

Addressing a Child Care Crisis Together



Coalition encourages local businesses to invest in early childhood

Kosciusko County is a child care desert. According to recent data, there is a shortage of 1,800 child care seats, and of the seats available, less than one third are considered high quality by Indiana's definition.

Kosciusko County is also known as the orthopedic capital of the world, but businesses are having trouble attracting and retaining talent due to lack of child care.

Local business leaders knew they had to do something. In October 2018, the Kosciusko Chamber of Commerce, the Kosciusko County Community Foundation and United Way of Kosciusko County partnered to form LaunchPad.



LaunchPad seeks to strengthen the climate of early learning in Kosciusko County by focusing on the most recent research for children, birth to age five, and meeting the needs of its youngest citizens.



"It took some time to identify where LaunchPad should begin. It's a complex issue, and the more we dug into it, the more complex it became. We want to provide affordable, high-quality child care to the families in our community and there's just not an easy path for that."

Sherry Searles, Director at LaunchPad

LaunchPad developed a five-year strategic plan to help focus its work and identified priorities to help meet its goals:

- improve family and community education;
- increase accessibility to child care by building capacity;
- increase affordability for families;
- grow early learning workforce and improve retention; and
- advocate for policy change.

LaunchPad is unique in that it is financially supported by local businesses. Half of its operating budget comes from companies that make an annual investment; the other half comes from grants and other foundations.

“We definitely see this as a workforce issue,” said Searles, adding that partnering with the Chamber of Commerce has been key to reaching the business community. She often meets with business owners who are struggling to attract or retain employees.

“They may be in orthopedics or production, but they want to be involved because they realize there is a lack of child care,” she said. “They are recognizing LaunchPad as an entity that can help them begin to solve some of those issues.”

In Kosciusko County, there are approximately 3,000 children under the age of five with working parents and only 1,200 child care seats available. Despite that, Searles said there are child care centers, ministries and in-home providers that are not full. Some are even struggling because they don’t have enough children.



“What I’m hearing over and over again is yes, but we need affordable care,” she said. “In our community there is a disconnect between paying for affordable care and what that looks like.”

If area businesses could help employees pay for child care, LaunchPad could serve as a connector between child care centers or providers and families who need care.

“Something else we are exploring is creating a network of licensed in-home providers,” she said.

LaunchPad’s success is tied to its strong community partners. In addition to the Chamber of Commerce, the Kosciusko County Community Foundation and the United Way have been driving forces from the beginning.

“Any time investment is made in early childhood, you’re investing in the future of our community and our kids,” Searles said.

