

# Shawnee

Care to Grow **FORWARD**

Care to Grow



## Employer childcare toolkit

Data, Tools, and Resources for Increasing Childcare  
Capacity for the Pottawatomie County Workforce

---

[shawneeforward.com/childcare](http://shawneeforward.com/childcare) | 405-273-6092

# In This Toolkit



This toolkit equips employers with practical strategies and resources to understand how childcare impacts workforce performance and retention. It helps businesses identify tailored solutions based on their unique needs and culture, empowering them to proactively address childcare challenges.

## Contents

### **2 Introduction**

### **3 Birth to Pre-K**

A Look at the Shawnee Childcare Supply

### **5 See the Signs, Share the Support**

Identify Childcare Challenges and Resources to Provide

### **6 Take Action. Simple Changes. Big Impact.**

Supporting Working Families Through Workplace Flexibility

### **7 Go the Extra Mile**

Immediately Actionable Resources for Employers & Employees

### **9 Care to Grow Initiative**

Smart Childcare Support for a Stronger Workforce

### **10 Counting on Care Adds Up**

Strategic Investment Creates Long Term Culture

### **11 Bridging the Benefits Cliff**

How Childcare Support Helps Families Move Forward

### **12 From Insight to Action: Who to Know, Where to Go**

References & Immediately Actionable Resources for Employers & Employees



# Introduction

## Reduced Productivity & Increased Absenteeism



- **45% of parents** report missing work due to childcare issues, averaging **4.3 missed days every six months**.
- These absences cost U.S. businesses an estimated **\$4.4 billion annually**.
- **1 in 3 businesses** say childcare challenges significantly contribute to **lost productivity**.

## Difficulty Hiring & Retaining Talent



- 56% of parents say childcare responsibilities have impacted their decision to accept a job - **limiting access to top talent**.
- Lack of Childcare often forces parents to **leave the workforce**, increasing employee turnover
- Employers that provide childcare support report **up to 60% reductions in turnover**.

## Lost Economic Output



- Childcare-related work disruptions cost the national economy **billions each year**, with states losing an average of **\$1 billion in economic activity annually** due to parents missing work or cutting back hours.

## Increased Costs for Businesses



- Some businesses are forced to **reduce hours or operate short-staffed** because employees can't access or afford childcare.
- Replacing an employee lost to childcare challenges can cost up to **33% of their total compensation**.

Employers are increasingly recognizing the business impact of limited childcare access. According to a 2020 U.S. Chamber of Commerce report, **76% of businesses have seen employees leave due to childcare challenges**. In 43% of those cases, 75-100% of departing employees were women.

Childcare plays a critical role in workforce stability, directly influencing participation, productivity, and economic growth. With 53% of U.S. workers being parents—and 37% of them with young children—**access to affordable, quality childcare is essential**.

Without it, businesses face absenteeism, reduced productivity, and costly turnover.





# Birth to Pre-K:

## A Look at the Pottawatomie County Childcare Supply

Like many communities across Oklahoma, Pottawatomie County faces ongoing challenges in delivering **accessible, affordable, and high-quality childcare** for working families.

To effectively address these challenges, it's important to understand the current landscape and capacity of licensed childcare in the region.



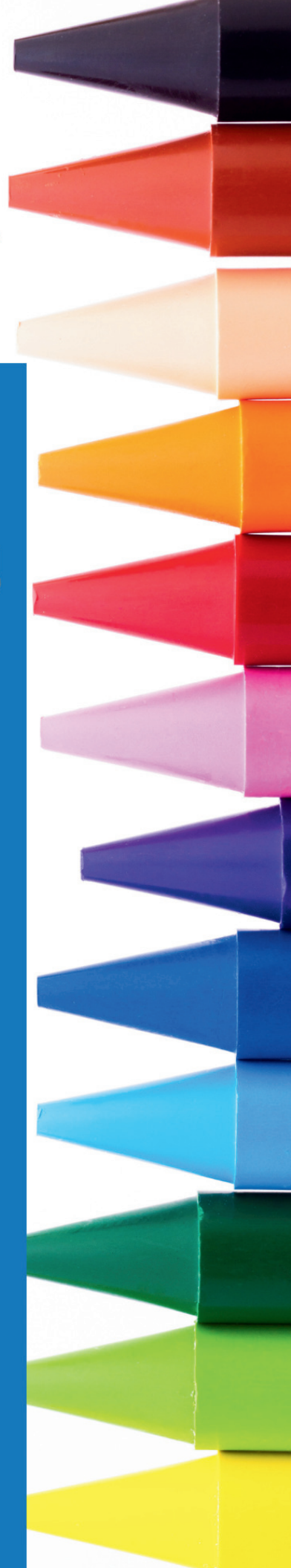
*For every 10 children under age 5 in Pottawatomie County, only 3.5 have access to a licensed childcare slot.*

