



2024

TULSA WOMEN'S COMMISSION

CHILDCARE ACCESS



Table of Contents

| | |
|--|-----------|
| Introduction | 1 |
| Tulsa Childcare Webpage | 2 |
| Acknowledgements | 3 |
| Executive Summary | 4 |
| Childcare Landscape | 5 |
| Inspiration from Other Cities | 6 |
| The Impact of Childcare on Families & Economy | 7 |
| Best Practices and Local Research | 8 |
| Commission Recommendations | 9 |
| Implementation Suggestions: A Leveled Approach | 12 |
| Conclusion | 13 |

Introduction

In 2021, the Tulsa Women's Commission, under the leadership of Chair Dr. Meg Myers Morgan and Vice-Chair Mary Quinn Cooper, embarked on a mission to address the critical issue of childcare access and affordability as a barrier for women entering, staying, and advancing in the workforce. The Commission members participated in a retreat to build consensus around this focus area, drawing upon research conducted by the Education, Employment, and Health Committees regarding the gaps and inequities faced by women and girls in our community.

To further investigate and tackle this pressing issue, the Commission formed three working research groups: the Guest Speaker Working Group, the City Comparisons Working Group, and the Tulsa Childcare Audit Working Group. These groups worked diligently to curate expert speakers, identify best practices from other cities, and gather data on childcare gaps in Tulsa. Additionally, the Commission restructured its committees to include Outreach and Education, Workforce, and Storytelling, each focusing on specific aspects of the childcare challenge.

Since the release of the 2021 Annual Report, the Commission, now chaired by Mary Quinn Cooper with Betsy Jackson serving as Vice-Chair for the 2023-2024 term, has made significant progress in its efforts to address the childcare crisis in Tulsa. A comprehensive study was conducted to assess childcare access throughout the city, providing valuable insights into the current landscape and identifying areas for improvement. Furthermore, the Commission hosted three forums featuring childcare experts who collaborated to identify potential solutions to bridge the childcare gap and ensure that women have equal opportunities to thrive in the workforce.

Building upon the findings of the study and the input from the expert forums, the Commission has developed a childcare website as well as a set of recommendations aimed at scaling childcare access citywide. These recommendations focus on implementing strategies to increase the availability, affordability, and quality of childcare services, ultimately empowering women to enter, remain, and advance in their chosen careers without being hindered by childcare constraints.

The Commission remains committed to advocating for women's needs and addressing the inequities they face in social, economic, and vocational pursuits. By prioritizing the issue of childcare access and affordability, the Commission aims to create a more inclusive and supportive environment for women in Tulsa, enabling them to reach their full potential and contribute to the city's overall growth and prosperity.

Tulsa Childcare Webpage

Throughout the process of research, data collection, and the development of recommendations, the Commission built a website to fill a gap that exists in the city. The website has served as a landing page for research, local perspectives, and ideas throughout the culmination of our work on this effort. The aim is for the web page to be useful to other Tulsans who are curious about the child care gap and how to access information related to filling that gap. The website was designed with the city in mind and hopes that the city may take over ownerships of any / all parts of the site www.twcchildcareresources.com/about

Screenshots from the website:

Resources and Strategies for Support



For Parents

- [Early Learning Works & Tulsa Educare](#)
- [CAP Tulsa](#)
- [MOMS FIRST: National Business Coalition for Childcare](#)
- [MOMS FIRST: Business Case for Child Care](#)



For Future Educators

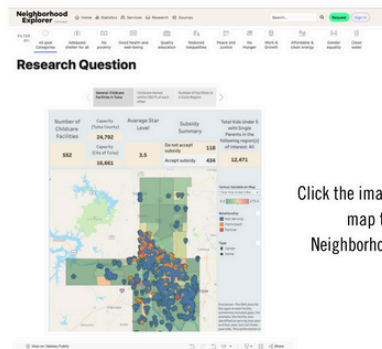
- [Tulsa-based Education scholarships](#)
- [Associate Degree at No Cost @ Tulsa Community College](#)
- [Transfer Map \(TCC and Ryzoff\)](#)



