

A **backbone** for collaboration.
A **catalyst** for change.

Impact Report | Fiscal Year 2024 – 2025

(Photo: Juntos Aprendemos Graduation, Prineville 2025)

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(Photo: Juntos Aprendemos Graduation, Redmond 2025)

A Backbone for Collaboration.

A Catalyst for Change.

Dear partners and friends,

Over the past year, **Better Together has moved from rebuilding to reimagining.** We've deepened our partnerships, strengthened our systems, and reignited a shared sense of purpose across Central Oregon.

As a backbone organization, we don't currently run programs or deliver direct services. Instead, we connect the dots between people, organizations, and ideas that—together—can make a difference for children and families. We create spaces for collaboration, alignment, and learning, so that community-driven solutions can grow strong.

And while we don't always stand on the frontlines, we are always behind the scenes — **powering the partnerships that make regional change possible.**

This year, that work took many forms:

- We stewarded nearly **\$2 million in community-rooted funding** through fiscal sponsorships.
- We supported **eight Family and Youth Councils** that now engage nearly **500 local families** and young leaders.
- We **convened partners** across education, nonprofits, business and industry, health, and government to align efforts around shared priorities for early learning, youth voice, regional workforce pathways, and family well-being.

Together, these efforts are creating ripple effects: stronger connections, shared vision, and more equitable systems for every child and family in our region.

To our district leaders, partners, funders, and families: thank you. You are the reason this network continues to grow and thrive. This report is a reflection of your commitment, and of what's possible when we work Better, Together.

With gratitude and hope,

Gabriela Peden

Gabriela Peden
Executive Director, Better Together Central Oregon



Connecting systems.
Centering community.
Creating impact.

Better Together brings people together and helps community-led solutions thrive.

We serve as a backbone organization for Central Oregon's regional cradle-to-career partnership, aligning hundreds of partners to improve outcomes for youth and families across Crook, Deschutes, and Jefferson Counties, and the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs.



Papalaxsimisha Event

How we work

→ Convenings: Workgroups, Roundtables, Communities of Practice

We convene partners to align around shared priorities and explore new strategies, from early learning to workforce pathways. Together, we identify what's working, what's missing, and where systems can improve.

→ Family & Youth Councils

We power place-based groups of parents, caregivers, and youth — primarily from Spanish-speaking and historically underrepresented communities — to shape local decisions and build belonging.

→ Fiscal Sponsorships

We provide financial and administrative infrastructure for community-rooted organizations, helping visionary leaders grow their impact while staying focused on their mission.

→ Cross-Sector Collaboration

We bridge over 400 education, business and industry, nonprofit, health, and government partners to take collective action on the issues that no single organization can solve alone.

Why It Matters for School Districts

When districts partner with Better Together, they gain:

- ★ **Stronger family trust**, especially among bilingual and multicultural communities.
- ★ **Access to aligned regional efforts** that amplify district priorities.
- ★ **Collaborative solutions** to complex issues like early learning, attendance, and mental health.

Because when families, schools, and communities move in the same direction, **students thrive.**

Collaboration that spans **Central Oregon**.

From the **La Pine County Health Center to the community centers of Warm Springs**, Better Together connects leaders, families, and organizations across Central Oregon to align resources, share solutions, and strengthen systems for children and youth.

We serve three counties — Crook, Deschutes, and Jefferson — and partner with the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs, encompassing more than **67,000 children and youth**.

