CITY OF MERCED

ADMINISTRATIVE REPORT

File #: 23-293   Meeting Date: 4/17/2023

Report Prepared by: Kimberly Nutt, Housing Program Supervisor, Housing Division/Development Services Department

SUBJECT: <u>Further Discussion, Additional Information, and Project Alternatives Regarding Community Development Block Grant Project Funding for the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) 2023 Annual Action Plan</u>

REPORT IN BRIEF
Provides additional project information and alternative options for Council consideration regarding 2023 Annual Action Plan project funding proposals, following Council direction received at the Public Hearing on March 20, 2023.

RECOMMENDATION
City Council -

A. Discuss and provide additional direction and/or comments to staff regarding the 2023 revised preliminary project funding for inclusion into the 2023 Annual Action Plan; and,

B. Though not a Public Hearing, provide an opportunity for the public to comment on project funding options.

ALTERNATIVES
No Council Motion or Approval is required for this discussion.

AUTHORITY
HUD requires, per Title 24 of the Code of Federal Regulations Section 91, that participating local government jurisdictions involve citizens in the development of the Annual Action Plan and any subsequent substantial amendments; the City of Merced Housing Division Citizen Participation Plan (Amended); and, the Charter of the City of Merced, Section 405, 409, and 411, et seq.

CITY COUNCIL PRIORITIES
As provided for in the 2022-23 Adopted Budget; and both the 2022-23 and 2023-24 Council Goals and Priorities.

DISCUSSION
At the March 20, 2023, Public Hearing, Merced City Housing Division staff introduced the non-profit project funding requests, anticipated funding resources, and proposed project funding expenditures

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for the use of U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Community Development Block Grant Program (CDBG) and Home Investment Partnership Program (HOME) funds during the 2023-24 program/fiscal year and that are to be included in the Final Draft of the 2023 Annual Action Plan. Staff also explained the steps made thus far towards completion of the Draft Annual Plan and the inclusion of resident, local agency, and community organization participation and input into the process, which included public outreach, public meetings, a needs assessment process, and a Non-profit funding application process (Attachment 4). Staff explained the results of the Needs Assessment Survey that was carried out December 2022 - February 2023, and to which project funding aims to address through the Annual Plan over the coming program year. Council also received public comment during the Public Hearing.

CDBG Public Service Project Funding

At the last meeting, Council gave staff direction regarding Public Service funding priorities, in order to reduce proposed project funding to match the 15% cap required, as staff had received more funding requests than will be available. As a result of this direction, all public service projects will tentatively receive funding at the amount requested, with the exception of Project Sentinel's Tenant and Landlord Counseling services proposal, which was reduced to the balance remaining after subtracting the total of other public service fund requests. Please refer to Attachment 1 for these final amounts.

CDBG and HOME Housing and Economic Development-Related Project Funding

At the last meeting, Council reviewed and discussed housing-related project funding and preliminarily accepted all planned housing projects, except for Sierra Saving Grace's (SSG) Supportive Housing-Acquisition with Rehabilitation project, given the number and complexity of the property purchase/rehab projects that SSG is currently working on with 2022 and prior-year funding awards. SSG had requested a total of $500,000 towards purchase and rehab activities for the 2023 program year, and $50,000 would be set aside for Housing Division admin/activity delivery costs (ADC), for a total of $550,000 for the project.

Council also requested more information about the CDBG Economic Development/ Microenterprise project proposed by WeeCare, Inc. for the "Business Operation and Optimization Support Tools (BOOST)" program for small-family childcare service owner support. The project proposed to benefit low- to moderate-income (LMI) childcare business owners by providing them support tools and services to help them run their services more efficiently. Per Council request, much more detailed information about the WeeCare program is provided at Attachment 3. WeeCare had requested a total of $84,000, which they will match dollar-for-dollar, if awarded.

As a result of discussion regarding both the SSG and WeeCare proposals (totaling $634,000 CDBG), Council requested staff return with alternative project funding options, to potentially consider using the funds towards other eligible projects. After reviewing other potential uses, staff is providing an alternative project, which is described under "CDBG Public Facility/Infrastructure Projects" in the next section below.

Please see Attachment 1 for both CDBG and HOME housing- and economic-development related

funding proposal totals. All project descriptions were included in the March 20, 2023, Administrative staff report at Attachment 4.

CDBG Public Facility/Infrastructure Projects

In the March 20, 2023, report and at the last meeting, staff reviewed all proposed public facility and infrastructure projects and Council indicated these were acceptable.

