



Rayitos de Sol

Bilingual Childcare



Mano en Mano
HAND IN HAND



Rayitos de Sol is a place where kids shine

Rayitos de Sol Bilingual Childcare opened its doors in January 2021 with the mission to provide bilingual Spanish and English childcare services that center the languages and cultures of the students we serve.

The center, located in rural Downeast Maine in the town of Milbridge, offers comprehensive childcare services based on the needs of children and families, in an area that critically needs it.

Rayitos de Sol acts as a bridge to connect families from different backgrounds so that language and culture are valued and appreciated by our whole community. Rayitos de Sol is open to **all families** in the Downeast community including families arriving to the area seasonally to perform agricultural work.

Rayitos de Sol, which means **"Little Sunbeams"** in English, provides children and their families *opportunities to shine*.

Rayitos de Sol is a program under the 501c3 nonprofit organization, Mano en Mano.

34
children served
through Rayitos
de Sol in its first two
years of operation

61%
of Rayitos families said
Rayitos de Sol childcare
enabled them to begin or
return to work full-time

63%
of Rayitos de Sol
families are seasonal
agricultural workers

"Over the years, many families in the community expressed their fears about their children losing their connection to their home language and cultural traditions. This loss goes beyond language, it means they also lose their ability to connect with their loved ones.

Language and culture are a central part of who a child is. In many places in our state, languages other than English are not viewed as important as English. To a child that speaks other languages, it can feel as if parts of the child himself or herself are not as important. At Rayitos de Sol, we center the language and culture of the children and families we serve and as a result, we have created a space that is welcoming and accepting, where all people belong.

- Juana Rodriguez Vazquez, Rayitos de Sol Founder & Mano en Mano Executive Director



MISSION: Work with farmworkers statewide and immigrants in Downeast Maine to empower them to thrive.

VISION: A stronger, more inclusive Maine where the contributions of diverse communities are welcomed, access to essential services, education, and housing are ensured, and social justice and equity are embraced.



Childcare made **accessible** for all families

Childcare is a critical need in Downeast Maine, yet working families struggle to find affordable childcare in the region. Washington County has one of the highest rates of poverty in the state of Maine and a lack of accessible childcare programs further exacerbates the problem.

Rayitos de Sol ensures **all families** can access affordable childcare. Rayitos de Sol sets the cost of tuition at the lowest amount possible, and at \$150/week for full-time care (up to 12 hours per day), Rayitos de Sol costs 28% less than other childcare programs in the region.

Rayitos de Sol is also **one of the only programs in the area that accepts the Maine Child Care Subsidy program**, and assists families every step of the way to apply. When subsidy doesn't cover enough of the cost, Rayitos de Sol supports migrant families to overcome systemic barriers to access childcare through our scholarship program, La Familia Fund.

Rayitos de Sol tuition costs
28%
less compared to the average cost of childcare in the region

Rayitos de Sol tuition costs
\$52/week
less compared to the state average

\$2,900
annual savings for Rayitos de Sol families in childcare expenses



Designed for working families, Rayitos de Sol is open from **6AM to 6PM** Monday through Friday, **50 weeks of the year.**

“The hours of operation are really helpful to my family since I get out of work after 5pm. I know that my child is in good hands at Rayitos de Sol.”

– Rebeca, Rayitos de Sol Parent

La Familia Fund

Meeting the unique needs of migrant families

Every year, thousands of seasonal workers and their families migrate to the Downeast Maine area for work opportunities, particularly for the blueberry harvest and the wreath-making seasons. Migrant families face distinct challenges because of their mobile lifestyles. This often leaves migrant families struggling to find childcare that is affordable and will accept a child who will only attend seasonally. Rayitos de Sol covers the gap by **allocating enrollment spots for seasonal families** during the blueberry harvest and wreathmaking seasons.

Rayitos de Sol goes a step further to ensure access for migrant families and in July 2022, established **La Familia Fund**. This scholarship program provides support to migrant families that qualify for the Maine Child Care Subsidy Program. Due to barriers such as extended time processing applications and waitlists, the Subsidy Program is not accessible to migrant families during the time period they are working in the area. La Familia Fund covers the gap in cost and ensures that childcare services are affordable for all working families.

\$3,000

dispersed through **La Familia Fund** in its first year of 2022.

63%

of Rayitos de Sol families are seasonal agricultural workers

“We are an English-speaking family and I love that my child comes home singing songs in Spanish and teaching us new words.”

