

embrace early

Sheltering Arms
The standard for early childhood education



2025 ANNUAL REPORT



Message from the President & CEO



Dear Friends,

2025 was an especially challenging year for early childhood education. Delayed payments, funding uncertainty, and a 43-day government shutdown created significant strain across our field. Yet through it all, Sheltering Arms remained steadfast in our commitment to the children and families who rely on us every day.

In January 2025, we made the difficult decision to close two of our childcare centers to realign operations and strengthen the organization's long-term health. While this was not an easy step, it allowed us to focus on sustainability and ensure we can continue serving families well into the future. We are grateful that every affected child was offered the opportunity to attend another Sheltering Arms center, maintaining continuity of care with as little disruption as possible for families and staff was—and remains—deeply important to us.

Despite these challenges, your partnership helped us move forward with purpose.

You inspire our work every day. Your belief in the power of early childhood education motivates us to continue strengthening opportunities for children and families across metro Atlanta.

You invest in brighter futures. Because of your generosity, more than **2,652 children and their families** received high-quality early education and vital family support services this year. Together, we also reached our annual fundraising goal—a remarkable milestone made possible entirely because of you.

And together, we create impact. Because of your support, classrooms remained vibrant, families continued receiving the resources they need, and children kept learning, growing, and building the foundation for lifelong success.

For 138 years Sheltering Arms has been a place where children thrive and families are respected, supported, and empowered. Advancing this work requires collaboration beyond our classrooms, and we remain committed to working alongside families, community partners, and policymakers to address the systemic barriers that limit opportunity.

As we look ahead, we are focused on strengthening our impact and expanding what's possible for children and families across metro Atlanta. With your continued partnership, we will keep building a stronger, more stable future for the communities we serve.

Thank you for being part of this work.

With gratitude,

Blythe Keeler Robinson
President and CEO





Who We Are

Sheltering Arms provides high-quality early education, child care, and comprehensive family support services to 2,652 children and their families annually at 11 metropolitan Atlanta locations in Cobb, DeKalb, Douglas, Fulton, and Gwinnett counties.

On average, children attending Sheltering Arms score in the 90th percentile for language and literacy, exceeding developmental milestones for kindergarten readiness.

