

**Kosciusko Childcare and Early Learning Hub**

Kosciusko Leadership Academy

White Paper Project

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**Special thanks to:**

Sherry Searles, LaunchPad Child Care & Learning Coalition

Ashlee Parker, Parkview Warsaw YMCA & Lily Pad

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## **Introduction**

Access to high-quality childcare is a foundational requirement for thriving families, strong communities, and a resilient local economy. In Kosciusko County, many families encounter significant challenges in locating affordable, accredited childcare that meets their children's developmental needs while also supporting parental employment and educational goals. These barriers extend beyond individual households, contributing to broader issues such as workforce instability, educational inequities, and constrained economic growth. As employers struggle to recruit and retain workers and families navigate limited care options, the need for innovative, accessible solutions has become increasingly urgent.

This paper examines the current landscape of childcare in Kosciusko County by identifying key barriers faced by families, as well as existing tools and resources that may improve access and quality. It further explores strategies that enable parents to make informed decisions, support providers in delivering high-quality services, and strengthen collaboration among stakeholders invested in early childhood development. Central to this effort is the guiding mission: to ensure that every family in Kosciusko County has access to state-approved childcare by empowering parents to engage with the *Kosciusko Childcare and Early Learning Hub*, thereby strengthening both community well-being and economic stability. Through a combination of data-informed analysis, community insight, and actionable recommendations, this study aims to contribute to meaningful progress in childcare accessibility and quality.

### **Child Care Landscape in Kosciusko County**

An examination of childcare in Kosciusko County reveals a complex and multifaceted system with numerous potential avenues for intervention. Conversations with local leaders consistently identified Sherry Searles as a key expert in this field. Searles serves as Director of the LaunchPad Child Care and Learning Coalition, a community-based initiative dedicated to expanding access to safe, affordable, and high-quality childcare. LaunchPad works to strengthen early learning environments while ensuring that families across the county can access reliable care. According to the organization, its mission is to improve early childhood education by making high-quality, affordable childcare accessible to all families in Kosciusko County. Affordability remains the most significant concern identified by community members. Recent reductions in Indiana's childcare voucher programs have increased the financial burden on families, requiring them to absorb higher out-of-pocket costs. Simultaneously, providers face economic challenges, often struggling to offer wages sufficient to retain qualified staff. As Searles notes, "parents cannot afford to pay, and teachers cannot afford to stay," illustrating a cycle that contributes to workforce shortages and limited care availability.

One emerging strategy to address affordability is the Tri-Share+ model, introduced by the Northeast Indiana Early Childhood Coalition. This model distributes the cost of childcare among three stakeholders: the employee (parent), the employer, and economic development grant funds. Employers located within eleven northeast Indiana counties, including Kosciusko County, are eligible to participate regardless of size or industry. The program began recruiting participants in early 2025 with the support of a five-million-dollar regional grant and continues to expand its

outreach efforts. Currently, two Kosciusko County employers, Parkview Health and Stillwater Hospice, participate in the program.

Despite its promise, several barriers limit broader adoption. Employers may lack awareness of employee childcare challenges, while employees may hesitate to disclose personal difficulties. Additionally, employers must commit to covering one-third of childcare costs for up to three years, creating uncertainty regarding long-term financial obligations. Eligibility restrictions, such as income limits exceeding 400 percent of the federal poverty level, further constrain participation among some families.

### **Project Development and Implementation**

Given the complexity of the childcare system, the scope of this project was refined to focus on a practical, community-based intervention. The result was the development of the Kosciusko Childcare and Early Learning Hub, a resource fair designed to connect families with local providers.

With support from Sherry Searles, local preschools, early learning programs, and childcare providers serving children ages zero to five were invited to participate. The event was scheduled prior to April to align with families' planning needs for summer care. In partnership with the Parkview Warsaw YMCA and Lilypad Café, the event provided a centralized space for families to explore available options, ask questions, and engage directly with providers. Eighteen organizations participated, offering families valuable insight into early childhood services within the county.

