

## BACK TO BUSINESS IOWA PODCAST

A partnership of Iowa State University Extension and Outreach and America's SBDC Iowa

### SEASON 1 | EPISODE 46: An Examination of Childcare in Iowa, Pt. 3

(32:53; published Nov. 17, 2020)

**Description:** *Dawn Oliver Wiand, executive director of the Iowa Women's Foundation, speaks to host Steve Adams about her organization's work to help Iowa's women achieve self-sufficiency through access to quality, affordable childcare.*



[music]

**Steve Adams, host** 00:10

Hello, and welcome to the Back to Business Iowa podcast from Iowa State University Extension and Outreach. This podcast is a collaboration between Iowa State University Extension and Outreach and the programs including Community and Economic Development, Farm, Food and Enterprise Development, and the Iowa Small Business Development Centers. These podcasts cover relevant topics for businesses and individuals related to education, research and technical assistance during and post COVID-19.

**Steve Adams, host** 00:55

I'm Steve Adams, field specialist three at Iowa State University Extension and Outreach, part of the Community and Economic Development unit and your host for these podcasts. Today, our guest is Miss Dawn Oliver Wiand, president and CEO of the Iowa Women's Foundation, otherwise known as IWF. This is a third in a series of podcasts dealing with childcare during the pandemic and its effect on families, providers and the Iowa workforce. Dawn, welcome to the program.

**Dawn Oliver Wiand** 01:25

Steve, thank you so much. I'm thrilled to be here with you today and to talk about childcare and the work that the Iowa Women's Foundation is doing across the state.

**Steve Adams, host** 01:35

I think we're all looking forward to that, too. So Donna, can you tell our listeners about the Iowa Women's Foundation, what it does and what its purpose or mission is?

**Dawn Oliver Wiand** 01:44

Absolutely. So the Women's Foundation is one of 140 women's funds around the globe. And we all work to improve the lives of women and girls in one way or another. So some may choose to do it through domestic violence. Others may choose to do it through human trafficking. We do it through economic self-sufficiency, because we believe if women are successful, their families will be and ultimately their communities will be better off. We aren't a direct service provider, so we don't actually have a shelter that we operate or a financial literacy program that we provide.

**Dawn Oliver Wiand** 02:26

We do our work through five key strategies: research, grant-making, advocacy, education and collaboration. And research really guides our efforts; research really helps us kind of look at what are those barriers that are keeping women from being successful and how can we work to break down those barriers so we have economic self-sufficiency for all across the state? And our research is where

we learned that childcare was one of the primary barriers that were keeping women from being successful. And because of that research, we are now looking at the childcare issue and trying to address that as our primary barrier.

**Steve Adams, host** 03:17

Well you know, I'm glad to hear you say they're research-based, because that's kind of what we are as a land grant institution. We like to tell people we're a research-based university. So I'm glad to hear you say that the data is driving your focus here. So that's really impressive. What are your duties and responsibilities as president and CEO of the IWF?

**Dawn Oliver Wiand** 03:38

So as the president and CEO, I have the great fortune to lead this organization and help steer its work. And as I said earlier, we do use research and then grant-making, advocacy, education and collaboration. So there's a lot of strategies that we focus on. But we're also a very small staff, we only have two and a half staff total running the organization: myself, a vice president of operations and a vice president of finance. We are very dependent on our volunteers and if it wasn't for them, quite honestly, we would not be able to do the work that we're doing across the state.

**Steve Adams, host** 04:22

It's interesting to hear you say that about volunteers. We just had a podcast here this past week with some nonprofits around the state and what we found out there was, volunteers really are the backbone of most nonprofit organizations within the state of Iowa. So I'm hearing the same thing from you, correct?

**Dawn Oliver Wiand** 04:41

Oh, absolutely. Matter of fact, this organization was started by 27 women back in 1996. And honestly, 20 of them are still very active and committed to the organization. So once you get involved, good news: you stay involved and you help us get the work done across the state.

**Steve Adams, host** 05:05

Well, you spoke about the data here and I noticed that the IWF has put out some really interesting, I thought, position papers regarding childcare in Iowa. And I want to dive into a few of those things that you discovered, if you don't mind. But first of all, how many children go without access to affordable childcare in Iowa and why is that so significant?

**Dawn Oliver Wiand** 05:30

Well, Steve, let me let me share with you first why we got to these numbers and how we got to them so everybody and our listeners will have an understanding of that. So when I said to you earlier, research really guides our efforts, what we learned back in 2015, when we were doing our research was that 70% of Iowa's female head of households were struggling economically. 70%. 40% were living below the federal poverty line, and another 30% were the working poor, or those women who are trying really, really hard to make ends meet, but for one reason or another, they just couldn't.

