

Work/Life Programs

Win-Win for Employees, Employers

Striking the right balance between work and family responsibilities is a never-ending juggling act for many employees. Today, challenges such as arranging for child or adult care, keeping hectic work schedules and meeting both family needs and work expectations are becoming increasingly more common and complicated.

A 2002 national study found that 32% of employees ranked balancing work and personal commitments as their highest concern, even above those who prioritized a good salary (18%) or job security (22%).

In turn, more and more Indiana companies, private and public sector alike, are recognizing that work/life programs or policies centered on child care are smart investments in their current and future work forces – resulting in improved employee productivity, retention and recruitment.

Instrumental in spreading the word and offering assistance to Hoosier businesses has been the Indiana Business Partnership Project (IBPP), which provides businesses around the state with access to qualified counselors specializing in the work/life initiative.

Created in January 2000 and funded through state government's Family and Social Services Administration, the IBPP has assisted 1,820 employers and a total of 720,000 employees representing 85 of Indiana's 92 counties.

"We view child care as an economic issue, not a social issue," states Shelli Williams, a regional specialist for the IBPP. "It's a fact that workers with dependent care responsibility have a higher rate of absenteeism, tardiness and turnover.

"The reality is that one in seven working families reports losing some time from work each month because of a breakdown in dependent care arrangements," Williams offers. "And for those small businesses – under 50 employees, one or two employees being absent can be a real hardship."

The latest Census provides further indication of the prevalence of child care obligations facing Hoosier employees. For children under age six with both parents in the workforce, Indiana ranks first among surrounding states and 16th in the nation at nearly 63%.

According to the IBPP, Indiana employers are taking action regarding child care issues in a wide variety of ways. From supporting community programs, offering information and referral services, providing subsidies for employees' child care expenses to creating child care centers.

"Often when we talk to employers about child care policies, we get that deer-in-the-headlights look because most employees instantly think only of on-site care," Williams notes. "The truth is that only a small number have on-site facilities. We want to let employers know of all the other options."

Exactly what type of program or policy a business implements can be a long and involved decision. Enter the IBPP, which identifies employee needs, as well as performs both a community analysis and a cost/benefit analysis on proposed programs. The end result is to find a solution that maximizes employer return on investment while also strengthening employee commitment to work and family.

Business, community leaders

One popular and effective dependent care policy for employers of all sizes is allowing employees the flexibility to pick up kids from school and then take them to babysitters or even bring them to work, says Williams.



Percentage of Children Under Age Six with Both Parents in Labor Force (2000 U.S. Census)

State	National Rank	%
Indiana	16	62.6
Ohio	19	62.1
Michigan	26	60.9
Kentucky	37	58.6
Illinois	39	58.3

By Rebecca Patrick

“This can be a far-reaching action or it can be for special circumstances such as school snow days when parents are left scrambling trying to make child care arrangements that they normally don’t do,” she explains. “Dearborn County Hospital, for example, has this policy.”

Some areas of Indiana are also fortunate enough to have well-run community day care or development centers which businesses can direct their employees to as resource.

Heading that list is a mainstay in Howard County.

Owned, operated and subsidized by the city, the Kokomo Community Day Care Center is the only facility of its kind in the state. Ahead of its time, the center, which opened in 1979 and has served a diverse group, is licensed to handle 120 children ages two and half to 12 – including many at-risk and low-income children.

“We’ve been doing this for so many years that now we are seeing children of the kids who spent time here,” remarks Vicki Douglas, director of the Kokomo facility.

“The center has been a great investment in the future of the area kids because it’s given them a secure environment and great foundation for learning.”

A corporate leader in recognizing the dependent care dilemma is Columbus-based Cummins, Inc., which began researching solutions in the late 1990s.

“We did a survey of employees to gain their input, to see what parents wanted,” says Victoria Baker, director of the Cummins Child Development Center. “It’s important that if you are going to offer a dependent care option that it is done right and matches the needs of your employees.”

In June of 2000, the Cummins Child Development Center opened for children ages six weeks to six years. Like many similar corporate facilities, it is managed by Bright Horizons Family Solutions – the world’s number one provider of employer-sponsored child care, early education



Instruction and interaction are the hallmarks of corporate child care centers.



