

CENTER CITY ACADEMY

Committed to the Core – A Critical Gap in Development Plans for Downtown Wichita

A renaissance is underway in downtown Wichita! Our hometown spirit is seen everywhere on flags, tags, t-shirts at many local festivals and events. As announcements of grand openings circulate, the blueprints for projects yet unveiled are contemplated by civic leaders and business developers. It is clear; our local pride is bursting at the seams! As a community, how do we expand on this positive momentum and sustain our progress into the future?

We should start at the beginning; **at the core.**

The BOD of Center City Academy (CCA) seeks to create a non-profit early child development center that will provide affordable, high-quality child care for those living and working in Wichita's urban core. This concept is not new. Previously known as the Downtown Day Care Center, CCA has an established and successful 43-year history in serving downtown Wichita's diverse child care needs. With a renewed vision, CCA is reorganizing to join and embrace the transformational growth taking place in Wichita's inner city. A new grass roots effort is underway! CCA's objective is to establish and fund a secure, centrally located, state-of-the-art facility in which all children have the opportunity to develop a healthy mind, body, spirit and character while receiving accredited child care in an academically enriched environment.

In 2018, the average cost of daycare per child at an accredited center in Kansas ranges from \$12,739/year for infants, \$10,906/year for toddlers to \$8,894/year for 4+ years of age (https://www.ks.childcareaware.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/2018-State-of-Kansas_Facts.pdf). Per the 2018 US Census, the **median household income in Sedgwick County is \$54,974** (<https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/sedgwickcountykansas>). This disparity between the cost of child care and household income creates a significant financial strain on even those considered "middle class" earners who simply cannot afford to spend between 16 to 23% of their annual earnings on child care for one child. Wichita's young parents with limited options are facing tough choices. As in CCA's previous business model, tuition will be determined on a sliding fee scale; based on household income and the number of children eligible from the same family.

THE CRITICAL YEARS

Experts in early childhood development have long known the significance of years 0-5 as a predictor in overall success in social, emotional and cognitive skills. Now advanced technologies in neuroscience are providing the proof. At birth, the brain undergoes tremendous development through interaction with primary caregivers and family alike. New research shows that both genetics and environment affect the long-term brain architecture. Both are considered equally important in building a foundation of skills that last a lifetime.

Genes provide the basic blueprint, but experiences shape the process that determines whether a child's brain will provide a strong or weak foundation for all future learning, behavior, and health (<http://www.urbanchildinstitute.org/why-0-3/baby-and-brain>).

THE INTERVENTION

During early childhood development, the brain's circuits and pathway connections are forming at a very rapid pace. Through the child's daily stimulation and experiences, crucial networks are activated and formed. The neurons of the brain that are continually and positively engaged become stronger and more efficient. On the other hand, if the young brain encounters repeated negative experiences, such as neglect, abuse or trauma, its

development is interrupted or stunted. The connections that determine control over emotion, behavior, memory, logic, language and motor skills become fragile and ineffective. Similar to the construction of a building, a strong foundation provides the support for the development of skill upon skill. Without strong brain architecture in all of the essential areas, future learning and skill development are compromised. The good news is, we have the ability to tip the scale in favor of more positive outcomes and Center City Academy seeks to be such a catalyst.

THE RETURN ON INVESTMENT

The bottom line is that an investment in early childhood development is a **WIN-WIN for Wichita!** It's a **WIN** for the child who becomes a better student, a better adult and an independent community leader. It's a **WIN** for the parent who is supported by the availability of safe, affordable child care and in turn, can be a more emotional stable parent and reliable employee. It is a **WIN** for the employer and business investor who will reap the benefit of a well-educated, responsible workforce. And, it's a **WIN** for a stronger community because quality early childhood development contributes to breaking the cycle of poverty, overall community health and economic growth. The immediate benefits to our city and the sustainability of growth into the future depend upon on our **commitment to the core.**

DOWNTOWN WICHITA IS GROWING AT A RAPID PACE

Economic development and the relocation of residents to the downtown area has happened at an impressive pace. As published by Downtown Wichita (<https://downtownwichita.org/development/state-of-downtown>) the *State of Downtown Report 2019* reveals an interesting shift in demographics: 1,228 new residential units have been built since 2010 and a recent study projects market capacity for an additional 2,000+ potential units. As of the date of the report (May 2019), there are an estimated 2,749 individuals residing in the downtown area: 84% of this population moved downtown since 2010, 68% of those individuals are between the ages of 20 and 50 and 41% of downtown residents hold a Bachelor's or higher educational degree. Available developments offer studio units or plans that accommodate one to four bedroom apartments.

