

# Pacific Gateway, Skills4Care Provide Just-In-Time Childcare

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EXECUTIVE EDITOR

Pacific Gateway has been a source of workforce innovation since the public agency was formed — Workforce Innovation Network is literally part of its name.

At the beginning of 2020, executive director Nick Shultz and partners were working on a flexible hourly worker concept to help people find work while filling specific needs. Shultz, working with an online platform called CalFLEXI, was on the verge of a launch when the coronavirus pandemic hit.

Mayor Robert Garcia called Pacific Gateway, and the conversation led to the need for flexible childcare. And the agency's emphasis focused there.

"You could see how the coronavirus immediately increased the need for childcare," said Rhannon Acree, founder of Cambrian Homecare and the nonprofit Skills4Care, which is partnering with Pacific Gateway. "We had been building a data base for a long time. Then we had all these qualified folks from the Boys and Girls Clubs, the YMCA, looking for work.

"There clearly was a need on both sides."

Acree's Skills4Care had the capacity to do background checks and vet people's qualifications as childcare workers. CalFLEXI had the technology to put people in need of childcare and those willing to do the job together. And [www.essentialchildcare.org](http://www.essentialchildcare.org) was born.

"We have all these local resources available," Acree said. "We can be flexible, providing childcare at the hours needed; two hours, four hours, whatever it takes... At first we thought it would be all hospital workers. But we quickly found out there are others who have to go to work and need childcare — even some working at home need the service."

In the less than two months since the matchmaking began, CalFLEXI's base of workers has climbed to 500 people. Acree said Skills4Care has vetted and hired

about 75 as childcare providers.

Shultz and CalFLEXI officials are in talks now with Childcare for Los Angeles County Economic Development Commission (LAEDC) to go countywide with the service, expanding the work opportunities — and the flexible childcare available.

All of the current caregivers are trained in COVID-19 responses and safety, with Skill4Care verifying qualifications and background before they are added to the available pool. Then the CalFLEXI platform takes over.

Parents register on the website with the number of children and type of care expected, then add the hours a caregiver is needed. A list of people available at that time comes up. Parents can look at profiles of each caregiver. Once a choice is made, the details of location, etc., are exchanged.

The program allows parents to

keep track of the caregivers they have used, and which they want to use again. Skills4Care keeps track of hours worked and handles both payments and payroll.

One potential roadblock is the cost. For the Long Beach service, charges range from \$21.60 an hour to \$26.40, depending on the number of children. Acree said discussions about how governments might ease the cost are taking place.

Acree said the partnerships forged between Pacific Gateway, Skills4Care, CalFLEXI and the city have been quick and strong.

"It takes a village to launch such an aggressive, much-needed service," she said. "All are important parts."

For information and to sign up for childcare, go to [www.essentialchildcare.org](http://www.essentialchildcare.org). To find out how to become a caregiver, go to [pacific-gateway.org](http://pacific-gateway.org).



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By AMY ORR  
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ideas, observations, and resources would be a great proposal to find," said David...