For Childcare Providers

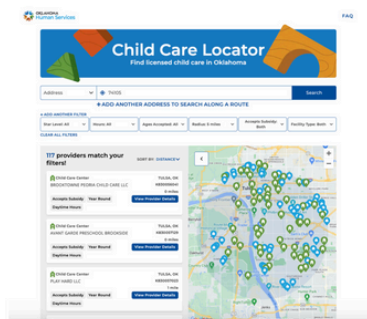
- [OK Shared Services](#)
- [Early Learning Workshops](#)
- [How to Become a Relative Provider](#)
- [Small Business Loans](#)

Neighborhood Explorer Tool: Childcare Availability



Click the image of the heat map to visit Neighborhood Explorer.

Oklahoma Human Services: Childcare Locator



Click the image of the search tool to visit the child care locator.

PARENT EXPERIENCES



QUICK WINS FOR EMPLOYERS

- Survey/Discussion** – Perform a survey or talk directly to your employees who are parents (including grandparents and foster parents) to determine what they may think would be helpful to them.
- Affinity Groups/Committees** – Create parent support affinity groups or committees within your organization to network and share information about childcare/nanny options in the area.
- Human Resources Departments** – Provide employees who are parents (including grandparents, foster parents, expectant parents and adoptive parents) with childcare resources and when possible take a more active role in contacting child care centers.
- Flexible Work Schedules/Meeting Times** – Develop a flexible work policy by job role for parents with dependent children who have circumstances that require an accommodation.
 - Except for unexpected or urgent business, try to avoid meeting times which coincide with the timing of childcare drop-off or pick-up.
- Subsidies** – Study childcare subsidy regulations and determine if any employees might qualify for existing subsidies.
- Childcare Benefits**
 - If possible, provide a child care stipend to employees as a benefit.
 - Set up a dependent care/flexible spending account at the workplace and encourage employees to take advantage of such account. There are limits as to the amount an employee can put in the account but it could save them over \$1,000 each year because it is pretax income.
- Engagement in Pro Child care Policies** – Support and have someone at your organization actively engaged in pro childcare policies at the local, state and national levels.
- Proclamation** – Proclaim a “Tulsa Early Child care Provider Day” to celebrate the work of those in our community who play an invaluable part in the education of Tulsa’s children.



Acknowledgements: Childcare Expertise in Tulsa

Over the course of this collaborative endeavor, the Tulsa Women's Commission has learned from each other and incredible community authorities on childcare access. We would like to thank the following individuals for sharing their insights, participating in our three childcare forum sessions, and serving as members of the Tulsa Women's Commission.

Tulsa Women's Commission:

- **Chair: Mary Quinn Cooper**
- **Vice Chair: Betsy Jackson**
- Premadonna Braddick
- Susan Bynum
- Susan Crenshaw
- Ashleigh Frohrip
- Dezeray Edwards
- Charisa Jacobs
- Deidra Kirtley
- Dr. Laura Latta
- Janet Levit
- Amy Mariska
- Dr. Meg Myers Morgan
- Kate Neary
- Maria Carlota Palacios
- Tina Patel



Speakers and Consulted Community Authorities:

Johanna Derrick, College Bound Academy
Karen Kiely, CEO, CAP Tulsa
Dr. Laura Latta, Executive Director, Tulsa Higher Education Consortium
Darek Latta, Managing Director of Crosstown Learning Center
Aaron Merchen, US Chamber of Commerce
Casey Moore, Regional Director of Community Service Council
Representative Suzanne Schreiber, Oklahoma House of Representatives
Tammie Strobel, Superintendent, Tri-County Technical College
Annie VanHanken, Senior Program Officer at GKFF
Joey Wignarajah, College Bound Academy

Caregiver Perspectives

Judith Barba Perez, Tulsa Public Schools Parent & Board Member
Carmela Hill, Carmela Hill Entertainment
Kassey Steele, Tulsa Community College Employee
Dr. Sarah Wyatt, Tulsa Higher Education Consortium

Forum Participants:

Dr. Lisa Bisogno (NSU), Jennifer Brown (City of Tulsa HR), Caren Calhoun (formerly Educare), Kyra Carby (Gathering Place), Kelsey Dowdell (TU), Heidi Hartman (Hartman Consulting), Wes Mitchell (2-1-1, Tulsa Area United Way), Karl Neumaier (Celebree School), Rue Ramsey (Tulsa Regional Chamber), Xia Thao (COT HR), Becky Fields Wilson (MidFirst Bank), Dr. Sarah Wyatt (Tulsa Higher Education Consortium)

Executive Summary

Childcare access is not just a women's issue. It is a family issue. Childcare access is an economic driver.

The Tulsa Women's Commission has worked diligently over the past few years to investigate the critical issue of childcare access and affordability as a barrier for women entering, staying, and advancing in the workforce.

Key findings include:

- Childcare availability declined significantly during the pandemic, with closures disproportionately impacting communities of color
- Childcare costs have skyrocketed, now exceeding \$10,000 annually per family on average
- Lack of childcare access is a major driver of women, especially women of color, leaving the workforce
- Childcare workers are underpaid and face high turnover
- Childcare is an economic driver, with lack of access reducing workforce productivity by over \$1 billion in Oklahoma alone
- High-quality early childhood education, as demonstrated by research on Tulsa's Educare program, provides long-lasting cognitive and academic benefits for children

The Commission developed recommendations focused on:

1. Promoting family-friendly workplace policies
2. Increasing access to affordable high-quality childcare
3. Developing an integrated childcare support system
4. Incentivizing caregiver supports for employers
5. Addressing childcare challenges collaboratively

A leveled implementation approach is provided to help employers progress from initial steps to comprehensive support and systemic change.

The Commission remains committed to advocating for women and ensuring access to childcare to enable workforce participation and advancement.

Childcare Landscape



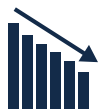
Availability of Childcare

- Approximately **9,000 childcare centers** and **7,000 home centers** nationwide closed during COVID.
- The US could lose up to **half of its licensed childcare supply** within the next 2-3 years without significant intervention.
- **Half of Americans** live in a childcare desert.
- **Black, Asian, and Hispanic families** were more likely to be exposed to childcare closures than white families.



Costs of Childcare

- Public funding for early care and learning is **89% less** per student than public school.
- The average cost of childcare now exceeds **\$10,000 annually per family**, which is more than **10% of the median income** for a married couple and **over 35% for a single parent**.
- Over **60% of families report an increase in childcare costs** and are spending over 20% of their household income on it.
- Childcare cost increases have outpaced family expenses such as housing and groceries by almost **200%**.



Impact on Labor Markets

- Access to childcare is one of the **largest single factors for the continual labor shortage**.
- **Women of color and young women**, who are more likely to be mothers, report higher unemployment rates.
- **98,000 women** have not returned to the workforce, with many citing lack of childcare as the primary reason.



Impact on Childcare Workers

- There are **90,000 fewer people** working in childcare than pre-COVID.
- The average turnover in childcare employment is **26-40%**.
- childcare workers are **paid less than half of what public school teachers earn**.
- Only **1 in 10 childcare** workers have the same benefits as public school teachers.

Inspiration from Other Cities

The US Chamber of Commerce

Throughout the pandemic, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation received inquiries from businesses seeking strategies to support their employees who are working parents. The U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation developed a roadmap to assist senior leaders and business owners in understanding their options for supporting working parents with their childcare needs. The Tulsa Women's Commission used this document as a launching tool for our child care research and practice



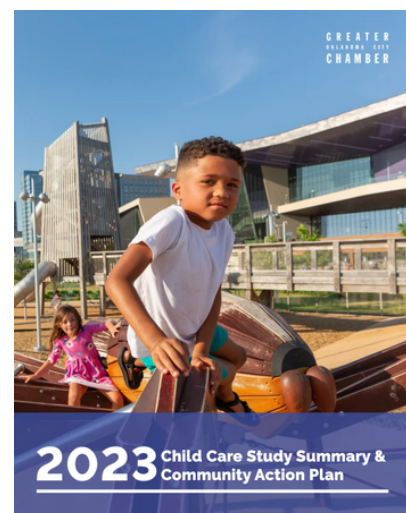
Women's Fund of Greater Fort Wayne, Indiana

