



# GROWING OUR IMPACT

2024 ANNUAL REPORT





Pathwaves 2024-26  
Fellows and Staff

## LETTER FROM NUBIA LÓPEZ, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear Friends and Partners,

Since Pathwaves' founding in 2021, we have been on a critical journey to build the collective power of leaders of color working to transform Washington's early childhood systems. This work is rooted in a bold vision: **that every child and every community in our state should have the opportunity to thrive, and that requires a system where leaders with lived experience have decision-making power.**

In just four years, we've seen that vision come to life. Our inaugural cohort of seven Fellows made an extraordinary impact through their placements in nonprofit and government settings—bringing lived expertise, advancing equity strategies, and growing as changemakers. We came together in June 2024 to celebrate the conclusion of our first cohort—a day filled with joy, connection, and storytelling that reminded us what's possible when we create a **community of belonging**. Subsequently, we proudly launched our second cohort of nine Fellows in the fall of 2024, deepening our reach across the state.

Our Fellows and partners are breaking down silos and shifting policy conversations across the state, working to expand access to affordable childcare, improving supports for families with children with intellectual and developmental disabilities, and



addressing maternal health – issues that shape early childhood outcomes. Through these efforts, our network is building bridges between direct service and systems advocacy and offering a visionary, cross-pollinated space where leaders learn from each other, model new strategies, and push forward collective solutions to Washington’s most pressing early childhood challenges.

### **The system needs representation.**

At Pathwaves, we have created intentional pathways for leaders from communities of color to gain skills, build relationships, and get the hands-on experience they need to advance equitable policy solutions for all communities in our state. I am humbled by the enthusiasm with which leaders of color have embraced our mission and the progress we have made already, working together.

I’m proud every day to work alongside an incredible team of collaborators, Fellows and alumni, our Pathwaves board, and a network of partners who share a commitment to building a more equitable early childhood sector. Together, we are not only shifting who holds power, **but how power is shared—with humility, collaboration, and a deep belief in our communities’ wisdom.**

As you read this report, I hope you see the seeds we’ve planted, our growing impact, and the transformation already taking root. None of this would be possible without your belief in our mission and your partnership in our shared work.

With deep gratitude,

Nubia López  
Executive Director  
Pathwaves

2024-26 Fellow Raishawn Swensen speaking with U.S. Senator Maria Cantwell





# OUR IMPACT

## Empowering Leaders of Color Through Pathwaves' Fellowship Program

Inaugural 2022-24 Cohort: **7 Fellows**

Current 2024-26 Cohort: **9 Fellows**

# 15

Nonprofit organizations and government agencies supported through Fellowship placements

2022-24 Fellow Samantha Grono **joined the Pathwaves Board** after completing her Fellowship

Dania Nuno Carrillo, 2024-26 Fellow, **appointed to the Steering Committee** of the Child Care Aware Washington roundtable

2024-26 Fellows **testified in Olympia** in support of bills to improve policies for caregivers

Raishawn Swensen, 2024-26 Fellow, **led a 15-person team from Washington state** during meetings with 9 elected officials in Washington, DC

Fellows attended multiple **advocacy days** that:

- Centered the **experiences** and **needs of immigrants** in our early childhood system
- **Promoted childcare access** and affordability
- Called for **expanded funding of Head Start** and Washington's Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP)



2022-24 Fellow Samantha Grono speaking at the celebration lunch marking the conclusion of our inaugural fellowship





Sandra Diaz (second from right) at the Governor's signing of a bill to enhance access to food assistance programs

## Alumna Story: Pathwaves and Washington State Association of Head Start and ECEAP (WSA)

Joel Ryan (he/him), Executive Director at WSA, believes the Pathwaves Fellowship meets an important gap in the system. "First of all, **there aren't enough people of color doing advocacy work in the early childhood policy space.** Secondly, bringing someone new onto your team who is launching their career and has a lot of drive and dynamism can be the jolt an organization needs to remain vital."

Sandra Diaz (she/her), 2022-24 Pathwaves Fellow at WSA, was the perfect addition to the team. "We knew that we had a star on our hands and were committed to making sure Sandra had a home with us at WSA."

