A Year of Stronger Beginnings

2025 Impact Statement

Child Care Aware® OF EASTERN KS

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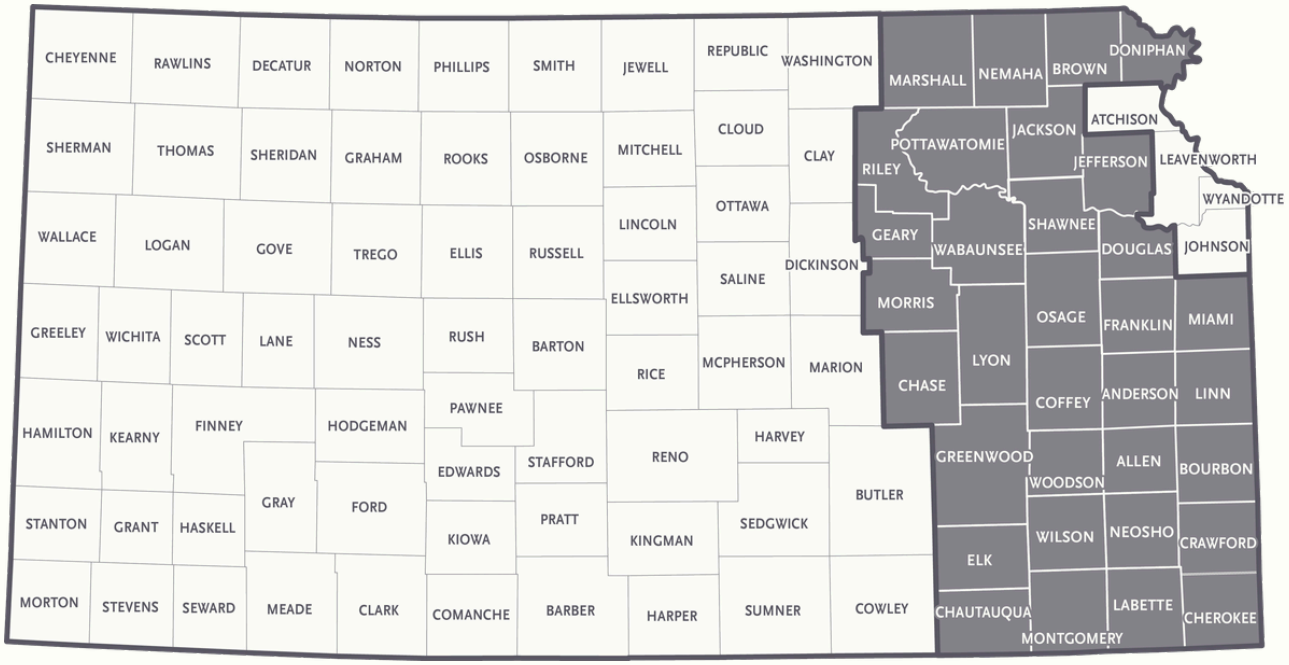
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Our Service Area

Child Care Aware® of Eastern Kansas serves 33 counties across eastern Kansas and operates the statewide Child Care Aware® of Kansas Resource Center.



A Note from our Chief Executive Officer



Every number in an impact report represents a story. A parent searching for child care so they can return to work. An early childhood professional building new skills. A young child spending their days in a safe, nurturing environment where they can learn, grow and thrive.

Throughout 2025, Child Care Aware® of Eastern Kansas continued working alongside families, early childhood professionals, businesses and community partners to help create stronger beginnings for children across our region.

From connecting thousands of families with resources to supporting early childhood educators and working alongside communities, 2025 was another year of creating opportunities for children and families across Kansas.

Our 2025 Impact Statement is about more than documenting what happened during one year. It is a reminder of what becomes possible when a community chooses to invest in its youngest children.

Behind every family served, every early childhood professional supported and every partnership created is a child whose story is just beginning.

Sarah E. Elsen

Sarah Elsen
Chief Executive Officer
Child Care Aware® of Eastern Kansas

Chapter One

Supporting Thousands of Families

In 2025, Child Care Aware® of Eastern Kansas provided free services to more than ***8,000*** families, helping connect them with quality child care and resources to support their children's success.

