



The R.O.I. of Caregiving Benefits

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Benefits and culture that support moms, dads, and other caregiving employees are more than just a “nice thing to do.” They’re a business imperative. Using original surveying, respected research, and ten diverse case studies, **Vivvi** and Lauren Smith Brody of **The Fifth Trimester** offer five key insights that show that parenthood motivates workers to be productive profit-drivers for their employers, and that workplace support for parents pays off.

Background

In the United States, support for sustainable working parenthood is viewed as a privilege, not a basic right, as it's treated in other modern economies. Legislation for national plans around paid family leave and subsidized child care have stalled repeatedly for decades, leaving solutions up to state government, or, increasingly, the private sector.

Indeed, business support for employees who have caregiving obligations is becoming more common, due to 1) the new visibility around these needs during the Covid-19 pandemic, and 2) the emergence of a new-generation workforce of all genders and ages that is embracing caregiving as an identity label. As many as 73% of workers have caregiving responsibility in their families—whether for babies, older kids, or aging loved ones—and it's become increasingly clear that working parenthood is a marathon, not a sprint. Business policies that support family life—parental leave, caregiving benefits, flexible policies and more—are both practical and emblematic, signaling organization-wide values. They can also improve equity, especially when employers offer benefits (like backup child care or on-ramping programs for new moms) to employees in lower-paying fields who are already more likely to be from marginalized groups and more likely to be pushed out of the workforce due to caregiving responsibilities.

The solution is to make caregiving support universally

available as a business best practice that will ultimately shape our broader culture. Cultural shifts sometimes happen first in the private sector—see the broad support for marriage equality that pre-dated the Supreme Court ruling that enshrined it—before they're mandated by law. And the best way to drive this major shift is by showing the return on investment.

As working parents become more emboldened to push for caregiving benefits—83% of women and 81% of men with children ages 0-5 said that child care support would be an important factor in whether they'd stay or switch employers—the time is ripe to reframe the cultural narrative around support for caregivers in the workforce.

Caregiving support is not “bells and whistles” but a vital pillar of profitability, with calculable R.O.I., that makes sense for all businesses and all employees.

Through first-person case studies and a survey of 300+ employees, **our research uncovered a primary finding: workplace support for parenthood drives profits**. Contrary to the stereotype of the distracted, overwhelmed, disheveled mess, our data shows that parents are not “quiet quitting” anything. Their caregiving responsibilities compel them to seek meaning, flexibility, and benefits like child care specifically because of their ambition to create value. The upshot: When businesses support parents' caregiving needs, they get back their most productive, and profitable work ever.

Methodology

The recommendations and findings in this report are the result of an analysis of three sources: 1) interviews conducted between July, 2023 and January, 2024, 2) an original survey fielded in September, 2023, and 3) existing research from studies cited on page 13. Throughout, any **bold purple numbers** you see are from our original survey.

The people interviewed for the case studies and quoted throughout these pages represent a diversity of roles, industries, locations, and family structures. Notably, the interviewees were selected in part because they have access to support for their caregiving in their jobs and wanted to give their time to help broadcast the value of that support. The R.O.I. calculations in their case studies incorporate only the benefits they used personally, not the entire breadth offered by their employers. Their productivity and output was calculated using either their self-reported base salary or an industry benchmark as noted.

The survey, fielded over social media and LinkedIn, was taken by 304 people who answered 22 questions. Of those, **95%** reported that they consider caregiving part of their identity, and **100%** reported that they provide care for someone other than themselves. They are also financially motivated to work: **70%** of survey respondents were either the primary or about-equal earner in their families.

KEY FINDING OVERVIEW:

1. Caregiving benefits drive an inclusive culture and increase retention for all.
2. Family benefits are now a hiring imperative.
3. Parents are business development heroes.
4. Parent-friendly practices boost productivity.
5. Care benefits unlock parents' leadership potential.



KEY FINDING 1:

Caregiving benefits drive an inclusive culture and increase retention for all.

