

**FINAL REPORT**

# Occupational Training & Child Care Program



Key results and findings of the Advancing Cities Initiative

Grant Awarded November 1, 2020  
Completed December 31, 2024

## Project Summary

Access to affordable and high-quality child care is a critical workforce issue, particularly for low-income families striving to enter middle-income careers. According to the Oregon 2024 Self-Sufficiency Standard, in Multnomah County, one adult with one preschool aged child needs to earn \$81,600 a year. Recognizing this challenge, Worksystems, in partnership with JPMorgan Chase's Advancing Cities initiative, launched the Occupational Training and Child Care (OTCC) program to integrate child care support with workforce development efforts.

The \$1 million Advancing Cities grant funds the OTCC program provides subsidized child care and childcare navigation support, enabling low-income parents to enroll in occupational skills training and transition into full-time employment. The grant supports the Early Childhood Education (ECE) workforce by expanding training opportunities for aspiring child care professionals. A Family Navigator, embedded within Multnomah County's Child Care Resource & Referral (CCR&R) agency, plays a critical role in helping parents access child care resources, navigate subsidy programs, and transition into stable employment.

### ***Key objectives and outcomes:***

#### ***Jobs & Skills Development***

- 90** individuals to receive occupational skills training with child care support.
- 60** participants to earn credentials, certifications, or licensure.
- 73** individuals to be placed into full-time employment with an average hourly wage of \$17.00.
- 87%** of graduates remain in employment 90-days or more.
- 25** or more employers engaged to support job placement.

#### ***Child Care Access & Family Support:***

- 180** children in poverty to gain access to early childhood development programs.
- 50** families to receive housing support during training and employment transitions.

This white paper serves as an evaluation of the Advancing Cities grant-funded program, documenting the impact, successes, and challenges. Drawing from quantitative data, participant interviews, and stakeholder insights, this report examines how integrating child care support with workforce initiatives improves economic mobility for families. It also explores barriers encountered during implementation, lessons learned, and recommendations for sustaining and scaling these efforts.

By highlighting the progress and ongoing challenges of this initiative, this report aims to inform policymakers, workforce development agencies, and child care advocates of strategies to create a more equitable and accessible workforce system.

Worksystems would like to acknowledge the following partner for their valued contributions and support: Kris Smock Consulting who assisted in grant evaluation activities.

# Background

## Child Care Shortages and Workforce Barriers in the Portland Metro Region

Access to affordable, high-quality child care is a critical factor in workforce participation, particularly for low-income parents seeking career advancement. Oregon, and the Portland Metro region specifically, faces significant shortages in child care availability, making it difficult for parents to balance employment and caregiving responsibilities.

A child care desert is defined as a community with more than three children for every regulated child care slot. According to the Oregon State University's Oregon Child Care Deserts 2022 report, 35 of 36 counties in Oregon are child care deserts for infants and toddlers, and 18 counties remain deserts for preschool-age children. The Portland Metro region is no exception.

### Clackamas County

20% of infants and toddlers and 32% of preschool-aged children have access, some of the lowest in the region.

### Multnomah County

26% of infants and toddlers and 50% of preschool-aged children have access to child care.

### Washington County

23% of infants and toddlers and 43% of preschool-aged children have access to child care.

## The Cost of Child Care in the Portland Metro Region

Even when child care is available, affordability is a barrier for many families. The 2022 Oregon Child Care Market Price Study found that child care costs in Oregon are among the highest in the nation, often exceeding the cost of rent or college tuition.



Infant care in the Portland Metro area costs an average of \$2,500 per month, or \$30,000 per year.



Toddler care costs exceed \$2,100 per month, making it unaffordable for many low and middle-income families.



The average cost of full-time care for a preschooler is \$1,167 to \$1,680 per month, depending on the provider and location

For families earning at or below the median family income, these costs are unsustainable, forcing parents to leave the workforce, rely on informal care, or delay their own training and education.

Programs like Employment Related Day Care (ERDC) and Preschool for All aim to offset these costs, but demand far exceeds availability, and many families remain on long waitlists.

## Workforce Shortages and the Impact on Economic Mobility

The child care workforce crisis is a significant factor contributing to Oregon's child care shortages, particularly in the Portland Metro area. Child care workers face low wages, financial instability, and unpredictable work conditions, leading to high turnover rates and worker burnout.

A 2023 survey by Portland State University found that over 41% of parents in Oregon reported that lack of child care negatively impacted their employment<sup>1</sup>. The inability to access reliable and affordable child care disproportionately affects low-income workers, women, and people of color, forcing them to leave the workforce or limit their hours, further exacerbating economic inequality.

The child care workforce in Oregon remains one of the lowest-paid sectors, despite the essential nature of the work. According to the 2024 Oregon Public Broadcasting report, child care workers in Oregon earn an average of \$15-\$18 per hour, significantly lower than what's needed to sustain a living wage.

In-home and non-traditional hours child care providers play a crucial role in supporting parents who work in health care, retail, manufacturing, and other industries that require evening, overnight, or weekend shifts. Oregon State University's College of Health report in 2022<sup>2</sup> found that child care providers are leaving the field at alarming rates:



Since 1999, Oregon has lost over 26,000 small in-home child care slots, a two-third decline in capacity, while larger in-home programs only grew by 10,000 slots.



Only 8% of child care centers in Oregon offer care outside the traditional 8 AM - 5 PM schedule, leaving many working parents without viable options.