**Dawn Oliver Wiand** 06:07

To us that was unacceptable, and we wanted to know why. And we wanted to know if that "why" was consistent across the state, or if it was different from community to community. So what we did is we identified 18 communities across the state of Iowa. We traveled those communities. We convened to the table stakeholders, leaders from business, schools, nonprofit organizations, the elected officials, and we asked, Why are women and girls struggling? From those conversations, we learned that there were six barriers to economic success: employment, childcare, education and training, transportation, housing, and mentorship.

**Dawn Oliver Wiand 06:50**

After we learned that, we traveled back to those 18 community, we presented the data and we said, Now in a perfect world, if you could start working on one of these, what would you work on and what would you do? Eight of the 18 communities chose childcare as their number one answer. Honestly, if you would have told me that back then, I would not have believed it, I would have honestly thought it would have been education and training or employment.

**Dawn Oliver Wiand 07:20**

But as when we were in Dubuque area, and we were talking about the issues, and they had chose employment as their number one issue, and they said to me, you know, we don't get it. We have all these job openings here in health care and IT and manufacturing and customer service. And we have this population that wants to work, and they're not. There's just this disconnect, and it was like a light bulb went off. Ah, we don't have enough childcare in this community. So they switched to childcare.

**Dawn Oliver Wiand 07:52**

So now nine of the 18 communities were telling the Women's Foundation that childcare was the number one barrier. So we do what we do best—we went back and looked at the research when it comes to childcare. And that's where we learned that one in two children in Iowa go without access to quality, affordable childcare. And in some parts of our state, this is much higher. Some parts, we've got five or six kids wanting childcare for every one slot available. And we know that this shortfall is not only impacting our families, but it's also impacting our children, our communities, and our businesses all across the state.

**Dawn Oliver Wiand 08:35**

We know that children's brains develop at a very early age, and that sets the foundation for their future success. So they need good quality, affordable childcare as they're going and developing and growing. And their families need that childcare if they want to be able to work, if they want to go to school, if they want to get additional training. All of these are paths to economic security. And if they don't have childcare, they don't, they can't take advantage of that path. And then finally, we know that businesses depend on childcare. They might not have ever realized it, but they need a workforce and our working parents are out there. And if they can't have childcare, they can't work. And that's impacting the businesses. So when you've got one in two children who can't get childcare, that's impacting a lot of parents and a lot of families and a lot of businesses.

**Steve Adams, host 09:34**

Well, you mentioned that shortfall. I know your research also kind of looked at the number of childcare businesses in Iowa. And that loss there seems to be fairly significant. How many have you lost in Iowa over the last five years?

**Dawn Oliver Wiand 09:49**

Yep. So Childcare Resource and Referral does a really great job of keeping track of this data for us. When we started this research back in 2016 and 17, we saw a 42% loss of child care providers in the last five years. The good news today, that number has gone down to 37%. But still 37% is a lot, and we can't keep losing at this rate. And all these numbers that I'm quoting to you are pre-COVID. We know that since COVID has hit we have, you know, in-home providers and centers that are struggling all across our state to stay open.

**Steve Adams, host 10:37**

Well still I see that that maybe is a kind of a trend. But it sounds like you've got a little optimism in your voice there as to potential improvement in that shortfall. Are you optimistic at this point?

**Dawn Oliver Wiand 10:48**

You know, I would say to you, I was really optimistic back in February, because one of the things that we've done, and we'll talk about more later in the podcast, is we've started working with communities and community partners all across the state to increase the availability of childcare. And we were on a really good path in February, and then COVID hit. And we've really had to do some pivoting and some changing of our focus. But because of COVID, and the bright light that's been shined on the situation, more people are talking about it now than ever. The message that the Women's Foundation brought out to year a year and a half to two years ago, is now really being heard all across the country. So that's where our optimism is coming from. Now, quite honestly, we just need to all come together and put some of this optimism into action. Because if we don't have any action, and we don't address some of these issues, it's only going to get worse.

**Steve Adams, host 11:51**

You know, if I had to pick one word that has popped up more often in these podcasts, and maybe the word of the Back to Business Iowa podcast, and that's the word pivot. So that pivoting and the changing of the business model seems to be the only way, because the pandemic, after all, is calling the shots, we're not. So I just want to dive just a little bit deeper there. How are some of these people pivoting? What are some of the changes that they're making?

