DuoShare Employer Partnership Guide

Little Sprouts Childcare
Nature. Play. Grow

A Program of the Mill Street Opportunity Alliance

Building Stronger Workforces Through Reliable Childcare

Updated July 2026

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WELCOME

Building a Stronger Workforce Through Childcare

Thank you for your interest in becoming a DuoShare Partner.

DuoShare is an employer partnership program offered through Little Sprouts Childcare, a program of the Mill Street Opportunity Alliance. The program helps employers recruit, retain, and support employees by expanding access to dependable, high-quality childcare.

Employer partnership conversations are underway now. Formal employer partnerships and the initial enrollment Interest List open in August 2026. Little Sprouts is anticipated to open in early 2027.

Whether your organization is interested in supporting one employee, reserving childcare spaces, or developing a long-term workforce benefit, DuoShare offers flexible partnership options designed to meet your organization's goals and budget.

This guide explains how DuoShare works and serves as a reference throughout your partnership with Little Sprouts Childcare.

Planning Ahead
Opening employer partnerships before the childcare center begins operations allows organizations to assess employee needs, reserve childcare spaces when appropriate, and establish benefits before the center opens.

PURPOSE OF THIS GUIDE

The DuoShare Employer Partnership Guide provides employers and community partners with an overview of the program and explains how to establish and manage a successful partnership with Little Sprouts Childcare.

Inside this guide, you'll learn about:

- Partnership options
- Reserved childcare spaces
- Enrollment procedures
- Tuition assistance opportunities
- Billing and employer responsibilities
- Frequently asked questions

This guide is intended to be used alongside the **DuoShare Employer Partnership Agreement**. While it explains program operations and expectations, the Employer Partnership Agreement contains the official terms of participation.

WHY DUOSHARE?

Reliable childcare is one of the most significant workforce challenges facing employers today.

When employees have dependable childcare, organizations often experience:

- Improved recruitment
- Stronger employee retention
- Reduced absenteeism
- Increased productivity
- Greater employee satisfaction

DuoShare provides employers with practical, flexible solutions that help remove childcare barriers while supporting working families.

Rather than offering a one-size-fits-all benefit, organizations can choose the partnership model that best aligns with their workforce needs and available resources.

Employer Tip

Many organizations begin by supporting a single employee and expand their partnership over time as workforce needs change.

ENROLLMENT TIMELINE

Employer partnerships begin several months before Little Sprouts opens, allowing organizations and families time to plan.

Timeline	Activity
Summer 2026	Employer Meetings
August 2026	Interest Form Opens
Fall/Winter 2026	Construction & Licensing
Early 2027	Little Sprouts Opens (Anticipated)

Please Note

All dates are anticipated and subject to construction progress, licensing approval, staffing, and other operational considerations. Participating employers will receive regular updates throughout the startup process.

IMPORTANT NOTICE

This guide is intended as an operational resource for participating employers and community partners.

Participation in DuoShare remains subject to:

- The executed Employer Partnership Agreement
- Michigan childcare licensing requirements
- Little Sprouts Childcare policies and procedures
- Classroom capacity and staffing availability
- Applicable federal, state, and local laws

The Mill Street Opportunity Alliance may update this guide periodically to reflect operational improvements, licensing requirements, or Board-approved program changes. Whenever practical, participating partners will receive advance notice of significant changes.

PARTNERSHIP OPTIONS

Flexible Solutions for Every Organization

No two organizations have the same workforce, budget, or childcare needs. That's why DuoShare offers flexible partnership options tailored to organizations of every size, from a small business supporting one employee to a large employer offering a comprehensive childcare benefit.

Organizations may choose a single partnership option or combine multiple options to create a customized program.

Good to Know

Many employers begin with one employee or a small tuition contribution and expand their partnership as workforce needs grow.

Option 1 | Direct Tuition Contribution

Best For: Organizations that want to directly support one or more employees with childcare costs.

How It Works: The employer contributes a fixed dollar amount or percentage toward an employee's weekly childcare tuition.

