



RURAL CHILD CARE INNOVATION PROGRAM

COMMUNITY SOLUTION ACTION PLAN FOR CHILD CARE

BEMIDJI AREA, MINNESOTA

JUNE 15 2019

The Rural Child Care Innovation Program is possible due to generous funding from the Minnesota Department of Human Services.



This Community Solution Action Plan is designed to be a deep dive into the Rural Child Care Innovation Program. You will step through every stage of the community engagement process through solution development and implementation. Please visit www.ruralchildcare.org for continued updates on community progress.

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“If employees can’t find quality care for their children, they won’t work for you. They won’t move to your community, or they’ll be forced to move away, or they might have to consider quitting their job to stay home with their children because they have no other option.”

Kris Bevell

Editor
Prairie Business Magazine



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Rural Child Care Innovation Program (RCCIP), is a community engagement process designed to develop right-sized solutions to address the needs of early care and education in Minnesota's rural communities. The goal of the RCCIP is to help communities identify the scope and size of their child care challenges and to empower and support communities to develop solutions to address these challenges.

The Community Solution Action Plan for Bemidji, Minnesota, intends to outline the child care challenges identified in the community and the proposed solutions to improve the state of child care in the area. A Core Team from Bemidji, with the support of First Children's Finance, conducted a thorough investigation and analysis to uncover the factors creating the child care shortage in the area through focus groups, individual interviews, and surveys with a multitude of stakeholders in the community.

To understand the potential need for child care in Bemidji, First Children's Finance conducted a supply and demand gap analysis, which showed a child care shortage of 747 slots. The analysis revealed that it's very difficult to be a child care provider due to numerous rules and regulations, low pay and no benefits, long hours, and high operating costs. Staffing is a significant expense for many child care programs. This heavily influences the ability of child care providers to sustain their child care operations.

The analysis revealed that the child care shortage has severely impacted parents living in Bemidji. Nearly 28% of survey respondents declined employment or withdrew from the workforce due to child care issues. Absence from work (when a provider is closed for the day), inability to work a flexible schedule, inability to work different shifts, and tardiness to work hinders the ability of parents to advance in their careers.

Some of the major factors contributing to the child care shortage in Bemidji include high regional poverty rates, increase in dual parent working families, attraction of new employees to the area, difficulties of being a child care provider, and lack of community recognition for child care providers. Furthermore, there is a lack of business supports and business incentives in the area, including parent support and parent education.

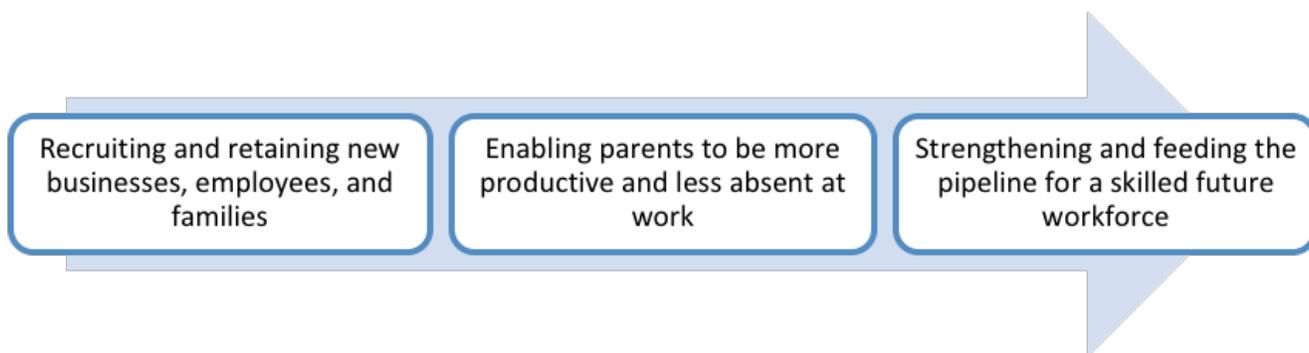
Through the RCCIP, Bemidji has identified 7 goals to address the child care challenges. These goals include:

- Create a Comprehensive Showcase Website for Bemidji Child Care Providers
- Educate Businesses Surrounding Child Care Options
- Develop a Resource Guide for New Providers
- Create a Child Care Provider Group to Plan Training and Networking
- Create a Mentor Network for New Child Care Providers
- Assemble a Group of Stakeholders to Review Current Regulations
- Create an Annual Appreciation Dinner for Providers

In implementing these goals, the Bemidji Area will improve the state of child care, empower local child care providers through continuous community support, provide parents with more care options, and providers with better resources to run and operate their child care businesses. In the next 12 months, First Children's Finance will support the core team in implementing these goals and measuring outcomes of their efforts.

THE IMPORTANCE OF HIGH QUALITY CHILD CARE IN COMMUNITIES

In rural communities, ebbs and flows of the local economy greatly influence the sustainability of a community's child care supply, and vice versa. That's why the Rural Child Care Innovation Program addresses child care and early education challenges through a framework of regional economic development. A robust supply of high quality child care fosters community growth through:



The connection is clear: when our children thrive, so do our communities. Investing in early care and education is not only the right thing to do for our youngest citizens, but the best thing to do for our economic growth and prosperity.

INTRODUCING THE RURAL CHILD CARE INNOVATION PROGRAM

Child care is an economic driver for rural communities across the United States but many communities are facing shortages of high quality child care. The Rural Child Care Innovation Program is based on the fundamental idea that rural communities are greater than their size in numbers and greater than their current challenges. By mobilizing and empowering rural communities, the landscape of early care and education is changing in rural America.

PROGRAM FOCUS

Children living in rural areas are more likely to come from low-income households than children in urban areas, and are more likely to be living in poverty for longer periods of time. Many rural areas struggle to attract and retain a young, educated workforce, while others lack the resources to keep up with their own growth and success. Although rural communities face many challenges, they are also resilient. They have the innovation it takes to develop nimble, creative solutions that will be effective in rural areas. The Rural Child Care Innovation Program leverages communities' independent, can-do attitudes to address early care and education in Greater Minnesota.