**Dawn Oliver Wiand 12:17**

Yeah, so we're all changing as far as, you know, businesses are looking at changes, parents are looking at changes, schools are looking at changes, and even nonprofits are. And so what the things that we've tried to do within these communities is say, okay, we need to increase the availability of childcare. How can we do that? Can we do that through building and expanding? Can we do that through increasing the workforce for childcare? Can we do that by looking at before and after school programs? Can we bring businesses together to partner?

**Dawn Oliver Wiand 12:49**

You know, businesses probably really in the past never thought about making an investment in child care. Well, we're spending a lot of time educating them on the importance of childcare and how those investments that they make can really not only impact their families and their workforces, but it's going to help their bottom lines. So we're all really looking at our attitude towards childcare. We're seeing it as an economic issue, not a family issue. We're seeing it now as an economic driver. And we're all trying to figure out how can we come together and come up with solutions and then implement those solutions that are going to help everybody?

**Steve Adams, host 13:35**

Well you know another data point that just kind of jumped out at me was Iowa households with children under the age of six have parents working outside the home. What is that percentage again and why is that significant?

**Dawn Oliver Wiand 13:49**

Yeah, Steve, I was really surprised about this one. When we saw it in our data, Iowa leads the nation, with 75% of our families with children under the age of six having all parents working outside of the home. We are number one across the country. We have the most working parents with young children. And these working parents need childcare or they're not going to be able to stay in the workforce. And this workforce is who's helping these businesses thrive. And if the businesses don't have a workforce, there's not going to be any thriving businesses. So it all kind of just sort of, you know, circles around and depends on each other.

**Steve Adams, host** 14:33

Oh, I would agree definitely. I also saw in one of the position papers that the US Chamber of Commerce Foundation had done, they released what I would just say was just astounding numbers, in my opinion, on the impacts of childcare on the economy in the state of Iowa. We've touched a little bit on this, but could you share a little bit more about some of that data that they came up with?

**Dawn Oliver Wiand** 14:56

Oh, absolutely. And I'm really thrilled that the US Chamber of Commerce Foundation, in association with ABI, the Area Business and Industry here in Iowa, put this report together. Because quite honestly, the Women's Foundation had been talking about this being a business issue, but we needed those numbers to show businesses that it was an issue for them, and it came from this report. So we know that in Iowa, childcare issues are resulting in an estimated \$935 million loss to our economy each year. \$935 million, that is a lot of money missing from our economy.

**Dawn Oliver Wiand** 15:43

In addition, we know that Iowa is losing an estimated \$153 million annually in tax revenue due to childcare issues, another astonishing number. And finally, we learned that absences and employee turnover are costing Iowa employers an estimated \$781 million a year. So what we like to say to our businesses is, if you would invest a little bit of money into childcare, you're going to see your recruitment and retention numbers, you know, get better and you're going to see your work productivity numbers get better.

**Dawn Oliver Wiand** 16:27

I'll just share with you, some people ask me all the time after I share those numbers, why? Why are we seeing such high economic numbers, and childcare impacts in these numbers? And I think it's kind of interesting to know that 65% of parents are late to work or leave early because of childcare issues. 65%. Specifically, we know that working parents are missing 4.3 days of work every six months. And they're late to work or leave early another 7.5 times in that same six-month time period. So you can see there's a lot of work disruptions, and there's a lot of, you know, work productivity that's not happening because of the childcare issues. So we're pretty excited that we can share these numbers. They're not good numbers, but it helps us tell the story and to let businesses know that there really is an issue here for them when it comes to childcare.

**Steve Adams, host** 17:37

We try to take an apolitical viewpoint with everything that we're talking about here. But with a loss of tax revenue and the loss of economic drivers caused by childcare and those numbers, like you said, are astounding and quite significant. You would think the federal legislators would look at this a little differently, and try to maybe, we talked about businesses making an investment, wouldn't it be incumbent upon Congress at the federal level, and also our state legislature, to maybe look at doing some reinvestment in childcare?

**Dawn Oliver Wiand** 18:14

That's exactly right. It's on our list. We're spending a lot of time not only the Iowa Women's Foundation, but other advocacy organizations across the state are working really hard to educate and inform our national elected officials as well as our state. And I am excited to share with you, we all know that the governor put together her Iowa economic advisory team to give her some suggestions and things that needed to be done to improve the economy and to bring it back, and their number one recommendation was to invest in childcare, and to really work within the childcare issues.

