



FIRST
CHILDREN'S
FINANCE

RURAL CHILD CARE INNOVATION PROGRAM

COMMUNITY SOLUTION ACTION PLAN FOR CHILD CARE

MEEKER COUNTY, MINNESOTA APRIL 1, 2020

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



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 from solution development to implementation.

Please visit www.ruralchildcare.org for continued updates on community progress.

Minnesota State Director
Suzanne Pearl

Program Lead
Jessica Beyer,
Business Development Manager

Contributing Members
Joan Berntson,
Business Development Specialist



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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 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 Meeker County 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 Meeker County, 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 of child care in Meeker County, First Children's Finance conducted a Supply Demand Gap Analysis and community survey, which showed a child care shortage of 402 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, resulting in 60-80% of overall expenses. 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 Meeker County. Nearly 33% 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, inability to work overtime, 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 Meeker County include an increase in dual-working families, attraction of new employees to the area, affordability of child care, 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.

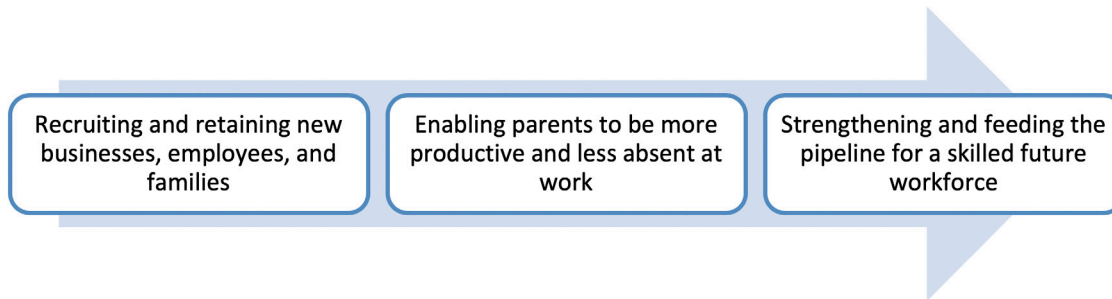
Through the RCCIP, Meeker County has identified six goals to address the child care challenges. These goals include:

- Maintain Core Team group beyond the Rural Child Care Innovation Program
- Eliminate the licensing fee for providers that are renewing their child care license by May 1, 2020
- Create an interactive and comprehensive website for child care programs on the Meeker County website within the next 6 months.
- Within the next year identify free local training opportunities and increase the number of local approved trainers.
- Within the next year build partnerships that includes providers, schools, businesses, and community members to increase the number of child care slots within the county.
- Within the next year create a community fund to financially support new child care programs and existing child care programs with ongoing support.

In implementing these goals, Meeker County 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 business. In the next 12-18 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 is 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 INNOVATIVE 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 & GENERAL TIMELINE

| APPLICATION PHASE | | |
|--|--------------------------------------|--|
| ACTIVITIES | TIMING | DETAILS |
| Webinar | August 6, 2019 | Learn about RCCIP, expectations, and ask questions |
| Application Opens | July 22, 2019 | Send the application, post on website |
| Application Deadline | August 21, 2019 | Due by 5:00pm |
| Follow Up Questions For Applicants | September 6, 2019 | FCF will connect by phone or email |
| Final Awards Made | September 13, 2019 | FCF will notify via email |
| PLANNING PHASE | | |
| ACTIVITIES | TIMING | DETAILS |
| Core Team Lead Orientation | September 25, 2019 | Webinar with Core team leaders to set expectations |
| Core Team Orientation Retreat (6 hrs) | November 4, 2019 | Face-to-face meeting to discuss RCCIP details and expectations |
| Core Team Planning Meeting (2 hrs) | November 18, 2019 | Face-to-face meeting to map out community engagement activities and fully develop the timeline |
| Data Gathering & Community Engagement Activities | November 2019 | Core Team engages community in gathering data and makes community aware of their work |
| Child Care Appreciation Dinner | January 12, 2020 | Dinner is organized to recognize and appreciate providers in the community |
| Synthesize Data | January 2019 | FCF synthesizes data into useful info for Town Hall meeting |
| Planning Meeting for Town Hall (1 hr) | January 14, 2019 | Core Team planning for the Town Hall meeting |
| Child Care Provider Recruitment | On-going | Recruit providers to participate in business trainings and one-on-one consultation conducted by FCF |
| Business Cohort | February - June 2020 | Series of business trainings and one-on-one consultation conducted by FCF |
| Town Hall Event | January 30, 2020 | Community wide event to identify and develop projects |
| IMPLEMENTATION PHASE | | |
| ACTIVITIES | TIMING | DETAILS |
| Organization of Town Hall Ideas | February 11, 2020 | FCF staff organizes Town Hall ideas into a workable format |
| Implementation Planning Retreat (2 hrs each) | February 11, 2020 and March 10, 2020 | Face-to-face meeting to prioritize goals; develop SMART goals and map out implementation activities, Plan for the Community Launch |
| Core Team Lead Meeting | March 16, 2020 | Webinar with core team leads from this year's RCCIP communities to network and share Town Hall outcomes |
| Community Solution Action Plan (CSAP) | April 2020 | FCF creates report detailing community data, types of solutions, and community identified projects |
| Community Launch of CSAP | TBD | Press release to share the CSAP |
| Regular Core Team Meetings | June 2020-May 2021 | Updates from project teams to the core team; frequency determined by core team; facilitated by Core team lead |
| Quarterly Updates | June 2020-May 2021 | Core team lead provides written quarterly updates to FCF |
| Regular Project Team Meetings | June 2020-May 2021 | Project teams meet to implement community solutions; facilitated by project team lead |
| Technical Assistance Support | June 2020-May 2021 | FCF provides Technical Assistance when needed |
| Final Report | June 2021 | Core Team leader submits final written report to FCF |
| Celebration | June 2021 | Core Team celebrates its success |



