

A publication of **Child Care Aware®** of Kansas

Kansas Child

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The Business of
Child Care

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The BUSINESS\$\$ of Child Care

Most child care professionals enter the field with a genuine desire to care for young children. It's a vocation that requires dedication, resilience, the capacity for joy, and seemingly endless grace and patience. It also requires a very different kind of expertise: business acumen.

For many child care providers, small business ownership is the fulfillment of a long-held dream. The vast majority of licensed child care centers and family and group homes operate as small businesses. That means **our national child care system rests on the shoulders of small business-owners and their staff** — 94% of whom are women and 40% people of color.

Child care programs — of all types and sizes — face significant challenges making the business model actually work. Providing high-quality care to young children is costly, yet many providers cannot pass the increasing costs off to parents — most of whom simply cannot afford to pay more. Plus, hiring and retaining qualified staff is arguably much more of a challenge today than in the past, which means child care programs often can't enroll the number of children they need to break even.

Kansas families desperately need more child care options. Over the past three years, our state has benefited from a net increase in the number of child care centers operating in the state (growing from 632 centers in 2020 to 658 in 2022). Over the same period, we've experienced a tremendous decline in family/group child care programs (declining from 3,547 to 3,250). Such losses disproportionately affect rural families and communities.

Kansas needs more child care that is high-quality, affordable, and flexible enough for families and children with a variety of circumstances and needs. To reach that goal, one of the most fundamental things we can do is to shore up the business side of child care.

In this issue of *Kansas Child*, you'll hear from national, state, and local experts about the constellation of solutions and resources we have at our fingertips. From strengthening business practices for child care providers to developing innovative

models that share business functions across programs, we've gathered the best thinking in the field to shape our collective path forward. When the business side of child care works, then child care providers are able to focus on what they do best: caring for our youngest Kansans. ●



KELLY DAVYDOV

Executive Director,
Child Care Aware® of Kansas

Kelly joined Child Care Aware of Kansas as executive director in September 2020. Kelly's professional background includes leadership for two key initiatives in Iowa: the state's early childhood system-building effort, Early Childhood Iowa, and its 2-Gen anti-poverty initiative. Kelly, her husband Dmitry, and their two sons, (Ethan, 15, and Henry, 12) have made Kansas City their new home. Together, they enjoy exploring state and national parks and farmers markets and spending their winter weekends pool side at swim meets.

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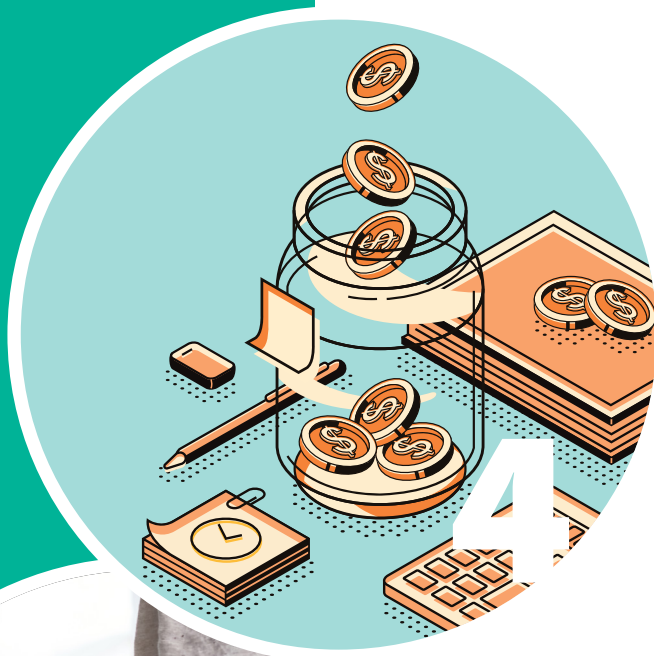
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STAYING FOCUSED ON THE BOTTOM LINE

A SIMPLE FORMULA FOR CHILD CARE BUSINESS SUCCESS

BY LOUISE STONEY

Running a successful child care business is not easy. It's crucial to have a steady flow of revenue to meet payroll, comply with tax withholding requirements, and cover other operating costs. With so many competing demands — from staff, families, funders, regulators, and others — finding the time to focus on cash flow or accurately project and track revenue is a daily challenge.

The Iron Triangle of Early Care and Education Finance is a simple formula to help busy child care providers stay on track. The formula focuses on three key metrics — enrollment, collections, and unit cost — that can be monitored with reports from the automated systems used to run a child care business every day.

**Monitoring enrollment
— and acting quickly to
address any shortfall — is
key to fiscal stability.**

Full Enrollment

Almost all revenue for an early care and education (ECE) program comes from tuition and fees collected on behalf of the enrolled children. While government and philanthropy sometimes help finance ECE, this funding is rarely provided as general operating support in the United States. Typically, the dollars provided by the government — and often philanthropy — are linked to the enrollment of specific children. If the children are not enrolled,

the funding does not flow. Full enrollment is a cornerstone of ECE finance, regardless of whether the program relies mainly on public funds, on parent fees, or a combination.

Unless a program is over-enrolled (a practice that is generally prohibited by licensing regulations because it could result in attendance that exceeds the ratio and/or group size limits), it's not possible to operate at 100% enrollment. Some experts suggest that a well-run center can operate at 95% enrollment; others suggest budgeting for a more achievable rate, such as 85% enrollment. Regardless of the target, any time enrollment drops below the budgeted target, an ECE program is losing money.

