

GAGE AREA GROWTH ENTERPRISE

ANNUAL REPORT

2022



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NGage

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LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

Greetings,

If someone were to ask you what economic development is, what would you say? Common answers would include things like like housing, business recruitment, business expansion, and workforce development. All of those things are correct and are active issues being tackled by NGage each year; however, there are more out of the box issues that economic developers are faced with and one that NGage has chosen to tackle head-on: childcare. We often forget that our county thrives on its youth – the future – of our communities. Just like for businesses, we need to provide the necessary infrastructure for families to grow and thrive here. We must do our part as a county to ensure we have a future not just 5-10 years from now but 50 years from now.

This is why NGage has been proactive in fostering and developing childcare infrastructure, receiving over \$100,000 to date and assisting providers in securing nearly \$200,000 in funding. The work we have been involved in will help us improve workforce attraction issues, increase partnerships with public school systems to develop talent pipelines starting in elementary school, and connect area employers to the heart of our county – its kids.

While the childcare initiative is a big talking point, it's only a small piece of our focus at NGage. We are actively working on recruitment projects totaling over \$3 Billion, working directly with employers to address workforce, expansions, and other retention pieces, and we're involved in local and state economic development groups that have a hand in creating policies and legislation that positively affect our area. Just last year alone, Gage County saw investments of nearly \$40 Million in commercial and residential expansions and improvements

In working with other early childhood organizations throughout the state, it has become apparent that in order for a community to thrive, it must meet five indicators *for every age group*. Those five indicators are: live, learn, work, play, and connect. In what areas do we meet these indicators? In what areas do we need to improve? These are questions that we'll be asking ourselves to direct our goals and scope of work in 2023.

Sincerely,



LIVE



LEARN



WORK



PLAY



CONNECT



RACHEL KREIKEMEIER, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Rachel and her family have been residents since 2015 and are active in the Gage County community. Rachel recently completed her MBA through Bellevue University. Rachel is a shining example of a purpose-driven person and NGage is thrilled to have her as its executive director. Rachel says, "Over the years, I have grown to love this community and county. My husband and I can not imagine raising our children anywhere else. I love getting to know more and more people in the area and helping to make this community and county a better place to enjoy life, work, and raise a family." In her free time, Rachel finds joy in chasing her kids around to all of their activities or enjoying the calm that comes from a cup of coffee.



MEGAN WICHT, MARKETING COORDINATOR

Megan moved to Beatrice in May 2022 after graduating from University of Nebraska-Lincoln. She holds a bachelor's degree in Marketing and Management, Google Analytics & Search certifications, and excellent communication skills that she is excited to use towards the growth of Gage County. Megan recently got married and bought a house in Beatrice. She says "we are excited to continue staking our claim and meeting more people in the community, Gage County is beginning to feel like home to us." In her spare time, you'll find her reading a good book, exercising, talking someone's ear off, or playing with her dog Beckett.



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City of Beatrice
Gage County

Leader

Beatrice Community Hospital & Health Center

Champion

Black Hills Energy
Pinnacle Bank
Security First Bank

Catalyst

Caspers Construction
Clabaugh Pharmacy
Diode Communications
Echo Electric Supply
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Willet & Carothers
Woods Bros Realty

GAGE COUNTY IS A COMMUNITY FOR KIDS



"The first years of a child's life are a period of rapid brain development, deeply influenced by early experiences, interactions and environments. That's why high-quality early childhood care and learning environments are so important: they build the foundation for cognitive and social-emotional skills that help children succeed now and in the future."

-First Five Nebraska

"Economic development starts with early childhood development - and the best investments ensure all children who need it, have access to high-quality early learning and care opportunities."

-FFYF

"Quality early childhood experiences are those in which children are physically safe and emotionally supported through frequent, warm, one-on-one interactions with caring adults who engage them in language-rich and educational activities. High-quality early care and education promotes the well-being of early childhood professionals, empowers parents as educators and caregivers, and fosters children's healthy development and learning. These experiences are made possible through policies and practices that support ongoing quality improvement wherever children are cared for."