“Workplace culture” is one of those lofty corporate goals that can be hard to pin down. How do you measure a vibe of camaraderie or a feeling of inclusion that truly motivates and retains a diversity of employees? We found that the answer is through support for caregiving. Our surveying and interviews showed that **benefits and policies that meet employees’ needs around care build a deep culture that retains workers.**

First, looking at retention: While **67%** of survey respondents have considered leaving their job in the last year, **42%** of those say that they stayed specifically because of their employer’s support of their caregiving. And, overall, **59%** of respondents say that if they had backup or subsidized child care they would be likely to stay put for at least four years (that’s 14 months longer than the average Millennial tenure). The cost of losing a worker is a minimum of 33% of their salary (or as much as **213% of salary for \$100,000+ earners**); retention saves far more money than the benefits cost. Julia, a high school English teacher and mom of four in a blended family, says the investment is worth it. **“Maybe they’re buying my loyalty, but yes, they can have it,”** she says, laughing. Julia works for a school that offered teachers a “care concierge” to book things like



“I would never even consider leaving my job while my kids are in the daycare here.”

Michael

pharma scientist, dad of 2

pediatrician appointments. “I feel respected not just as a professional but as a person.”

Next, culture: Notably, only **22%** of our survey respondents say that they feel “very welcome” to express their identity as caregivers at work, and an almost identical number (**21%**) report that their benefits “mostly” or “very well” address that identity. The correlation between the two, which was further confirmed in our interviews: caregiving benefits encourage comfort with caregiving identity and broadcast wider organizational values that ultimately impact the bottom line.

These include:

↑ **Equity:** Programs that support caregivers’ mental load, or create universally available flexibility, prevent proximity bias and stigma. Julia, the teacher, says that the care concierge program keeps her from having to ask other non-parents to cover her classroom while she addresses caregiving needs, making the day more fair for all. [Read Julia’s case study.]

↑ **Authenticity:** As a self-described “very transparent person,” Danielle, a marketing manager and mom of three, ages 2 to 18, says her benefits make her feel welcome to share honestly at work when “life gets crazy.” [Read Danielle’s case study.] Research shows that a culture of authenticity at work yields a **14% increase in productivity** and prevents “imposter syndrome” (which reduces worker output by \$3,400 per year).

↑ **Diversity:** DeAnne, a well-being leader and managing director at PwC, says that being able to use four different corporate caregiving benefits to have two children with her wife is a big part of why she’s stayed and grown there for 22 years. Studies show that companies with higher executive level gender diversity have a **21% likelihood** of outperforming their peers. [Read DeAnne’s case study.]

↑ **Belonging:** “There is so much camaraderie around parenting,” says Michael, a big pharma scientist and dad of two. “I would never even consider leaving [my job] while my kids are in the daycare here.” [Read Michael’s case study.] High levels of belonging have been shown to decrease turnover by 50%.

↑ **Mattering:** As a trans man working at a reproductive health clinic in the South, Sincere, dad of four kids in a blended family, uses employer-provided care credits to be able to accommodate travel for community outreach work. “I don’t have to sell my soul to help other people instead of my own kids. I can actually help them all,” he says. Employees like Sincere, who find greater meaning in their work, experience increased productivity. [Read Sincere’s case study.]

It’s a profitable feedback loop: For parents, benefits establish cultural norms, and that culture drives retention.

KEY FINDING 2:

Family benefits are now a hiring imperative.

We asked our survey-takers a grown-up equivalent of the famous marshmallow test: Would you rather have an immediate cash bonus of \$10,000, or an ongoing child care subsidy of \$10,000 per year? An overwhelming **9 out of 10** people chose the latter. Child

care (much like a marshmallow, actually) is sticky: job seekers look for it specifically, and workers who have it, stay.

Danielle, a highly-skilled former gig worker, took her first full-time role in more than a decade explicitly because, “they offered child care for my 2-year-old Zoie, and that was the biggest incentive, absolutely, hands down.” Evangeline, a beauty formulations scientist, and single mom, was lured back to her former employer a decade after leaving—in part by after-care for her son. While 10 years earlier, she couldn’t even imagine being a mother in the workplace, today there is caregiving support to make it possible. [Read Evangeline’s case study.] And Jo, a brand new mom whose premature son inspired her employer, Bobbie’s NICU policy, says, “how we support parents is what draws people to apply. These are the number-one questions applicants are asking.” [Read Jo’s case study.]

Our survey found that when job-searching, candidates now actively look for child care benefits in their compensation package. They’re **three times (3x)** more likely to assess a potential employer’s work culture by checking out the benefits package directly than by researching reviews online. And when we asked what specifically candidates were seeking, **child care support ranked in the top three** most-wanted benefits, right alongside standards like vacation days—and **ahead of more traditional benefits like a 401k.** (“I’m not going anywhere,” says Jo. “But if I were looking, I’d be like screw the 401K. I’ve got to be able to take care of my family now before I can take care of my future old self.”) Child care also makes parents evangelists for their companies: **68%** say that if they had it, they would tell their friends “to apply for jobs here.”

