

# RURAL CHAMPION CHILDCARE PROJECTS

The counties of Clay, Decatur, Ford and Kingman have all identified childcare as a vital need and partnered with the Rural Champion program to address the challenge and embrace a solution for childcare in each of their counties.

Our Rural Champion was tasked to help solve our community childcare shortage. There were three identified goals:

- Put together a Child Care Task Force to help guide the work of the Rural Champion
- Explore opening a childcare center in collaboration with county, city, school district and hospital to increase childcare slots in our County.
- Research how we might develop a substitute pool to help providers when they need time off to provide stability to the workforce.

## CLAY COUNTY

### Background Information

In June of 2021, Clay County Child Care announces their closure due to staffing issues. This decreased the number of available childcare slots by approximately 32. An additional childcare facility closed later in the year eliminating 10 more slots. Lastly a church associated childcare closed. In all, approximately 50 slots were lost during this time period. Three new in-home providers opened giving some relief to the shortage, but many providers do not operate at full capacity. Thus, there was a quest to increase childcare spots in Clay County.

The shortage of childcare has been an issue for several years but was intensified after COVID-19 Pandemic. It's a concern for families, employers and the overall vitality of the county. Community members had an opportunity to give input at a public forum. The school district's Citizen Review Committee and a Community Strategic Planning session that met several times to identify district and community needs.

The lack of adequate childcare was recognized as a top concern in every meeting. Surveys were sent to local providers, parents and businesses to assess needs and challenges which identified the need for more childcare slots especially for infants and the availability of drop-in care. County data from Child Care Aware supported the need for additional childcare slots.

Gaps/Barriers Identified: Capacity Barriers:

- Staffing shortages
- Finding local contractors

### Steps to Success

Initially the Clay County Child Care Taskforce, USD 379, Clay County Medical Center, Clay County officials, Lakeside Learning Tree, KDHE and local in-home day care providers were involved in envisioning a solution to the childcare need. As the project progressed, USD 379 has taken a lead role in implementing the eventual project.

Some public officials were not aware of the shortage of childcare and not thought about the impact of that shortage on families, businesses and growth opportunities for the community. They were educated on the issue and eventually lent their support.

Some in-home childcare providers were concerned that their businesses would be negatively impacted. Once they were made aware of the extent of the shortage, their concerns were lessened. Every effort was made to include as many interested parties as possible.

### Solutions

The need to address childcare was assessed and confirmed. Interested parties discussed potential solutions and a plan was developed which included securing grant funding and assessing possible locations for a facility.

After a thorough consideration of options, stakeholders chose to apply for the Accelerator Grant with the goal of building a structure to house a childcare facility located at the elementary school in Clay Center.

Numerous other grants were pursued to fund furnishings, equipment, and staff. Community Service tax credits were requested and approved from the Department of Commerce. When the Accelerator Grant was not secured the group pivoted to another option.

When funding for new construction was not secured, other options were considered. Throughout the consideration process, USD 379 superintendent offered the idea of housing the program in an existing facility within the district. The middle school became a workable option and funding was available from grants already secured to complete the retrofit and get the program up and running. The school board has been supportive and in the process of giving final approval.

A benefit to this location is its proximity to the high school making it convenient for CTE students enrolled in early childhood education to participate in the program. This arrangement will provide for 12-24 childcare slots with the potential for expansion if the need exists. The USD 379

superintendent is in the process of planning for the retrofit of the space and gathering hard costs. It was identified that most in-home providers were not in favor of the substitute pool idea, so that idea was not pursued further. However, in the parent survey, it identified the need for drop-in availability and the school district has agreed to explore that concept once they get up and running.

Only seven of the 27 licensed providers accept DCF payments creating a significant shortage of slots for these families. The USD 379 program will accept DCF payment. As a result of educating the public about the shortage of providers that take DCF payment two existing providers became eligible to accept those payments.

### Resources

Rural Champion Project Implementation Grant funds will be used for construction/remodel, furnishings, toys/supplies, and design fees for the retrofit at USD 379 for an area in the middle school that will provide space for 12 – 14 childcare spots.

