Meeting the Need

ABC Christian Childcare & Education Center adds overnight hours

For parents who work nights, finding childcare can be a huge challenge.

In a community like Coffeyville, where several major employers operate around the clock, having care available beyond traditional hours can make a real difference for working families.

That's the need ABC Christian Childcare & Education Center is meeting with its recent expansion into a new facility and with extended overnight hours are already in place.

Owner Sharon Brown says it's about more than just adding hours, though. More childcare options can give parents greater freedom to work, help local employers build their workforce and give children a safe, supportive place to learn and grow.

For ABC, it's an investment in families and in Coffeyville's future.



How did the idea for expanded, overnight childcare get started?

My son Blake is the one who brought it up to me. He said, "Why don't we do all-night childcare?" And I thought it sounded crazy because we didn't have room to do it. We didn't have the finances to do it. I just didn't see any way to do it.

But I kept feeling like the Lord kept bringing it up to me over and over again. Finally, one day I said, "Okay, okay. We're going to do it. God will provide."

My husband Steve and I started looking for a house to do it in, and then found out we couldn't because of regulations. You had to live in the house. Then, at just the perfect time, Child Care Aware came out with a grant. Right after that, the accelerator grant came out, and that grant would pay for a building or to build the building.

I thought, "Okay, God, you are definitely providing."

We have four pretty large businesses in Coffeyville that work overnight, plus another between us and Caney and other smaller places. I felt like there was a need.

We formed a coalition because we had to have one for the Child Care Aware grant. I asked a lot of people in Coffeyville to be part of it. There was a handful that stayed with me the entire time. It took us three years because we ran into obstacles, like you do with everything.

What was the need you were trying to address?

We felt like there was a need for childcare outside of normal business hours.

Originally, our hours were 7:30 to 5:30 because we wanted people to be able to drop their kids off, go to work, come back and pick their children up without having to have somebody else transport them. Then, we gradually started increasing the time we opened.

We had one gentleman who lived in Independence and worked in Neodesha. He had school-age children and a preschool-age child. He would bring his children down early in the morning, go back to work in Neodesha and then pick them up after work. In the meantime, his school-age children were transported to and from school. He was a single father, and even though it was a lot of driving for him, he didn't have to worry about his children.

That's an extreme case, but it shows the kind of need that is out there.

When did ABC originally open?

ABC opened in 2018.

I used to work at a law office, and I loved my job. But I had worked for Head Start years ago and had babysat, and I just felt like God was calling me to work with children again.

I have a passion for our next generation and making sure we make things better for them. Getting them off to a good start is so important.

It's not only about preparing them to go into kindergarten. It's about setting up basic principles in their lives that can affect their whole life.

My husband and I both have that passion to make whatever difference we can.

Faith obviously plays a major role in your life and in ABC. Where does that come from?

I've always been a Christian. My parents were Christians. But you don't really grow in faith unless you're stepping out in it.



It's learning to step out in faith and do things you know you can't do without the Lord, but also listening to His voice to make sure you're in His will.

My husband and I pray that anything that is in His will, He would bless and it would succeed. But if it's not in His will, we pray that it wouldn't succeed because we don't want to be outside His will.

There have just been so many times in our lives when I've seen God move.

And there's no way we could have gotten this facility without Him.

> "You don't know unless you try."

Were there moments during the development of the new facility when you wondered if it was going to happen?

Absolutely. We had to have a 25% match for one of the grants, and we were having trouble getting it. It was a huge amount.

We were told a foundation would take care of any lack of funding we had on the match. Then, a day or two before we were supposed to submit the grant, I found out we didn't qualify. I thought, "You don't know unless you try."

So I reached out to them and had to send a lot of documentation. They changed their mind and did it for us. They want to remain anonymous, so I won't say who it is. Without them, we wouldn't have been able to do it.

Charlee Brown, a coalition member helping us with the grant, said "That never happens."

We were having trouble finding a fiscal agent and Linda Follett fulfilled that need with Genesis of Coffeyville.

I feel like God put all these people in our path to help us achieve the goal of getting it built.

How important was having that community of people around you?

The coalition helped me a lot. It was encouraging just to have somebody there and know somebody else cared besides my family.

My daughter-in-law, Sandra Brown, is our director, and if she hadn't stepped up and done that, I wouldn't have had time to do everything else.

It was God's perfect timing in everything.

The main thing is that you keep believing, you don't give up, you keep trusting and you keep stepping out.

What was the community reaction when you began talking about offering overnight and extended-hours childcare?

When we were talking about building it, everybody I talked to said, "Oh man, I wish they would have had that when my kids were young."

Everybody felt like there was a need.

We had support from the City, Esther Cuevas, Candi Westbrook, Coffeyville Chamber of Commerce and Melissa Johnson, Montgomery County Action Council. Jason McVey with Decker Construction did such an awesome job and they also donated a large sign that can be seen from the highway.

Coffeyville Resources provided major financial support and ultimately gave us $100,000. Jamie Armstrong was very supportive. She kept talking about the project and Brandy Stevens came to look at our place. When she came and looked at it, she went back, and advised Coffeyville Resources to donate to our project.

Donations also came from Acme Foundry, Grace Fellowship Church with Pastor Doug Mund, Vivian Frost and other private donations.

Mike and Leslie Avey were also important. Mike is the one who gave us the property through Community State Bank at the time, now Solutions North Bank.

When Mike and Leslie first moved to Coffeyville, they had trouble finding childcare themselves. When he purchased that property many years ago, he was already thinking about childcare.

To me, God was preparing that location for us before we even knew we would ever need it.

How would you describe the philosophy at ABC?

We want the teachers to enjoy teaching, and we want the children to enjoy learning.



One of our philosophies is treating each other the way we want to be treated.

We also believe in the verse about raising a child in the way they should go, and when they're old, they won't depart from it.

We use a curriculum called Learning Beyond Paper, which creates daily plans and makes it easy for substitute teachers or new teachers to step in. We also use other curriculum. But we realize young children learn really well just by playing.

A teacher asking, "Do you want the red truck or the black truck?" is a learning experience. They're learning while they're playing and discovering.

We believe in both structured and unstructured play. Motor skills and physical development are important not only physically, but mentally and in other areas of development.

Most importantly, children need to feel safe and loved.

They need to feel safe and loved to be able to learn and have a good day. If they don't feel safe, they're not going to be paying attention. If they feel like the teacher doesn't like them, that's going to make a big difference.

Why is quality childcare so important to a community?

First, you want to take good care of the children. That's a blessing for parents because they can go to work and not worry about their children.

With extended hours, maybe parents can choose the job they really want.

Then businesses have a bigger workforce because there are more people available to work.

If parents feel confident taking their children to a childcare center that is going to keep them safe and teach them what they need to know, they can work.

If businesses are thriving because they have a good workforce, then more businesses are more likely to move into the community, and more families are likely to move into the community. We're hoping and praying this will help the whole community grow and thrive.

When you look back at 2018 and everything that has happened since, how do you think about the journey?

I know it wouldn't have been possible without the Lord.

I have a plaque that says this was built with God and community because it took a lot of people to help us with all the different things we needed.

I feel like the best is yet to come.