

# Childcare Market Analysis Smyth County



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Way



United Way of  
Southwest Virginia

2022-2023

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# Project Purpose & Scope

The childcare ecosystem has been unduly strained by the COVID-19 pandemic which has ultimately impacted the working families in counties of Southwest Virginia. The purpose of this analysis is to evaluate and quantify the child care needs of the workforce with children from birth to five years of age in Smyth County.

This report first defines childcare options and explains key differences between different types of options, defines other important terms found in this analysis, and outlines relevant state and regional statistics.

Characteristics of the residents, the childcare landscape, and the experiences of working parents of Smyth County are then detailed. Numbers provided in this report are based on the most current information available.



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# Childcare Options

The Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) oversees childcare in the Commonwealth. A child day care program in Virginia refers to a regularly operating service arrangement for children where, during the absence of a parent or guardian, a person or organization has agreed to assume responsibility for the supervision, protection,

and wellbeing of a child under the age of 13 for less than a 24-hour period.

There are several types of child day care programs. Out-of-home care (centers) includes child care providers operating in non-residential buildings, schools, or faith-based organizations. In-home care (family day homes)

takes place in a residential building or private home. Two other child care programs have eligibility criteria: Headstart is a national program serving income-eligible children ages birth to 5, and The Virginia Preschool Initiative (VPI) serves at-risk preschoolers by placing eligible children in high-quality preschool programs.



## Childcare Programs Fall into Different Categories of Licensure

- Licensed child care programs have requirements including background checks for providers, trainings, and health and safety. These programs are inspected at least twice a year to ensure compliance.
- Unlicensed but Regulated programs vary in requirements but have some form of standard procedures to ensure safety. Religiously exempt child day centers are common examples of Unlicensed (but regulated) in Southwest Virginia and are required to complete background checks on their employees and annually self-certify compliance with health and safety standards.
- Unlicensed and unregistered do not have background checks, training, or health and safety requirements.

Headstart programs are required to be licensed, VPI programs are not.



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# Helpful Key Terms

The Child Care Cost Burden (or Burden Rate) is a measure that determines the percent of a two-child household income going toward childcare costs. The Department of Health and Human Services has considered child care affordable if the expense consumes less than 10% of household income, and more recently proposed an affordability threshold set at 7% of household income.

VQB5 is a statewide measurement and improvement system that focuses on the quality of all publicly-funded classrooms serving ages birth through five and supports families so they can choose quality programming across different program types. VQB5 measures the quality of infant, toddler and preschool teaching and learning based on two nationally-recognized quality indicators: Teacher-Child Interactions and the use of a state approved curriculum. The goal of VQB5 is to ensure that all children have quality teaching and learning experiences that meet their unique needs. VQB5 sets shared expectations for measuring quality and supporting teachers

in all publicly funded, birth to five programs across the Commonwealth of Virginia. Regionally, this effort is guided by United Way of Southwest Virginia who acts as the lead agency for Ready Region Southwest. Ready Region Southwest is one of nine regional hubs who connect and collaborate with existing state-wide agencies and organizations to support Early Childhood Education (ECE) programs with their quality improvement goals.

A.L.I.C.E. is an acronym that stands for Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed. These are households with an income that is above the Federal Poverty Level but still below the basic cost of living. The most recently-available data is from 2018, two years before the global COVID pandemic. Provided ALICE numbers should be taken with consideration of the negative impacts the pandemic had on the region.

The Childcare Infrastructure Development Index (CIDI) is a number produced by staff at United Way of Southwest Virginia as a tool for communities to know,

generally, how they are doing when it comes to meeting the childcare needs of its youngest citizens. Scores encompass workforce participation trends and childcare quality measures and affordability considerations. Because communities vary greatly in size and scope, this index utilizes ratios so that communities can compare their scores to any locality in Southwest Virginia. Possible scores range from 0 to 10, with higher scores representing more developed infrastructure to serve its youngest citizens.