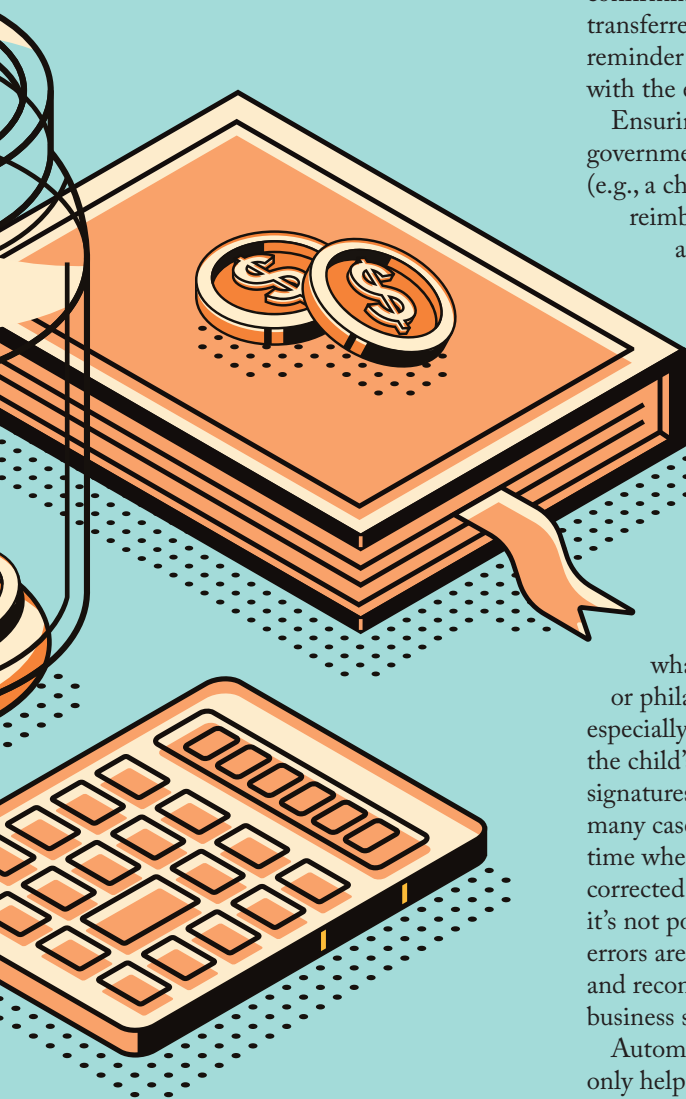
Monitoring enrollment — and acting quickly to address any shortfall — is key to fiscal stability. This means program administrators must track attendance in each classroom on a regular basis and plan in advance for when children will age out of the program or move to a different classroom. Without careful monitoring and active outreach to fill vacant slots, it's easy for these natural transitions to cause funding gaps.

Tuition, especially when reimbursed by the government, may also be dependent on actual attendance, so staying on top of this is crucial. It's easy for non-attendance to turn into non-enrollment. In a small program, every day a slot remains open can make a big difference. Over time, these losses add up and can lead to serious financial shortfalls.



The COVID-19 pandemic had a dramatic impact on attendance and enrollment, as well as teacher recruitment and retention. While enrollment is returning to pre-pandemic levels, many programs still struggle to find enough teachers. In short, predicting enrollment in the current environment is a tricky business. And yet it is essential to the bottom line.

Automated child care management systems (CCMS), like those described on pages 8 and 15, offer a host of tools to support online enrollment, waitlist management, electronic documentation, automated check-in/out and more — all designed to make managing and tracking enrollment and attendance less burdensome. Most CCMS also include data dashboards and reports so that, with the press of a button, a busy program operator can view current enrollment and attendance data and trends over time.



collection. The electronic check-in systems supported by CCMS make it possible to create a daily touch point for families — confirming that tuition funds have been transferred or serving as an automated reminder when fees are due or a problem with the electronic transfer has occurred.

Ensuring that tuition is paid by the government or philanthropic entities (e.g., a child care voucher, per-child reimbursement, or scholarship) in full and on time is also essential. Even if you participate in the state EBT swipe card system for the child care subsidy, you still need to maintain your own electronic time and attendance tracking.

It's essential that child care program operators track and compare what is owed (an invoice or electronic record for every child, regardless of who pays their tuition) against what is paid by the government or philanthropy. Errors are common, especially when payment is based on the child's attendance or dependent on signatures provided by the parent. In many cases, there is a narrow window of time when errors can be identified and corrected. After this window has closed, it's not possible to recoup funds even if errors are found. In short, systems to track and reconcile fee collection are essential to business sustainability.

Automated CCMS software not only helps monitor the collection of tuition and fees but can also generate the documentation needed to reconcile payments from the government and philanthropy on behalf of children eligible for financial assistance.

Fees + Third Party Funding = Per-Child Cost

Setting tuition and fees accurately involves many factors and decision points, some of which are beyond the control of an ECE program. What parents can afford to pay is based on what they earn and the local cost of living. What the government or scholarship programs will pay is typically based on available funds.

Determining the actual cost per child, comparing this cost to the price charged, identifying when fees cannot cover the full cost, and finding third-party funding to fill the gap — all these tasks are essential to sound fiscal management. The bottom

line is that parent fees plus third-party payments must equal per-child cost. If the math doesn't add up, a program is losing money.

Even when the math won't work, even when it's impossible to set tuition at what it actually costs to deliver child care services, it's essential that program operators understand and document their costs. We cannot solve a problem if we do not fully understand it. This data — even if it cannot be acted on right away — is a powerful tool.

It's essential that program operators understand and document their costs.

Calculating per-child costs is not simple. Infants require a lower child-to-staff ratio, along with special equipment and supplies designed to meet the needs of babies, and all of these costs significantly increase the unit cost per child. The cost of serving school-age children, on the other hand, is typically much lower, since these children can be in larger groups and may not attend for the full day. Enrollment and fee collection also impact actual per-child costs. If a program is not fully enrolled, the per-child cost increases. In short, simply dividing the total budget by the number of children served is not a helpful metric. Providers need a more precise understanding of how cost and revenue differ for each age group.

In some cases, a budget gap can be addressed by boosting enrollment or reducing bad debt, rather than raising fees. The three factors are related. In tough fiscal times, when public funding is scarce and parents are squeezed financially, ECE programs often face a difficult choice: keep fees high and risk increased vacancy rates and more bad debt or reduce fees to boost cash flow. Unfortunately, the right answer is not simple or obvious, and it may vary from program to program based on the services offered and the families served.

