

# Innovative Minds, Bold Solutions: Announcing the Winners of the First Ever 2025 Wings of Innovation CCR&R Awards

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EINPresswire.com/ -- The First Ever Wind Beneath Your Wings Summit, held September 8–10 in San Diego, brought together Child Care professionals, innovators, and leaders from across the nation to discuss how Technology innovation is an imperative in shaping the future of our Child Care system. Hosted by [TOOTRiS](#), the Summit provided a meaningful platform for CCR&Rs and industry partners to come together to design and help engineer a system of the future — one that is resilient, scalable, and sustainable for generations to come. The three-day event culminated in the recognition of six groundbreaking initiatives through the 2025 [Wings of Innovation CCR&R Awards](#).



These awards honor the extraordinary work of Child Care Resource & Referral (CCR&R) agencies that are addressing today's challenges by redefining how Child Care is envisioned, delivered, and sustained for the future. From rural solutions to state-wide policy wins, the winners exemplify the creativity, collaboration, and resilience needed to ensure every family has access to affordable, high-quality care.

## 2025 Wings of Innovation CCR&R Award Winners

### Platinum Award Winner

#### Rural Pathways – Enhanced Two-Tier Provider Partnership Model:

Tackling one of Minnesota's most severe Child Care deserts, Rural Pathways is proving that community-driven partnerships and innovative funding can turn crisis into opportunity. By blending employer contributions, family support, and expanded tax credits, their model is providing living wages for providers, reducing turnover, and delivering up to a 50% ROI — a bold blueprint for rural Child Care across the nation.

## Gold Award Winner

### Child Care Aware® of Missouri – Child Care Keeps Missouri Working:

After losing a 23-year state contract in a competitive bid, Child Care Aware® of Missouri transformed setback into innovation, launching Child Care Keeps Missouri WorkingSM, which now is the engine behind a new tri-share model that unites businesses, families, and government. Child Care Works, Missouri's first statewide tri-share model, has already secured millions in public funding and partnerships with TOOTRiS and Kids Win Missouri to expand access through a statewide digital referral system — ensuring Child Care remains the backbone of Missouri's workforce.

## Silver Award Winner

### Child Care Aware of Kentucky – Utilizing WLS to Assess Barriers for Prospective Providers in Kentucky:

With a data-driven approach, CCAKY revealed that financial burdens — not zoning — were the greatest obstacle for new providers. By exposing the real barriers, their work empowers targeted policy change and helps build a sustainable Child Care pipeline in Kentucky.

## Bronze Award Winner

### PATCH – Fueling Keiki Minds, One Meal at a Time:

Hawaii's PATCH is easing the burden on Family Child Care providers with a statewide program that delivers nutritious, USDA-compliant meals directly to programs. By reducing administrative stress and ensuring children receive healthy meals, PATCH empowers providers to focus on nurturing young minds.

## Honorable Mention

### Child Care Aware of Kansas – Baby Steps:

Through stipends and mentorship, Baby Steps is strengthening the most financially fragile part of the Child Care system: infant care. This initiative is expanding openings, elevating provider standards, and offering a blueprint for sustainable infant care statewide.

## Honorable Mention

### MountainHeart South CCR&R – Together We Grow, Provider Recruitment and Quality Resources Provided by Our Traveling Resource and Information Library Services:

MountainHeart South CCR&R is working to strengthen Child Care in rural West Virginia by recruiting and equipping new providers while supporting existing ones with the resources they need to succeed. Through community-based outreach, training, and its TRAILS library service, the organization delivers hands-on assistance ranging from educational materials, like

“Experience Adventures I Family Child Care”, and equipment to professional development and technical guidance. The Together We Grow initiative brings families, providers, and employers together to expand access to safe, quality Child Care, build resilient local programs, and create stronger communities across the region.

### A Future Built on Innovation

The Wings of Innovation 2025 CCR&R Award winners embody the bold leadership needed to transform Child Care in America. Their solutions are creative, practical, and essential in addressing the toughest challenges families face.

“Child Care is the backbone of our economy and the key to unlocking opportunities for families everywhere,” said Alessandra Lezama, CEO of TOOTRiS. “The Wings of Innovation Award winners are not only tackling today’s challenges with creativity and courage, they’re building the foundation for a stronger, more equitable future. Their vision and determination inspire us all to reimagine what’s possible.”

We extend heartfelt congratulations to all finalists and winners. Thank you for courageously sharing your solutions with CCR&Rs nationwide and for your unwavering commitment to building sustainable systems that uplift children, families, and communities. Because of your vision and persistence, the future of Child Care is bold, resilient, and filled with promise.

### About Rural Pathways

Rural Pathways develops innovative community-based solutions to expand access to Child Care in rural America. By leveraging partnerships with families, providers, and employers, they create sustainable models that deliver equitable access, economic stability, and thriving local economies. Learn more [ruralpathways.org](https://ruralpathways.org)

### About Child Care Aware® of Missouri

Child Care Aware® of Missouri is dedicated to strengthening the Child Care system across the state by providing resources, advocacy, and innovative solutions that help families access affordable, high-quality care while supporting the workforce and economy. Learn more at [mochildcareaware.org](https://mochildcareaware.org)

### About Child Care Aware of Kentucky

Child Care Aware of Kentucky works to improve the quality and accessibility of early childhood programs by supporting providers, empowering families, and driving data-informed policies that build a stronger Child Care infrastructure for the state. Learn more at [childcareawareky.org](https://childcareawareky.org)

### About PATCH

PATCH (People Attentive to Children) is Hawaii’s statewide Child Care resource and referral agency, connecting families to Child Care options, training providers, and delivering innovative programs that ensure children grow up healthy, safe, and ready to learn. Learn more at

[patchhawaii.org](http://patchhawaii.org)

#### About Child Care Aware of Kansas

Child Care Aware of Kansas partners with families, providers, businesses, and policymakers to create sustainable solutions that increase access to high-quality Child Care, strengthen communities, and support the healthy development of children across the state. Learn more at [ks.childcareaware.org](http://ks.childcareaware.org)

#### About MountainHeart South CCR&R

MountainHeart South CCR&R serves Southern West Virginia with a mission to strengthen families and communities by improving access to high-quality child care. The organization provides critical support for families seeking care and equips Child Care providers with the tools, training, and resources needed to succeed. Through innovative programs like TRAILS and initiatives such as Together We Grow, MountainHeart fosters community partnerships that expand opportunities for children, empower providers, and build resilient local economies. Learn more at [mthtwv.com/mcs/ccrr](http://mthtwv.com/mcs/ccrr)

#### About TOOTRiS

TOOTRiS is the nation's largest Child Care platform that partners with employers, providers, government agencies, and Child Care Resource & Referral (CCR&R) organizations to strengthen local Child Care ecosystems, amplify the impact of community-based initiatives, and make care more accessible, equitable, and sustainable — empowering parents, supporting providers, and fueling economic growth. Learn more at [tootris.com](http://tootris.com)

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