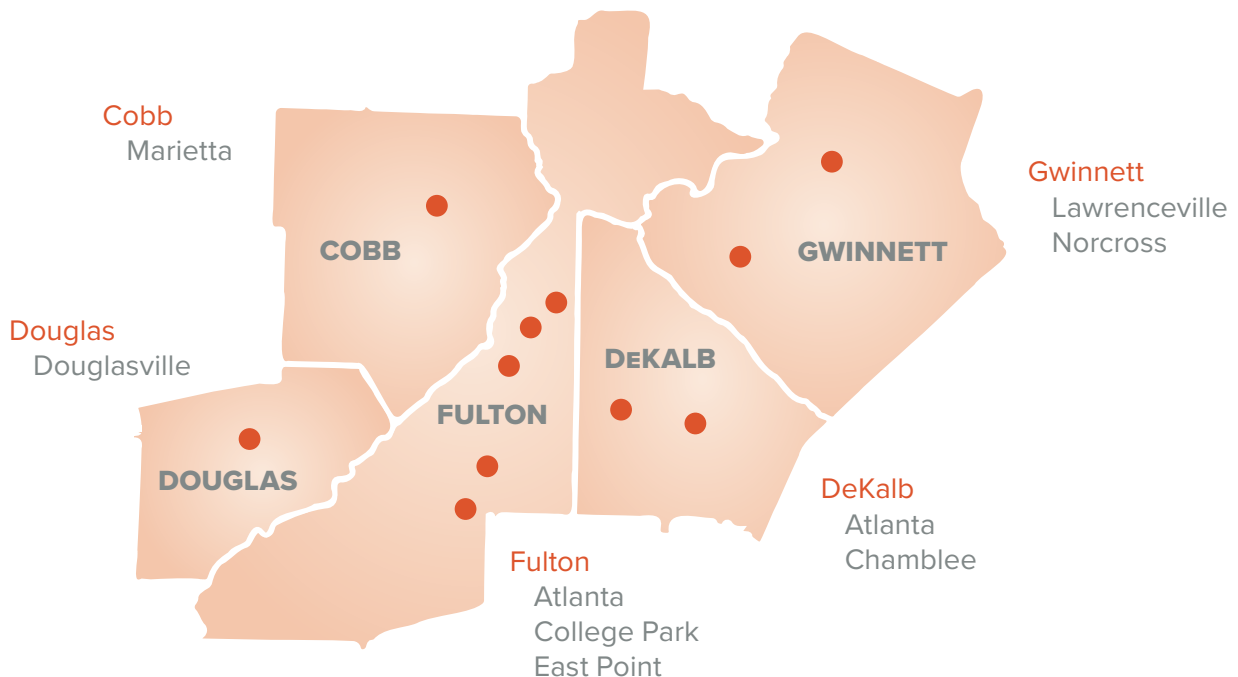
Our Mission

Sheltering Arms closes opportunity gaps by transforming the lives of children and their families through high-quality, affordable early childhood education and leadership in the field.

Our Vision

Sheltering Arms sees thriving communities where all families hold the power to create opportunity for themselves and their children.

Sheltering Arms Locations



Early Education Outcomes

Sheltering Arms fosters excellent early learning experiences by providing children with a rich and diverse environment for exploration and discovery. Through a combination of observation, listening, experimentation, and questioning, children are empowered to actively engage with their surroundings and learn through hands-on experiences.

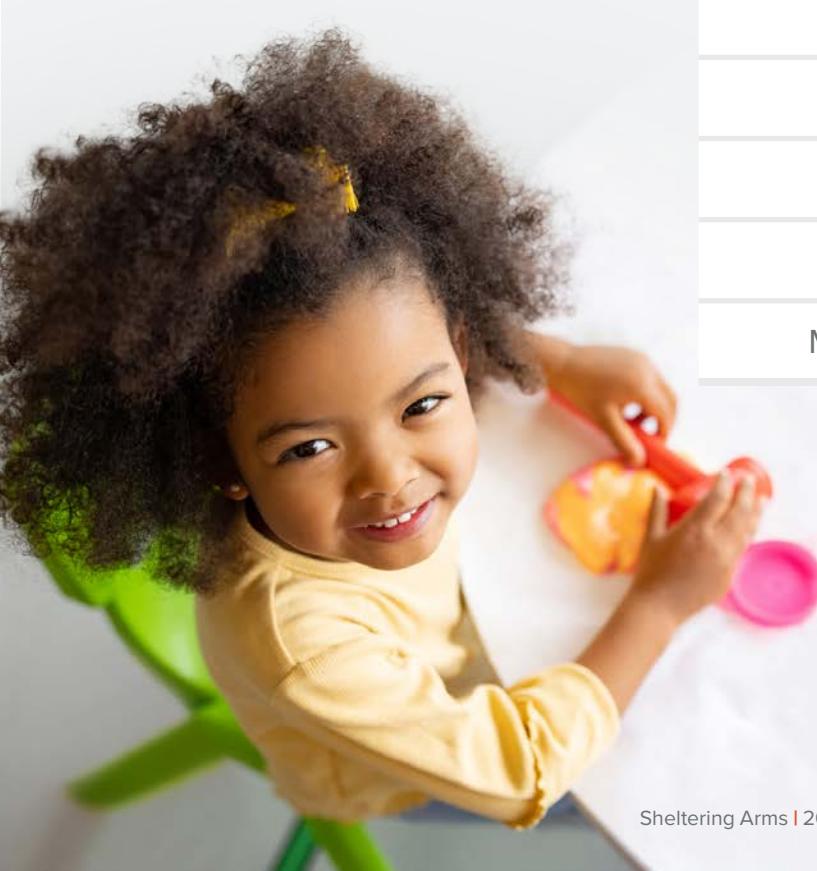
Sheltering Arms demonstrates a solid commitment to the development of every child by conducting developmental assessments throughout the year and by tracking children’s progress across five key domains - social-emotional, physical, language, cognitive, literacy, and mathematics. Sheltering Arms ensures a comprehensive understanding of each child’s strengths and areas for growth.