#### State Resources:

- Awarded in the amount of \$199,999
- State programs from The Children’s Cabinet
- Childcare Aware of Kansas
- Kansas Department of Commerce Community Service Tax Credits
- State or Federal resources that were valuable in learning about childcare resources included:
- Kansas Department of Commerce/Office of Rural Prosperity – Rural Champions
- KDHE for guidance on regulations.
- Childcare Aware and the Kansas Children’s Cabinet and Trust

#### Local Resources:

- Donated \$5,000 towards the project:
- Patterson Family Foundation
- Community Foundation
- Paid for plans for new facilities (\$6,200)
- Grow Clay County
- Grow Clay County helped with grant writing, outreach, surveys, and convening partners and stakeholders
- The city was willing to sponsor the CBDG grant if we needed extra funding
- Many local community members purchase tax credits to help support the project

## OBERLIN - DECATUR COUNTY

### Background Information

After a Strategic Doings presentation in February 2022, a group of community members came together to create a coalition to address the childcare needs in our county. Using data from Child Care Aware of Kansas and a community

survey, we concluded that a community childcare facility is seriously needed. Working with community leaders, we strategized what our next step should be. The research led to conclude that the USD 294 would be the best “parent” organization for the project. The mission statement of USD 294 is “Our mission. Their journey! Where kids come first!”

USD 294 strives to guide their students on their educational journey from Pre-K through high school. With USD 294 sponsoring this childcare project, the children start that journey earlier. The school district Childcare project curriculum can be aligned with the Pre-K program to help young children prepare for success from the moment they are born to the day they enter school. This project would increase the number of childcare slots available in our county.

According to data from Child Care Aware there are potentially 119 children in need of childcare in our county. The current number of childcare slots available is 43, leaving many families with limited opportunities for quality childcare options. In addition, two of the five current providers are near retirement age. Their retirement will leave the County with an even larger deficit of slots for our children. The Champion will help USD 294 Community Childcare Project progress more efficiently with the additional resources and connections that made available.

Based on a community survey which indicated that 98% of participants, there is a need for more daycare. Additionally, a survey of current licensed providers, indicated that there a few openings. The few openings available are strictly for school-aged children, which is not the highest need.

A survey of businesses indicated that there are issues with employees needing to have special schedules to accommodate for their childcare or have been unable to hire a qualified individual because of a lack of childcare.

Child Care Aware of Kansas provides data for each county which includes how many children there are under the age of 6, which is the primary ages for childcare needed, percentage of children in licensed childcare facilities, and the number of potential childcare slots needed. For Decatur County there are 170 children under the age of six with 25% of these children being cared for in a licensed facility, and a potential 125 childcare slots are needed.

Previously, in 2014, a group of community members faced the need for additional childcare and explored ways to solve this long-term problem. They were a loosely organized group, led by the Head Start teacher. The original group applied for a Dane G. Hansen grant of \$10,000 for startup

funding. At the same time, they searched for a facility that could be adapted as a group home.

St. John Lutheran Church had come to the decision that having a parsonage was no longer appropriate for congregational needs. The home was located near the church and shared utility costs. An agreement was reached for the childcare facility to be housed in that home with generous financial support. A director was hired, and the group home was fully operational. The leadership did not have any official sponsorship for long-term support and guidance. The leadership remained fluid and, eventually, the board of directors was entirely made up of parents involved in the home. Staffing was a major issue. Finding replacements as staff changes happened became an ongoing issue and without a sponsoring organization to provide some stability, they were unable to manage the home successfully.

As this group failed, another attempt to reorganize through Decatur Health was begun. Again, issues of appropriate staffing were hurdles that could not be resolved. That reality, along with difficulties in finding a way to create a relationship between the hospital and the group home, led to that project being abandoned. At that time, St. John's proceeded to sell the parsonage.

### Steps to Success

The vision of this project is to provide quality affordable childcare services for the community. The primary goal of this project is first to increase childcare capacity for our community through creating a community daycare facility. This facility will add twelve childcare slots. For a focus on quality our facility will offer a learning curriculum which is not currently being offered through any local childcare facilities.