ECE Resources Kansas — a one-stop location for ECE policies, forms, regulations, guidance, and more — offers

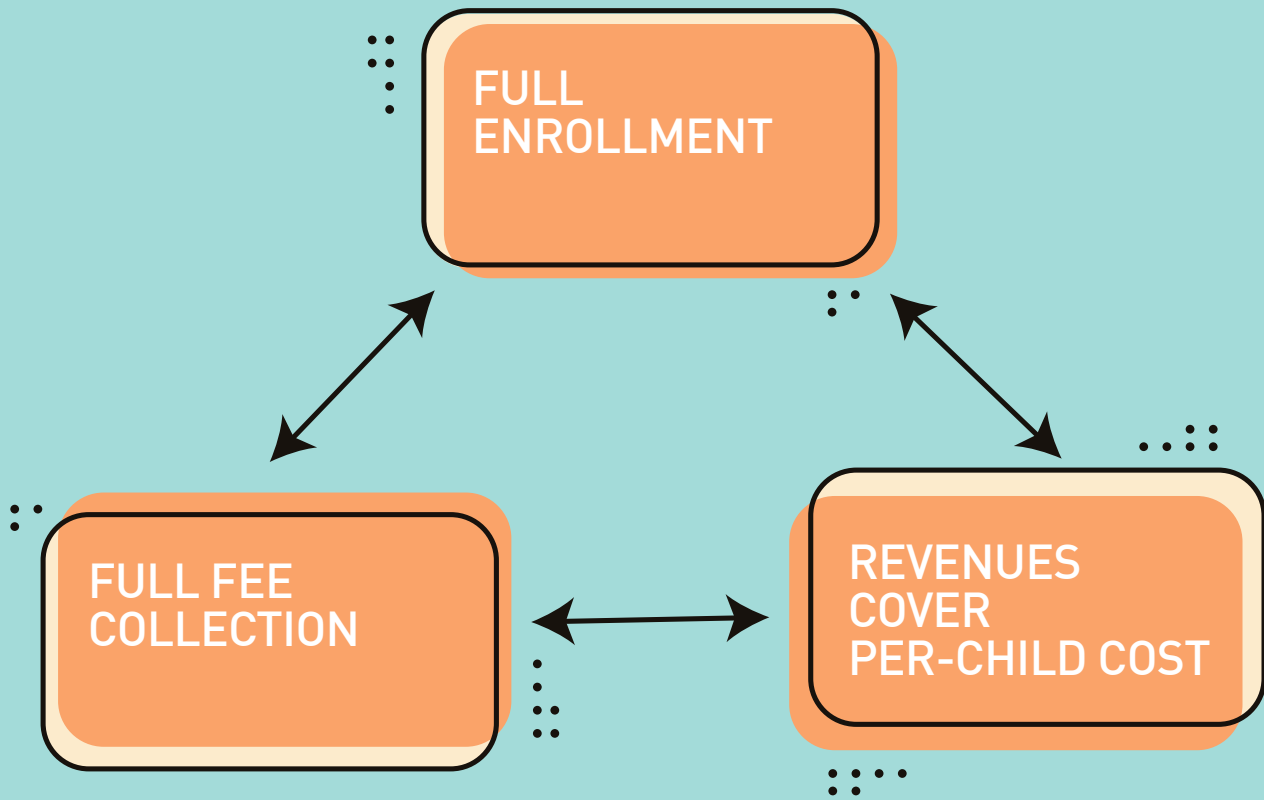
Full Fee Collection

Tuition and fees only become revenue when they are collected. All too often, an early childhood program will have a budget that balances on paper, but the cash just doesn't come in the door. Successful ECE administrators keep up with fee collection; they have clear policies, are firm and consistent with families and thorough and prompt with billing, and stay on top of the paperwork required by third-party funders. Fee collection can be very time-consuming unless systems are put in place to streamline and automate the process.

Electronic funds transfer (automatic electronic transfer of funds from a bank account or debit or credit card) is the best way to ensure prompt and consistent payment from families. It should be the norm for all tuition and fee



ECE IRON TRIANGLE



a set of tools that can be downloaded and customized to help track Iron Triangle metrics, including a tool specifically designed to help calculate the unit cost per child.

While balancing the Iron Triangle can be a challenging task, the potential results are significant.

Another option is to use one of several online cost calculators, such as the interactive tool provided by the Center for American Progress or other cost-modeling resources available from P-5 Fiscal Strategies. Increasingly, ECE business coaches are using these tools, and others like them, to help providers calculate

the unit cost of care. In some states and cities, ECE Shared Service Alliances are available to assist with Iron Triangle metric management.

While balancing the Iron Triangle of ECE Finance can be a challenging task, the potential results are significant. Indeed, nearly every program operator who has put systems in place to track Iron Triangle metrics and make changes based on the data has found that revenue increases — in some cases, quite dramatically. In addition to serving as an internal dashboard to guide decision-making, financial management tools based on the Iron Triangle can help program administrators better communicate with boards, funders, and public sector partners about what changes are needed to ensure program sustainability. ●



LOUISE STONEY
Opportunities Exchange

Louise is an independent consultant specializing in early care and education finance and policy (Stoney Associates) and the co-founder of both Opportunities Exchange and the Alliance for Early Childhood Finance. Louise has spent her career focused on innovation. She devised the Iron Triangle of ECE Finance as a framework to guide practitioners and policy. She has also encouraged and guided efforts to maximize the power of technology and has helped model ECE program costs to deepen understanding of both administrative and direct services.





Shared Business Services For Providers Save Time And Money



BY SARAH MINSHULL

Shared Service Networks offer child care providers the opportunity to strengthen their business practices while focusing on what is the most important — the children. This approach is flexible and customizable, and it's most successful when tailored to a provider's specific needs.

**This approach is...
most successful when
tailored to a provider's
specific needs.**

By participating in a Shared Service Network, child care providers benefit from services that cost less — and that are often more efficient — than what the programs could do on their own.

The specific mix of services and support offered through a Shared Services Network is based on the needs of the participants and the capacity of the hub entity, which provides the services to

a group of child care programs. These entities are often based locally, serving a network of providers in the same community or region.

The foundation of most Shared Service Networks is child care management software, which can help providers communicate with families and staff; set up reminders; handle scheduling and calendars; manage billing, reporting, and enrollment; and much more. The software also helps providers determine where additional support is needed, such as janitorial, maintenance, or administrative services.