The proficiency demonstrated by Sheltering Arms’ students in literacy and mathematics during the 2024-2025 school year is a testament to the effectiveness of the organization’s educational approach and the dedication of its staff.

With 93% of early learners meeting or exceeding expectations in literacy and 90% achieving the same in math and critical developmental domains, Sheltering Arms prepares children for future academic success. These high levels of achievement serve as strong indicators of future readiness and proficiency in core academic subjects, laying a solid foundation for continued learning and growth.

These essential areas not only prepare children for success in core academic subjects but also equip them with the foundational skills and abilities needed for lifelong learning, personal growth, and achievement in all aspects of their lives.

Sheltering Arms – Spring 2025	
	Meets/Exceeds Development Expectations
Social-Emotional	95%
Physical	96%
Language	92%
Cognitive	94%
Literacy	93%
Math/Science	90%



Strategic Plan Initiatives

Accelerating Family Impact, Our Role in the Field, Financial Resiliency & Employee Well-being.

Accelerating Family Impact addresses our focus on 2-generation strategies to offer comprehensive support to families and our children’s social-emotional and mental health.

Enhance the 2 Generation (2-Gen) Model of Comprehensive Family Support

As part of Sheltering Arms’ 2-gen approach, we provide children with high-quality early learning experiences and work individually with their families. We work with families to identify strengths and opportunities, and use this information to connect them to services and resources that support them, through extensive partnerships with community organizations.

The Level-Up Program- The Level-Up Program expanded opportunities for families with young children to advance their economic mobility. Through six months of targeted workshops, one-on-one coaching, and connections to community partners, parents built skills, clarified career goals, and prepared for the next phase of their professional journeys.

One standout participant in 2025 was **Marvin Lambert Jr.** Marvin joined Level-Up with a strong commitment to creating stability and opportunity for his family. As an actively involved father, he balances co-parenting responsibilities while fully engaging in program activities.

Throughout the cohort, Marvin emerged as a thoughtful leader among his peers. He worked closely with Family Support Coaches, contributed meaningfully to group sessions, and encouraged others in the program. **After completing the program, he earned a promotion at his workplace—demonstrating how Level-Up equips parents with the skills and confidence to achieve meaningful career advancement.** Marvin’s leadership also extends beyond the classroom through his involvement with Sheltering Arms’ **Fatherhood Advisory Committee**, where he helped strengthen programs that support fathers in our community. In recognition of his dedication, Marvin was also named **Parent Leader of the Year in 2025 by Sheltering Arms.**

The **Fatherhood Advisory Committee**, part of Sheltering Arms’ father involvement program, met quarterly and



brought together fathers and father figures from all 11 locations. Unlike traditional father-engagement efforts, the committee focuses on developing father leaders who strengthen involvement at their centers and in the broader community.

Meetings provide time for connection over a shared meal, opportunities to learn about upcoming ways to engage with other fathers—such as playdates and sporting outings—and collaborative planning for future events and workshops designed to support and engage Sheltering Arms fathers.

Kids’ Mindfulness: Laughing Dogs Yoga partnered with Sheltering Arms to provide weekly movement and mindfulness classes to students. All classes included music, free movement, poses, and calming breathing techniques. Growing research shows that bringing this education to children reduces anxiety, enhances coping skills, promotes self-regulation, and increases self-awareness. Together, movement and mindfulness support focus, self-regulation, and improved learning outcomes.

In addition, Sheltering Arms continued its partnership with **Inner Explorer**, an evidence-based mindfulness platform designed to support mental health and well-being in schools and centers. Inner Explorer offers age-appropriate mindfulness practice daily for our children. The practice helps cultivate critical life skills, such as self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, and resilience.

“A child’s mental health is as important as their physical health. Inner Explorer is an integral part of the daily routine in our classrooms and helps our children feel calm, centered, and ready to take on the day,” says Amy Hobart, Director of Education at Sheltering Arms.