PROGRAM ACTIVITIES AND GENERAL TIMELINE

APPLICATION PHASE		
ACTIVITIES	TIMING	DETAILS
Webinar	March 26, 2018	Information session on RCCIP
Application Deadline	April 30, 2018	
Selection of Communities	May 25, 2018 (November 2018)	Communities notified via email
Program Setup	May 2018 (November 2018)	FCF connected by phone with the main community contact to set up first Core Team meeting.
PLANNING PHASE		
ACTIVITIES	TIMING	DETAILS
Core Team Onboarding Retreat	January 31, 2019	Face-to-face meeting with FCF and the Core Team to discuss project details and expectations.
Core Team Planning Meetings	Feb. 22, 2019 March 7, 2019 March 18, 2019 March 28, 2019	Face-to-face meeting to map out community engagement activities and fully develop the program timeline.
Community Engagement Activities	March 2019 – June 2019	Implementation of engagement activities within the community.
Child Care Provider Trainings- Family Child Care Providers	April 2019- June 2019	Series of business trainings and one-on-one consultations conducted by FCF.
Town Hall Event	April 25, 2019	Community wide event to identify and develop community solutions.
IMPLEMENTATION PHASE		
ACTIVITIES	TIMING	DETAILS
Implementation Planning Retreat	May 9, 2019	Face-to-face meeting to map out smart goals and implementation activities with project teams.
Community Solution Action Plan	June 2019	Report detailing community data, types of solutions, and community identified projects.
Regular Project Team Meetings	May 2019 – June 2020	Implementation of community solutions.
Regular Core Team Meetings	May 2019 – June 2020	Connect with FCF to discuss Project Team outcomes.
Technical Assistance Support	April 2019 – June 2020	FCF available to provide ongoing business support
Final Report	June 2020	Core Team submits final report to FCF.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES AND IMPACT

The Rural Child Care Innovation Program is designed to support fundamental change in the overall conditions for child care in the areas that it is delivered. This is accomplished through various methods that include:

- A thorough analysis of the current child care supply and demand and evaluation of community factors impacting the local child care supply
- Events that educate community members about the link between quality child care, rural economic development, and viable communities.
- A Community Solution Action Plan that includes innovative solutions generated through a facilitated Town Hall process
- Support and business improvement services to existing family child care providers and child care centers
- Access to First Children's Finance's expertise, resources, and tools: including research and financial modeling
- Links to other communities working on similar issues

Measurements of success are determined through a tactical project management grid that provides guidance to the Core Team about the involved participants and their projected steps and progress towards project completion.

ABOUT BEMIDJI, MINNESOTA



Surrounded by pristine lakes and deep forests, Bemidji is a friendly, family community with rich tradition and the right touch of hipness. It has top-tier higher education, outstanding K-12 schools, a major health care center, convenient air service, fine dining, a vibrant arts scene and the hottest commercial buzz in all of Northern Minnesota.

Bemidji is a wonderful place to call home. Just ask the 46,000 residents who live and work in and around this big small town.

The Bemidji Area currently has 97 licensed child care providers and 3 child care and 3 pre-school or Head Start centers. In focusing on the number of child care slots available within the Bemidji School District Boundaries, approximately 37% growth is needed in the number of licensed child care slots to fill the shortfall the community is

experiencing. The Bemidji area and businesses in our region who want to attract talent are subject to the shortage of child care with little to no options to grow if these social issues are not overcome.

LOCAL CORE TEAM REPRESENTATION

The Core Team was identified locally and asked to commit to investigating the child care challenges in Bemidji. The Core Team supports the development of solutions to sustain a high quality and sustainable child care infrastructure in the local area.

- Erin Echternach, Greater Bemidji: Co-Lead of Core Team
- Anne Lindseth, Beltrami County Human Services: Co-Lead of Core Team
- Denaé Alamano, United Way of the Bemidji Area
- Michele Andringa, BI-CAP/Head Start
- Cory Boushee, Northwest Minnesota Foundation
- Jean Christensen, First Lutheran Church Bemidji
- Kellie Dixon, Karvakko
- Sandy Eberhart, Bemidji School District (ISD 31)
- Tim Flathers, Headwaters Regional Development Commission
- Jeri Francis, Family Child Care Provider
- Cailee Furer, Parent & Family Educator/Early Childhood Educator
- Billie Jo Green, Rural MN CEP
- Justin Holley, North Central Door
- Rebecca Kremer, Beltrami County Public Health Nurse
- Ginny Kurtzweg, TLC Preschool/Bemidji Early Childhood Collaborative
- Kathy LeClaire, Family Child Care Provider
- Andrew Lesch, Bemidji School District (ISD 31)
- David Liedl, Culver's of Bemidji
- Kay Mack, Beltrami County
- Casey Mai, Greater Bemidji Area Joint Planning Board
- Brian Mathews, Sanford Health of Northern Minnesota
- Missy Okeson, Northwest Minnesota Foundation
- Dana Patsie, Child Care Aware
- Lydia Pietruszewski, Pine Pals Learn & Play
- Olive Smith, Pine Pals Learn & Play
- Heather Sutherland, Northwest Technical College
- Mary Thompson, Headwaters Regional Development Commission
- Michele Voorhees, Beltrami County Health & Human Services
- Leah Weller, Choice Therapy
- Megan Zothman, Bemidji State University

CHILD CARE DATA AND EARLY EDUCATION TRENDS

As part of the Rural Child Care Innovation Program, the local community was provided with various forms of support to understand the contributing factors for the child care challenges. First Children's Finance leveraged different data sources to pull together an illustrative picture of the impact of child care in the local area. These data sources included US Census Information, MN Child Care Licensing Records, Minnesota Department of Education, MN DEED, and other internal research tools including First Children's Finance data.