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.
- First Children’s Finance will provide 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 MEEKER COUNTY

Meeker County is a rural community in Southwest MN with approximately 23,000 people. The predominant racial makeup is White at 94.3% followed by Hispanic at 3.8% of the population. There are many lakes and ponds in Meeker County as well as productive agricultural land. Manufacturing employs the largest number of residents in Meeker County. The median income for families in the county is around \$48,000. Manufacturing and other businesses indicate that they have more jobs available than they have qualified workers. At times the lack of quality child care hampers hiring additional staff. Research conducted by the University of Minnesota ranks Meeker County 70th of the 87 counties in the availability of child care. Parents report that they have the most difficulty in obtaining a place for an infant in a licensed child care program. Meeker County Social Services data shows that there were about 46 licensed family child care providers in 2014, data from DHS from early June 2019 indicated that that number has dropped to 28 licensed family child care programs. As of early June it is estimated that there is a need for 402 additional licensed child care slots for children under the age of 5 in Meeker County whose parents are working.



LOCAL CORE TEAM REPRESENTATION

The Core Team was identified locally and asked to commit to investigating the child care challenges in Meeker County. The Core Team has and will continue to support development of solutions to sustain a high quality and sustainable child care infrastructure in the local area.

- Colleen Kotila – Core Team Lead, Owner, Stay and Play Child Care Center
- Peg Beckstrand – Family Child Care Provider
- Teri Boese - Dassel City Clerk
- Paul Bukovich - Director, Meeker Co. Social Services
- Eric Day - Lic. Social Worker Central MN Jobs & Training Services
- Julie Elam - EHS & Sustainability Coord./First Dist. Association
- Michelle Falling - Community Member
- Denise Fransen - Director/Kids Of The Kingdom Child Care
- Roxanne Godejohn - Hicks Bus and Trucking
- Lisa Graphenteen - Director Meeker County Economic Dev.
- Judy Hultstrum - Exec. Director/Litchfield Area Chamber of Com.
- Kristin Jaquith - Director/CFO/ Stay 'N Play Child Care
- Bill Kerr – Pastor with Litchfield Area Ministerial Association
- Jenny Klima - Director/Ecumen of Litchfield
- Darla Loch - UCAP/Child Care Aware Quality Coach
- Chris Loew - Admin. Assist./Meeker Economic Development
- Jodi Maertens - Youth and Family Officer/Southwest Initiative Foundation
- Aaron Nelson - Resource Officer Litchfield Public School
- Les Nelson - Econ. Dev. Director/Mid MN Dev. Corp
- Beth Oberg - Meeker County Commissioner
- Kiza Olson - Administrator, Monarch MN
- Nels Onstad - Superintendent ACGC Schools
- Syndi Raiber - Licensing Soc. Worker/Meeker Co. Social Service
- Kim Renner – Family Child Care Provider
- Beckie Simenson - Superintendent Litchfield Public Schools
- Laurie Terning - Nurse Supv./Mkr Co. Public Health
- Sue Thomes - UCAP/Child Care Aware Quality Coach
- Dean Urdahl – MN State Representative
- Paul Virnig - Meeker County Administrator
- Kurt Waldbillig - Meeker Memorial Hospital
- Rebecca Warpula - Director of Com. Ed./ Early Childhood

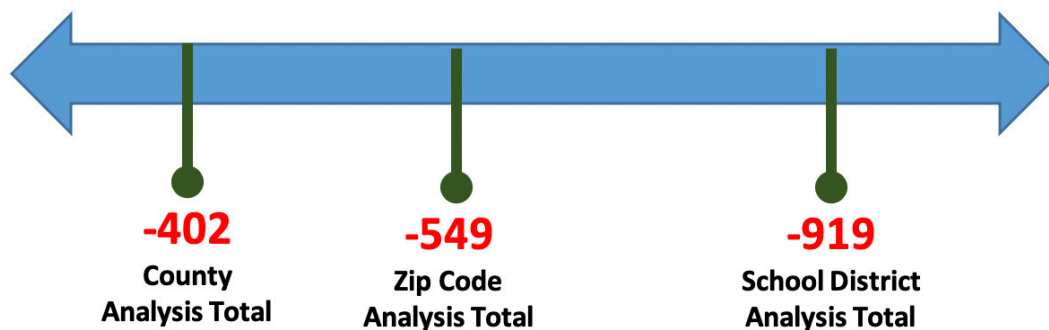
CHILD CARE DATA AND EARLY EDUCATION TRENDS

As part of the Rural Child Care Innovation Program, the local community was provided with various forms of data 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 include US Census Information, MN Child Care Licensing Records, Minnesota Department of Education, MN DEED, School District Census information and other internal research tools including First Children's Finance data.