However, as a result of Council's request for the alternative funding option(s) discussed above, the following is an additional use of CDBG funds for Public Facilities which staff requests Council consider as an eligible alternative, described as follows:

- Organization: City of Merced Fire Department
  Program: Health Education Assessment/Referral Team (HEART)
  Requested: $632,000 (CDBG)
  Program Description: The City of Merced Fire Department (MFD) proposes to use $632,000 of CDBG funds to purchase and equip two Emergency Medical Service (EMS) health education assessment/referral team (HEART) vehicles and one off-road Emergency Assessment Vehicle (EAV). In 2022, the MFD responded to 11,672 calls for service, with the vast majority of the calls being for EMS response. Currently, service gaps exist between the time requirements of the local ambulance contractor to respond to Code 3 "lights and siren" calls and the ability of MFD EMT's to respond to Code 2 non-emergent calls the local contractor cannot service. With the use of CDBG funding, MFD has the opportunity to provide medical assessments and transport in a timely manner for those Code 2 calls.

  Each HEART vehicle would be staffed by two first responders and would essentially be an ambulance. In addition to EMT service, each HEART vehicle would go in-service with a mid-level practitioner approximately one time per week and establish pop-up health clinics in predominantly LMI areas within the city limits. The HEART vehicles would also stay available to respond to the needs of the local hospital to provide ambulance transport. Post-pandemic, HEART vehicles could also provide regular vaccine and preventative health service programs to the homeless. Additionally, during large structure fires, a HEART vehicle will be able to respond on-scene to provide medical aid to fire victims.

  The EAV unit would be utilized to access off-road and other hard-to-reach areas of the City that are not accessible by normal vehicles or ambulances to provide EMS services directly to the unhoused/ homeless. The EAV would be a 4x4 SUV and would be equipped to have full response and treatment capabilities.

  All three proposed vehicles would provide an increase in the level of service provided to LMI and homeless individuals within the city limits, which meets HUD National Objective and Eligibility requirements to be included for 2023 Annual Plan funding. Though this is not a HUD-categorized "public service" project, provision of services to the homeless was ranked the #2 most needed public service in the 2023 Community Needs Assessment Survey, with services for Special Needs

populations ranked #1. Additionally, "Improving Neighborhood and Public Facilities/Infrastructure" was ranked the #1 Neighborhood Improvement need. As such, Housing staff recommends Council consideration of this alternative project.

The project would not include any percentage for administrative activity delivery costs. An environmental review will be required under the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) for this alternative proposal.

CDBG and HOME Administrative Funding

No changes have been made to Administrative funding amounts since the last meeting, and no changes are expected. Please see Attachments 1 and 4 for more information.

Next Steps

Currently, the 30-day Public Review and Comment Period is in progress, which began on March 31, 2023, and will run through Monday, May 1, 2023. Though the April 17th meeting was not included in the published notice for Annual Action Plan public hearings- thus this is not a public hearing - Housing staff encourages public comment be collected at tonight's meeting, to fulfill the City's responsibility to include Merced City resident input in all Annual Plan funding decisions.

A second and final public hearing will be held at the Council meeting of May 1, 2023, where Council will be asked to approve final project funding and the final draft of the plan.

Housing staff is on track to submit a Council-approved 2023 Annual Action Plan to HUD by May 15, 2023. An on-time submission ensures that the programs approved with the plan are able to implement and complete their programs in a timely fashion.

IMPACT ON CITY RESOURCES
No budget or appropriation action is required at this time.

Funding for the 2023 HUD Annual Action Plan is representative of the 2023-24 Housing Division budget in the concurrent development of the overall City budget for the upcoming City fiscal year. Funds presented as CDBG and HOME anticipated allocations were the amounts included in the nationwide announcement of allocations by HUD on February 27, 2023, and will be the City's 2023-24 allocations unless corrected by HUD with amendment notifications or other processes.

ATTACHMENTS
1. 2023 Annual Action Plan Project List
2. Merced City Fire Department Proposal - HEART/EAV Vehicles
3. WeeCare Program Information
4. March 20, 2023 Administrative Report

