



## Council Bluffs Schools Foundation **KIDS & COMPANY**

Expanding Inclusive Care for Children with Special Needs in Council Bluffs

### **Overview**

Every child deserves access to a safe, inclusive environment where they can learn, grow, and belong. Yet for families of children with special needs in Council Bluffs, before- and after-school care remains one of the most significant unmet needs. Many parents are forced to reduce work hours, change jobs, or leave the workforce entirely due to the lack of suitable care options.

The Council Bluffs Schools Foundation is responding to this need by partnering with a local nonprofit to create a new inclusive before- and after-school program for up to 15 children with special needs. The program will be housed in a centrally located, state-licensed childcare facility, offering safe classrooms, sensory-friendly spaces, and access to a gym for play and physical activity.

This pilot will serve as a model for inclusive care across southwest Iowa, one that supports children, strengthens families, and fuels local economic growth.

### **The Challenge**

Families of children with disabilities face barriers that most childcare systems are not equipped to address:

- **Limited availability:** No inclusive before- or after-school programs currently exist in Council Bluffs.
- **Workforce impact:** Employers struggle with absenteeism and turnover when parents lack reliable care.
- **Emotional toll:** Families report high levels of stress, isolation, and difficulty balancing caregiving with employment.

Without intervention, these challenges perpetuate inequity for families and limit opportunities for children with special needs to thrive alongside their peers.

### **The Solution**

The Council Bluffs Schools Foundation's *Inclusive Kids & Company Expansion* Pilot Program will:

- Serve 15 children with special needs, ages 5–12, in a supportive, inclusive environment.
- Operate before- and after-school, Monday through Friday, aligning with district calendars.
- Employ 4 specialized staff trained in inclusive care, sensory support, and behavioral strategies.
- Partner with the Iowa Department of Human Services (DHS) and Child Care Resource & Referral (CCRR) to ensure compliance, safety, and quality standards.
- Build a replicable model for inclusive childcare in communities across southwest Iowa.

## Economic and Community Impact

The benefits extend far beyond the classroom:

- **Retained Family Income:** Up to \$120,000 in annual household earnings retained as parents stay in the workforce.
- **Local Employment:** Program operations will create 4 local jobs, contributing approximately \$100,000 annually in wages.
- **Business Stability:** Reliable childcare supports workforce productivity and reduces absenteeism.
- **Reduced Public Costs:** Stable employment and reduced reliance on assistance programs strengthen the local economy.

## Outcomes & Success Metrics (Years 1–3)

| Focus Area               | Year 1   | Year 2                           | Year 3                           |
|--------------------------|--|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| <b>Access</b>            | Serve 15 children; maintain 85% attendance     | Expand by 20%; maintain waitlist | Maintain 95% family retention    |
| <b>Family Stability</b>  | 80% of parents report improved ability to work | 90% report reduced stress        | 90%+ satisfaction and stability  |
| <b>Child Development</b> | Baseline assessments completed                 | 75% meet social-emotional goals  | 85%+ show growth in independence |

**Financial  
Sustainability**

Secure 3 funding partners 75% self-sufficient

Sustainable funding  
mix achieved

## **Funding Need**

To bring this vision to life, the Council Bluffs Schools Foundation seeks **\$500,000 in startup funding** to cover:

- Classroom renovation and equipment
- Specialized staff training and salaries
- Licensing, insurance, and program materials
- Transportation and accessibility supports
- Years 1-3 operational gap as enrollment builds

This investment will ensure that children with special needs, and their families, have access to consistent, high-quality care that helps them succeed at school, at work, and in life.

## **The Vision Forward**

This program represents more than a pilot, it's the beginning of a **regional movement for inclusive care**. By proving the model's success, we will create opportunities to expand services, share best practices, and inspire other communities to follow suit.

Together, we can build a future where every child is included, every parent is supported, and every family has the stability to thrive.

**Contact:**

*Bridgette Watson, Executive Director*  
Council Bluffs Schools Foundation  
bwatson@cbsf.org