The Coalition was established February 2022 and in August of 2022 it got the approval of the USD 294 Board of Education to be our sponsoring entity to establish a childcare facility. The coalition started with a Strategic Doings session hosted by GROW Decatur County our local foundation. Building the committee, workgroup, and relationships:

- Entities included in community conversations: City Administrator, school superintendent, County Commissioner, hospital administrator, church leaders, local childcare providers and local business owners to discuss how to best address the childcare shortage in our community
- Members included in Childcare Coalition: local bank manager, a retired early childhood educator, a retired childcare provider, school superintendent, city administrator and a

- mother with daycare experience
- Other community members join us on occasion when they are available. Throughout the project relationships were maintained with these other entities and had regular conversations outside of the regular meetings.

There has been community doubt. The previous failures to establish a community and maintain a community daycare have led many community members to doubt our ability to succeed. There continued to remain positive and approach community doubt with confidence in acquired skills. Highlighting the successes as encouragement to the community regardless of the hurdles, is critical to gaining confidence from the community.

It would have been good to have more representation from local childcare providers. The reasons it was difficult to get them to participate were primarily that they are so busy offering childcare that during free time, it's preferred spending time with their families rather than spending more time talking about childcare. We found that having one on one conversations was more effective to learn from them.

### Solutions

Our group decided it would be best to open a community daycare facility to increase the number of childcare slots in our community. It was also identified that increasing the number of home providers can help address the situation, as there is such a great need. It was determined that there would also be support for current and new providers.

Not many properties were available for purchase which led to the idea of construction. After months of contacting contractors and receiving bids, roadblocks appeared. The availability of contractors was extremely difficult to work with and the cost seemed to be impossible to manage. This led to a change in the plan of action in finding a location. The housing market had changed in Oberlin making there many houses listed for sale. Working with realtors made it easier to find a house. The location is currently under contract for the project.

Finding a contractor became difficult. The project coordinator found a contractor and is currently under contract for a property. The necessary funding to fill the facility has been reached and will soon become a facility for childcare. It intends to open early spring 2024 with 12 additional slots that will need to be filled.

The Decatur County Childcare Coalition is working towards increasing the community involvement,

as well as completing the community daycare project. To build community awareness, \$1,000 of implementation grant funds were used to sponsor and host one of the kids rides at the fair for the week for all five nights that rides are open. Remaining implementation grant funds will be used to support expenses in renovation of the home into the childcare facility.

### Resources

Rural Champion Project Implementation Grant funds will be used for the acquisition of the property for the childcare facility to increase the number of available slots for quality childcare.

#### State Resources:

- State programs from The Children’s Cabinet and Childcare Aware of Kansas
- Dane G Hansen Foundation and Patterson Family Foundation

State or Federal resources that were valuable in learning about childcare resources included:

- Kansas Department of Commerce/Office of Rural Prosperity – Rural Champions
- KDHE for guidance on regulations.
- Childcare Aware and the Kansas Children’s Cabinet and Trust

#### Local Resources:

- GROW Decatur County: Seed money
- City of Oberlin & Oberlin Rotary Club
- Non-financial resources included:
- Two local churches offered their space for meetings
- The city provided support through a cellphone for childcare usage and has provided office supplies such as printer paper and intend to continue this support in the future
- Decatur Health System is supporting our project through providing free first aid and CPR training for staff, a defibrillator machine and training on how to use it, and having medical professionals come and do informational sessions with the children in the facility
- Local thrift store has agreed to support through collecting donations for supplies

## DODGE CITY - FORD COUNTY

### Background Information

The Ford County Development Corporation is a non-profit organization that promotes the growth and development of existing businesses and pursues quality new businesses to help sustain the economic vitality of the area. The childcare industry is an important economic driver within states.

There are 2064 children under six years of age

that are in need of childcare according to an in-depth environmental scan completed for Ford County by All In For Kansas Kids. The shortages are affecting businesses with the struggle to retain and attract new workforce to the community without affordable childcare. The two largest employers operate 24 hours a day in multiple shifts. There are currently no licensed childcare facilities that offer non-traditional hours.

