



Building Child Care Capacity in Kosciusko County

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Introduction

Quality early education experiences for children are not only important during the early years of development but set the foundation for the child's ability to learn later in life. Decades of research indicate that the early years of life are a period of exponential brain development. Nearly ninety percent of a child's brain is developed within the first five years of life. (Zerothree.org). High-quality early education experiences are critical during these important developmental years to assure the child has a solid foundation of learning that will continue for his/her lifetime.

Research from the Harvard Center for the Developing Child tells us that children learn more during the first five years than any other time in their lives (Harvard). The science of early brain development underscores the importance of ensuring that children are in high-quality learning environments. The emotional and physical health, social skills, and cognitive development that emerge during the early years are all important prerequisites for success in school and later in life. When these high-quality environments are not available to working parents in Kosciusko County, everyone eventually feels the effects. Currently, Early Learning Indiana, the state's oldest and largest nonprofit for Early Childhood Education, has declared Kosciusko County a *childcare desert*, meaning that only one spot in a quality childcare is available for every three children in need of care (Earlylearningin.org). The lack of childcare affects the work force as well as the ability to ensure that children in the county are receiving a safe and educational early learning experience (Belfield).

Shortage of childcare not only affects families with young children needing care, but also businesses and the community where these families work and live. Testimonies from parents in the county indicate the very real need for quality childcare in this area. Many families report that the shortage of childcare in this area has forced them to not only seek employment outside of the community, but also choose public education for their older children outside of the county. For this reason, our group chose to partner with LaunchPad, the Child Care and Early Learning Coalition of Kosciusko County, to open an early learning program.

Project Plan

According to the most recent data, there are approximately 3,000 children under the age of five who have working parents in Kosciusko County. With only 1,200 known childcare seats in the county, there is a shortage of about 1,800 seats for children who need care (ELAC Kosciusko County Profile).

Known childcare seats are those that are regulated by the state of Indiana. They are childcare programs that are state licensed centers, registered ministries, licensing-exempt school programs, or licensed homes. These programs are required to meet standards in regards to employing qualified staff who provide a safe environment and meet the individualized needs of the young children. Because there are not enough regulated programs in Kosciusko County, we can only assume that children are being placed in unlicensed homes and “neighborhood care” that is unregulated. In some cases, this could be a trusted relative or close friend. However, in many cases there are children

whose basic needs are not being met in these types of childcare. In 2014, the Indy Star reported just some of the violations that are taking place in homes that are not regulated and the disastrous results (Kwiatkowski).

With the closing of seven early learning programs in the last five years in Kosciusko County, LaunchPad has taken time to examine what led to those closings and how a sustainable model could be utilized to create more childcare capacity in Kosciusko County. The programs that closed cited insufficient funds and/or lack of early childhood workforce as the two main reasons for the closings of the programs. The plan for this project is to build a collation of partnerships to create a sustainable childcare model in the community (Childcare Desert Grant Application).