### **Event Overview and Marketing Strategies**

The event targeted parents seeking early childhood services, with marketing objectives focused on increasing awareness, driving attendance, and building partnerships. A multi-channel marketing strategy was implemented, leveraging partnerships with organizations such as LaunchPad, Parkview Warsaw YMCA & Lily Pad, Joe's Kids, Everwise Credit Union, the Kosciusko County Visitors Bureau, and Ivy Tech Community College.

Social media played a significant role in outreach efforts, particularly through a promotional video shared by LaunchPad and Kosciusko County Chamber, which generated over 25,000 views between Facebook and Instagram. The event was further promoted through local radio broadcasts, professional networks, and a press release distributed to local media outlets. Printed flyers were also disseminated across high-traffic community locations, ensuring outreach to diverse audiences.

The event incorporated family-friendly features, including free playtime for children at Lilypad Café and complimentary refreshments, allowing parents to engage with providers without distraction. Interactive activities, such as a resource-based bingo game, encouraged participation and facilitated meaningful engagement with exhibitors.

### **Results of the Project**

The Kosciusko Childcare and Early Learning Hub was held on March 26 from 4:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. at the Parkview YMCA. A total of 30 families attended the event, and 21 surveys were completed and returned. Because respondents could select multiple answers and some families reported on multiple children, percentages do not total 100%.

Most participating families had young children. Forty-eight percent reported having children aged three to five, 43% had children aged one to three, and 24% had children under 12 months. Only 10% of participants had school-aged children. In terms of childcare usage, 33% of families were not currently utilizing childcare services, while 19% reported using center-based childcare.

Participants attended the event for a variety of reasons. The majority (67%) came to learn about early learning programs, while 43% attended to find childcare options. Additionally, 48% sought to connect with community resources, and 33% attended to explore future childcare opportunities. Overall, the event was well received, with 81% of participants indicating it was very helpful and 90% reporting that their needs were met.

Survey responses identified several key barriers to accessing childcare. Cost and affordability were the most significant challenges, reported by 86% of respondents. Availability of openings was noted by 43%, followed by hours of care needed (33%), program quality (24%), and transportation or location barriers (14%).

Families expressed a wide range of childcare needs. Forty-three percent were seeking preschool options, 38% part-time care, and 24% full-time care. An additional 24% indicated a need for before- and after-school care. Some participants also expressed interest in parenting resources (19%) and financial assistance (14%).

In terms of outreach, social media was the most effective method for promoting the event, accounting for 48% of responses. Other sources included the YMCA (19%), word of mouth (19%), community flyers (10%), preschool connections (10%), and news platforms (5%).

Participants provided feedback for improving future events, including extending the duration and securing a larger space. Additional needs identified through the surveys included increased access to extracurricular activities, camps, and expanded after-school options. Notably, 62% of respondents expressed interest in receiving information about future events and available resources. Detailed data and results can be found in Appendix B.

### **Community Partnerships and Sustainability**

The success of the event was largely driven by strong community partnerships, including collaborations with educational institutions, nonprofit organizations, and local businesses. These partnerships enabled broad outreach and contributed to the event's overall effectiveness.

Sustainability remains a key priority, with plans to establish the event as an annual initiative.

Continued collaboration with LaunchPad, the Kosciusko Chamber of Commerce, the YMCA, and Lilypad Café will be essential. Financial sustainability will depend on ongoing sponsorships, grant funding, and in-kind contributions.

In total, event expenses included \$1,956 for tablecloths, \$270 for marketing efforts, \$494.25 for refreshments provided by The River, and \$300 for a complimentary hour of play at Lilypad Cafe. This brought the grand total cost of the event to \$3,020.25. All expenses were covered through the LaunchPad Child Care & Learning Coalition event budget.

### **Conclusion**

The challenges surrounding childcare in Kosciusko County are complex and deeply interconnected, affecting families, employers, and the broader community. Limited access to affordable, high-quality care continues to constrain workforce participation and economic

development. While innovative models such as Tri-Share+ offer potential solutions, they also highlight the need for increased awareness, collaboration, and sustained investment.

The Kosciusko Childcare and Early Learning Hub represents a meaningful step toward addressing these challenges by providing families with direct access to information and resources. One parent shared, *“It’s really great that this is all here and I don’t have to just rely on Google searching for childcare.”* This feedback highlights the importance of creating centralized, in-person opportunities for families to explore options and make informed decisions.