- Stephanie, Rayitos de Sol Parent



Rayitos de Sol is the **first** licensed bilingual Spanish-English childcare center in the **entire state**.



Centering and celebrating language & culture

Rayitos de Sol creates a pathway for children and families to **preserve their language and culture outside of the home**. Over the years, many families in the community expressed their fears about their children losing their connection to their home language and cultural traditions. This loss goes beyond language, it means they also lose their ability to connect with their loved ones. Losing language is more than a linguistic loss, it's a connection to family, friends, and culture that makes us unique and shapes who we are.

At Rayitos de Sol, **children learn and communicate in two languages**. Rayito de Sol's bilingual curriculum ensures that not one language is dominant over the other. All music, songs, art, games, and day-to-day activities are conducted in both Spanish and English, creating a **truly bilingual and multicultural space**.

Families continually share their parts of their culture with Rayitos de Sol: from recipes they prepare at home to special traditions and holidays families celebrate. Rayitos de Sol integrates families' cultures into the curriculum's monthly themes in an ongoing, responsive practice to connect children's lives at home with their families to their experiences at our childcare center.

64%

children are from Spanish-speaking or multilingual households

36%

children are from English only-speaking households

“I feel comfortable leaving my child at Rayitos de Sol because I know that she and I can communicate with teachers. My favorite thing about the center is that it's bilingual.”

- Maria, Rayitos de Sol Parent



Changing childcare in **our state**

The field of early childhood education in Maine, like many states across the country, faces many challenges. Low wages and benefits for educators lead to labor shortages that have closed classrooms, resulting in long waitlists for families looking for care for their children. Rayitos de Sol is committed to solving these workforce challenges that impact families and children and the passionate, talented educators who work with them.

We believe early childhood education should be accessible to professionals who want to work in the field, but can't afford to because of the low wages and benefits. At Rayitos de Sol, **teachers are paid \$5.75-\$8.75 more per hour** compared to the average childcare provider wage in Maine. In addition, all Rayitos de Sol staff receive employment benefits, including healthcare, retirement savings, and tuition assistance. **Educators who are multilingual receive additional compensation** in recognition of the valuable skillset that speaking more than one language offers in our community.

Rayitos de Sol's workforce model aims to change the field of childcare in our state to better meet the needs of all our families and children and allow educators to thrive.

“At Rayitos, I feel welcome with the staff and the space. I feel free to express my opinion. What I like most about working at Rayitos is our bilingual curriculum for children that allows them to explore the world in two languages.”

- Isamar, Rayitos de Sol teacher



\$5.75 to \$8.75

more per hour that Rayitos de Sol staff earn compared to the average childcare provider wage in Maine

100%

of Rayitos de Sol staff receive employment benefits (partial or full)



Creating Pathways for Leadership in Early Childhood Education

At Rayitos de Sol, we pursue creative solutions to workforce challenges by creating pathways of opportunity for young people interested in the field of early childhood education.

Through a **collaboration with Washington County Community College**, Rayitos de Sol offers paid assistantship opportunities for students studying early childhood education. College students are placed with Rayitos de Sol and work at the center over the course of a year. In a supportive coaching environment, these students learn the professional skills to thrive as a bilingual early childhood educator.

Rayitos de Sol has also established a **Youth Leadership Program** for high school students in the community. The program offers a paid internship at Rayitos de Sol in which students gain experience in the field and pursue their passions in a supportive learning environment.





A place for the whole community

Rayitos de Sol is much more than a traditional childcare center: it is a place where the whole community can thrive. Rayitos de Sol focuses on meeting the holistic needs of children and families and that includes creating a space where health, education, and community celebration come together to promote overall well-being. Families are deeply involved in shaping the direction of Rayitos de Sol's programming and form a parent advisory board that makes recommendations.

Rayitos de Sol **nourishes growing brains and bodies**. One priority highlighted by parent leaders was promoting nutrition through healthy, culturally nourishing food. The program provides homemade breakfast and lunch as well as two snacks each day for all children. Teachers prepare culturally relevant foods including tamales, pan dulce, and tortillas at the center. Teachers also prepare weekly food bags for students to take home to ensure that all children have access to food while not at the center.

Each summer, Rayitos de Sol children and teachers work together to plant seeds in the **Rayitos de Sol community garden**. When the fruits, vegetables, and herbs are ready to harvest, they are used as ingredients in meals for children as well as made available to families through weekly food bags or at the Our Mercadito food pantry.