POTENTIAL NEED OVERVIEW

First Children's Finance conducted a Supply Demand Gap Analysis which provided a view of potential child care needs.

When analyzing the data we look at a range of slots, this gives us the best picture of need in the community. The Supply Demand Gap Analysis for Meeker County dated October 15, 2019 shows a shortage range of 402 slots to 919 slots for children birth to 5 with all available parents in the workforce. Narrowing that down even further, the data shows that roughly 31% of the slots needed are for infants & toddlers.



October 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.

| | LOCAL | STATE |
|-----------------------------------|------------|--------------|
| TOTAL FAMILY CHILD CARE PROVIDERS | 46 | 7,715 |
| AVERAGE LENGTH OF SERVICE | 11.7 years | 13 Years |
| LESS THAN 5 YEARS / SERVICE | 21 / 44.7% | 2209 / 28.6% |
| MORE THAN 20 YEARS / SERVICE | 13 / 27.7% | 2256 / 29.3% |
| NON-OWNER OCCUPIED | 2 / 4.3% | 222 / 2.9% |
| NON-RESIDENTIAL DWELLING | 0 / 0% | 53 / 0.7% |

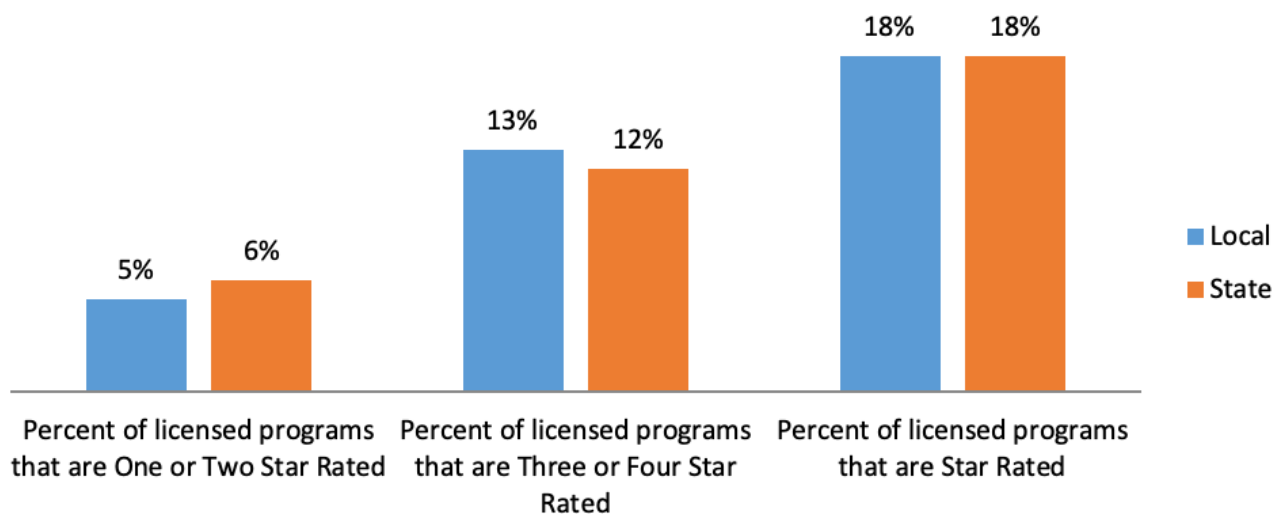
-June 2019 DHS Licensing

When asked about how long providers plan to stay in the business 15% providers said they are planning on staying in business less than 5 years while 46% said they are planning on staying in the business for 3-5 years. The survey indicated that 23% of providers are planning on being in business 6-9 more years, while 15% said they are planning on staying for 10 plus years. This is important for Meeker County to think about ways to retain family child care providers as well as building more slots within the community.

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 higher quality in their child care programs.



The chart above demonstrates that child care providers in Meeker County are very similar to the state average when it comes to Parent Aware enrollment. This is a critical component 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. A market rate survey of child care providers was accessed as part of the RCCIP to provide information about parents' 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. This number means 25% of child care programs charge more than this number and 75% of child care programs charge less.