Where we work

Family Councils

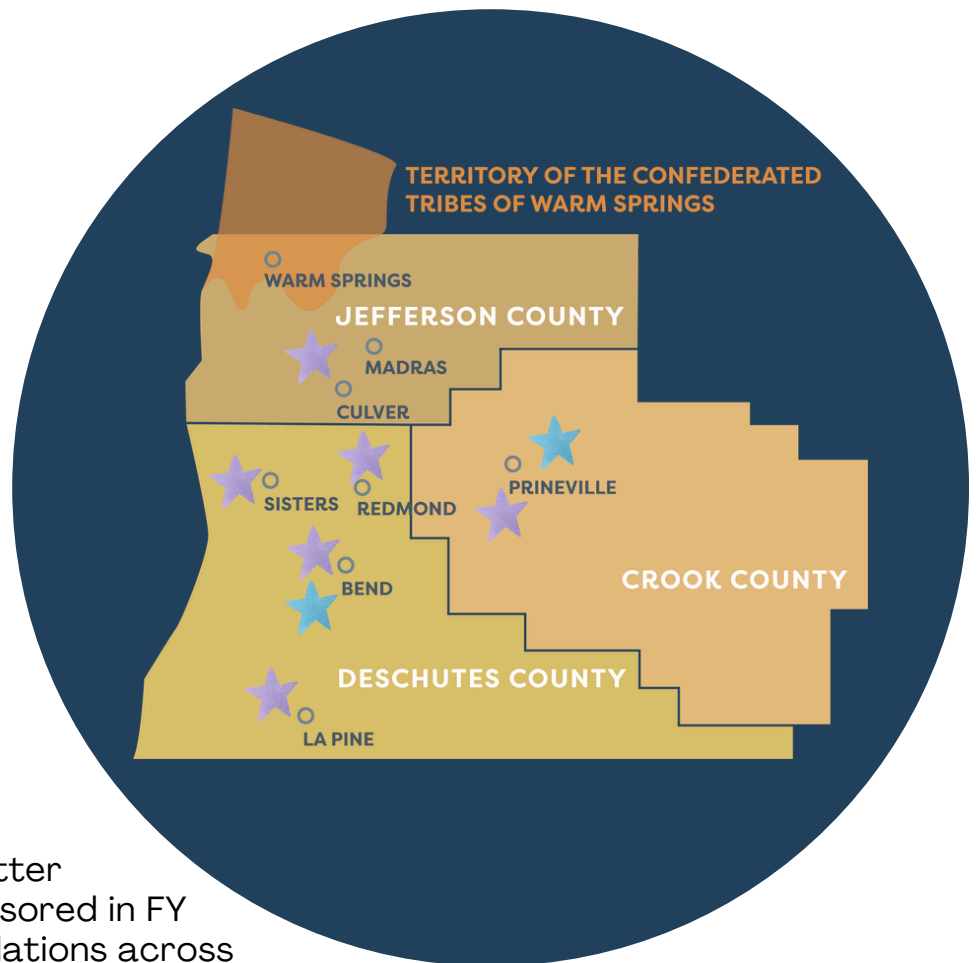
- ★ Bend
- ★ Crook County
- ★ Jefferson County
- ★ La Pine
- ★ Redmond
- ★ Sisters

Youth Councils

- ★ Bend
- ★ Prineville

Fiscally Sponsored Organizations

- Combined, the seven organizations that Better Together fiscally sponsored in FY 2024–25 served populations across the three counties and Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs.



“Better Together's support allowed us to **expand access to high-quality early education in Spanish**, ensuring that preschool-age children and their families build critical literacy and school readiness skills in their home language.”
– Hannah Hinman, Juntos Aprendemos

Powering partnerships that **move the needle.**

Better Together's role as a **backbone organization** means our **impact is collective**, driven by the success of the partners and families we support. This year, that impact was both deep and wide.



Impact At a Glance

\$1,953,846

stewarded through fiscal sponsorships of **7 community-rooted organizations**

619+

adults served through sponsored programs

4,585+

youth served through sponsored programs

6 Family Councils & 2 Youth Councils

powered across Central Oregon

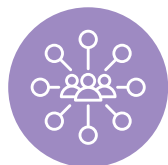
500+

families, youth, and community members actively engaged through Councils

400+

cross-sector partners aligned around cradle-to-career collaboration

A Catalyst for **Community-Led Change**



Our fiscal sponsorships helped grassroots and culturally specific organizations grow their reach and sustainability, ensuring that local wisdom shapes regional solutions.



Our Family and Youth Councils created trusted spaces for belonging, leadership, and advocacy, empowering Latinx and rural families to co-design solutions that reflect their lived experience.



Our convenings aligned district leaders, nonprofit partners, and community members around shared regional priorities, from school readiness and youth voice to mental health and career pathways.

The Ripple Effect

Every hour invested, every partnership strengthened, and every family heard brings us closer to a Central Oregon where every child, no matter their background or zip code, has the opportunity to thrive.



Es algo bello. Los padres de familia tienen en el grupo esa confianza donde pueden desahogarse, hacer comunidad y ser quienes son sin tratar de encajar en un lugar donde no se sientan cómodos. Desde que empezamos hace casi 3 años, se ha logrado todo lo que ellos han pedido, gracias a Better Together que nos provee los recursos necesarios.