The event also demonstrated the value of strong community collaboration and cross-sector engagement. This was further reinforced by employer participation, as one attendee noted, *“I’m an employer for Zimmer Biomet and I wanted to attend your event as we have been promoting this for our employees with kids.”*

Together, these perspectives underscore the impact of bringing families, providers, and employers into one shared space, strengthening connections and increasing awareness of available childcare resources within the community.

Long-term success will depend on maintaining partnerships, expanding access to resources, and adapting strategies based on community feedback. Establishing the Kosciusko Childcare and Early Learning Hub as an annual event offers a scalable approach to improving childcare accessibility. Ultimately, ensuring access to high-quality, state-approved childcare is not only an investment in children but also in the long-term stability and prosperity of the community.

### **Northenor Award Proposal**

The Northenor Award would support the continued growth and visibility of the event through targeted marketing and branding efforts. Funding would be used to develop a cohesive and professional presence, including branded materials, volunteer apparel, and promotional resources. Additional support would enhance advertising efforts and provide engagement materials for participating families.

The award would also offset essential event costs, including venue expansion, refreshments, and general operations. These investments would contribute to a welcoming and accessible environment that fosters community engagement and strengthens connections among families, providers, and stakeholders.

## Works Cited

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**APPENDIX A (Event Materials)**

Promotional Flyer:

The flyer features a green-to-blue gradient background. At the top, the title "Kosciusko Childcare & Early Learning Hub" is written in a white serif font. Below the title, the date "March 26, 2026" and time "4:00 PM-6.00 PM" are separated by a vertical line. In the center, there is an illustration of a woman reading a book to a group of diverse children. To the left of the illustration, text describes the event: "Register for local preschools, early learning programs, and childcare facilities. For ages: 0-5." To the right, it says "Free drink and free hour of play at the Lilypad Cafe". At the bottom, the event location is listed: "Event Location: Parkview Warsaw YMCA, 1305 Mariners Dr. Warsaw, IN". A row of logos for partner organizations is displayed below the location, including Launchpad, Ivy Tech, Joes Kids, Clearly Kosciusko, Everwise, The Y, and Lilypad. At the very bottom, a dark blue bar contains a globe icon, the website "www.klaunchpad.com", a phone icon, and the phone number "574.267.6311 x5".

**Kosciusko Childcare  
& Early Learning Hub**

March 26, 2026 | 4:00 PM-6.00 PM

Register for local preschools, early learning programs, and childcare facilities.  
For ages: 0-5.

Free drink and free hour of play at the Lilypad Cafe

Event Location:  
Parkview Warsaw YMCA  
1305 Mariners Dr. Warsaw, IN

LAUNCHPAD | IVY TECH COMMUNITY COLLEGE | JOES KIDS | CLEARLY KOSCIUSKO | everwise CREDIT UNION | the Y | lilypad

[www.klaunchpad.com](http://www.klaunchpad.com) | 574.267.6311 x5

Distributed across high-traffic community locations to include: Bowen Health Center, Ivy Tech Community College, Cardinal Services, Town of Winona Lake, Wildman Business Group Break Room, Everwise Credit Union Warsaw Branches, Pierceton Library, Warsaw Community Public Library, North Webster Public Library, Healthcare Pavilion, The Bowling alley, North Pointe Cinemas, Pottery Bayou, Kids Market, Baker Youth Club, Bell Memorial Library, Combined Community Services, Kosciusko Human Resources Association, Leesburg Elementary Schools, and Warsaw Community Schools Communications Department.