As of the end of 2024, there were 30 licensed childcare facilities in Pottawatomie County, offering care for just 1,461 children. That's only enough to serve 35% of the 4,167 children under age 5 who live here, according to U.S. Census estimates.


**The result? A shortage of over 2,700 childcare slots—leaving many families without reliable care.**

Licensed childcare availability in Pottawatomie County varies by age group. Preschool-aged children generally have more access, thanks in part to Oklahoma's public pre-K programs for 4-year-olds. These programs have eased the burden for many families by expanding access to part-time care.

But care for infants and toddlers is still a major challenge. Providers face higher costs and strict staffing requirements, making it harder to offer enough slots. That means many families with very young children are left scrambling to find affordable, reliable options.







Across the board, licensed childcare simply isn't keeping up with demand. Workforce shortages, rising costs, and facility limitations continue to make it tough for Pottawatomie County families to find the care they need to stay in the workforce.

Childcare access in Pottawatomie County mirrors a growing crisis seen across Oklahoma and the nation. Families in Pottawatomie County are experiencing firsthand what many refer to as **childcare deserts**—areas where there are **no licensed providers or only one available slot for every three children who need care**. With statewide data showing that **55% of Oklahoma families live in childcare deserts**, the local impact is significant.

**Since 2014, Pottawatomie County has lost 16 licensed childcare facilities—representing a staggering one-third of its total facilities.** This decline has significantly reduced the number of available childcare slots, from 1,977 in 2014 to just 1,461 at the end of 2024—a **27% drop, meaning 561 fewer slots for local children**. This sharp reduction mirrors broader national trends in early childhood care, where **local providers are struggling with staffing shortages, high turnover, rising operational costs, and increasingly complex regulatory requirements**. These challenges make it especially difficult to sustain programs for infants and toddlers, where strict staff-to-child ratios and high facility standards are essential but costly to maintain.

Families in Pottawatomie County are also feeling the pressure of rising costs. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services considers childcare affordable when it accounts for no more than **7% of a household's income**, yet as reported by the Economic Policy Institute, only 13.4% of Oklahoma families can afford infant care. On average, **infant care in Oklahoma costs \$12,468 per year—or about \$1,039 per month**. Care for a **4-year-old** averages **\$10,790 annually, or \$899 per month**.

In Pottawatomie County, local rates vary depending on the child's age and the type of provider, but many families pay between **\$899 and \$1039 per month**, placing a heavy burden on household budgets.

As these pressures grow, it's increasingly important for employers to recognize when their workforce may be struggling with childcare. When care is unavailable or unaffordable, employees are often forced to make tough decisions—**cutting hours, missing work, or leaving their jobs entirely**.

*In Oklahoma, infant care costs 1.6% more than average rent.*



# See the Signs. Share the Support.

Working parents often try to balance it all—but when childcare becomes a challenge, it can show up at work. Recognizing the signs is the first step; responding with understanding and offering support or flexibility can make all the difference in helping employees stay present, productive, and supported.



## 01 Signs of childcare-related stress.

- Sudden changes in performance or behavior
- More frequent tardiness or absences
- Noticeable stress, fatigue, or burnout
- Trouble focusing during meetings or tasks
- Requests for adjusted hours or flexibility
- Signs of work-life imbalance
- Emotional shifts or irritability
- Lower engagement or motivation
- Openly sharing concerns about childcare

## 02 Support Starts Here

- Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) – Oklahoma DHS helps eligible families pay for part or all of their childcare costs.  
<https://oklahoma.gov/okdhs/services/childcare.html>
- Head Start and Early Head Start – Free early learning and development programs for income-eligible families  
<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/programs/article/head-start-programs>
- Oklahoma Universal Pre-K – Public preschool offered through local school districts <https://sde.ok.gov/early-childhood-education>
- Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies – Support families in finding licensed care options  
<https://www.oklahomachildcare.org/parent-referral-request>



# Take Action.

## Simple Changes. Big Impact.

As Pottawatomie County faces a growing childcare access crisis, local employers can play a major role in creating stability for working families—and **building stronger, more resilient businesses** in the process.