As part of Mano en Mano, Rayitos de Sol hosts many family and community events throughout the year. With the opening of its new facility in 2024, Rayitos de Sol will be able to become even more of a family and community hub.



Healthy, Culturally Nourishing Food Access for All

For many years, community members have voiced ongoing concern about the lack of culturally nourishing foods available at stores in the Downeast area. Many families cannot access foods that are familiar to them or have a difficult time finding the ingredients to prepare dishes that have traditional and sentimental value.

For this reason, Mano en Mano opened a culturally nourishing food pantry, **Our Mercadito**, that is open and accessible to everyone in our community. Community members came together and selected the name Our Mercadito (Little Market) for the food pantry.

As Rayitos de Sol makes plans for an expansion into a new facility, the future center will become the home of Our Mercadito food pantry, ensuring greater access for Rayitos de Sol families and children.

12,000

meals provided to children **each year** including breakfast, lunch, and two snacks every day

750

take home food bags distributed to Rayitos de Sol families each year

5,800

visits to the food pantry each year

5,000

pounds of food distributed each month

“May this center be a place that connects our children back to the community and be medicine that honors our shared individuality.”

- Hubert Francis, Elpsipogtog elder and musician



It's time to **grow!**

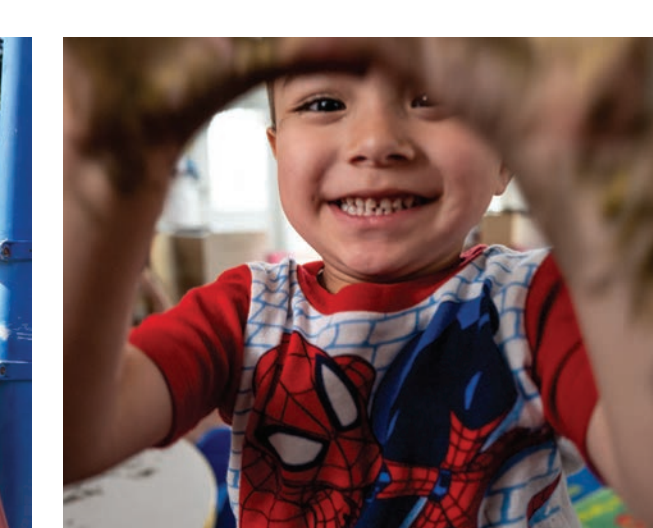
After operating at its maximum capacity of 12 students since opening in 2021, **Rayitos de Sol is going to expand!** The new facility will offer more space and infrastructure to serve up to **64** children and help the center more effectively serve toddlers and preschoolers, and begin serving infants and elementary school students up to age 12.

Programs that serve children ages 6 weeks to 12 years are very limited in the state, and **do not currently exist in the area.** In addition to creating new jobs and the increasing capacity to serve more families, the center will incorporate spaces that have been prioritized by community members including: Mano en Mano's Our Mercadito Food Pantry, community areas, a playground, and indoor recreation spaces.

Here are some of the ways Rayitos de Sol will grow from its current capacity through the **Let Kids Shine campaign:**

Rayitos de Sol Capacity 2021-2023	New Rayitos de Sol Facility 2024
1 classroom in the Mano en Mano conference room (740 sq. ft.)	5 classrooms in a 6,600 sq. ft. Rayitos facility
Ages served from 1 to 5 years old Toddlers and preschoolers	Ages served from 6 weeks to 12 years Infants, toddlers, preschoolers, and elementary
12 children	64 children
5 staff members 3 full-time, 2 part-time	14 staff members 8 full-time, 6 part-time
Open Monday through Friday From 6AM to 6PM	Open Monday through Saturday 6AM to 6PM, open Saturdays during harvest seasons





“Language is personal, visceral, and powerful; it is tied to our lands and to our bodies. Every time we open our mouths to speak in our accents and dialects, we identify ourselves and bring all these things with us. When we come together to have the hard conversations, it is important that we are able to express ourselves in the language that most fully conveys the depth and nuance of our hopes and our frustrations.”

– Roberto Tijerina, Highlander Research and Education Center



Since opening our doors in January 2021, Rayitos de Sol has been dedicated to changing childcare in our community and in our state.

Families need affordable child care services and community spaces that are representative of the backgrounds of our community. Rayitos de Sol acts as a bridge to connect families and community members so that language and culture are valued, identity is celebrated, and everyone feels that they belong.

Rayitos de Sol ensures that every child - no matter where they are from or what language they speak - **has the chance to shine.**

At Rayitos de Sol, we build
brighter futures



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