For Sandra, the Pathwaves Fellowship was the ideal training ground for engaging with the Washington State legislative system. "I was new to the state and the Fellowship curriculum intentionally equipped us to understand the system and its various actors. Most importantly, **I learned about the significance of relationships in the legislative process and was given opportunities from the very beginning**

**to make connections with important actors within the sector."**

Joel reflects, "One of Sandra's first projects as a Fellow was to conduct a series of interviews with Head Start and ECEAP directors and staff to learn more about their programs and the impacts of COVID-19 on young children. This work resulted in us receiving a Voices for Healthy Kids grant through the American Heart Association. The purpose of this funding was to deepen our understanding of the impacts of COVID-19 with a specific focus on the needs of children experiencing social-emotional challenges and the parental and professional caregivers supporting them."


**"The ripple effect of Pathwaves will only continue to grow because we have more capacity within our team."** Sandra continues, "WSA has a strong network of parents doing grassroots advocacy in our state and across the country. **I'm excited to be a part of our growing impact in the years to come."**

# BUILDING COLLECTIVE POWER FOR BIPOC LEADERS

Barbara Belk (she/they), Pathwaves Fellow at Families of Color Seattle (FOCS), describes **Pathwaves as the answer to a question they didn't know they were asking.** After graduating with a Master of Social Work, Barbara began searching for a job. She recalls stumbling upon Pathwaves' website and seeing the words: building the collective power of BIPOC leaders. Those words took hold of Barbara, and they began to realize that this was what they truly desired in their workplace: to work and learn alongside other leaders of color who are committed to building power together and for their communities.

Since Barbara joined the team at FOCS as a Pathwaves Fellow, she has seen a strong commitment to increase collective power in action. They share, "FOCS and Pathwaves both come from an asset-based approach. Our work at FOCS is oriented around parents and caregivers, and really helping our community recognize that they have power and a role to play within the system. **And at Pathwaves, we are transforming that system by building the collective power of leaders in the state. I'm watching it happen in real time.** We are a Fellowship cohort of 9 leaders and our impact will just grow."

Regardless of where Barbara's career takes them in the future, they hope to always remember that "doing work well and in a sustainable way means not doing it alone. Being surrounded by people you trust allows you to show up even on the hardest days". **For Barbara, the Fellowship cohort has been her safe space as she navigates an increasingly tumultuous political landscape.** They look forward to seeing how their impact will continue to grow and evolve alongside the collective power they have played a part in creating.

A photograph of Barbara Belk, a woman with dark hair and sunglasses, wearing a vibrant floral shirt. She is standing behind a table covered with a purple cloth. On the table are several informational cards with QR codes and a banner for Families of Color Seattle. The banner includes the text 'FAMILIES OF COLOR', 'parent groups | resource sharing', and 'focseattle.org'.

Barbara Belk at the Annual FOCS Kids Melanin Spectrum Celebration



# INCREASING CAPACITY OF PLACEMENT PARTNERS

Emani Donaldson (she/her), **Pathwaves Fellow at Open Doors for Multicultural Families (ODMF)**, was still in the hiring process when she was informed about the opportunity to participate in the second Fellowship Cohort. Moses Perez (he/him), former ODMF Director of Advocacy & Civic Engagement and placement supervisor shares, "Emani is a really special person, and we wanted to invest in her professional development from the beginning so she wouldn't get burned out." Emani joined Pathwaves' second cohort as a self-placed Fellow, a capacity-building opportunity for organizations to select an existing employee to participate in the Fellowship program.

For Emani, **the Fellowship was an exciting opportunity to continue to deepen her learning in a way that felt appropriate for this moment in her career.** "The Fellowship allows me to learn in a way that invests directly in my career, with professional development tailored to my specific needs. Early in the curriculum we focused on storytelling, anti-racist leadership, and how to make an impact on policymaking spaces. I have applied these lessons to work at ODMF to bolster our collective skills and knowledge to mobilize our community advocates in different ways, especially during advocacy days in Olympia."

Partnership with Pathwaves directly aligns with ODMF's value of investing in their community in order to transform systems. Moses explains **"Our pillars of opportunity and advocacy directly tie in with our work with Pathwaves and investing back in our community** and building capacity at ODMF. Emani's policy advocacy work with Pathwaves is the perfect example of this value in action."