For families, access to child care can affect nearly every part of daily life. It can determine whether a parent can accept a job, maintain employment, attend school, or meet other family responsibilities.

That is why helping families navigate their child care options remains such an important part of our work.

Sarah Elsen
Chief Executive Officer
Child Care Aware® of Eastern Kansas

"It is comforting to know that the services provided by CCAEKS are available to help all families, regardless of their income or life situation. As a grandmother of three grandsons under the age of 6, this service is a one-stop resource for any information you need to know in order to locate and choose high-quality child care."

Eastern Kansas Grandmother



Parent Resource Center

In 2025, the Child Care Aware® of Kansas Parent Resource Center, operated by Child Care Aware® of Eastern Kansas, completed ***10,977*** child care referrals, benefiting more than ***5,470*** children throughout Kansas.

A total of ***6,026*** families turned to the Resource Center for child care information and support. While 83% began their search online, the Resource Center provided personalized assistance and ongoing support tailored to each family's needs. Resource Specialists educated families on the importance of quality licensed care and early childhood education, guided them through child care licensing information, explained financial assistance options and connected them with community resources.

Successful Connections

Funded through Capital Area Successful Start (CASS), Successful Connections supported ***670*** families with children from birth to age five, as well as expectant parents, by connecting them with community resources throughout Shawnee County, including parent education and developmental screenings.

Through partnerships with local hospitals, new parents received resource packets containing handmade cuddle blankets, child development calendars, child care information and additional community resources. The program continued collaborating with Topeka Rescue Mission Services and Impact Avenues to support families experiencing homelessness and strengthen parenting knowledge.

In 2025, a new partnership with Prevention and Resiliency Services (PARS) provided mothers of newborns with water bottles, thermometers and educational materials promoting maternal and infant health.



Chapter Two

Investing in the People Who Care for Our Youngest Children

Strong beginnings depend on the early childhood professionals who nurture, educate, and support young children every day.

These professionals are the heart of the child care system. Every day, they create environments where young children develop relationships, explore their world, build new skills, and establish foundations for future learning.

Throughout our 33-county service area, Child Care Aware® of Eastern Kansas works to strengthen and support these professionals while helping communities build the child care infrastructure families and employers depend upon.

Supporting the early childhood workforce is an investment in stronger communities, working families and brighter futures for children.

Sarah Elsen
Chief Executive Officer
Child Care Aware® of Eastern Kansas

> **"Child Care Aware helps ensure children are planted in good soil, where they can take root, grow, and thrive."**
>
> **John Cantrell, Father & Volunteer**



Early Childhood Educators

In 2025, Child Care Aware® of Eastern Kansas served ***1,461*** child care programs and their staff across our 33-county service area.

Shared Services Network Hub

Funded through Child Care Aware® of Kansas with support from the Department of Children and Families, the Shared Services Network Hub helped early childhood educators in Southeast Kansas access resources to support program sustainability.

Services included professional learning resources through the Southeast Kansas library system, an HR Hotline, Employee Assistance Program (EAP), laminating and substitute services. Thirty educators had the opportunity to establish individual retirement accounts (IRAs) through the initiative before funding ended in June 2025.

Child Care Quality Initiative System Support (CCQIS)

Funded by Child Care Aware® of Kansas through the Department of Children and Families, CCQIS supports quality improvement in child care programs throughout the region.

Monthly, provider-driven Learning Communities offer opportunities for networking, resource sharing and professional growth. Additional support includes accreditation assistance, classroom observations, child screenings and goal-setting.

Baby Steps

Funded by Child Care Aware® of Kansas with support from the Preschool Development Grant, Baby Steps helps family child care professionals offset the financial challenges of caring for infants. Because infants require more individualized attention, licensing regulations limit the number of infants an educator can care for at one time, reducing their potential enrollment and income.

In 2025, ***10*** family child care professionals participated, creating ***20*** infant care spots and expanding access to care for families.



Professional Development

In May 2025, Child Care Aware® of Eastern Kansas became the first outside training organization to have its classes onboarded into Cape, the new statewide professional development registry. This milestone streamlined registration, training completion and the awarding of professional development credit, saving time and resources while expanding the agency's ability to track and evaluate its training offerings.