Providers who continue to offer care during early mornings, evenings, or weekends often face unpredictable hours, unstable income, and no compensation for overtime work. Many providers report providing care far beyond their contracted hours to accommodate parents whose employers change their schedules last-minute.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.pdx.edu/social-work/news/oregon-lacks-child-care-meet-family-needs>

<sup>2</sup> [Oregon's Child Care Deserts 2022](#)

## Partners and Roles

The OTCC program, funded by JPMorgan Chase's Advancing Cities grant, is a multi-agency collaboration working to address the intersection of child care access and workforce development. The key partners in this initiative include:

### 1. Worksystems (Lead Organization)

<b>Role</b>	<p>Coordinates local public workforce systems and project lead for grant.</p> <p>Manages the Economic Opportunity Program (EOP) and coordinates workforce development efforts ensuring that participants receive career coaching, occupational skills training, and access to support services.</p> <p>EOP is a suite of program services offered through community-based organizations using long-term, relationship-based career coaching and employment resources to achieve stability, job readiness, and sustainable careers.</p> <p>The EOP model serves adults 18 years of age and up. Worksystems also contracts with multiple agencies to serve young adults aged 16 – 24 years old.</p>
<b>Key Contribution</b>	<p>Leads the integration of child care support into workforce initiatives, aligning services with regional workforce needs.</p>

### 2. Child Care Resource & Referral (CCR&R) Partners: Multnomah County CCR&R – Mount Hood Community College and Washington County CCR&R – Community Action Organization

<b>Role</b>	<p>Provide child care navigation services, helping parents secure child care placements, navigate subsidy programs, and process child care provider payments. They ensure that parents in workforce training can access reliable child care resources.</p>
<b>Key Contribution</b>	<p>Operate the Family Navigator, who works directly with OTCC participants to ensure they receive child care support tailored to their workforce training schedules.</p>

### 3. Aligned Partner Network (APN) – Community Based Career Coaching

<b>Role</b>	<p>Provides a strategic connection to the public workforce system that addresses poverty by breaking down barriers and providing pathways.</p> <p>The APN is comprised of community-based organizations connecting job seekers to education opportunities, quality, living-wage employment, and support services. to training, wraparound services, and career-track employment.</p> <p>A large part of the APN network is the Economic Opportunity Program (EOP) Model. Funded primarily by County and City resources—leveraging Worksystems funding.</p> <p>Each organization employs dedicated career coaches who recruit participants, work with participants to develop career plans, connect them to skills training, and provide access to support services such as child care and housing assistance.</p>
<b>Key Contribution</b>	<p>Outreach to current EOP/APN caseload and prospective participants about child care resources. Referred participants in need of CCR&amp;R Family Navigator for enrollment in OTCC program. Supported participants during training and job search.</p>

### 4. A Home for Everyone (AHFE) EOP Career Coaching

<b>Role</b>	<p>Provides career coaching and housing support for EOP participants who are experiencing homelessness or housing insecurity.</p>
<b>Key Contribution</b>	<p>Ensures that parents participating in workforce training have stable housing so they can focus on their career development.</p>

### 5. WorkSource Portland Metro (American Job Center)

<b>Role</b>	<p>Connects OTCC participants to job training programs, hiring events, and employment opportunities across high-demand industries.</p>
<b>Key Contribution</b>	<p>Ensures that program participants gain access to employer partnerships and career-track jobs.</p>

## Key Initiatives and Activities

### Occupational Training and Child Care (OTCC) Program

The Occupational Training and Child Care (OTCC) program is the core component of the Advancing Cities initiative, designed to address workforce shortages while ensuring that working parents have access to reliable and affordable child care. Through this program, participants receive comprehensive support, including career training, financial assistance, and child care services. Key elements of the OTCC program include:

<b>Family Navigator</b>	<p>The Family Navigator serves as a critical link between workforce participants and child care services, ensuring that families can seamlessly access the support they need to engage in training and employment. The Family Navigator:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Provides individualized guidance to help families identify suitable child care options.</li><li>• Assists with the application process for child care payments.</li><li>• Coordinates with child care providers to ensure placements align with parents' work schedules.</li><li>• Offers ongoing support to address any challenges related to child care.</li></ul>
<b>Occupational Skills Training Scholarships</b>	<p>Scholarships are a key component of the OTCC program, reducing financial barriers for individuals pursuing career training in high-demand fields. These scholarships:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Cover tuition, fees, and related expenses for occupational skills training.</li><li>• Support a range of training programs in health care, early childhood education, and skilled trades.</li><li>• Complement additional financial aid options, minimizing out-of-pocket costs for participants.</li></ul>
<b>Child Care Support Service Payments</b>	<p>To further alleviate financial burdens on working families, the OTCC program provides direct child care support service payments. These payments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Subsidize child care costs for parents engaged in job training or workforce programs.</li><li>• Ensure access to quality child care providers that meet licensing and safety standards.</li><li>• Allow parents to focus on skill development and career advancement without the stress of child care instability.</li></ul>

## **Early Childhood Education (ECE) Workforce Initiatives**

Recognizing the urgent need for qualified early childhood educators, the Advancing Cities initiative, combined with other Worksystems funding, invested in workforce development strategies that strengthen the ECE talent pipeline. The following initiatives play a crucial role in expanding career pathways in early education:

### **1. *Preschool for All***

Preschool for All is a county-led initiative that aims to increase access to high-quality preschool programs while simultaneously building a diverse and well-trained early education workforce. This initiative:

- Provides tuition-free preschool slots for families with young children.
- Raises early childhood education jobs wages and benefits to match those of elementary school teachers.
- Partners with community colleges and training programs to develop a sustainable workforce pipeline.

