

The Story of Our Organization

Hilltop Children's Center and Educator Institute was founded in 1971 by a group of parents at the Queen Anne Lutheran Church looking for after-school care for their children. There, we grew to offer full-day preschool programs to the local Queen Anne community. Our curriculum went through several evolutions in our first 20 years, including influences from Montessori, seasonal themes, and principles from the High/Scope model. In the mid-1990s, those influences were loosening and dissipating due to the presence of educators who had visited the schools of Reggio Emilia, Italy, and were inspired by Reggio philosophy and teaching practices.

This spirit of change and transformation has been a constant thread through our organization from the beginning. Through collaborative and courageous dialogue, our educators began to further explore emergent curriculum, reflective teaching practices, and pedagogical documentation. We saw the children in our center thinking critically about their world, connecting in profound ways with each other, and experiencing great joy in their learning. As a faculty and family community, we continue to learn in relationships and grow as an organization.

Since the early 2000s, we have continued to draw inspiration from Reggio philosophy and emergent curriculum principles. Our program has also found inspiration in the early learning centers of Aotearoa New Zealand and the Te Whariki model of early education that is rooted in Indigenous principles. We continue to grow in our commitment to and implementation of anti-bias education in our program and in our efforts toward becoming an anti-racist organization.

In the early spring of the 2020-2021 school year, our organization adjusted our services to remain open during a global pandemic while continuing to produce positive outcomes for the children in our care. The pandemic created protocols and restrictions that forced us to rethink our way of existing. Our relationships were tested, but our resiliency has proven strong as we navigated the challenges as a community.

Entering the 2024-2025 school year, we are very excited to continue living out our mission and values and to embark on our next chapter together as an organization through various teaching theories that value children's perspectives and support best practices. We seek to expand our knowledge by continuing to learn about other early learning philosophies and approaches to working with children and families.

Our focus will include:



Developing a new 5-Year Strategic plan, including input from families, faculty and community stakeholders



Elevating the field and the professionalism of our work through an increase in wages for our faculty



Revisiting our larger organizational systems and structures to assess what's working, where we want to make change, and what we want to strengthen



Deepening our connection to our pedagogical approach and our commitment to social justice