

Investing in Child Care: **IN-KIND SUPPORT**

Applied Connective Technologies

95% of Boone County children under age 6 have all available parents in the workforce.¹

For businesses seeking to fill open jobs, including Applied Connective in Albion, access to high-quality child care is essential to recruit and retain working parents.

Key Points

- ▶ Applied Connective Technologies took a lead role in supporting Boone Beginnings through in-kind donations of technology equipment and services, as well as an annual financial contribution for its scholarship tuition program.
- ▶ In-kind donations enable businesses of any size to support early childhood initiatives by leveraging their unique resources or expertise.
- ▶ Access to safe, nurturing child care environments such as Boone Beginnings helps boost workplace morale and productivity.



Advancing quality early education through tech

Co-founded in Albion in 2004 by Ed Knott, [Applied Connective Technologies](#) is a one-touchpoint provider of technology services for small businesses, school districts and healthcare and government entities. In 2015, Knott purchased his partner's interest and expanded the business and its services. Applied Connective now has 35 full-time employees among three offices in Albion, Columbus and Norfolk. Like many other tech businesses, many of Applied Connective's employees are young and just beginning to put down permanent roots, purchase homes and start families. The company prides itself on its commitment to family, integrity and service—Midwestern values that start at the top.



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Knott, a father of three young children, understands the importance of high-quality early childhood education from his advocacy on the local school board. Early childhood education's impact on community vitality and business growth became even more evident as he sought to recruit and retain employees at Applied Connective.

“As I started to hire staff, that’s when lack of child care became really painful for us, [as we had] key employees absent for periods of time and concerns about losing staff permanently because they had to make the decision of whether to work full-time and pursue their careers or stay home with their children until they were at least school-age.”



Overcoming child care challenges

Child care can be especially hard to come by in rural communities—a top concern in Albion and Boone County. Inadequate access to child care has been estimated to cost Nebraska as much as \$745 million annually in reduced wages for workers, business profits and tax revenues, according to The Bottom Line, a report issued by First Five Nebraska and the University of Nebraska Bureau of Business Research. The pandemic further impacted the child care industry, as some programs closed and educators left the industry completely.

Community stakeholders, early childhood advocates and local business leaders in Boone County—including Ed Knott and Applied Connective—came together to address the child care challenge. The result was [Boone Beginnings](#), a state-of-the-art center providing high-quality care and education for 80 children ages six weeks through preschool. The center opened in 2021.

Knott was heavily involved in Boone Beginnings from the very start, attending committee meetings and forging relationships with the school district and community advocates. As the plan came together, Applied Connective made a key contribution, offering to provide full-service technology solutions in kind. The team worked with engineers to find ways to reduce the program’s technology costs and provided all the computer, cabling, physical security technologies (access control, surveillance system), phones, network and audio-video equipment.

Ensuring access for all young children

Additionally, Knott was passionate about making Boone Beginnings accessible and affordable for all. So the business became a lead annual sponsor for its scholarship program, which offers reduced tuition for families who may not otherwise be able to afford care. Applied Connective’s total contributions were between \$100,000 to \$125,000.

“Family and community are very important to us. We wanted to set an example in the community, so we contributed from that standpoint on an ongoing basis toward scholarship funds for those that are on the free and reduced lunch program.”

Knott acknowledges that, while not every business may have the ability to provide direct financial support, they can consider other ways to help.

“Not every community of 1,800, or even 3,500, is going to have a technology company, but we all have our niches and opportunities to contribute. Whether it’s landscaping, concrete . . . there are those niche services every community has, and I think it’s important for all to come together and contribute, especially when it’s a project that benefits the entire county.”



Focusing on the future workforce

With Nebraska's record low unemployment rate, businesses and communities looking to court young professionals and families need to differentiate themselves. Championing accessible, affordable and high-quality early childhood programs, such as Boone Beginnings, is one way to stand out. Though Boone Beginnings only recently opened its doors, Knott said his employees—and Albion—are already reaping big benefits.

“Just the peace of mind that comes from having a facility like [Boone Beginnings], you can't put a dollar amount to that,” Knott said. “It has a huge impact on the morale and culture inside an organization. At the end of the day, retention's not an issue. Those employees are happier, more engaged and more productive, and that is invaluable not only to their quality of life but to us as businesses who enjoy the benefit of having them at work more often, giving us their undivided attention and doing their best work.”



In-kind support for child care

Communities across Nebraska are undertaking initiatives to strengthen the early childhood landscape and increase access to quality child care and education programs. In-kind contributions of goods and services offer businesses in any sector and of any size an opportunity to support early childhood efforts beyond a cash donation. Here are some of the tangible in-kind needs of child care businesses:

- Land or buildings
- Construction-related services and supplies
- Technology services, such as IT, web development, wireless connectivity and security systems
- Classroom and educational materials
- Food and commodities
- Furniture and fixtures
- Landscaping and outdoor services or supplies
- Business and marketing services
- Appliances, such as storage freezers and laundry machines

¹ 2019 American Community Survey Estimates, United States Census. Age of Own Children Under 18 Years in Families and Subfamilies By Living Arrangements by Employment Status of Parents, Boone County, accessed Jan. 2021.



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