

Introduction:

SENT (Strengthening and Equipping Neighborhoods Together) Topeka was established in 2018 as a non-profit entity to address the underdeveloped and under-resourced Hi-Crest neighborhood's needs. Continuing community revitalization efforts began in 2013 led by the Topeka Rescue Mission and various community partners, SENT brought a new perspective and direction to the approach. SENT's mission is to provide the residents of this neighborhood a vision of what is not only possible but is also attainable by walking beside neighbors through loving relationships and strategic development to accomplish the holistic transformation of this neighborhood. The pillars of SENT include housing and business development, cradle-to-career education, and health and wellness. SENT is working in tandem with the Hi-Crest Neighborhood Improvement Association (NIA) to improve the neighborhood. SENT believes that through loving relationships, trust and cooperation are built with the community's residents and local organizations such as churches, small businesses, and other non-profits. Fusing outside resources with the neighborhood's existing resources and abilities is helping the community develop dignity, pride, and ownership. SENT's leadership has been working to secure a facility to meet the need for child care in the community, aligning with their strategy for cradle-to-career education.

SENT, Inc. is under the leadership of Executive Director Nikki Ramirez-Jennings. A native Topekan, Ramirez-Jennings is a graduate of Washburn University, having earned her Bachelor's in Human Services. Ramirez-Jennings has focused her career on working with students of various ages, both in public school settings and non-profit environments. Ramirez-Jennings has a demonstrated passionate commitment towards empowering individuals, both in her current role and through various volunteer activities. She has been recognized professionally with her Topeka Public Schools Distinguished Staff Award while also receiving honors among civic organizations such as the Minority Leadership Academy and Topeka Alliance of Black School Educators. She was recently the recipient of the YWCA 2020 Women of Excellence Award in the non-profit category.

Paige Roudybush will serve as the center director for the SENT child care program. Roudybush has worked with children and families for the past ten years in different settings and roles, from early childhood education teacher to volunteering for Love Your Melon-Washburn Campus and, most recently, Case Management with Family Service and Guidance Center. In 2015, she obtained her child care program director license. Roudybush graduated from Washburn University in 2018 with a Bachelor of Arts in Sociology, studying children and families throughout her college coursework. Working as a SENT volunteer since January 2020, and serving on their education committee rekindled her passion for early childhood education because of the community, creativity, and fun that comes with this vital work.

Business Concept:

SENT Topeka proposes to launch the SENT Prep Academy, an early childhood education program providing high-quality child care for working families. The program will initially serve children ages six weeks to six years, with limited school-age care offered during summer, spring and winter break weeks. Building on the organization's cradle-to-career strategic focus, this model meets the needs of the Hi-Crest community as well as area parents with young children. SENT Prep's staff will have the opportunity to provide education for the children enrolled in the program and strengthen families with their robust family engagement model.

Data from Child Care Aware® of Eastern Kansas indicates that there are nine child care facilities within a one-mile radius of the Avondale East CARES Center located in Hi-Crest--- two child care centers and seven family child care programs. (This one-mile radius actually expands beyond the boundaries of the neighborhood.) Of the two child care centers, only one serves infants, and that facility has enrollment spaces for six children under the age of 18 months. Of the seven family child care programs in the area, only five offer infant care and indicated a desired enrollment capacity of a total of just five infant slots. Additionally, data gathered from the City of Topeka Neighborhood Planning Department showed that approximately 617 children under age six currently reside in the Hi-Crest neighborhood. Anecdotal data from Child Care Aware® of Eastern Kansas indicates both a specific need for infant and toddler care throughout Topeka and options for non-traditional hours of care. It is anticipated that this facility will be licensed to serve 86 children.

SENT Prep Academy has established the following goals for the child care facility:

- **Highly qualified staff.** Knowing that a great teacher is the leading indicator of quality in the classroom, SENT Prep Academy strives to hire highly qualified teachers. SENT's goal is that each classroom will have a lead teacher with a bachelor's degree in early childhood education or a closely related field. Assistant teachers will meet the minimum educational requirements of child care licensing and will commit to coursework (provided through SENT) that will lead them to attain their CDA (Child Development Associate) credential during their first year of employment. This commitment to providing a pathway to education and credentialing aligns with both SENT's education goals and the challenges of the early childhood field that faces significant shortages of qualified teaching staff.
- **Commitment to staff retention.** SENT Prep Academy knows the importance of stable relationships for children. In order to hire highly qualified staff and retain those

teachers, the center is committed to paying above-average salaries and offering a benefits package that encourages and rewards longevity. Additionally, understanding the complexity and importance of the earliest years in life and the fact that child care is challenging work, we want our staff to be supported and up-to-date on the latest in research and best practices. SENT is committed to offering ongoing professional development for their team, giving them the tools needed for offering high quality early experiences to the children enrolled in the program.