Continuous problems with childcare can affect the parents’ long-term career goals. A quarter of parents have reduced their work hours, turned down other job offers or been prevented from pursuing further education and training. Other effects include parents rejecting promotions, reducing hours from full-time to part-time work or quitting a job due to insufficient childcare.

For there to be growth, the community must work together to increase affordable quality childcare facilities. In addition, we are exploring possible grant opportunities, private partnerships and fundraising opportunities to fund the construction of the facilities. The Rural Champion will provide the support needed to fill the gap in capacity and be dedicated to see the project through to completion.

A childcare committee was formed and consisting of local and regional organizations to try to identify opportunities to tackle the childcare shortage. Local businesses and regional partners were engaged to explore a variety of opportunities. Based on the research it was determined that to meet the large shortage, the committee would need to focus on creating two new facilities:

- Operated by USD 443 (South Dodge City): serving 320 children during first shift and an additional 320 children during second shift
- Operated by Dodge City Community College (North Dodge City): serving 212 students during first shift and an additional 212 students during second shift

Regular committee meetings were held until the start of COVID. Everyone recognizes the need, however, no one wanted to be the entity to take the lead.

Gaps/Barriers Identified: Capacity Barriers:

- Language barriers

### Steps to Success

The vision is to increase the number of childcare capacity of new child centers/homes in Dodge City and/or increase capacity of existing childcare centers/homes in Dodge City.

To know if success is achieved, there will be work with providers from Kansas Health and Environment to track those approved to open an in-home childcare facility.

Involving many stakeholders was critical to achieving the goal of the project. It was essential to meet with major employers such as Cargill, National Beef, Inc., and Hilmar Cheese Company to discuss their specific needs related to childcare.

The committee/work group:

- Dodge City/Ford County Development Corporation
- Childcare Coalition of Dodge City
- Ford County, City of Dodge City
- Dodge City Community College
- USD 443/Dodge City Public Schools
- Russell Child Development Center
- Dodge City Area Chamber of Commerce
- Childcare Aware of Kansas
- Kansas Department of Health and Environment
- Kansas Small Business Development Center
- Dodge City YMCA

### Solutions

A partnership with Childcare Aware and the KU Center for Public Partnership and Research evolved to better understand the landscape of available early childhood care including the needs of families, childcare providers and businesses as well as current gaps and availability of care.

Because the need is so great, it's important to ensure that there is continuous work on increasing childcare at all levels. There needs to be options available to cater to different family lifestyles. This need brought the idea of increasing childcare on a large scale by building a facility that would serve 314 children and increasing in-home providers.

There were partnerships with the school district, college, county and city to design a childcare facility. The five-million-dollar facility will serve children and families to better serve the shift workers in Dodge City's industry environment. After creating an operational budget for the facility and its non-traditional hours, the project became no longer feasible. Currently, the project leads are working with beef packing plants to secure annual donations to become operational.

Additionally, there was a need for a solution to make progress was also to set up Childcare Provider Seminars and following up with calling the people who attended the seminar. The "How-To-Become A Childcare Provider" seminars were provided to free from the public and experts from KDHE, Child Care Aware, SBDC and the food program attended to explain their portion of the licensing process.

These sessions identified those with interest that participated. However, it identified the people who wanted to become an in-home provider faced financial strain because providers needed an egress window or playground equipment and/or

start-up funds.

### Resources

Rural Champion Project Implementation Grant funds will be used for the purchase of office and tech needs for the Rural Champion/ED of Childcare and subsidize a small portion of wages. Rendering and mechanical drawings for future childcare facility. Funds committed for future training sessions on How to become a childcare provider. Mini grants for future childcare providers to establish their business.

