

Business Innovation in Child Care:

Case Studies Across Ohio

APRIL 2026



Child care remains one of the biggest challenges facing working families and employers alike. While long-term public policy solutions are critical to making care more affordable and accessible, businesses and communities cannot afford to wait.

Across Ohio, employers are stepping forward with creative approaches to support their workforce and strengthen the communities where they operate. From partnerships with local providers to new benefit models and community investments, these efforts demonstrate how the public and private sectors can be part of the solution.

This series highlights **case studies from across Ohio** where businesses are helping address the child care challenge for their employees and their communities—and what we can learn from their leadership.

Ashland County Community Foundation Women's Fund



WHAT

The Ashland County Community Foundation Women's Fund dates to 2004. In 2020, the fund's leaders decided they wanted to be more strategic with their grantmaking. After conducting research, they determined that access to affordable, quality child care was the number one barrier for women entering and remaining in the workforce.

The finding led to a needs assessment that identified only 82 licensed infant and toddler spaces in Ashland County and no licensed child care past 6 pm.

In April 2021, Women's Fund leaders began a campaign to raise \$4.5 million to build a child care center at the Ashland Business Park, home to nearly 30 companies that collectively employ 1,200 full-time employees. In November 2021, a real estate developer donated three acres at the park for the center. In April 2022, a non-profit organization was created to operate it. The center opened in June 2024.

FUNDING SOURCE

The Women's Fund raised \$4.8 million—\$300,000 more than its goal—to build the Foundations Community Childcare center and establish a \$1 million endowment to help ensure the center's sustainability.

The fund received over 300 donations, including a \$1 million commitment from an Ashland area couple and \$500,000 from the Ashland County Board of Commissioners.

The child care center is independently operated but must have representation from the Women's Fund on its board in perpetuity to ensure community input.

The original Women's Fund continues and has an \$800,000 endowment from which it makes small annual grants to area non-profits and awards scholarships to women.

The IMPACT



- The Foundations Community Childcare center has capacity for up to 150 children and also offers before- and after-school care and summer camps.
- There continues to be a waiting list for infant and toddler care.
- The center accepts families receiving Publicly Funded Child Care.
- Employees of businesses that donate to the center receive slightly discounted tuition.

Why the Work MATTERS



“The whole initiative was data-led. We didn't want to duplicate services in the community. We wanted to supplement them. We needed child care for infants and toddlers and during non-traditional hours.”

~ Kristin Aspin, Chief Operating Officer,
Ashland County Community Foundation

COAD4kids

WHAT

An initiative of the Corporation for Ohio Appalachian Development, COAD4kids is a child care resource and referral agency that works with 17 community action agencies in 31 southeastern Ohio counties.

In 2021, COAD4kids received a 3-year, \$1.5 million federal grant from the Workforce Opportunity for Rural Communities program to increase access to child care by supporting business partnerships. Extended for a year, the funding expired in 2025.

Today, COAD4kids continues to partner with businesses in rural Ohio to address the child care crisis.



FUNDING SOURCE

Most of COAD4kids' funding is from the Federal Child Care Development Block Grant via the Ohio Department of Children and Youth.

Special projects have been funded by the Ohio Children's Trust Fund, the U.S. Department of Labor, and the United Way of Greater Cincinnati.

The IMPACT



- COAD4kids spent three years assisting the Eagles Nest Daycare in an effort to establish a child care center adjacent to Columbus Industries in West Union. Operated by the Adams County Christian School, the center opened in April 2025 and can serve up to 90 children.
- It also supported the Holzer Emergency Medical Center in Gallipolis to build an on-site child care center for up to 100 children. Specifically, COAD4kids helped the hospital secure \$7.3 million from the Ohio Department of Development's Appalachian Community Grant Program. The center is slated to open in August 2026.
- In 2023, COAD4kids supported Chillicothe's Goodwill to open an on-site child care program to serve employees and the public. This was Goodwill's first on-site child care center in Ohio, the third in the nation. COAD4kids provided training and funding for background checks.
- COAD4kids has developed a toolkit for employers looking to create a family-friendly workplace and respond to employees' child care needs.