### **2. *Work Experiences – West Side Works***

To provide hands-on learning and real-world application of training, the OTCC program and ECE workforce initiatives integrate work experience opportunities. These experiences:

- Offer paid internships in child care centers and preschool settings.
- Provide structured mentorship and coaching from experienced educators.
- Enable participants to apply theoretical learning in practical environments.
- Enhance job readiness by building essential skills and competencies needed in early education careers.

These targeted investments in workforce development and child care accessibility help bridge the gap between economic opportunity and family stability, creating a more inclusive and resilient workforce system.

### **3. *Careers Dislocated Worker Grant (DWG)***

The Careers Dislocated Worker Grant (DWG) focuses on supporting individuals who have been displaced from previous employment by offering training and career transition opportunities in early childhood education. This initiative:

- Funds tuition and training for displaced workers interested in becoming early educators.
- Provides paid internships and on-the-job training in licensed child care facilities.
- Assists in credential attainment for Child Development Associate (CDA) and other ECE certifications.
- Connects program participants with employment opportunities in preschool and child care settings.



## Impact of the OTCC Program

The following data highlights the measurable impact of the Occupational Training and Child Care (OTCC) program, demonstrating its effectiveness in improving workforce participation, child care access, and economic mobility for participants.

### Participant Enrollment and Completion Rates

*Tracking the number of individuals who enrolled in and successfully completed occupational training programs provides insight into program reach and retention.*

- **Individuals receive occupational skills training with child care support:**

The program supported 90 occupational training starts by 77 participants<sup>3</sup>. Four participants received the OST in the form of Work Experiences. Healthcare is a large employer in our region, and that was reflected in the number of participants pursuing trainings like Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) and Dental Assistant. Commercial Driver's License (CDL) trainings have been in high demand for our populations as our participants see CDL as a short training that leads directly into a livable wage career and that is reflected in the numbers below as well.

Training Type	Trainings Started
Construction	4
Healthcare	37
Information Technology	3
Manufacturing	3
Transportation	22
Education	4
Other	17
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>90</b>

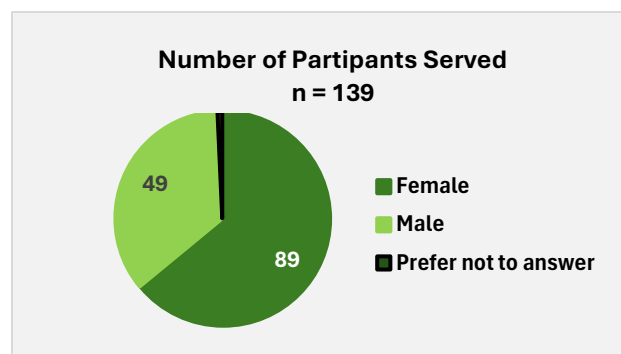
- **Occupational Skills Training completion rate: 88.3%.** Of 77 participants, 7 did not complete successfully, and 2 are still in the training program. 88.3% of the 77 individuals that started training have completed it successfully with a degree or certificate at the date of this report.
- **Work Experience completion rate: 100%.** 4 participants started and completed their work experiences in ECE through the Westside Works Program.

### Demographic Breakdown of Participants Served

*Understanding the demographic composition of program participants provides insights into equity, access, and the program's reach within different communities.*

