

## Offering a Comprehensive Benefits Package

Janice King: My name is Janice King, and I'm executive director of Head Start Inc. based out of Billings, Montana. We serve 360 children and their families in Yellowstone and Carbon Counties.

For many years, we've had a somewhat comprehensive benefits package that is pretty typical. We contribute monthly towards our employees' medical, dental, and vision benefits, and we also contribute a match up to 3% of contributions in a 401(k) retirement plan for our employees. But we really took the time to analyze our workforce and try to understand employee turnover, what was retaining employees. We pulse surveyed our employees. We listened to their feedback and really tried to come up with an enhanced compensation plan that really met the needs of those that we were employing.

One of the things we discovered is we employ – about 95% of our employees are female, and many of them are young females who may be starting a family of their own or raising a family of their own. In working with our insurance provider, which is BlueCross BlueShield in Montana, we were able to use some quality improvement funds to invest in a plan that includes short-term disability benefits, long-term disability benefits, and resource services for our employees. In a nutshell, short-term disability benefits include up to 8 weeks paid leave at 60% for our employees who deliver a baby. We also ... It covers up to 12 weeks, 60% of wages for illness or injury, which has really been crucial in times of COVID. And some people have gotten significantly sick with that.

The resource services that come with that include face-to-face counseling. There's telephonic counseling for those that aren't as comfortable talking face-to-face. But there's also web-based services. Those web-based services cover everything from supporting you through divorce, debt relief, saving money, natural life transitions like college or getting ready for retirement. Those benefits coupled with ... We use a local clinic here in Billings that provides face-to-face counseling, that we call employee assistance programming, as well. Those have been very cost effective and have really helped. Over the course of the last few years, we were looking at over 60% employee turnover, and mostly in our education department. And this last calendar year, we were able to reduce turnover to 17%. We're really proud of that.

I believe, or we believe as a program, that the employee benefits packages – health care, access to mental health services, payment if you're out of work due to illness or medical reasons – are just part of what makes us successful in retaining employees. The other piece is really tapping into that human side of the work we do. Our employees have become our most precious resource right along with children and families. Head Start has always had a great philosophy around supporting children and families, but we also have to support our employees. And sometimes, many times, many of our employees are Head Start families, and that's what Head Start is about. Treating our employees with the same dignity, respect, offering resources that we can, just like we do for children and families.