Area Market Rates – Meeker County

| AGE GROUP - CHILD CARE CENTER | WEEKLY RATE | ANNUAL TOTAL |
|-------------------------------------|-------------|--------------|
| 75TH PERCENTILE - INFANT WEEKLY | \$213 | \$11,067 |
| 75TH PERCENTILE - TODDLER WEEKLY | \$199 | \$10,348 |
| 75TH PERCENTILE - PRESCHOOL WEEKLY | \$185 | \$9,620 |
| 75TH PERCENTILE - SCHOOL AGE WEEKLY | \$151 | \$7,852 |

| AGE GROUP - FAMILY CHILD CARE | WEEKLY RATE | ANNUAL TOTAL |
|-------------------------------------|-------------|--------------|
| 75TH PERCENTILE - INFANT WEEKLY | \$140 | \$7,280 |
| 75TH PERCENTILE - TODDLER WEEKLY | \$135 | \$7,020 |
| 75TH PERCENTILE - PRESCHOOL WEEKLY | \$130 | \$6,760 |
| 75TH PERCENTILE - SCHOOL AGE WEEKLY | \$128 | \$6,656 |

Results of the DHS 2018 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 indicate a 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 |
|--------------------------|-----------------------|
| ACGC #2396 | 45.7% |
| Dassel-Cokato #465 | 71.3% |
| Eden Valley-Watkins #463 | 58.3% |
| Litchfield #465 | 51.4% |
| Statewide | 56.2% |

Minnesota Department of Education Report Card

Local Graduation Rates

| DISTRICT | 2018 PROFICIENCY RATE |
|--------------------------|-----------------------|
| ACGC #2396 | 93.2% |
| Dassel-Cokato #465 | 88.0% |
| Eden Valley-Watkins #463 | 97.4% |
| Litchfield #465 | 90.7% |
| Statewide | 83.2% |

Minnesota Department of Education Report Card



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 – Meeker County

| | |
|---|-------|
| Total Population Living Below Poverty Threshold in Last 12 Months | 1,885 |
| Related Children Under Age 18 Living with Income Below Poverty Threshold | 448 |
| Families With Related Children Under Age 5 Living Below Poverty Threshold | 234 |

U.S. Census American Community Survey 2018

Household Income – Meeker County

| TOTAL HOUSEHOLDS ACS MEEKER COUNTY ESTIMATE | | 9,164 |
|--|-----------------|-------|
| TOTAL HOUSEHOLD INCOME & BENEFITS (2017 INFLATION-ADJUSTED DOLLARS) | # OF HOUSEHOLDS | % |
| Less than \$10,000 | 444 | 4.8% |
| \$10,000 to \$14,999 | 427 | 4.7% |
| \$15,000 to \$24,999 | 796 | 8.7% |
| \$25,000 to \$34,999 | 879 | 9.6% |
| \$35,000 to \$49,999 | 1,115 | 12.2% |
| \$50,000 to \$74,999 | 2,076 | 22.7% |
| \$75,000 to \$99,999 | 1,437 | 15.7% |
| \$100,000 to \$149,999 | 1,325 | 14.5% |
| \$150,000 to \$199,999 | 387 | 4.2% |
| \$200,000 or more | 278 | 3% |
| MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME | \$59,611 | |

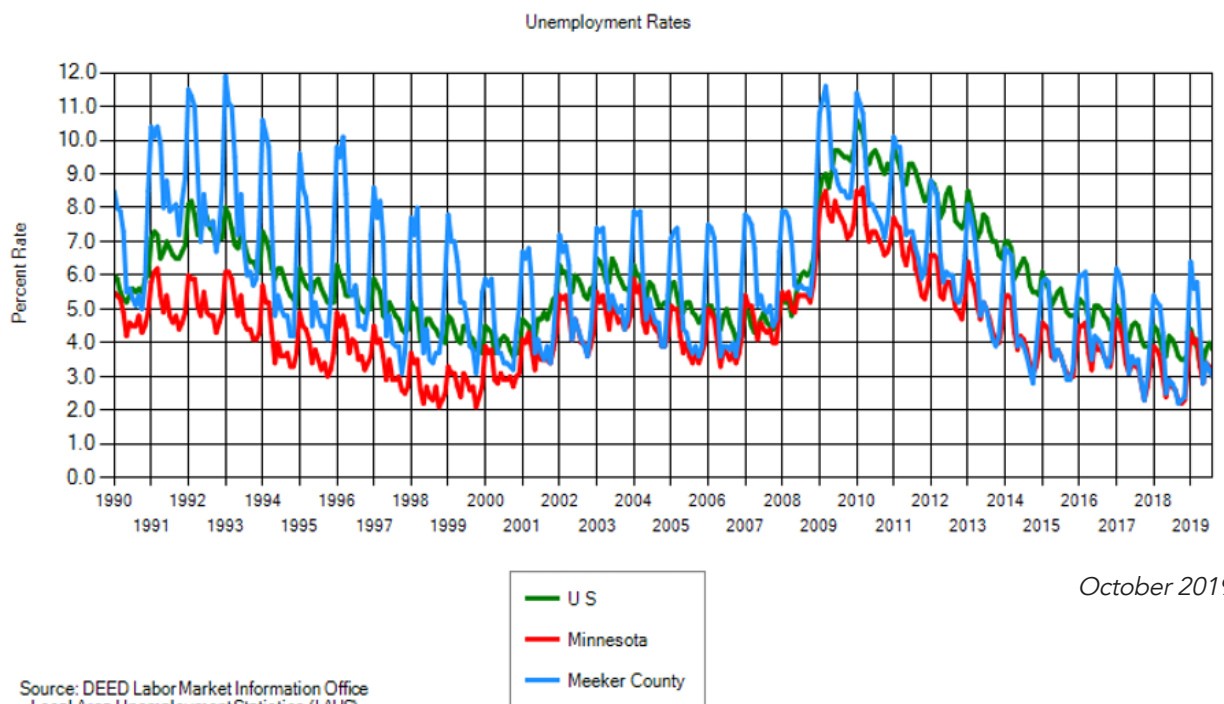
U.S. Census American Community Survey 2018

