

**First Friday
Lessons Learned - Childcare
December 1, 2023**

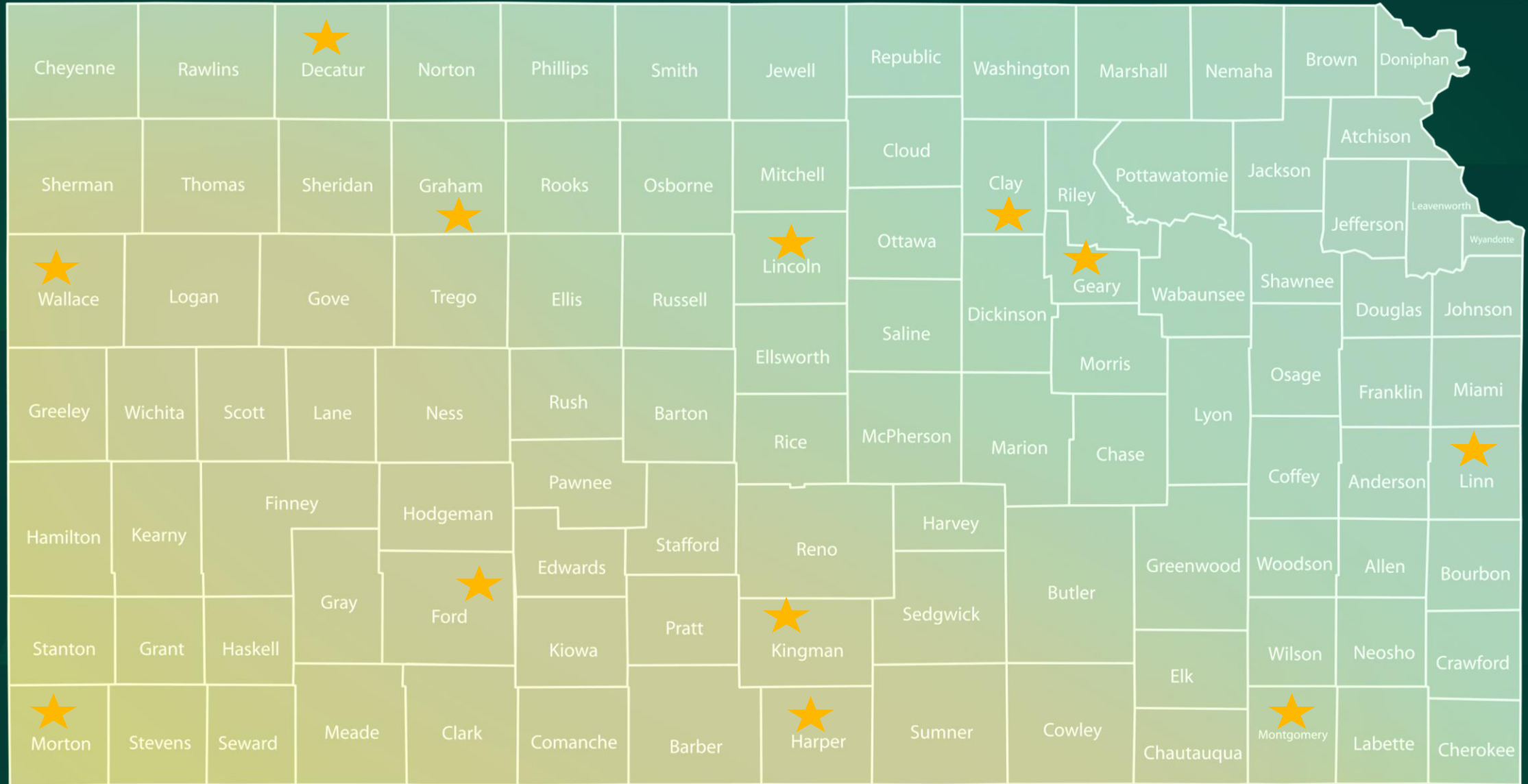
OFFICE OF RURAL PROSPERITY

RURAL 

CHAMPIONS

**Moderated by
Kerri Falletti**

#RuralByChoice Champions



#RuralByChoice Champions



Susie Swanson
Grow Clay County



Rebecca Nedland
Oberlin USD 294



Dalila Boys
Dodge City/Ford County

Amy Wallace - Kingman County

Grow Clay County Childcare - Susie

Project Overview and previous work:

Project began with a large facility concept that would include construction of a new building to replace current preschool rooms at elementary school and add space for two daycare rooms. The facility would have provided approx. 50 daycare spots. Budget had to be revised after a large grant was not received. The new plan includes utilizing existing space available at middle school that will provide an additional 12-14 child care slots. Funds will be used for construction/remodel, furnishings, toys/supplies, and design fees for the retrofit.