- **Gender Representation:**

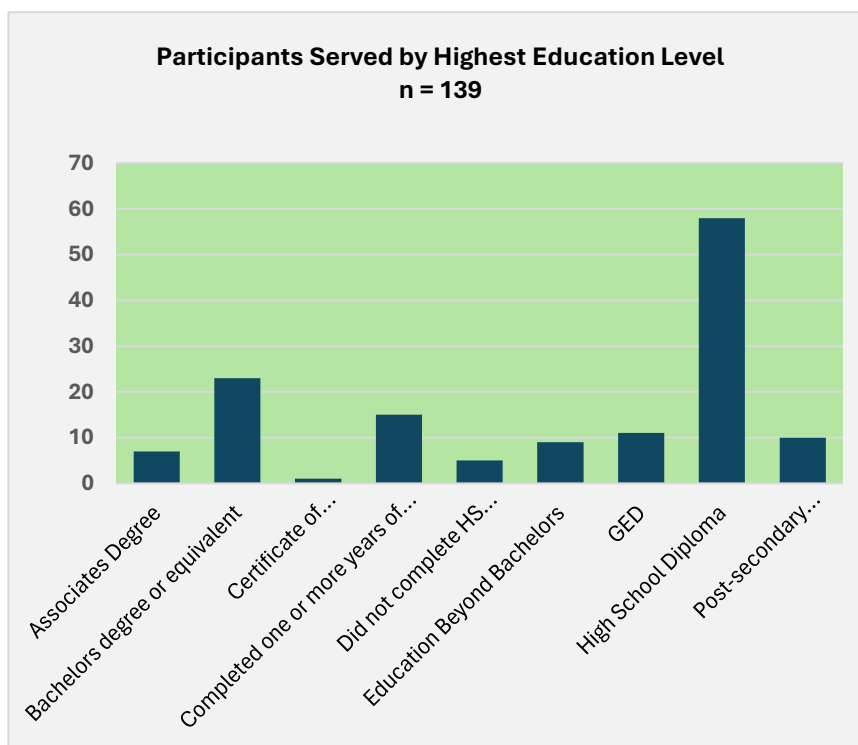
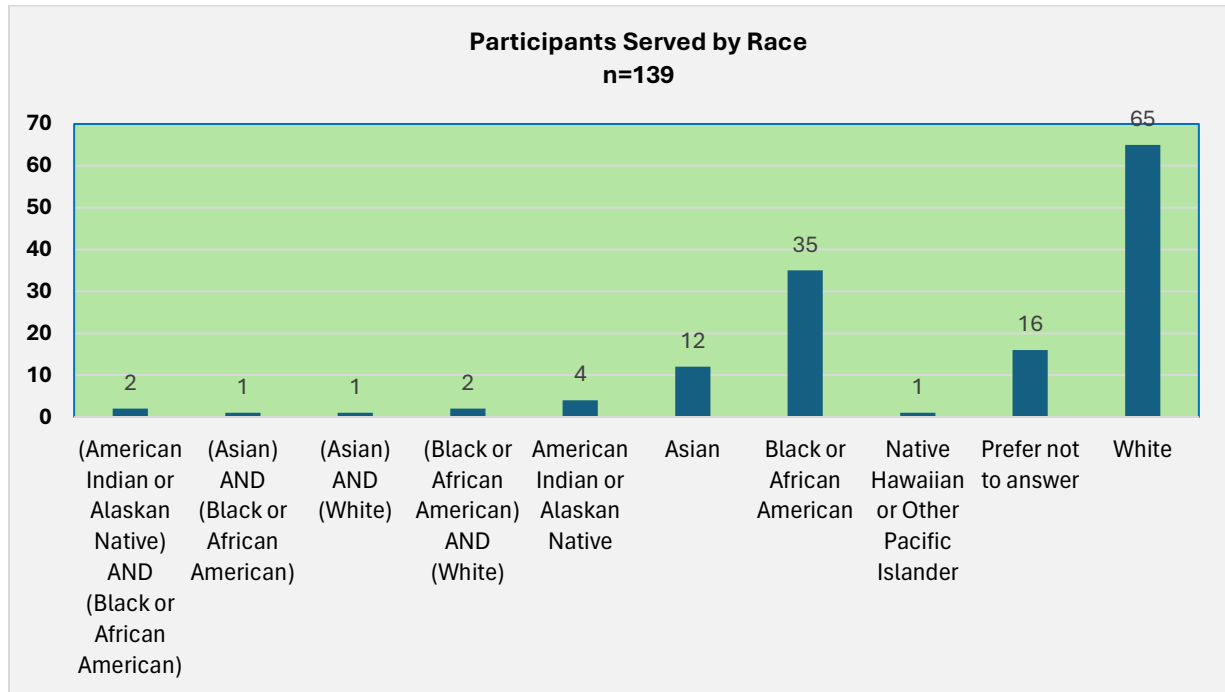
64% of all participants served identified their sex as female.



<sup>3</sup> Participants have the opportunity to pursue multiple occupational trainings during enrollment in order to further their career.

### Ethnicity and Race Distribution:

42% of the participants served in the OTCC program identified as a person of color. According to the 2020 US Census for Portland, OR, 30% of people identified as a person of color. The OTCC program worked closely with career coaches from culturally specific organizations across the region to reach the most marginalized communities to offer this service.



### Education Levels

Predominantly the people who were served most by this program had not completed any degree programs through college. This was expected as the goal of this program was to find people who need training to start or advance in their career towards a livable wage in a quality job.

## Employment and Wage Outcomes

Measuring employment placement and wage increases among program participants illustrates the program's effectiveness in supporting career advancement.

<b>Number of individuals enrolled who gained employment</b>  <b>97</b> individuals reported finding employment after being served by OTCC.  <b>139</b> individuals were served by OTCC funding over the life of the grant.  <b>69.8%</b> <sup>4</sup> employment placement rate	<b>Average wage at employment</b>  <b>\$24.08</b> per hour average wage for participants served by OTCC.  Of the 51 individuals reporting wage data, 44 of those participants (86.3%) were making over \$17.00.  11 participants left the program making over \$30.00 per hour.
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## Child Care Utilization and Impact

Assessing the accessibility and use of child care services through the program helps evaluate its role in supporting working parents.

- **Number of participants receiving child care assistance:** The OTCC program supported by the Mount Hood Community College Childcare Resource & Referral team was able to support 55 individuals with childcare navigation and assistance during the life of the grant. Of the 55 supported, 36 individuals were placed into a child care provider with costs covered by the OTCC program, while the remaining 19 individuals were assisted in finding free or supported childcare through other local programs that they may have not been able to find without the support of the Family Navigator position.
- **Childcare Support Dollars Spent:** The OTCC program provided 36 families with \$292,607 in direct payments to childcare providers to support their children during program enrollment. This averages out to \$8,128 per family during the program.

## Other Program Impacts

Understanding the broader economic and social benefits of the program provides insight into its systemic impact.

- **Number of families receiving housing support during OTCC enrollment:** 20 families were able to be dual-enrolled in Worksystems-funded rent-assistance program to receive support in finding affordable housing and potentially rent assistance payments. The 20 participants co-enrolled in OTCC and the rent-assistance career coaching program received over \$19k in support services including rent and utilities to maintain stable housing during the program.