Why the Work MATTERS



“Many businesses know their employees are not showing up for work, but they don't know why. I share survey questions with human resource departments so they can gather data and understand why workers call off or quit altogether. The results can be eye-opening, and more times than not, investing in child care is the answer.”

~ Megan Pieper, Regional Coordinator for Business Supports, COAD4kids

Hancock County Childcare Collaborative



WHAT

Convened by the Findlay-Hancock County Community Foundation, the Hancock County Childcare Collaborative was formed in 2024 after United Way of Hancock County and the Findlay-Hancock County Chamber of Commerce **conducted a survey of more than 600 families about their child care needs and frustrations. Fifty businesses also were contacted.**

The Collaborative includes representatives from United Way of Hancock County, Blanchard Valley Health System, the City of Findlay, the Hancock County Commission, Hancock County Job and Family Services, and the Findlay Family YMCA. Teachers, child care providers, employers, government leaders, nonprofit organizations, and funders also are involved.

FUNDING SOURCE

To lift up the Collaborative's work, the Foundation created two dedicated funds.

It allotted \$100,000 to provide child care support for families who earn too much to qualify for Publicly Funded Child Care assistance and who struggle to afford child care. That focus was bolstered in January 2026, when the Collaborative was awarded a \$224,566 Early Care & Education Business Partnerships grant to launch the Hancock County Tri-Share Program. Under the one-year initiative, which will be managed by the Findlay Family YMCA, most employees will pay 40% of their child care costs, with employers and the grant splitting the remaining 60%. The grant can support child care for 40 children. **The Foundation's child care fund will supplement the "tri-share" model.**

The Blanchard Valley Port Authority donated \$50,000 to the effort, noting that access to child care is an economic development issue.

The Foundation's second fund of \$50,000 supports creating long-term solutions to child care issues.

The IMPACT



- The Collaborative has created work groups around:
 - 1) Improving child care policy, and
 - 2) Retention and recruitment in early education.
- The policy work group has identified 10 changes it would like the state to adopt, including increasing reimbursement for Publicly Funded Child Care for infants and toddlers and basing reimbursement on a center's enrollment versus children's attendance.
- With other local leaders, Findlay Mayor Christina Muryn has been an especially vocal champion of the cause among state elected officials.

Why the Work MATTERS



“*To address the child care crisis, we need to focus on multiple things at once. We have to make sure child care is affordable, and we also have to ensure our community has enough slots for children. In addition, we need to pay child care staff who do this important work a living wage.*”

~ Brian P. Treece, President & CEO,
Findlay-Hancock County Community Foundation

First Federal Savings

WHAT

In April 2020, First Federal Savings began its Babies at Work program. **Parents or caregivers may bring their infant to work until the child turns six months or starts to crawl.** Employees understand the child cannot be disruptive to colleagues, and they're given latitude to do what they need to take care of the child. The infant may be taken to meetings, and in one case, a teller wore a baby carrier so she could keep her child with her on the job.

First Federal, which has just 55 employees, learned of the program after an employee saw the national model Babies at Work. It consulted its attorney and insurer before adopting the program, and employees must sign a liability release.



FUNDING SOURCE

No funding is required.

Why the Work MATTERS



“The program has been great for morale. It gave us the opportunity to demonstrate we are a family-friendly small business. We’ve kept wonderful employees, and it’s been fun having a baby around. Customers love it. I’m asked if the mother is as productive as she would otherwise be. The answer is, Of course, not – she has a baby with her. But it’s a temporary situation, we’ve eased the transition back to work, and we avoided potentially losing an employee. Why wouldn’t we celebrate that?”

~ Sally Heckman, President & CEO,
First Federal Savings

The IMPACT



- As of March 2026, eight employees, all women, have been part of the initiative. All returned to work within 12 weeks of giving birth. The majority continue to be First Federal employees.
- The program saves employees typically three months of the cost of child care (during the period when it’s the most expensive).
- Mothers have the option of continuing to nurse for a longer period.