To help providers master the software and share expertise, Learning Community meetings give providers a chance to learn tips and tricks and ask questions. Coaching, consultation, and technical assistance is available at any time.

When you join a Shared Service Network, you get the opportunity to enroll in child care management software, and you can share feedback about the types of shared services that would help your business thrive.

After your Shared Service Network is up and running, you'll find that you have more time and money to pour into caring for the kids and families you serve. ●

**ARE YOU
READY TO
SAVE TIME
AND MONEY?**

If you think a Shared Services Network might benefit your program, contact us to schedule an introductory meeting to find out what services are available for you.

**info@ks.childcareaware.org
(785) 823-3343**



WHY PARENTS LOVE CHILD CARE MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS



BY KALI & BRAD STEELSMITH

Child care management systems are software programs and applications that early care and education professionals can use to provide real-time updates about children in their care. Common features include timely records of meals, diaper changes, and naps, as well as the sharing of photos, videos, calendars, announcements, and reminders. As parents of a daughter in child care, we find the software to be an invaluable resource.

Common features include timely records of meals, diaper changes, and naps... photo sharing, videos, and reminders.

The transition to child care was not easy for us; nor is it easy for any family, no matter the age of the child. It's been a huge relief to be able to check the application at our convenience to view our daughter's activities throughout the day.

Our daughter's child care provider posts the weekly lesson plans in the application so that we can see the activities planned for the week. Our favorite features are the photo and video sharing. This was

absolutely invaluable to our peace of mind when our daughter transitioned into child care at 3 months old. Some of her most special moments have been shared with us through the application. Our child care provider caught our daughter's first steps on video and shared it with us through the application. We will treasure that video forever.

The real-time updates and tracking features were also beneficial when it came to introducing solid foods. Since communication can be difficult during drop-off and pick-up times, my daughter's child care provider sent the weekly menu through the application. We communicated directly with the provider through the application about the foods on the menu that my daughter had already been introduced to and could eat that week.

Additionally, the application has helped us establish and maintain a seamless schedule between child care and home. My daughter struggles with naps, and we have been working on a consistent schedule between home and child care. Through the application, our child care provider logs when our daughter starts and ends her naps. This allows us to see the time and length of each nap period. We are able to reference that schedule anytime throughout the week to evaluate trends or to review her naps on a particular

day, which could affect her behavior and sleeping habits that evening. This has also allowed us to brainstorm with our provider about ways to help her nap better at home and at child care.

We are so grateful that our program uses a child care management system, and we recommend it to all early care and education professionals. It makes the transition between home and child care much easier, and it's invaluable during other developmental transitions. As a communication and tracking tool, a child care management system benefits both the provider and the families.

If your provider doesn't use a child care management system, talk to them about the idea. If they'd like to learn more, encourage them to contact Child Care Aware® of Kansas. ●



KALI STEELSMITH

Senior Program Manager,
Child Care Health
Consultant Network

Kali is a Kansas native, originally from Overland Park, and has lived in Manhattan for the past 14 years. She graduated from Kansas State University with a master's degree in family studies and a bachelor's degree in family studies & human services. She has worked in both the military and civilian sectors of early childhood education. She joined Child Care Aware of Kansas in March 2022.



Time to Get Going on Child Care

The Child Care Go Team coordinates efforts among all the stakeholders in the early childhood system.

BY MITCH RUCKER

Take a moment to pause and appreciate the opportunity in front of us. For years, parents and providers have been saying and demonstrating that we need intervention to support the child care market. It appears the message has finally been received, as decision-makers from various fields have begun to allocate money for solutions. Partnerships in the early childhood system have expanded, and new resources are available.

With new partners and resources comes the need for collaboration on multiple fronts. Getting this right — expanding access to affordable, high-quality child care to the degree that meets but does not exceed the market demand in a given community — will require coordination and cooperation among parents, providers, advocates, employers, state agencies, county agencies, municipalities, and more stakeholders than would fit in this article. That’s how much of our society depends on having a reliable child care system that works for parents and providers.

To help streamline the flow of communication between these groups, Kansas now has the Child Care Go Team. As community child care coalitions run into problems for which they don’t have solutions, they can now connect with the Go Team coordinator.

The coordinator works alongside community outreach and engagement teams to meet with community groups and early childhood stakeholders, understand the issues they’re facing and the barriers blocking their progress, and connect those issues to the ongoing

systems work. While we may not be able to solve each discrete issue (we will when we can!), we will provide timely, relevant feedback on how the supports being put into place are working, where there are gaps, and who is best positioned to address community needs.

As the name implies, this work requires a team-based approach. While the state streamlines and improves their part of the system, we will also need to strengthen the foundations of our early childhood framework. Specifically, we need to engage the business community directly in all capacity-building efforts.

Let’s face the facts: this is going to be expensive. The underlying issue with child care — that it’s both overly expensive for families while also being a low-margin and necessarily low-volume business — cannot be solved without private partnerships and, frankly, investment.

Not to put too fine a point on it, but we can’t afford to be unclear about this: In order for these efforts to succeed, we have to increase pay for Kansas child care providers, and we can’t put that increased cost on families. Either the government and/or private entities will have to make up that difference. As such, we need to ensure that these capacity-building efforts benefit them, too!

The Child Care Go Team is here to help make these connections. In the coming months, we will be doing proactive outreach across the state. ●



KEEP IN TOUCH

If you’re interested in helping build up Kansas child care capacity, or are running into issues with your ongoing capacity-building efforts, please feel free to reach out directly. Contact Child Care Aware of Kansas through the website or email the coordinator at communitysupport@ks.childcareaware.org.



MITCH RUCKER

Early Childhood Education Consultant

Mitch currently works with Child Care Aware® of Kansas as the Child Care Go Team coordinator. In that role, he works with child care stakeholders across Kansas to identify solutions for barriers facing communities working to expand child care capacity. Previously, Mitch was the early learning policy advisor for Kansas Action for Children.