Our **Health Services Advisory Committee Meetings** bring together families, community partners, and health providers to ensure services meet community needs. Providing expertise to help identify and prioritize health issues, advocating for positive change, building strong community relationships, providing technical assistance for health and safety plan implementation, developing health-related policies and procedures and evaluating and planning health programs. These efforts strengthen Sheltering Arms’ health offerings and support the well-being of our staff and the children and families we serve.

Our Role in the Field

Speak Up is Sheltering Arms’ advocacy-focused parent leadership program, and grounded in the Head Start Program Performance Standards that call on programs to support parents as advocates and leaders—both in early childhood settings and at home.

Aligned with requirements for meaningful parent participation in Policy Council and parent committees, **Speak Up** equips families with the confidence, skills, and knowledge to raise their voices on issues affecting their children, schools, and communities. Through guided practice, collaborative learning, and hands-on advocacy opportunities, the program empowers parents to lead, partner with educators, and help shape decisions that



Speak Up - Parents Unite Conference

impact the future of young children.

The Sheltering Arms Educare Center Parent Advocacy Ambassadors coordinated an Advocacy Day, **Spring into Action**, that empowered families to engage in civic leadership and share their voices. During this event, parents supported and encouraged one another to participate in the democratic process by writing letters to their elected officials about their personal experiences with early learning programs and the impact of Head Start on their children and families. Through these conversations and letters, parents highlighted the



importance of access to high-quality early childhood education, family support services, and stable funding for programs that strengthen communities. Advocacy Day not only amplified parent voices but also fostered confidence, connection, and

leadership among families, reinforcing Sheltering Arms’ commitment to collaborating with parents as advocates for their children and for the future of early learning.

Strolling Thunder

Sheltering Arms joined GEEARS’ for the 8th Annual Strolling Thunder at the Georgia Capitol, where families and children from across the state gathered to advocate for early education, child care, and health. The event included advocacy training, meetings with legislators, and kid-friendly activities that highlighted the importance of early childhood development. As part of this effort, Sheltering Arms joined GEEARS and a broad coalition of Georgia businesses and individuals in signing a joint letter to the state’s congressional delegation in support of policies that strengthen children, families, and early learning systems. More than 150 parents, caregivers, and children from 33 Georgia cities participated, demonstrating strong support for early childhood education and family-focused policies.

Protecting Early Learning

When the federal government shutdown threatened early education programs nationwide, Sheltering Arms faced potential classroom closures that would impact 825 children and more than 200 educators. Alongside partners, including the **YMCA of Metro Atlanta and Easterseals of North Georgia**, the crisis put services for more than 5,500 children at risk across metro Atlanta.

The Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta, together with philanthropic partners, provided a critical 45-day emergency bridge loan to keep Head Start programs open, ensuring continuity of care, learning, and family support.

A joint roundtable with partners—including GEEARS (Georgia Early Education Alliance for Ready Students) and the Georgia and National Head Start Associations—helped elevate this issue, drawing media attention and reinforcing the essential role early childhood education plays in supporting working families, a stable workforce, and a strong economy.

Employee Well-Being & Engagement

To encourage healthy habits and strengthen workplace morale, we launched *Spring into Motion*, a month-long wellness challenge in which staff tracked physical activity and used an online wellness platform to earn points for their teams. 130 employees participated, fostering friendly competition and team spirit across centers. The initiative reinforced the importance of physical activity in supporting employee well-being and in cultivating a positive, energized workplace culture.

To further support employee well-being and connection, the Administration Team hosted a four-week **Summer Fun Event Series** designed to build camaraderie and boost morale. These shared moments created space for connection, laughter, and renewed energy—strengthening relationships across the team while reinforcing a culture of appreciation and engagement.

Financial Resiliency

Our financial position has strengthened significantly over the past year, marking a clear and measurable turnaround. Through disciplined financial management and a more streamlined operating structure, we achieved an operating surplus and improved our overall financial stability. At the same time, we exceeded our fundraising goals, reflecting strong philanthropic momentum and a more strategic and effective use of resources.



