



**Increasing
Access to
Child Care in
Clay County**



Introduction

A 2021 report, from First Children Finance, shows an additional 1,300 child care slots are needed in Clay County, MN to meet the needs of families. Of those slots, roughly 1,000 are needed in the city of Moorhead. Based on ongoing conversations with the community and local child care providers, we continue to hear a growing concern and need for more affordable, quality child care slots.

Additionally, with worker shortages and the need to increase recruitment, area businesses are actively asking for child care solutions to address this primary workforce barrier (FM Chamber).

West Central Initiative (WCI) partnered with Clay County Social Services to invest funding to improve access to child care. Creating Community Consulting (CCC) was hired to identify gaps, barriers, and

opportunities to address child care in the county. CCC started this process with asset mapping; primarily through an online survey and individual conversation with key stakeholders and partners in the county.

Once feedback was collected, Created Community Consulting formulated an action plan to strengthen what is working and address the barriers and gaps identified to recruit and retain child care providers in the county as well as develop a comprehensive communication plan.

This report includes the key findings from those conversations and the survey, details on the action plan developed, and how stakeholders can engage in this work moving forward.



Thanks to the following partners and organizations who have invested in and helped inform strategies to help increase access to child care in Clay County:

- Cass Clay Community Land Trust
- Clay County Social Services
- Clay County Child Care Licensors
- Clay County Early Childhood Initiative
- Clay County based Child Care Centers
- Clay County based Home Child Care Providers
- City of Moorhead
- Fargo Moorhead West Fargo Chamber of Commerce
- Inclusive Moorhead
- Jasmin Child Care and Preschool
- Resilient Moorhead
- West Central Initiative



Survey Key Findings



The online survey was open from September 28 to November 2. There were a total of 23 responses online. In addition, CCC meet with the following stakeholders to inform this process:

- Clay County Social Services
- Clay County Commissioners
- Clay County Child Care Licensors
- Director of ABC123 Child Enrichment Center LLC

Of those who responded via the online survey, 65% were family child care providers, 5% were child care center directors, and 13% were supporter providers of child care providers.

What is working to help expand child care access in Clay County

When asked "What is working to help expand child care access in Clay County?" the following were commonly expressed themes (listed in order of most expressed items to least):

- Grants to support cost of operating child care
- Collaboration across groups; including Early Childhood Initiatives (ECI) connections, Advocacy Groups, and Parent Groups
- Child Care Aware and Parent Aware Resources and Scholarships
- County Licensors and incentives offered by the county
- Word of mouth
- Wayfinder Program
- Access to online training



What are the barriers to expanding child care access in Clay County

When asked "What are the barriers to expanding child care access in Clay County?" the following were commonly expressed themes (listed in order of most expressed items to least):

- Staffing; including recruitment, retention, qualified staff, low wages and benefits, and how lack of staff leads to some providers not able to fill spots
- Cost of operations; including start-up, general operation, and concerns with increasing costs
- Process to getting licensed is slow and cumbersome
- No allowance of variance for ratios
- Lack of transportation for some families
- No supports for providers who do not engage in Parent Aware and Child Care Assistance
- Lack of support from the state and DHS



What do you feel would be the most helpful strategy to improve access to child care in the next year In five years

When asked "What do you feel would be the most helpful strategy to improve access to child care in the next year? In five years?" the following were commonly expressed themes (listed in order of most expressed items to least):

- Funding support for providers; including grants, incentives, and financial support to help keep costs down for families while meeting the needs of providers and child care staff
- Improvements to licensing and regulations; including areas of speed and process of licensing, provide financial support to meet regulations, allowance of variances
- Staffing; including collaborative ways of attracting and retaining staff, ensuring staff/providers earn a livable wage, providing benefits for staff, mentorships programs to retain providers/staff

What do you feel would be the most helpful strategy to improve access to child care in the next year In five years continued...