How was childcare determined as a priority issue for this project?

In June of 2021, Clay County Child Care announces their closure due to staffing issues. This decreased the number of available child care slots by approximately 32. An additional child care facility closed later in the year eliminating 10 more slots. Lastly a church associated child care closed. In all, approximately 50 slots were lost during this time period. Three new in-home providers opened giving some relief to the shortage but many providers do not operate at full capacity. Thus, we set out on a quest to increase child care spots in Clay County.

What partners did you involve in the project to address childcare?

Initially the Clay County Child Care Taskforce, USD 379, Clay County Medical Center, Clay County officials, Lakeside Learning Tree, KDHE and local in-home day care providers were involved in envisioning a solution to the child care need in our communities. As the project has progressed, USD 379 has taken a lead role in implementing the eventual project.

Grow Clay County Childcare - Susie

Did you uncover any unexpected challenges in the community through the process?

Some community public officials were not aware of the shortage of child care and had not thought about the impact of that shortage on families, businesses and growth opportunities for our community. They were educated on the issue and eventually lent their support. Some in-home child care providers were concerned that their businesses would be negatively impacted. Once they were made aware of the extent of the shortage, their concerns were lessened.

Challenging people to think outside the box and think big was an important task in moving the project along. Educating people regarding the need for and importance of quality child care for the benefit of our families and the growth of our communities was a piece of the initial challenge.

What outcomes have been developed to support the success of the childcare Champion project?

The initial solution was to build a new facility located on the elementary school campus and work to establish a provider substitute pool.

When funding for new construction was not secured, other options were considered, and the USD 379 superintendent offered the idea of housing the program in an existing facility within the district. The Middle School became a workable option and funding was available from grants already secured to complete the retrofit and get the program up and running. The school board has been supportive and are in the process of giving their final approval.

We also identified that most of our in-home providers were not in favor of the substitute pool idea, so we did not pursue that further. However, in our parent survey we identified the need for drop-in availability and the school district has agreed to explore that concept once they get up and running.

As a result of educating the public about the shortage of providers that take DCF payment two existing providers became eligible to accept those payments.

Oberlin USD 294 - Rebecca

Project Overview and previous work:

Our primary goal has been increasing the number of childcare slots available in our community. How this happens has changed from our initial plan. We initially planned to build, but the difficulty of finding available contractors with the skills needed cause us to shift our plans. We shifted to finding a suitable property for sale in Oberlin. We found a location we loved and have closed on this property. We are now able to move forward with implementation of a project

How was childcare determined as a priority issue for this project?

Our local foundation hosted a Strategic Doings session where the Dane G. Hansen Foundation came and spoke of the childcare shortage in Northwest Kansas and what they are doing to help. After this meeting, several of us showed interest in moving forward in having conversation to see what needs to be done about childcare in our community. The primary issue that came up during our conversations was that there weren't enough childcare providers and we needed more

What partners did you involve in the project to address childcare?

Locally we involved our local foundation GROW Decatur County, as well as, the City of Oberlin, USD 294, Decatur Health System, Bargain Box, and Rotary International Club. Regionally we involved the Innovation Center (EIC), Dane G. Hansen, LiveWell Northwest Kansas, and Northwest Kansas Educational Service Center. We also have partnered with the Office of Rural Prosperity, the Kansas Children's Cabinet and Trust, Childcare Aware of Kansas, and the Patterson Family Foundation.

Oberlin USD 294 - Rebecca

Did you uncover any unexpected challenges in the community through the process?

I honestly didn't think that finding contractors would be that hard. It was honestly shocking. I expected that process to be a lot easier, but I did learn a lot about zoning and building codes that I wouldn't have learned otherwise. Other challenges we faced were community rumors and negativity. For me this is easy to combat. I tend to have a very positive outlook on things and a way of phrasing things that can help others see the positive side. I am also happy to share information with anyone who is inquiring and answer any questions that they may have.

What outcomes have been developed to support the success of the childcare Champion project?