- **Strong family engagement and support strategies.** A strong partnership between child care and home leads to better outcomes for children. SENT Prep Academy will offer various methods for engaging families in extending the learning from child care to home and involving parents in the early education program's activities. Additionally, families will benefit from opportunities to receive referrals to other community resources through the Successful Connections Family Resource Specialists, onsite weekly to visit with families and make community referrals.
- **Operational hours that meet the needs of families in the Hi-Crest neighborhood.** Knowing that many area families do not work traditional 8 am - 5 pm hours, SENT Prep Academy will gather feasibility data to determine whether extended hours of care (before 7 am and after 6 pm) are needed and warranted in the area. It will then use that data to guide the establishment of operating hours. The center will also offer part-time and drop-in child care options as enrollment capacity permits, providing needed flexibility for families in the area and accommodating families that may need short-term child care as they attend a job interview, go to a medical appointment, or complete a job training course.

Program Plan:

To ensure that children attending the SENT Prep Academy are well-prepared for success in school and later in life, SENT has selected *The Creative Curriculum* as the foundational curriculum to be implemented center-wide. *The Creative Curriculum* includes developmentally appropriate goals and objectives for children within four main areas: social/emotional, physical, cognitive, and language. Within this stage, children learn how to make friends, have group interactions, and follow rules.

The Creative Curriculum for Infants, Toddlers, and Twos is a comprehensive, research-based curriculum designed to help teachers and caregivers implement developmentally appropriate practices and offer responsive daily routines and meaningful experiences that nurture learning and development. *The Creative Curriculum for Preschool* is one of the most widely used pre-K

SENT PREP ACADEMY BUSINESS PLAN BRIEF

curricula in the nation. It's comprehensive, research-based, research-proven, and features exploration and discovery as a way of learning.

The Creative Curriculum for Preschool, also research-based and research-proven, features exploration and discovery as a way of learning. It guides teachers to create high-quality learning environments and supports deep understanding of early childhood best practices, theory, and research. Children are engaged in project-based investigations, making every moment of the day meaningful, intentional, and engaging.

Conscious Discipline will also be utilized to support the enrolled children's social and emotional needs. *Conscious Discipline* is a social-emotional learning program. This well-known and highly respected curriculum helps teachers see how they personally respond to being upset, understand their emotions, and regulate themselves when triggered. In short, it teaches how to be conscious as adults of language and behaviors that are being modeled for children. Staff will receive extensive training on *Conscious Discipline*, and all classrooms will be equipped with materials and strategies for fostering positive social-emotional development in children.

Partnerships:

Working in collaboration with other community agencies will strengthen the program and provide additional layers of support to enrolled families. SENT Prep Academy will receive services through the Capital Area Successful Start (CASS) collaborative partners, including support for the administration and classroom teachers through Child Care Aware® of Eastern Kansas. SENT is also committed to drawing on the strengths of the Hi-Crest community. It will provide ongoing opportunities for neighborhood involvement and volunteer opportunities, bringing a sense of ownership and pride to this collaborative effort.

In addition to the facility's program plan for the children enrolled in the program, it is also essential to note that SENT sees this facility as a tool that can be used to help the early childhood workforce. SENT has agreed to host the planned Early Childhood Career Center that will be operated by Child Care Aware® of Eastern Kansas. This center will provide job-specific training for individuals in the community interested in a career in child care, helping them obtain all needed KDHE approved in-service classes required by the Kansas child care licensing system. Upon completion of the coursework, participants may choose to enroll in an experiential classroom teaching track, customized to meet the needs of the participant's career goals. Participants will then be qualified to accept employment in a licensed child care facility in the community, addressing a tremendous workforce shortage. SENT's willingness to host this innovative new program demonstrates their commitment to serving both the needs of their

facility in the Hi-Crest community as well as the needs of the greater early childhood community. This job-training program aligns perfectly with SENT's cradle-to-career education goals and demonstrates the strong collaborative partnership between SENT and Child Care Aware® of Eastern Kansas.

