



To: Representative Sean Tarwater *and*
Members of the 2022 Special Committee on Workforce Development
From: Lucas Neece, Assistant City Administrator
City of Lindsborg
Date: 21 November 2022

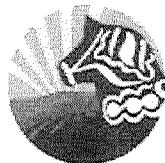
Chairman Tarwater and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to talk about workforce and childcare.

Many of you may be familiar with Lindsborg, Kansas—Little Sweden, USA. We are about 15 minutes south of Salina on I-135, and 15 minutes north of McPherson. Like many parts of the state, we have very low unemployment and a need to have people come to our region to fill high paying jobs at employers including Viega, Vortex, Kubota, Schwans, Pfizer, as well as at our institutions—Bethany College, the hospitals, nursing homes, and school districts.

Nearly 5 years ago, community leaders identified housing, a recreation center, and childcare as challenges that needed to be addressed, in order to invite people to come build a prosperous future with us in Lindsborg.

As we looked at the childcare issue, we realized that really solving childcare would involve work on three areas: availability, quality, and affordability. Most childcare projects prioritize just two of these areas, and to some degree that is true of ours, as well. We have focused on availability and quality. As we talked with people and employers, we learned that employers recruiting highly skilled employees from outside the region were being told that there was not the quality of childcare available that would allow them to move their family across the country. Others were choosing not to have a second child because the quality of childcare they wanted was not available. We talked with people who had master's degrees in highly sought after fields, who would like to have served their neighbors with their skills, but did not have the quality of childcare available to them that they wanted, in order to work outside the home.

I was hired in December 2018, and was quickly tasked with working on childcare. It became apparent that the small non-profit childcare center would need significant assistance in order to build an appropriate



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building to replace the outdated and poorly configured 1912 era bungalow. I became the project manager, with the City giving about half of my time to the non-profit to guide the visioning of the project, as well as the design (in partnership with JGR architects in Salina), and the fundraising. We broke ground on the 10,600 square foot facility in June 2021, and moved into the building in August 2022. Currently, our childcare center is full. Although our tuition is higher than most other providers in the region, it provides the non-profit childcare center the ability to pay higher wages for a more effective team. This, we have seen, results in staff who are able to bring their best selves to work, invest in themselves, and build a career at the center. It also prevents us having to hire less qualified staff who may have generally short tenures (3-6 months on average) which is what we saw in our center before transitioning to our new model.

The Lindsborg Child Development Center was built on a 4.7 acre site provided by the City on a \$1/99 year lease. The rest of the \$3.5 million cost was funded by private dollars solicited by a fundraising campaign. Through the generosity of donors, we were also able to establish two endowments at the McPherson County Community Foundation: one is intended to bring the cost of care down for all families by eventually covering the cost of the director's salary; the second is intended to provide scholarships for families who need assistance to afford high-quality childcare.

The State of Kansas is an important partner in our success. About 10% of the project cost has been funded using Community Service Tax Credits awarded by the Department of Commerce. DCF subsidies for families who need assistance is essential to enabling us to serve all working families, and I am encouraged to hear that those subsidies may be adjusted to better meet the costs of high-quality care. Finally, the work that KDHE does to hold our center and others accountable for providing safe childcare is essential and appreciated.

For further background on the work we have done on childcare, please visit www.childcareforlindsborg.org/about. Our progress has been recorded in several publications, including the KLC Journal and a podcast, "Where's My Village" which was done by Fortune Magazine.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit these comments today.



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