It’s easy to understand why child care has become a necessary recruiting tool: while 70% of kids in two-parent homes have two working parents, 51% of America lives in what’s considered a child care desert. It is not necessarily the private sector’s responsibility to solve this access gap (indeed, other wealthy countries’ governments spend an average of \$14,000 per year per toddler while the U.S. contributes only \$500), but our study showed that when they do, it pays off. And culturally, we have hit the “popular” threshold on the Overton Window, a model of how social ideas become policy, with 93% of voters across the political spectrum saying that they believe that affordable, quality child care is important for working parents of young children, and 59% of part-time or non-working parents reporting that they would go back to work full time if their child had access to the same. Child care is no longer a polarized political issue; it’s an everyone issue.

Remarkably, our survey also found that child care is a critical benefit for companies to offer even when employees don’t want or need to use it. In fact, **our respondents ranked back-up child care as a benefit that they would want for their colleagues even more than for themselves.** Job candidates want to know that they’re walking into an environment where teams are already feeling supported, and where they don’t have to be adversely affected by colleagues’ care needs. It bears repeating: child care has become a business imperative.

We heard again and again from our parent interviewees about how child care allowed them not just to show up, but to increase their



focus and collaboration, and even over-deliver on their output [see page 7]. Further, once workers have support for child care as part of their benefits package, they build caregiving consistency for their kids that they don't want to disrupt. "I'm approached with competitive [job] offers often, but between my FSA for child care, and the subsidized daycare tuition for my kids who are so happy, it would be very, very hard to walk away," says Keeley, who is her family's primary breadwinner. [Read Keeley's case study.]

Our survey respondents, as a whole, would like to "stay and grow with the same employer," a goal they ranked as a **5 out of 5**. But that requires adequate child care. Without it, **64%** say that their care responsibilities negatively impact their ability to take on extra work or business development.



9 in 10
choose care support over cash

When given the choice between a **one-time immediate cash bonus of \$10,000** and an **ongoing annual childcare subsidy of \$10,000 per year**, **90.5%** of respondents chose the latter.

KEY FINDING 3:

Parents are biz dev heroes.

Flexibility may get a lot of headlines, but our research showed that there's something else working parents are seeking: money. And they're motivated to put in the work to earn the bonus, get the commission, close the deal. So, when they win, the company wins, too.

When asked which of their goals are most influenced by their caregiving responsibilities, survey respondents ranked "earning more money" as **4.2 out of 5**. Kids are expensive, so working needs to feel worth it, literally. And **interviewees recognized that increased compensation requires increasing the value of their work.**

Internal business development is a key value parents bring to their organizations (and some survey respondents even said that caregiving has made them better at networking). They are taking on leadership roles in employee resource groups and re-conceiving them as hotbeds for business growth. DeAnne from PwC helped develop 12 such groups with a staggering 23,000 members. Madeline is a fully remote health tech worker, and when her ERG hosted a training on career growth, she says, "I could tell the organization was truly investing in its people—and that helped me invest in my colleagues, too." [Read Madeline's case study.] Onsite daycare can serve as an ad-hoc ERG, too, allowing



parents to connect personally and professionally. Michael, the pharma scientist, credits the community at his company's onsite daycare for growing his communication skills and breaking down departmental silos, connecting him to people across the organization, prompting new efficiencies. "I'm better at managing, instructing, and mentoring—all thanks to drop-off and pickup," he says. It turns out, daycare is the new water cooler in a post-Covid return-to-office world.

External business development is a pain point for the parents surveyed. The majority say that—without workplace support—their caregiving responsibilities negatively impact their ability to travel or attend

