



When Early Childhood Works, We All Work

Pulse plan guides region toward affordable, accessible child care

A new plan created by Pulse at the W.E. Upjohn Institute puts southwest Michigan on the path toward more affordable and accessible child care. The comprehensive plan follows an expansive survey and engagement with partners representing all facets of the child care landscape.

In 2023, Pulse received one of 16 Regional Child Care Planning Grants from the Early Childhood Investment Corporation, the state's focal point for early childhood issues. The \$150,000 grant tasked Pulse with [leading the planning process](#) for the region covering Berrien, Branch, Calhoun, Cass, Kalamazoo, St. Joseph and Van Buren counties.

The plan addresses a workforce crisis as complex as it is pressing: families need child care so they can work but don't earn enough to afford child care. At the same time, jobs in child care don't pay enough to ensure a stable workforce.

"Child care is a wicked problem that affects the entire labor market," said Pulse Co-Director Kathy Szenda Wilson. "Teachers can't afford to stay and families can't afford to pay."

Pulse focused on changing the systems that hold the problem in place, engaging partners from each sector affected by child care affordability and availability: municipalities, funders, employers, childcare business owners, policy makers and those involved in economic, community and workforce development. The new report offers recommendations for each.

Key to the plan is the recommendation to launch implementation teams in each county. To that end, Pulse has identified partners in each county who will lead efforts in their communities and secured \$250,000 in private funding to train and hire implementation coaches and facilitators for each team.

"The child care crisis affects every community in our region but each faces its own challenges," said Pulse Co-Director Maria Ortiz Borden. "The locally led implementation teams ensure that the solutions come from within, and are specifically responsive to, each community's unique needs."

Pulse will start training these positions in August and has already started on other initiatives, such as incorporating child care into the state's [Redevelopment Ready Communities](#) framework and supporting partners across the state in their convening of business leaders through "CEO Roundtables."

"Child care has sizable benefits for local economic development," said Tim Bartik, senior economist with the Upjohn Institute. "In the short-run, child care enables parents to work in better full-time jobs or go back to school. In the long-run, the skills these parents get from greater work experience and educational attainment will increase these families' earnings. In addition, high-quality child care will help these children as adults get more advanced education and better jobs."



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“With higher productivity for parents and these former child participants, greater availability of high-quality child care will make the [entire local economy](#) more productive. Businesses will be better able to introduce new technologies and compete in the national and global economy, which will enable higher local job growth and broadly shared increases in local earnings per capita.”

The plan is titled “When Early Childhood Works, We All Work, Southwest Michigan’s 2024 Comprehensive Child Care Plan.”