Community Participant Survey:

**Kosciusko Childcare and Early Learning Hub: Bingo and Survey**

1. What is the age of your child(ren)?
  - Infant (0–12 months)
  - Toddler (1–3 years)
  - Preschool (3–5 years)
  - School Age
2. What type of childcare are you currently using?
  - Center-based care
  - In-home childcare
  - Family/friend care
  - Not currently using childcare
  - Other: \_\_\_\_\_
3. What was your main reason for attending today?
  - Looking for childcare options
  - Learning about early learning programs
  - Connecting with community resources
  - Exploring future options
  - Other: \_\_\_\_\_
4. How helpful was this event in learning about available services?
  - Very helpful
  - Somewhat helpful
  - Neutral
  - Not very helpful
5. Did you find providers or resources that met your needs?
  - Yes
  - Somewhat
  - Not yet
6. What are your biggest challenges when finding childcare? (Check all that apply)
  - Cost/affordability
  - Availability/openings
  - Location/transportation
  - Hours of care needed
7. What services are you most interested in?
  - Quality of programs
  - Special needs support
  - Other: \_\_\_\_\_
7. What services are you most interested in?
  - Full-time childcare
  - Part-time childcare
  - Preschool programs
  - Before/after school care
  - Developmental/therapy services
  - Parenting resources
  - Financial assistance information
8. How did you learn about this?
9. What did you like most about the Childcare and Early Learning Hub event?
10. What could we improve for future events?
11. What additional resources would you like to see offered?
12. Would you like to receive information about future events and resources?
  - Yes (email/phone): \_\_\_\_\_
  - No

Event Bingo Sheet:

**Kosciusko Childcare and Early Learning Hub: Bingo and Survey**

Please visit as many childcare options as possible. This bingo card will be stamped once you have visited a table. The survey on the back is to be completed after you are done visiting tables. If both are completed, you will be entered into a drawing for a prize.

Presby Preschool	Pleasant View Early Learning	KinderCare	Growing Kids	Wee Warriors
Lakeland Christian Early Learning	Adventure with the Stars	Greater Warsaw Cooperative Preschool	YMCA Preschool	Lilypad
Head Start	Wawasee Early Learning	Kiddie Kare	Valley Early Learning Academy	<u>Whitko</u> Little Cats
Bright Point	The <u>River</u>	Mentone Kindergarten Readiness Center	Lake City Music Together	Survey and Drawing Draft



Did you make meaningful connections with families or other vendors? \*

Short answer text

Would you recommend this event to other vendors? If so, who? \*

Short answer text

How likely are you to participate in this event again? \*

Short answer text

Any overall feedback for the event? \*

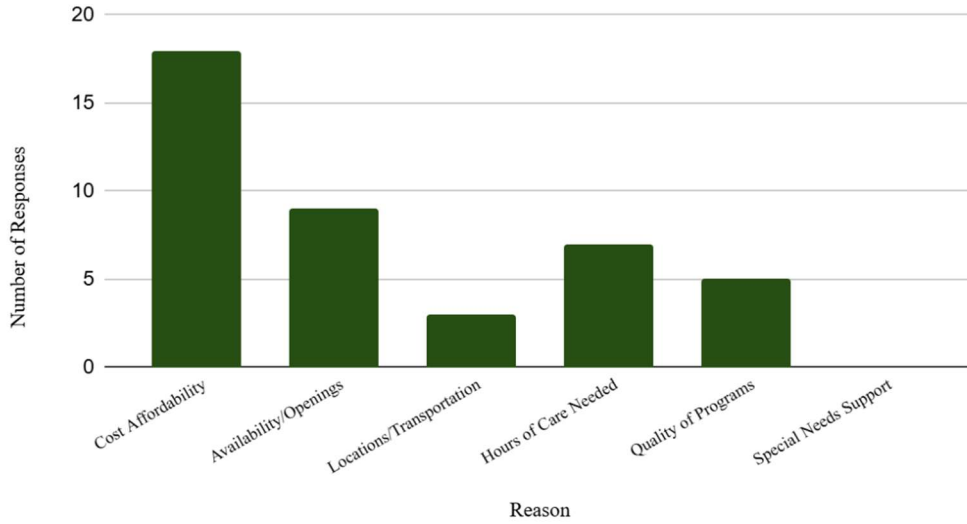
Short answer text

Name (optional)