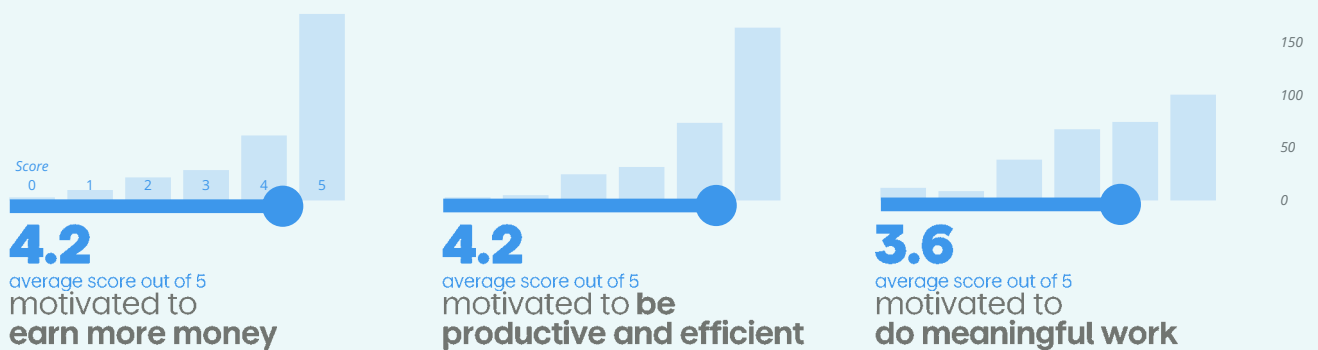
community events outside of business hours. Our supported case studies, however, show the enormous payoff that could be possible for all:

- **Travel dexterity:** “Invaluable.” That’s the word Keeley, who works in sales, uses to describe the opportunities she’s been able to pursue for her employer because of the child care they offer as a benefit. **“If a potential client says they have time to meet—you go,” says Keeley, who was traveling right after coming back from maternity leave, with no caregiving stress.** It’s a win for companies: every dollar spent on business travel is estimated to yield 2.9x in profits.
- **Smarter strategy:** Madeline uses her flexible/remote work schedule (yes, that’s a caregiving benefit) to do many client outreach emails at 5 a.m. (schedule send!) before her daughter wakes up so she can be fully present—and not working—later in the afternoon. Remote work leads to gains in productivity (as much as 24%) if managers are well-trained for it.

- **Broader influence:** Marissa, an in-house attorney, who used her employer Etsy’s flex work mode option to move to Washington, D.C., closer to her children’s grandparents (a.k.a. her backup caregivers), found that her new location provided her the opportunity to begin to contribute to Etsy’s advocacy efforts, in addition to her existing work. Backup child care means that she could take a meeting on Capitol Hill on a moment’s notice, too. [Read Marissa’s case study.]
- **Thought leadership:** At the reproductive health clinic in Atlanta, **Sincere stretches his evenings and weekends with events and travel made possible by child care credits. “I shine a bright light on our work,” he says,** of these extracurricular business development opportunities. “I’ll hear, ‘we were wondering where your clinic has been, and now you’re back and better than ever.’” Thought leadership has been shown to have a 14x ROI for organizations. That’s one very bright light.

Caregiving is a career motivator for parents

When asked to **score how caregiving motivates an employee** on a scale of 0 (not motivating) to 5 (very motivating) the following were the three highest ranking.



KEY FINDING 4:

Parent-friendly policies boost productivity.

Caregivers, by and large, are not quiet quitting anything. **Survey respondents say that their caregiving responsibilities motivate them to be “more productive and efficient”—not less—ranking that goal as a 4.2 out of 5.** And when they have support for their caregiving, they meet their goal.

“Any day that I use our child care benefit for coverage is a day when I can sign the contract, take the call, and keep our mission moving forward. Every day is important,” says Marissa, the in-house attorney.

Sometimes, extra productivity is direct and easily measurable:

- Julia hit a record for most teaching shifts covered.
- Sincere jumped in to help with his employer’s annual fundraiser.

- Scientist Michael created efficiencies his lab experiments, saving thousands of dollars in supplies (and time) from being wasted.
- Evangeline, a single mom, uses flexibility to do more business across time zones globally.

All of these employees took on more work because they had capacity. And they had that capacity because they had support for their caregiving.

But our research uncovered two additional, deeper ways that workers' output increases when they have access to benefits and policies that support their caregiving, too: they achieve greater focus and find more motivation for their work.

Increased focus came up repeatedly in interviews: **Parents who were able to work remotely or at odd hours reduced their absenteeism, applied commute time to work, or timed their work sprints to match the hours they had care, increasing their productivity.** Research shows that 73% of managers agree that flexible work increases productivity.