Financial Sustainability Plan:

A three-year financial projection for the SENT Prep Academy was prepared, based on the following assumptions:

- SENT will contribute \$10,000 (cash and in-kind support) to complete needed renovations for infant and toddler care. This includes the installation of handwashing sinks in the infant room, a partial wall to create a safe sleeping space in the infant room, and the addition of a toilet in the toddler room. Additionally, SENT will provide paid labor and volunteers to paint and clean as needed to prepare for reopening.
- Enrollment projections were based on 50% enrollment at the time of opening, with gradual growing enrollment to 80% enrollment after six months. Break-even (income = expenses) occurred at 75% enrollment.
- Child care tuition for SENT Prep was projected based on a review of rates being charged by other child care centers in the Topeka community provided by Child Care Aware® of Eastern Kansas. Both the area's market rates and the program's actual operating costs are being considered as tuition rates are established. Recognizing that child care is a significant expense for many families, SENT will establish a scholarship fund for families needing some assistance with their child care tuition, funded with private donations and grants. Scholarships will be awarded on a sliding fee scale, as funding permits. The fee structure will be reviewed and adjusted every six months, as appropriate.
- The SENT board of directors and staff have committed to building financial reserves by accessing all appropriate grants and local financial support to build the program's sustainability over time. SENT has engaged an independent contractor to conduct a feasibility study that will enable the organization to launch a capital campaign in early 2021, raising funds for neighborhood revitalization efforts focused on housing as well as additional resources supporting cradle-to-career education efforts including the SENT Prep Academy.

The financial projection indicated that \$470,687 is needed for first year operations. SENT projects \$425,201 will be taken in through a combination of tuition, subsidy, and identified grant funding. Budget assumptions account for the time needed to grow the number of children enrolled. An additional \$60,000 is needed as operational start-up cash to offset a

negative cash flow in the first 18-month period following acquisition of the property. This accounts for factors including payroll and training expense as staff are hired and trained prior to enrollment fee revenue, utilities and maintenance expense on the building, and the expectation that payroll expense will exceed revenue during the first year of operations as revenue from enrollment builds over time. Two grants totaling \$55,000 have been committed to support the SENT Prep Academy's start-up to help bridge this shortfall. Additionally, the Topeka Community Foundation has indicated interest in providing a combination of grant funding and up to a \$60,000 loan at 1% interest to provide additional working capital until parent fees will sustain the program. It is likely that other local support will be generated once the plan is in public and motion, with every indication that the program will be fully self-sustaining after the initial three-year start-up period.

Insurance & Risk Management Plan

The facility will obtain insurance on the building after soliciting bids. Additionally, liability insurance specific to child care will be purchased prior to opening to ensure adequate coverage for child care services.

In addition to insurance, the SENT Prep Academy has adopted the following strategies for managing risk:

- Applicants seeking employment with the SENT Prep Academy must complete a written application and provide references.
- Reference and background checks are conducted on all staff and volunteers, following child care licensing requirements through the Kansas Department of Health & Environment (KDHE). Any prohibited persons will not be allowed on the premises when children are present.
- Staff receive extensive training prior to being placed in an early childhood classroom and receive ongoing training and supervision.
- Safety protocol will be established and maintained at all times. This includes safety protocol outlined in child care licensing regulations (fire drills, tornado drills, protocol for building intruders, etc.) and building safety issues (locked exterior doors, always a minimum of two staff on-site, etc.).
- Compliance with child care licensing regulations will be maintained at all times. This includes ongoing maintenance of the building and grounds to mitigate risk to children, staff, and visitors.

Recordkeeping Plan:

SENT PREP ACADEMY BUSINESS PLAN BRIEF

SENT Prep Academy will maintain financial records separate from the overall SENT Topeka financial report, allowing the administration to see its financial status, including revenue and expenses. This system will also enable the SENT Prep Academy administration to monitor various grants and contracts that are specific to the child care program. An industry-specific software will be selected for use at the SENT Prep Academy. Available options include comprehensive solutions that save time and money by streamlining administrative tasks, including invoicing, billing, and payments, as well as student-to-staff ratios and child data tracking. SENT's office manager will reconcile the center's bank account and provide ongoing financial reports to the SENT board of directors. Financial data can then be integrated into the organization's overall monthly financial statements.