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 – Meeker County

3% Unemployment Rate



October 2019

Source: DEED Labor Market Information Office
Local Area Unemployment Statistics (LAUS)

Top Local Industries – Meeker County

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

| | | |
|---|-------|-------|
| Industry: Educational Services, and Health Care and Social Assistance | 2,662 | 23.0% |
| Industry: Manufacturing | 2,634 | 22.7% |
| Industry: Retail Trade | 1,093 | 9.4% |

www.ruraldataportal.org

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, electronic surveys of parents, providers, and employers, focus groups, and presentations about child care. Through these various inputs, the Core Team was able to better understand the underlying causes of local child care challenges.

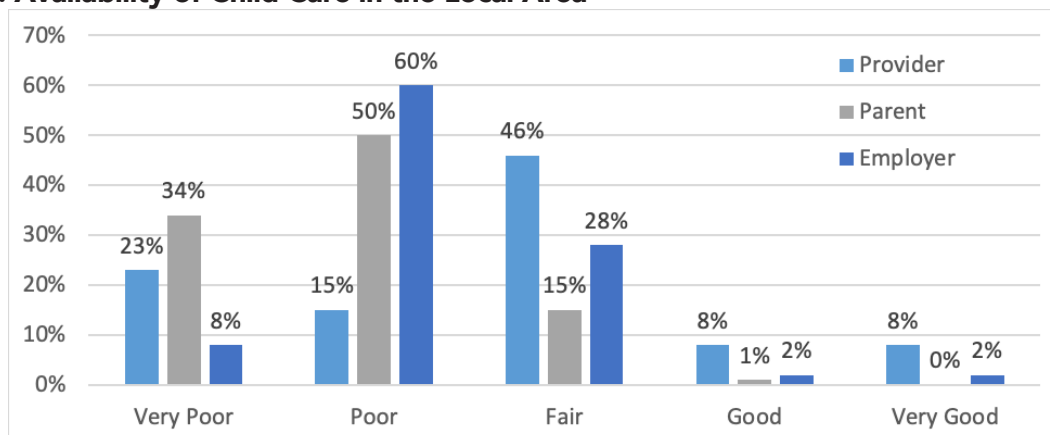


COMMUNITY SURVEYS – SELECTED PERSPECTIVES

The general community was invited to participate in a comprehensive survey about child care in the local Meeker County community. Over 224 individuals participated in the community survey, over 50 employers participated in the employer survey and over 15 family providers and child care centers participated in separate surveys specific for child care providers.

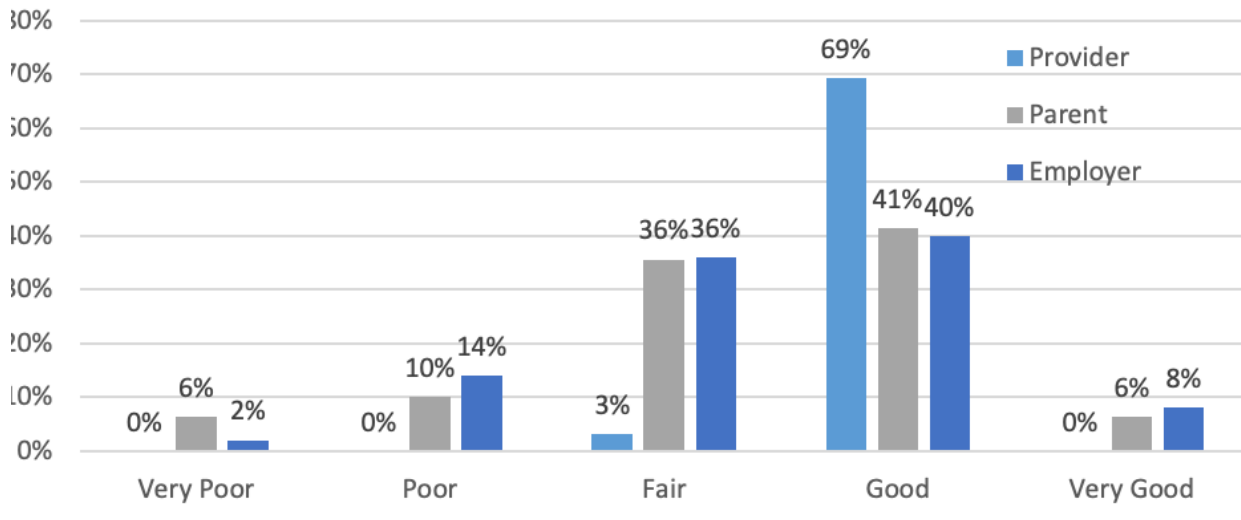
The following charts represent some highlighted perspectives within the community:

Perceptions: Availability of Child Care in the Local Area



Survey respondents indicated that parents were traveling great distances to find appropriate child care. Nearly 22% indicated that they were traveling out of the way in one direction more than 11 miles for child care.