Little Sprouts bills the employer for the agreed-upon employer contribution, while the employee remains responsible for the remaining tuition balance and any applicable childcare fees.

Employer Responsibilities

- Determine the amount or percentage of tuition assistance.
- Identify participating employees.
- Pay the employer portion of tuition.
- Notify Little Sprouts when employee eligibility changes.

Why Employers Choose This Option

- Easy to administer.
- Flexible for individual employees.
- Highly visible employee benefit.
- Excellent recruitment and retention tool.

Option 2 | Shared Employer Support Fund

Best For: Organizations looking for a simple, scalable childcare benefit with minimal administration.

How It Works: Instead of paying tuition for individual employees, the employer establishes a dedicated childcare assistance fund administered by Little Sprouts.

The employer selects a tuition assistance level, and Little Sprouts applies assistance to participating employees until available funds are exhausted.

Employer funds remain separate and are used only for that employer's employees.

Available Tuition Assistance Levels

Employer Contributions:

- 10%
- 15%
- 20%
- 25%

Employer Responsibilities

- Select a tuition assistance level.
- Fund the employer assistance account.
- Notify Little Sprouts when employee eligibility changes.

Little Sprouts Will

- Administer the employer fund.
- Apply individual tuition assistance.
- Provide periodic fund balance updates.

- Notify employers when additional funding may be needed.

Why Employers Choose This Option

- Predictable budgeting.
- Supports multiple employees.
- Minimal administrative burden.
- Easily expanded as workforce needs change.

> **Planning Ahead**
>
> Employers may increase contributions or adjust tuition assistance levels over time as staffing needs and budgets evolve.

Option 3 | Community Contribution Fund

Best For: Organizations and individuals interested in strengthening the local workforce by expanding access to childcare.

How It Works: Contributions to the Community Contribution Fund help provide childcare assistance for families and workforce priorities identified by the Mill Street Opportunity Alliance.

Examples may include:

- Healthcare workers
- Teachers
- First responders
- Workforce training participants
- Other community priorities

Eligibility and award amounts are determined by the Mill Street Opportunity Alliance based on available funding and program priorities.

Why Organizations Choose This Option

- Demonstrates community leadership.
- Supports workforce development.
- Expands access to quality childcare.
- Creates lasting community impact.

Combining Partnership Options

Organizations are not limited to a single partnership model.

Many employers combine options to create a benefit package that meets both current and future workforce needs.

Example

A manufacturer may:

- Reserve four childcare spaces.
- Offer a 20% tuition contribution through the Shared Employer Support Fund.
- Make an annual contribution to the Community Contribution Fund.

This approach provides immediate employee support while investing in long-term childcare capacity within the community.

Choosing the Right Partnership

If your goal is to...	Recommended Option
Support one or two employees	Direct Tuition Contribution
Offer a company-wide childcare benefit	Shared Employer Support Fund
Reserve childcare spaces for future hiring	Reserved Childcare Spaces
Invest in community childcare access	Community Contribution Fund
Build a customized workforce benefit	Combination Partnership

Partnership Principles

Every DuoShare partnership is built on five guiding principles:

- Flexibility to meet organizational needs.
- Transparent administration and financial reporting.
- Respect for employee and family confidentiality.
- Fair and consistent enrollment practices.
- A shared commitment to supporting employers, working families, and the Barry County community.

RESERVED CHILDCARE SPACES Add-On

A Smarter Approach to Employer-Supported Childcare

One of the most valuable features of DuoShare is the opportunity for participating employers to reserve childcare spaces for current or future employees.

Rather than dedicating an entire childcare center to one employer, Little Sprouts uses a balanced enrollment model that supports employer partnerships while preserving access for the broader community.

This approach helps employers recruit and retain employees while providing flexibility for Little Sprouts to respond to changing enrollment needs.

Employer Tip
Reserved childcare spaces can support both current employees and future recruitment efforts, giving employers a competitive advantage when hiring.

Classroom Allocation

Little Sprouts uses three enrollment categories to balance workforce needs, community access, and operational flexibility.