FEE is a child care subsidy program that subsidizes child care for recipients who meet the income eligibility threshold and are employed, seeking employment, or in an approved education or training program.

Families served by Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) funds can receive support for child care access through this program.

Mixed Delivery Program provides public funding to serve young children in private, community based (non-school based) birth to 5 classrooms.

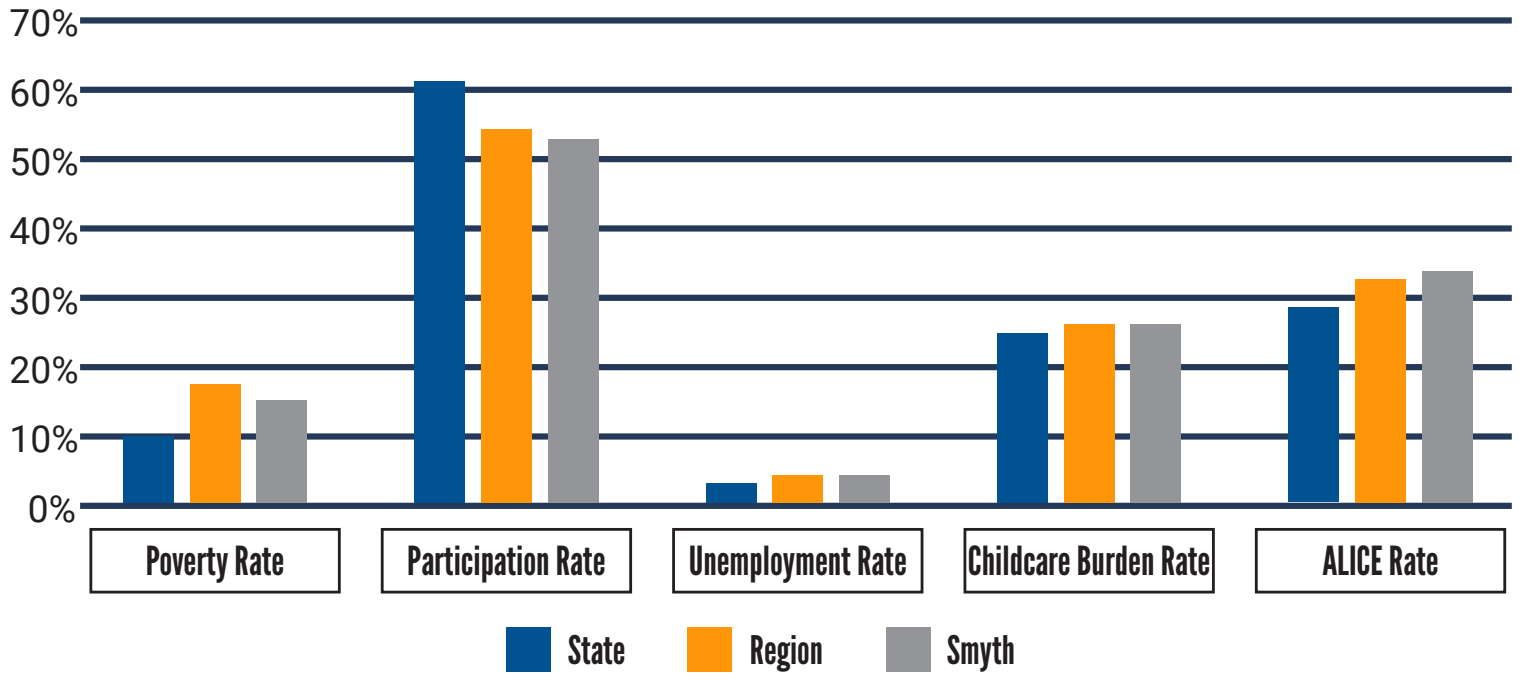


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# Population Overview



## Virginia State Population Overview

The state of Virginia has a population of 8,642,274 residents. The median income is \$80,268 and 10.2% of the population is living below the poverty line. The state has a workforce participation rate of 61%<sup>5</sup> and an unemployment rate of 3.9%<sup>4</sup>. The Childcare Cost Burden Rate for the state of Virginia is 25%<sup>2</sup>. 29%, or 3.17 million households, are ALICE families<sup>3</sup>.