-First Five Nebraska

Nebraska is facing a major shortage of available and affordable childcare for ages 1 - 6 years old. It is a statewide problem and one of the statewide solutions is Communities for Kids (C4K), "a community-based initiative designed to assist in the development of right-sized solutions for communities selected to participate in the program. Over a three-year period, selected communities will increase the focus on opportunities and challenges they are facing with enhancing and expanding child care opportunities." Gage County was selected in 2021.

In 2021, NGage applied for and was accepted into the Nebraska Children & Families Foundation (Nebraska Children) C4K program. Nebraska Children granted Gage County a total of \$30,000.00, \$10,000 to spend per year over the course of three years. In addition to the Gage County C4K Initiative, Gage County was selected in 2022 as one of twelve Nebraska communities to receive funding from the federal Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations (CRRSA) Act. The Nebraska Department of Health & Human Services (DHHS), together with Nebraska Children, granted Gage County a contract for \$78,500.00. NGage has chosen to fuse the funds in order to be more effective for the children, providers, and families in Gage County. We have until 2023 to utilize the total sum of \$108,500.00 to make a big difference.

C4K funds will be geared towards administrative assistance, advocacy, and training for providers while the CRRSA funds will be spent primarily on child care capacity expansion and related expenses, such as wage support, minor facility renovations, educational supplies, and expenses directly tied to licensing requirements..

With communication comes effective change. In efforts to ensure C4K resources are put to good use, an Early Childhood Quality and Capacity Survey was distributed throughout Gage County communities in February. In September, a "Gallery Walk" event was hosted for early childcare providers and their employees to gain insight on issues, wants, and needs that impact their businesses and industry as a whole. Central themes discussed at the event included the need for provider healthcare plans, better access to provider training, and the need for a substitute pool.

Because Gage County has nearly 400 children currently without access to quality childcare, NGage has drafted a grant application to assist providers in expanding their capacity. These funds can be utilized to move from one license to the next (ie. Family Home I to Family Home II, or to center based care), assist with staff wages, supply educational materials, or accomplish minor renovations, so long as the project results in an increase in capacity within the facility. The application for this grant launched October 1st and recipients will be awarded in November; however, it doesn't stop there!

Early childhood care and education are community problems. Community problems need community assistance to solve. Though Gage County was granted over \$100,000.00, that's not enough to complete the task. In order to care for the children in early childcare programs now, the 400-plus on the waiting list, and the children to come, more money is needed to curb the demand and complete the necessary expansions.

C4K CAPACITY EXPANSION GRANT RECIPIENTS

Thanks to funding from Nebraska Children and the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services, the Gage County C4K team created a Childcare Capacity Expansion Grant. Local childcare providers submitted applications that were reviewed and selected by a committee of community stakeholders, NGage staff, and NGage board members. The requirements:

- Currently providing quality care
- Intent to utilize DHHS' Step Up to Quality program
- Participate in accepting subsidies
- Utilize the Child Care Referral Network

Once awarded, all awardees must increase capacity. After a rigorous review process, four childcare providers were selected:

SKY HIGH LEARNING CENTER

\$32,000

- Expansion from Family Home II to Center
- Anticipated capacity increase of 52 spots

LITTLE GIGGLES

\$13,600

- Expansion of second location.
- Anticipated capacity increase of 24 spots.

APRIL'S DAYCARE & PRESCHOOL

\$5,700

- Expansion to full capacity Family Home II
- Anticipated capacity increase of 4 spots

APRIL'S ADVENTURE ACADEMY

\$5,700

- Expansion to full capacity Family Home II
- Anticipated capacity increase of 4 spots

GAGE COUNTY C4K: BY THE NUMBERS

Childcare is a critical piece of community infrastructure - without it, a community is not sustainable. Our work with the C4K initiative seeks to reinforce the existing infrastructure while creating new growth.

376

CAPACITY DEFICIT

This number was determined at the start of the Gage County C4K initiative and illustrates the great need for additional providers and expansions of existing facilities.