Family-friendly policies aren't just good for employees; they're a strategic advantage. Research shows that businesses offering supportive policies experience **higher retention, improved productivity, better morale, and lower absenteeism**. In today's tight labor market, offering flexibility and support can set your business apart.

Only 60% of America's largest companies currently disclose a parental leave policy

79% of women who return to full-time work after childbirth end up leaving—often **due to lack of workplace support**.

### 01 Paid Parental Leave

Offering paid leave for new parents—whether through birth, adoption, or fostering—supports bonding, health, and emotional well-being. It also gives employees peace of mind, knowing they can care for their family without risking their job.

### 02 Flexible Work Arrangements

Offering options like flextime, remote work, or compressed workweeks can help employees balance work and family life—especially when childcare falls through.

### 03 Lactation Support

Providing a private, clean space and flexible break time for employees who need to pump or express milk supports a smoother transition back to work and promotes infant health.

### 04 Childcare Assistance & Referrals

You can support employees by helping them connect with local childcare resources or by **offering childcare stipends**.

### 05 Emergency & Family Care Leave

Create a policy that allows employees to take leave when caregiving emergencies arise—whether that means a sick child, a family medical emergency, or an unexpected school closure.

Help attract and retain talent

**Boost employee productivity and focus**

Reduce absenteeism due to family issues

**Improve job satisfaction and morale**

Enhance your company's reputation in the community

5 benefits of family-friendly policies

# Go the Extra Mile

While Pottawatomie County doesn't yet have an official Family-Friendly Workplace certification, Oklahoma employers can still lead the way.

**Consider getting involved to show your commitment to being part of the solution.**

## → Potts Family Foundation – Certified Family Positive Workplace Program

Recognizes Oklahoma employers implementing family-friendly policies such as flexible work schedules, childcare support, and family leave options. Provides resources and guidance to create a supportive work environment.

<https://pottsfamilyfoundation.org/oklahoma-certified-family-positive-workplace/>

## → Women Employed – Sample Parental Leave Policy

Offers a sample parental leave policy outlining minimum standards that employers can use to craft their own, promoting workplace fairness and support for new parents.

<https://womenemployed.org/resources/tips-tools-and-templates/>

## → Oklahoma Child Care Resource & Referral Association (OCCRA)

Provides free consultations for employers seeking to support employees with childcare needs, including resources for finding quality childcare and implementing supportive workplace policies.

<https://www.oklahomachildcare.org/employerbusiness>

## → Office on Women's Health – Supporting Nursing Moms at Work

Offers resources and solutions for employers to support nursing mothers in the workplace, including guidance on creating lactation-friendly environments and complying with federal regulations.

<https://womenshealth.gov/supporting-nursing-moms-work>

## → Oklahoma Child Care Subsidy Program (CCAP)

Assists eligible families in Oklahoma with the cost of child care, enabling employees to access affordable, quality childcare services while maintaining employment.

<https://oklahoma.gov/okdhs/services/adult/ccsubsidy/child-care-subsidy.html>

## → Oklahoma Child Care Locator

An online tool that helps families search for licensed childcare providers in Oklahoma, facilitating access to quality childcare options for employees.

<https://childcarefind.okdhs.org/>



*Small steps add up.*

**Whether you implement one policy or overhaul your entire approach, taking action today builds a stronger, more family-supportive workforce tomorrow.**



# BUILDING THE INFRASTRUCTURE FOR FAMILY SUPPORT

When employees have access to reliable, affordable childcare, everyone wins. Productivity goes up. Turnover goes down. Your business builds a reputation as a great place to work.

In Pottawatomie County and across Oklahoma, the lack of childcare is keeping too many parents—especially women—out of the workforce.

**But as an employer, you can help turn the tide.**

Childcare is often a family's biggest monthly expense.

Even modest support from employers can make a major difference.

**Here are a few ways you can step in and support the families who keep your business running:**

## WHAT YOU CAN DO: HELP OFFSET CHILDCARE COSTS

Offer a childcare stipend—a small monthly contribution goes a long way.

Provide access to a Dependent Care Flexible Spending Account, so employees can set aside pre-tax dollars for care.

