

# Dreams. Drive. Dedication.

**2022 ANNUAL REPORT** 



# A Message From the CEO

#### SCOTT SPROUL, PRESIDENT AND CEO

It is exciting and rewarding to lead the Northwest Kansas Economic Innovation Center, Inc. in its **mission to increase the population, add to the quality of life for residents, and foster economic innovation in our region**. This last year has seen many changes for the Innovation Center resulting in progress for the region.

In February 2022 the Innovation Center Board approved funding for the expansion of a program with Goodland Tech, Inc. This program worked to revamp the crypto program at Northwest Kansas Technical College and resulted in yearly admissions to the program jumping from an average of six students per year to over 50 students in one year. The Innovation Center has continued to work on workforce challenges for the region. **ConnectNWK continues to be a great resource** for both employers and job seekers with 134 employers and 146 job seekers using the site, resulting in 71 jobs filled by the end of 2022. In May the Innovation Center launched a pilot program for workforce recruitment. This program is open to 24 counties in the region and offers up to \$60,000 in incentives to be allocated and administered according to personalized plans developed by each county.

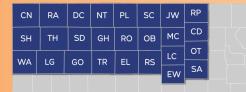
Adding workforce to the region can compound some of the struggles the area is experiencing with childcare. Recognizing the **vital role early childcare plays in the quality of life and economic health of our communities** the Innovation Center added a childcare director to its staff in July. Dana helps communities explore viable solutions to their childcare needs and helps childcare facilities navigate the many local and state resources available to providers. Another challenge for the Innovation Center region is the lack of affordable, viable housing. This past year, Innovation Center staff and board members have spent time researching technologies that are either more cost effective, quicker to build, or both. In November the Innovation Center Board approved a loan to build a house with one of those technologies.

The Innovation Center Business Finance Program **continues to provide non-traditional funding to help businesses and entrepreneurs** in the area with financing to purchase an existing business, start a new business, or develop a product. In 2022 the Innovation Center Board approved over \$3 million in loans.

As I reflect on 2022, I am thankful for all the partnerships and engagements over the past year, and am looking forward to **expanding the Innovation Center's reach** and continuing to make a positive impact on our region.

## INNOVATION -CENTER-

Serving 26 counties in Northwest Kansas, NWKEICI is a private foundation offering economic and entrepreneurial assistance to businesses and individuals.





SCOTT SPROUL PRESIDENT AND CEO



MARIA DAHLQUIST RURAL & REMOTE TECHNICAL LEAD



LUCAS GODDARD PROGRAM DIRECTOR



DANA JO STANTON CHILDCARE PROGRAM DIRECTOR



**GRETCHIN STAPLES** RURAL & REMOTE COORDINATOR



MICHELLE PREWO OFFICE MANAGER This last year has seen many changes for the Innovation Center resulting in progress for the region.

#### **2022 BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

Doug Albin, WaKeeney Morris Engle, Phillipsburg Michelle Foote, Hoxie Clare Gustin, Hays Mark Lowry, Stockton Mike Posson, Norton Jenny Russell, Courtland Finance

## **Work Force**

**ConnectNWK**\*

188 Jobs posted to ConnectNWK

in Northwest Kansas posting employment opportunities

143 Members applying for opportunities using ConnectNWK

71 Total Jobs Filled in Northwest Kansas because of ConnectNWK

**107 Summer Internship** 

opportunities hosted through ConnectNWK in partnership with

**Nex-Generation Round Up for Youth** 





#### 62 Community Asset **Survey Responses**

This will communicate ConnectNWK's long-term goal of connecting people and communities, not just job seekers and employers



# Childcare

# Housing

### **NWK Cares for Kids Program**

\$58,114 support for five childcare centers

\$55,114 childcare center staff support

\$3,000 book grants for centers

#### 5 Houses built for use as childcare facilities and directly funded through community loans to the developer

### 8 Childcare Coalitions

developed in coordination with individuals in Russell, Rawlins, Ellis, Decatur, Graham, Cloud, **Rooks, and Cheyenne Counties** 

#### **34 Community Meetings**

attended regarding childcare

**CHILDCARE TRACKING** system developed to monitor childcare trends in Northwest Kansas

#### **FACEBOOK GROUP**

established with over 50 active members Northwest Kansas Childcare Provider Support Group

#### **Early childhood education plays a pivotal role**

in the quality of life and economic health of a community. Our tomorrows will be brighter with an adequate number of high-quality childcare slots available in Northwest Kansas communities. In 2022, the Northwest Kansas Innovation Center showed their commitment to this concept by hiring a fulltime staff person to oversee their early childhood initiatives. Dana Stanton was hired as the NWKEICI Childcare Director in July 2022. Stanton brings 17 years of experience in early childhood education, grant writing, and communication to the new position. She is excited to work with individuals and communities to address childcare needs in Northwest Kansas.

**DANA JO STANTON** CHILDCARE PROGRAM DIRECTOR

NWKEICI.ORG

# New initiatives begin

In 2022 the Innovation Center spent a considerable amount of time exploring opportunities to tackle the many challenges communities face in housing.

Due to ever increasing supply costs Innovation Center staff and board members researched many different types of construction technologies such as 3D printing, Structural Insulated Panel (SIP) construction, and Waffle

#### **THREE-DIMENSIONAL PRINTING**

**STRUCTURAL INSULATED PANELS** 

#### WAFFLE CRETE CONSTRUCTION

Crete construction. In November, the Innovation Center Board approved a loan to build a home using the Waffle Crete technology to determine if there are any advantages over a traditional built home.





While looking at the different construction technologies, the lack of workforce and construction trades in the Innovation Center region became a renewed challenge. In the organization's goal of creating opportunities for residents in the region, staff began researching how to create construction trades within the Kansas Department of Corrections. A program like this can create many benefits including a reduction in recidivism, teaching valuable new skills to those in the system, and increasing the number of skilled workforce for the area. In 2023 the Innovation Center will continue working where needed with the Kansas Department of Corrections.

The Innovation Center staff and board members have also embarked on a learning process to better understand the many housing resources available locally and statewide to determine the best options for communities to increase the availability of affordable, viable housing. It was discovered that working with communities to develop individual plans was the most impactful and the Innovation Center will continue to work with communities in 2023.

NWKEICI.ORG

Find out how you can make an impact in partnership with the Innovation Center wkeici.org

NWKEICI.ORG





#### nwkeici.org

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