POTENTIAL NEED OVERVIEW

First Children's Finance conducted a supply and demand gap analysis which provided a view of potential child care needs.

This analysis was conducted in January 2019 and showed a shortage of 747 slots in Bemidji and surrounding areas. Additional focus on the 56601 zip code in Bemidji showed a gap of 601 slots.

ZIP CODE	CITY	# OF CHILD CARE CENTERS (CCC)	# OF FAMILY CARE CENTERS (FCC)	PLUS/ MINUS/ TOTAL
56678	BEVIDA/SOLWAY	0	1	-24
56601	BEMIDJI	3	91	-601
56461	LAPORTE/GUTHRIE	0	5	-100
56667	NEBISH	0	0	-22

JANUARY 2019

FAMILY CHILD CARE – BY THE NUMBERS

First Children's Finance evaluated the current supply of family child care to identify trends that needed further examination.

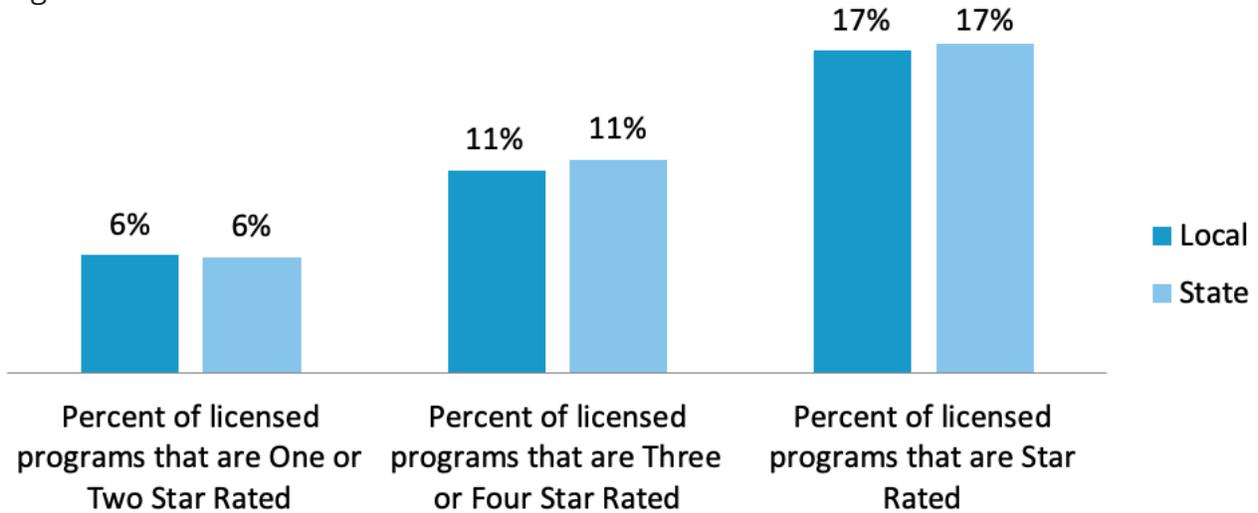
- The average length of service is lower than the state average which indicates a population of providers with shorter lengths of service
- Providers with less than 5 years of service and those with more than 20 years of service are most at risk for turnover in an industry that already sees tremendous employment turn-over rates.
- The area is ahead of the state average for family providers being located outside of their primary residences and in non-residential dwellings.

	LOCAL	STATE
Total Family Child Care Providers	97	8,693
Average Length of Service	9.9 years	12.3 years
Less than 5 years / Service	39 / 40.2%	2577 / 29.6%
More than 20 years / Service	12/ 12.4%	2150 / 24.7%
Non-Owner Occupied	4 / 4.1%	214 / 2.5%
Non-Residential Dwelling	2 / 2.0%	87 / 1.0%

QUALITY CHILD CARE OVERVIEW

First Children’s Finance examined state-wide information about the number of child care programs that are participating in the Parent Aware program.

Parent Aware is Minnesota’s Quality Rating and Improvement System that identifies programs that go above and beyond the general licensing requirements to obtain a higher quality rating in their child care programs.



The chart above demonstrates that child care providers in Bemidji, MN are exactly the same as the state average when it comes to Parent Aware enrollment. Parent Aware enrollment is one component to utilize when we evaluate the quality child care program offerings in the area.

AVERAGE COST OF CHILD CARE

Child care is a large investment for families with children. The market rate survey of child care providers provided by DHS was used by the Bemidji RCCIP to examine child care investments in the area.

The following chart shows the average cost of child care investment on a weekly basis at the 75th percentile for each age group in both a center and family child care setting. It means that 25% of child care programs charge more than the market average and 75% of child care programs charge less.

AREA MARKET RATES – BELTRAMI COUNTY

AGE GROUP- CHILD CARE CENTER	WEEKLY RATE	ANNUAL RATE
75TH PERCENTILE - INFANT WEEKLY	\$ 197.00	\$ 10,244
75TH PERCENTILE - TODDLER WEEKLY	\$ 188.00	\$ 9,776
75TH PERCENTILE - PRESCHOOL WEEKLY	\$ 174.00	\$ 9,048
75TH PERCENTILE - SCHOOL AGE WEEKLY	\$ 150.00	\$ 7,800

AGE GROUP- FAMILY CHILD CARE	WEEKLY RATE	ANNUAL RATE
75TH PERCENTILE - INFANT WEEKLY	\$ 140.00	\$ 7,280
75TH PERCENTILE - TODDLER WEEKLY	\$ 130.00	\$ 6,760
75TH PERCENTILE - PRESCHOOL WEEKLY	\$ 125.00	\$ 6,500
75TH PERCENTILE - SCHOOL AGE WEEKLY	\$ 125.00	\$ 6,500

Results of the 2016 Child Care Market Rate Survey: Minnesota Child Care Provider Business Update

While rates of investment for child care are high for families, many child care operations run on very slim margins due to the high cost of quality staffing and care. Staffing is a significant expense for many child care center programs at 60-80% of overall expenses.