He has also served as the legislative director for the majority leader of the Kansas House of Representatives. A fifth-generation Kansan, Mitch grew up on his family farm outside of Burdett and holds a B.A. in political science with a minor in economics from the University of Kansas.



Taking **BABY STEPS** to Expand Care for Infants and Toddlers



BY CHILD CARE AWARE OF KANSAS STAFF

Access to child care for infants is often overshadowed by the larger issue of access for all children. However, there are a number of structural factors that impact the availability of infant care, particularly for family child care programs. These include the structure of licensed capacity and caregiver-to-child ratios for child care programs and the ability of child care providers to command competitive fees for children at different ages.

As small business owners, family child care providers are generally less likely to accept infants because doing so reduces the amount of revenue that they're able to generate. For family child care providers, this means less income for their own families. Family child care providers stand to generate the greatest revenue when they fill available spaces with older children, because caring for infants is costly and reduces the total number of children a provider can serve.

At first glance, the solution may seem to involve either passing increased costs off to families or changing the ratio of staff to children. Yet neither of those options are true solutions. Families simply cannot afford to pay more for child care, and compromising the health and safety of our youngest, most vulnerable Kansans is simply unacceptable.

Child Care Aware® of Kansas is exploring a third option: providing a financial incentive to increase the likelihood that a family child care provider will accept an additional infant. Launching in spring 2023, Baby Steps is an innovative pilot that seeks not only to offset the revenue lost by caring for infants and toddlers, but also to bring family child care providers' incomes closer to what might be considered a "livable" wage.

The Baby Steps pilot project will serve 53 family child care programs in 10 Kansas counties that meet the following criteria:

- Total population of less than 50,000 residents
- High Social Vulnerability Index score from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
- The extent that desired capacity meets potential child care demand is low
- High number of children under age 3 per child care slot
- High birth rate per 1,000 population

In addition to the financial incentive, participating child care programs will also receive support from Kansas' Infant Toddler Specialist Network and other programs and services aimed at improving the quality of care for young children.

Baby Steps is made possible by generous support from a private donor, with evaluation and technical assistance provided by the University of Kansas – Center for Public Partnerships and Research. ●

THE BABY STEPS
PILOT PROJECT OFFERS
A FINANCIAL INCENTIVE
FOR FAMILY CHILD CARE
PROVIDERS TO CARE
FOR INFANTS.



The Role of Business in Child Care Solutions

BY MELISSA ROOKER

The early childhood field in Kansas is a complex ecosystem. As executive director of the Kansas Children's Cabinet, I often act as a connector — working in families' best interests to find alignment between the many early childhood stakeholders, particularly nontraditional partners like those in the private sector.

Child care is a perfect example of an early childhood issue that spans multiple sectors and interests. Parents aren't the only ones who depend on reliable care; employers and the communities where they are located have a vested interest in expanding child care options. Our state can't experience economic growth unless we have people caring for our children — and unless our children's care prepares them to be thriving adults. Dedicated caregivers across Kansas provide essential support for young children and their families, while simultaneously contributing to our state's overall productivity and economic stability.

Our state can't experience economic growth unless we have people caring for our children.

The private sector can play a significant role in expanding child care options. Companies investing in on-site child care can increase both employee retention and morale while reducing pressure on other providers in the community. Expanding public-private partnerships in communities across Kansas can help establish alternate funding streams, offer supplies and technological support

to providers, and create pathways between educational institutions and child care centers.

Nationally, some of the most innovative and manageable solutions to expanding child care access make sure to include employers in the equation. Under the Michigan Tri-Share Program, child care costs are split evenly between families, the state, and employers. Similar programs have been introduced in Kentucky and North Dakota.

Kansas employers have many tools at their disposal to support families, and everything counts. Employers who are in the position to offer on-site or subsidized child care can address the need directly and will likely benefit from a particularly devoted workforce as a result. These employers should take advantage of the Child Day Care Business Tax Credit, which has expanded eligibility to all Kansas businesses that provide child care for employees or that help employees pay for child care.

Employers can also offer Dependent Care Flexible Spending Accounts, giving employees the option to use pre-tax funds to pay for child care.

For employers that are not in the position to offer child care benefits, adopting family-friendly workplace policies to help support families with young children will relieve pressure on the system, enabling parents to care for their children in some of the situations in which the child care system is particularly strapped. Flexible work

schedules, hybrid or remote work, reduced or compressed work schedules, paid parental leave and sick leave, and infants-at-work programs enable parents to take on more of the care for their infants and sick kids — care which is particularly difficult to find and expensive on the open market.

All of these strategies help parents reconcile their responsibilities to their employers and to their families and create a culture of shared responsibility for children. They are also proven to increase recruitment, retention, and productivity.

In my travels to communities around the state, I have been impressed by how enthusiastic businesses are to partner on this issue. Businesses increasingly understand that child care is part of the equation for economic growth for themselves and the communities they call home. They are critical partners in developing innovative and sustainable child care solutions. ●



MELISSA ROOKER

Executive Director,
Kansas Children's Cabinet

Melissa began her current role in February 2019 after serving three terms in the Kansas House, focusing on children's issues and public education. Before running for office, Melissa spent 15 years as a development executive at Malpasco Productions. She holds a bachelor's degree from the University of Kansas.



A photograph of a woman in a classroom setting, seen from behind, with her right hand raised. She is wearing a white shirt and has her hair in a bun. In the background, other people are seated at desks, and a woman in a dark blazer is standing, possibly a teacher. The text 'LEARNING COMMUNITIES FOR CHILD CARE PROVIDERS' is overlaid in large, bold, white letters.

LEARNING COMMUNITIES FOR CHILD CARE PROVIDERS

BY CHILD CARE AWARE OF KANSAS STAFF

Child care is a wonderful and rewarding career that allows you to spend your day working with children, watching them grow and learn new skills. Whether you work with infants, toddlers, preschoolers, or even school-age children, they keep you on your toes and busy all day long. Your days never look the same, and there is no denying that working with little ones is a life-changing experience.

Child care may be your dream job, but no matter how much you enjoy working with children, it can be extremely lonely. At times, you may even feel isolated, especially if you work in a classroom by yourself or run a program on your own.