**Dawn Oliver Wiand** 18:59

And selfishly, I, you know, I have to say, I sure hope the Iowa Women's Foundation and our partners are a part of that work. We've been doing it for two years, we've got a lot of information that we can share, a lot of actions that we can recommend. And if we can work together, I truly believe that we're going to be able to turn this issue around and instead of making it a crisis, make it you know, something that we're proud of. I told the governor once when I met with her, I said, Wouldn't it be neat if other states were saying we want to do what Iowa did? We want to be like Iowa and address this issue. So my fingers are crossed that that happens.

**Steve Adams, host** 19:42

Well, as you said, we lead the nation in people working outside the home, or number of people in a household working outside of the home. So maybe we can be number one in this category as well. I have to assume though, that all the things we've talked about up to this point have created some economic insecurity facing women and girls in the state of Iowa. Could you speak to some of those economic insecurities?

**Dawn Oliver Wiand** 20:07

Oh, absolutely and you know, that's why we're here—even though childcare is really our focus, we're focusing on childcare because we want more women across our state to be economically self-sufficient. And I shared those numbers with you earlier, about 70% of Iowa's female head of households struggling, and 40% are living at the federal poverty line and another 30 are the working poor. I just read an article right before we got on this podcast about what's happening with women in the workforce and we're seeing women drop out of the workforce tremendously quickly. And they're doing that for a number of reasons but we're now back to the numbers of women in the workforce from the 1990s. So we're really losing some traction here.

**Dawn Oliver Wiand** 21:03

And the National Women's Law Center shows that women have disproportionately been affected by COVID. We know that women have made up 49% of the workforce, but honestly, they're 60% of the job losses. They're outnumbering men in all of the sectors, both nationwide and in Iowa. You know, we saw the unemployment rate in Iowa jump to 10.3% in May. Thank goodness it's back down, and it's continuing to trend down.

**Dawn Oliver Wiand** 21:35

But those numbers are getting better for men, not as well for women. Because women are really overrepresented in all of the sectors that have been affected the most by COVID. So women are going to have to, you know, make some changes. And that's one of the things that the Women's Foundation is here for, is to kind of look at what are some of those things that they can do and how can we help them? And how can our community partners and organizations around the state help them?

**Steve Adams, host** 22:05

Yeah, I just also read an article, in fact, the title of it was, "Pandemic job losses hit mothers harder than fathers: wage gap, changes in kids schooling among the factors that have led to the disparity along with the lack of childcare." So you're basically just echoing all the things that were in this article as well or not?

**Dawn Oliver Wiand** 22:25

Yep. And that sounds like one I just read myself, Steve, it's absolutely right. And I just reached out and asked a couple of people to get some data for me. I'm really curious right now to know, out of all these childcares, how many of our providers have closed since COVID and have stayed closed. I think that's going to be an important number that we look at, too. Because of the fact that they're having to homeschool, because of the fact that they're having to do more of the childcare giving, it is the women

that are the ones that are making the decision to stay home. Unfortunately, though, if you're a single head of household, female, you don't have that option. So you've got to look at everything.

**Steve Adams, host** 23:10

I appreciate that. Well, I also noted that the IWF is started something called the Child Care Solution Fund or CCSF. Could you tell our listeners a little bit about its intent and purpose? And would you consider that that program is a success or just a necessary first step?

**Dawn Oliver Wiand** 23:29

So first of all, I think I've done a lot of talking so far on this podcast about data and research. And I did say to you that action is what it's going to take and that we can't just keep having conversations. And so the Women's Foundation, if we're going to talk about action, we need to help lead with action. And so one of the things we did is, grant-making is the heart of our work. We do grant-making, and we have for the last 25 years. But we noticed that most of our grant-making that we were doing was for direct service to help individuals directly. And that if we wanted to increase the availability of childcare, we were going to have to look at bricks and mortar, we were going to have to look at supplies, we were going to have to look at staffing. And we were going to have to look at things that just were not being directed in our core grant-making.

**Dawn Oliver Wiand** 24:19

And so we established our Child Care Solutions Fund. That is a fund that is helping communities across the state invest in different strategies to increase childcare. It is just a first step. As a matter of fact, this is our third year. I had over 53 requests asking for well over a million dollars and I had \$40,000 to grant. I had to leave, we left so many great programs on the table unfunded. So we need to figure out how we can increase the funding and get to these organizations and help. And so that's one of the things that we're looking at is, how can we grow that fund?

**Steve Adams, host** 25:08

Well, obviously, there's quite a bit of disparity between a million dollars' worth of ask and only \$40,000 to distribute. So that does become problematic, so I can understand that. And certainly I think, you know, again, making people more aware of that education component, Dawn, that you talked about, is going to be essential in getting people involved in that fund, I would think, in the long term. So another program that kind of caught my eye was the Building Community Childcare Solutions Network. Now why was that formed and how's that program [unclear].

