



Dickinson State University
STROM CENTER



Final Project Report
N. D. Child Care Professional Portal
As prepared for Vision West ND Consortium
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www.ChildCareND.com

The Local Voice – Vision West ND

The lack of child care is one of the top three topics brought forward at virtually every Vision West ND local Voice of the Community meeting. When asked what is affecting the quality of life in communities, leaders and volunteers alike responded “child care.” The consortium members have a range of experience working with Child Care providers and the industry as a whole, but have faced a variety of barriers trying to increase the availability of Child Care in their communities.

The 2013 Legislature responded to the severity of the problem by creating new policies, approving supportive programs, and increasing funding. As a result, community organizations and Child Care providers have access to more technical assistance for their Child Care needs, additional fund through grants which help with the capitalization of facilities, and incentive programs available through local economic developers, such as the Bank of ND Flex PACE interest buy down programs. The positive approach has helped. However, the demand far outpaces the resources and the number of available Child Care spots continue to decline.

The Issue

Child Care is one of the big issues facing our communities, specifically the lack of Child Care. The child care shortage is not new to North Dakota. However, the explosive growth from the always expanding oil and gas industry has moved Child Care concerns to a full blown crisis! We have more workers, more working two parent families, more working single parents, a younger population, retiring baby boomer providers, a robust and healthy economy where jobs are a plenty, and fewer Child Care spots. Providers struggle to obtain and keep staff who require higher wages to keep up with inflation. As a result, low staff numbers inhibit providers from creating additional child care spots. Employers can't fill jobs, job seekers can't find housing, and job seekers with housing can't find Child Care. It's become a cycle of unfilled jobs.

“Current projections show population increases of 25% for North Dakota by 2025. ***Some western cities are projected to see population increases of 30% to 137%***. Current projections recommend North Dakota create ***child care space for 21,000 more children*** by 2025 or nearly ***1,600 spaces per year***. This will be an ***increase of nearly a thousand new family/group facilities*** which will ***need 1,400 staff positions*** plus nearly ***100 new child care centers*** with an ***additional workforce of 2,500***”.¹

The Proposal

Discussions revealed that Child Care licensers want one thing, the Cities and Counties the Child Care facilities are located in want something else. On the other hand, all had the goal of increasing the number of Child Care spots. Additionally, plenty of support was available. County Social Services provided licensing assistance and compliance support, Child Care Aware offered a vast amount of resources to help providers in startup and build a program, the food reimbursement program provided additional funding to providers serving low-income families, Small Business Development Centers offered guidance and information to who'd become business owners by opening day cares.

Despite the vast amount of supportive services, many individuals interested in becoming providers were unaware of the resources. The Strom Center/Dickinson Regional SBDC office brought forth a proposal to the Vision West ND ***Solutions*** fund to partner on developing a resource for Child Care professionals. The basic concept for the project was to create a resource to help providers navigate the Child Care system and connect with the individuals who can support them on the journey of opening day cares.

Child Care providers tend to be lifestyle driven business owners. They value the benefits that owning or operating a Child Care business brings to them. They want to take care of children. They want to provide a great day for the kids they care for! What few want is to navigate a convoluted process that's frustrating and discouraging. Yet the business of Child Care is one of the more complicated business models. The number of children changes by license level and whether you are located in a City, County or workplace. The ratio of staff to children changes based on age. Reimbursement through the food program changes based on the income eligibility of the provider, the child, and whether you are licensed as a family/group or center. Subsidized Child Care for qualified families is a great resource, but the turnaround time on payment creates a cash crunch for the provider.

Vision West ND recognized the resources were already available and pondered the ramifications of developing something new that might or might not make a difference. They also felt they needed to try to make a difference and be part of a new **Solution**. The **Solution** proposed was to develop a simple "One Stop Portal" for Child Care Providers – a place where someone thinking about opening a Child Care service could be encouraged by a simplified step by step guide, while also providing contact information to support programs who can help navigate the child care licensing

The Project

The vote was taken, the project approved, the contract issued, and work began. The Strom Center/SBDC researched the programs and resources currently available and diagrammed processes needed to start a Child Care business. The resulting structure focused on the essential steps – the licensing process followed by complimentary resources to enhance the provider's success, resources for continuing education, compliance, organizational effectiveness, programming and successful business management. Each County Social Services office was contacted to obtain the name and contact information of their licenser. Additional local licensing related resources, such as the regional Fire Marshall and fire chiefs, Health Inspectors, CPR/First Aid trainers, zoning and permit offices were identified as well.

From there, the data was compiled into a website template for review. Meetings were held in Minot, Williston, and Dickinson to obtain feedback from local Social Service agencies and their Child Care licensing staff, Vision West ND Consortium members and plan directors, economic and community developers and program partners. The sessions focused on drawing new providers into the child care industry, developing outreach material, connecting potential child care candidates to resources, and presenting uncluttered and understandable information. Above all, there was a strong push to keep the process simple.

Williston – April 7, 2014 7 attendees

The Future

Dickinson – April 30, 2014 11 attendees

The website is live but developing a website is not enough.

Research and discussions with the Child Care organizations revealed there was a disconnect amongst the organizations offering support services to providers and potential Child Care providers. The resources were available, but organizations were often unaware of the services others in the industry provided. This has resulted in fewer referrals within the industry, which in return means providers often may not receive the help available to them.

In response to this concern, The Strom Center proposed a grant to the **Bush Foundation**, which was awarded, to help connect individuals in the Child Care industry and facilitate relationships. Social Services/Child Care Licensors, Building/Fire/Health Inspectors, Economic/Community Developers, SBDC, Vision West ND members, Child Care Aware and local legislators will be invited to a one day event planned in Dickinson, Williston, and Minot. The goal is to provide a venue for these disconnected groups to meet one another, share resources – and strategies to address the current crisis and encourage future collaboration to support Child Care in their regions.

Dickinson	Monday, October 27	10:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m. MST	The Strom Center
Williston	Tuesday, October 28	10:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m. CST	Marquis Plaza & Suites
Minot	Wednesday, October 29	10:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m. CST	Comfort Inn

ND Child Care
Professionals

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