Let's be honest, you can only talk about your third favorite dinosaur or princess so many times before you need a more stimulating topic of conversation. Of course, it isn't appropriate to talk to children about behavior concerns or ask their advice on changes to your parent handbook.

So who do you turn to when you feel overwhelmed and in need of adult conversation? Who do you bounce ideas off of? Maybe you turn to a friend or family member, or maybe you talk to a co-worker. Another option is to join a learning community with other child care providers from your area.

A learning community is a peer support network of early childhood professionals who meet on a regular basis to work toward shared goals. Meetings are typically driven by providers, who choose topics they want to learn more about to support their business. This may involve inviting a guest speaker or just talking through things together. Ultimately, it's up to the providers who attend to decide what they want to hear more about.

Attending a learning community meeting allows you to meet other providers in the same area where you live and work, or even a provider from across the state. As long as you work in early care and education, be it family child care or a child care center, you are welcome and encouraged to attend. Everyone's ultimate goal is to improve the quality of the child care they offer and strengthen the relationships they have with children and families. ●



JOIN A LEARNING COMMUNITY

Child Care Aware® of Kansas hosts eight learning community meetings around the state that you're welcome to join. If you'd like more information about a learning community in your area or want to connect with a regional community consultant, check out [this map](#) or contact us at info@ks.childcareaware.org.



FREE RESOURCES AT YOUR FINGERTIPS

BY CAROLINE IRELAND

Working in child care is not for the faint of heart. There's so much to do every day — and so much you need to know to run your business and provide high-quality care. Sometimes, it feels like there's not enough room in your brain to fit it all in.

Thankfully, now you can rely on ECE Resources Kansas to keep a lot of important information saved for you in one place. The new website, eceresourcesks.org, offers an array of free resources for the Kansas child care workforce. It includes everything from templates, forms, and checklists to ideas on how to engage families.

The ECE Resources Kansas platform can help you keep up to date on the best practices for managing administrative details, safety, family engagement, regulatory support, and the development and implementation of high-quality early childhood care and education services.

Let's take a deeper look into the resources the website offers to staff and providers. For one, you can access detailed family engagement strategies, including handouts and examples for staff to review and print. You can also easily access information on nutrition, child development, healthy environments, and other topics to share with families!

Additionally, ECE Resources Kansas provides information to help you navigate the crucial early years of a child's development in a manner that is culturally and socially responsive. The site contains lessons on topics such as oral health and nature-based learning and offers educational opportunities for children and teachers to learn about anti-bias education.

The Saving Money section of the site can help you identify opportunities to make sound fiscal decisions. And the Successful

Program Management section outlines strategies designed to increase your capacity to develop a high-quality child care program.

Even more exciting, for a low monthly fee, members of the child care workforce and their families can access telemedicine and teletherapy services, allowing them to actively engage in self-care.

ECE Resources Kansas provides innovative solutions to help members of the child care workforce best serve children, families, and themselves.

There is so much to explore! Register for ECE Resources Kansas today. Visit eceresourcesks.org! ●



CAROLINE IRELAND

Links to Quality Developmental Specialist, Department for Children and Families

Caroline holds a bachelor's degree in elementary education, emphasis in early childhood, from Washburn University. Prior to earning her degree, she worked in early childhood settings for five years. After graduating college in 2016, she taught elementary and middle school for five years before joining DCF in 2022. She lives in Holton with her husband and two stepchildren.

A KANSAS CITY NETWORK FOR FAMILY CHILD CARE PROVIDERS

BY EMMA BART-PLANGE

Family child care (FCC) homes have always played an essential role in the child care system — nurturing and educating young children and supporting families. The survival and growth of the family child care business is key to our economy, our workforce, and the development of future generations and leaders.

During the pandemic, the family child care business suffered a sharp decline here in Kansas City and nationwide. The pandemic forced many child care businesses to close. Some never reopened. It was therefore no surprise that FCC rose to the top of the list of Kansas City's greatest community needs during an in-depth look by the GreenLight Fund.

GreenLight Kansas City, All Our Kin (AOK), and The Family Conservancy (TFC) are partnering to create a staffed Family Child Care Network in the Kansas City metropolitan area.

Research has identified predictors of quality in FCC, including licensing, professional support, training, financial resources, and provider experience. Thus, the network will focus on those areas in order to bring about lasting change.

The network will provide education and business support through a specific business training series aimed at enhancing FCC providers' skills as both business professionals and entrepreneurs — so that they can create high-quality programs and sustainable FCC businesses. A recent provider who participated in the business training was blown away by how much information was available through the class.

TFC will also work with potential providers — offering toolkit support for licensure and beyond — thereby supporting providers at various levels and allowing

them to continue to grow, expand, and sustain their businesses over time.

FCC providers often feel isolated and overwhelmed. Access to training and other resources can be challenging, considering the long hours of care they provide. The network will offer one-on-one coaching and peer support opportunities to help FCC providers build relationships with specialists and each other — in order to socialize and solve problems together. When FCC providers are supported and empowered through networks, professionalism is increased and relationships with families and children are strengthened.

To ensure that the voices of FCC providers are heard, the network will involve them in all levels of decision-making, planning, and delivery. Through leadership opportunities, FCC providers will be able to work in conjunction with community partners to build a comprehensive network that meets the specific needs of the Kansas City community.

In order to create a long-lasting and sustainable system, TFC will also build on existing support and services in the community.

AOK has been successful in creating networks like this in other states, and we are thrilled about the partnership. Creating a supportive network for FCC providers will strengthen our community child care system.

Learn more at: thefamilyconservancy.org/kansas-city-in-home-child-care-network. ●



EMMA BART-PLANGE

Family Child Care
Network Manager,
The Family Conservancy

After more than 25 years in early education, it is always a joy to see the reactions of teachers and family child care educators when they realize the impact of their interactions on a child's growth!

ONE PROVIDER'S EXPERIENCE WITH KIDKARE: A CHILD CARE MANAGEMENT SOFTWARE

BY JULIE SCHWARZ

One child care provider is seeing things in a whole new light. I recently had the opportunity to sit down with Julie Schwarz, owner of Thunderhawk Daycare in Grinnell, Kansas, to get her opinion on the KidKare software, a child care management system (CCMS), and how her program has benefited from using it.