Family Child Care providers invest significant portions of tuition revenue back into their operations leaving providers with less than minimum wage for compensation, according to research by First Children's Finance in 2016.

OTHER LOCAL SUPPORTING DATA

As part of the overall collection and review of data, First Children's Finance highlighted additional data outcomes that can impact third grade reading levels and local graduation rates. There are multiple studies that indicate the link between early education and school readiness with third-grade reading levels and high school graduation rates. Lower achievement levels can be an early indicator of future challenges with high school graduation rates, engagement in higher education, and teen pregnancy rates.

THIRD GRADE READING LEVELS

DISTRICT	2018 PROFICIENCY RATE
Bemidji District 33	56.4%
Statewide	57.50%

LOCAL GRADUATION RATES

DISTRICT	2018 GRADUATION RATE
Bemidji District 31	75.9%
Statewide	82.7%

ABILITY TO PAY FOR CHILD CARE

Many families working on the lower end of the wage spectrum have difficulty paying for child care. The following charts provide an overview of local economic factors that can further impact child care:

Local Poverty Information - Beltrami County

Total Population Living Below Poverty Threshold in Last 12 Months	8,247
Related Children Under Age 18 Living with Income Below Poverty Threshold	2,486
Families With Related Child Under Age 5 Living Below Poverty Threshold	610

Household Income - Beltrami County

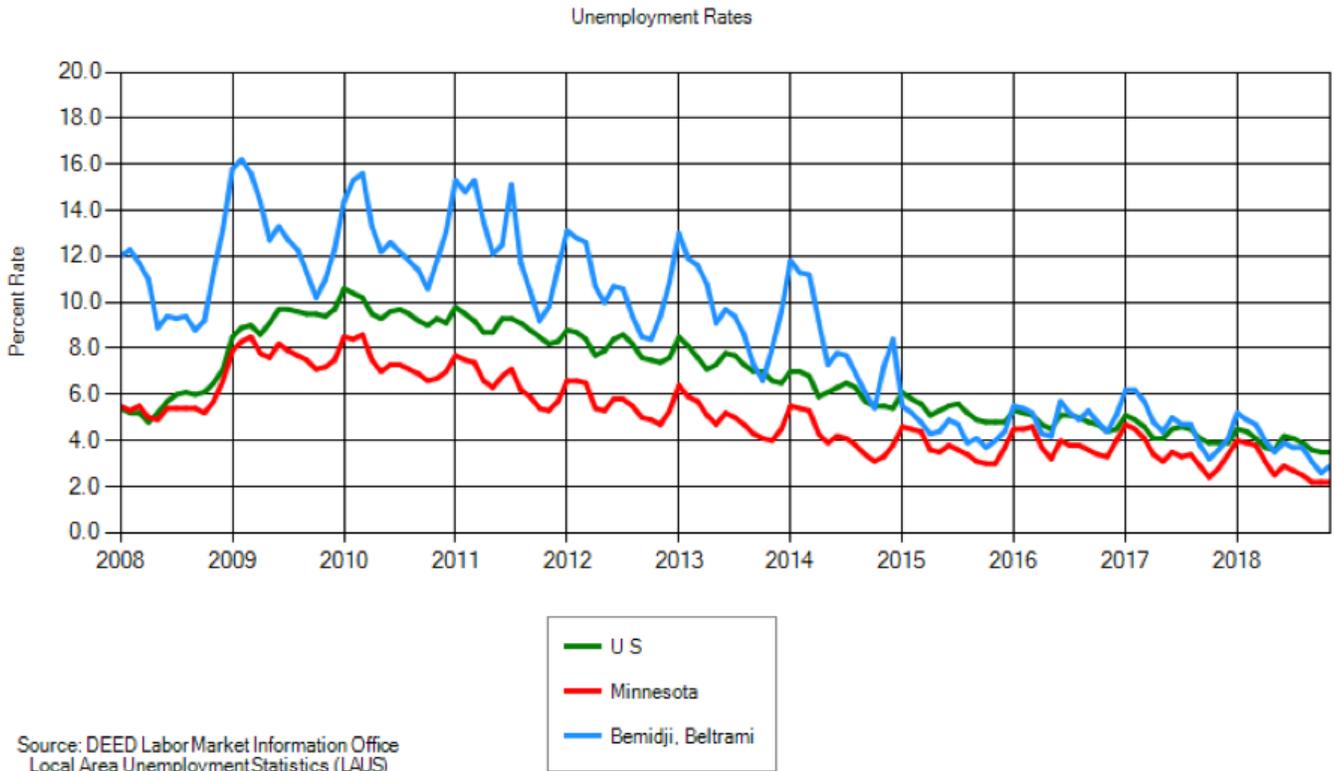
TOTAL HOUSEHOLDS ACS 2017 ESTIMATE	5,983	% OF TOTAL POPULATION
HOUSEHOLDS: INCOME LESS THAN \$10,000	592	9.9%
HOUSEHOLDS: INCOME \$10,000 TO \$14,999	897	15.0%
HOUSEHOLDS: INCOME \$15,000 TO \$24,999	939	15.7%
HOUSEHOLDS: INCOME \$25,000 TO \$34,999	694	11.6%
HOUSEHOLDS: INCOME \$35,000 TO \$49,999	951	15.9%
HOUSEHOLDS: INCOME \$50,000 TO \$74,999	820	13.7%
HOUSEHOLDS: INCOME \$75,000 TO \$99,999	527	8.8%
HOUSEHOLDS: INCOME \$100,000 TO \$149,999	431	7.2%
HOUSEHOLDS: INCOME \$150,000 TO \$199,999	108	1.8%
HOUSEHOLDS: INCOME \$200,000 OR MORE	66	1.1%
MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME	\$34,260	

Local Employment Conditions

Employment data was considered as it can be an indicator that additional child care is needed to support the employment needs of the community since there are more two-parent families employed.