It's a beautiful thing. Parents have that confidence in the group where they can express themselves, build community, and be who they are without trying to fit into a place where they don't feel comfortable. Since we started almost 3 years ago, everything they have asked for has been achieved, thanks to Better Together providing us with the necessary resources.

- Margarita, Bend Latinx Family Council Facilitator

Fiscal Sponsorships

Powering Community Solutions

In 2024–25, Better Together provided fiscal sponsorship to seven community-rooted organizations across Central Oregon, offering **financial infrastructure, grant management, and administrative support** that allowed visionary leaders to focus on their mission and scale impact. The table highlights the scope and diversity of their work. Redmond School District is not included in the table.

	What They Do / Key Message	School Districts Served	Total Served (Youth / Adults)
	Connects and coordinates partners to broaden STEM learning and career pathways region-wide.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Redmond • Culver • Jefferson County • Warm Springs 	480 hours devoted to youth
	Walks alongside partners to ensure children (birth–5) and families thrive; champions early literacy via Dolly Parton Imagination Library.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bend-La Pine • Culver • 509J • Warm Springs • Crook County 	3,775 (children birth–5)
	Central Oregon’s only Spanish-language early education program; builds literacy and school readiness in Spanish.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bend-La Pine • 509J • Crook County • Redmond 	148 (74 / 74)
	Operates through an Indigenous lens to support healing, wellness, and belonging in community-led ways.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 509J • Warm Springs • COIC Skills Lab 	330 (180 / 150)
	“Restorative work is human work.” Builds healing and belonging through restorative practices in schools.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bend-La Pine 	175 (140 / 50)
	Connects South County partners to coordinate resources and services for youth and families.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bend-La Pine 	761 (416 / 345)

\$1,953,846

stewarded through fiscal sponsorships

4,585+

youth served through sponsored programs

619+

adults served through sponsored programs

6

Programs served families across six school districts.

Key Activities

Languages Spoken

- Education
- Leadership Development

English, Spanish

- Education

English, Spanish

- Education
- Leadership Development
- Family Support

- Cultural Celebration

Spanish

- Education
- Leadership Development
- Family Support

- Cultural Celebration
- Advocacy
- Health or Wellness

English, Ichishkin, Kiksh, Numu - revitalization

- Education
- Leadership Development
- Cultural Celebration

- Advocacy

English, Spanish

- Education
- Leadership Development
- Family Support

- Advocacy
- Health or Wellness
- Work Readiness

English

Investing in culturally affirming experiences.



From 2022 to 2024, the Redmond School District partnered with Better Together through Oregon's Culturally

Specific Afterschool Learning (CSASL) Grant. The purpose: to expand afterschool learning opportunities for students most impacted by the pandemic, in collaboration with local culturally specific organizations.

Impact Highlights

★ **Estamos Listos!**
A bilingual (English/Spanish) back-to-school event supporting Redmond families.

★ **Recreation Access**
Grant funds helped Redmond Parks & Rec provide free access to activities for families, promoting health and wellness.

★ **Summer Learning & Family Engagement**
Funding supported Redmond Proficiency Academy, expanding summer programming and family outreach efforts.

***Note:** Total youth and adult numbers vary by organization. For the Central Oregon STEM Hub, Early Learning Hub of Central Oregon, and South County Collaborative, the figures shown represent participants in programs specifically funded through grants fiscally sponsored by Better Together during the 2024–25 fiscal year. These totals do not reflect the organizations' full regional reach.*

**Building belonging.
Growing leadership.
Powering change.**



(Photo: Jefferson County Family Council)

Better Together's **Family and Youth Councils** are transforming how systems listen, learn, and lead. These councils bring together **Latinx parents, caregivers, youth, and community members** who experience barriers in public systems — due to language, race, rurality, or poverty — and create spaces for connection, leadership, and collective action.

Since launching the first Latinx Family Council in 2018, these community-led groups have become a trusted regional model for family engagement and partnership.

2024–25 Impact At A Glance

500+

families, youth, and community members actively engaged.

6 Family Councils & 2 Youth Councils

operated in Bend, Redmond, Sisters, Crook Co., Jefferson Co., Prineville and La Pine.

How It Works

- ➔ **Better Together** provides funding, coordination, and facilitation training for council leaders.
- ➔ **Facilitators** host monthly gatherings where families share ideas, build trust, and co-design solutions.
- ➔ **Community partners** — from schools to public health — join meetings to listen and collaborate.
- ➔ **Together**, we're removing barriers and co-creating systems that reflect the voices and needs of local families.



