



**2024 Impact Statement** 

# EARLY LEARNING ADVENTURELAND

A year of wonder, growth, & discovery.



### ADMIT ONE

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# LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

As we reflect on 2024, I'm pleased to share this year's Impact Report –a snapshot of the work we've accomplished and the momentum we've built in support of young children, families, and early childhood professionals throughout eastern Kansas. This year brought both new opportunities and ongoing challenges, and through it all, Child Care Aware® of Eastern Kansas remained focused on ensuring access to quality child care and meaningful resources for those who rely on us most.

The need for child care continues to outpace availability, and the strain on providers remains significant. Many programs are struggling to maintain operations due to staffing shortages, financial pressures, and limited infrastructure support. These difficulties have had a ripple effect across our communities, impacting families' ability to work and children's access to early learning experiences. But 2024 was also a year of creative problem-solving and renewed partnerships that helped us take important steps forward.

Together with Child Care Aware® of Kansas and community leaders, we expanded efforts to develop solutions tailored to the unique needs of each of the areas we serve. These collaborations have played a critical role in helping programs stay open, strengthen their services, and better support the children in their care.

One of the year's most exciting highlights was our first-ever Celebrity Waiter fundraiser. The event brought together local leaders, supporters, and friends for an evening of fun, community spirit, and generosity. Thanks to an incredible outpouring of support, the event exceeded expectations, raising funds for our programs and increasing awareness about the importance of child care in our region. Its success has already inspired future planning for even more engagement in the years to come.

Throughout 2024, our team remained deeply committed to helping families navigate child care decisions, providing training and support to providers, and working alongside businesses and agencies to address community needs. Their expertise and passion, combined with the involvement of donors, volunteers, and partners, allowed us to extend our impact in meaningful ways.

To everyone who contributed to our mission this year, thank you. Whether through your time, your resources, or your voice, you helped make a difference. We welcome your continued involvement and look forward to sharing more opportunities in the year ahead. Together, we are making child care more accessible, more sustainable, and more responsive to the needs of our communities. Thank you for being part of this important work.

With appreciation,

Sarah Elsen, Executive Director

# EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS

In 2024, **1,649 child care programs** and their staff were served across the 33-county region of Child Care Aware® of Eastern Kansas.

Professional Development continued in three formats, providing participants the flexibility to choose classes that best suited their needs and learning styles. In 2024, Child Care Aware® of Eastern Kansas hosted 46 live virtual courses via Zoom, 133 inperson courses, and 22 online instructor-led courses.

Child Care Aware® of Eastern Kansas celebrated 20 years of strengthening leadership and program quality through the **Director's Toolbox** training series. In 2024, the series equipped **54 child care directors** with strategies for success, including burnout prevention, professionalism, business practices, the Six Thinking Hats method, and supporting staff goals. The series included **four in-person classes**, **two live virtual sessions via Zoom**, and **one instructor-led online course**, offering directors flexible learning and valuable networking opportunities.

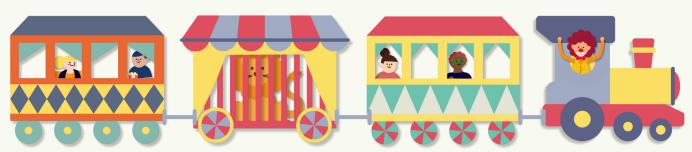
In 2024, the agency introduced an innovative approach to initial health and safety training for new early childhood professionals. The twelve-hour in-person Foundations of Quality Child Care course was offered in Topeka, with opportunities for digital fingerprinting and on-site CPR/FA certification provided by a community partner. This streamlined process allowed participants to become "work-ready" within one week.

Capital Area Successful Start (CASS),

funded by the Kansas Children's Cabinet and Trust Fund, continues to bring together community partners to help children and families thrive. Together, eight agencies work to ensure every child in Shawnee County, from prenatal to age five, has the best possible start in school and life. Partners include: Child Care Aware® of Eastern Kansas, Community Action Head Start, Family Service & Guidance Center, Kansas Children's Service League, Shawnee County Nurse-Family Partnership, TARC, United Way of Kaw Valley, and USD 501 Parents as Teachers.