*"Our pillars of opportunity and advocacy directly tie in with our work with Pathwaves and investing back in our community and building capacity at ODMF. Emani's policy advocacy work with Pathwaves is the perfect example of this value in action."*

**Moses Perez**  
Former ODMF Director of  
Advocacy & Civic  
Engagement

Emani Donaldson, 2024-26 Fellow at Open Doors for Multicultural Families, testifying on improving community inclusion services for individuals with developmental disabilities during an Early Learning & Human Services Committee hearing,





Panel participants Fernanda Martinez Novoa, Sen. T'wina Nobles, Dr. Nucha Isarowong, and Sheila Ater Capestany (from left)

## 2024 PANEL DISCUSSION

On April 24, 2024, Pathwaves hosted the panel discussion **BIPOC Leadership Toward Early Relational Health** in conjunction with the UW School of Social Work. Featuring Washington State Senator T'wina Nobles; Sheila Ater Capestany, Strategic Advisor for Children and Youth at King County; and Dr. Nucha Isarowong, Director of the Advanced Clinical Training Program at Barnard Center for Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health, the panel was moderated by Pathwaves Fellow Fernanda Martinez Novoa.

The panel **discussed the vital importance of early relational health for children's long-term health and life trajectories**. Children grow and learn when they feel safe and their basic needs are met and this sense of safety comes from the relationships they create with their caregivers. Without a sense of safety, babies and toddlers' brains become stressed, preventing healthy development. Speakers stressed the importance of utilizing a holistic approach when designing early childhood programs, taking early relational health into account, and ensuring that systems focus on early interventions.

This event was attended by 40+ participants, which included Pathwaves Fellows, partner organizations, Board members, sector leaders, and MSW students. It was an **opportunity to build understanding of this issue while also creating a space for discussion, connection and building relationships, and increasing their collective power as leaders in the field**. It also brought together panel speakers who represent nonprofits, the public sector, and politics to talk and strategize around advancing their shared priorities to improve the health and wellbeing for Washington's children.



# INAUGURAL 2022-24 FELLOW COHORT

Pathwaves is so grateful to our Inaugural Cohort and Placement Sites for embarking on this journey with us. We set out to co-create a space of transformational growth as individuals and as a collective, to have an impact on the early childhood policy landscape in Washington state. It was 20-months of courageously navigating new experiences and challenges together in pursuit of our shared vision, and we learned so much together along the way.



**Fernanda Martinez  
Novoa (she/her)**  
Childhaven



**Maya Washington (she/her)**  
Washington Communities  
for Children



**Reshonna Reynolds  
(she/her)**  
MomsRising



**Sandra Diaz (she/her)**  
Washington State  
Association of Head  
Start and ECEAP



**Samantha Grono (she/her)**  
Voices of Tomorrow



**Sharissa Liam (she/her)**  
Department of Children,  
Youth, and Families



**Shatterra Overton (she/her)**  
Council for a Strong America  
|. ReadyNation

# 2024-26 FELLOW COHORT

Pathwaves is proud to welcome our second cohort of Fellows. Building on the lessons learned in the inaugural cohort, we're helping cultivate leaders of color to take on decision-making roles that will create more equitable early childhood policy systems.



**Asha Farah (she/her)**  
Voices of Tomorrow



**Barbara Belk (she/they)**  
Families of Color Seattle



**Dania Nuno Carrillo (she/they)**  
Washington STEM



**Elisha Sneddy (she/her)**  
Hummingbird Indigenous  
Family Services



**Emani Donaldson (she/her)**  
Open Doors for  
Multicultural Families



**Gemma O'Neil (she/her)**  
Washington Family  
Engagement



**Jasmine Walters (she/her)**  
Best Starts for Kids



**Kawthar**  
OneAmerica



**Raishawn Swensen (she/her)**  
Washington Association for the  
Education of Young Children



## PATHWAVES STAFF



**Lish Olson (she/they)**  
Manager of People and Culture



**Nubia López (she/her)**  
Executive Director

**Pathwaves WA is built on the work and wisdom of our mentors, partners, and teachers.**

We wish to especially acknowledge Leslie Dozono (she/her) as a co-founding consultant and Interim Executive Director and Makeba Greene (she/her) as co-founding consultant, as well as LaToya Holmes-Ware (she/her) as past Co-Executive Director, and Meg Gomez (they/them) and Arianna McLaren-Simpson (they/them), who have provided consultant support.

Thank you also to the creative teams who help us share our impact through storytelling, photography, and design: Stacy Nguyen Creative, Michael B. Maine, and Storytellers for Change.