Perceptions: Quality of Available Child Care in the Local Area

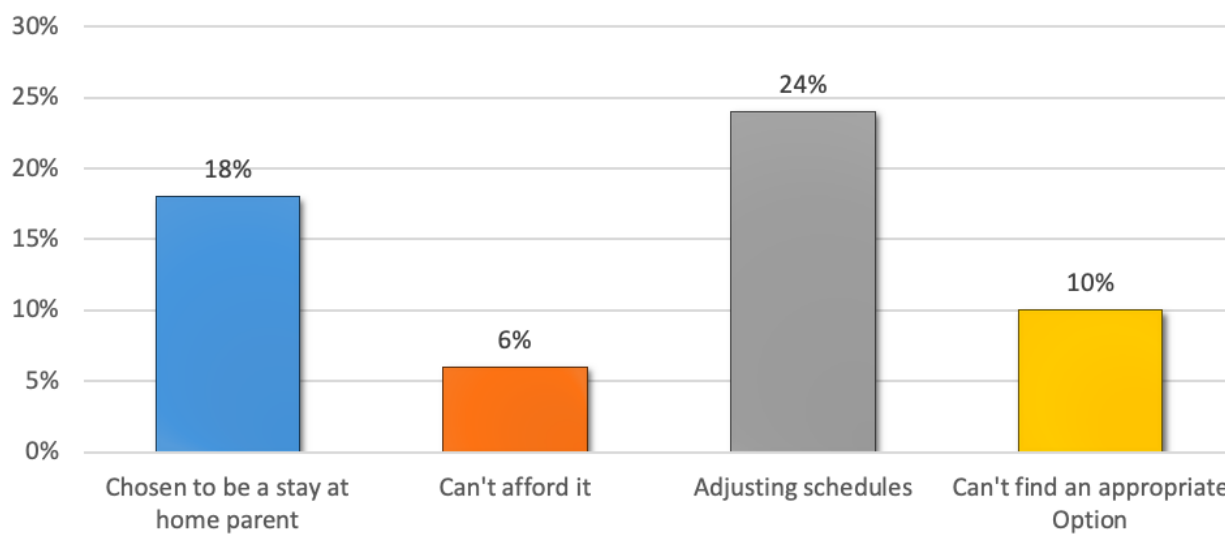


While specific questions about quality were not part of this survey, it was noted that there are similar response to the quality of child care the community between child care providers, employers, and parents on the availability of high quality child care in the area. When survey participants were asked 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. Conveniently located
4. Education Curriculum
5. Provider has high level of education
6. Provider is someone I know
7. Provider is Parent Aware rated



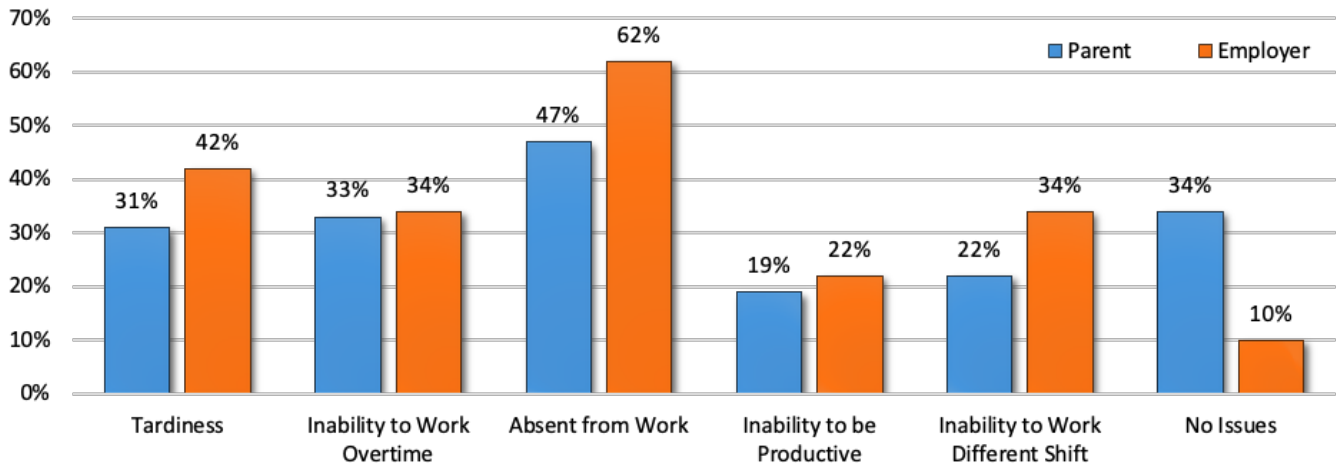
Reasons for Not Enrolling in Preferred Care



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 unavailable child care or by businesses relocating to environments with better availability of care.