In 2024, **77 early childhood classrooms** were supported through CASS, reaching over **500 at-risk children and their families**. Through on-site coaching, targeted professional development, and access to high-quality resources, programs strengthened their capacity to meet each child's unique learning needs.

The Shared Services Network Hub, funded through Child Care Aware® of Kansas with support from the Department of Children and Families, is available to early childhood educators in the Southeast region. This initiative aims to pool resources to help providers remain sustainable. This effort has partnered with the Southeast KS library system to provide providers access to professional totes and learning resources. Other shared services include an HR Hotline, EAP Services, laminating, and substitute services.



Child Care Aware® of Kansas funds the Child Care Quality Initiative (CCQI) through the Department of Children and Families. The initiative aims to enhance the quality of child care environments. Regional Community Consultants host monthly provider-driven Learning Community meetings that offer opportunities to network, share resources, learn about Shared Services, and plan future topics. Support for accreditation, class observations, child screenings, goalsetting, and other quality-improvement efforts are also provided. At the end of 2024, 346 early childhood educators in 27 counties participated in the program.

Baby Steps is funded by Child Care Aware® of Kansas, with support from the Patterson Family Foundation. Due to capacity ratios, family child care professionals may experience a loss of income when they enroll an infant. Through the program, participants are compensated for their lost income, thereby increasing the number of available infant spots. In 2024, 12 family child care professionals participated in the program, creating 27 infant spots across four counties.

Emergency Preparedness (EP), funded through Child Care Aware® of Kansas, provided 31 EP kits to early childhood educators in four counties in 2024. The kits contained five children's books, lesson plans to accompany the books, a crank flashlight, a CPR mask, and other materials to help prepare for an emergency. Each provider received follow-up technical assistance and ongoing support while working on or updating their EP plan.

The Child Care Health Consultant (CCHC) network was funded by the Kansas Department of Health & Environment through Child Care Aware® of Kansas. This network aimed to work with potential child care providers to provide consultation and support as they navigate the licensing process, collaborating closely with child care licensing specialists. Overall, the team helped 367 professionals apply and receive \$917,500 in start-up funds, and 86 programs accessed an additional \$427,440 in health and safety grants to offset the costs of materials and services needed to meet licensing compliance. CCHC assisted 328 educators in receiving their temporary licenses, and 329 have moved forward to obtain their permanent licenses from KDHE. Funding was discontinued on June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2024.

The Topeka ARPA Child Care Access Project, funded by the City of Topeka, was created to expand high-quality child care within Topeka city limits by increasing infant care, extending non-traditional hours (before 7 a.m., after 6 p.m., and weekends), and strengthening business practices for long-term sustainability. In 2024, the agency coordinated the Topeka Child Care Task Force to raise awareness of these needs and expand opportunities.

In 2024, 10 child care professionals created 28 new non-traditional hour slots and 64 new infant care slots through the project. With individualized coaching, informational sessions, business and consumer education resources, participants enhanced program quality and increased access to care for Topeka families.



# CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

In 2024, A total of **14,215 child care referrals** were completed through the Child Care Aware® of Kansas **Parent Resource Center** operated by Child Care Aware® of Eastern Kansas.

**8,137 families** used the Resource Center to search for child care. While 84% started their search online, all families received personalized follow-up support from the Resource Center staff.

In addition to receiving a list of licensed child care programs, families received information and tips on how to find quality care. This included questions to ask when interviewing programs, child care licensing information, financial resources, and other resources in their local community. The referral services benefited **8,044 children** in Kansas.