Age Group	Total Capacity	Employer Partnership	Community/ Public	Open/Flexible
Infants	12	6	3	3
Toddlers	12	6	3	3
2.5–3 Years	16	7	5	4
Preschool	20	8	7	5
Total	**60**	**27**	**18**	**15**

These allocations are planning targets and may be adjusted over time based on enrollment trends, employer participation, and community needs.

How the Enrollment Model Works

Employer Partnership Spaces

Reserved for participating DuoShare Partners.

These spaces provide employers with priority access to childcare for current or future employees.

Organizations may reserve spaces as outlined in their Employer Partnership Agreement.

Why Employers Value Reserved Spaces

- Supports recruitment and retention.

- Provides dependable childcare access.
- Helps with workforce planning.
- Reduces uncertainty when hiring.

Community/Public Spaces

These spaces remain available for families enrolling independently of an employer partnership.

Maintaining dedicated community spaces reflects the Mill Street Opportunity Alliance's commitment to serving both employers and the broader Barry County community.

Community enrollment follows standard Little Sprouts enrollment procedures.

Open/Flexible Spaces

Flexible spaces allow Little Sprouts to respond to changing enrollment needs while maintaining balanced classrooms.

These spaces may be used to:

- Support classroom transitions.
- Reduce waitlists.
- Fill unexpected openings.
- Respond to new employer partnerships.
- Maintain classroom balance.
- Support financial sustainability.

> **Good to Know**
>
> Flexible spaces help Little Sprouts respond to changing enrollment needs without disrupting children already enrolled in the program.

Choosing a Reserved Space Model

Employers may choose the reserved space model that best fits their workforce strategy

Option 1 | Employer-Held Spaces

Best For: Organizations that expect ongoing hiring or employee turnover.

How It Works: The employer reserves the childcare space and retains priority access to that space.

If an employee leaves the organization, the employer may assign the reserved space to another eligible employee, subject to classroom availability and enrollment procedures.

If the departing employee's family wishes to remain enrolled, Little Sprouts will make every reasonable effort to accommodate continued enrollment. If a space is not immediately available, the family may join the Interest List and be offered the next available opening based on enrollment priorities.

Benefits

- Supports recruitment.
- Simplifies workforce planning.
- Maintains priority childcare access.
- Provides flexibility for future hiring.

Option 2 | Child/Family-Held Spaces

Best For: Organizations that prioritize continuity of care for employees' children.

How It Works: The childcare placement remains with the enrolled child.

If employment changes, families may continue enrollment provided they remain in good standing and continue meeting tuition obligations.

The employer receives priority consideration for the next available opening within the applicable classroom should they wish to enroll another employee.

Benefits

- Promotes stability for children.
- Reduces disruption for families.
- Maintains the employer partnership.
- Balances workforce and family needs.

Waitlists & Enrollment Priority

When demand exceeds available capacity, enrollment is managed through established priorities.

Enrollment generally follows this order:

1. Internal classroom transitions.
2. Existing enrolled siblings (when appropriate).
3. Employer Partnership Spaces.
4. Community/Public Waitlist.
5. Open/Flexible Space assignments.

Enrollment decisions are based on:

- Classroom capacity.
- Staffing availability.
- Michigan licensing requirements.
- Age eligibility.
- Partnership agreements.

Little Sprouts may adjust enrollment priorities when necessary to maintain licensing compliance or classroom balance.

Annual Review

The Reserved Childcare Space model is reviewed periodically to ensure it continues to meet the needs of employers, families, and the community.

Enrollment patterns, employer participation, staffing, and community demand may result in adjustments to classroom allocations over time.

Participating employers will be notified in advance, whenever practical, if changes may affect their partnership.

Guiding Principles

Every reserved childcare space is managed according to five core principles:

- Support workforce recruitment and retention.
- Preserve community access to quality childcare.
- Promote continuity of care for children.
- Maintain operational and financial sustainability.
- Provide flexibility as workforce and community needs evolve.