Youngsters playing and learning at the Cummins Child Development Center.

and work/life solutions.

"We have 130 children right now, with a capacity of 144. Cummins employees have first chance for open spots, but the community is welcome," notes Baker. "It has been a phenomenal success. We do parent surveys each year to gauge satisfaction in the program. Consistently, we have scored over 90 percent and last year, it was at 95 percent.

"It's a wonderful center that has education as a priority as well as the creative arts, plus it provides peace of

mind to our employees," Baker describes. On top of that reassurance, Cummins, one of the state's largest companies, subsidizes the child development center for its employees.

Meanwhile in Dubois County in southwestern Indiana, Jasper's Kimball International has been going strong with Kimball Kids since May 1999. Also a Bright Horizons Center, Kimball Kids was created in response to "the problem of child care in the area coupled with the stress of work and family on employees," states Martin Vaught, director of public relations for Kimball International.

"There was really a strain on the entire child care situation in the area, both for employees and companies, with large facilities being a couple counties away."

Kimball Kids can accommodate 170 kids and has remained close to capacity since it opened. According to Vaught, the company saw a return on investment on the center within the first year, and the employee feedback has been tremendous.

"From the get-go employees had a sense of security by knowing where their kids are," describes Vaught. "For the company, it's simple. If workers are less stressed, they will be more productive.

"My daughter is there...it's just a great, great program."

Kimball continues to invest in the center to keep costs manageable for its employees. It's an endeavor well worth the price says Vaught.

"Employees have even chosen to work at Kimball because of the child care facility or elected to stay because of it," he offers. "An executive who didn't even have kids said the facility helped him make his decision to work for Kimball because it said a lot about the company and its commitment to employees."

Planning process

For any business or organization looking to start a child care program or policy, the IBPP's initial step is typically for one of its regional specialists to go on site to analyze employee needs.

"This assessment focuses primarily on child care concerns with secondary options of elder care and transportation that

Key Self-Assessment Questions

- How does your business view child care and other work/life issues?
- What factors are considered key in attracting and retaining employees?
- What business goals can be advanced by helping employees with child care?
- What policies, programs or benefits for working parents do you currently have in place? How are employees using these policies or programs?
- What are the limitations on what you can do? (budget, logistics, etc.)

can be integrated back into the survey," explains Williams. "The data is then analyzed with recommendations returned back to the company."

The IBPP also has a helpful checklist of procedures for interested companies to follow:

1. **Plan Carefully** – Determine your objective, what policies or programs that will work best for you, your employees and your community.
2. **Identify Internal Champions** – Having a leader or champion in your business that is passionate about child care will help others in your company and/or community to understand and embrace the policy or program that you seek to develop and implement.
3. **Form a Task Force** – Many mid to large size businesses establish a committee or task force to assess and analyze needs and resources, develop options and manage the decision-making process. Composition of the task force should be diverse.
4. **Conduct Business Self-Assessment** – Ask what are the specific needs and limitations of your business.
5. **Probe Employees' Needs and Preferences** – Information can be gathered in focus groups, surveys or staff meetings.
6. **Conduct Community Resource Assessment** – Determine what child care services are currently offered in the community and where there are gaps between what is supplied and what is needed.
7. **Conduct Costs and Benefits Assessment** – Before implementation of any new child care policy, do a cost-benefit analysis on each of the options you are considering.

The IBPP most frequently works with larger companies, those with 100 or more employees, as they are most likely to make a commitment to a dependent care initiative based on the volume needs of their employees. Yet, the IBPP encourages all businesses to try and make a difference.

"Any size company or organization can do something to improve their employees' work/life issues," Williams says. "Being able to show your employees that you are a responsive company that is keeping pace with the changing dynamics, demographics and challenges the workforce faces is very important.

"Above all, a work/life initiative is an investment in your current and future workforce, one that will have a positive impact on your bottom line."

INFORMATION LINK

Resource: Shelli Williams, Indiana Business Partnership Project, at (812) 871-3000 or www.indianaworklife.com

Victoria Baker, Cummins Child Development Center, at (812) 378-5833

Martin Vaught, Kimball International, at (812) 482-8255

Vicki Douglas, Kokomo Community Day Care Center, at (765) 456-7550