Julie says that, by introducing this software into her child care business, she has been able to stay on top of her recordkeeping on a regular basis.

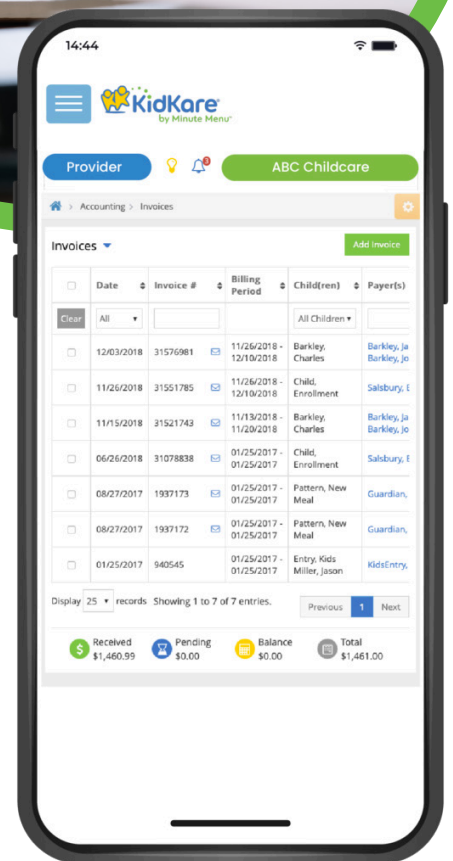
Although she admits that she's not very tech-savvy, Julie says the KidKare software has made a huge impact on her business. She has found it to be user-friendly and easy to navigate. The CCMS software does everything her child care business needs it to. She can easily maintain records for children in her care, as well as print any invoice that she may need. By inputting everything into one program, she can always find what she needs when she needs it.

The software houses records on each child and family enrolled in her program. It also provides a variety of resources, like health and emergency forms. She can easily email families their invoices so that they can pay online. If a family prefers a printed invoice, that option is available as well.

Julie says the software has made filling taxes the simplest and easiest it's ever been. All she needs to do is make sure records are updated and then select which report she wants to run from the accounting tab. It really is just a click of the mouse to keep all her business records up to date.

"As a child care provider, you don't have a lot of time for any recordkeeping," says Schwarz. "We work long hours with no breaks. The CCMS program is versatile. You can choose to use it for just a few of the features or all of them. How you incorporate it into your business is up to you. It is a reasonable price for all you are getting."

Julie advises providers to do research on different CCMS software programs in order to select the one that best fits their needs. Overall, using CCMS software has been one of the best decisions she has made for her business. ●



JULIE SCHWARZ
Owner, Thunderhawk Daycare

Julie has worked in the early childhood field for 36 years. She has been a nanny, has worked in a child care center, and recently opened her own child care facility.



Helping new providers set up their businesses

BY JESSICA SOTO-BOTELLO

Life is a learning curve that never ends. That's especially true for new business owners just starting out on their journey into child care.

The Child Care Health Consultant Start-Up program is dedicated to welcoming new providers to the child care business. Our amazing health consultants share their early childhood expertise with potential providers who are thinking of becoming licensed or who are in the early stages of the licensure process.

Part of the Child Care Aware® of Kansas team, our start-up program consultants work closely with the health, safety, and wellness consultants, as well as the nurses and emergency preparedness and health equity consultants. We understand the importance of providing high-quality care, and our goal is to get providers to that level.

The Child Care Health Consultant Start-Up program is dedicated to welcoming new providers to the child care business.

When we first meet with potential providers, we ask about their dreams for their program. We focus on building a relationship with them — knowing that this is an exciting and scary time in their

We offer new providers the information they need to access important resources on topics like health, safety, and wellness practices.

lives, especially if their business will be located in their home. Adapting to these big life changes is tough — sometimes just as difficult as understanding and meeting state regulations.

This is where the Start-Up Health Consultants come in. We offer new providers the information they need to access important resources on topics like health, safety, and wellness practices and policy development and implementation. This helps providers feel confident about their program's protocols and the safety and well-being of the children in their care.

As consultants, we make the provider's goals our own. Their success is also our achievement. The Child Care Health Consultant Network is there to support them along the road to becoming a successful business. ●



JESSICA SOTO-BOTELLO
Strategic Partnership Manager,
Child Care Aware of Kansas

Jessica resides in Garden City, Kansas. She graduated from Fort Hays State University with a bachelor's in general studies with an emphasis in social services. Her passion has always been helping others and being a helping hand in moments of need.

ARE YOU READY TO START YOUR BUSINESS?

If you're in the process of becoming a child care provider — or thinking about doing it — we can help you get licensed and offer helpful resources and tools.

Visit us online at ks.childcareaware.org/cchc or email cchc@ks.childcareaware.org.





El cuidado de niños como negocio

Qué hace el equipo del programa inicial de CCHC y datos para respaldar

BY JESSICA SOTO-BOTELLO

Cuando nos planteamos convertirnos en empresarios, pensamos en cuál es nuestra pasión y a que nos queremos dedicar el resto de nuestra vida. Nuestro objetivo es tener éxito en nuestro negocio. Hacemos una lluvia de ideas sobre lo que sabemos y lo que necesitamos para ayudarnos a alcanzar nuestra meta. El conocimiento que traemos al principio se convierte en un proceso de aprendizaje, abierto al crecimiento. La vida en general es un ciclo de aprendizaje que nunca termina. El desarrollo profesional es una pieza importante como dueños de negocios que crecerán día a día.

Esto ayuda a los proveedores a sentirse seguros acerca de los protocolos de su programa y la seguridad y bienestar de los niños bajo su cuidado.