2023 Annual Plan Project List

CDBG *(2023 Allocation $1,034,373)*

Organization/Agency	Description	Project Type	Funding Resource	Activity Delivery [Admin]	Project Costs
CDBG Prior-year Carryover + Actual Program Income = $ 797,983 as of 3/30/23					
<u>**CDBG Public Service Activities**</u>					
Projects Accepted (per 3/20/23 Council direction):					
Sierra Saving Grace	Short-term rental assistance	Homelessness Prevention	CDBG	--	$ 35,500
Harvest Time	Food Distribution to LMI/homeless	LMI/homeless services	CDBG	--	61,660
Lifeline CDC	Afterschool support/job training for Loughborough area LMI families	Employment Training	CDBG	--	25,000
Boys and Girls Club of Merced County	Youth services – youth workforce training and internship programs	Youth Services	CDBG	--	40,694
Project Sentinel, Inc	Tenant/landlord counseling service for city residents	Housing Counseling	CDBG	--	40,226
Preliminary Final - Total CDBG Public Service projects (meets 15% cap of $203,080):					**$ 203,080**
<u>**CDBG Infrastructure, Housing, and Economic Development Activities**</u>					
A. Projects Accepted (per 3/20/23 Council direction):					
City of Merced – Recreation and Parks	Energy efficiency and ADA upgrades to McNamara Park pool/bathrooms (10% ADC) *Note: amounts will increase with any unanticipated program income to be received thru 6/30 AND potentially by $2,000 from difference of "B" and "C" below*	Public Facility	CDBG	$ 20,706*	$ 207,066*
CVCAH / City of Merced	Water/Sewer Main/ADA Improvements for GTII and surrounding area (10% ADC)	Public Infrastructure	CDBG	25,000	250,000
Habitat for Humanity, Merced/Stanislaus	Owner-Occupied Rehab to enable repairs for LMI homeowners (Funding Year 2 of 3) (20% ADC)	Housing	CDBG	30,000	150,000
Habitat for Humanity, Merced/Stanislaus	Change of funding source to enable completion 241 E Main St project (20% ADC)	Housing	CDBG	30,000	150,000
Subtotal ADC & Project Costs – Accepted projects:				**$ 105,706***	**$ 757,066***
B. Projects Requiring Further Consideration (per 3/20/23 Council direction):					
Wee Care, Inc	Microenterprise business support assistance to LMI childcare providers (0% ADC)	Economic Development	CDBG	0	$ 84,000
Sierra Saving Grace	Acquisition/rehab of existing residential units for conversion to affordable permanent supportive housing (10% ADC)	Housing	CDBG	50,000	500,000
Subtotal ADC & Project Costs - Original:					**$ 634,000**
C. Alternative to B above:					
Merced City Fire Department	Purchase of 2 HEART vehicles (ambulances) and 1 EMS off-road EAV SUV	Public Facility	CDBG	0	$ 632,000
Subtotal ADC & Project Costs – Proposed Alternative:					**$ 632,000**

CDBG Administrative Activities					
Merced County Human Services Agency/CoC Collaborative Applicant	Homelessness planning activities by the Merced City and County Continuum of Care	Admin	CDBG	--	$ 38,000
Housing Division	Direct Administration costs	Admin	CDBG	$ 74,737	N/A
Housing Division	Indirect Administration costs	Admin	CDBG	112,737	N/A
Total Housing Admin & Project Costs - CDBG:				**$ 187,474**	**$ 38,000**
Total CDBG Available:					**$ 1,925,326**

HOME (2023 Allocation $573,200)

Organization/Agency	Description	Project Type	Funding Resource	Expected Activity Delivery [Admin Revenue]	Project Costs
HOME Prior Year Carryover + Actual Program Income = $ 4,029,944 as of 3/30/23					
HOME Housing Activities					
TBD	Affordable Rental Housing	New Rental Housing Construction	HOME	$ 731,345	$ 3,656,730
Certified Community Housing Development Organization (CVCAH)	Eligible CHDO HOME project TBD (can be combined with regular HOME funds if CVCAH is developer partner) *Note: total also includes 2022 CHDO funds that will be committed to a 2023 project*	New rental housing construction, - OR - Mult-Family rental rehab	CHDO HOME (Reserve 15%)	35,291	176,458
Total Housing ADC & Project Costs – HOME:				**$ 766,636**	**$ 3,833,188**
HOME Administrative Activities					
Project Sentinel, Inc	Fair Housing Services for city residents	Admin Fair Housing	HOME	--	$ 33,360
Housing Division	Direct Administration costs	Admin	HOME	$ 23,960	N/A
Total Admin Activities & Fair Housing Project Costs:				**$ 23,960**	**$ 33,360**
Total HOME Available:					**$ 4,657,144**

INTEROFFICE MEMORANDUM

TO: Stephanie Deitz, City Manager

FROM: Derek Parker, Fire Chief

DATE: April 4, 2023

SUBJECT: Health Education Assessment/Referral Team (HEART) Proposal

In 2022 Merced Fire Department (MFD) responded to 11,672 calls for service with the vast majority of the calls being emergency medical services (EMS) responses. Although this was the highest number of responses that MFD has ever responded to, there are a significant number of EMS responses that occur within the city limits where MFD is not responding. The MFD mission is to prevent, prepare for, and mitigate emergencies to protect the citizens of the City of Merced through exceptional service and visionary leadership. Part of that leadership is ensuring all members of the community receive care when needed. This gets the right resource to the right patient to provide the right care at the right time.

MFD responds with the local ambulance contractor for most calls. The contractor does have a time requirement for lights and siren "code 3" responses. Non-emergent calls are code 2 responses for low acquity complaints and there is no time requirement for response. MFD does not provide service to the citizens with respect to EMS response for lower acquity calls. MFD has an opportunity to provide assessments in a timely manner for those in need.

MFD proposes a change to the level of service for all EMS responses within city limits. This can be accomplished with the addition of a health education assessment/referral team (HEART) car and an emergency assessment vehicle (EAV).

The HEART would be staffed by two first responders and would be an ambulance. The HEART car would go in-service with the mid-level practioner and establish weekly pop-up health clinics. The HEART will also stay available to respond to the needs of the local hospital to provide ambulance transport outside of pop-up clinics.

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An EAV would be utilized to access areas of the community no accessible by vehicle to care for the unhoused. The EAV would be in a 4x4 SUV and would have full response capability as well as the equipment to treat patients as they come upon them.