## PATHWAVES BOARD OF DIRECTORS



**Dr. Angela Griffin\***  
(she/her)  
Byrd Barr Place



**Dr. Kelly Nicolls**  
(she/her)  
Cheney School District



**Maggie Mendoza\***  
(she/her)  
Educational Service  
District 105



**Maria Vasquez\***  
(she/her)  
Growth X Design LLC



**Nawiishtunmi  
Nightgun**  
(she/her)  
Chief Seattle Club



**Sabrina Miller**  
(she/her)  
Yakama Nation Child  
Care Development Fund



**Samantha Grono**  
(she/her)  
Washington State  
Women's Commission



**Tanya Hutton**  
(she/her)  
National Indian  
Child Care Association



**Haydeé Lavariega\***  
(they/them)  
Collective Liberation  
in Practice



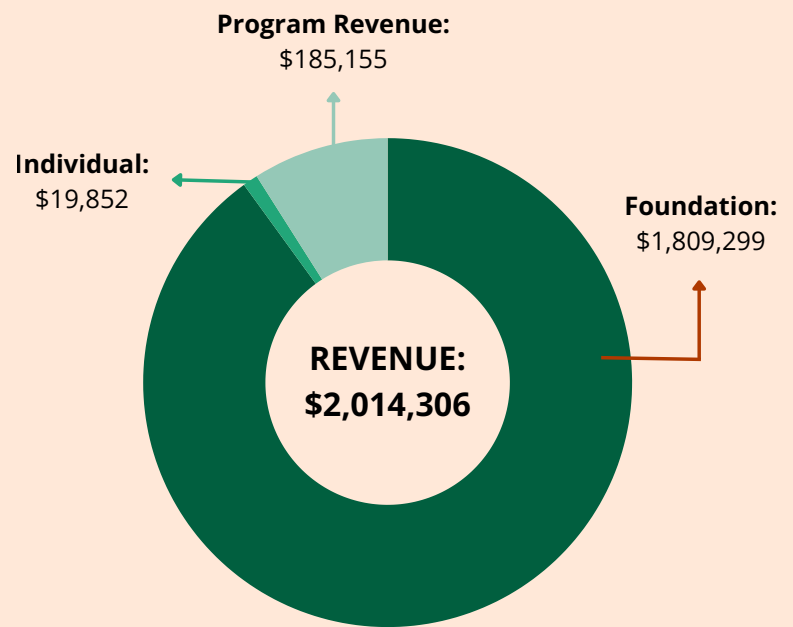
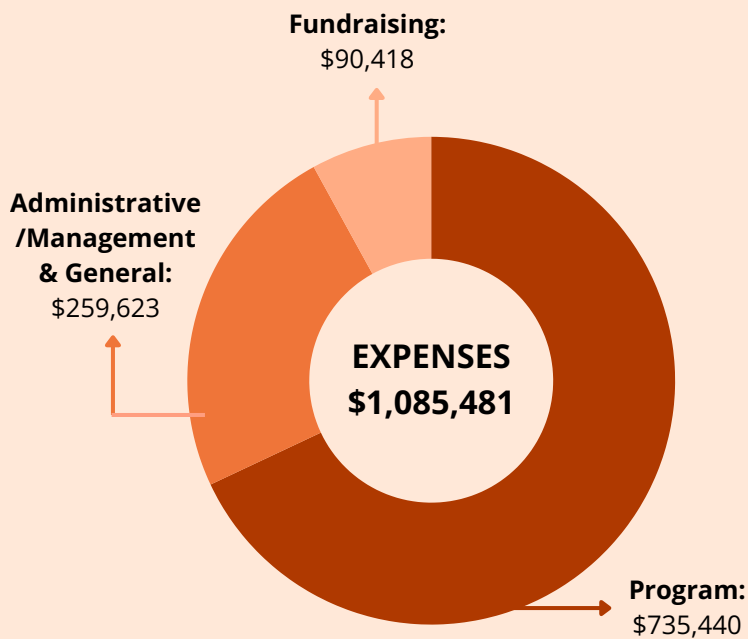
**Soleil Boyd\***  
(she/her)  
Washington STEM

### PREVIOUS FOUNDING BOARD MEMBERS

\*Founding Board Member



# 2024 FINANCIALS



**Net Assets:**  
**\$1,328,825**

2024-26 Fellow, Jasmine Walters, shares a laugh with placement site supervisors during our Fellowship Orientation event.





# CONTRIBUTORS

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*\*Founding Donor*

**To support Pathwaves in our efforts to increase the representation and power of people of color in early childhood policy spaces, please visit <https://pathwaveswa.org/donate>**





# PATHWAVES

Leaders of color transforming  
early childhood systems



[PATHWAVESWA.ORG](http://PATHWAVESWA.ORG)