El programa de Consultores de Salud de Cuidado Infantil, Programa Inicial, está con nuestros proveedores de cuidado infantil en este proceso de aprendizaje y crecimiento. Nuestra red consta de un grupo de asesores de salud increíbles que se enfocan en compartir su experiencia en la primera infancia con nuevos programas que están pensando en obtener una licencia

o ya la obtienen. Nuestra red está dedicada a dar la bienvenida a nuevos proveedores al negocio del cuidado infantil. Los consultores del programa inicial trabajan en colaboración con nuestros consultores de salud, seguridad y bienestar, así como con nuestros consultores de enfermería, preparación para emergencias y equidad en salud. Entendemos la importancia de brindar una atención de alta calidad y juntos como red, nuestro objetivo es llevar a los proveedores a ese nivel.

La primera conexión con nuestros proveedores se centra en la relación y el aprendizaje de sus sueños dentro de su programa. Entendemos que es un nuevo episodio y para muchos de ellos es su propio negocio en su propia casa. La adaptación a los cambios puede ser difícil, así como entender las regulaciones estatales y ponerlas en práctica. Aquí es donde entran las consultoras del programa inicial, para apoyar y ayudar a facilitar el proceso.

Nuestro programa inicial brinda muchos recursos y hace referencias cuando trabajan con los proveedores de cuidado infantil. Como consultores, le brindamos al proveedor la información que necesita para acceder a esos recursos. Como propietario de un negocio, desea que su negocio brinde los mejores servicios en su comunidad. Los temas de prácticas de salud, seguridad y bienestar de calidad son una gran solicitud para nuestro equipo del programa inicial. Esta capacidad se vincula muy de cerca con el desarrollo y la implementación

de políticas, que es otro tema de gran demanda. Estas capacidades funcionan muy bien juntas cuando se trabaja con proveedores de cuidado infantil. Los proveedores están muy complacidos con los consultores cuando tienen conversaciones sobre estas capacidades porque los hace sentir seguros sobre el protocolo de su programa sobre la seguridad y el bienestar de los niños bajo su cuidado.

Hacemos nuestros los objetivos de nuestro proveedor y su éxito es nuestro logro. Los programas de cuidado infantil son un negocio necesario en nuestras comunidades y la Red de Consultoras de Salud está aquí para apoyarlos a lo largo del camino para que sean un negocio exitoso. ●

Para su beneficio tenemos consultores bilingües disponibles.



JESSICA SOTO-BOTELLO
Strategic Partnership Manager,
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Jessica reside en Garden City, Kansas. Se graduó de la Universidad Estatal de Fort Hays con una licenciatura en estudios generales con énfasis en servicios sociales. Su pasión siempre ha sido ayudar a los demás y ser una mano amiga en momentos de necesidad.



FREE COACHING & SUPPORT FOR CHILD CARE BUSINESSES

BY CHILD CARE AWARE OF KANSAS STAFF

News and commentary lamenting the prohibitive cost of child care is everywhere. But there's rarely any mention of the child care program's cost of doing business — both financially and physically.

At Child Care Aware® of Kansas, we regularly work with professionals who have chosen to stay in the child care field for 35 years or more. We see new people joining the child care workforce with optimism and excitement. Despite the challenges they face, early care and education professionals welcome kids and families every day with smiles and laughter. They are committed to caring for and educating our state's greatest resource — children.

To help ease the financial and administrative burden of running a child care business, our Links to Quality consultants work alongside providers across the state through Program Administration Support (PAS), which is funded by the Department of Children and Families. Since the launch of PAS in October 2021, our consultants have helped professionals from child care centers, school-age programs, preschools, and family child care homes build upon their existing business practices and create operations and administrative systems to help them work more efficiently and cost-effectively.

PAS works with newly licensed providers and professionals at every level of experience, including seasoned providers who have been in the field for decades. Our consultants help each participant strengthen their business practices to enhance the sustainability and quality of their program. Support is provided one-on-one by phone or email or through virtual platforms. We also offer workshops on creating handbooks and budgets, and we're in the process of designing more workshops based on providers' most common questions and requests.

From the moment they decide to participate in PAS, each provider drives their own journey — choosing the supports that would benefit them most. Consultants discuss the provider's ideas and make suggestions to meet their particular business needs, plans, and goals.

Our Links to Quality consultants work alongside providers across the state.

A Look into the Process

To get started with PAS, providers first complete the intake form, which takes only seven minutes. A consultant then reaches out to arrange a meeting to get acquainted and share more information about PAS.

Next, each participant completes a simple online self-assessment about their current business practices. The assessment helps determine which areas of their business could benefit from updated practices or policies.

Consultants use a strengths-based approach in their work, recognizing and honoring what participants already know and do and building on those good practices. Each participant decides how much or little support they want and which format of technical assistance works best for them at any given time. We offer virtual meetings, phone calls, text messages, emails, and in-person visits. Consultants are trained in the principles of business management, and we readily offer printed resources, brainstorming assistance, proofreading, moral support, and a listening ear when needed.

PAS is not designed to create cookie cutter businesses with identical policies and procedures. Instead, consultants help each provider create a unique improvement plan with realistic goals.

As part of PAS, participants can apply for funding to purchase equipment, supplies, training, child care management software, or other business-related items that will help them reach the goals they've set for themselves. Providers can apply for these funds twice, and they're encouraged to work with their consultant for ongoing technical assistance, resources, and guidance over time as they continue improving the quality of care they provide.

If you're interested in participating, check out the [PAS webpage](#) to learn more and complete the intake form. ●

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HELPING LOCAL COMMUNITIES MEET THEIR CHILD CARE NEEDS

Quality child care benefits everyone living and working in Kansas. Just like we invest in roads, utilities, and broadband to fuel our economy and provide a good quality of life for Kansas residents, we must also invest in a more effective early care and education system for our state.

In the short term, child care enables parents and guardians to pursue work, education, and other aspirations to support their families economically and live fulfilling lives. When everyone in the state has access to quality, consistent child care, employers can attract and retain a productive and loyal workforce.

In the long term, implementing new child care solutions will ensure that Kansas children grow up in environments that shape their healthy development and lay the foundation for future learning, well-being, and success throughout their lives.

Local communities across the state are taking action to build child care capacity in their area — with support from Child Care Aware® of Kansas. We provide pre-planning guidance, a tailored workshop experience, funding, and follow-up support so that communities can meet their unique child care needs.

Is your community ready to take action?
Visit ks.childcareaware.org to get started.



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