State Resources:

- Kansas Department of Commerce Rural Champions
- The Children's Cabinet
- Childcare Aware of Kansas
- State or Federal resources that were valuable in learning about childcare resources included:
- Kansas Department of Commerce/Office of Rural Prosperity – Rural Champions
- Childcare Aware and the Kansas Children's Cabinet and Trust
- KDHE for guidance on regulations
- Small Business Development Center
- KU Center for Public Partnership and Research

Local Resources:

- City of Dodge City
- Ford County
- USD 443/Public Schools
- Dodge City Community College
- Community Foundation of Southwest Kansas
- Major employers - Cargill and National Beef

## KINGMAN COUNTY

### Background Information

Based on meetings with local governments, childcare providers, school districts, employers, and parents/guardians, the Kingman County Economic Development Advisory Committee (KCEDAC) established childcare as its top priority after a February 2022 meeting. At the time, Childcare Aware of Kansas' real time data for Kingman County indicates only 32% of childcare were being met, leaving parents and guardians of 195 children without the childcare they needed.

Feedback was not limited to the lack of childcare alone; the need for childcare outside of traditional business hours and the desire to use childcare as an employee benefit were also mentioned as priorities.

Providers indicated that the startup costs, lack of benefits, and generally low wages were barriers to entering childcare as career option.

A lack of substitute providers, utility expenses, and insurance costs are an ongoing concern.

In addition to the concerns of employers, parents/guardians and providers, the shortage of adequate childcare has had economic implications to the community as a whole. The Bi-Partisan Policy Center estimates the childcare gap has cost an estimated \$4.8 million dollars to Kingman County.

The Kingman County Childcare Coalition was started in June of 2022 and included community members including parents, teachers, providers and employers. It was set up through Kingman County Economic Development and assisted in hosting several events over the summer in 2022 to raise awareness about the importance of childcare in Kingman County.

With funding from the Kansas Office of Rural Prosperity, Kingman County Economic Development hired a Childcare Rural Champion in October of 2022. Kingman County, the City of Kingman and USD 331 supplied matching funding and office space to support the Rural Champion. Since then, the Rural Champion has led the Childcare Coalition which meets regularly to plan for future childcare resources.

Gaps/Barriers Identified: Capacity Barriers:

- Needed more parents invested
- Hesitancy among current providers throughout the process

### Steps to Success

Initial data from Childcare Aware and community conversations supported the need for additional childcare slots. In addition, a childcare survey was created and distributed over social media, schools, and in-person events. The data was essential in applying for numerous grants and continues to be of benefit. The survey had over 60 respondents, and all but one indicated there was additional need for childcare in Kingman County. The surveys distributed in person were entered into our spreadsheet and graphs were created to present the data. An employer survey was also created and did not have the response of the public survey, but the results were the same.

Once the coalition was created and active, several community events were conducted to start the outreach of the project.

The first event, which was designed to raise awareness of the importance of early childhood education and development, was a screening of the movie “No Small Matter” at the local theatre. The event brought together several agencies to speak with potential providers about regulations and resources. Childcare Aware was able to attend and spoke about the economic impacts of the lack of childcare specific to Kingman County. A discussion

with attendees completed the event. All attendees were forthcoming about the need for ongoing support and the obstacles they face in providing or finding childcare.

The second event was held at the Chamber of Commerce office and Zero to Thrive provided training on childcare advocacy, titled “Rural Child Success Roadmap.” The training was the first meeting of the childcare taskforce. Attendees included providers, parents, grandparents and citizens interested in childcare availability. Discussions covered a range of topics including common roadblocks, avenues of support and potential partnerships county-wide.

The third event hosted five potential future childcare providers and was held at the Kingman EMS Training Center which provided training and resources for potential providers. Childcare Aware, the Kansas Department of Health & Environment, Kansas Childcare Training Opportunities, Childcare Links, the Small Business Development Center and local licensed childcare providers each gave presentations on programs and funding opportunities as well as information on start-up.

Building the committee, workgroup, and relationships:

- Support from the City of Kingman for matching funds for the Accelerator grant
- Support from other city and the county governments is sparse
- USD 331 Kingman-Norwich

It became extremely difficult to convince the local county commission of the importance of childcare to the economy and its relationship to attracting workers. A favorable election will be the only thing that will address it.

Local in-home providers had concerns about the new center taking business away, but there were efforts to educate them on the shortage and also support them in their business.