Illuminate USA

WHAT

Illuminate USA is the largest single-site solar panel manufacturer in North America. Begun in 2023, today the advanced manufacturer has a workforce of over 1,600 operating around-the-clock. Production associates have 12-hour shifts (6 am - 6 pm) and work staggered shifts of two days on two days off, followed by three days on three days off.

Associates typically work just 15 days per month and are provided 16 weeks of paid maternity leave and four weeks of paid paternity leave.



FUNDING SOURCE

Overtime costs are built into the pay structure because every other week, associate shifts are planned to exceed 40 hours.

In the company's first two years, associates collectively had 150 births or adoptions.

The IMPACT



- Illuminate USA's shifts guarantee associates a consistent schedule and time off on different days of the week.
- The longer shifts are balanced out by fewer work days in a row and fewer work days per month.
- Nonetheless, finding child care for a 12-hour shift can be challenging for associates.

Why the Work MATTERS



“We built our processes and policies with an associate-first mindset. While our manufacturing operations run 24/7, we intentionally designed our schedules around the people who power them. Many of our associates tell us the shift structure gives them meaningful work-life balance—time to attend their children’s events, schedule appointments without using PTO, and stay active in their communities. We’re proud to have policies that support not just our associates at work, but their families and lives outside the plant as well.”

~ Brittany Rogers, Chief Human Resources and People Officer, Illuminate USA

Muskingum Valley Educational Service Center

WHAT

The Muskingum Valley Educational Service Center supports 13 public school districts and 33 affiliated districts in southeastern Ohio by providing services and programs that often are unaffordable for small districts. It expanded into operating three child care programs when teachers complained they couldn't afford to take or stay in jobs because of the cost of child care.

Today, MVESC operates Panther Cub Academy for the New Lexington School District, where employees of the district, Perry County Children's Services, and Perry County Job and Family Services receive discounted tuition rates. The center serves up to 42 children.

It also operates the Rising Stars Academy serving up to 30 children. Families working for Maysville Local Schools, Foxfire Schools, and employees of Muskingum County agencies receive discounted tuition.

In Fall 2025, MVESC opened Little Farmers Academy in Zanesville, which ultimately expects to serve up to 160 children between the ages of 6 weeks to 12. Employees of Muskingum County agencies and Swingle Countertops receive discounted tuition at the center.

The IMPACT



- Families of upwards of 225 children in rural communities with limited child care options have increased access to care and in some cases at discounted rates.
- In addition, businesses are experiencing first-hand how they benefit (employee retention, reduced absenteeism and worker satisfaction) by helping make child care more affordable.



FUNDING SOURCE

The educational service center received \$877,368 in Early Care and Business Partnership funding, an initiative that is designed to encourage businesses to see the value of subsidizing child care. Families that are eligible for funding under the grant pay about a third of their child care costs, with the remaining 66% split between their employer and the grant funding. Families understand that the state subsidy will end in December 2026 and that their rates will go up. The goal is to find funding to continue the effort.

The educational service center's child care programs are designed not to operate at a loss, though MVESC has helped with start-up costs. It also holds a mortgage on the \$1.4 million Little Farmers building.

The Muskingum County Commissioners contributed \$200,000 toward the creation of Little Farmers Academy.

Why the Work MATTERS



“*Our work in providing child care is a workforce development project. We're making an investment in our community and our children. Everyone is stepping up to the plate.*”

~ Monte Bainter, Superintendent

Women's Fund of the Richland County Foundation



WHAT

The Women's Fund of the Richland County Foundation was established in 1996 to fund initiatives that empower women and girls in Richland County. In 2018, the Fund conducted a survey and held focus groups to better understand the needs of local women.

Access to affordable child care was cited as one of the biggest barriers to women participating in the workforce, becoming economically mobile and advancing in their careers.

FUNDING SOURCE

The Women's Fund has a nearly \$3 million endowment. Since 2019, it has awarded \$338,000 to increase access to child care and improve quality at programs. Begun by a core of 10 Richland County women, the fund accepts donations and occasionally organizes fundraisers.