Who We Serve

Sheltering Arms serves children from six weeks to five years old, focusing on mixed-income and historically underserved communities. Our programs support working families across a diverse socio-economic spectrum, including those who qualify for Head Start and Early Head Start services. By providing high-quality early education and comprehensive family support, we help children build a strong foundation for lifelong learning while enabling parents to work and contribute to a stable, thriving community.

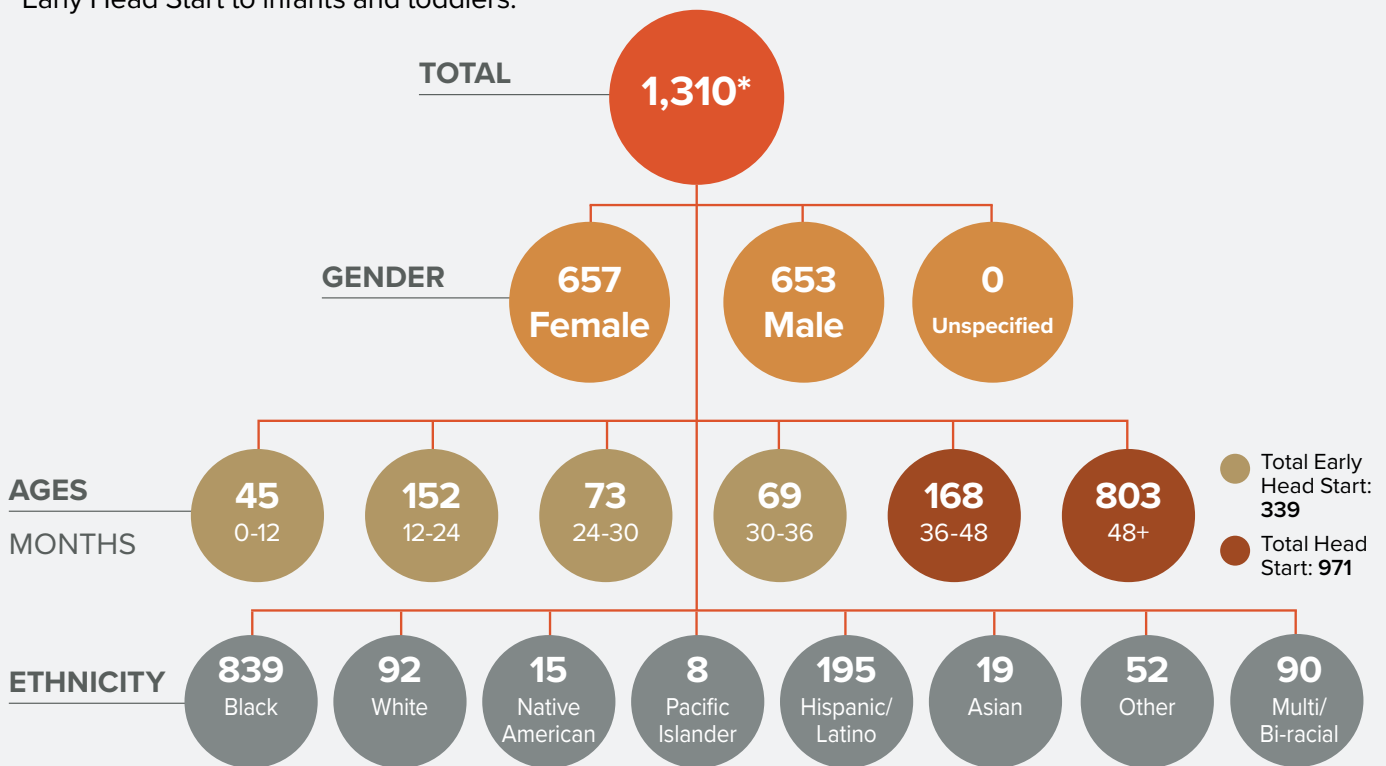
Total GA Pre-K students: 1,017*

Total number of children served through Preschool, Tuition, and Subsidized programs: 2,652*

**Represents the total number of children served over the course of the calendar year, including those who entered and exited the program.*

