

Bold Beginnings

How investments in child care are making Nebraska communities the right fit for working parents and employers



The good life becomes even greater when Nebraska communities come together to create innovative solutions for the care and education of young children.



Nebraska is the premier place to grow a career, raise a family or build a business. Across the state, communities are taking bold steps to strengthen quality child care and, in turn, Nebraska's economic future and attractive quality of life.

Accessible child care is a powerful spark for Nebraska's prosperity. It enables working parents to pursue their careers, empowers businesses to recruit and retain talented employees and promotes community growth. It also helps young Nebraskans develop the cognitive and social-emotional skills they need to prosper and succeed in school and life.

Here's how three Nebraska communities are taking bold steps to boost early childhood efforts statewide.

Lincoln: A big boost for our littlest residents

Nebraska's capital city of Lincoln is a welcoming community of nearly 300,000 with a long legacy of caring for its youngest residents. One example is Lincoln Littles, launched in 2019 by the Lincoln Community Foundation in partnership with Nebraska Children and Families Foundation. The Lincoln Littles Tuition Assistance initiative enables child care providers to offer financial assistance to families who find it difficult to afford child care but may not qualify for state or federal subsidies.

In 2015, a group of business leaders, community advocates and nonprofits came together with a goal of ensuring every child in Lincoln has the opportunity for a great start in school and life. Lincoln Littles was created to ensure more children can benefit from high-quality early learning experiences, regardless of income level.

In February 2020, Lincoln Littles held its second annual giving day on Abraham Lincoln's birthday and raised nearly \$670,000 to increase access and affordability of high-quality child care and education. Learn more at lincolnlittles.org.

Wood River: Coming together for quality care

Wood River, population 1,359, is a vibrant rural community in central Nebraska located off Highway 30 near the larger cities of Kearney and Grand Island. The community is meeting the challenge of rural population loss head on by encouraging young families to move in and put down roots.

As Wood River's population grows, it's important that access to affordable, quality child care grows along with it. Community leaders collaborated to create Stick Creek Kids Child Development Center, a nonprofit early childhood program. The center will use play-based curriculum, so kids have the opportunity to build intellectual, social-emotional and cognitive skills. At full capacity, Stick Creek Kids will serve 80 children ages 6 weeks to 12 years and include a program for 3-year-olds to complement the school district's preschool program.

Stick Creek Kids is slated to open in the near future. Learn more about the program at stickcreekkids.org.

Bold Beginnings Community Stories

McCook: Inspiring child care entrepreneurship

Founded in 1882, the southwest community of McCook embraces its cowboy roots while looking toward the future. The community's population is growing, and the need for accessible, quality child care along with it.

McCook Economic Development Corporation is leading an initiative to strengthen existing child care programs and grow the early childhood professional workforce. While many Nebraska communities fund early childhood programs through capital campaigns or grants, other communities are turning to existing municipal dollars set aside for economic development. McCook is one of the first Nebraska towns to approve child care programs for investment through its Local Option Economic Development program. The community has launched three initiatives to:

- Increase availability of infant care by offering a financial incentive for providers who increase their infant care capacity.
- Start and expand new child care businesses through online training of prospective entrepreneurs.
- Improve program quality through fully funded early childhood scholarships at McCook Community College.

By thinking creatively about its available resources, McCook has expanded access to child care while supporting local entrepreneurs. As working parents flock to this southwest Nebraska town, McCook will continue to build on its strengths while remaining firmly focused on early education. Learn more at mccookne.org.



If you're considering Nebraska as the place to grow your family, career or business, access to quality child care makes all the difference. Communities statewide are boosting early childhood programs to ensure they're a great fit for working families with young children.



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