The Successful Connections Program, funded through CASS, supports pregnant women and families with children from birth to age five by linking them to community resources throughout Shawnee County. In 2024, the program served **751 families**, providing information and referrals for parent education, developmental screenings, and other essential supports. In partnership with local hospitals, new parents also received packets that included a handmade cuddle blanket from agency volunteers, a child development calendar, information about finding child care, 1-800-Children, and additional community resources.

Successful Connections strengthened its collaboration with Topeka Rescue Mission Services, a partnership that began in 2023, to better serve families with young children experiencing homelessness. In 2024, the program became a partner of the Impact Avenues Program, joining a network of community organizations dedicated to helping homeless students and their families in Shawnee County find stability and success.

# COMMUNITIES AND BUSINESS

Child Care Aware® of Eastern Kansas sponsored two regional Business Summits in 2024, one in the northern region and one in the southern region, focused on helping employers strengthen family-friendly workplace practices and build partnerships with child care programs. These events brought together business leaders, community partners, and child care professionals to explore how supporting employees with young children benefits both families and the workforce.

The summits also advanced efforts to establish stronger connections between employers and child care providers in Southeast Kansas. Building on this momentum, the agency is developing a Family-Friendly Workplace Resource Binder to help businesses implement supportive policies and access local resources that promote family well-being and workforce stability.

In the fall of 2024, the Community Outreach and Engagement (COE) team supported community coalitions through another round of grants to continue their work in Labette, Geary, Crawford, Allen, Miami, and Neosho counties. Along with providing funding, specialists offered technical assistance and resources to help communities strengthen services and expand child care capacity.

In Geary County, the COE team, in collaboration with the statewide GO Team, worked closely with the City of Junction City to review and modernize outdated city codes. As a result, new ordinances were approved and adopted that allow for nontraditional child care hours, reduce local fees and permitting processes, and establish local enforcement of illegal child care as a municipal offense.

In November, the team coordinated a **Provider Recruitment and Resource Fair** in Geary County, introducing a new approach to connecting current and prospective providers with valuable tools and information. Attendees received guidance on topics such as business practices, quality improvement supports, coalition partnerships, business insurance, tax education, and health benefits. The agency hosted a booth at the event, which was well attended and positively received.



### **PUBLIC POLICY**

Public policy is defined as a purposeful and consistent course of action produced in response to a perceived problem of a constituency, formulated through a specific political process, and adopted, implemented, and enforced by a public agency. Everyone has a role in shaping public policy through advocacy efforts.

#### **Public Policy Statement**

ERC Resource & Referral, Inc., dba Child Care Aware® of Eastern Kansas, is committed to:

- Advocating for federal, state, and local policies that support working families with young children, including child care resource and referral services for every family.
- Working collaboratively with other entities to define the issues and challenges facing families with young children in today's society.
- Sharing information about national, state, and local policy issues that have an impact on families with young children, early childhood educators, businesses, and community leaders.
- Showing support for accessible, affordable, high-quality programs and services that meet the needs of families with young children.

#### **Public Policy Principles**

Our organization:

- Recognizes parents as their child's first and most important teacher.
- Connects families with community resources that support their child's development, supporting family choice.
- Promotes high-quality early education in every setting, including family child care, center-based care, preschools, Head Start, license-exempt programs, and schools.
- Embraces the belief that learning starts at birth and what happens in a child's earliest years lays the foundation for all later learning, strongly impacting their success in school and beyond.