Staffing:

Shifts	24 hour shifts	
Administrative Oversight	Addition of a 960 hour FNP-RN/PA	Provides CQI
Equipment	SUV and Ambulances	

Equipment:

Ambulance	Patient transport capability	$100,000 x 2 ($200,000)
Ambulance Equipment	Communications, treatment, advanced charting capability	$180,000 x 2 ($360,000)
SUV	Off-road capability	$55,000
SUV Equipment	Communications, treatment, advanced charting	$17,000
Total		$632,000

Added value:

The community will receive timely service for their requests. MFD will not pend calls, we will answer their request for service.

During large structure fires the HEART car will be able to respond to all medical aids and continue to provide service to the community.

Unhoused residents can proactively be addressed with regular interaction. On the heels of the COVID-19 pandemic, the administration of a vaccine and preventative health assessment program can utilize the HEART car model.

Jessa Santangelo
WeeCare
VP of Business Development
(310) 710-2833
jessa.c@weecare.co

City of Merced Housing Program
678 W. 18th Street
Merced, CA 95340

Dear City of Merced Housing Program,

Thank you for reviewing WeeCare's proposal for CDBG funding in PY 2023-24. We are submitting a request to fund our community program, BOOST.

WeeCare is a network of licensed child care providers, and our mission is to make affordable, quality child care accessible to all families. One way we do this is by equipping child care providers to operate sustainable businesses with technology-based tools. Although we are a for-profit company, our community program, BOOST provides its services to child care providers for free and does not generate any revenue.

BOOST's activities are public-service oriented, but the activity itself qualifies as economic development for microenterprises and does not need to be funded from the 15% reserve restricted for Public Service. Please see Attachment A for details on HUD's Code of Federal Regulations 24 CFR 570.201 (o) on eligible activities. Therefore, per the City of Merced's Consolidated Plan, Public Services & Quality of Life Improvements is a form of public service that can provide supportive services for LMI households and special needs populations. These activities that benefit LMI microenterprises can be funded by non-public service CDBG dollars.

With this in mind, WeeCare is requesting $84,000 in CDBG funding to pay for program expenses to run BOOST for one year. WeeCare has identified 14 daycares within the City of Merced's limits, and although more may exist, to curate an effective program, the scope of this proposal will be based on those 14. This program will be made available to *all* licensed daycares in Merced and applicants will be prioritized based on their level of need and risk. The program can easily be scaled up or down to according to Merced's needs.

If funded, WeeCare commits to providing a $1 for $1 match, doubling the investment in the local community to $168,000. This will benefit 14 LMI daycare owners, potentially create 4 new LMI jobs from hiring teaching assistants, and can benefit up to 196 LMI households who use the child care services.

If you would like any additional information beyond what is included in this application, I'm happy to provide more details.

Thank you for your consideration,

Jessa Santangelo
VP of Business Development

• Code of Federal Regulations

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iii\ **Title 24** ■

Subpart C- Eligible Activities

§ 570.201 Basic eligible activities.

CDBG funds may be used for the following activities:

(a) *Acquisition.* (Condensed to save space.)

(b) *Disposition.*

(c) *Public facilities and improvements.*

(d) *Clearance and remediation activities.*

(e) *Public services.* Provision of public services (including labor, supplies, and materials) including but not limited to those concerned with employment, crime prevention, child care, health, drug abuse, education, fair housing counseling, energy conservation, welfare (but excluding the provision of income payments identified under§ 570.207(b)(4)). homebuyer down payment assistance, or recreational needs. If housing counseling, as defined in 24 CFR 5.100, is provided, it must be carried out in accordance with 24 CFR 5.111. To be eligible for CDBG assistance, a public service must be either a new service or a quantifiable increase in the level of an existing service above that which has been provided by or on behalf of the unit of general local government (through funds raised by the unit or received by the unit from the State in which it is located) in the 12 calendar months before the submission of the action plan. (An exception to this requirement may be made if HUD determines that any decrease in the level of a service was the result of events not within the control of the unit of general local government.) The amount of CDBG funds used for public services shall not exceed paragraphs (el(1) or ill ofthis section, as applicable:

(1) The amount of CDBG funds used for public services shall not exceed 15 percent of each grant, except that for entitlement grants made under subpart D of this part, nonentitlement CDBG grants in Hawaii, and for recipients of insular area funds under section 106 of the Act, the amount shall not exceed 15 percent of the grant plus 15 percent of program income, as defined in § 570.500(a). For entitlement grants under subpart D of this part. nonentitlement CDBG grants in Hawaii, and for recipients of insular area funds under section 106 of the Act. compliance is based on limiting the amount of CDBG funds obligated for public service activities in each program year to an amount no greater than 15 percent of the entitlement grant made for that program year plus 15 percent of the program income received during the grantee's immediately preceding program year.