Higher motivation: Our survey asked respondents to rank five things that improve their work motivation. Respondents' most common **#1 ranked work motivator was simply knowing their kids were safe and cared for while they worked**—above a deadline, flexibility, or a financial goal. Additionally, **69% of survey respondents say that if their employer had backup or subsidized child care they would work in person more often than required, and 57% said they would take on higher-level work.**

Motivation is also driven by their desire to do meaningful work, a goal they ranked **3.6 out of 5**. "Being a mother, of course, is meaningful work," says Madeline, who works in health tech. "But it's also very one-on-one. In my job, I feel like I'm able to take my mission and desire to improve the world and do it at scale, touching more and more people." Employees like Madeline who find greater meaning in their work tend to also put in a higher quantity of work hours, in a feedback loop of satisfaction-to-productivity ratio that has been found to generate an additional \$9,078 per worker per year.

Bottom line: Caregiving is an overall career motivator. And parents are driven to deliver.

Employer provided care impacts **worker drive and retention.**

If their employer had on-site, subsidized, or back-up child care, respondents indicated they would do the following:

Work in person more than required



Stay at my employer for at least 4 years



Take on higher level work





KEY FINDING 5:

Care benefits unlock parents' leadership potential.

Officially: It's time to retire the concept of the Mommy Track. **Our research shows that parents are far more ambitious than the current cultural narrative suggests: 57%** say that if their employer had backup or subsidized child care, they would take on higher-level work. And when asked which of their goals are most motivated by their caregiving, survey respondents ranked “stay and grow long-term” and “earn more money” highly, **3.5 and 4.2, out of 5**, respectively. They want to stay and lead specifically because of being parents.

- “I raise my hand,” says Marissa.
- “I hustle,” says Danielle. “I jump after my dream.”
- “My career remained on an upward trajectory,” says Keeley.
- “We raise the bar for what we expect of each other,” says Madeline.

And care benefits that compel future career growth pay off. Filling roles internally increases productivity, with faster onboarding and improved team morale. Internal hires cost 18% less, are 21% less likely to leave, and create a ripple effect that makes other employees stay 41% longer, too. Keeping moms, in particular, in the pipeline to leadership, is smart business. Fortune 500 businesses with a higher representation of women in leadership show a 34% higher return to shareholders. And supporting men's caregiving with gender-neutral policies—57% of dads say that fatherhood is extremely important to their identity—drives gender equality, too.

And parents who do climb the ladder want to lead in a new, authentic way: “my generation has stripped away hustle culture. Who we are being as people for our people

is a the forefront,” says Jo, the NICU mom.

To achieve business growth, parents need supportive policies—and role models in leadership who use the benefits too. Although **33%** of survey respondents say that they see their company's leadership using the benefits offered, half (**50%**) are not sure if they do. Keeley saw her company's founder take a fully unplugged maternity leave and says because of that example, **“I never felt like I was compromising on the ability to grow after my own two leaves. I returned even more motivated.”**

Not everyone has a boss with a baby, like Keeley's. But parents think long-term about care. About 1 in 5 (**18%**) of survey respondents provide care for a non-spouse adult such as an aging parent, so they know that the need for support extends far beyond the little-kid years, into later career stages, too, and they're looking for empathy and role models. Evangeline didn't have that when her mother was ill and dying, and she ended up leaving her company. Years later, that company evolved and added care benefits. Now, she's back and in a much bigger role.

One last note: When asked what kind of management training would have the biggest positive effect on company culture (and therefore retention—see finding 1), **48%** of respondents said that caregiving sensitivity training would have the most impact—more than risk management, sexual harassment, and implicit bias training combined.

Parents are driven to succeed, stay, and grow. And companies that make that path possible reap the rewards.

Headlines, Stats, and Key Takeaways

Parents are driven to stay, grow, and create progress and profit for their employer. And supporting their ability to do so—with family-friendly benefits and policies—is a business imperative. Our five key findings:

1

Benefits for parents drive culture and retention for all by increasing equity, authenticity, diversity, belonging, and mattering, all of which positively impact worker commitment.

- 42% of survey respondents who considered leaving their job in the last year say that they stayed specifically because of their employer's support of their caregiving.
- 59% of respondents say that if they had backup or subsidized child care they would be likely to stay in their job for at least four years.
- Overall, only 22% of survey respondents say that they feel “very welcome” to express their identity as caregivers at work, and an almost identical number (only 21%) report that their benefits “mostly” or “very well” address that identity.

2

Family benefits are now a hiring imperative. Job candidates actively seek them out, get attached to them, and promote them.