Professional development remained accessible through live virtual classes, in-person trainings throughout the region and flexible online courses with instructor support. In 2025, the agency offered ***542.5*** hours of professional development, helping early childhood educators strengthen their knowledge and skills.

Through a partnership with Kansas Child Care Training Opportunities (KCCTO), the agency also offered ***38*** health and safety trainings at ***11*** locations across the region, helping early childhood educators meet applicable child care licensing requirements.

Director's Toolbox

For more than ***20*** years, Child Care Aware® of Eastern Kansas has offered professional development specifically for child care center directors and administrators.



In 2025, Director's Toolbox trainings focused on effective hiring and onboarding, positive workplace cultures, conflict resolution, collaborative relationships between staff and families, and identifying individual leadership strengths.

These opportunities helped child care leaders strengthen management practices and create supportive environments for staff, children and families.

Capital Area Successful Start (CASS)

Funded by the Kansas Children's Cabinet and Trust Fund, Capital Area Successful Start (CASS) brings together eight community agencies to strengthen early learning opportunities and help children and families thrive.

In 2025, collaborative partners included Child Care Aware® of Eastern Kansas, Community Action Head Start, Family Service & Guidance Center, Kansas Children's Service League, Shawnee County Nurse-Family Partnership, TARC, United Way of Kaw Valley and USD 501 Parents as Teachers.

Through the CASS collaborative, Child Care Aware® of Eastern Kansas supported *54* early childhood classrooms enrolled in the Literacy Connections program, reaching more than *400* children and their families.

Participating programs received on-site coaching, targeted professional development and access to high-quality resources to strengthen their ability to meet children's individual learning needs and support positive early learning experiences.



Chapter Three

Building Stronger Communities

Access to quality early childhood education strengthens more than individual families. It supports local businesses, creates opportunities for working parents, and contributes to stronger communities.

In 2025, we continued building relationships with families, child care providers, businesses, policymakers, and community partners to strengthen early childhood education throughout Eastern Kansas.

Our team also continued advocating for children, families, and the early childhood workforce at both the state and national levels. This included traveling to Washington, D.C., to participate in national advocacy efforts and connecting with policymakers about the importance of investing in early childhood education. These conversations gave us opportunities to share the challenges facing Kansas families and early childhood educators and reinforce why access to quality early childhood education matters to our workforce and communities.

Sarah Elsen
Chief Executive Officer
Child Care Aware® of Eastern Kansas



"The contribution of Childcare Aware of Eastern Kansas is significant to not just our community members, but to the businesses in the community."

Eastern Kansas Mother & Business Leader

Coalition Workshops

In 2025, Child Care Aware® of Eastern Kansas sponsored workshops tailored to the needs of local community coalitions working to increase child care capacity. Topics included expanding child care slots, building business partnerships and strengthening coalition efforts.

Workshops were offered in Allen County, Coffeyville, Geary County, Frontenac, Labette County, Miami County and Neosho County, bringing together business leaders, community partners and child care professionals to explore how supporting employees with young children benefits families and the workforce.



Community Outreach and Engagement (COE)

With funding from Child Care Aware® of Kansas, the Community Outreach and Engagement team continued supporting local coalitions working to strengthen child care in their communities.

In 2025, six Child Care Community Partnership Grants of up to *$30,000* each were awarded within our service area, supporting efforts in Allen, Crawford, Geary, Labette, Montgomery and Neosho counties.

The grants focused on bridging gaps in child care access, building local capacity and strengthening coalition structures to support long-term community growth.

Chapter Four

Powered by Partnership

None of this work happens alone.

Our impact is made possible by donors, volunteers, businesses, early childhood professionals, community organizations, and board members who share our commitment to young children and families.

To everyone who invested their time, resources, and support in 2025, thank you for helping us write another chapter of stronger beginnings.

Sarah Elsen
Chief Executive Officer
Child Care Aware® of Eastern Kansas

"Being a working parent, having a strong and reliable childcare provider is essential. CCAEKS was there to provide guidance when we were looking for care and help us know what types of questions we should be asking when looking at potential providers. As a Board member of CCAEKS, I want to see other families receive these same valuable resources so they are comfortable with the care being provided to their children while they are at work."