(2) A recipient which obligated more CDBG funds for public services than 15 percent of its grant funded from origin year 1982 or 1983 appropriations (excluding program income and any assistance received under Public Law 98-8). may obligate more CDBG funds than allowable under paragraph Will of this section, so long as the total amount obligated in any program year does not exceed:

(i) For an entitlement grantee, 15% of the program income it received during the preceding program year; plus

(ii) A portion of the grant received for the program year which is the highest of the following amounts:

    (A) The amount determined by applying the percentage of the grant it obligated for public

    services in the 1982 program year against the grant for its current program year;

    (B) The amount determined by applying the percentage of the grant it obligated for public

    services in the 1983 program year against the grant for its current program year;

    (C) The amount of funds it obligated for public services in the 1982 program year; or,

    (D) The amount of funds it obligated for public services in the 1983 program year.

(f) *Interim assistance.*
(g) *Payment of non-Federal share.*
(h) *Urban renewal completion.*
(i) *Relocation.*
U) *Loss of rental income.*
(k) *Housing services.*
(l) *Privately owned utilities.*
(m) *Construction of housing.*
(n) *Homeownership assistance.*

(o)

(1) The provision of assistance either through the recipient directly or through public and private organizations, agencies, and other subrecipients (including nonprofit and for-profit subrecipients) to facilitate economic development by:

    (i) Providing credit, including, but not limited to, grants, loans, loan guarantees, and other forms of financial support, for the establishment, stabilization, and expansion of microenterprises;

    (ii) Providing technical assistance, advice, and business support services to owners of microenterprises and persons developing microenterprises; and

    (iii) Providing general support, including, but not limited to, peer support programs, counseling, child care, transportation, and other similar services, to owners of microenterprises and persons developing microenterprises.

(2) Services provided this paragraph (o) shall not be subject to the restrictions on public services contained in paragraph (e) of this section.

(3) For purposes of this paragraph (o). "persons developing microenterprises" means such persons who have expressed interest and who are, or after an initial screening process are expected to be, actively working toward developing businesses, each of which is expected to be a microenterprise at the time it is formed.

(4) Assistance under this paragraph (o) may also include training, technical assistance, or other support services to increase the capacity of the recipient or subrecipient to carry out the activities under this paragraph (o).

Appendix A: Narrative of Project

There are approximately 6,091 children under six years old in the City of Merced and about 81,306 households that make up the community that raises them (U.S. Census, 2020). That means there are 81,306 households across Merced that potentially need full or part-time child care to support their family's well-being. Whether it is to enrich the growing child or to provide supervision so parents can work, child care is an essential service that touches thousands of Merced residents.

WeeCare proposes CDBG funds be allocated to benefit child care providers throughout the City of Merced. The program, BOOST (Business Operation & Optimization Support Tools), provides specialized technical assistance and business support for these microenterprises, known locally as daycares. They serve children ages 0-5 (and up to age 13 with before/after school care). The BOOST program will expand economic opportunities for daycare providers in the City of Merced by training them to use essential tools that will make their operations more efficient. This program will empower them to reach their full revenue potential and stabilize their jobs in the child care industry.

Through BOOST, the daycare providers located in various places within the City of Merced get individual business coaching and learn best practices to grow and sustain their business. Their child care businesses support many Low-to-Moderate Income (LMI) families who depend significantly on their services. WeeCare is designed to serve daycare providers and families 24 hours a day, every day of the year. BOOST participants will receive the same access to its services year-round.
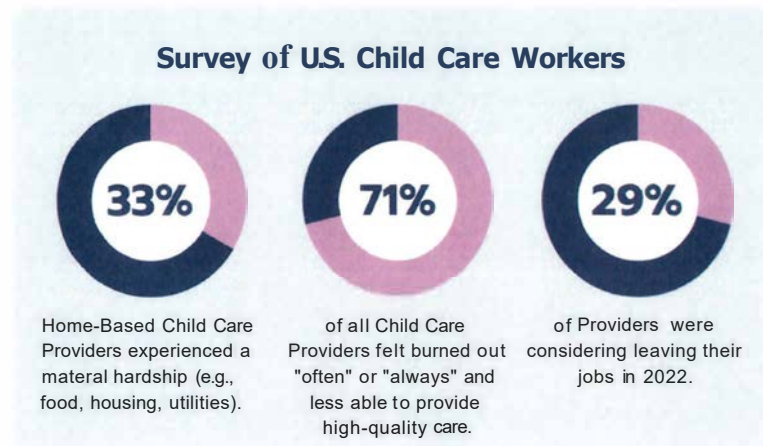
WeeCare has identified 14 daycares within the City of Merced's limits. Although more may exist, to curate an effective program, the scope of this proposal will be based on those 14. This program will be made available to **all** licensed daycares in the City of Merced, and applicants will be prioritized based on their level of risk and need.

