K-State prof touts success of childcare efforts in Kansas

By Pat Melgares, K-State Research and Extension news service

MANHATTAN, Kan. – When parents can’t work because childcare is not available, their community suffers.

Bradford Wiles, a child development specialist at Kansas State University, recently conducted a survey of stay-at-home parents in several Kansas counties. He said the data show that nearly 75% of those who stay home with their children would go to work if they could find reliable childcare.

Further, their median annual income – if they were able to work – would be about $50,000.

“You’ve got this latent talent that’s sitting around that could be earning money for their families while generating economic assets for their employers and communities,” Wiles said.

Wiles was the featured speaker during the June 2 First Friday e-Call, a monthly online series hosted by K-State Research and Extension that helps to nurture small businesses and inspire entrepreneurship in Kansas. The online discussions, which routinely host dozens of Kansas citizens from the public and private sectors, are available free each month.

“Typically,” Wiles said, “the second largest expense for young families – beyond house expenses – is early childhood care and education. Why is that? Well, simply put, early care and education is like private school in the United States. And we’re asking people who likely are at their lowest earning power of their lifetime to pay out of pocket for expensive services.”

Wiles said it’s incumbent upon rural and urban communities to recognize the challenges faced by parents and establish systems that make childcare available and affordable. He said it doesn’t matter whether promoting childcare services is done to boost income, or whether it’s just a good thing for the local economy or the families themselves.
“Whatever your angle is, I’m good with that,” he said. “It doesn’t make any difference. At the end of the day, you’re investing in high quality early care and education, and that’s good for everybody.”

Wiles is director of the K-State lab, Applied Research in Child Health and Enhancing Resilience (ARCHER), which routinely conducts surveys related to child development in Kansas. He also regularly works with several Kansas organizations – Kansas Child Care Training Opportunities (KCCTO) and Child Care Aware of Kansas among them – to help communities conduct a needs assessment, gather resources and establish a plan for building childcare infrastructure.

Recent successes include creating 60 new spots for childcare each in Edwards County and Marion County, and 42 in Wichita County.

“So there are now 42 kids that are going to early care and education in Leoti, Kansas (Wichita County) who were not going to go before, and their caregivers (parents) can now join the workforce,” Wiles said.

More information on opportunities in Kansas, including grants and other funding, is available by contacting Wiles at 785-532-1939, or bwiles@ksu.edu. Information is also available on the ARCHER website.

Wiles’ June 2 talk and other First Friday presentations are available online from K-State Research and Extension.

-FOR PRINT PUBLICATION: Links used in this story
First Friday e-calls, www.ksre.k-state.edu/community/business/entrepreneurship


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