At a Glance

Employer Need	Recommended Option
Ongoing hiring and recruitment	Employer-Held Spaces
Employee stability and continuity	Child/Family-Held Spaces
Maximum flexibility	Open/Flexible Spaces
General community enrollment	Community/Public Spaces

ENROLLMENT, BILLING & EMPLOYER RESPONSIBILITIES

Becoming a DuoShare Partner

Establishing a DuoShare partnership is designed to be straightforward and collaborative. The Little Sprouts team will work with your organization to understand your workforce needs and develop a partnership that aligns with your goals, budget, and anticipated childcare demand.

Whether your organization plans to support one employee or implement a comprehensive childcare benefit, the enrollment process follows the same five simple steps.

Getting Started

Step 1 | Connect

Schedule an introductory meeting with the Little Sprouts team to discuss your organization's workforce needs and childcare goals.

Topics may include:

- Current workforce challenges
- Anticipated childcare demand
- Recruitment and retention goals
- Interest in reserved childcare spaces

Step 2 | Assess

Complete an Employee Childcare Interest Survey to better understand the childcare needs of your workforce.

The survey may identify:

- Number of employees needing childcare
- Children's ages
- Desired start dates
- Scheduling preferences

This information helps both your organization and Little Sprouts plan for future enrollment.

Step 3 | Choose Your Partnership

Select the partnership option that best supports your organization.

Options include:

- Direct Tuition Contribution
- Shared Employer Support Fund
- Community Contribution Fund
- Reserved Childcare Spaces Add-On

Many organizations choose to combine multiple partnership options.

Step 4 | Partnership Agreement

Once your partnership is finalized, both parties execute the DuoShare Employer Partnership Agreement.

The agreement outlines:

- Partnership option(s)
- Reserved childcare spaces (if applicable)
- Tuition assistance
- Billing arrangements
- Communication expectations
- Partnership terms

Step 5 | Employee Enrollment

After the partnership agreement is completed, Little Sprouts works directly with participating employees to complete enrollment.

- Enrollment includes:
- Registration forms
- Required documentation
- Classroom placement
- Family orientation

Enrollment remains subject to classroom availability, staffing, and Michigan childcare licensing requirements.

> **Planning Ahead**
>
> Employer partnership conversations are underway now. Formal employer partnerships and the initial enrollment Interest List opens in August 2026. Little Sprouts is anticipated to open in early 2027.

Tuition & Billing

Billing is designed to be simple, transparent, and predictable.

The billing process depends on the partnership option selected by the employer.

Direct Tuition Contribution

The employer is invoiced for the agreed-upon employer contribution.

The employee remains responsible for the remaining tuition balance and any applicable childcare fees.

Shared Employer Support Fund

Employer contributions are deposited into the employer's designated childcare assistance fund.

Little Sprouts applies tuition assistance according to the employer's selected contribution level.

Participating employers receive periodic reports including:

- Current fund balance
- Number of participating employees
- Estimated funding duration

Reserved Childcare Spaces

Reserved childcare spaces are billed according to the Employer Partnership Agreement.

Unless otherwise specified, reserved spaces remain billable while reserved, regardless of occupancy.

This approach allows Little Sprouts to maintain staffing levels while ensuring childcare availability for participating employers.

> **Good to Know**
>
> Current tuition rates are published separately and reviewed periodically. This allows Little Sprouts to adjust tuition without requiring revisions to this guide.

Employer Responsibilities

Successful partnerships rely on clear communication and shared expectations.

Participating employers agree to:

- Designate a primary DuoShare contact.
- Maintain regular communication with Little Sprouts.
- Notify Little Sprouts of employee eligibility changes within five (5) business days.
- Meet financial obligations outlined in the Employer Partnership Agreement.
- Respect the confidentiality of employee and family information.
- Encourage employees to communicate directly with Little Sprouts regarding enrollment and childcare services.

Little Sprouts Responsibilities

Little Sprouts is committed to providing responsive service and consistent program administration.

Little Sprouts will:

- Administer employer partnership programs fairly and consistently.
- Manage enrollment and waitlists.
- Maintain confidential employee and family information.

- Provide timely billing and financial reporting.
- Communicate enrollment availability and program updates.
- Operate in accordance with Michigan childcare licensing requirements.