## Southwest Virginia Population Overview

The Southwest Region of Virginia has a population of 552,831. The median income of the region is \$41,540 with a poverty rate of 17%. The region's workforce participation rate is 54%<sup>5</sup> and the unemployment rate is 4.2%<sup>4</sup>. The region's Childcare Cost Burden Rate is 26%<sup>2</sup>. 32% of the region's 224,346 households are ALICE families<sup>3</sup>.  
Smyth County

## Smyth County Population Overview

Smyth County has a population of 29,800 residents. The median household income is \$41,088 and a poverty rate of 15.2%<sup>1</sup>. The county has a workforce participation rate of 53.1%<sup>5</sup> with an unemployment rate of 4.2%<sup>4</sup>. The Burden Rate for Smyth County is 26%<sup>2</sup>. 4,521 households are ALICE families; ALICE households account for 35.9% of all households within the county<sup>3</sup>.



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# Smyth County Child Care Inventory

## 18 Providers

**7** Child Care Centers

**1** Family Day Home

**7** VPI Programs

**3** Head Start Centers

There are 1,529 children five years and younger in Smyth County<sup>6</sup>. Approximately 268 children are toddler-aged and 814 are preschool-aged<sup>7</sup>. 1,059 (69% of all children birth to five) of those children have parents in the workforce, highlighting a critical need for available and accessible child care in this county<sup>6</sup>.

There are a total of 18 child care providers in Smyth County. 16 providers are participating in VQB5. Provider's hours of operation vary across programs, overall ranging from 5:00am as the earliest opening hours until 7:00pm as the latest closing hours. 8 providers are licensed with a total maximum licensed capacity of serving 323 children. 4 providers are religiously exempt serving a total maximum of 196 children. The VPI program offers 128 slots throughout Smyth County public schools. 5 providers serve infants (0 to 2 years of age), 10 providers serve toddlers (2 to 3 years of age) and 13 serve preschoolers (3 to 5 years of age)<sup>8</sup>.

Smyth County has a reported ability to serve 587 children. Notably, licensed capacity reporting may be overestimates of actual capacity due to reporting variations including; staffing issues, including afterschool program numbers, and licensure based on square footage of a center. With these three reporting variations taken into consideration, at maximum assumption of childcare capacity, 55% of children with working parents, or 38% of all children, can be served.

**At maximum assumption of childcare capacity, 55% of children with working parents can be served.**

The CIDI score for Smyth County is 6.02. The county succeeds in measures of quality, but has the opportunity to develop pathways for better utilization and affordability.



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# Smyth County Subsidy Information

To help families cover the cost of childcare, there are state and federal programs that offer subsidies to families in need who meet eligibility requirements (e.g., FEE, TANF, Mixed Delivery Program). Child care centers that participate in the Mixed Delivery Program can receive an annual maximum reimbursement rate of \$21,840 for infants, \$18,980 for toddlers, and \$13,620 for preschoolers.

2 providers in Smyth County are participating in the Mixed Delivery Program, serving 23 preschoolers and 5 infants and toddlers. 4 of the 18 (30.8%) child care programs in Smyth County are subsidy providers. Child care subsidy funding streams combined can serve up to 64 children in Smyth County. 32 children (50%) are currently authorized and participating in child care subsidy utilization. \$296,398 is allocated to subsidizing child care. In 2022, average spending of subsidy dollars was \$7,986 (2.7%) each month<sup>8</sup>.

Infant childcare costs range from **\$4,420<sub>9</sub>** to **\$8,060<sub>10</sub>** annually.