Unemployment Rates – Beltrami County

- **2.3% Unemployment Rate**



Top Local Industries – Beltrami County

The largest employers were invited to participate in the child care conversation since they are impacted by absenteeism and lower productivity when child care is a challenge.

INDUSTRY: HEALTH CARE AND SOCIAL ASSISTANCE	1,136	16.6%
INDUSTRY: EDUCATIONAL SERVICES	1,001	14.7%
INDUSTRY: RETAIL TRADE	987	14.5%

COMMUNITY INSIGHTS

Extensive outreach was conducted by the Core Team to engage the community about child care. This work included one-on-one stakeholder meetings with various community leaders, parent and provider electronic surveys, focus groups and presentations about child care. Through these various inputs, the Core Team was able to better understand the underlying causes of the local child care challenges.

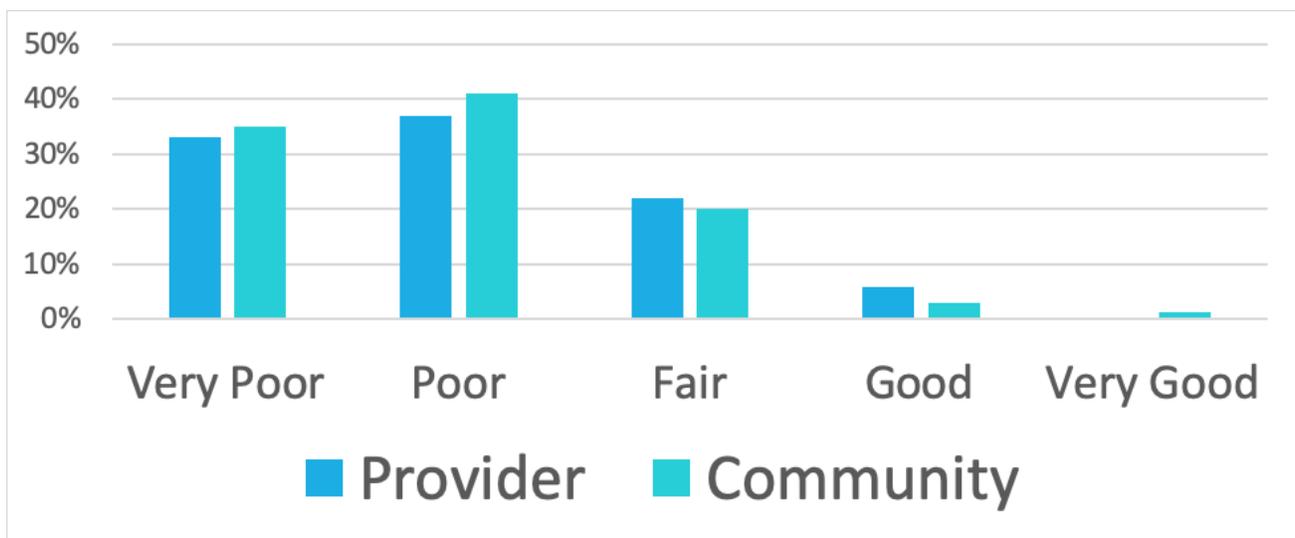


COMMUNITY SURVEYS – SELECTED PERSPECTIVES

The general community was invited to participate in a comprehensive survey about child care in the local Bemidji, MN community. Over 500 individuals participated in the community survey, 56 employers participated in the employer survey, and around 50 providers participated in a separate survey specific for child care providers.

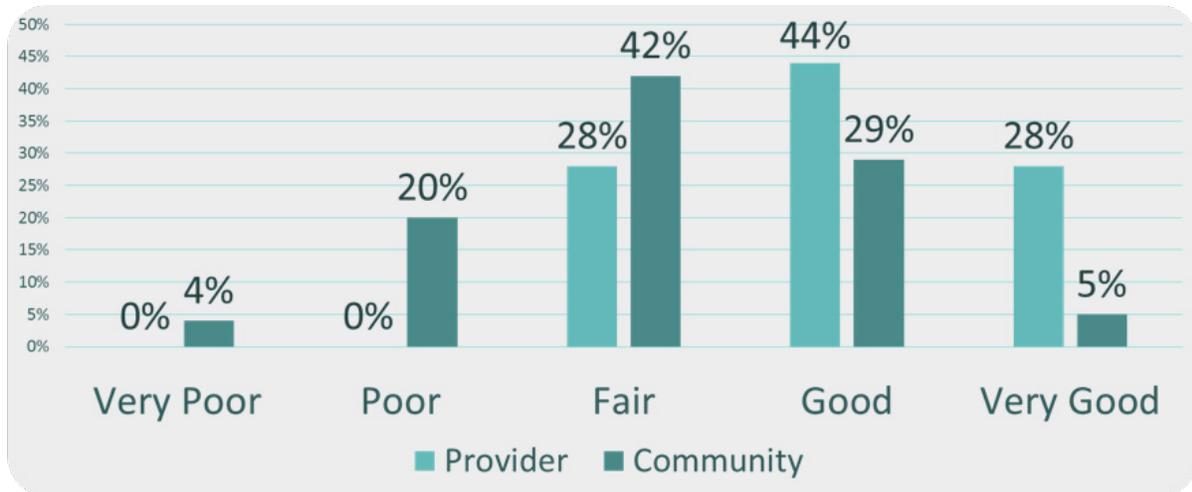
The following charts represent some highlighted perspectives within the community:

PERCEPTIONS: AVAILABILITY OF CHILD CARE IN THE LOCAL AREA



Survey respondents indicated that they were traveling great distances to find appropriate child care. Nearly 40% indicated that they were traveling more than 11 miles for child care.

