



When Providing Dollars Makes Sense



A small, family-owned manufacturing company's tuition assistance program yields an undeniable return on investment.

Family-owned and operated for more than 60 years, Indiana Stamp & Indiana Signworks' culture is rooted in the idea of family, according to President Olivia Warner. The manufacturer and distributor of stamps, inks and stamp accessories located in Fort Wayne employs a small staff of roughly 60 people, which means any attrition can have a significant impact of productivity.



In 2002, Warner's father and two business partners realized four employees were getting ready to become parents. In an effort to ensure those employees returned to work, the owners looked at different ways they could help with child care. The addition of an on-site child care center to the new company headquarters, under construction at the time, was considered, but leaders determined that the high cost meant that it was not feasible. Instead, they instituted an infant care tuition assistance program that remains in effect today. Indiana Stamp & Indiana Signworks offers to pay for 33% of child care costs for employees' babies up to 12 months. The only condition is that the parents choose a center that is rated as a Level 3 or higher in Paths to QUALITY, the state's voluntary quality rating and improvement system for child care.



Emmylou Winegarden, a finisher and engraver of signs at the company, has been employed there for four years and used the tuition assistance offered when her daughter, now two, was born.

“It definitely helped, especially considering I had two other children,” said Winegarden. “Having kids is expensive, and care is a big part of that expense.”

Warner doesn’t have an exact count of the number of employees who have taken advantage of the infant tuition assistance program over the years but estimates it to be in the range of 10 to 15. She does know for certain that the average tenure at the company is 15 years – a decade more than the highest median tenure for the manufacturing industry - and credits the program as being a factor in that longevity.



It’s been a great tool that we’ve used for 17 years now. We’re not a big facility, but it’s been really beneficial to the employees that have had children and were able to take advantage of it.”
Olivia Warner, President

It’s so beneficial that the company may expand the program to include a “stair-step” of tuition assistance up to age five, as it looks for ways to not only retain staff but develop new talent.

“What can we do?” Warner asks, sharing the business’s forward-thinking considerations. “What’s that next step where we can push and really extend those benefits that are going to make us look attractive to our employees and attract other people as well?”



While those questions are still being answered, Warner says there’s no question about the return on investment for this kind of retention effort. The exact cost of tuition assistance for the last employee who used it was \$1900. Costs associated with replacing and onboarding a new employee? At least \$4000.

“We’re not a large corporation with unlimited resources. Those are actual, factual numbers, and you can’t argue with them.”