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<sup>4</sup> This number is likely lower than actual results as some participants do not report their jobs, and some participants were still in job search or training when the grant period ended.

## Progress Towards Systems Alignment

One of the primary goals of the Advancing Cities Initiative is to create a more integrated and aligned workforce and child care system that better serves families, jobseekers, and early childhood educators. This section examines the progress made in achieving greater coordination between workforce development programs and child care services, highlighting key milestones and partnerships.

A key achievement of the initiative has been the integration of child care support within workforce development programs. Historically, workforce development services and child care resources have operated in silos, creating barriers for parents seeking employment and training opportunities. Through strategic partnerships and funding from the JP Morgan Advancing Cities grant, we have made progress in bridging these gaps:



**Embedding Child Care Navigators:** The inclusion of Family Navigators within Multnomah County's Child Care Resource & Referral (CCR&R) agency has facilitated direct support for jobseekers who need child care assistance. These navigators help families identify and secure affordable, high-quality child care while participating in workforce programs.



**Coordinating Workforce and Child Care Services:** Worksystems and partner organizations have aligned their career coaching and training programs with available child care resources, creating a wealth of knowledge among the network in navigating the resources that will continue long after the grant expires.



**Expanding Supportive Services:** Funding from the grant has allowed for expanded child care subsidies. Although this funding is temporary, it did allow the network to provide expanded childcare support during the grant life. This project will also serve as a demonstration for future funding pursuits around child care support.



**Established Early Childhood Education Sector Lead:** To address workforce shortages in the child care sector, the initiative has focused on strengthening pathways for early childhood educators. As a result of the work with the Advancing Cities Grant and Preschool for All, Worksystems recognized the early childhood education sector as an emerging industry in the Portland-Metro Region. This resulted in more focused resources for Occupational Skills Training and Work Experiences in ECE. The results are:

- **Developing ECE Career Pathways:** The program provided career coaching and training for individuals interested in entering or advancing in the ECE workforce, with a focus on serving communities that have faced barriers to higher education and employment opportunities. Programs like Early Learning Works have specifically supported people of color and English Language Learners. 55% of the enrollees identified as an English Language Learner and 73% identified as a person of color. West Side Works has also been able to support refugees from Ukraine in large numbers. 53 interns have been placed through the Early Learning Works program, 13 of those 53 are Ukrainian Refugees<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.oregonlive.com/politics/2025/02/the-war-in-ukraine-tore-them-from-home-preschool-for-all-provided-a-fresh-start.html>

- **Collaborative Training Programs:** Partnerships with community colleges and training providers have expanded access to professional development, certification programs, and apprenticeships in the ECE field. The OTCC program was able to partner with Clackamas Community College to support ECE students waiting for scholarships to attend classes. This was especially effective because Clackamas Community College is one of a few colleges in the nation that offers online Spanish ECE courses with the complete curriculum in Spanish and taught by a native Spanish speaker.
- **Employer Engagement:** Engaging child care providers and employers in discussions on workforce needs has led to stronger collaboration between workforce agencies and early learning centers. As a part of the Preschool for All collaboration, the OTCC program was able to gather direct feedback from child care providers about their workforce needs. Employer engagement included working with large childcare providers like KinderCare and small individual owned childcare providers. 2 of the Westside Works participants supported by JP Morgan Advancing Cities funds did their internship at the German International School in Beaverton, OR which offers German and Mandarin immersion programs from age 2 through middle school.

While programmatic changes have been critical, progress at the policy and systems level has also been a focus of this initiative. Some key advances include:



**Advocacy for Sustainable Child Care Funding:** Collaborative efforts with policymakers and advocacy groups have emphasized the need for sustained public funding to support child care affordability and workforce development. Worksystems work on the OTCC project helped introduce the workforce system to the ECE field and eventually lead to Worksystems becoming a significant partner in Multnomah County's Preschool for All work. In February of 2024, Worksystems was also invited to speak on a community panel for the State of Oregon's Early Learning Council. Prior to the JP Morgan Advancing Cities Grant, Worksystems had not been involved with the Early Learning Council.



**Cross-Agency Collaboration:** Increased data sharing between workforce agencies, CCR&Rs, and community-based organizations has improved service coordination and reduced redundancy in program delivery. According to CCR&Rs, participating in the OTCC program has helped them build relationships with more child care providers in Multnomah County. Once CCR&R has contracted with a provider, it makes it simpler to connect additional families with that provider. While the OTCC program is unique in terms of eligibility requirements for families, working with OTCC participants has helped CCR&R to be able to grow its contacts with providers, which will benefit participants in all the programs that it supports.

# Challenges and Lessons Learned

## Barriers to Implementation

### 1. Covid 19 Pandemic

One of the biggest hurdles in early implementation was attempting to launch this program in 2020 and 2021. All the providers involved were shifting how they were doing work, going from almost exclusively in-person to completely remote. There were also many delays related to the pandemic in hiring staff to support the grant. There were also huge impacts to the preschool workforce. The State of Oregon Employment Department through QualityInfo.org estimated that just one month after COVID lockdowns started the number of jobs in childcare went from 13,000 to 8,400 across the state of Oregon and is slowly recovering since then.