PERCEPTIONS: QUALITY OF AVAILABLE CHILD CARE IN THE LOCAL AREA

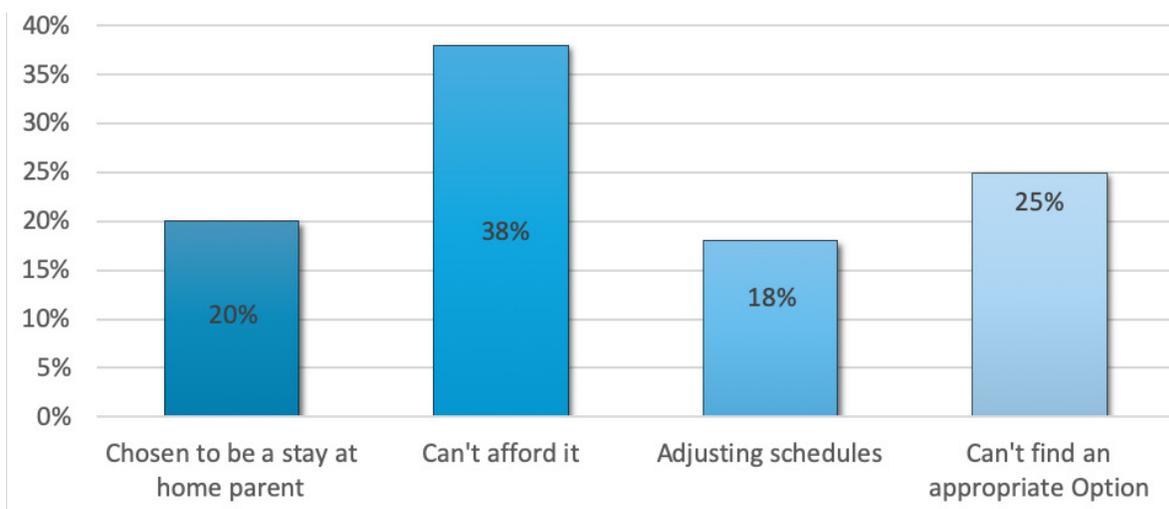


While specific questions about quality were not part of this survey, it was noted that there is some disconnect between child care providers and the local community on the availability of high quality child care in the area. When survey participants were asked about what is important for them in a child care program, they ranked their preferences as follows (1 being the most important):

1. Safe and healthy environment
2. Licensed by DHS
3. Educational curriculum
4. Conveniently located
5. Provider has high level of education
6. Cost
7. Provider is Parent Aware rated
8. Provider is someone I know



REASONS FOR NOT ENROLLING IN PREFERRED CARE



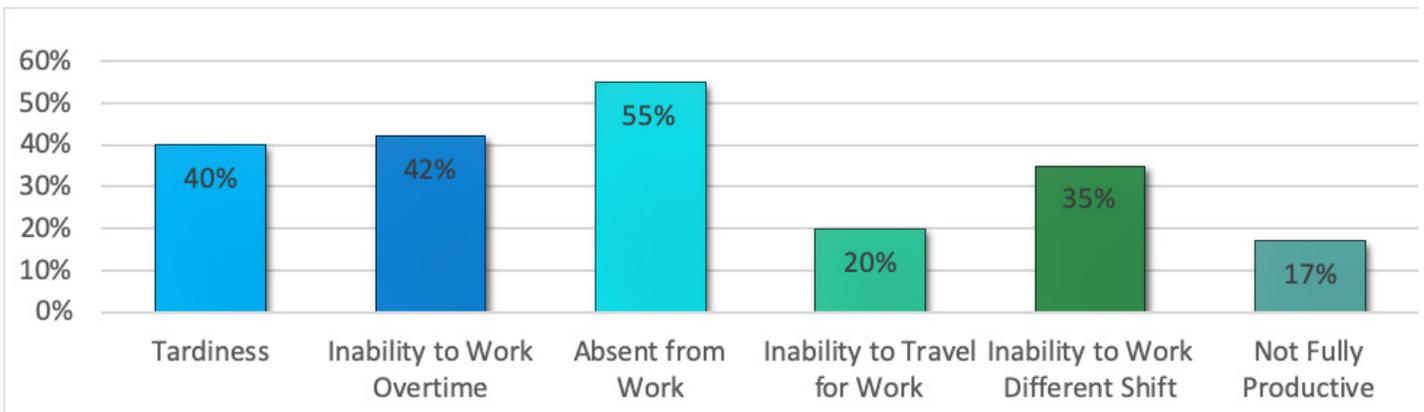
COMMUNITY AND BUSINESS IMPACTS OF THE CHILD CARE ISSUE

Beyond families and children, the greater community and local businesses can also be impacted by child care challenges and issues. Child care is often framed as an economic development issue by communities facing declining populations or challenges with the work force. These issues can compound and further extend into the business community by causing loss of workers due to unavailability of child care or by businesses relocating to environments with better availability of care.

“The community continues to try to draw young families to Bemidji. We are not prepared to offer the amenities necessary to support them. From spousal job opportunities, shopping needs, to child care”

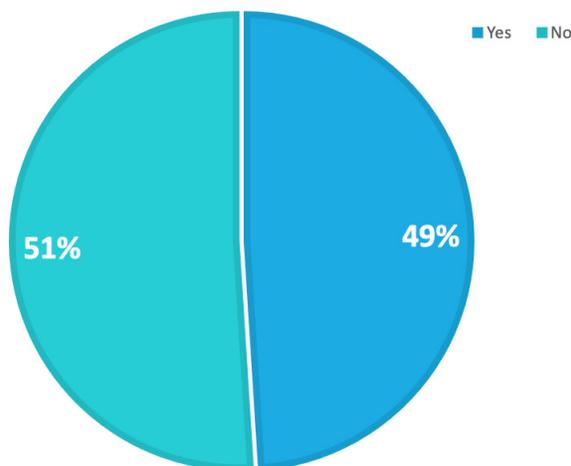
-Local Resident

WORK ISSUES OCCURRED DUE TO CHILD CARE ARRANGEMENTS IN THE LAST 12 MONTHS



Normal work environments can be adversely impacted when child care is a challenge for employers and workers. As illustrated, the biggest impact of child care limitations include absence from work (when a provider is closed for the day), inability to work overtime or a different shift, and tardiness to work. A study in 2004 showed the national impact of child care issues in the economy, this impact was valued at over \$3 billion dollars annually.

