

## Aligned Case Study:

### KC Medical Center: Four Decades of Unique Onsite Childcare

*For over four decades, AdventHealth Shawnee Mission (formerly Shawnee Mission Hospital) in Merriam, Kansas, has stood out by offering onsite childcare, a unique benefit that began in 1979 to attract and retain top healthcare talent. Candy Seltman was recruited to launch the childcare center, which started with 100 slots and now operates as part of the B.E. Smith Family Center, serving up to 200 children daily. The center has become an essential asset for employees, offering flexible hours, reduced rates, and high-quality care, fostering a supportive work environment. This case study highlights the ongoing importance of employer-based childcare in addressing workforce challenges and the critical role it plays in the lives of working parents, demonstrating a successful model that could inspire similar initiatives in other organizations.*

Competition for healthcare workers was intense, and as hospital administrators sought an edge in attracting and keeping the best talent, they opened an onsite childcare center.

A scenario from the COVID-19 pandemic or its aftermath? Hardly.

That real-life turn of events came more than four decades ago at Shawnee Mission Hospital in Merriam, Kansas.

Hospital leaders recruited Candy Seltman to fast-track the childcare operation. Seltman left her job running a home-based center in nearby Overland Park, and after a seven-month sprint, the 100-slot center opened in August 1979.

Forty-plus years later, the childcare program remains open as part of the 63,000-square-foot B.E. Smith Family Center, which includes a wing serving special needs kids from the community.

Seltman served as the director until retiring at 80 four years ago. “I loved what I did,” she said, “and I felt like it fit the mission of the hospital.”

The hospital operates today as AdventHealth Shawnee Mission.

The fact that the center remains an integral part of the medical center illustrates that quality childcare for working families is needed as much today as it was in the late 1970s.

This necessity is why Aligned advocates so strongly in Topeka and Jefferson City for policies that expand access to Pre-K education. Aligned considers employer-based childcare a critical component





of a multi-faceted Pre-K system that serves the needs of working parents.

Only 13% of the more than 2,000 businesses surveyed by Best Place for Working Parents, a business network, had on-site childcare, according to the organization's 2023 "[National Trends Report](#)." The trend has accelerated considerably since before the pandemic, the report said.

However, childcare remains a disruptive workforce issue, according to the [2023 Kids Count data book](#) from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, which said

that nationally 13% of children lived in a family where childcare problems required a job change.

The figure was 12% in Kansas and 10% in Missouri. The report also found that the cost of center-based care for a toddler equals more than a quarter of the median income for a single mother in both states.

State lawmakers in Topeka and Jefferson City responded to the ongoing childcare crisis in their 2024 sessions with legislation signed into law by Kansas Gov. Laura Kelly and Missouri Gov. Mike Parson.

Missouri expanded the number of free Pre-K slots available to low-income students. Kansas allocated \$5 million for a partnership supporting rural childcare providers in the northwest part of the state. (Read more about the sessions in [our newsletters](#).)

**Aligned considers employer-based childcare a critical component of a multi-faceted Pre-K system that serves the needs of working parents. The fact that the childcare center remains an integral part of the medical center illustrates that quality childcare for working families is needed as much today as it was in the late 1970s.**

But as four women researchers wrote in a [2021 article](#) for the Harvard Business Review, childcare should be a private sector priority as well. (The women noted they were all mothers.)

"Employers that provide high-quality childcare will not only differentiate themselves from the competition but will also create a 'sticky' benefit that fosters retention," the researchers wrote. "Employees are less likely to move to a new job if it also means moving their childcare from an environment they love and trust."

That is especially true at AdventHealth, which caters to the unique schedules of employees who work at an institution that is open 24/7.

Its center serves as many as 200 children daily. It is one of the largest centers in Johnson County but still has a two-year waiting list.

The center was initially open until midnight, but Seltman said demand for the later hours waned.

They now operate from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. five days a week, and unlike the flat weekly or monthly fee charged by other community providers, parents only pay for the days their children are at the center.

The hospital's financial support allows the center to charge rates that are about 20% less than the average cost for childcare in Johnson County.

***Just how vital is the on-site care to AdventHealth employees?***

In the case of Callie Anderson, the benefit helped recruit a recruiter.

She sought a position at the hospital, knowing she could be close to her infant daughter, who was already enrolled in AdventHealth childcare because her husband worked in security at the medical center.

Anderson is now a talent acquisition supervisor for AdventHealth's Mid-America region. Her daughter is a second grader, but it was a relief for Anderson to know she could walk to the childcare center if her daughter were ill.

She also appreciated that the center was as much a preschool as it was a safe place to drop off your child. Anderson's daughter marveled after her first day of school, saying that some of her peers knew nothing about circle time.

Offering quality childcare is as essential to keeping workers as it is to recruiting them because it creates a sense of community within the organization, she said. "You know your family is being taken care of here. We're taking care of you by providing something you need."

Such a convenient, affordable childcare option also makes the grass look much less greener if an employee is considering switching jobs.

Attending Pre-K near a medical setting can also influence career choices. Anderson has hired alums of the childcare center. "It's a natural progression for them to want to apply here because they remember coming here every day with their parents," she said.

For another AdventHealth worker, Katie Davis, the on-site childcare meant not having to choose between career and family. Davis is a mother of four and a registered nurse and lactation consultant.

At AdventHealth, Davis could provide the regular breathing treatments one of her children needed because the childcare center was so close. Under any other scenario, she said, "I probably would have had to quit working to take care of that child."



A native of Lawrence, Kansas, the onsite childcare is why Davis sought work at AdventHealth when she and her husband moved back to the area from northwest Arkansas, where her broadcaster husband was calling games for one of the Kansas City Royals minor league teams.

At one point, when she was working part-time, Davis owed AdventHealth a little bit per paycheck because the cost of healthcare and childcare exceeded her take-home pay.

Her decision to stay in the workforce has paid off as she has watched teacher and nurse friends struggle to restart careers after they stayed home with their kids instead of essentially working to afford childcare.

The AdventHealth childcare was a welcome improvement from Davis' arrangement in Arkansas, where nurses heading to work would swap their kids in the hospital parking lot with another nurse who had finished her shift and could watch the kids at home.

The system worked, but it was barebones. "We were just keeping everyone alive," Davis said.



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