Annual care for toddlers and preschoolers ranges from **\$4,420<sub>9</sub>** to **\$7,800<sub>10</sub>**.



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# Child Care Needs and the Workforce

The availability and accessibility to child care is integral to the sustainability of the workforce. This includes both keeping current workers employed, and allowing others to enter or re-enter the workforce. In Smyth County, the most common occupations that employ county residents are Production, Sales, and Office and Administrative Support<sup>11</sup>.

**62%** of employers reported facing challenges in hiring and retaining their employees due to childcare struggles.

A survey conducted by United Way of Southwest Virginia and the Smyth County Chamber of Commerce asked employers of Smyth County to identify the make-up of their workforce, challenges they faced due to childcare strain on their employees, and potential avenues either currently in practice or possible considerations to alleviate such strain. 16 businesses responded to the survey. While a sample of this size is small, it did provide insight into workforce challenges in this county.

Employer size ranged from small businesses with under 10 employees to large businesses employing over 100 individuals. 62% of employers reported facing challenges in hiring and retaining their employees due to

childcare struggles. In fact, 56% of employees from surveyed businesses have frequently missed work due to childcare issues. Child care strain on the workforce is not limited by gender. Businesses largely employing women were no more likely to experience disruption due to childcare issues than those predominantly employing men. Despite these frequent struggles due to childcare strain, 81% of responding businesses do not offer child care benefits of any kind. Yet, 75% of employers reported that, if financial assistance were made available, they would consider some avenue of child care support, particularly by offering tuition assistance or childcare stipends to aid in the high costs of child care. While the cost of child care is certainly a barrier, many employers (77%) reported that the availability of child care posed issues for their employees.

**75%** of employers reported that they would consider child care support if financial assistance were available.



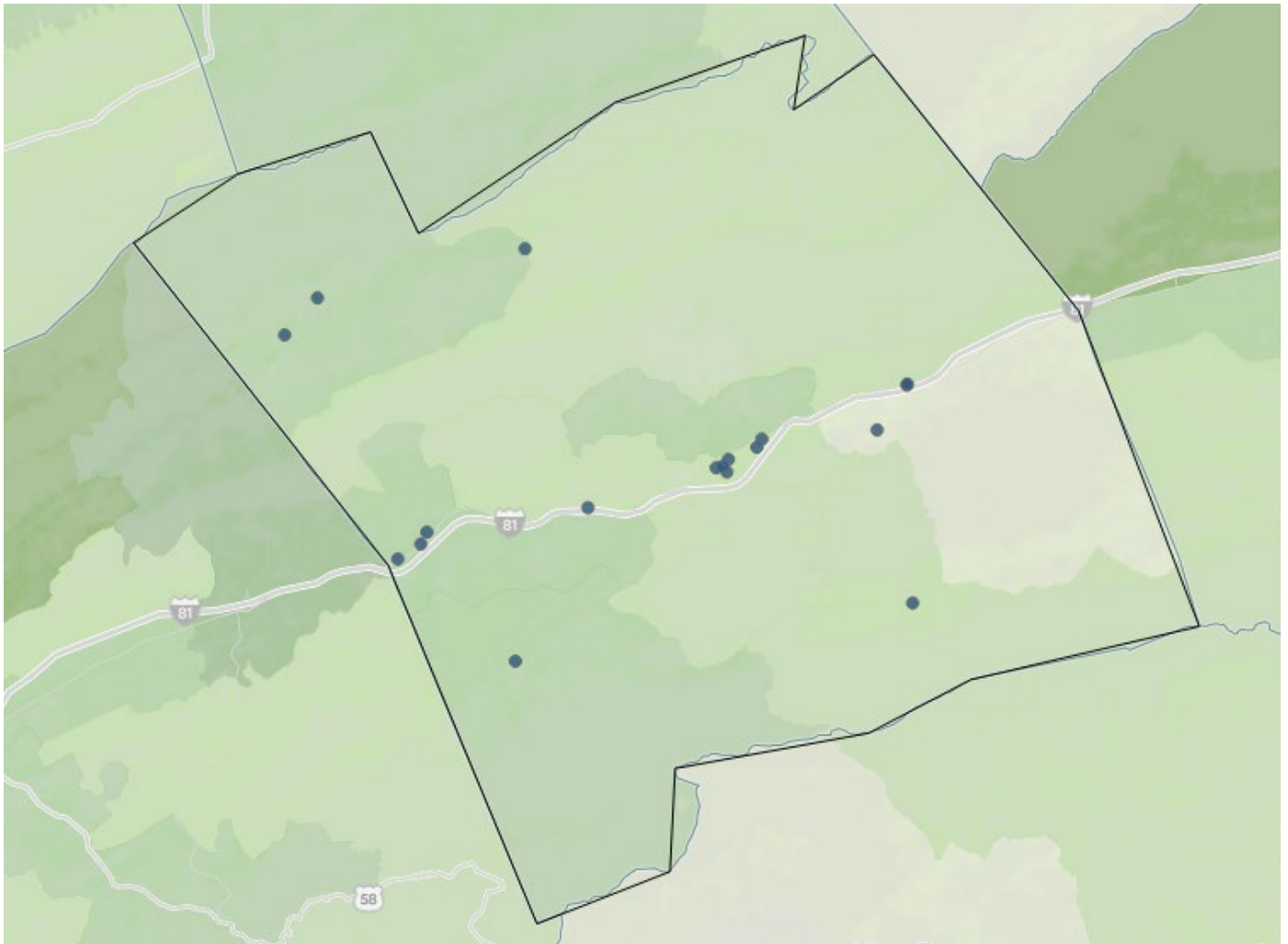
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# Child Care Providers Map