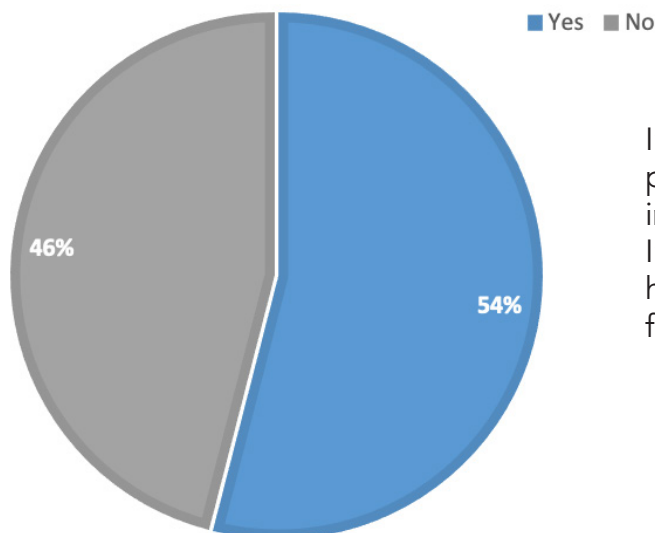
Work Issues Occurred Due to Child Care Arrangements in the Last 12 Months



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 a flexible schedule or work different shifts, and tardiness to work. From the employer survey, 40 percent of employers responded that the lack of child care impacted their ability to attract employees and 30 percent stated that it has an impact to retain employees. A study in 2004 showed the national impact of child care issues in the economy, and it was valued at over \$3 billion dollars annually.

Impact on Family Planning – Meeker County Area

Has the availability of your preferred child care option impacted your decision to have another child and/or limit the size of your family?



In addition to the impact on family planning, child care shortages can also impact the local employment environment. In the survey, nearly 33 percent of parents had declined employment or withdrawn from the workforce due to child care issues.



UNDERSTANDING THE UNDERLYING CHALLENGES

The Core Team in Meeker County spent several months investigating the underlying reasons for 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 Meeker County:

IT IS CHALLENGING TO BE A CHILD CARE PROVIDER

- Providers do not feel treated like business owners and people do not understand the value of the service they offer
- They are treated as a “babysitter” not as the highly educated professionals they are
- Centers can’t find and keep good quality workers – they can’t afford to pay them more
- Low wages, long hours and have NO benefits (such as health insurance, retirement, or PTO)
- Fear that school based preschool offerings will take children away from programs making it more difficult to break even
- Lack of space to expand or operate outside of the home
- Complicated business model – constantly changing

“It would help if they fully understood the value of a child care provider and what it takes to be one.”

- -Local Provider

The challenges of being a family child care provider or a child care center 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. 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 continuous 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 AND REGULATIONS: TWO SIDES OF ONE COIN

- Parents want a high quality environment with a curriculum
- Community wide frustration with paperwork and rules
- Highly regulated industry
- Ratios for numbers of children in younger age groups reduce the number of infants and toddlers a provider can care for - hard to cash flow infants and toddlers
- Growing number of requirements & regulations for centers and home providers
- Potential new providers are frightened of the regulations and experienced providers fear the impact of new regulations and fines

"I think it is a demanding job with maybe a lot of regulations and high risk responsibilities with not as much of a financial reward." - Local Parent

Residents indicated the desire to have more licensed child care choices and quality offerings available to select from. While some of this desire is for new child care offerings, many also wanted enhanced offerings within existing child care. Leveraging interaction and engagement with existing child care programs and families can provide additional insights to support and understand child care programs within the county. As child care quality increases, the community should expect increased family and community investments in child care.

HIGH COST AND LOW AVAILABILITY OF CARE

- Some families make too much for child care assistance but not enough to pay for care plus bills
- Employers see the need to provide flexibility to schedules when possible to accommodate lack of child care
- Infant care is very hard to find - parents are trying to line up infant care in early pregnancy or before they become pregnant
- Child care has small profit margins, expensive to start, and may not/hard to cash flow – lack of resources
- Parents want high quality care, but they can't pay enough to compensate providers
- Parents know providers need vacation, but it is expensive to pay for it and they have a hard time finding replacement care during that time
- Hard to find care that meets family's needs

"By recognizing that yes, child care is expensive, but that providers are not getting rich by any means. Providers have a lot of expenses..." - Local Provider

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

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

WORKFORCE AND TRAINING THEME

- Create Grant system – cost of trainings
 - ◊ First Aid and CPR
 - ◊ Other trainings
- Develop trainers within the county to provide trainings in-house
- Create and train a pool of substitutes
- Reduce the cost of background studies

REGULATION

- N/A - no one wanted to refine these ideas further – the comments were that none of this can be done at the local level and wanted to focus their efforts on activities that can happen locally.

