



2022 Family-Friendly Focus



The Family-Friendly Workplace Accelerator Program is a partnership among First 5 San Luis Obispo County, the San Luis Obispo Chamber of Commerce and the County of San Luis Obispo. This FREE initiative, housed within the Chamber, aims to help businesses hire and retain employees, support working parents' balance between job and home life, and bolster the economic vitality of our communities. The program builds on the SLO County Family-Friendly Workplace Toolkit which was created by the "We Are the Care" Initiative – a countywide coalition dedicated to addressing local child care and related work-life balance challenges faced by local families.

MARCH HERO: RRM Design Group

Providing a safe, healthy, caring work environment ensures that employees thrive and, in return, improves overall business performance. This is the mindset of RRM Design Group, a multidisciplinary firm that is 100% employee-owned, has a staff of over 140 in 5 offices across California (including SLO) and a long-standing commitment to Family-Friendly policies and practices. When the Pandemic hit, RRM saw the added stress being put on working parents, and in response stepped up its game to provide additional support.

For many years, RRM has offered Dependent Care Flexible Spending Accounts (DCFSA), which work similarly to health care spending accounts. In this case, employees can set aside a specified amount from their paychecks and then use those pre-tax dollars toward child care costs. For perspective, according to the Economic Policy Institute, infant care for one child can take up to 25% of a median family's income in California. DCFSA's can even ease the financial burden of the "sandwich generation," workers who find themselves caring for children while also covering care for adult family members. Eligible expenses may also include day camps, after-school programs and transportation, etc. RRM Principal & Chief Operating Officer (COO) Susan Whalen says the parents who use this benefit greatly appreciate it and that there are also financial perks for the company through employer tax savings—more evidence that when you invest in your employees, everyone wins!

Last year, for employees affected by school disruptions due to COVID, RRM implemented an extra assistance program

that provided financial help for child care costs incurred as a result of classroom closures. The firm saw the difficult position many moms and dads were in trying to pull off double duty as parent and teacher—or having to deal with hiring extra help for their children. An already-in-place flexible scheduling policy worked in tandem, allowing parents to adjust their schedules as needed to accommodate their families' ever-changing school and child care schedules.

It's no surprise that the Pandemic has exacerbated stressors for every age group, and RRM understands the importance of prioritizing one's mental and physical health. The firm offers an Employee Assistance Program for counseling services and trainings on topics such as communication, how to handle difficult situations, asking for help and beyond. We know that reducing stressors on working parents serves to buffer and cultivate more stable, healthy home environments for the whole family to flourish.

All of the benefits outlined above can prevent absenteeism and boost productivity, as employees' family issues are less likely to interfere with their ability to show up or distract them at work. Whalen says, through her own experience, she's learned that businesses need to continuously educate their employees about benefit programs because, while juggling the demands of life, they don't always remember what they have available to them until they need the support. We're grateful companies like RRM are so eager and willing to provide it!



To learn more about the Family-Friendly Workplace Toolkit, visit slofamilyfriendlywork.org. For information on the Family-Friendly Workplace Accelerator Program, contact the SLO Chamber's Workforce Development Manager, Christina Lefevre Latner, at (805) 786-2762 or christina@slochamber.org. To learn more about early-childhood related initiatives, go to first5slo.org.