## Centers by Population



Census tract level

Lower population density

Higher population density



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“There is just a general lack of child care options, particularly infant to preschool.

Being able to provide even **1-2 days of childcare** would allow my employees to add a day of work to their week, which would be great for our company as well as the community of families we serve.”

-Smyth County Employer



# Ongoing Initiatives - Smyth County

Impact Area	Program	Description
Childhood Success	Rural Summit	The Rural Summit brings together leaders, practitioners, educators and community members to provide strategies that can be employed locally in any rural community. Topics focus on engagement in the classroom, early child care, resilience, youth success, and workforce development.
	VQB5	A statewide measurement and improvement system focused on the quality of publicly-funded classrooms serving children ages birth to five in order to ensure all children have quality teaching and learning experiences to meet their needs.
	Mixed Delivery Program	The Mixed Delivery Program provides public funding to serve young children in private, community based (non-school based) birth to 5 classrooms. The program supports family choice in the type of early education setting that best meets the needs of eligible children and families and provides a stable and predictable source of revenue for participating programs.
	Ready Region Southwest	United Way of Southwest Virginia serves as the lead for our Ready Region. This state-wide public-private partnership ensures that every child and family in our region benefits from the efforts to expand access to quality child care. This includes programs such as Mixed Delivery and classroom quality initiatives like VQB5.
	Virginia Infant & Toddler Specialist Network	From the time babies are born, their brains are developing. Most of a child's brain development happens before he or she is three years old, setting patterns for success or failure in the workforce from an early age. United Way of Southwest Virginia serves as the Western Regional Office for the statewide Virginia Infant & Toddler Specialist Network (VA ITSN). VA ITSN delivers on-site consultations, trainings, mentoring, feedback, and support to program providers that care for children birth-36 months, and helps providers make connections to existing community resources.
Thrive	AI's Pals	AI's Pals is a comprehensive curriculum and teacher training program that develops social-emotional skills, self-control, problem-solving abilities, and healthy decision-making in children ages 3-8 years old.
	Trauma Informed Schools and Community Network	As the anchor entity of the Trauma-Informed Community Network (TICN) in Southwest Virginia, we guide the region to help critical stakeholders realize the public health crisis we are experiencing because of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and childhood trauma. United Way works with cross-sector partners to build a more unified trauma-informed system to build resilience in children, families, and child-serving systems across the region. The Trauma-Informed Schools Initiative offers participating school divisions the opportunity to engage in an initial Pilot Cohort that will create a unified Trauma-Informed System through a multi-tiered systems approach to address trauma and Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) in schools.
	Backpacks Unite - Chilhowie Middle	Backpacks Unite provides nutritious weekend meals during each school year to almost 1,000 elementary and middle school aged students throughout Southwest Virginia ensuring that students come to school Monday ready to learn and ready to succeed.
	Campaign for Grade-Level Reading: Attendance Initiative	Over 8 million students across the country are chronically absent. This puts an unacceptable number of tomorrow's workforce off-track to read proficiently by third grade and for early school success overall. United Way of Southwest Virginia provided resources to every school system to implement an attendance project to reduce the number of children who miss more than 18 days in a school year.
	Kinder Camps	A program to bring at-risk pre-K children into a school setting to provide them a chance to learn basic skills before their first day of kindergarten.



