values, voice, and actions to create equity, opportunity, and educational excellence for all young children and families.

For more information about the Buell Early Childhood Leadership Program, please visit www.ucdenver.edu/education/buell

Phone: 720-639-9229
Email: BECLP@ucdenver.edu