The Women's Fund of Greater Fort Wayne, in partnership with the Community Foundation of Greater Fort Wayne, commissioned a comprehensive study to assess the well-being and economic health of women and girls in Allen County, Indiana. The study, conducted by Purdue University Fort Wayne Community Research Institute, collected both qualitative and quantitative data to identify key issues and priorities for improving the lives of women and girls, focusing on economic security, personal safety, and supporting young women and girls to reach their full potential. Additionally, Ft. Wayne developed a survey and toolkit for local business to not only gauge but also increase how effectively support employees who are caregivers.



Oklahoma City

The Greater Oklahoma City Chamber, with funding from the City of Oklahoma City, collaborated with the Coalign Group and the Oklahoma Partnership for School Readiness to create a data repository and strategy to address child care needs in Oklahoma City.



The Impact of Childcare on Families and the Economy

Childcare is an Economic Driver

Data shared during a recent legislative interim study revealed that in 2021, a lack of childcare caused more than one in 10 Oklahomans to change jobs, reduce work hours, or leave the workforce – resulting in \$1.2 billion in lost productivity.

-Chancellor Allison Garrett, OSRHE, 2024



Oklahoma Partnership for School Readiness Annual Report

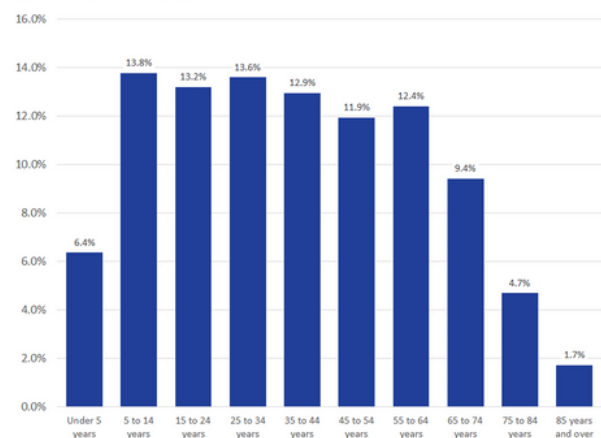
- 34 of Oklahoma’s 77 counties are identified as **childcare deserts**.
- There was a **17.3% reduction** in the number of licensed childcare programs across the state of Oklahoma between 2017 and 2022.

U.S. Census Data - Tulsa MSA

According to the most recent U.S. Census (2022), “the 5- to 14- and 25- to 34-year old age groups represented the largest age groups in the Tulsa MSA at 13.8 percent and 13.6 percent respectively.”

Children and parents, the demographics most impacted by availability of childcare, are our largest population groups in Tulsa.

Figure 2: Population by Age



SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau, 2022 American Community Survey, ACS 5-Year Estimates.

Best Practices and Local Research



Article

Kindergarten through Grade 3 Outcomes Associated with Participation in High-Quality Early Care and Education: A RCT Follow-Up Study

Diane M. Horn , Shinyoung Jeon , Moira V. Clavijo and Melissa Acton

Early Childhood Education Institute, University of Oklahoma-Tulsa, Tulsa, OK 74133, USA
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Abstract: An accepted conclusion is that children at risk for educational failure who participate in high-quality early care and education (ECE) enter kindergarten “more ready,” possessing skills comparable to their more advantaged peers. There is less consensus about longer-term outcomes with some studies finding continuation of early gains, while others report “fade out” by elementary school. This study investigated child outcomes, kindergarten through Grade 3, of 75 children randomly assigned as infants to either participate or not in an enhanced Early Head Start/Head Start program. It was hypothesized that the children who experienced this high-quality ECE would perform better than their control group peers across a range of measures. From kindergarten to Grade 3, children in the treatment group demonstrated higher skills in letter and word identification, vocabulary, oral comprehension, and math than control group children after controlling for child/family characteristics and classroom quality. Results for executive functioning were mixed with children in the treatment group showing higher skills on one of the two measures of executive function. No group differences were found for social-emotional skills. This study contributes to the scant literature of longitudinal studies spanning infancy through to Grade 3. In addition to the findings of a general pattern of continuation of positive child outcomes in early academic skills associated with earlier high-quality ECE attendance, this study also contributes information about the potential size of impacts of contemporary ECE programs starting in infancy.