- Increase number of spots available; including incentives and recruitment strategies for family child care providers, recruitment of staff into the field to meet need, and public advertising for new providers
- Increase access to mental health support for children and staff coaching (especially around COVID disruptions and increase behavioral issues) and mental health supports for providers and staff to help prevent burnout
- Increase data collection around staff storages, slots left open and lose of hours of operation due to lack of staff, and current rates
- Community education for families on available assistance and increase what is available to help families afford care
- Continue to improve relationships between DHS, the state, and providers

What type of appreciation (specifics) do you feel would be meaningful to you as a provider, or what do you hear people would appreciate most

When asked "What type of appreciation (specifics) do you feel would be meaningful to you as a provider, or what do you hear people would appreciate most?" the following were ideas to show appreciation for our providers:

- Encourage the Community and Parents to express Appreciation for Providers
 - Expressions of value, thank yous (verbal, written), small self-care focused gifts, sense of trust and respect from community and parents
- Years of Service Recognition
- Financial incentives
 - Financial resources, retention bonuses/ grants, paying staff for completing trainings
- Support programs; such as mentorship programs



Action Plan

CCC recommends a four prong approach, based on feedback provided, feasibility within Clay County, and what will be most impactful in increasing access to child care:

1. Support creation of new child care center in Moorhead, MN
2. Recruitment Video Series
3. Retention Campaign
4. Community Outreach and Communication Plan

Creation of New Child Care Center

It would take 71 new Family Child Care centers starting up to meet the child care shortage need. That is not feasible as a stand alone solution. Therefore, we need a collaborative approach including support for child care centers and family child care to meet the needs of the county.

One opportunity to do this is through a redevelopment project in the Romkey Park Neighborhood, in Moorhead, that engages community in creating a multi-use building



to support early childhood development, affordable housing, community based services, and community space. The living spaces and child care spaces will be independently owned within the building.

The child care center will have capacity for up to 136 new child care slots and 28 new teacher positions and will be located on the main floor. Outdoor access includes an enclosed child care play area, a parking lot and it's within close proximity to Romkey Park.

The Cass Clay Community Land Trust is a key partner as the current land owner. Jasmin Child Care and Preschool will lead the child care services. Jasmin is a multicultural child care center and preschool which has been providing culturally honoring care and early childhood education for children ages 6 weeks to 12 years in the Fargo-Moorhead area for the past 7 years.



Recruitment Video Series

Through the feedback gathered, many shared amazing resource available and great passion for early childhood development and care. The main barrier is disconnected supports and a lack of awareness around resources. It was also expressed the need to do positive messaging to help change the prospection of child care, staff and providers, and the create awareness of how best support these critical services provided in our community.

Working in partnership with West Central Initiatives, a series of 8 videos will be created to help with recruitment of new providers and staff; as well as create overall positive messaging around child care in our community. These videos will be framed using Positive Community Norms messaging and will highlight diverse child care providers sharing their passion and why from across the region followed by resources and support information to help navigate for new providers or businesses looking to support expansion.

The plan is to coordinate with newspaper stories, TV3, and radio to promote and recruit new providers through this video series with social media promotion and outreach to area high schools and colleges.

Estimated cost needing to be raised is \$10,000 to support the creation and promotion of this video series.



Retention Campaign

Similarly to recruitment the number one opportunity to help in retention of providers was in promotion of available resources. With this a resources list will be created specific to Clay County to help promote available supports to providers and center; including:

- County Retention Bonuses
- Available financial resources
- Mental Health Resources through Department of Health
- WayFinder
- First Children Financial
- Empower to Educate
- MBA Membership and Opportunity for Cost-Share Insurance Plans
- County mentorship programs and other supports for providers
- Creating marketing materials to promote specialty child care with businesses and organizations

Additionally, a number of ideas were shared that would be a great engagement opportunity for the community and area businesses to support retention of child care providers and centers:

- Creating volunteer group to write thank you notes to providers and center staff
- Volunteer supported gift drives for providers and center staff
- Encouraging community annual awards programs to include categories specific to child care
- Fundraising to support paid training time for providers and on-site staff trainings for centers
- Adoption of policy and procedure recommendations for area business





Community Outreach and Communication Plan

Promotion and outreach will be key to the success of increasing access to child care in Clay County. The recruitment video series and available resources with providers and potential providers to increase recruitment and retention. This will be primarily done through the video series marketing plan, social media, and through partner programs like West Central Initiative, Parent Aware, First Children Finance, Wayfinder, and County Licensors.

Secondly, there is a need for community outreach and communication targeted in connecting businesses and leaders to help support the efforts of recruitment and retention of providers. This will be done through engagement with area business associations, such as the Moorhead Business Association and the Fargo Moorhead West Fargo Chamber of Commerce, providing education and using inclusive planning to help create a plan to support this work.

Additionally, businesses will be encouraged to explore updated policies and procedures to support child care access of their employees; such as:

- Promoting child care as a business issue with colleagues and in the community
- Changing organizational policies to support all parents (flexible work schedules, predictable schedules, remote work, parental leave, breastfeeding policies, and adequate lactation spaces)
- Increasing or adding new employee benefits related to accessing child care (child care subsidies as an employee benefit)
- Exploring opportunities to provide on-site child care
- Explore opportunities to subsidize childcare slots at local childcare provider
- Advocate for investment into child care solutions by emailing or calling your elected officials at the city, county, state, and federal level. For contact information and to find out more about your elected officials visit:
 - <https://www.fmwfchamber.com> government-contacts
 - <https://www.cityofmoorhead.com> how-do-i- contact- my-elected-officials
 - <https://claycountymn.gov> 132 Board-of-Commissioners





Business Investment Opportunities

Through this work, it was very apparent that the Clay County business community is interested in helping with solutions to solve child care as a workforce issue. CCC worked with the County and Clay County ECI to set up an Investment Fund which will be shared with community businesses as an easy way to invest in the recruitment and retention of child care providers to support a healthy workforce and healthy children.

Businesses are directed to make tax deductible donations to Clay County ECI to support:

- New child care facility start-up
- Facility updates for current providers
- Training for providers and staff
- Appreciation celebrations and recognition

Donations can be sent to:

ECI Clay County at PO Box 280, Moorhead, MN 56560.

The tax deductible donation is through EIN 41-6005775 and questions can be directed via email at ECIClayCounty@gmail.com.

Progress Measures

Creating Community Consulting (CCC) is committed to data-driven community change and transparency of evaluating project outcomes. Based on the strategies outlined in this document, here are the key outcomes and targets set for this work.

Overall

- Overall dollars leveraged to support child care in Clay County; \$120,000 confirmed with an additional \$140,000 pending.

Support creation of new child care center

- Up to 136 new child care slots
- Up to 28 new teacher positions
- Number of partners engaged to build connection support creation of new child care slots
- \$5,000 investment for a project development lead

Recruitment Video Series

- Series of up to 8 videos based in Positive Community Norms in partnership with West Central Initiative
- \$15,000 raised to create videos and promote (social media, TV, radio, newspaper coordination for series) them throughout the region
- Social Media Insights
- Number of new providers

Retention Campaign

- Expand access to list of Clay County specific resources and supports available for new and existing providers
- Create volunteer opportunities for businesses and community members to show appreciation for child care providers and staff
- Improve the percentage of child care providers who feel appreciated and increase retention rates

Community Outreach and Communication Plan

- Educate businesses on how to engage in improving child care access and opportunities for employer child care friendly policies
- Raise \$10,000 to support ECI efforts to support recruitment and retention of child care providers and staff
- Number of area businesses engaged in inclusive planning process to support work
- Number of area businesses committed to changing policies and procedures to support access of child care for employees





**For more information
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