

Child Care Aware of Kansas Earns National Spotlight for Expanding Infant Care Through 'Baby Steps'

Honoree at TOOTRiS' 2025 Wings of Innovation Awards for strengthening one of the most fragile parts of the Child Care system

SAN DIEGO, CA, UNITED STATES, October 9, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Finding infant care is one of the toughest challenges in Child Care — and [Child Care Aware of Kansas](#) is tackling it head-on. Their Baby Steps initiative has earned them recognition as an Honoree in the [2025 Wings of Innovation CCR&R Awards](#), presented by TOOTRiS in San Diego.



Child Care Aware of Kansas honored at first Wings of Innovation Awards

Infant care has long been one of the most fragile parts of the Child Care system. Providers face higher costs due to strict staff-to-child ratios, greater responsibility for safety and development, and the need for specialized equipment and training. Yet, even with these higher demands, programs often earn less revenue per infant slot, making it financially difficult to sustain. The result is that families across Kansas — and the nation — struggle to find infant care openings, with long waitlists and limited options.

Recognizing this challenge, Child Care Aware of Kansas created Baby Steps to support programs in opening and sustaining more infant slots. Baby Steps, fueled by support from the Patterson Family Foundation and the Preschool Development Grant, breaks this cycle by providing quarterly stipends that stabilize provider income and create more infant care openings. The initiative also pairs providers with mentorship and resources to raise standards, ensuring the youngest learners receive safe, high-quality care from the start.

The program has already helped expand access and stability, giving families more reliable options and offering providers a replicable blueprint for long-term sustainability. Its success shows how targeted support can make meaningful improvements in even the hardest-to-serve areas of Child Care.

The award was announced during TOOTRiS' [Wind Beneath Your Wings Summit](#), which drew hundreds of Child Care leaders from across the nation to reimagine and strengthen the future of Child Care. As part of the Summit, the Wings of Innovation Awards spotlight bold, local solutions making a difference today and offering models for tomorrow. Other award winners included Child Care Aware of Missouri, Child Care Aware of Kentucky, PATCH Hawaii, Rural Pathways, and MountainHeart South CCR&R.

"Kansas is showing that when communities invest in providers, entire Child Care systems grow stronger," said Alessandra Lezama, CEO of TOOTRiS. "Baby Steps is more than a program — it's a model that proves thoughtful support can expand access for families while giving providers the confidence to thrive."

"At Child Care Aware of Kansas, we view infant care as the cornerstone of a child's future and a community's strength," said Christi Smith, Executive Director. "Through Baby Steps, we're helping child care providers open more doors for families—offsetting the high costs of infant care, creating brighter beginnings for babies, and building stronger local economies as parents are able to work, businesses can grow, and communities can thrive."

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.

About TOOTRiS

TOOTRiS is the nation's largest Child Care platform partnering 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*.

* - <https://tootris.com/>

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