Keywords: sustained effects of ECE; RCT follow-up of ECE; Educare



Citation: Horn, D.M.; Jeon, S.; Clavijo, M.V.; Acton, M. Kindergarten through Grade 3 Outcomes Associated with Participation in High-Quality Early Care and Education: A RCT Follow-Up Study. *Educ. Sci.* **2022**, *12*, 908. <https://doi.org/10.3390/educ12120908>

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Educ. Sci. **2022**, *12*, 908. <https://doi.org/10.3390/educ12120908>

<https://www.mdpi.com/journal/education>

“Our findings are much stronger and enduring than what some have suggested as reasonable estimates or expectations for longer-term impacts of early childhood education programs.”
(Horn et al., 2022, p. 17)

Nationally recognized research on the benefits of high-quality early care and education (ECE) is happening right here in Tulsa. A longitudinal study by local experts Dr. Diane Horn, Dr. Shinyoung Jeon, Moira Clavijo, and Melissa Acton (2022) from OU-Tulsa’s ECEI found that children who attended Tulsa Educare, an enhanced Early Head Start/Head Start program, starting in infancy demonstrated significantly higher academic skills in vocabulary, oral comprehension, and math through Grade 3 compared to their control group peers.

These findings showcase the powerful impact of investing in comprehensive, high-quality ECE programs like Tulsa Educare, which provide long-lasting support for children's learning and development, enable parental workforce participation, and contribute to a more skilled future workforce. Tulsa is already seeing the benefits and effects of high-quality childcare firsthand, and we should lean into these strengths by scaling such programs city-wide.

By making high-quality ECE accessible to all families, Tulsa can become a national leader in supporting children's success and building a thriving community.

Commission Recommendations



On behalf of the Tulsa Women's Commission and the childcare forum, we are pleased to present this set of research-based and community-developed recommendations to support working families and improve access to high-quality, affordable childcare options in our city.

After extensive national, regional, and local research, incorporating the experiences of local families and caregivers, as well as the facilitation of three local forums of content experts, our group has identified key themes and actions that are highly supportive of caregivers.

Additionally, over the course of our investigation into the issue of childcare availability and supportive practices for caregivers, the Commission has curated a website with helpful resources for caregivers. We hope that this website serves as a useful tool to empower and support caregivers in the Tulsa region. For more information about our findings and the resources available, please visit our website at: <https://twcchildcareresources.com/about> . We hope that this website serves as a useful tool to empower and support caregivers in the Tulsa region.

The key themes and action items that emerged from our research on effective supports for caregivers in the workplace include the following:

1. Promote Family-Friendly Workplace Policies

- Encourage employers to offer flexible scheduling, remote work options, and generous paid family leave policies.
- Recognize childcare as a parental responsibility, and advocate for pay equity for all working parents and caregivers.
- Require inclusive practices and support for all parents and caregivers in the workplace.

2. Increase Access to Affordable and High-Quality Childcare

- Provide incentives for employers to offer on-site or near-site childcare facilities that are subsidized or low/no cost for employees.
- Establish a citywide childcare voucher or stipend program to help families afford the provider of their choice.
- Partner with local and regional childcare providers to secure discounted rates and priority enrollment for city residents.
- Invest in and promote high-quality in-home childcare options within the community.

3. Develop an Integrated Childcare Support System

- Encourage employers to implement a multi-pronged approach that integrates childcare supports into their benefits and culture.
- Offer city-sponsored resources, support groups, and navigation assistance to help families find, evaluate, and manage their childcare arrangements.
- Research options for citywide backup childcare service to provide care when regular arrangements fall through.

