

Pilot Program Expands Child Care Options in Josephine County

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A collaborative pilot program aimed at easing the child care shortage in Josephine County is already making an impact, with one new child care business launched and another expanding its capacity to serve more local families.

The initiative, which combines funding, training, and technical support, is the result of a partnership between Southern Oregon Early Learning Services (SOELS), the Child Care Resource Network (CCRN), and Rogue Community College's Small Business Development Center (RCC SBDC). Together, the organizations are working to provide aspiring and current child care providers with the tools they need to start or grow licensed facilities — a critical step in a county where child care availability remains far below demand.

Participants in the pilot program receive a combination of hands-on and financial support. CCRN offers guidance on state licensing requirements, quality standards, and required trainings. RCC's SBDC helps providers develop sustainable business models, including budgeting, marketing strategies, and operational planning. Funding from the SOREDI Foundation and Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds through the City of Grants Pass covers startup costs such as equipment, furniture, and educational materials.

"This project is giving providers a genuine head start," said Laura Hofmann, owner of the newly launched Sugar Pine Schoolhouse. Hofmann credits the grant with allowing her to create an engaging environment filled with quality learning tools and play structures. "It's been incredible to watch the children develop new skills and confidence every day. Without this support, it wouldn't have been possible to open so quickly or at this level of quality."

Applicants go through a structured process that includes training sessions, site visits, licensing assistance, and one-on-one business coaching. Once licensed, providers are expected to begin serving families within 45 days and commit to at least two years of

operation. SOELS will continue to monitor quality, track family satisfaction, and offer ongoing improvement resources.

So far, two businesses have benefited from the grants, and the program aims to support up to five more in the coming months. City officials say expanding child care access benefits not just families, but the local economy, allowing more parents to remain in or return to the workforce.

The project's backers say their investment is already paying off. "Working with the SBDC, SOELS, and CCRN to bring this to life has been a blessing," a City of Grants Pass spokesperson said. "Child care is a necessity for the health of our community and our economy, and we are proud to be part of a solution."

Interested individuals can learn more or apply by contacting SOELS, CCRN, or the RCC SBDC. The hope is that the pilot's early successes will lead to an expanded program that continues to address one of the county's most pressing needs.

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