Communication

Open communication is essential to a successful partnership.

Each participating organization should designate one primary contact for DuoShare communications.

Routine communication may include:

- Enrollment updates
- Waitlist status
- Billing information
- Employer fund balances
- Partnership planning
- Program announcements

Confidentiality

Little Sprouts respects the privacy of participating employers, employees, and families.

Information regarding enrollment, tuition assistance, or family circumstances will only be shared as permitted by law or authorized by the participating family.

Employers are expected to respect the confidentiality of employee childcare information as well.

Program Updates

As Little Sprouts grows, policies and procedures may evolve to improve operations, maintain compliance with licensing requirements, or respond to changing workforce needs.

Whenever practical, participating employers will receive advance notice of significant changes affecting:

- Billing procedures
- Partnership policies
- Enrollment practices
- Reserved childcare spaces
- Tuition schedules

Minor administrative updates may be implemented without formal revision to this guide.

READY TO PARTNER?

Let's Build a Stronger Workforce Together

Thank you for exploring the DuoShare Employer Partnership Program.

Whether your organization is interested in supporting one employee, reserving childcare spaces, or developing a long-term workforce benefit, Little Sprouts Childcare is committed to helping you create a partnership that supports both your employees and your organization.

Our team will work with you to understand your workforce needs, explain available partnership options, and develop a customized approach that aligns with your goals and budget.

No organization is too small to participate. Many employers begin by supporting a single employee and expand their partnership as workforce needs grow.

Employer Tip
Starting early gives your organization the greatest flexibility. Employer partnerships and the Enrollment Interest Form opens several months before Little Sprouts begins operations, allowing time to assess employee needs and plan ahead.

Next Steps

Getting started is easy.

1. Schedule an introductory meeting.
2. Complete an Employee Childcare Interest Survey.
3. Select the partnership option that best fits your organization.
4. Execute the DuoShare Employer Partnership Agreement.
5. Begin employee enrollment planning.

Stay Connected

Participating employers will receive updates throughout the startup process, including:

- Construction milestones
- Licensing progress
- Enrollment planning
- Staffing updates
- Partnership news

- Program announcements

Contact Us

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We're Here to Help

Schedule an introductory meeting to discuss your organization's workforce needs and explore the partnership options that best fit your team.

If you have questions about partnership options, reserved childcare spaces, tuition assistance, billing, or enrollment planning, we'd love to hear from you.

Contact us to schedule a conversation about how DuoShare can help support your workforce and strengthen your organization.

APPENDIX A

Sample Partnership Scenarios

Every organization has different workforce needs. DuoShare was intentionally designed to be flexible, allowing organizations of any size to create a childcare partnership that fits their goals and budget.

The following examples illustrate several ways employers and community partners may participate.

<u>Small Business</u>
Organization: Local accounting firm (12 employees)
Goal: Retain a valued employee returning from parental leave.
Partnership

- 15% Direct Tuition Contribution

Why It Works

- Affordable employee benefit
- Improves retention
- Demonstrates commitment to work-life balance

<u>Restaurant or Retail Business</u>
Organization: Local restaurant or retail store
Goal: Improve recruitment and reduce turnover.
Partnership

- 10% Shared Employer Support Fund
- One reserved childcare space

Why It Works

- Supports hourly employees
- Creates a competitive hiring advantage
- Allows the program to grow over time

<u>Manufacturer</u>
Organization: Regional manufacturer (150 employees)
Goal: Address workforce recruitment challenges.
Partnership

- Four reserved childcare spaces
- 20% Shared Employer Support Fund

Why It Works

- Strengthens recruitment
- Improves retention
- Supports workforce planning
- Provides predictable annual budgeting

Healthcare Provider

Organization: Hospital or healthcare system

Goal: Support employees working varied shifts.

Partnership

- Reserved infant and toddler spaces
- Shared Employer Support Fund

Why It Works

- Supports healthcare professionals
- Improves recruitment
- Reduces absenteeism
- Increases employee satisfaction

School District

Organization: Local school district

Goal: Support teachers and educational staff.