### 2. Staffing Shortages in Child Care

One of the major challenges faced during the implementation of the Occupational Training and Child Care (OTCC) program was the ongoing staffing shortages in both early childhood education (ECE) and workforce development services. The demand for qualified child care professionals far exceeded supply, leading to delays in program expansion and limited availability of high-quality child care for participating families.

*“Some days, I ran into some hiccups. One [day the childcare provider] were short staffed so after-school care was closed, so I had to switch my schedule so that way I would be able to get them when they get off the bus.”*  
– stated one OTCC participant

### 3. Payment Delays and Administrative Hurdles

A significant bottleneck in the program stemmed from delays in processing payments to child care providers. Many providers operate on thin financial margins, making timely payments critical for sustaining operations. Oregon Child Care Resource & Referral (CCR&R) has a specific process and requirements that a child care provider must meet to create a contract with CCR&R. This caused a few delays and hardships for parents and providers.

First, child care providers had to meet licensing and insurance requirements and complete specific paperwork. For small businesses serving just a few children, this was burdensome or impossible to meet. We had multiple childcare providers who were not able to contract with CCR&R because they couldn't meet the insurance thresholds. Conversely, many parents enrolled in the program were happy about the insurance and safety requirements because they felt peace of mind knowing that the child care providers were being vetted.

Second, the contracting process could take 4 -6 weeks to complete. The OTCC program was able to back pay to the original contracting date, but some providers were nervous or unwilling to provide services until payment was made. Some providers were able to wait for payments, but a few providers were not able to. This required the participant to work longer with the Family Navigator to find another childcare provider that may not have been as good of as fit.

Finally, many parents found that having friends or family provide care for their children was the best option for them to get childcare while they pursued training or employment. The OTCC

program did not have the ability to support this type of childcare due to insurance requirements, and many participants decided not to enroll because of this.

#### **4. Cost of Childcare**

The OTCC program was able to support 36 families with childcare support at an average cost of \$8,128 per family. When Worksystems applied for JP Morgan Advancing Cities funding in 2020, Worksystems calculated that costs would be around \$4,444 per family. A study by Oregon State University found that prices increased by 15-37% since 2020 and an article published by Oregon Public Broadcasting in February of 2024 stated that the average monthly cost for infant child care costs \$2,500.<sup>6</sup> This increased cost of childcare limited the OTCC program in the number of families it could ultimately serve with child care support funds.

#### **5. Gaps in Child Care Coverage and Lack of Back-Up Care**

Many participants faced challenges finding child care that aligned with non-traditional work hours. While the OTCC program aimed to increase access, the lack of flexible and overnight child care options created obstacles for parents working in industries such as healthcare, hospitality, and manufacturing. Additionally, the absence of reliable back-up care forced some parents to miss work or training sessions when their primary provider was unavailable.

*“I’m trying to find back up care just in case, because anything could happen at school or my kids could get sick. I’ve been coming [to the apprenticeship] every single day, but that’s the biggest obstacle I have right now.”*  
– OTCC participant

#### **6. Limited Awareness and Accessibility of Services**

Despite efforts to promote the program, many eligible families and job seekers remained unaware of the resources available to them. Outreach efforts faced difficulties in reaching historically underserved communities due to language barriers, digital access limitations, and distrust of government or institutional programs. Additionally, some child care providers were hesitant to engage with the program due to uncertainty about the administrative process or concerns over sustainable funding.

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.opb.org/article/2024/02/01/oregon-child-care-affordability-access/See>

## Participant Challenges

### 1. Balancing Work, Training, and Child Care Responsibilities

Many program participants struggled to balance work, training, and parenting responsibilities. The transition to full-time employment or participation in workforce training programs required significant adjustments, often exacerbated by unpredictable child care availability and transportation challenges.

### 2. Financial Strain Despite Subsidies

While the program provided financial assistance for child care, the overall cost of living remained a significant burden for many participants. There were also concerns about how to support their child care costs once the program ended. For example, one participant was going to face a multi-month gap between the end of the OTCC program and when their child was eligible for Head Start.

The OTCC participants also face the potential benefits cliff. As seen below, the self-sufficiency wage for one adult and one preschooler is around \$40/hr. Even with support of the OTCC program and other workforce development services, participants are leaving the program only making around \$25/hr but with a decrease in government benefits like food assistance.

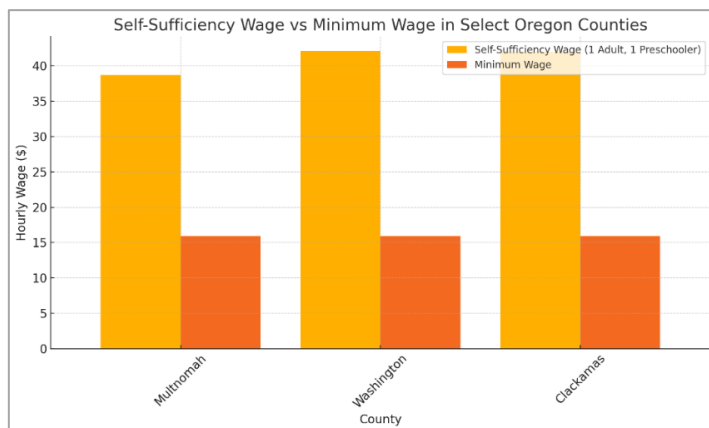


Figure 1 - Oregon 2024 Self-Sufficiency Standard Report

## Collaboration and Systems-Level Hurdles

### 1. Navigating Multi-Agency Coordination

The program required coordination among multiple stakeholders, including workforce agencies, child care providers, community-based organizations, and local government entities. Differences in policy structures, funding cycles, and reporting requirements sometimes created inefficiencies in service delivery.