**Dawn Oliver Wiand** 25:42

That is exactly the program that we started back after 2016 and 17, when we learned that childcare was the number one priority for the majority of our communities that we were visiting with. We put together a toolkit, and that toolkit has six possible solutions that a community can look at to increase the availability of childcare. We went back to those eight communities that identified childcare, we presented the toolkit again to community leaders and stakeholders, we worked with them to identify solutions that were viable and doable for their communities.

**Dawn Oliver Wiand** 26:25

We put together plans that they could use, we looked at resources, we looked at people, we looked at leadership, and we really helped these communities move forward with building childcare in their communities. I'm excited to share with you, we now have 30 communities across the state that are working with us. We have gotten national funding from the Gates Foundation to expand this program and we are now in the process of putting together tools that these communities need. The whole point is to work together—if they decide to do something in Sioux City, that's the same thing and Keokuk or Decorah or Des Moines. Let's share, let's talk, let's not all recreate the wheel and start over. We're a

network of communities and community partners working together to, you know, increase the availability and, honestly, to stabilize the childcare industry across the state of Iowa.

**Steve Adams, host** 27:31

Right, networking is kind of the key to that. So we've talked about all these resources, is there anything we missed? Are there other resources available to through IWF that our listeners need to know about?

**Dawn Oliver Wiand** 27:43

Well, again, IWF could not do the work we were doing if it wasn't for our community partners. So Early Childhood Iowa, Childcare Resource and Referral, community leaders, business leaders—all of these individuals and organizations have come together. We're working on tools, we're working on fast-track training, we're looking on pilot projects. And if anyone out there wants to get involved at a community level, or even at the state level, please let me know. We're gonna have to do this together, and we're going to have to do this, you know, in a number of different ways, from advocacy, down to education, down to bricks and mortar.

**Steve Adams, host** 28:31

Well, you've referred several times in those publications to the childcare crisis and I think you've got that very well-documented. Are their long-term implications if we don't do something about this? And you've talked about what we can do, but if we don't get a handle on this, again, what are you seeing as the future of childcare in Iowa?

**Dawn Oliver Wiand** 28:52

If we don't get a handle on childcare, childcare is not only going to impact our businesses, our families, it's going to impact those businesses and those communities out there. Childcare really is an economic driver and we need to see it that way. But it is such a big issue that it can't be solved by just one group. It's going to take everybody to come together, to work together, to create a public-private partnership, and to have that partnership identify, develop, implement, and support solutions—and multiple solutions and multiple ways to address this issue. And honestly, I believe we're on a really good path. And I believe that if we continue doing what we're doing and people join us, people will come to Iowa and want to learn from us and want to do what we did in Iowa.

**Steve Adams, host** 29:48

Well, after all, if you build it, they will come, right?

**Dawn Oliver Wiand** 29:51

Absolutely.

**Steve Adams, host** 29:54

Well, Dawn, hopefully we haven't flooded the brains of our listeners with too many statistics and acronyms today. But I really do not know how else we could have told this story, and I thought you did a wonderful job telling it, by the way.

**Dawn Oliver Wiand** 30:07

Well, thank you so much. I really appreciate it. And I tell it all the time, because it's important that people hear it and and we see some action.

**Steve Adams, host** 30:17

So if someone wanted to inquire about resources or assistance available to them through IWF, what would be the best way for them to reach out to you or the organization?

**Dawn Oliver Wiand 30:27**

Absolutely, thank you. I would encourage them to go to our website, which is, of course [www.iawf.org](http://www.iawf.org). Or feel free to reach out to me, my email is [dawn@iawf.org](mailto:dawn@iawf.org). We would love anyone's help, input, resources, you name it. We're looking for help

**Steve Adams, host 30:59**

Outstanding. Well, thanks again for all you're doing for the women, girls and children in the state of Iowa, and what a privilege it has been for us to have you here today. And I just want to say, keep up the fine work you're doing and best of luck going forward.

**Dawn Oliver Wiand 31:13**

No, thank you, Steve, and remember, we couldn't do it if it wasn't for our partners and our volunteers. So we have a great team, so I thank them as well.

**Steve Adams, host 31:22**

Go team. Yep. If you have any questions about this Back to Business Iowa podcast, please feel free to contact me, Steve Adams, [stadams@iastate.edu](mailto:stadams@iastate.edu). As always, thanks for listening. This podcast is a collaboration between Iowa State University Extension and Outreach and the Small Business Development Centers of Iowa. We're always serving Iowans, hashtag strong Iowa.

**Steve Adams, host 31:53**

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