

2023  
Annual  
Report

Prairie Flower  
Children's  
Center



*"We must teach our children to smell the earth, to taste the rain, to touch the wind, to see things grow, to hear the sun rise and night fall – to care." – John Cleal*



**Clockwise from top left:** Enrolled families enjoy a community hike during a 2023 spring open house; board member Debra Kumar (right) engages a family in a nature craft at Prairie Flower's Juneteenth festivities booth in Ames; a felted butterfly hangs on the wall in one of our classrooms.

## Our Mission

For almost 30 years, Prairie Flower Children's Center has sought to strengthen connections to community and the natural world while nurturing children's innate capacities for imagination and wonder, and instilling a sense of unconditional belonging. Our mission over this time has remained resolute: to honor unpressured childhood as a critical time for healthy development.

This approach is needed now more than ever. Society is facing dual childcare and youth mental and physical health crises. Conventional schools, childcare centers and youth programs place a significant – and growing – emphasis on academics and achievement. Much of that is accomplished indoors, at desks and on screens.

This philosophy is trickling down to even the youngest children, with parents of toddlers and preschoolers feeling

pressure to "ready" their children for academic achievement in kindergarten. Outdoor time has significantly declined for school-aged children over the past 40-plus years.

Children today are showing increasing evidence of these harmful trends. More are either overweight or obese, or at risk of becoming so, with significant impacts on their future health. Society's predominant focus on academic achievement is also linked to skyrocketing rates of anxiety.

Yet research shows that time spent in nature is a powerful antidote. At Prairie Flower, children spend meaningful time each day engaging with the natural world – through crafts, natural play materials, outdoor exploration and more. We carry out our mission by creating a gentle, unhurried space where children can learn, play and grow while engaging with the natural world as both a source of wonder and a teacher.



*"Our capacity to love is an unstoppable essence that, when nurtured, can expand without limit." – Pema Chodron*



**Clockwise from left:** Building forts is one of many activities Prairie Flower children enjoy during visits to the woods; center director Monica Marcomb connects with the community during the City of Ames' 2023 EcoFair; natural textures and toys help inspire open-ended play.

## Our Programs

Prairie Flower programs provide dynamic, rhythmic and holistic learning environments experienced through the senses. Children learn through imitation, immersion in free play, creative movement and exploration of nearby woods, fields, groves and urban ecosystems.

In 2023, we worked to expand our offerings to meet the needs of a wider swath of our community, including adding full-day preschool options (in addition to our part-time preschool and mixed-aged kindergarten). We also offer after-school programs for older children and are in the process of designing new summer camp programs that will start in 2024.

Our new location at Bethesda Lutheran Church has positioned us more centrally in Ames, increasing access for more families, and has given us additional classroom space to grow our impact.

## Our Team

### Teaching Staff

Monica Marcomb  
*Center Director & Lead Teacher*

Caeli Coffin  
*Lead Preschool Teacher*

Mirrah Wilson & Amy Worrel  
*Assistant Preschool Teachers*

Kealey Oldham  
*PoemTree Supervisor*

Emma Haase & Lili Lobato  
*Assistant PoemTree Teachers*

### Board of Directors

Abi Gundlach-Graham  
*Board President*

Debra Kumar  
*Board Treasurer*

Tamsyn Jones  
*Board Secretary*

Christina Sheets  
*Board Member*

Karuna Sajeevan  
*Board Member*





Play-Based



Love-Centered



Nature-Immersed

## Financial Highlights

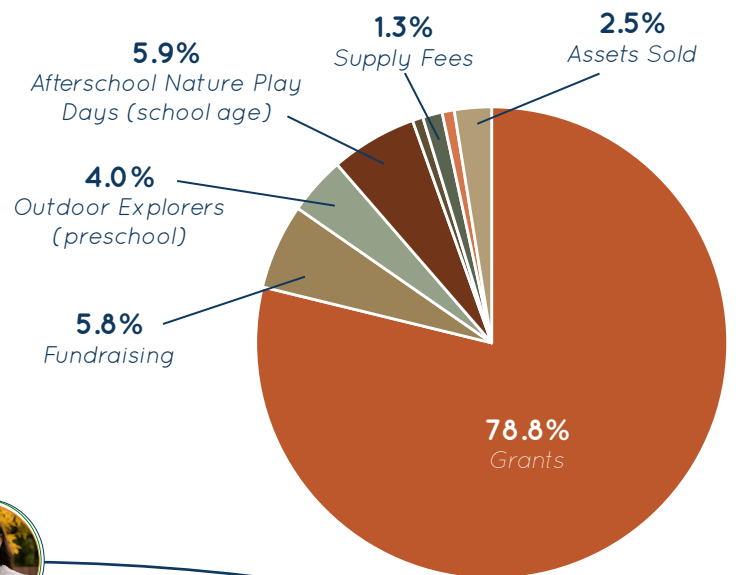
Our fiscal year encompassed July 1, 2022-June 30, 2023. This was an irregular year for us as we underwent searches for both a new location and a new director. We suspended our regular programming for this time, instead holding fully outdoor, part-time programming from September to December 2022. These included our Outdoor Explorers preschool program and our Afterschool Nature Play Days program for school-age children.

**Total income:** \$35,375      **Total expenses:** \$26,102

### Financial Summary:

Net Income for the Year: \$9,273  
Cash on Hand: \$59,395  
Total Assets: \$59,935  
Total Expenses: \$24,907

## 2022-2023 Income



## Contact Us

### Questions?

Prairie Flower Children's Center  
1517 Northwestern Ave. | Ames, IA 50010  
(515) 292-4312 | [director@prairieflowercc.org](mailto:director@prairieflowercc.org) | [www.prairieflowercc.org](http://www.prairieflowercc.org)