The Problem

Child care is a much-needed service, but paradoxically an under-resourced industry. The cost of caring for young children exceeds what many families can afford to pay. Child care workers are left to bear the brunt of the disparity and frequently cover the cost of the difference with their salary. In California, 98% of daycare providers are women, 71% are people of color, and 60% are between the ages of 40 to 59 years old (Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, 2020). The average earning of a child care worker in Merced is $17.88 an hour (Zippia, 2022), or about $37,190.00 a year, qualifying them as LMI persons. They are greatly underpaid compared to their counterparts in elementary schools. California early educators with a bachelor's degree who work in preschools are paid 37.8% less than their colleagues in the K-8 school system. The poverty rate for preschool educators is 17%, much higher than for California workers in general (8.7%) and 6.7 times as high as for K-8 teachers (2.5%). (Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, 2020)

The child care workforce has been steadily declining for years due in part to these low wages and financial challenges. The COVID-19 Pandemic hit the child care sector particularly hard and further exacerbated the problem. With school closures and fears of health risks, child care enrollment numbers dropped too drastically for many programs to stay afloat. The already decreasing child care workforce only made matters worse. Unlike other sectors that could raise wages to attract talent, the child care industry was left with no incentives to attract or retain its employees.

Appendix A: Narrative of Project

Survey of U.S. Child Care Workers

33%
Home-Based Child Care Providers experienced a material hardship (e.g., food, housing, utilities).

71%
of all Child Care Providers felt burned out "often" or "always" and less able to provide high-quality care.

29%
of Providers were considering leaving their jobs in 2022.

(RAPID ,2022)

This is because daycares typically serve a vulnerable, low-income earning pool of customers. Therefore, they are at a disadvantage because when their own costs go up, they cannot rely on raising prices on their families. If they charge too much, the families will take their business elsewhere, but if they charge too little, they will not be able to cover their expenses. Because of this, they must rely on other methods to operate soundly.

Impact

The ailing child care sector received much needed financial assistance from the federal government in response to the COVID-19 crisis. USA Today reported that the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) made an unprecedented effort to include the child care industry to keep it from collapsing. But the effects of the one-time funding are starting to wear off. The temporary fix was only meant to stabilize the industry and get parents back into the labor market. Many acknowledge that more long-term strategies are needed to keep the child care industry from crumbling once again (2022).

The strategy behind BOOST applies that knowledge - that government funding is a transitional aid, not the solution itself. Therefore, BOOST is designed to only operate with each daycare cohort for one year. It uses that time to teach daycare owners how to improve their microenterprise with best practices while also providing enrollment assistance by matching local families who need child care.

BOOST individually coaches the daycare provider throughout the 12 months and supplies customer (family) leads so they can experience business growth while they have access to WeeCare's professional guidance. By the end of the program, daycare providers experience a year of using the right tools for free and learn valuable lessons by "doing," not just observing. At the close of the BOOST program, daycare providers can continue with WeeCare's management software or adopt a different software program of their choosing. The child care industry is one that has many symbiotic relationships between providers, children, families, and employers, thus the goal of the BOOST program is to strengthen the child care ecosystem as a whole. When child care is strong, everyone benefits.

WeeCare List Of Services

- 24/7 Support
- Anonymous Reporting and On&Q.1.ng Feedback
- Background Check Technology
- Capacity & Scheduling System
- Care Coaches for Providers
- Care Managers for Families
- Community Support Forums
- Curriculum Provided Weekly
- Drop In Scheduling
- Enrollment Automation and Support
- Finance Management
- License and Citation Monitoring
- Uceosiog Support

- Location Performance Metrics
- Matchmaking Afgorithm
- MilestQne_Trac_king
- Photo And Video Updates (Moments)
- PrDfessionaLDevelopment and Continuing Education
- Regulations & Information Confirmation System
- Resource Center
- Staff Recruitment
- Timestamped Verification & Attendance System
- Tour Scheduling
- Tuition Collection
- Waitlist System

24/7 Support

Parents and providers can use the app to communicate with one another and with the WeeCare support team. Support for both parents and providers is available in over 30 languages. We can communicate directly with our entire network and confirm that the messages have been read. If a provider has not read the information, we're able to send reminders until they do.

Anonymous Reporting and Ongoing Parent and Community Feedback

Instead of conducting one-time spot visits, WeeCare obtains real-time feedback after every step from a tour through enrollment and un-enrollment-this allows WeeCare to continually ensure that all providers are meeting its high safety standards and allows for WeeCare to provide actionable feedback to providers.

Background Check Technology

Safety is a top priority. All FCC participants go through a rigorous background check process to ensure the safety and quality of each location. In addition, all our network locations are licensed by the state and undergo additional background check and health and safety screenings before being admitted as a WeeCare Network Provider.

WeeCare's admin system runs nightly licensing and inspection reports and immediately alerts Care Manager if any Network Provider status changes or receives a new infraction. In addition, all site managers, family members, and staff background checks are also run nightly to identify any changes that could be missed or delayed in reporting to licensing.

Capacity & Scheduling System

Real-time information on each facility's current and future available capacity down to each hour and age group providing the most accurate picture of each location and aiding in the inputs for our customized matchmaking. Providers also benefit from this system because they can maximize the spaces that they have open when other children are out sick or on vacation, or open available seats thereby maximizing their income.