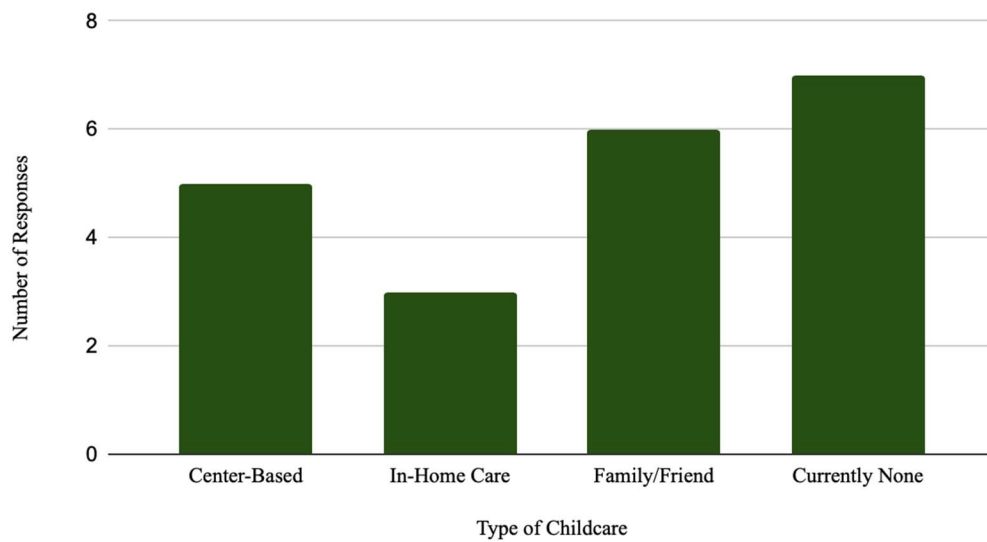
Short answer text

**APPENDIX B (Charts/Graphs)**

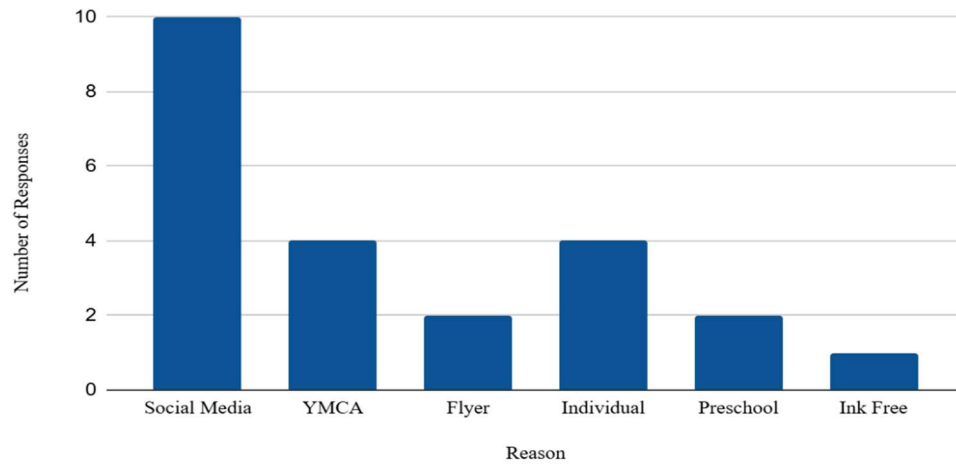
Biggest Challenge When Finding Childcare