56K

GRANTS AWARDED

NGage, with Federal Coronavirus Relief funding, awarded 4 childcare facilities a total of \$56,000 to expand their capacity.

21%

DEFICIT TACKLED

With the grant funding, capacity will increase by 84 spots in Gage County, reducing the deficit by 21%.



THE BOTTOM LINE

The C4K Initiative was created in response to community requests for assistance with shortages of high-quality early care and education programs - shortages that both impact children's optimal development and pose a challenge for communities hoping to attract and retain the viable workforces they need to thrive.

C4K partners with communities' public and private entities to support and coordinate planning for access to high-quality early care and education for all children birth through age five. These partnerships are customized to address each community's unique assets and needs - so each community can grow and prosper well into the future.

POPULATION = \$21,706

AGES 0-5: 1,443

AGES 6-17: 3,253

AGES 18+: 17,010

RACE & ETHNICITY

WHITE/NON-HISPANIC: 94.2%

HISPANIC/LATINO: 2.7%

FOREIGN BORN: 2%

2+ RACES: 1.4%

AMERICAN INDIAN/ALASKAN NATIVE: .7%

BLACK: .6%

ASIAN: .6%

MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME = \$55,000

ESTIMATED PER-CAPITA INCOME: \$30,918

GAGE COUNTY 0-5 BELOW POVERTY: 22.7%

GAGE COUNTY 6-18 BELOW POVERTY: 17%

GAGE COUNTY 65+ BELOW POVERTY: 11.5%

NEBRASKA BELOW POVERTY: 10.8%

PARENTS OF AGES 0-6 IN LABOR FORCE: 77%

PUBLIC EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS

PUBLIC PRESCHOOL CAPACITY: 270

HEAD START: 60

TOTAL PUBLIC PROGRAM NUMBERS (LESS 50% HALF DAY PROGRAMMING): 165

PRIVATE EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS

LICENSED IN-HOME PROVIDERS: 37

LICENSED CHILDCARE CENTERS: 5

LICENSED PRESCHOOL PROVIDERS: 0

TOTAL CAPACITY: 589

COMPARISON RATES & OUTCOMES

MOBILITY:

6.54% BEATRICE, 4.22% NEBRASKA

FREE/REDUCED LUNCH:

43% BEATRICE, 41% NEBRASKA

HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION RATE:

