

Area deals with day care shortage

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By: [Lisa Anne Call](#), The Dickinson Press

Available licensed child care is becoming a hot commodity these days amid a population influx and many agencies are reporting shortages.

“We have a child care shortage across the state, but it’s particularly significant in oil country where we have young people moving in and the child population, the zero to five population, is going to grow and those parents have to work,” said Linda Reinicke, director of North Dakota Child Care Resource & Referral.

Kristi Asendorf, a parent service coordinator for NDCCRR, said based on data from the North Dakota Kids Count and the number of mothers in the workforce, about 2,778 children in Stark County are potentially needing childcare.

However, licensed capacity is estimated to be about 847, she said.

Asendorf said while there is no way to know exact figures, experts do know some children do not need care due to several factors such as parents working different shifts.

Having worked in the child care arena since 1992, Reinicke said the present shortage is one of the largest she’s seen, citing it as “very significant.”

In a healthy community, licensed care would meet about 50 percent of the potential capacity, Asendorf said.

Only five counties meet such a standard, none of which are in southwest North Dakota, according to NDCCRR progress report.

A Williston housing study projected the 2010 zero to five age group to consist of 840 children, with a projected increase in five years to 1,459, Reinicke said.

The six to nine-year-old population in 2010 was estimated at 755 children and in 2015, is projected to be 1,049 children.

“Even though we don’t have this kind of projected data, I think Dickinson is going through the same crisis and no one is talking about this child care issue,” Reinicke.

Child care is an industry that doesn’t respond to supply and demand formulas, Reinicke said.

“In order for demand to really speak ... there has to be money behind it,” she said. “Parents have to have the money to be able to say, ‘We will pay for this regardless, we want it. Childcare costs are so high already. It costs as much to send your child to childcare as it does to a university in North Dakota and that’s at the beginning of a family’s earning cycle.’”

Child care in North Dakota can range from \$5,000 to \$6,000 a year.

“Parents are opting if they don’t have the money, and most of them don’t, to find the least expensive care ... so that doesn’t push the market, it doesn’t put up the flag and say, ‘Hey people we have a need for child care,’ ” Reinicke said.

NDCCRR has been working on an initiative to recruit, train, retain and build the state’s supply of child care and a 2009 state legislative bill appropriated \$3.6 million in stimulus dollars to do so, Reinicke said.

Those dollars run out June 30, she said.

Sharon Hansen, director of Community Action’s Early Childhood Center in Dickinson, said she hears of waitlists for infant care and a lot of concern surrounding the shortage.

Hansen said when the agency conducted a community assessment, it found a shortage of care not just in Dickinson, but in rural areas where licensed care is critical.

Stark County Social Services said there are 63 licensed child care facilities in the county.

Yet, providers still have to turn people away.

Darla Kuntz, owner of the Gingerbread House Daycare in Dickinson, a group day care with a maximum care capacity of 18, said she has a waiting list of about 17 people wanting to get their child into her day care.

Kuntz said she has to turn down three to five people a week.

“It’s just been crazy and because we take infants, not too many take infants,” Kuntz said. “I won’t be able to take new kids for quite a while.”