### 2. Challenges in Scaling and Sustainability

While the OTCC model demonstrated promising results, scaling the program to meet the needs of a larger population proved difficult. Funding constraints and limited availability of ECE professionals made it challenging to expand services beyond the initial target population. The long-term sustainability of the program remains a concern, particularly in the absence of continued external funding. Worksystems offers support services for many expenses including child care, but the high cost of child care is beyond the scope of what a typical support services budget can provide.



# Recommendations

## **1. Funding for Family Navigation staff**

The process of finding quality childcare in our region is extremely time-consuming, frustrating and opaque. One of the key takeaways from the OTCC effort was having an expert in child care navigation by itself provides relief to low-income families. The Navigator helps reach out to providers, finds slots and assists with paperwork. Creating dedicated staff in our region and others could improve the process of finding quality child care and potentially help child care providers reach out to families to fill open slots.

## **2. The Need for Streamlined Administrative Processes**

Reducing paperwork and simplifying eligibility verification processes can help minimize delays in payment and service access, making it easier for families and providers to participate in the program. One of the biggest resources a family has for childcare are family, friends, or other small childcare providers to supplement or completely fulfill childcare needs. Unfortunately, many of these providers can't meet the requirements to contract with CCR&R or other similar organizations to receive funding.

Small childcare providers and friends/family play a critical role in the child care landscape and provide more opportunities for the parents to succeed in the workforce. Systems need to be developed to be able to pay or reward these small providers.

## **3. Expanding Employer Partnerships for Child Care Solutions**

Engaging employers to co-invest in child care solutions, such as on-site child care or subsidies for employees, can help address workforce shortages and increase stability for working parents.

## **4. Investing in Workforce Pipelines for ECE Professionals**

Addressing staffing shortages in child care requires intentional investment in training, certification, and career pathways for ECE professionals. Providing incentives such as tuition assistance, stipends, and mentorship programs can attract and retain qualified child care workers. The Westside Works program was an excellent example of how incentives and exposure to the ECE job can lead to high-quality caregivers. Many of the Westside Works program participants were not sure ECE was for them but providing them with a paid position was incentive enough for them to explore the career and pursue it long-term.

## **5. Enhancing Outreach and Community Engagement**

Targeted outreach efforts, including multilingual materials and trusted community representatives, are crucial to ensuring equitable access to program resources.

## **6. Developing Flexible Child Care Models**

Expanding non-traditional child care options, including extended hours, home-based care networks, and emergency back-up care solutions, can better align with the diverse needs of working families.

By addressing these challenges and applying these lessons, future workforce and child care integration efforts can build upon the successes of the OTCC program and create more sustainable, scalable solutions for families in need.

## Participant Success Stories

### Tracy

Before enrolling in OTCC, Tracy was at home caring for her two children and wasn't able to work because she didn't have child care. She had signed up for several career training programs in the past that she wasn't able to take because she couldn't afford to pay for child care while she was in training. "I dropped a lot of classes I was supposed to take over the years because I didn't have the child care."

Enrolling in OTCC enabled Tracy to launch a career in the healthcare field. "I have been able to access fully paid child care for my children which has given me time to plan and search for resources and meet my current goals in health care." Tracy graduated from the Career Works Medical Program in May 2023 and then

enrolled in a Sterile Processing Technician program, a more specialized role. This training will enable her to work in specialized clinical positions that pay more and have more flexible hours. Her long-term career goal is to become a nurse.

During her training, Tracy's children were enrolled in a KinderCare center near her home. She appreciates that her child care subsidy covers the hours that she is in training as well as the time to commute to classes and do her homework. "I'm grateful for the opportunity because it allowed me to take my classes and complete my assignments. When I complete training, I will be able to obtain employment."

### Kent

Kent was working at a homeless shelter earning \$15-17 an hour before enrolling in OTCC. His children went to day care when he was earning enough to cover the costs, but he frequently had to pull them out because he couldn't afford it. When his children weren't in day care, either he or their mother would have to stop working to take care of them.

Seeking opportunities to increase his income, Kent entered career training for a Class B Commercial Driver's License. Support from OTCC enabled him to keep his children in the same day care program but more consistently, allowing him to complete his

training and providing coverage while he was looking for a job. "Help with the child care helped me to focus on my school and training. It meant I could just focus on school and not stress about other things."

Kent is now working as a dump truck driver earning \$25 an hour. His children are still enrolled at the same day care program, which he is able to pay for with his increased earnings. He's hoping to complete training for a Class A Commercial Driver's License in the near future, which will allow him to earn more money and will open up more year-round job opportunities.

### Breanna

Before participating in OTCC, Breanna was receiving child care support through the State of Oregon's Employment Related Day Care program (ERDC). She had a part-time job with unstable hours, but she wasn't able to pursue career training because she didn't have child care support outside of her work hours. When she was laid off from her job, she lost her ERDC coverage.

Breanna's case worker at Central City Concern connected her with OTCC so that she could enroll in career training to qualify for more stable employment. With support from OTCC, she completed a Peer Wellness Specialist training course. Realizing there were additional steps she would need to take after the training that she wasn't sure she could do, she

switched career paths and enrolled in a warehouse and assembly apprenticeship program. The apprenticeship provides paid work along with career training for three to six months.