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# Ongoing Initiatives - Smyth County (continued)

Impact Area	Program	Description
Youth Success	Careers Expo for Youth	As one component of the United Way of Southwest Virginia Ignite Program, the Careers Expo for Youth is an annual event for over 4,000 7th grade students from Southwest Virginia. Students move through four zones filled with hands-on activities presented by more than 100 volunteers from regional employers. At this annual event, seventh grade students see first-hand what it's like to participate in a chemistry experiment, climb a utility pole, practice CPR, or use a 3D printer – directly from industry professionals located in Southwest Virginia.
	Educators in Industry	Many educators in Southwest Virginia are unaware of the job opportunities available for their students in Southwest Virginia. United Way works with our business partners to host teacher tours at local employers' work sites so teachers can learn about the workplace skills that their students will need to be successful. Teachers share the information they learn with other faculty members at their schools.
	Ignite	Across the United Way of Southwest Virginia service area Ignite is sparking almost 30,000 students' interest in career opportunities by connecting schools and students with employers and employees through career development software, career guidance, soft skills training, a Careers Expo for Youth, Reality Stores and Educators in Industry.
	Major Clarity	In Virginia, all seventh-grade students are required to complete a career plan. However, many of these students have no idea what careers are available or what skills they need to have to be successful in the workforce. United Way of Southwest Virginia provides an individualized career planning and exploration software to more than 30,000 students across Southwest Virginia to help students prepare for the workforce.
	Summer Internships	United Way of Southwest Virginia's Ignite Program provides our region's high school students with a four-week summer internship component designed to teach critical workplace skills and prepare students for the workplace through hands-on work experience. Internships bridge the gap between the worlds of learning and work by connecting students and schools with employees and employers.
Financial Stability	ALICE	ALICE, an acronym coined by United Way, stands for Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed and represents men, women, and families who work hard and earn more than the official Federal Poverty Level, but less than the basic cost of living. The ALICE rate, combined with a 24% poverty rate, shows that as many as 59% of the region's households cannot afford basic costs of living. Because of this, United Way of Southwest Virginia is developing programs and services that help ALICE become economically mobile through financial stability initiatives and assistance for working families.
	MYFREETAXES	United Way and H&R Block have partnered since 2009 to promote MyFreeTaxes to help support the health, education, and financial stability of every person in every community. Families and individuals who earn \$64,000 a year or less are able to file state and federal returns for free, which helps them maximize their tax refunds.
	VITA	Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) links individuals and families who earn less than \$54,000 a year with volunteers who prepare their tax returns for free, boosting a family's yearly income by an average of \$261. VITA helps families in Southwest Virginia keep more of their hard-earned money.



