



\*\* This news release from K-State Research and Extension is available online at <https://ksre-learn.com/first-friday-hays-childcare>

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## **Hays groups join forces to support childcare providers**

First Friday speaker outlines success stories in northwest Kansas

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

MANHATTAN, Kan. – There’s still work to do, but an ambitious group of citizens and city officials in Hays have taken an innovative approach to addressing child care challenges in their region.

Sarah Wasinger, president and Chief Executive Officer with The Chamber in Hays Kansas, says the Ellis County Child Care Task Force – formed in 2021 – has been a driving force in providing affordable, quality childcare in northwest Kansas.

“Every community in Kansas is struggling with providing adequate child care,” Wasinger said. “In Ellis County, we knew very early on that (building) the work force was a very big (challenge) as is providing affordable and quality child care.”

Wasinger was the featured speaker during the Dec. 6 [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.

Buoyed by a grant from the [Bob and Pat Schmidt Foundation](#), the Ellis County Child Care Task Force formed in 2021 and set a goal to recruit providers for 700 new childcare spots in Ellis County. They had early success, reducing the number of openings to just a little more than 400, but recently lost seven in-home providers. Wasinger said the need is currently at 486 spots.

The task force has continued major efforts aimed at supporting those who want to open in-home childcare. Since 2021, Wasinger said some of those efforts include a quarterly professional development series that aids prospective childcare providers with such help as financial planning, stress management, and understanding regulations related to in-home care.

Also, to lessen stress and expense, the task force has acquired grants and other resources to provide assistance with fingerprinting for childcare providers, emergency plans, and emergency equipment (such as fire extinguishers).

“We also realized we need to encourage businesses to support staff who need childcare,” Wasinger said. “We’ve talked to our local business community about maybe providing stipends to families who are in need of childcare...and giving some flexibility, such as, if they lack childcare, bringing the child to work or working part time from home.”

They’ve formed important partnerships with such groups as Kansas Childcare Training Opportunities, Kansas Department of Health and Environment, K-State Research and Extension and numerous elected officials. The task force also joined efforts with [the Innovation Center](#), a nonprofit that serves 26 counties in northwest Kansas, when childcare was added to their strategic framework.

“We are very cognizant of how we make progress, and the conversations we have with partners, to make sure that we speak to the concerns that providers have,” Wasinger said. “The Ellis County Child Care Task Force has looked at childcare more from a global perspective – not just adding capacity – and giving a voice to childcare providers.”

More information about the Ellis County Child Care Task Force is [available online from The Chamber in Hays](#).

Wasinger’s full talk and other First Friday presentations are [available online](#) from K-State Research and Extension.

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**FOR PRINT PUBLICATION:** Links used in this story

First Friday e-calls, <https://ksre-learn.com/entrepreneurship>

Bob and Pat Schmidt Foundation (Hays, Kansas), <https://schmidtfoundation.net>

Northwest Kansas Economic Innovation Center, <https://nwkeici.org>

Child Care Task Force of Ellis County, <https://hayschamber.com/child-care-task-force-of-ellis-county>

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