Partnership

- 10% Tuition Assistance
- Reserved childcare spaces

Why It Works

- Supports educator recruitment
- Improves retention
- Demonstrates investment in employees and families

Community Foundation

Organization: Local foundation

Goal: Expand access to childcare for priority workforce occupations.

Partnership

- Annual contribution to the Community Contribution Fund

Why It Works

- Supports workforce development
- Expands childcare access
- Creates measurable community impact

Civic Organization or Faith Community

Organization: Service club, church, or community organization

Goal: Strengthen local families and support workforce participation.

Partnership

- Contribution to the Community Contribution Fund

Why It Works

- Removes barriers to employment
- Supports working families
- Demonstrates community leadership

<u>Startup Business</u>
Organization: New business with 5 employees.
Goal: Offer a childcare benefit without a large HR department.
Partnership

- One employee
- 15% tuition contribution

Why It Works

- Affordable
- Flexible
- Scales with growth

Every Partnership Makes a Difference

Whether your organization supports one employee, reserves multiple childcare spaces, contributes to the Community Contribution Fund, or creates a customized workforce benefit, every DuoShare partnership helps strengthen our local workforce and expand access to quality childcare.

If you're unsure which partnership option is right for your organization, the Little Sprouts team will work with you to develop a solution that aligns with your workforce needs, organizational goals, and budget.

APPENDIX B

Employer Frequently Asked Questions

<u>General</u>

Who can participate in DuoShare?

DuoShare welcomes partnerships with businesses, nonprofit organizations, schools, healthcare providers, government agencies, foundations, civic organizations, faith communities, and individuals who want to support working families.

Does my organization have to reserve childcare spaces?

No. Reserved childcare spaces are optional. Employers may choose to provide tuition assistance, establish a Shared Employer Support Fund, reserve childcare spaces, or combine multiple partnership options.

Can we start with just one employee?

Yes. Many organizations begin by supporting a single employee and expand their partnership as workforce needs grow.

> **Employer Tip**
>
> There is no minimum participation level. Every partnership is customized to meet your organization's needs.

Partnership Options

Can we combine multiple partnership options?

Yes. Employers may combine:

- Direct Tuition Contributions
- Shared Employer Support Funds
- Reserved Childcare Spaces
- Community Contribution Fund support

Can we change our partnership later?

Yes. As workforce needs change, employers may adjust tuition assistance levels, reserve additional childcare spaces, or modify their partnership agreement with reasonable notice.

Reserved Childcare Spaces

Can we reserve childcare spaces before hiring an employee?

Yes. Reserved spaces may be held for anticipated workforce needs in accordance with your Employer Partnership Agreement.

What happens if an employee leaves?

The answer depends on the reserved space model selected.

Employer-Held Spaces

The employer retains priority access to the reserved childcare space and may assign it to another eligible employee.

Child/Family-Held Spaces

The childcare placement remains with the child provided tuition obligations continue to be met.

Can we reserve infant spaces?

Yes. Reserved spaces are available within each classroom based on availability and the classroom allocation model.

Tuition & Billing

How are employer contributions managed?

Employer contributions are administered according to the selected partnership option.

Organizations participating in the Shared Employer Support Fund receive periodic updates regarding:

- Current fund balance
- Number of participating employees
- Estimated funding duration

Can we change our tuition assistance level?

Yes. Employers may adjust their tuition assistance level with reasonable notice.

Available levels include:

- 10%
- 15%
- 20%
- 25%

Can multiple employers support the same family?

Generally, each participating family is supported through a single employer partnership. If unique circumstances arise, Little Sprouts will work with all parties to determine an appropriate solution.

Enrollment

Who works directly with employees?

Little Sprouts manages enrollment, registration, orientation, tuition, and childcare communication directly with participating families.

When does enrollment begin?

Employer partnership conversations are underway now. Formal employer partnerships and the initial enrollment Interest List open in August 2026. Little Sprouts is anticipated to open in early 2027.

Who should we contact with questions?

The Little Sprouts team is available to discuss partnership options, workforce planning, and enrollment at any time.