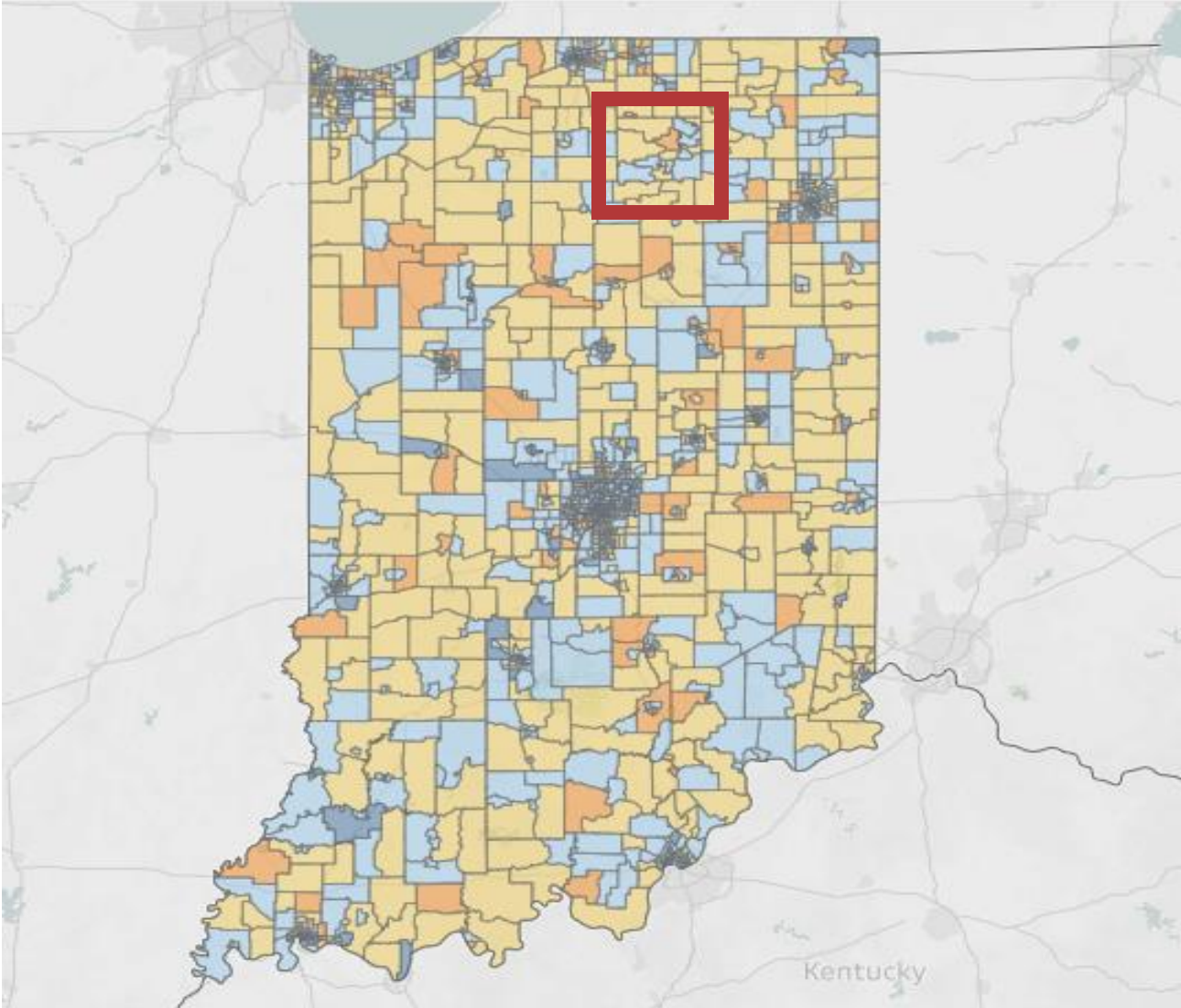
In October 2019, Early Learning Indiana announced that Kosciusko County was awarded a \$75,000 grant to increase access to high-quality childcare for children six months to six years. Our group began to work on a plan to bring an early learning program to Claypool, a rural area in the southern part of the county that has low capacity for childcare. We began by bringing together community partners to determine who would take the lead in operating the program and how to fund it long-term. Unfortunately, after several months of working on budgets and plans, we were unable to identify a provider of care, find a suitable space to lease, or secure the additional funds needed to invest in the early learning program to make it sustainable.

Fortunately, Early Learning Indiana allowed us to pivot our project, along with the \$75,000 in funding to explore opening an early learning program in the northern part of Kosciusko County in Syracuse and North Webster. This area is also considered a childcare desert (Earlylearningin.org). After conversations with the Wawasee Community School's superintendent, it was determined that they would be willing to provide the use of their two elementary school buildings and to be the provider of care for two early learning programs. Additional funds have been applied for from the Dekko Foundation and Kosciusko County Community Foundation.

Project Objectives

- Increase the number of childcare seats in Kosciusko County, specifically in an area that has been declared a *childcare desert*.
- Partner with organizations to provide a sustainable program that will be able to continue to operate after the initial funds have been used.
- Partner with organizations that will provide a high-quality early learning program, determined by Indiana's Child Care Quality and Improvement Rating System (Paths to Quality).
- Duplicate the early learning program to bring additional child care to Kosciusko County.

Indiana census tracts by child care capacity¹



Capacity Designation	
■	1 - Child Care Hub
■	2 - Moderate Capacity
■	3 - Low Capacity
■	4 - Child Care Desert

As shown in the above map of Indiana, Kosciusko County currently is classified as a *childcare desert* meaning that only one seat of quality childcare is available for every 3 children in need of care.