The biggest success of the childcare Champion project is that we do have a building and we are moving forward with implementation of our facility. We learned a lot through this experience. A mantra that I developed is "these bumps in the road are helping me grow."

Another development of the childcare Champion project has been my professional and personal growth. I have learned so much about nonprofit work, the ins and outs of business planning, childcare regulations and trainings, being assertive as a leader and not being afraid to put myself out there, dealing with difficult situations with grace and so much more.

Dodge City/Ford County Childcare - Dalila

Project Overview and previous work:

Our Mission is to be instrumental in assisting and creating more childcare seats in Dodge City and the surrounding area. Our goal is to assist our employers, and families, in providing childcare during the time of first and second shift to help with recruitment and retention. Our main project is to construct and open a childcare center with 300 plus childcare seats available.

Update: To increase childcare capacity in Ford County we are still working on building a 22 hour, 313 child capacity building. We are also continuing to build capacity of licensed home facilities.

How was childcare determined as a priority issue for this project?

With 2 major beef packing plants that employ a big part of our community, it has caused a shortage in childcare. We also have Hilmar Cheese plant being built at the moment that will bring additional employment to our community.

What partners did you involve in the project to address childcare?

We have partnered with Dodge City/Ford County Economic Development, The City of Dodge City, Ford County, Dodge City Community College, USD 443, YMCA, Chamber of Commerce, Childcare Aware, KDHE, KSBDC, KCCTO/KITS, Russell Child Development Center, KU Center for Public Partnerships and Research, Kansas Child, Kansas Department of Commerce, Office of Rural Prosperity and the Kansas Children's Cabinet and Trust Fund.

Dodge City/Ford County Childcare - Dalila

Did you uncover any unexpected challenges in the community through the process?

Absolutely we did. We discovered that price was a big challenge but most importantly a language barrier was preventing in home child care providers from getting licensed and ready to operate.

What outcomes have been developed to support the success of the childcare Champion project?

We have put together a How to Become a Childcare Provider Seminar for people to attend and learn the process of opening a home day care. We have guest speakers from KDHE, Russell Child Development Center, KCCTO and Childcare Aware. I have personally attended orientation with KDHE and received a certification to help through the process. As a Spanish speaking woman, it has brought me great joy to help people find childcare for all walks of life especially with Ford County speaking 28 different languages. Our diverse community is in dire need of childcare.

Kingman County Childcare - Amy

Project Overview and previous work:

The Childcare Champion was tasked with creating and implementing a county-wide strategic plan to increase childcare capacity throughout Kingman County. The essential duties of the champion include conducting research, analyzing data, meeting with stakeholders, writing grants, securing funding, and managing forthcoming projects.

How was childcare determined as a priority issue for this project?

After speaking with the school districts, employers, providers, and parents, the Economic Development Committee made childcare a priority in February of 2022. We then met with Childcare Aware and learned about the real-time data which showed the deficiency in childcare slot in Kingman County. We formed a coalition in June and received notification of our award for the Rural Champion grant in September. Our first priority was to create a survey to collect additional data. The survey has been instrumental in applying for funding various grants.

Kingman County Childcare - Amy

What partners did you involve in the project to address childcare?

Our major project was the grant for USD 331. We helped write the Accelerator grant and supplied much of the data to back up the need. Frankly, I am not sure how a small rural community can make a substantial dent in childcare without the support and involvement of a school district. The school district has partnered with the hospital, rec commission, and the City of Kingman to ensure the project would be completed. Since that application Amy Wallace, the project manager at the district has applied and been awarded several additional grants.

We also worked with current local providers to make sure they funding as well. Most of the grant money out there right now is to build capacity, but it is important to maintain the providers we have as well.

Did you uncover any unexpected challenges in the community through the process?

There was some uncertainty among current providers with the new center opening, but we had the data to back up the need. We are currently trying to build support in Cunningham for the center located there. We should be meeting with USD 332 to see if the board will help support the facility which is very month to month.

What outcomes have been developed to support the success of the childcare Champion project?

The Kingman-Norwich school district is remodeling two classrooms and opening a center that will be able to accommodate up to 46 kids. We also were able to bring a lot of focus to childcare issues.

#RuralByChoice Champions – Panel Discussion

Questions from audience?

How would more child care opportunities benefit your community and communities in rural areas?

What is the first step you would recommend to a community wanting to start addressing childcare?

What other best practices would you share with other rural communities that are working to address housing?