While Breanna is in the apprenticeship program, OTCC is paying for her children to attend the before-and after-care program at their school. "I appreciate the hours I'm getting coverage because child care is very expensive. . . . The good thing about it is it's very convenient because it's at their school so I don't have to find transportation and it's close to where I live." Her goal is to find stable, full-time employment after the apprenticeship ends with high enough wages that she can continue to pay for child care on her own.

## Westside Works – Work Experiences for ECE – Sherita & Aida

### Sherita

Sherita has a degree in business and worked at a non-profit for five years until her daughter was born. She started volunteering with children once she became a mom and realized she had a passion for early childhood education. She has been providing child care in her home for one to two children at a time but isn't able to expand beyond that in her current rental home. She decided to pursue training so that she could get a job in a child care center once her daughter begins kindergarten. "I've been working with kids for a long time and decided I should get a job doing what I love and what I'm doing anyway."

Sherita was excited to learn about West Side Works' ECE program from a posting on a Black Beaverton social media group. "This summer, I already took the classes on CPR, first aid, the state's online trainings to be certified. I was hoping that along with this training that would help me be able to be put in the system as a child care worker." Her goal is to complete her work experience placement by the fall which is when her daughter will begin kindergarten and then look for a job in a child care center that fits with her daughter's school schedule.

Needing a part-time placement to accommodate some pre-existing volunteer commitments, Sherita

was placed in the preschool program at the German International School. Her role is to assist teachers in the classroom with whatever support they need. She worked one day and enjoyed the experience but then faced an unexpected family emergency that required her to take temporary custody of her nephews. She had to put her placement on hold while she works to get her nephews stabilized. She is looking forward to resuming her placement once her family situation is resolved.

"Finding this program was a blessing. I can get 300 hours, my child care certificate, all of this while I'm still working on life. Hopefully by December I can get a job based on this experience."

Sherita hopes to become an assistant teacher and then eventually a teacher. She is interested in finding a job with hours that fit with her daughter's school schedule. She is earning \$17 an hour in her work experience placement and hopes to get closer to \$20 an hour eventually. That will be enough money to supplement her husband's full-time salary, although she acknowledges that without his income, she would not be able to make ends meet on an ECE salary.

### Aida

Aida worked for 15 years in the technology business in her country of origin before moving to the United States. Once her children were born, she became a stay-at-home mom and got involved in volunteer leadership roles focused on engaging young children in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) activities. She loved the work and decided she wanted to pursue a career in early childhood education. She learned about PCC's bilingual ECE program and applied for a scholarship to get her ECE certification.

Aida's long-term goal is to become a specialist teacher working with three- to five-year-olds on STEM related education. While many of her classmates have work experience in early childhood settings, she only has volunteer experience as a parent. "I was talking to my advisor and said I have classmates talking about their experience being a teacher, and for me my only experience is being a mom. How can I learn more about how to work with kids beyond what I'm learning

in the books?" She decided to enroll in West Side Works' ECE program to get practical experience applying what she is learning at PCC in the classroom.

Like Sherita, Aida needed a part-time placement to accommodate her existing volunteer commitments and was placed in the German International School. She works four hours a day as a floater to help the teacher and assistant teacher with whatever they need in the classroom. She helps the children with reading and coloring, supports the teachers with preparing for snack time and lunch, and helps to set up the classroom for nap time. The teachers have been welcoming and supportive, and she is enjoying getting to know the children.

"I'm really thankful for the opportunity to get the experience I didn't have. It's been amazing so I'm thankful for that. I'm hopeful it will give me the opportunity to find more doors in other places to keep practicing and learning to become a better teacher."

Aida aspires to become a STEM teacher for young children. She wants to be a specialist teacher so she can work part time and continue to be involved in her children's school and parenting. She recognizes that this career path will not provide a very high salary, but it will provide her with the flexibility she needs to balance work and parenting: "I know that teachers are not very well paid, so that gives me the idea that the income isn't going to be high. That's something that people, even my husband says, 'you have an engineering background, you can make more money doing what you did before. It makes no sense to me.' I say to him, 'I like doing this – this is what I want to do.' Also, I want to keep raising my kids. If I want to do both

things, I need to keep working part time like I'm doing right now."

For both participants, the ability to work part time and have flexible hours during their ECE placement was a significant benefit. They both needed work experience hours that would accommodate their own child care hours and their existing volunteer commitments. As Sherita put it, "I've been a stay-at-home mom for five years. West Side Works were able to accommodate my daughter's schedule, and I was grateful for a program that would work with my lifestyle that also gave me the opportunity to get some work experience."

## Conclusion

The Occupational Training & Child Care Initiative, funded by the JP Morgan Advancing Cities grant, has shown how important child care is for helping parents succeed in their jobs and careers. By making child care more available and affordable, the program has given more families the chance to work and train for better jobs.

Even with these successes, challenges remain. Many families still have trouble finding reliable child care, and costs are too high for many parents. The workforce development system does not have the funding available to maintain long-term child care resources for participants in need. The number of child care providers is too low, and many early childhood teachers leave their jobs because of low pay and limited career opportunities. To keep improving, communities need to invest in child care, update policies, and work together to create more solutions.

This initiative proves that child care is not just a family issue. It is a key part of a strong economy. Parents should not have to choose between working and taking care of their children. With ongoing support and smart policies, more families can benefit from programs like this, creating better opportunities for everyone.