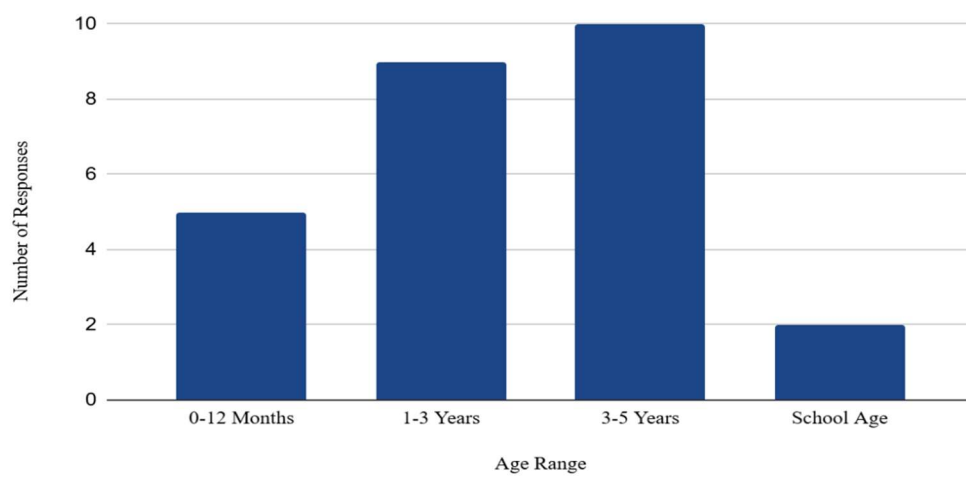
Current Childcare Used



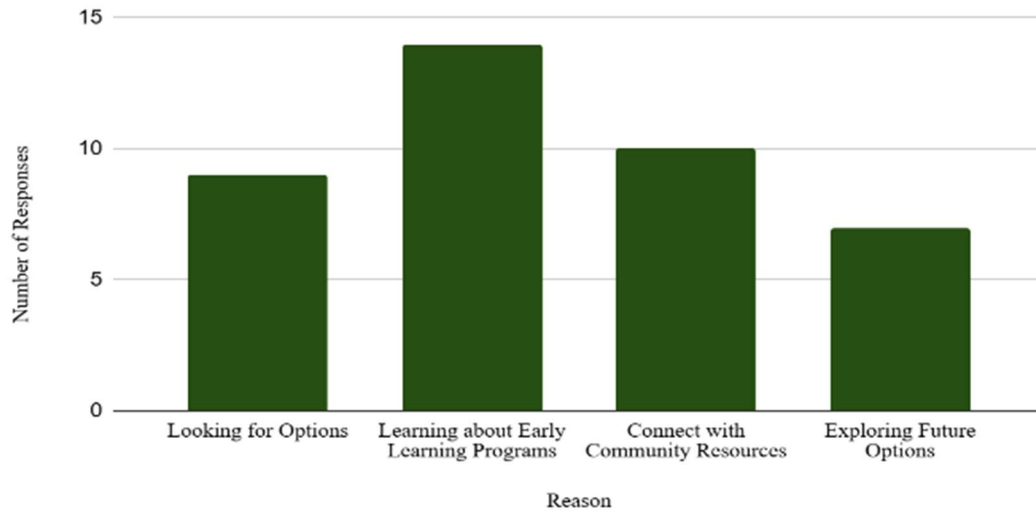
### Marketing



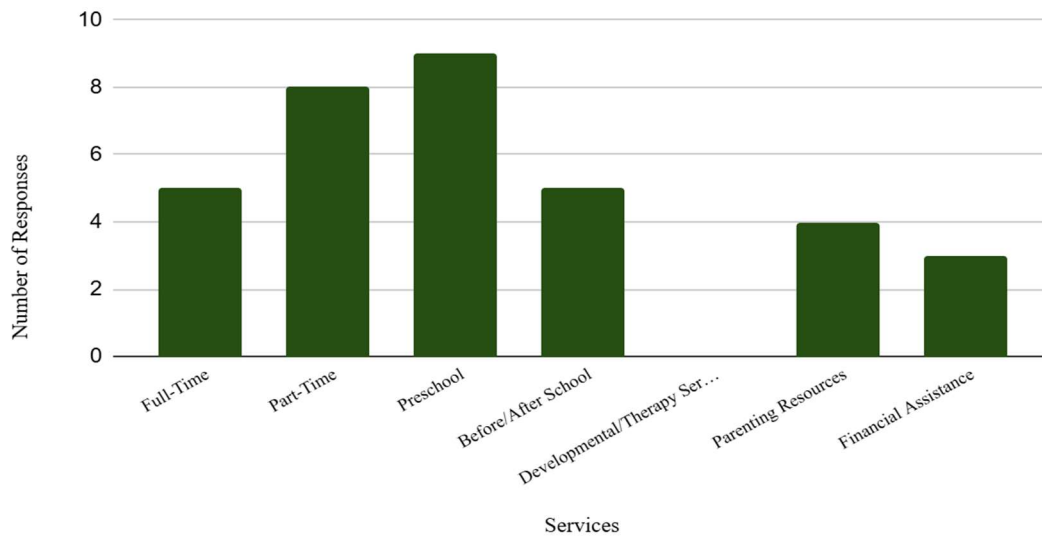
### Child Age



### Reason For Attending



### Services Most Interested In



APPENDIX C (Slides)

# Kosciusko Childcare & Early Learning Hub



Trisha Musall, Joe's Kids  
Alexis Devenney, Everwise Credit Union  
Matthias Briz, Kosciusko County Convention & Visitors Bureau  
JoAnne Alvarez, Ivy Tech Community College of Kosciusko County

## Child Care Landscape

Child care access is a critical issue impacting families, employers, and the economy in Kosciusko County.