PARENTAL LEAVE

- Increasing parental leave advocacy group
- Tax credit for those needing leave (layoff parental)
- Endowment Fund

FACILITIES

- Existing spaces
- Businesses provide child care center
- Location for family child care – POD Model

PROVIDER APPRECIATION

- Have a yearly provider appreciation event
- Promote the child care association
- Community awareness

FINANCIAL INCENTIVES

- Start a go fund me page
- Grants

COMMUNITY INCENTIVES

- Incentives from City and business to help providers
- Taxes
 - ◊ Property tax bill
 - ◊ Partial tax abatement
 - ◊ Other tax incentives
- Low interest loans

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 - Maintain Core Team Group Beyond the Rural Child Care Innovation Program

After the Rural Child Care Program concludes the core team intends to meet to continue annual provider appreciation activities, community awareness initiatives, and to continue to learn about legislation and educate local legislators about the challenge of child care in the county.

Expected Outcomes and Impact

Yearly child care appreciation activities, community education initiatives, and information and education session to local legislators on the child care challenge

Core Team Lead – Paul Virnig

Additional Core Team Members: All Core Team Members

SMART Goal Two - By May 1, 2020, Eliminate the Licensing Fee for Providers That are Renewing Their Child Care License

Work with Meeker County to eliminate the licensing fee for family providers that are renewing their license.

Expected Outcomes and Impact

Reduce the financial burden to renew their license and make the renewal process user friendly for family child care businesses

Core Team Lead – Syndi Raiber

Additional Core Team Members - Beth Oberg, Denise Fransen, Eric Day, Chris Loew, Sue Thomes, and Lori Terning

SMART Goal Three - Create an Interactive & Comprehensive Website for Child Care Programs on the Meeker County Website Within the Next 6 Months

Create an interactive map where child care providers are located within the county connecting with additional information for the community on locations of existing providers by improving the Meeker County Child Care Website.

Expected Outcomes and Impact

Interactive map, linking providers to their DHS license, Parent Aware and other additional resources for parents and providers to access

Core Team Lead – Syndi Raiber

Additional Core Team Members - Beth Oberg, Denise Fransen, Eric Day, Chris Loew, Sue Thomes, and Lori Terning

SMART Goal Four - Within the Next Year Identify Free Local Training Opportunities and Increase the Number of Local Approved Trainers

To work on identifying trainings that could be offered for free i.e. free CPR/First Aid multiple times per year along with identifying community members interested in becoming approved trainers to be able to offer locally in-house trainings.

Expected Outcomes and Impact

Free training offered locally along with additional local approved trainers to be able to offer more local trainings needed for licensing requirements.

Core Team Lead – Sue Thomes and Lori Holtberg

Additional Core Team Members - Beth Oberg, Denise Fransen, Eric Day, Chris Loew, and Lori Terning

SMART Goal Five - Within the Next Year, Build Private, School, Provider & Community Partnerships to Increase the Number of Child Care Slots Within the County

Dive deeper into the potential need analysis to identify areas in the community that need more child care slots, the type of slots needed, the supports needed to increase those slots, and identify spaces to house those slots i.e. family child care programs or expansion of child care centers.

Expected Outcomes and Impact

Increase new child care availability along with financial supports and locations to house child care programs.

Core Team Lead – Paul Virnig

Additional Core Team Members - Kristin Jaquith, Judy Hulterstum, Kieth, Becki Simenson, Denise Fransen

SMART Goal Six - Within the Next Year, Create a Community Fund to support existing child care programs and to assist the build out

Work with the local community foundations to set up a fund where businesses and community members could donate to support the startup of new child care programs along with existing child care programs. A list of resources available will also be developed to identify grants, financial assistance, and gap funding for child care programs to access.

Expected Outcomes and Impact

A Community fund will be create with financial backing to support the build out of child care slots.

Core Team Lead – Colleen Kotila

Additional Core Team Members - Darla Loch, Lisa Graphenteen, Les Nelson, Judy Hulterstrom



FIRST CHILDREN'S FINANCE

Founded in 1991, First Children's Finance is a national nonprofit organization based in Minneapolis, Minnesota with regional offices in Iowa and Michigan. First Children's Finance works to stabilize, improve and expand high-quality child care businesses serving low and moderate-income families.

First Children's Finance provides financing, child care business training and consulting, and build partnerships that connect child care businesses with the resources and expertise of the public and private sectors.

First Children's Finance understands the issues and challenges child care businesses face in today's world. We have industry-specific expertise and a shared commitment to the success of child care.

In addition, First Children's Finance aligns its work with child care leaders, businesses and regional initiatives that are committed to quality. We define quality as the creation of environments that support healthy brain development for young children to enhance early learning. First Children's Finance brings a unique perspective, approach, and experience to providing business, planning and financial assistance to our child care and economic development partners.

For more information about First Children's Finance visit www.firstchildrensfinance.org