Dawn Bicknell-Reiser, Mother & Past Board President



2025 Executive Board

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Erin Lewis - FHLBank

President-Elect
Catherine Deters - Midwest Concrete & Materials

Immediate Past President
Dawn Bicknell-Reiser - Kaw Valley Bank

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Lisa Walker - Kansas Office of Early Childhood

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Jordan McKnight - Boys & Girls Club of Manhattan

Marisol Marcelo - Brennan-Mathena Funeral Home

Kelly Trussell - City of Topeka

Casey Vigus - State Farm

2025 Child Care Aware® of Eastern Kansas Staff

Chief Executive Officer
Sarah Elsen

Accountant
Diana Ingram-Cantrell

Special Project Coordinator
Melissa Mosher

Marketing & Communications Coordinator
Julie Scott

Community Outreach & Engagement Coordinator
Rhianna Nelson

Family Services Manager
Nancy Rohr

Resource Specialists
Lori Boos (Team Lead)

Provider Services Managers
Michelle Gilbert, Talia Juiliano-Myers

Data Specialist
Holly Wehner

Early Care & Education Specialists
Grace Cott, Debbie Hildebrandt (Co-Team Leads), Karin Richmond, Marie Treichel, Deana Turner

Program Support Specialist
Stephanie Prue

Professional Development Specialists
Dawn Brown, Kari Cronister, Mary Murphy

Parent Resource Specialists
Jane Redger (Team Lead), Ashley Buss, Jennie Heim

Regional Community Consultants
Deb Danielson, Kristina Griffee

2025 Financial Overview

The Resources Behind Our Story

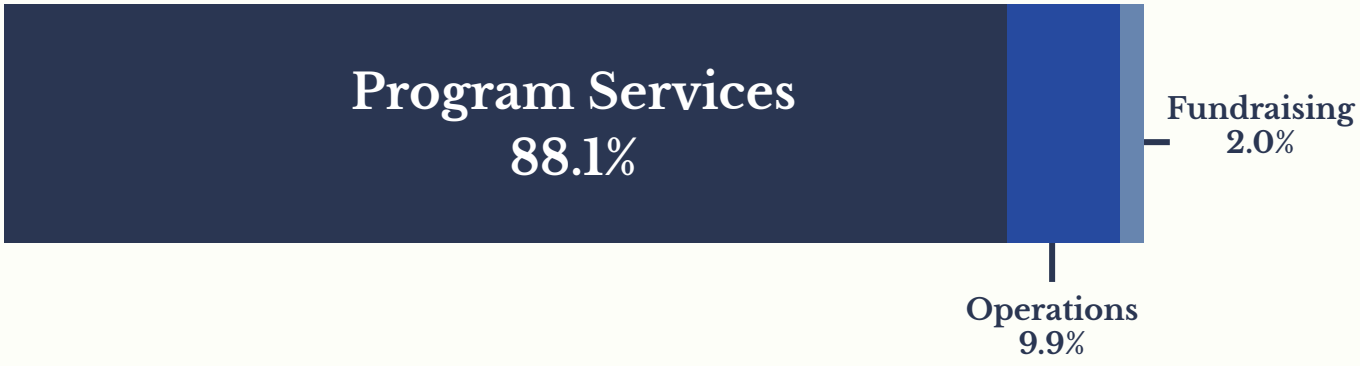
Total Revenue
$1,844,173

Total Expenses
$1,885,253

Where Our Funding Came From



How Our Resources Were Used



Every Story Gives Life to Another

As we look ahead, Child Care Aware® of Eastern Kansas remains committed to helping families access quality child care, strengthening the professionals who provide it, and building communities where children have opportunities to thrive.

Every year brings new beginnings, new opportunities and new stories waiting to be told. The pages of 2025 may be complete, but the stories they helped shape are far from over.

Help write the next chapter. Your support helps create stronger beginnings for children, families, and early childhood educators.



To Be Continued...

Sarah Elsen
Chief Executive Officer
Child Care Aware® of Eastern Kansas



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