“ This is where voices are heard, and ideas for growth or change happen.

– Mari, Jefferson County Latinx Family Council Facilitator



(Photo: Crook County Family Council, Community Garden Party)

When public health meets community wisdom.

In 2024, **Felipe Santacruz**, a bilingual public health leader with Deschutes County Health Services, connected with the **Bend Latinx Family Council**. What he thought would be a single presentation turned into something far more powerful — a trusted space for collaboration and co-creation.

Through a series of events, workshops, and ongoing conversations, Felipe and Family Council members began **shaping public health priorities from the ground up**, helping agencies like Deschutes County Health Services design outreach that meets real community needs.

Community Impact in Action

- ★ **Deschutes County Public Health** integrated Family Council feedback into outreach planning.
- ★ Bend Latinx Family Council members contributed to a **Deschutes County needs assessment** with DCHS and OHSU.
- ★ Bend Latinx Family Council members piloted a **6-week workshop series** designed to strengthen family health and connection.

“

My work for the past year – and the future – has been shaped largely by the Family Council’s feedback. It’s important to me that Better Together continues to elevate Latine and Spanish-speaking families.

– Felipe Santacruz,
Community Outreach
Coordinator, Deschutes
County Health Services

Our Backbone Role **in Action**

“ We meet monthly for two hours, always with food—sometimes potlucks. The meetings are held in Spanish and we play games like lotería or charades. Members bring their kids. **We share resources, relay information back to the community, and communicate with schools about what’s needed.**

– Jefferson County Latinx Family Council Facilitator

“ Support from Better Together allows us to **bring the Dolly Parton Imagination Library to our region.**

– Krissa, Early Learning Hub of Central Oregon

“ Having community partnership allowed for SCC to **promote events, form new projects, and continue to build a presence in South Deschutes County.**

– Sarah, South County Collaborative

(Photo: Fall 2025 Convening on Integrating a School Readiness & Early Learning Ecosystem)



(Photo: 10-year Anniversary & Vision Summit, June 2025)

From vision to collaboration, from collaboration to impact.

In 2025, Better Together celebrated ten years of collective action. Now we're charting the next phase of our shared journey — one that deepens collaboration, centers community voice, and fuels the future our youth deserve.

Over the past year, Better Together:

- ★ Held **40+ one-on-one** stakeholder conversations.
- ★ Facilitated spring **roundtables** on emerging priorities.
- ★ Celebrated a decade of impact at our 10-Year Vision Summit with **140+ leaders** and nearly \$20,000 raised.

These steps surfaced the following shared priorities and a clear call: **more in-person collaboration to drive outcomes.**



Shared Priorities

- ➔ **Integrating** a School Readiness & Early Learning Ecosystem
- ➔ **Strengthening** Holistic Mental Health & Well-being Supports
- ➔ **Advancing** Pathways to a Thriving Regional Workforce
- ➔ **Elevating** Youth Voice to Shape the Future
- ➔ **Investing** in Community-Led & Place-Based Strategies

From Fall 2025 through Spring 2026, our focus shifts toward **Communities of Practice**, where educators, community members, and families come together to regularly learn, test ideas, and reflect as peers.

Because when we bridge perspectives and align efforts — across systems, schools, and communities — we move closer to shared outcomes and shared prosperity for every child, from cradle to career.

Better Together brings people together and helps community-led solutions thrive.

Our partners contribute expertise, programs, and resources.

Together, we align efforts, lift community voices, and achieve results that strengthen systems and create equitable opportunities for children, youth, and families.



(Photo: Bend Youth Council & Facilitator)

Collaboration is what fuels change. Your support makes it possible.



Stay Connected

Sign up for the Better Together Newsletter to receive updates, invitations to convenings, and stories of collective impact across Central Oregon.



Fuel Collective Impact

Donate to support community-led solutions, cross-sector partnerships, and the infrastructure that makes collaboration possible.

Have questions?

We'd love to discuss how you can partner with us! Contact Gabriela Peden, Executive Director, at gabriela.peden@hdesd.org or (541) 745-4355.

Together, we're creating a Central Oregon where every child, no matter their background or zip code, has the opportunity to thrive and belong.

Let's keep showing up, building, learning, and growing – better, together.

- Gabriela Peden, Executive Director

Better Together Central Oregon



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