Head Start

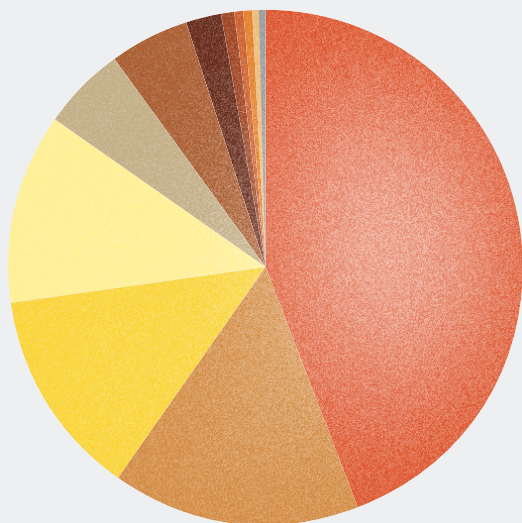
We are proud to be a Head Start grantee and have offered the program for over 25 years. Head Start and Early Head Start programs are federally grant-funded by the Office of Head Start within the Administration for Children and Families/Department of Health & Human Services to promote the school readiness of children under age 5. A core component of the Head Start model is its focus on family partnership, recognizing parents and caregivers as their child’s first and most important teachers. Through family engagement, leadership opportunities, and comprehensive support services, Head Start works alongside families to strengthen stability, well-being, and long-term success for both children and their caregivers. Each center provides a full-day schedule to accommodate working parents and blended classroom structures that integrate children from diverse socio-economic backgrounds. Sheltering Arms also offers Early Head Start to infants and toddlers.



**This number differs from the funded enrollment in the Head Start & Early Head Start grant because it represents the total number of children served over the course of the calendar year, including those who entered and exited the program.*

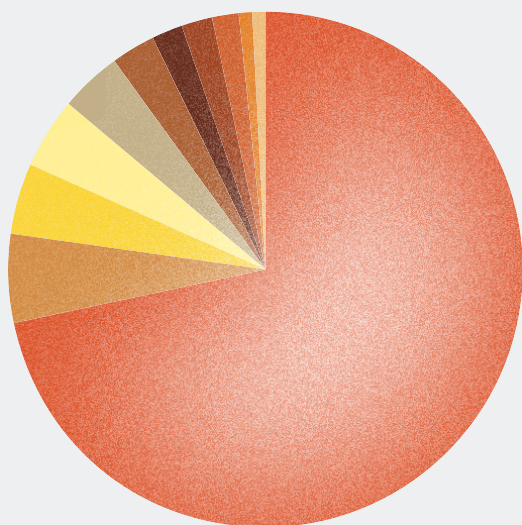
Financial Summary

For the Year Ended December 31, 2025



REVENUE BREAKDOWN (Total: \$28,162,193.58)

● Head Start	44.29%
● Tuition	15.69%
● Fundraising	12.79%
● Pre-K Revenue	11.97%
● CACFP Grant	5.41%
● DFACS Parent Voucher	5.04%
● Change in Market Value	2.29%
● Head Start Contract – 9th District	0.73%
● Summer Transition Grant	0.56%
● Investment & Interest Income	0.47%
● Other Revenue	0.44%
● Dividends	0.30%



EXPENSE BREAKDOWN (Total: \$27,649,836.89)

● Salaries and Benefits	71.92%
● Maintenance	5.47%
● Food	4.38%
● Occupancy	4.38%
● Professional Fees	4.06%
● Depreciation	2.80%
● Supplies	1.98%
● Other Expenses	1.92%
● Interest Expense	1.52%
● Travel & Training	0.83%
● Fundraising	0.73%

NET SURPLUS

Net Surplus as % of Revenue	1.82%
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Our Supporters:

1888 Society

The 1888 Society recognizes Sheltering Arms' supporters whose gifts of \$1,000 or more sustain and expand our work. Named for the year Sheltering Arms was founded, the Society honors donors who make significant annual investments in our mission—ensuring that children and families across metro Atlanta have access to high-quality early education and comprehensive family support services.

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Sheltering Arms,


385 Centennial Olympic Park Drive NW
Atlanta, Georgia 30313
404-523-2767 | shelteringarmsforkids.com

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