## The Challenge

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- Limited access to affordable, quality childcare
- Workforce shortages in childcare sector
- Financial strain on families and providers

## Tri-Share Model

- Cost shared by employer, employee, and grants
- Expanding but with participation challenges

## Project Development and Implementation

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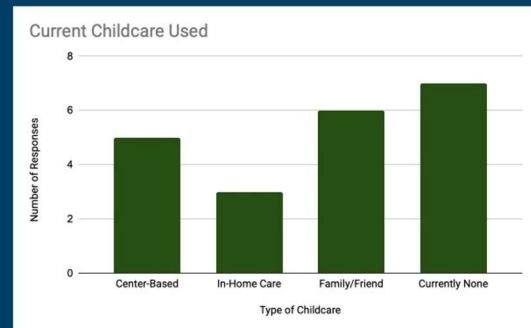
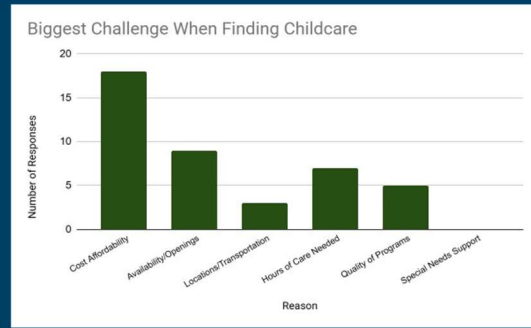
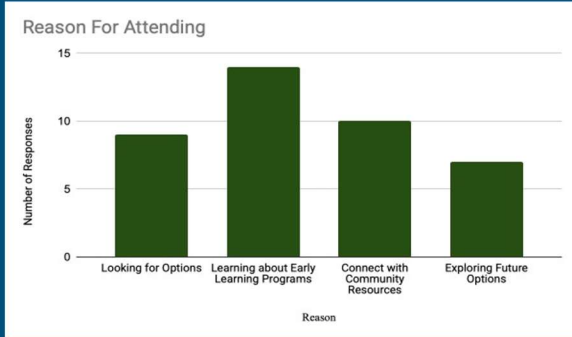
- Partnership with community and resources
- Challenges families face
- Needs of our families, providers, and community

## Community Response

### Kosciusko Childcare & Early Learning Hub:

- Resource fair connecting families and providers
  - Centralized access to information
-

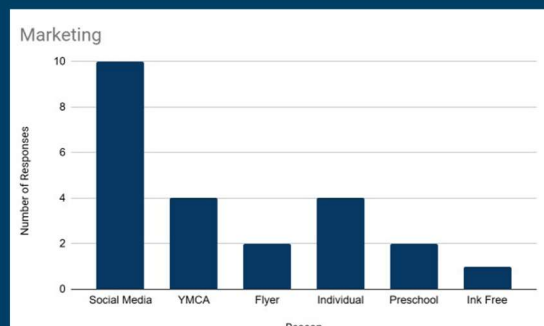
# Event Results



# Marketing Strategy

- Increase Awareness
- Driving Attendance
- Strengthening Community Partnerships

# How Participants Heard About Event





## Sustainability and Feasibility

- Plan to make event annual
  - Continued partnerships essential
  - Volunteer support needed
  - Event Total: \$3,020.25
-

## Conclusion

- Expand access to childcare strengthens families, workforce stability, and economic growth

## Northenor Award Proposal

- The award would support the continued growth and visibility of the event

**Special Thanks:**

Sherry Searles, LaunchPad Child Care & Learning Coalition

Ashlee Parker, Parkview Warsaw YMCA & Lily Pad

Kosciusko County Chamber of Commerce



**Thank You!**