The IMPACT



- In response to its research and beginning in 2019, the Women's Fund committed to giving \$25,000 annually for five years to improve early education in the community. It has continued that commitment beyond the 5-year mark.
- In recent years, the fund chose the YWCA of Northwest Ohio to administer its annual \$25,000 award. Area child care providers submit applications to purchase curriculum and supplies designed to improve their quality. Typically, grants are for \$2k.
- In addition to making financial awards, the Fund's leadership has focused on advocating for women and families by joining Groundwork Ohio's advocacy events; sharing data about issues impacting families and employers in their community; holding a round table with elected officials where child care providers shared their perspectives on child care policy; and helping spur an ongoing series of articles in the local media about the challenges facing the child care industry, families with young children, and businesses struggling to hire and keep employees.

Why the Work MATTERS



“Making high-quality child care affordable is an economic issue and lays the foundation for successful educational outcomes in children ages birth to 5. That is why we are educating employers so they can help their employees pay for child care through the Child Care Cred program.”

~ Amy Hiner, M. Ed., Chair

“We have discussed the pilot Child Care Cred program with local employers to encourage its use while funds remain available. Our hope is that by assisting at least one Richland County employer, we can gain valuable insight from their experience.”

~ Amy Goyal, Vice Chair

Alliance Employment Promise

WHAT

Begun in 2019, the Alliance Employment Promise was started to preserve and grow Stark County's workforce.

One plank in the promise makes child care more affordable.

Employees receive up to \$200 per month per child applied toward their child care costs regardless of family income. Families must choose from eight child care providers that collectively have 13 sites. All programs are highly rated under Ohio's Step Up to Quality initiative. This component of the initiative is administered by the Early Childhood Education Alliance.

Four businesses initially participated in the pilot. Today, six companies are involved. They are: Coastal Pet Products, MAC Trailer, Robertson Heating Supply, Morgan Engineering, Winkle Industries, and Trailstar International.



FUNDING SOURCE

Subsidies initially were paid fully by the employee's employer. Beginning in July 2025, a two-year \$344,000 Early Care and Business Partnership Grant is supporting expansion.

In the first year, the grant will cover \$125 per month toward the employee's subsidy, with newly participating companies picking up the remainder. In Year 2, the commitment flips, with the employer paying \$125, the grant covering \$75. Only new participating businesses are eligible for grant dollars.

The grant also is being used to assist two child care providers to extend their hours so employees can work 12-hour shifts. That assistance has topped out at about \$3,000 per month to support 11 employees working longer shifts.

The IMPACT



- Since 2019, 76 families with 110 children have received a subsidy. As of March 2026, 13 total businesses participate in the Early Care and Business Partnership Grant.
- Three employers have had 100% retention of employees receiving subsidies. A fourth had a 90% retention rate.

Why the Work MATTERS



“This program has truly been a game-changer for us, reinforcing our commitment to our employees and the community.”

~ Mark Fedor, CEO,
Morgan Engineering

Unified Early Learning System



WHAT

The Unified Early Learning System is an extension of work by Akron area civic leaders dating back to 2017 to increase the number of children who start kindergarten fully ready to learn. When Akron Mayor Shammias Malik was elected in 2023, he wanted to build on those efforts, noting the critical importance of quality, affordable child care to economic development.

Phase 1 of the initiative is a \$950,000 effort and focuses on:

- Business and leadership development aimed at helping child care providers improve their operations, and professional development designed to ensure early educators have the skills they need, particularly in literacy;
- Improved wraparound support for families and children, especially early intervention services;
- Evaluation around quality of early learning at the eight pilot child care programs, including home-based and center-based care from infants to entry to kindergarten.

Multiple community organizations are serving as system vendors, providing supportive services and training. They

include the University of Akron, Akron Urban League, Akron Metropolitan Housing Authority, Summit County Developmental Disabilities Board, Summit Education Initiative, and United Way of Summit and Medina's Center for Immersive Leadership.

Phase II of the initiative will begin in Fall 2026 and will involve additional child care programs.