86% BEATRICE, 87% NEBRASKA

1,135

-

589

-

165

=

381

NUMBER OF CHILDREN
0-6 WITH ALL
AVAILABLE PARENTS
WORKING

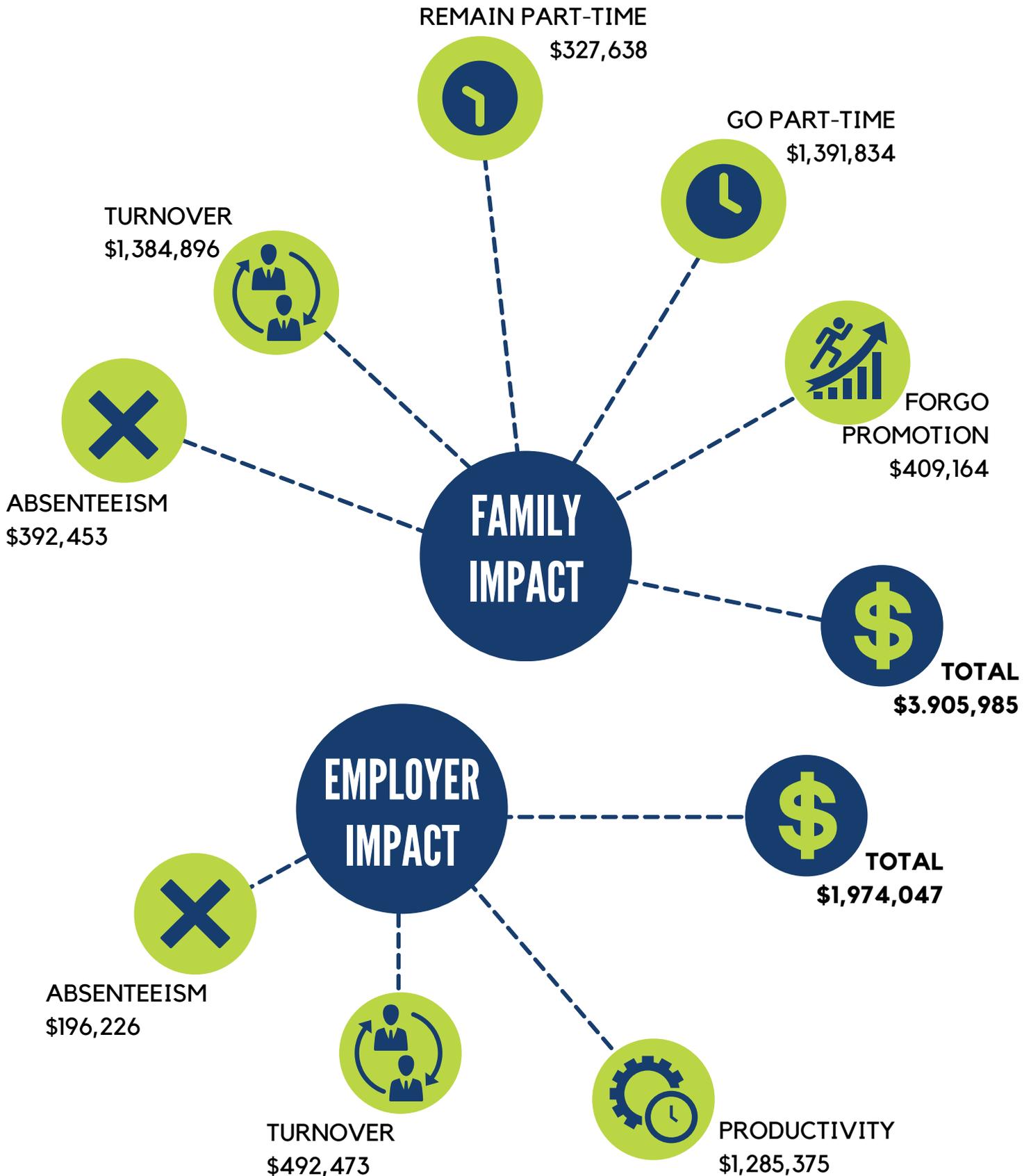
TOTAL NUMBER
OF LICENSED
CHILDCARE
SPOTS

TOTAL NUMBER
OF PUBLIC
PRE-K/HS

NUMBER OF CHILDREN 0-
6 NOT ENROLLED IN A
PRIVATE LICENSED OR
PUBLIC PRESCHOOL

THE BOTTOM LINE

The following data provides a snapshot of the financial impacts of inadequate child care on Gage County families and businesses. Estimated potential annual impacts total over \$5.8 million between families and employers combined. The bottom line? Child care is crucial to our economic well-being.





The observance of Manufacturing (MFG) Day, held nationally on the first Friday every October, is continued throughout the month to celebrate manufacturing, a \$2 billion industry, employing almost 9% of America's workforce. MFG Day was created to showcase the reality of modern manufacturing careers by encouraging companies and educational institutions to open their doors to students, parents, teachers, and community leaders. With the theme of Creators Wanted, the focus is to build the future workforce by educating America's youth about the pathways and careers modern manufacturing offers, inspiring the next generation of future manufacturers.

NGage celebrated MFG Day in Gage County on October 6th, by partnering with local manufacturers and area public schools. These manufacturers are leaders in good workplace practices, produce high quality products, and consistently innovate to remain progressive in their industries. We are proud these companies call Gage County home.

This day-long event allowed over 100 area students to spend 45 minutes at four manufacturing facilities, where they toured and witnessed how business is done.

Companies participating this year included:

- Precise Fabrication
- NEAPCO Components
- Rare Earth Salts
- Landmark Snacks

AROUND THE COUNTY

Gage County saw growth in many areas in 2022 - from new construction to expansions to business retention.