#### 2024 Executive Board

**President** 

Dawn Bicknell-Reiser - Kaw Valley Bank

**President-Elect** 

Erin Lewis - FHLBank

**Immediate Past President** 

Cherie Sage - Safe Kids Kansas

**2024 Board of Directors** 

Amy Bauer - Blue Cross Blue Shield of Kansas

Joe Beasley - BOK Financial

Deb Crowl - Retired Director at Emporia Child

Care

Natalie Gordon - Anderson Knights Architects

Jordan McKnight - Boys & Girls Club of

Manhattan

Secretary

Cherie Sage - Safe Kids Kansas

**Treasurer** 

Catherine Deters - Midwest Concrete &

Materials

Treasurer-Elect

Christina Schmitt - Envista Credit Union

Catherine Shafer - Midwest Concrete & Materials

Kelly Trussell - City of Topeka

Lisa Walker - Azura Credit Union

Lisa Walker - Kansas Department of Health &

Environment

#### 2024 Child Care Aware® of Eastern Kansas Staff

**Executive Director** 

Sarah Elsen

Accountant

Diana Ingram-Cantrell

**Administrative Assistant** 

Earlina Faurot

Marketing & Communications Coordinator

Julie Scott

**Community Outreach & Engagement** 

Coordinator

Rhianna Nelson

**Family Services Manager** 

Nancy Rohr

**Resource Specialists** 

Lori Boos (Team Leader), Tosha Lawson,

Dalia Marquez

**Provider Services Managers** 

Michelle Gilbert, Talia Juiliano-Myers

**Data Specialist** 

Holly Wehner

**Early Care & Education Specialists** 

Grace Cott (Co-Team Leader), Debbie Hildebrandt (Co-Team Leader), Karin Juarez,

Sarah Jane Russell, Deana Turner

**Library Resource Specialist** 

Stephanie Prue

**Professional Development Specialists** 

Dawn Brown, Kari Cronister, Mary Murphy

**Project Coordinators** 

Deb Danielson, Melissa Mosher

**Parent Resource Specialists** 

Jane Redger (Team Leader), Jennie Heim,

Ashley Buss

**Regional Community Consultants** 

Kristina Griffee, Autumn Ryser

Special Projects & Initiatives Coordinator





#### **Statement of Financial Position**

Year Ending December 31, 2024

Assets	2024
Cash & Cash Equivalents	\$ 1,027,643
Receivables	300,556
Investments	430,996
Property Held for Sale	0
Operating Lease Right of Use	252,737
Other	40,024
Total Assets	2,051,956
Liabilities & Net Assets	
Accounts & Notes Payable	17,045
Operating Lease Liabilities	88,566
Accrued Expenses	131,387
Unearned Revenue	203,760
Total Liabilities Current	440,758
Non Current Operating Lease Liabilities	167,538
Total Liabilities	608,296
Without Donor Restrictions	1,376,535
With Donor Restrictions	67,125
Total Net Assets	1,443,660
<b>Total Liabilities &amp; Net Assets</b>	\$ 2,051,956

#### **2024 AGENCY FUNDING**

The agency is supported through a variety of grants, contracts and fund-raising efforts, including:

- Kansas Department for Children & Families through Child Care Aware® of Kansas
- Kansas Children's Cabinet
- Child Care Aware® of America
- City of Topeka
- United Way of Kaw Valley
- Kansas Health Foundation
- Topeka Community Foundation
- Individual Donor Support
- Support from Area Businesses & Corporations
- Agency fundraising activities

#### **Statement of Activities**

Year Ended December 31, 2024

#### Without Donor Restrictions

Revenues		
Grant & Contract Income		
Child Care Aware of Kansas	\$	963,723
County CARES Act Funding	\$	-
Capital Area Successful Start		778,662
Preschool Development Grant		0
United Way		0
Other Grants or Programs		576,488
Other Revenue		
Showhouse & Other Special Events-net of expenses		29,371
Provider Training		10,985
Donations and Contributions		19,033
Other Revenue		36,396
Total Revenues	-:	2,414,658
Total Unrestricted Revenue, Gains		2,414,568
& Other Support		
Expenses		
Program Services	:	2,046,707
Fundraising Expense		47,467
All Other Operating Expense		174,031
Total Expenses		2,268,205
Change in Net Assets Without Donor Restrictions	\$	146,453
With Donor Restrictions		
Contributions and Program Revenue		250
Net Assets Released From Restrictions		(4,500)
Change in Net Assets With Donor Restrictions		(4,250)
Change in Total Net Assets		142,203
Net Assets at Beginning of Year		1,301,457
Net Assets at End of Year	\$	1,443,660