Strengthen Your Workforce

With low unemployment across the state, Montana businesses are going to great lengths to attract and retain qualified workers. Many individuals are not in the workforce because of difficulty finding quality, affordable child care. Child care capacity currently only meets approximately 41% of estimated demand.9

FAMILY FRIENDLY BUSINESS PRACTICES

Background: The financial burden of and access to quality child care in Montana limits the positive performance and workforce participation of employees. The state median cost of both center- and home-based child care exceeds 10% of household income, which the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services considers an affordable limit.1 Also, a steady decline in available child care across the state means some families have few or no options for child care so they can't work.2 A national survey found nearly 10% of families had to change or quit their employment because of child-care related issues.3 By working to create innovative solutions to the cost and accessibility of child care, businesses will experience: Less employee turnover, higher productivity, less absenteeism, improved morale and employee loyalty, and greater recruiting power.4

Affordable child care is essential, not only for families but for the economic prosperity of Montana. The Committee for Economic Development measured the spillover impacts of child care in Montana, determining that access to child care resulted in $93 million in positive economic impact to industries outside of child care, contributing $31.8 million in added earnings, and 1,178 jobs in 2016.3 With access to quality child care, the future generation would be better prepared to enter the workforce, less likely to live in poverty or face incarceration as adults, and possess higher emotional and social skills.5

Employer Solutions

Businesses in all industries can assist their employees through creative changes in organizational practices.

Flexible Work Arrangements: Employers can consider offering employees a compressed work week (i.e. four 10-hour shifts), flex hours (i.e. flexibility in the start and end time of a shift) and part-time employee job share (when two part-time employees combine their hours to create a fully staffed position). Other arrangements include telecommuting, or bringing an infant or child to work for all or a portion of the shift.
Providing Resource Guides: Family and community resource guides can be provided to all employees upon hire and with periodic updates, regardless of family status. These resource guides already exist for all Montana counties and are updated by each county.

Work-Family Balance Policies: Paid family and medical leave and paid sick days not only reduce the burden of missed pay due to sick children, they are attractive policies for employees entering the workforce. Employees and especially women with children are more likely to return to work following a birth, and remain with their employer when policies exist to support a work-family balance. Supportive breastfeeding policies encourage mothers to express milk for their babies in clean and private areas and encourage family and health goals for mother and baby.

Best Practices

St. Peter’s Hospital in Helena offers on-site child care and flexible work schedules for employees. This benefit not only provides reliable child care, but close access to children and promotion of work-family balance. To meet the special needs of long and non-traditional shifts, the on-site child care also provides extended care hours.

Small businesses in Montana are especially innovative when supporting employee’s family needs. Meetings Northwest, a Missoula-based company, provides an office space specifically for employee’s children to use, complete with toys, books, a television and room to play. In addition, half of the staff telecommutes and uses flexible work hours to complete important tasks.

Resources for Businesses

New Mexico Family Friendly Business Toolkit
Child Aware Washington Employer Toolkit
Leading the Way Toolkit

References

1 Economic Policy Institute, 2016.
4 Strengthening Montana through Investments in Early Care and Education. America’s Edge, 2019.
8 Personal Communication. Traci Ulberg, CEO, 2019.