- 9 out of 10 survey respondents say that they'd rather have an ongoing childcare subsidy of \$10,000 than an immediate \$10,000 cash bonus.
- 3x more survey respondents say that they would assess a potential employer's culture by checking out the benefits package directly rather than reading online reviews of a company's culture.
- 68% say that if they had child care benefits, they would tell their friends “to apply for jobs here.”
- Survey respondents rank child care benefits as more desirable than a 401k.

3

Parents can be business development heroes. Highly motivated to bring in cash, they use caregiving benefits and supportive policies—if they have them—to achieve key business development actions, like travel, strategy, and thought leadership.

- Survey respondents rank “earning more money,” as their top goal (other than flexibility) that's motivated by their caregiving responsibilities.
- Parents excel at internal business development, particularly via ERGs, peer mentoring and sponsorship.
- But 64% say that their care responsibilities negatively impact their ability to take on extra work or business development without support.



4

Parent-friendly policies boost productivity—both for logistical reasons (fewer absences, for instance), and because they increase workers' focus and motivation.

- Survey respondents say that their caregiving responsibilities motivate them to be “more productive and efficient” and to “do meaningful work.”
- 69% of survey respondents say that if their employer had backup or subsidized child care they would work in person more often than required.
- 57% of survey respondents say that if their employer had backup or subsidized child care they would take on higher-level work.

5

Child care unlocks parents' leadership potential. Ambitious but stability-seeking, they strive to advance internally (and look for role models). The result: Better gender balance in leadership, a proven profit-driver.

- 33% of survey respondents say that they see their company's leadership visibly using the benefits offered. Half (50%) are not sure if they do.
- 18% of survey respondents provide care for a non-spouse adult such as an aging parent, so they know that the need for support extends far beyond the little-kid years.
- 48% of respondents said that caregiving sensitivity training would have high impact on company culture—more than risk management, sexual harassment, and implicit bias training combined.

Our case studies show that every \$1 invested in caregiving benefits drives \$18.93, for an R.O.I. of nearly 18x.



Case Studies: Care Pays Off



Madeline:
Health Tech
Strategist
6.5x R.O.I.

Her company's shift to fully remote work let this brand new mom work more efficiently and effectively than ever, increasing her team's output and goals.



Marissa:
In-House Employment
Attorney
4.9x R.O.I.

Her company's flexible work mode option and child care credits let this mom of two expand the scope of her important role, limit absences, and co-lead an ERG.



Sincere:
Reproductive Health
Care Worker
50.5x R.O.I.

As a life-saving trans outreach coordinator who travels, this dad of four created a new footprint of advocacy and visibility for his center thanks to child care credits.



Evangeline:
Beauty Formulations
Scientist
18.7x R.O.I.

This single mom with flex hours—who cares for extended family, too—returned to her former employer to lead a global team once they improved their benefits.



Michael:
Pharmaceutical
Company Scientist
11.3x R.O.I.

This dad of two credits his company's on-site daycare for unlocking business development and communication skills, and saving money and time in his lab.



Julia:
High School
English Teacher
62.3x R.O.I.

A mom of four in a blended family, she performed at a higher level than ever at her school with the help of a new care concierge program for daily family tasks.



DeAnne:
Well-Being Leader +
Managing Director
12.3x R.O.I.

Over 22 years, this mom of two used both adoption and infertility benefits to grow her family while simultaneously developing a wellness strategy for 75,000+ employees.



Keeley:
Media Tech
Sales Lead
5.2x R.O.I.

With two kids under two in the busiest years of her career, this primary breadwinner says yes to every meeting, every trip, and every sales lead thanks to her care benefits.



Johanna:
Talent Program
Manager
5.6x R.O.I.

When her baby boy came early, at 27 weeks, Jo's employer immediately implemented a NICU care leave policy, giving her son the best start possible, and setting an example that was a massive PR win for the company.



Danielle:
Marketing and
Events Planner
2.0x R.O.I.

With built-in child care, this multi-hyphenate multi-tasking mom of three returned to full-time work where she saved freelance costs for her employer.

Average R.O.I. delivered back to companies from their caregiving benefits: 18x

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About The Fifth Trimester

The Fifth Trimester helps businesses support and retain caregiving employees to advance their gender equity goals. CEO Lauren Smith Brody is a best-selling author, speaker, trainer, and thought leader who works across the Fortune 500 and in public policy to advocate for progress for working families.

About Vivvi

Vivvi provides child care and early learning for today's families, aligning the exceptional quality families deserve with the flexibility they need. We also partner with employers of all sizes to make full-time, part-time and backup care more accessible and affordable for working parents.