4. Incentivize Caregiver Supports for Employers

- Highlight the benefits of caregiver supports, such as enhanced employee recruitment, retention, and productivity.
- Leverage available tax credits, subsidies, and other financial incentives from the state and federal government.
- Encourage employers to align their caregiver support initiatives with corporate values and social responsibility commitments.

5. Address Childcare Challenges through Collaborative Solutions

- Work with employers to address inflexible work schedules by promoting flexible scheduling and remote work options.
- Foster a culture of empathy and understanding to address stigma or bias against working caregivers.
- Provide counseling, support groups, and productivity tools to help employees balance work and caregiving duties.
- Offer financial assistance through caregiving stipends, dependent care FSAs, or other forms of support.

By implementing these recommendations, we believe that our city can create a more supportive and equitable environment for working families, ensuring access to affordable and high-quality childcare options that meet their diverse needs.

We look forward to discussing these proposals in further detail and working together to improve the lives of families in our community.

Sincerely,

**The Tulsa Women's Commission
The Childcare Forum Participants**

Implementation Suggestions: A Levelled Approach

By providing a scaled approach, employers can start with Level 1 initiatives and gradually progress to higher levels as their resources and commitment to childcare support grow. This allows for a more manageable and sustainable implementation process while still working towards the ultimate goal of comprehensive and systemic childcare support for working families in Tulsa.

Level 1

Getting Started

- Offer flexible scheduling and remote work options when possible.
- Provide information about local childcare resources and referral services to employees.
- Encourage a culture of empathy and understanding towards working parents and caregivers.
- Align caregiver support initiatives with corporate values and social responsibility commitments.

Level 2

Enhancing Support

- Implement generous paid family leave policies.
- Offer financial assistance for childcare through dependent care FSAs or stipends.
- Partner with local childcare providers to secure discounted rates for employees.
- Provide access to counseling and support groups for working parents and caregivers.

Level 3

Comprehensive Integration

- Establish on-site or near-site childcare facilities that are subsidized or low/no cost for employees.
- Develop a multi-pronged approach that integrates childcare supports into employee benefits and company culture.
- Advocate for pay equity for all working parents and caregivers.
- Offer backup childcare services for when regular arrangements fall through.

Level 4

Community Leadership

- Collaborate with other employers and the city to address inflexible work schedules and promote family-friendly policies.
- Invest in and promote high-quality in-home childcare options within the community.
- Support the establishment of a citywide childcare voucher or stipend program.
- Leverage available tax credits, subsidies, and other financial incentives to expand childcare support initiatives.

Level 5

Systemic Change

- Advocate for policies and legislation that support affordable and accessible childcare for all families.
- Partner with local government and community organizations to develop an integrated, citywide childcare support system.
- Collaborate with educational institutions to promote and develop a skilled childcare workforce.
- Encourage other employers to adopt comprehensive caregiver support policies and practices.

Conclusion

Through extensive research, expert input, and cross-sector collaboration, the Tulsa Women's Commission has developed a compelling case for prioritizing access to affordable, high-quality childcare as a critical support for working families and an economic necessity.

Highlight 1: Childcare Access is an Economic Driver

The pandemic exacerbated pre-existing gaps in the childcare system, disproportionately impacting women, especially women of color. Lack of childcare access is a major driver of reduced workforce participation and productivity.

Highlight 2: Tulsa is Well-Positioned to Lead the Way in Childcare Access

Tulsa has an opportunity to become a leader in early childhood education and caregiver support, building on the success of programs like Educare. High-quality early childhood education provides long-lasting cognitive and academic benefits for children.

Highlight 3: There is a Path Forward for Increased Childcare Access

By implementing the multi-pronged, employer-engaged approach outlined in this report, we can develop a more equitable and supportive infrastructure that enables all parents to thrive in the workforce. This includes promoting family-friendly workplace policies, increasing access to affordable high-quality childcare, and addressing challenges collaboratively.

The Tulsa Women's Commission will continue advocating for progress and partnering with stakeholders to make affordable, accessible childcare a reality for Tulsa families. Together, we can build a stronger future for our children, our families, and our community.