Since the adoption of *Project Downtown: The Master Plan for Wichita in 2010* (<http://www.wichita.gov/Planning/Pages/Downtown.aspx>), over \$694,550,000 of private and public investment has been made in downtown Wichita and the growth continues at a phenomenal rate. Another \$1,158,000,000 investment over 10 years is proposed in the Riverfront Legacy Master Plan (<https://www.riverfrontlegacywichita.org/>). Currently there are 10 companies that report a range of 100 to 850 employees in this area totaling approximately 4,000 employees alone. Additional projects underway include a new downtown headquarters for Meritrust Credit Union and \$51M expansion for Fidelity Bank. Yet, with all the workforce growth within the downtown corridor, adequate resources for quality childcare in the area are lacking. Currently there are four open enrollment childcare facilities within the core downtown area with the capacity to serve only 231 children. Additionally, the *2019 Child Care Supply Demand Report: The Landscape of Child Care in KS* (<https://ks.childcareaware.org/wp-content/uploads/Supply-Demand-2019-FINAL.pdf>) states that the number of available openings in child care facilities in Sedgwick County can serve only 45% of the number of children under age six potentially needing care and that there are 11-20 children per one child care opening under the age of three.

The missing component of the plan for the development of downtown Wichita is the availability of quality day care and early childhood education for preschool children. This unmet need creates a challenge for the parent, the workforce and the employer alike. The big picture for effective urban growth must include a

mindful understanding of the community's fundamental needs while enabling the flow of new commerce and opportunity for revitalization.

OUR HISTORY – A LEGACY OF LEARNING

The rise of women and single parents in the workforce in the 1960s created a challenge to provide quality education, meals, and nurturing care for children in the early stages of development. As previously mentioned, the Downtown Day Care Center opened in 1971. In its 43 year history, it enriched the lives of thousands of children and their families.

As a Non-Profit corporation, the center was a licensed, nationally certified facility qualified to serve 100 children from 1 – 5 years. In 2010 an infant room was added to serve children as young as 6 weeks. Hours of operation were from 6:00 AM to 6:00 PM. The sliding scale allowed tuitions based on household income and included discounted fees for additional children from the same family. Further support for the annual budget came from church provisions, private contributions, grants from community foundations and organizations, and the Department of Children and Family.

The Board of Directors included community volunteers, professionals in law, education, business, finance and parents of enrolled children. All requirements for education in early childhood education were met by a staff of twenty nine professionals.

The Downtown Day Care Center ceased operations in the summer of 2014 due to structural and mechanical issues in the facility.

THE MISSION AND VISION OF CENTER CITY ACADEMY

The mission of Center City Academy is to provide a safe, educationally enriched environment for children at an affordable cost to families from diverse socio-economic backgrounds.

The vision of Center City Academy is to create a new facility located within a five- mile radius of the center of Wichita, possibly through receiving land by donation or at a reduced price. The center will provide state-of-the-art teaching with a holistic approach, educating the mind, body and spirit. The staff will be diverse, well-trained and well paid, with the availability of vacation, health and retirement benefit plans. The facility will support the latest in advanced technology systems specially designed for early childhood development, child care and security. A Board of Directors comprised of community leaders, professionals and parents will guide the Center City Academy into the future. An endowment fund will be established to subsidize scholarships for families in need and all possible grant and corporate gift sources, including the United Way will be pursued. CCA will continue to serve with other local non-profit partners, including Women's Initiative Network and The Women's Crisis Center.

CURRENT BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Sally Chesser, Treasurer

Sally@ChesserCPAs.com

Nancy Crandall

NCrandall@cox.net

Tim Holt

TimHoltRE@gmail.com

Betty Moore, President

BMooreASID@aol.com

Rebecca Moore

admin@CenterCityAcademy.org

Dr. Jennifer Stone, PhD

Jennifer.Stone@Wichita.edu

Gregg Wilhite

gwilhite47@gmail.com

OPPORTUNITIES FOR VOLUNTEERS & DONORS

We are in search of community leaders to join us in an effort to become “Committed to the Core” by cultivating a non-profit child care center of superior and affordable nature in the heart of our re-emergent downtown. You, or someone you know, may have the expertise, community ties and leadership skills necessary to help us nurture and grow this grass roots effort from concept to reality. If you share a passion for children and are inspired by the momentous transformation taking place in Wichita’s inner city, please consider this an invitation to reach out for more information! We can provide additional informational materials or make a scheduled presentation to your large or small group.

This journey will take many generous hearts and hands with a wide range of talent and dedication. Whether it be through a financial gift, volunteering time, energy or expertise, or leadership support through BOD service, many levels of commitment and participation are available. Would you consider being a part of this crusade to support the early development of Wichita’s future generations? Please reflect on your availability and resources to help us celebrate the diversity that enriches our community while providing a service that is desperately needed by making a personal “Commitment to the Core!” ***We believe that early child development is the foundation of a prosperous, innovative, resourceful and resilient community.***

PLEASE JOIN US IN COMMITTING TO THE CORE!

FIND MORE INFORMATION HERE:

Rebecca Moore, Board of Directors | Direct 316-641-4153

Email admin@CenterCityAcademy.org

Online <https://www.CenterCityAcademy.org>

Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/CenterCityAcademy/>