Help employees apply for the Oklahoma Child Care Subsidy Program (CCAP).

## WHY IT MATTERS:

**Financial support reduces employee stress and keeps parents from having to reduce hours or leave altogether.**

## WHAT YOU CAN DO: EXPLORE ONSITE OR PARTNER BASED CARE

Offering onsite or near-site childcare is one of the most powerful ways to support working parents. Even partnering with a local provider can make a big impact.

Start by connecting with:

- Oklahoma Human Services – Child Care Services
- Potts Family Foundation

## WHY IT MATTERS:

**Access to childcare close to work improves reliability, attendance, and morale.**

## WHAT YOU CAN DO: LOOK INTO FEDERAL TAX CREDITS

You may qualify for the Employer-Provided Child Care Credit (IRS Section 45F), which offers up to 25% back on expenses related to operating a childcare facility, partnering with a licensed provider, or offering referral and resource support.

➤ Talk to your tax advisor or visit [IRS.gov](https://www.irs.gov) for current details.

## WHY IT MATTERS:

**You can do good - and get a tax break.**

## The bottom line?

Supporting working parents isn't just the right thing to do—it's a smart investment in your people and your business. Start small, reach out for help, and be part of the solution for your team and your community.

# Care to Grow Initiative

## CHILDCARE SUPPORT FOR WORKFORCE STRENGTH A Grant Program from Shawnee Forward

Struggling to keep great employees—or stay in the workforce because of childcare costs? We hear you. **You aren't alone.** Shawnee Forward's new childcare grant program helps employers invest in their team by supporting the working parents who power our economy.

### FOR EMPLOYERS

**Make childcare your competitive edge.**

Commit \$2,000 per employee, and we'll match it with \$3,000 in grant funding—providing **\$5,000 in childcare assistance** per eligible employee.

**Here's what you get:**

- A 150% return on investment
- Support with recruiting and retaining staff
- Improved employee focus, fewer absences, and lower turnover
- Full program support—we handle the admin, you support your team

Your \$10,000 investment = \$25,000 in childcare support for 5 employees.

### FOR EMPLOYEES

**More support. Less stress.**

If your employer participates in the Care to Grow Initiative, you could receive up to \$5,000 to help cover licensed childcare costs. Funds are paid directly to your provider—giving you peace of mind and helping you stay focused at work.

**This means:**

- Fewer missed workdays
- More reliable care options
- Reduced financial pressure
- A chance to grow your career—**without sacrificing your family**

## GET INVOLVED



Employers and employees in the Shawnee Forward network are already participating—including some of our largest local companies. Space is limited, so reach out today to learn more.

**Let's build a stronger workforce—together.**





# Counting on care adds up.



#1 business concern



partnership & investment



sustainable future workforce

**This isn't a cost - it's a strategy.  
And when it's done right? It adds up.**

Investment in your current workforce creates a culture of working households.

When parents have the support they need to succeed at work, their children witness stability, structure, and the dignity of earning a living. Research shows that when kids grow up in households where employment is visible and valued, they are more likely to complete school, pursue higher education, and become workforce participants themselves.

**In other words: when parents work, kids learn how to work.**

**55%**

of the Oklahoma population lives in a childcare desert, meaning many working families don't have access to licensed care.

And the numbers back it up...

**58%**

of parents who left their jobs cited lack of childcare as a reason.

**86%**

of working parents are more likely to stay with an employer who offers childcare benefits.

**1%**

retaining just 1% of eligible employees can cover the full cost of employer childcare benefits.

**24% ↗ 6%**

The amount one employer offering childcare saw turnover drop company-wide among employees using the benefit. (Bright Horizons)

Providing childcare support isn't just good for business-  
**it's an investment in your team, your culture, and your community.**

You're not just solving today's workforce challenges.

**You're shaping a generation that sees work as meaningful, possible, and worth showing up for.**

**Thank you for helping build a future where  
families thrive and businesses grow - together.**

# Bridging the Benefits Cliff

## How Childcare Support Helps Families Move Forward

### What's the Benefits Cliff?

In Oklahoma, a benefits cliff happens when a small increase in income—like a raise, promotion, or taking on more hours—causes a family to lose public assistance such as SNAP (food stamps), Medicaid, or childcare subsidies. These programs have strict income limits, and even a slight earnings increase can push families over the edge, resulting in a sudden loss of support.