Southeast Community College

Agriculture Career Center announced - a \$22-24M expansion with plans to open in 2025.

Beatrice Public Schools

BPS, together with ESU 5, secured funding for the construction of a consolidated PK-5 elementary school, expected to open in 2024.

Beatrice Community Hospital

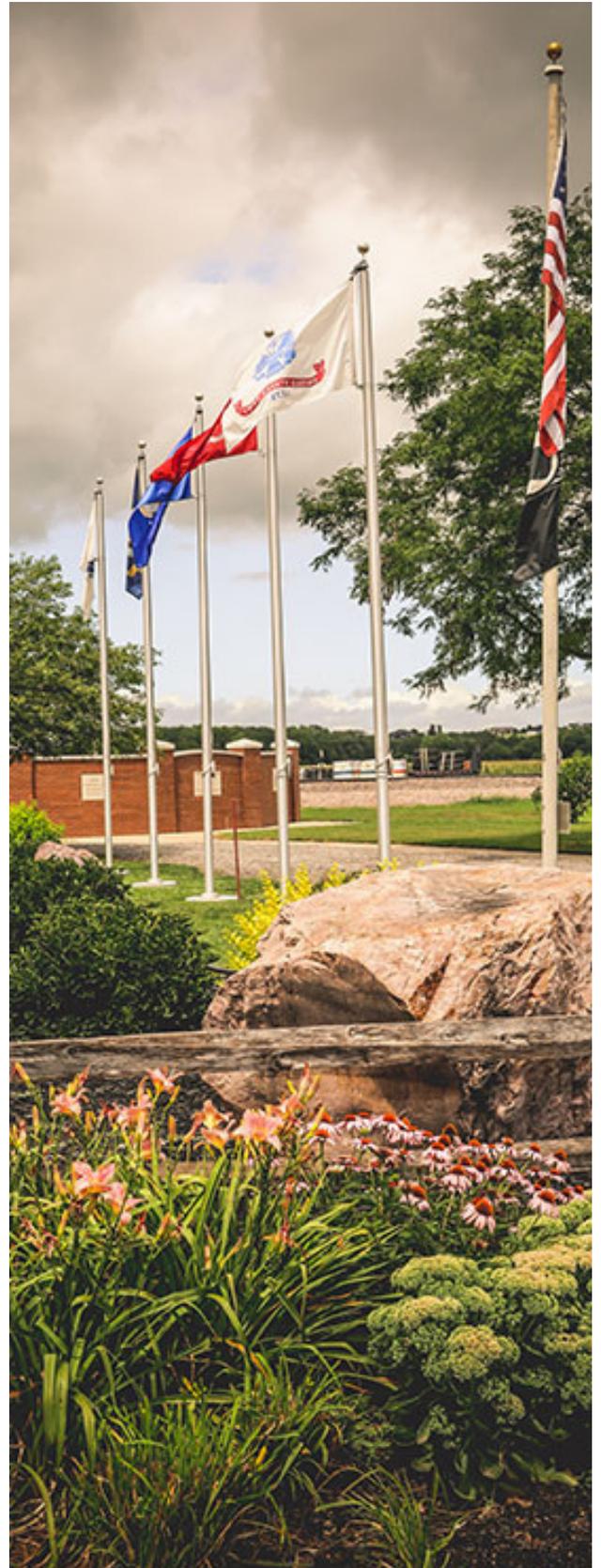
A groundbreaking held in February celebrated the expansion of the hospital to include all area medical offices previously housed off-campus. This \$13.3M, 22,450 sq ft expansion will open in mid-2023.

Federal Loan Programs

Businesses in Gage County were strongly impacted by COVID and utilized tools to help them stay in business, keep employees, and thrive. To date, there have been 1,873 PPP loans issued, totaling \$45,614,003 and 153 EIDL loans, totaling \$11,277,200.

Investments & Improvements

Throughout the county, residents and businesses invested in new ventures and improvements to the tune of \$38 Million last year.





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