¹ Early Learning Indiana website: <http://www.earlylearningin.org>

Project Timeline

March 2020

Finalize Locations/Programs

Develop budget

Develop Wawasee High School student internship program

Submit grants for funding (DEKKO, Community Foundation, K21 Foundation)

April 2020

Write program policies, procedures, and job descriptions.

Advertise programs

Hire director

May 2020

Purchase curriculum.

Purchase all equipment, furniture and toys.

Enroll families

June-July 2020

Set up classrooms.

Hire additional staff.

Train staff

August 2020

Open programs on first day of school in mid-August

Project Budget

Child Care Desert Grant for Kosciusko County

Project Budget Date April 1, 2020-July 31, 2021

Revenue

Desert Grant – Received	\$75,000
Wawasee Community Schools (In-Kind rent, 10 months)	\$40,000
Tuition for childcare program at Syracuse Elementary based on 100% capacity	\$115,625
Tuition for childcare program at North Webster Elementary based on 75% capacity	\$138,750
Donation from sale of former elementary school	\$25,000
DEKKO Foundation – will apply (curriculum, training, coaching)	\$6,000
Kosciusko County Community Foundation – will apply (start-up furniture, equipment, supplies)	\$30,000
USDA Food Program Reimbursement for child care center/early learning program	\$32,859
TOTAL REVENUE	\$463,234.00

Start-Up Expenses

Furniture, equipment, supplies for 2 rooms for childcare program	\$14,462
Furniture, equipment, supplies for 2 rooms for early learning program	\$15,330
Program Development Administration	\$7,500

Operational Expenses

Director Wages, Benefits, Payroll Taxes	\$61,575
Early Learning Lead Teacher	\$17,592
Early Learning Assistant(s) – 2	\$35,185
Childcare Lead Teacher Infant/Toddler	\$17,592
Childcare Lead Teacher Pre-K	\$17,592
Childcare Assistants (2)	\$35,185
Consumable Supplies Childcare	\$3,000
Consumable Supplies Early Learning	\$3,000
Food Vending Services through school corporation for Childcare	\$18,500
Food Vending Services through school corporation for Early Learning	\$22,200
Rent	\$40,000
Food Vending Services through school corp	\$45,000
Curriculum, Training, Coaching	\$6,000

Total Expenses **\$359,713.00**

Conclusion

Regulated early learning programs operate on a very thin margin. While federal and state governments are pushing to ensure higher quality standards for early learning programs, there is no additional funding offered to programs to accomplish these standards. The revenue for early learning programs comes from the customers (parents) who often have limited ability to pay fees. This makes it difficult for early learning centers to pay early childhood professionals a fair and living wage. Programs offering benefits is rarely seen in the early childhood field. The delicate balance means that parents cannot afford to pay and teachers cannot afford to stay.

One way of creating a sustainable early learning program is to reduce the overhead costs. Our project outlines two ways in which that can be achieved.

1. Using available space at no cost to the program.

In this case, we are using vacant classrooms in two area elementary school buildings in the Wawasee School District; North Webster Elementary and Syracuse Elementary. School buildings are suitable spaces because they have already been designed with safety in mind. They have the state-mandated fire codes and protected building entry points. When a program is able to create a partnership with an existing space like a school building, church, or nursing home, it reduces the overhead costs, significantly. The saved funding can then be directed to paying higher wages to staff and dedicated to creating a high-quality program.

2. Partnering with one or more local businesses or organizations to reduce overhead costs and provide expertise to the early learning director.

Many early learning program directors hold degrees in Early Childhood Education but are often expected to manage the business-end of the program such as payroll and grant writing as well. When partnering with a larger entity, these services can be provided for the program, in turn freeing the director to focus on quality, staff, and program improvements. In partnering with Wawasee Community Schools, this program will have access to a larger network of financial services,

grant writers, and other businesses-minded professionals. Insurance benefits for staff can also be accessed at a better rate because of the volume of employees within the school district.

These two solutions will help to create a more sustainable early learning program. Our hope is to use this model in other locations across the county in order to create more capacity to meet this very important need in the Kosciusko County community.

Works Cited

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Appendix

Power Point Presentation Slides