FUNDING SOURCE

Funders for Phase 1 include: the City of Akron (\$300,000); the GAR Foundation (\$200,000); the Akron Community Foundation (\$100,000); and Summit County (\$50,000). The Greater Akron Chamber of Commerce is soliciting donations from members. In February 2026, the City of Akron received a \$10,000 grant from the U.S. Conference of Mayors along with matching funding from The Greater Akron Chamber of Commerce and the Early Childhood Resource Center to support building a Child Care Business Accelerator, the arm to scale business and technical support to child care programs.

The IMPACT



- The evaluation component of Phase 1 is not measuring the initiative's success by children's scores on Ohio's kindergarten readiness assessment.
- The initiative is too new to impact scores.
- Instead, this demonstration phase is measuring effectiveness based on child enrollment, worker attrition, quality standards, and families' connection to needed services.

Why the Work MATTERS



“We are building a unified early learning system because Akron's future depends on it. This is about more than child care—it's about economic vitality, workforce stability, and giving every child a strong start. When we invest in early learning, we invest in families, employers, and the long-term strength of our city.”

~ Shammias Malik, Akron Mayor

TuscoMFG

WHAT

TuscoMFG has four initiatives designed, in part, to address the child care crisis for its workforce of just under 100:

1. Employees have flexible start times from 5 am to 9 am.
2. The business offers part-time positions for employees who can't work full-time because of child care or dependent care needs.
3. The company provides "no-fault" paid time off that does not have to be scheduled in advance and may be taken in one-hour increments to meet family needs, e.g., doctor appointments.
4. In Summer 2026, the company expects to begin offering stipends to employees of up to \$150 per month to apply toward child care costs for each child. (The stipend may be used for unreimbursed adult dependent care as well.)



FUNDING SOURCE

Based on a survey of its associates, Tusco estimates the stipend program will cost less than \$100,000 per year.

"The commitment is less an expense and more of an investment in our associates during a relatively short period of time when they're paying sometimes \$1,000 or \$1,500 per month for child care."

~ Mike Lauber, CEO & Chairman, TuscoMFG

The IMPACT



→ Tusco does not have data to show if the company's policies have led to increased retention, but turnover is low.

Why the Work MATTERS



"We find women especially sidelined because of the cost of child care. We welcome parents who can only work part-time. Half of our workforce is women, many with young children. Some started as part-time associates before converting to full-time as their child care needs changed. We want to be an employer of choice for young families."

~ Mike Lauber, CEO & Chairman,
TuscoMFG

Q: How can you help address the child care crisis?

By taking action to solve the child care crisis, Ohio's businesses—and our economy—can grow and children and families can thrive.

We need you to be a part of the solution.

 EXPLORE	  INVEST	   ADVOCATE
<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Shift workplace practices to address employee needs.</i></p> <hr style="border-top: 1px dotted #ccc;"/> <p style="text-align: center;">Schedule Predictability</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Job Sharing</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Flexible Scheduling</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Support employees to make child care more accessible and affordable.</i></p> <hr style="border-top: 1px dotted #ccc;"/> <p style="text-align: center;">Back-Up Child Care</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Child Care Benefits</p> <p style="text-align: center;">On-Site Child Care</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Share experiences and perspectives to propel change.</i></p> <hr style="border-top: 1px dotted #ccc;"/> <p style="text-align: center;">Get Involved:</p> <p>Engaging in public advocacy helps to raise awareness about the economic benefits of investing in child care and garner support for policy changes at local, state, and federal levels. Businesses can partner with others to advance child care access in the state.</p>

A: Businesses must be part of the solution, but they can't solve this crisis alone. It's going to require the commitment of private and public partners alike. A robust, high-quality, affordable child care system benefits the entire state and should be discussed in boardrooms and in lunchrooms, but also in the halls of Congress and our state legislature.

COALITION PARTNERS



Tell Us Your Story!

We want to hear from communities across Ohio who are stepping up to address the child care crisis where they can and how they can.

Support the Workforce of Today & Tomorrow.



Groundwork OHIO

Learn More at
GroundworkOhio.org








@GroundworkOhio