This “cliff effect” can leave families worse off financially, even with higher pay. It creates a tough choice: grow your income and lose your benefits—or stay stuck.

Families rely on supports like:

- SNAP (food assistance)
- Medicaid (healthcare)
- Subsidies for housing, transportation,
- and childcare

When a family crosses an income threshold, these supports may vanish all at once—even though the new income isn't enough to cover basic needs.

### The result?

Families may avoid better jobs, raises, or promotions out of fear they'll end up with less, not more. It's a barrier to growth—for families and for the workforce.

### How the “Care to Grow” Grant Helps

Shawnee Forward's Care to Grow initiative helps ease the transition by providing \$5,000 in childcare assistance per employee (\$2,000 from the employer, matched with a \$3,000 grant).

For families, this creates breathing room to take on new opportunities. For employers, it builds a more reliable, engaged workforce.

**Let's Build a Workforce  
That Grows Together**  
Together, we can remove the guesswork  
and help more families grow  
—not pause—  
when opportunity knocks.

### Benefits for Employers:

- Strengthen retention & recruitment
- Support career growth without financial tradeoffs
- Build a reputation as a family-forward workplace

### Benefits for Families:

- Take promotions or full-time roles with confidence
- Afford reliable childcare during income transitions
- Reduce stress and improve work-life balance



### See the Big Picture

Want to see how a raise or new job offer could affect your benefits?

Contact the Oklahoma Department of Human Services  
Visit: <https://oklahoma.gov/okdhs/contact-us.html>  
Call: (405) 522-5050

Learn more about  
the grant and apply





# From Insight to Action:

References & Immediately Actionable Resources for Employers & Employees

## **Understanding America's Labor Shortage: The Impact of Scarce and Costly Childcare**

A U.S. Chamber of Commerce report on how the childcare crisis affects the workforce. Offers employer-focused solutions to support working parents and address labor shortages.

## **Childcare Toolkit | NYC Economic Development Corporation**

A practical guide for employers with strategies, case studies, and policy ideas for improving employee retention and support through childcare benefits.

## **Family-Friendly Policies: Redesigning the Workplace of the Future | UNICEF**

A global policy brief advocating for inclusive, family-friendly practices like paid leave, flexible work, and lactation support.



## **Family-Friendly Workplace Toolkit | Health Links**

Helps employers evaluate and improve workplace culture with policies that support employee well-being and work-life balance.

## **Moms First Report**

Explores the economic impact of childcare barriers on mothers and provides employer-focused recommendations for building mom-friendly workplaces.

## **Employer-Based Child Care Feasibility & Assessment Guide**

A planning tool for businesses interested in offering onsite or near-site childcare, including cost considerations and partnership strategies.



# Who to Know, Where to Go

## Oklahoma Child Care Locator

An online search tool that helps families find licensed childcare providers near their home or workplace.

## Economic Policy Institute: Child Care Costs in Oklahoma

An interactive data source showing the average cost of childcare in Oklahoma by age, helping employers understand the financial strain on families.

## Potts Family Foundation – Certified Family Positive Workplace Program

Recognizes Oklahoma employers with family-supportive policies and offers tools to help businesses implement and promote a family-first culture.



## Women Employed – Sample Parental Leave Policy

Free, customizable policy template employers can use to create or strengthen paid parental leave benefits.

## Oklahoma Child Care Resource & Referral Association (OCCRRA)

Offers free support for employers and families, including consultations, referral services, and employer tools to improve childcare access.

## Office on Women's Health – Supporting Nursing Moms at Work

Federal guidance for creating lactation-friendly workplaces, including case examples and best practices for employer compliance.

## Oklahoma Child Care Subsidy Program (CCAP)

Helps eligible families pay for licensed childcare, reducing the financial burden and supporting workforce participation.







# Employer childcare toolkit



Care to Grow  
[shawneeforward.com/childcare](http://shawneeforward.com/childcare)

405-273-6092

This booklet is supported by Grant Number 90TP0094-01-00 from the Office of Early Childhood Development within the Administration for Children and Families, a division of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Neither the Administration for Children and Families nor any of its components operate, control, are responsible for, or necessarily endorse this [blank] (including, without limitation, its content, technical infrastructure, and policies, and any services or tools provided). The opinions, findings, conclusions, and recommendations expressed are those of the Oklahoma Partnership for School Readiness and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Administration for Children and Families and the Office of Early Childhood Development.