

# CHAMPIONING CHILDCARE

## Resource Organization Continues to Serve Southern Indiana

By Matt Ottinger

Childcare ranks atop the most pressing issues in the Hoosier state and beyond.

In fact, the Indiana Chamber of Commerce released a report last September in partnership with the U.S. Chamber Foundation and Early Learning Indiana (ELI) quantifying remaining challenges.

Among other findings, it revealed Indiana misses an estimated \$4.22 billion annually for the state's economy, including a \$1.17 billion annual loss in tax revenue, due to childcare issues. Additionally, 57% of parents of young children missed work or class at least once in the surveyed three-month span for childcare-related reasons and 40% of parents that experienced such employment disruptions in the prior year reported leaving the workforce as a direct result of childcare-related issues.

### Serving the young is an old endeavor

While it's an increasingly acute matter, childcare has long been a focus in the state. This is evidenced by the fact that Evansville-based nonprofit childcare resource center Building Blocks began its operation back in 1969. CEO Aleisha Wilson has been with the organization for nearly a decade and relays its origin, built by childcare providers looking for a support system.

"Over the years, it was about the accessibility and the affordability, but then also the components of the family and what supports are being given to the family," she shares. "(We asked) how do we support our families outside of the childcare on the daily basis and the evolution of the state partnerships that they created?"

"Being able to have some of the block funding to provide vouchers for that accessibility piece, and then being a resource and referral agency in order to connect parents to adequate care as well as other resources for our communities to be able to tap into," Wilson adds.

Building Blocks now serves 28 counties.

### Establishing a strategy

Building Blocks now has just under 40 employees. Positions include six staffers on a state contract for resources and referrals like family engagement, data and community engagement specialists.

Beginning in the spring of 2021, the organization also began a pilot of an early learning Regional Training Center (RTC) model of service delivery. During the initial year, a total of 26 early learning sites participated, representing 88 early learning classrooms for ages 3 to 5 years old. Early childhood sites include both businesses and faith-based centers. The primary purpose of the model is to improve child outcomes by increasing the capacity of early learning sites to provide high-quality early childhood education to children and families.

The RTC component works with partners like ELI and SPARK Learning Lab. A December report from ELI stated, "A recent provider training in partnership with Building Blocks and SPARK Learning Lab had 103 registered participants; the SPARK team said it was one of the largest trainings they had ever held in Indiana."

"(Because of that) then our philanthropic dollars are all focused



Enhancing childcare options is currently a priority for many employers and workers. Building Blocks has been addressing the need in southern Indiana for decades.

on the quality piece," Wilson specifies. "(We ask), 'how do we get to our childcare centers to create an infrastructure that really is early learning, that we're monitoring our growth of our children with ongoing assessment?'"

She points to partnership on a research project with Dr. James Heckman of the University of Chicago as an example of ongoing analysis. Heckman is a Nobel Prize-winning economist studying investment on early learning.

### Partnering up

Some of Building Blocks' other staffers work toward administering the Child Care Development Fund (CCDF). Known to many families as "the voucher program," the CCDF is a federal program created to help low-income families obtain childcare so they can work, attend training or continue their education.

A November 2024 report revealed that 2,465 children and 1,444 families in Vanderburgh County alone were enrolled in the CCDF.

The collaboration is imperative to keep doors open at childcare facilities while providing quality, affordable care, according to Wilson.

In addition to working closely with the state of Indiana, other organizational partners include Lilly, the Toyota National Foundation, Welborn Baptist Foundation, various community foundations, mayors' offices, Ohio-based Stranahan Foundation and many more. Wilson also points to recent collaborations with Knox and Posey counties as examples of how closely Building Blocks works with economic development boards.

"We know pretty much we can tie everybody back to why they want to invest in early childhood or have a voice in the early childhood realm," Wilson concludes.

Those interested in learning more or for information about becoming a childcare provider, visit [www.buildingblocks.net](http://www.buildingblocks.net).

**RESOURCE:** Aleisha Wilson, Building Blocks, at [www.buildingblocks.net](http://www.buildingblocks.net)