



PROJECT OASIS

Addressing Childcare Deserts in
Yamhill County

AT A GLANCE

In response to escalating staff absenteeism exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, DCI, a prominent dental equipment manufacturer in Yamhill County, Oregon, embarked on an innovative initiative to tackle the underlying issue: lack of accessible childcare. Collaborating with community partners and leveraging public-private partnerships, Project Oasis emerged as a solution to the childcare desert dilemma, resulting in the establishment of a 100-slot childcare facility. This case study explores the journey of Project Oasis, offering insights into the challenges faced, solutions implemented, and lessons learned in addressing workforce childcare needs.

BACKGROUND

In the summer of 2020, Tim Murphy of DCI reached out to Abisha Stone at SEDCOR with concerns about the unprecedented staff absenteeism faced by DCI, a dental equipment manufacturer in Newberg, Oregon. This conversation led to the realization that the community was grappling with the challenge of childcare deserts, exacerbating workforce issues. Thus, Project Oasis was born - a cross-sector, public-private partnership aimed at providing safe, nurturing childcare environments while addressing root causes of poverty and economic disparities.

PROBLEM

Yamhill County, even before the COVID-19 pandemic, faced a shortage of licensed childcare facilities, earning it the designation of a childcare desert. The lack of childcare options not only impacted working families but also contributed to adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and toxic stress, leading to long-term health and social disparities.

A survey conducted by DCI revealed a significant correlation between absenteeism and the lack of childcare options for employees, particularly amidst the transition to distance learning. The designation of Yamhill County as a childcare desert further underscored the severity of the issue, with only a fraction of children having access to regulated childcare slots.



BREAKTHROUGHS

- 1** The first breakthrough for Project Oasis was the receipt of CARES Act funding from the county. This financial support provided by public partners encouraged the DCI team to persevere in their efforts to address childcare challenges.
- 2** The second breakthrough occurred when the City of McMinnville revised zoning restrictions, allowing childcare centers to be established in zones other than heavy manufacturing. This policy change expanded the potential locations for childcare facilities within the city, facilitating the implementation of Project Oasis.
- 3** The third breakthrough came from the Oregon Department of Education Early Learning Division's capacity grant program, which awarded capital funds to expand childcare facilities in communities. This grant enabled "Little Bird by Project Oasis" in McMinnville to secure the necessary funding to build and outfit their facility.
- 4** The final breakthrough was the opening of Little Bird by Project Oasis in McMinnville. This 100-slot childcare facility not only addressed the critical need for childcare in the community but also embraced the Reggio Emilia approach to learning, offering a unique educational philosophy and environment for children.

CHALLENGES

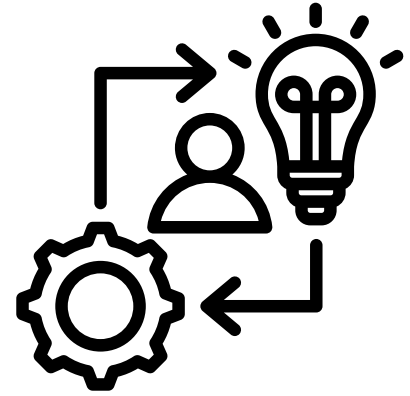
Challenges faced in implementing Project Oasis include high system development charges (SDCs), permitting and land use issues, and funding constraints. However, partnerships with various organizations and stakeholders have helped navigate these obstacles and foster consensus-driven decision-making.

Project Oasis aims to serve 100 children initially, with the potential for further expansion. By preventing ACEs and toxic stress, it seeks to improve overall community health outcomes and socioeconomic well-being. The program provides financial assistance through scholarships, prioritizing families with the highest need, and promotes workforce development by enabling parents to maintain employment or pursue education.



IMPLEMENTATION

Project Oasis is currently implementing a phased approach to help children and families in Yamhill County, Oregon, reach their full potential through integrated, co-located services designed to support children from infancy to five years of age and their families.



- 1** Phase 1 involves community engagement, developing a website, launching a scholarship program, and conducting a feasibility study for a new childcare center.
- 2** Phase 2 focuses on opening a new childcare facility in McMinnville, expanding capacity, and integrating expertise with local public health authorities.
- 3** Phase 3 entails opening a Community and Family Resource Center in Newberg, offering co-located services, and promoting health equity initiatives.

LOOKING AHEAD

Next steps for Project Oasis include securing additional funding, conducting feasibility studies, and finalizing agreements with stakeholders such as PGE and the City of Newberg. The program remains committed to its mission of providing accessible, affordable childcare options for all families in Yamhill County.



PARTNERS

With creating a program that serves the community, working with partners are essential. It is important to choose partners who are aligned with your mission and goals. It is also helpful to have a mix of private and public partners. Project Oasis is a private-public partnership, and decisions are only made when there is a consensus between all partners.



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Head Start of Yamhill County



Little Bird Childcare



C-Suite NW



Yamhill Early Learning Hub



City of McMinnville



City of Newberg



Yamhill County