The Early Child Care Business Accelerator, led by Central Oregon Community College’s (COCC), is picking up momentum across the state.

The program was conceptualized in 2020 in response to the childcare crisis that Oregon families have been facing for years. Between 1999 and 2020, Oregon lost 32,000 slots in small family childcare homes, according to the latest report from Oregon State University.

As of April 2021, all of Oregon’s 36 counties are considered “childcare deserts” for infants and toddlers, defined as a community with more than three children for every regulated childcare slot. Roughly 70% of counties have the same shortage of access for preschool-aged children.

The Early Child Care Business Accelerator’s business training pilot program launched the first of three cohorts in October 2021 to meet this need in partnership with NeighborImpact and funding from the City of Bend and Deschutes County. Currently the SBDCs are offering the Early Child Care Business Accelerator Program in English four times a year and in Spanish two times a year.

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Intended for new childcare providers planning to open, as well as recently established providers who require expanded business skills and state licensure, students in the program receive one-on-one assistance from an SBDC business adviser. Once students graduate and are successfully licensed, they receive a minimum of $5,000 to start their businesses, along with continued wraparound services from both NeighborImpact and the SBDC after the program.

“The curriculum supports growing a high-quality, licensed program, taught by NeighborImpact, with business topics covered by SBDC instructors,” explained Karen Prow, director of childcare resources at NeighborImpact.

The result is more than 25 new home-based childcare providers, creating more than 260 slots for parents seeking childcare.

The Oregon SBDC Network is expanding on its success in Central Oregon and launching this pilot program statewide. The Business Accelerator Program will be offered in partnership between the SBDC and the Child Care Resource and Referral Agency at Columbia Gorge, Southwestern, Lane, and Oregon Coast community colleges. The Network hopes to generate 500 to 1,000 more childcare slots across the State of Oregon with this effort. The goal is to have this program permanently funded by the state to continue to meet the needs of working families.

This program is offered through a grant from Deschutes County, City of Bend, City of Sisters, the Oregon Small Business Development Center Network, and a new grant through NeighborImpact from House Bill 5202. To learn more about the Early Child Care Business Accelerator and efforts across the state, contact Kathryn Brown at kbrown28@cocc.edu.

For more information on how the Oregon SBDC Network is building Oregon’s best businesses, visit OregonSBDC.org.

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