Care Coaches for Providers

Care Coaches oversee the success of their assigned FCC Providers. Care Coaches focus on quality improvement and real-time support. They closely monitor quality and safety, developmentally appropriate activities, and assist with career-enhancing resources. Care Coaches work to improve the quality of child care given and support efforts to expand FCC 's licensed capacity and can provide support in English or Spanish.

Care Managers for Families

Care Managers assist with every step of enrollment and address any questions or concerns the families may have. They bridge the gap between families and FCC providers to support at critical junctures such as enrollment, recertification, family meetings and transitions. They encourage family involvement and provide resources and referrals for additional services based on families' needs, such as access to food or parenting resources. They can provide support in English or Spanish.

Community Support Forums

WeeCare provides community support forums for parents and providers to connect with each other on many different topics including behavior and development, child care, learning and education, parent hacks, pregnancy and childbirth, tough topics, and more. The community forum is beneficial for parents and providers to connect with each other and give advice or just relate to one another in a non-professional setting. For example, parents and providers have posted about ideas for social distancing, tips, and tricks for picky eaters, and dealing with separation anxiety. A community forum is a place for knowledge sharing and support rather than a formal educational resource, so parents and providers feel supported and empowered.

Curriculum Provided Weekly

WeeCare offers an in-house curriculum that's accessible to every provider. These lesson plans are designed to be easy to follow and enriching for children of all ages. Providers can access the curriculum directly in the app for free. WeeCare also works with educational institutions so providers have access to the statewide curriculum and can track developmental milestones. This can later be used when children reach kindergarten age and can provide a retroactive look into that child's developmental milestones.

Drop-In Scheduling

Our technology allows for providers to accept drop-in care, where parents can find locations that meet their flexible one-off requests. This is especially important for tourism, the restaurant industry and gig workers, and any parents that have fluctuating schedules, or when schools shut down and parents need to find emergency backup care. These parents can immediately find quality care at the nearest location whenever they need it. Providers also benefit from this system because they can maximize the spaces that they have open when other children are out sick or on vacation, or open available seats thereby maximizing their income.

Enrollment Automation and Support

WeeCare simplifies the enrollment process by modernizing and supporting the very first step after a family secures a spot at a child care location - the paperwork. Immediately after enrollment is confirmed via the WeeCare app, the family is emailed a copy of their provider's WeeCare enrollment packet.

Providers enjoy the assurance that comes with letting go of the administrative work - putting together a new packet, ensuring the new family receives it and communicating that it is due on the first day of care. All mandatory licensing documentation, for example, requests for immunization records, are included. WeeCare enrollment packets are automatically updated upon any changes to state licensing so that providers never have to worry about potential licensing citations for outdated or missing paperwork. Finally, as our database records verify when the enrollment packet was received by the family, we can mediate both parties if a dispute ever occurs. All in all, an automated and digitized enrollment process is the key to a successful start to care.

Finance Management

WeeCare's technology can assist with record keeping for billing, tracking expenses, end of year tax documents, FSA Dependent Care Reimbursement, and required paperwork for subsidy reimbursement.

License and Citation Monitoring

Safety is a top priority for WeeCare. WeeCare providers must go through a rigorous background check process to ensure the safety of each location. All of WeeCare's providers are licensed and background-checked before being on boarded to the platform. WeeCare has technology that also continually monitors the provider's licenses and background checks nightly. We are automatically notified of any new infractions which ensures that all locations continue to meet our standards.

Licensing Support

There has been a decline in providers moving from a small FCC to a large FCC or a corporate center for several reasons. First, it's difficult to spread awareness of who can expand their license and the necessary steps to do so. For providers wishing to expand to a corporate center, there is a lot of hesitation around the potential financial burden and having to deal with other entities such as insurance companies and the fire department to ensure their center is up to code. WeeCare can identify providers who are ready and willing to expand their licenses and we have a dedicated support team to walk them through the entire process, helping to ease any doubts or fears they have about moving their license. WeeCare's support team is well-versed in licensing requirements and can make suggestions for further resources and next steps.

Location Performance Metrics

WeeCare can track how each FCC location is performing to find areas to focus on professional development. We can look at things such as enrollment, children's milestones, achievements, and safety ratings to determine how each location is performing. From there, we can tailor the location's development specifically to its needs and offer suggestions for professional development.

Matchmaking Algorithm

WeeCare's system has the capability of matching families with child care providers with current capacity openings in real-time. Typically, parents will have to spend time calling multiple child care providers (sometimes from outdated resources) to determine which provider has the capacity and maybe a good fit for their child. This leads to wasted time and energy on behalf of both the parents and providers as the providers are likely fielding inquiries while simultaneously watching over children. WeeCare accomplishes this matching in seconds and with the most up-to-date and accurate information. This virtually eliminates the need for parents to spend days searching for child care that meets their needs.