IMPACT ON FAMILY PLANNING – BEMIDJI AREA



In addition to the impact on family planning, child care shortages can also impact the local employment environment. In the survey, nearly 28% of parents had declined employment or withdrawn from the workforce due to child care issues.

UNDERSTANDING THE UNDERLYING CHALLENGES

The Core Team in Bemidji spent several months investigating the underlying reasons for the local child care challenges. This work involved engaging with many members of the local area to determine the underlying causes for the identified shortage of care.

The Core Team identified the following factors impacting the child care system in Bemidji:

• IT IS CHALLENGING TO BE A CHILD CARE PROVIDER

“It is a very demanding job. It seems like parents are never quite satisfied 100% with the child care and if something comes up for the provider, they get grief from the parents” - Local Parent

- ◇ Parents want high quality care, but they can't pay enough to compensate quality
- ◇ There is low respect for child care as a profession
- ◇ No access to benefits
- ◇ Little flexibility for a providers own family needs
- ◇ Long hours for low pay
- ◇ Child care is a very complex business to operate
- ◇ Can't afford a helper or a substitute care giver
- ◇ Child care has a high operating cost

The challenges of being a family child care provider are well-documented and come in a variety of ways. Licensing and regulations have changed over the years along with increasing expectations around outcomes for children entering the primary school system. Many family child care providers operate their businesses with minimal business supports which can sometimes lead to issues with overall sustainability.

Family child care providers have a tough job – one that often comes with very few benefits and recognition. Local providers and other community organizations have an opportunity to recognize the ongoing contributions, and continues innovation of family child care providers in the child care industry. This could be achieved through recognition programs, and other material support such as training.

• QUALITY & REGULATIONS: TWO SIDES OF ONE COIN

“There is a huge learning curve to the rules and regulations” - Local Provider

“Questionable providers sneak and don't follow rules and regulations and provide substandard and possibly unsafe care.” - Local Parent

- ◇ Parents are looking for more high quality child care options
- ◇ Need for low cost, local training to increase quality care
- ◇ Providers fear the impact of new regulations and fines
- ◇ Community wide frustration with paperwork and rules
- ◇ Ratios for numbers of children in younger age groups reduce the number of infants and toddlers a provider can care for
- ◇ Need a better understanding of what constitutes high quality care
- ◇ Child Care is a highly regulated industry

Residents indicated the desire to have more choices and quality offerings available to select from. While some of this desire is in the form of new child care center offerings, many also would like enhanced offerings within existing child care.

Leveraging interaction and engagement with existing families can provide additional insights as to the child care program offerings that are most important to families. As child care quality increases, the community should expect increased family investments in child care.

- **LOW AVAILABILITY OF INFANT CARE**

“Our community is desperate for infant spots! - Local Parent

“Often families are turned away because we can’t accommodate an infant or toddler with our current enrollment! - Local Provider

- ◇ Not enough infant slots
- ◇ Infant care is expensive for parents and hard to cash flow for providers
- ◇ Parents limiting the size of their family because there is not enough infant care
- ◇ Parents are extending their parental leave
- ◇ Employers are allowing flexible schedules for new parents, sometimes over the needs of the business

It is clear that a big part of the shortage of child care can be attributed to infant and toddler slots that are often difficult to find. Provider/Staff ratios for infants and toddlers are much less than preschool and school age children. Additional focus on ensuring these slots are created as part of larger community solutions is critical to address overall child care needs in the community.

“Most individuals do not truly value the crucial role of caregivers. People will pay for what they value. It’s not any one entity’s job to pay for improving child care in Bemidji, it has to be a collaborative effort... non-parents need to understand why caring for children is crucially important – even to them.” - Local Parent

- **NON-TRADITIONAL CARE NEEDED**

- ◇ There are few options for evening, weekend, or overnight care
- ◇ Parents are looking for extended hours beyond 8-5
- ◇ Employees are not able to attend early morning or late afternoon meetings
- ◇ Summer school age care is hard to find for the full summer vacation

As communities grow and evolve, needs of new community members can sometimes be different from what the current child care market offers. Working to understand needs of specific populations and their child care needs can better position the community and the existing provider network to better respond to those needs.

Bemidji is home to several large organizations that employ local residents beyond traditional day shift hours. In many cases, these workers find balance with split shifts with partners or family members who pitch in to help. Even in this case, there are workers who don’t have access to these options and require non-traditional care. Encouraging niche service delivery with new and existing providers could be an option to address this challenge.

- **REGIONAL SOCIOECONOMIC FACTORS PLAY A ROLE**

“We have a high percentage of people living below the poverty line. They can’t afford child care even if there are openings. But they can’t go to work because someone has to watch the kids. It’s a vicious cycle.” -Local Parent

- ◇ Beltrami County is one of the lowest income counties in the state
- ◇ Higher rates of poverty for families requires additional financial supports to help parents pay for child care and to increase the quality of care needed
- ◇ Providers can’t charge more as most working parents can’t afford to pay the higher costs

- **PRICES FOR PARENTS ARE HIGH, AND COST OF DELIVERY FOR CHILD CARE PROVIDERS IS HIGH**

“The cost of child care is outrageous for the income families are bringing in. Families want to work to provide for their kids, but can’t afford it...” -Local Parent

- ◇ Many families struggle to afford quality licensed child care
- ◇ Child care centers and in-home family providers alike invest much of their program income into delivery of services, leaving providers with less than minimal take home pay

There is no clear answer to the ongoing challenge of costs of care versus family investment to get quality child care. Additional support in helping families with low-to-moderate incomes become acquainted with existing support systems such as CCAP and Early Learning Scholarships can help bridge the gap.