### Solutions

Awareness of the local childcare issues and the data to back that up were our initial priorities. Those involved with the project attended events and shared information on social media to spread awareness and recruit residents to fill out the surveys.

Several small grants have been awarded including a South-Central Community Foundation’s Children’s Health Grant, which was awarded to the childcare center in Cunningham, Kansas. Kingman County Economic Development also received a Coalition Building Grant from Childcare Aware of Kansas to help market the community survey and bring awareness to the coalition. The coalition also received funding from Childcare Aware Capacity

Building Grant. Those funds have been split between the center in Cunningham and the new center going into Kingman Elementary School.

USD 331 received an Accelerator grant from the Children’s Cabinet which would provide funding to rehab two former classrooms into a new center. The district hired the South-Central Kansas Economic Development District to write the grant and the coalition assisted by providing data and a history of what work had been done. The data from the survey and the formatting were important in receiving the grant.

Because of that application, the district has been able to apply and receive several more grants, including a Patterson Foundation grant. Additionally, KDHE had noticed the Accelerator application and met with the district and the coalition about a pilot program for centers which will allow the district to increase capacity from 24 to 46.

By supporting current providers, there is proof to show that the project is the overall childcare system, and they are a significant part of the future of childcare in Kingman County. Other support included gifts for providers on Provider Appreciation Day. There were drawings held for survey participants, and had several cool marketing give-a-ways to spread awareness.

There had been communication with USD 331 throughout the journey, and after the data was able to back the concerns, there was a natural transition to begin work on grant applications. The school district had been contemplating a center for a long time and with the data supplied, it allowed for assistance with the application process.

Because of the heavy representation of providers on the coalition, the strong information on what types of assistance would be helpful to them. Providers would also be able to receive funding, but unable to secure funding to create a substitute provider program which is desperately needed throughout the region.

There were two primary goals for our coalition:

- Increase capacity
- Support current capacity

The center in USD 331 will be open before the next school year and work should start in January of 2024 to remodel the rooms. The opening of the center and the new slots created will be the largest measure of success.

In addition, the current capacity remained steady, there was enough funding to support the childcare center in Cunningham and maintain the current capacity of the in-home providers. In short, no one

closed, and two in-home providers opened.

Long-term success would ensure the center in Cunningham remains open long into the future. It does struggle and we are working to get support from the school district in Cunningham to help support the center on a more permanent basis. School districts are the natural partner to childcare.

Implementation grant funds were made available and used to support current in-home providers who were not eligible for most of the capacity building funding. Nine providers submitted their ‘wish list’ of needs for the centers and funds were split evenly between each of them.

### Resources

Rural Champion Project Implementation Grant funds will be used to continue the Rural Champion/ ED of Childcare and subsidize a small portion of wages, for the purchase of office and tech needs, cover cost for rendering and mechanical drawings for future childcare facility. Funds committed for future training sessions on How to Become A Childcare Provider and mini-grants for future childcare providers to establish their business.

#### State Resources:

- Kansas Department of Commerce Rural Champions
- The Children’s Cabinet
- Childcare Aware of Kansas
- SEED Programs
- State or Federal resources that were valuable in learning about childcare resources included:
- Kansas Department of Commerce/Office of Rural Prosperity – Rural Champions and SEED Program
- Wrote several letters of support for grant applications and also provided training and peer discussions
- Childcare Aware and the Kansas Children’s Cabinet and Trust

#### Local Resources:

- Kingman County and City of Kingman supplied matching funds for Rural Champion
- City of Kingman committed another \$8000.00 to USD 331 childcare center project

#### Grants available:

ORP-Rural Champion  
Increase Childcare Capacity  
\$45,800.00

TEFFI-SEED  
Community Projects  
\$5,000.00

Childcare Aware of Kansas

Coalition Building  
\$2,000.00  
Childcare Aware  
Capacity Building  
\$45,000.00  
Accelerator  
Childcare  
\$674,000.00  
Total: \$771,800.00

Non-financial resources:

- Survey was based on a community survey from Childcare Aware
- Childcare Aware provided real time data
- Training sessions when available through multiple organizations, including Childcare Aware and Zero to Thrive