Our matching algorithm matches parents from as much information that is available and can be up to 22 different points with even customized prioritization of criteria, so we are able to ensure the highest quality provider family matches. For example, we can take the parent's individual criteria such as budget and schedule to search across multiple Geographic Location(s) desired to find the best match for the parent that may perfectly fit in along the parent's commute.

Currently, with many childcare matching databases, parents can't search based on their unique needs. WeeCare allows parents to filter their childcare search by different needs so they're able to find the perfect fit for their family including primary language spoken at daycare, or whether the provider has experience with special needs or developmental delays.

Milestone Tracking

Our AI technology recommends curriculum based on developmental milestones and individual child profiles. When a child enters WeeCare, we can get a baseline on them to see where they're at developmentally and where they need to be. The curriculum can then be tailored to fit specific needs. Parents also have access to curriculum to follow along at home and so they know what they're learning throughout the day and can continue the learning at home.

Payment to Providers

WeeCare pays child care providers quickly and provides the first payment to providers within 2-5 days. If needed, WeeCare could also pay providers upfront to further streamline the process and be

reimbursed later. The same methods can create a bridge program while providers wait for government subsidy payments.

Photo And Video Updates for Families (Moments)

One of the most common requests by parents is for their provider to send photo and video updates of their child throughout the day. The WeeCare app makes it easy for parents to feel connected and at ease by allowing providers to securely send *Moments* directly in-app to a parent. Moreover, the Moments feature enables providers to link the specific curriculum or activity they are doing in the photo or video, so parents can have the full experience.

Professional Development and Continuing Education

WeeCare can provide safety education and training including 1 on 1 and monthly in-service training webinars. The community forum also encourages community engagement. WeeCare has a designated training section and is easily able to push out regulation changes so providers are aware of them. Providers can also connect with the community and parents on relevant topics, including a searchable database for providers to use. WeeCare is also able to work with accredited institutions and connect their trainings and content so that all available professional development is easily accessible and centralized to providers with search and filter functionality.

Regulations & Information Confirmation System

The lack of access to mandatory licensing information is easily addressable by utilizing WeeCare's in-app licensing checklist and push notification system. There are multiple methods we can use to verify that a provider successfully received and confirmed that they read the latest licensing information, which should be standardized across FCCs.

Resource Center

WeeCare acts as a centralized source of information and offers support to who want to apply for assistance paying for child care. If parents are denied or unable to pay for child care, we have resources to point them in the right direction and can help figure out the next.

Staff Recruitment

WeeCare can connect providers to licensed and background-checked teaching assistants by serving as a place where assistants can apply to be placed at a WeeCare location in their area. Similar to how we

match parents and providers, we match assistants to the best WeeCare employer. When a provider has more staff, it means they can accommodate more enrollments and give more kids access to quality care. WeeCare can do all the work to identify, recruit, and vet individuals to serve as teaching assistants for providers including detailed background checks.

In addition to matching teaching assistants with providers, WeeCare can facilitate a substitute teaching pool to give providers a backup if they ever need to take a day off due to illness or emergencies. This substitute pool would also consist of individuals that have been vetted and checked by WeeCare's thorough process.

Timestamped Verification and Attendance System

WeeCare offers accuracy in variable schedule payments. WeeCare can verify when children are dropped off and picked up from child care providers due to a location enabling timestamp, along with real-time photo verification. This technology leaves less room for error and leads to major cost savings.

WeeCare also has a contactless attendance system that providers and families use to mark when a child arrives and when they depart. This eliminates the need for pen and paper sign outs, which is a system plagued by human error. The use of WeeCare's contactless attendance system also helps to store that data in one place rather than scattered across other forms and pieces of paper. If providers need access to that attendance data for reporting reasons, they're able to access it directly.

The contactless attendance system can also be useful in contact tracing if there is ever a COVID-19 case at a location. Providers can see who was there on a certain day to determine if anyone needs to quarantine.

Tour Scheduling

WeeCare built a tool in the app that allows for virtual tours to eliminate unnecessary contact. During the pandemic, touring facilities in person is not possible for most people and is not the safest method. Now, parents can tour facilities remotely and leave feedback after each tour. This feedback is used to assess WeeCare providers and address any concerns that might come up

Tuition Collection

Parents can easily pay their tuition in the app. Tuition payments are charged 1 week in advance of care that is given. This gives room to ensure providers are paid upfront and on time, as well as guaranteeing a child care spot for the parent.

If there are any financial situations that arise, WeeCare works with the parent directly and develops a plan with the parent directly while covering the costs with no interruption of payment to the provider to help avoid any uncomfortable conversations or friction between parent and provider, preserving a healthy relationship, and saving everyone time and financial stress.

Waitlist System

Parents can be on multiple WeeCare location waitlists and will receive automatic updates on their status and spot, rather than them having to call the provider directly. As real-time information comes in about changes incapacity, we inform the waitlisted parents every step of the way with automatic notifications via text message, email, and/or in-app notifications, and parents are also able to see at any time their real-time place and status on each waiting list.