TOWN HALL MEETING & GATHERING

The Town Hall meeting is designed to provide an opportunity for the Core Team and the community to interact and understand the findings of the extensive focus groups and surveys. Participants shared ideas about how to address the child care challenges in the local community.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPED SOLUTIONS

BUSINESS IDEAS

- Employer support or provide matching funds for child care costs
- Employer run child care

LEGISLATION & TAXES

- Review regulations to improve efficiency and have consistent enforcement of current laws
- Paid parental leave for first 2 years of a child’s life
- Providers automatically receive Medical Assistance

NEW CARE OPTIONS

- Employer run child care
- Legislation for paid parental leave for first 2 years of a child’s life
- Parent Co-op care
- Call center and/or Resource Guide for parents showing available slots

PROVIDER SUPPORTS

- Providers automatically receive Medical Assistance
- Start-up funding for new child care programs
- Mentors/advocates for providers
- Ongoing Provider Appreciation Events
- Increased respect for child care providers in the community
- Incentives for increased training

QUALITY OF CARE

- Defining Quality & a Rating System
 - Parent Co-op care
 - Organized substitute pool
 - Coordination of care between providers
 - Utilizing unlicensed resources such as elders and students
 - Professional Development
-

IMPLEMENTATION PROJECTS

The Town Hall meeting is an opportunity to leverage multiple view points and ideas related to addressing the local child care challenge. After the Town Hall meeting, the Core Team met to discuss all ideas and formulated an action plan to move forward. The following SMART goals were developed..

SMART GOAL ONE – CREATE A COMPREHENSIVE WEBSITE FOR BEMIDJI CHILD CARE PROVIDERS AND PARENTS

CORE TEAM LEAD –Erin Echternach

Within the next 12 months, create a comprehensive, interactive website for use by Bemidji Child Care Providers and parents.

Expected Outcomes and Impact

- Parents would have the ability to search for open slots
- Trainings for providers posted to site
- Mentorship and connections between providers
- Networking opportunities between providers
- Marketing tool for Bemidji Area Child Care Providers
- Education on new/changing regulations

SMART GOAL TWO – ASSEMBLE A GROUP OF STAKEHOLDERS TO REVIEW CURRENT REGULATIONS

CORE TEAM LEAD David Liedl

Within the next 6 months, assemble a group of licensors, providers, and parents to review current regulations to identify unnecessary, cumbersome, and frivolous laws surrounding child care, and then work with legislators on updating these policies and regulations.

Expected Outcomes and Impact

- Research licensing process and regulations
- Partnership with the Coalition of Greater MN Cities to address changes in child care regulations at a state level
- Provide education and recommendations to legislators for updates needed for rules and regulations
- Changes or alterations in regulations surrounding child care legislation to alleviate or eliminate unnecessary rules
- Community support and appreciation for providers

SMART GOAL THREE – EDUCATE BUSINESSES SURROUNDING CHILD CARE OPTIONS

CORE TEAM LEAD –Erin Echternach

Within the next 6 months, provide education to businesses regarding the options they may be able to offer surrounding child care.

Expected Outcomes and Impact

- To help increase available child care options in the Bemidji area through parental supports (paid parental leave, Bring Your Baby to Work program, subsidized worker program, Dependent Care FSA)
- Develop businesses partnerships to create new child care programs in the area
- Find spaces in the community that are available for new child care programs

SMART GOAL FOUR – DEVELOP A RESOURCE GUIDE FOR NEW PROVIDERS

CORE TEAM LEAD- Michele Voorhees

Within the next 6 months, develop a Resource Guide for new providers including business plan development and support.

Expected Outcomes and Impact

- Work with Northwest Technical College and their Child Care Program for education of new providers
- Recruitment of new providers
- Ease the new child care provider stresses and confusion around business start-up
- Business plan development and financial planning assistance (Small Business Development Center)
- Access to financial supports available to new providers (start-up funds and grants through Northwest Minnesota Foundation)

SMART GOAL FIVE – CREATE A CHILD CARE PROVIDER GROUP TO PLAN TRAINING AND NETWORKING

CORE TEAM LEAD- Heather Sutherland

Within the next 3 months, coordinate a child care provider group to plan out ongoing training, education and networking opportunities throughout the calendar year.

Expected Outcomes and Impact

- Support and connection between providers
- Networking opportunities between providers
- Education of new/changing regulations
- Other educational opportunities for providers

SMART GOAL SIX – CREATE AN ANNUAL APPRECIATION DINNER FOR PROVIDERS

CORE TEAM LEAD –Jeri Francis

Within the next 6 months, create an Annual Appreciation Dinner for Child Care Providers.

Expected Outcomes and Impact

- Support and connection between providers
- Networking opportunities between providers
- Showcase providers
- Community support and appreciation for providers

SMART GOAL SEVEN – CREATE A MENTOR NETWORK FOR NEW CHILD CARE PROVIDERS

CORE TEAM LEAD- Jeri Francis

Within the next 6 months, create a mentor network for new Child Care Providers.

Expected Outcomes and Impact

- Mentorship and connections between providers
- Networking opportunities between providers
- Ease the new child care provider stresses and confusion of business start-up



ABOUT FIRST CHILDREN'S FINANCE

Founded in 1991, First Children's Finance is a multi-state nonprofit organization. We work with communities, and early care and education businesses to increase the supply of high quality early care and education in urban and rural areas. We do this through business management training, one-on-one consulting, and financing. For more information about First Children's Finance, please visit: www.firstchildrensfinance.org

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