# Analysis Summary

Smyth County has a large workforce in need of childcare for their young children. Both the cost and availability of child care may be potential barriers to workforce entry and retention. With a total of 18 childcare providers in the county, maximum estimates indicate that 55% of young children with working parents can be served. However, parents of infants have fewer options- only 38% of providers serve children under the age of 2. These gaps in access are evident to employers in the county. One employer reported having individuals miss work due to childcare issues on a monthly basis and identified the lack of childcare availability as a prevalent theme: “The search for childcare in our county is a common issue I hear among our employees.” With many employers open to supporting their workers with child care costs, Smyth County offers potential opportunities for both the expansion of child care programs, particularly for infants, and the possibility of partnering with organizations to assist in making child care more affordable for working parents.

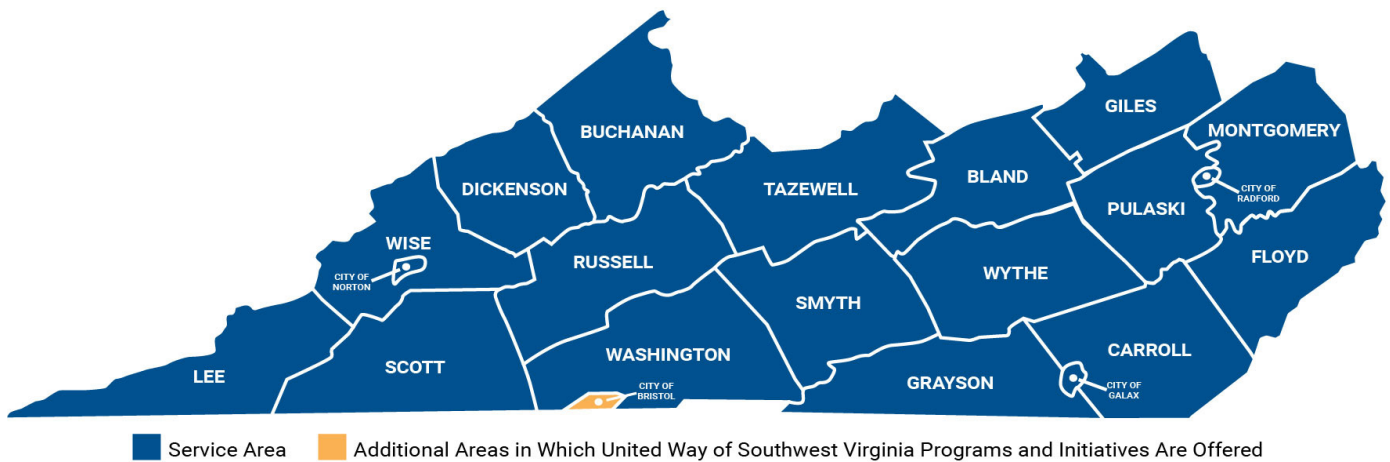


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**United Way of Southwest Virginia** fights for the health, education and financial stability of every person in Southwest Virginia because they are the building blocks for a good quality of life. Through an initiative-based cradle-to-career approach, United Way of Southwest Virginia is creating sustainable solutions to address the challenges facing tomorrow's workforce. United Way convenes cross-sector partners to make an impact on the most complex problems in our region. Through collaboration with government, business, nonprofit and individuals, United Way innovates for positive, lasting social change. With a footprint that covers nearly 20% of the state of Virginia, United Way of Southwest Virginia programs and initiatives serve the counties of Bland, Buchanan, Carroll, Dickenson, Floyd, Giles, Grayson, Lee, Montgomery, Pulaski, Russell, Scott, Smyth, Tazewell, Washington, Wise, and Wythe, and the cities of Bristol, Galax, Norton, and Radford.



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- 7 - Virginia Department of Social Services Live Birth Data 2017-2020 (data not available for infants)
- 8 - Virginia Department of Social Services (2022)
- 9 - Childcare Aware (2022)
- 10 - Internal United Way SWVA survey (2022)
- 11 - Data USA (2020)

