

Child Care Needs in Hettinger

Executive summary

With funding from the USDA Rural Development awarded to the Rural Economic Area Partnership Investments (REAP) and the North Dakota Association of Rural Electric Co-ops (NDAREC¹), a task group calling itself the Co-op Child Care Team has been meeting regularly to figure out if, and how, cooperative models of child care might be used to address the unmet needs for child care in Hettinger (Adams county) and in Rolette counties. The Co-op Child Care Team includes Shirley Brentrup (REAP), Lori Capouch and Mary Stumpf (RETDC), Earleen Friez (Hettinger) and SyAnn Graber (Rolette and Rugby). E. Kim Coontz from the California Center for Cooperative Development was invited to participate because of her expertise in child care cooperatives. Earleen and SyAnn are facilitating local activities in their respective communities. Experiences with these programs will be used to help fuel similar efforts in other North Dakota communities.

Focus on Hettinger

With the goal of accurately assessing the need for additional child care in Hettinger we gathered the most recent census data for the community and conducted a survey. We are grateful to local employers who helped in sending out the survey and to the parents who responded.

Based on a review of census data and the findings of a parent survey, there is a need for additional child care in Hettinger. The survey found that parents currently use child care, but the arrangements many currently use are often unreliable, which influences their labor participation in ways that are problematic to both parents and their employers, such as absence or tardiness, or needing to leave work early.

Studies by Child Care Aware found that child care costs in Hettinger, as in other communities in North Dakota, are among the major household expenses for families, and can be among the highest expenses in a family's budget.² At the same time, some of the primary ways to keep the costs of child care low can also erode the quality of care that children receive. For example, the biggest way to reduce the cost of child care is to reduce staffing costs by hiring fewer staff members (thus decreasing the ratio of caregiver to children) and by paying low wages (which can make it difficult to recruit and retain caregivers). These methods of lowering the costs for child care can be problematic since they affect the characteristics of caregiving that are core measures of quality of care: low child-to-caregiver ratio, continuity of care, and caregiver characteristics such as education, experience and training.

While the survey findings indicated needs for school-age care, especially on school holidays and during the summer, the respondent pool and responses point to a crucial need for care for preschool aged children. For this reason, at this particular time, this project is focusing only on child care for this age group.

¹ NDAREC hosts a cooperative development center, the Rural Electric and Telecommunications Development Center, which is financially supported by North Dakota's electric and telecommunications cooperatives and through a grant from the United States Department of Agriculture.

² ChildCare Aware: Parents and the High Cost of Care, 2014 report pgs 22-23 (direct: 2012 report, p.23)

Cooperative models of child care can address issues of both cost and quality (see “Co-op Child Care” attachment). For this reason, the team of this project is turning to this model to address child care needs in Hettinger.

Hettinger Findings

Profile of Hettinger

According to US Census figures the population of Hettinger is 1,208; 70 of these individuals are children between the ages of 0-4 and 73 are aged 5-9. Labor force participation of parents in Hettinger is high. More than seventy percent of Hettinger’s married couple families are dual earner households and 91% of single parents are in the labor force.

Child Care Survey Results

In February of 2015, a survey of Hettinger parents was conducted by the Co-op Child Care Team. Seventy six Hettinger residents responded to the child care needs survey. While the survey included mechanisms to prevent multiple responses from the same household, we can only estimate the response rate because the survey was open to those logging on using a provided link. Fifty nine respondents indicated that they had at least one child who was five or younger and 10 have children who are in kindergarten. Given this anecdotal information we can infer that the response rate was good.

Furthermore:

- 74% of respondents have one or more children who need care
- 76% of respondents have used child care over the past 12 months and 74% anticipate needing care in the next 12 months.
- 62% of respondents need care for 31 or more hours per week.

Other findings suggested that some parents struggle to find child care arrangements that match their needs, such as licensing, flexibility or back up care when a primary provider is ill. Within the past six months 59% reported unexpected changes in their child care arrangements. These issues impacted a parent’s ability to work. 66% of respondents missed one or more days of work, and 29% missed three or more days of work. Parents also reported that child care issues impacted their regular work schedule; over one third report being late to work and 62% shared that they needed to leave work early one or more times because of child care issues.

Respondents indicated that child care problems had impacted their work schedule., causing them to miss work days: 45 reported missing one or more days of work in the past six months, and almost half of these missed three or more days of work. Twenty nine respondents indicated that child care issues caused them to arrive late to work or leave early.

It can be costly to employers to have employees miss work, be late to work, or need to leave work early, and it is also costly to the employees. When parents are absent from work, respondents who had it used their paid leave time, but 52% of them took unpaid time off to deal with child care issues.

Respondents are interested in care that is near their workplace. In fact, 57% thought it would be helpful to have on-site child care at their place of employment and 37% of respondents reported that it would be helpful if employers reserved space in a child care program for employees.

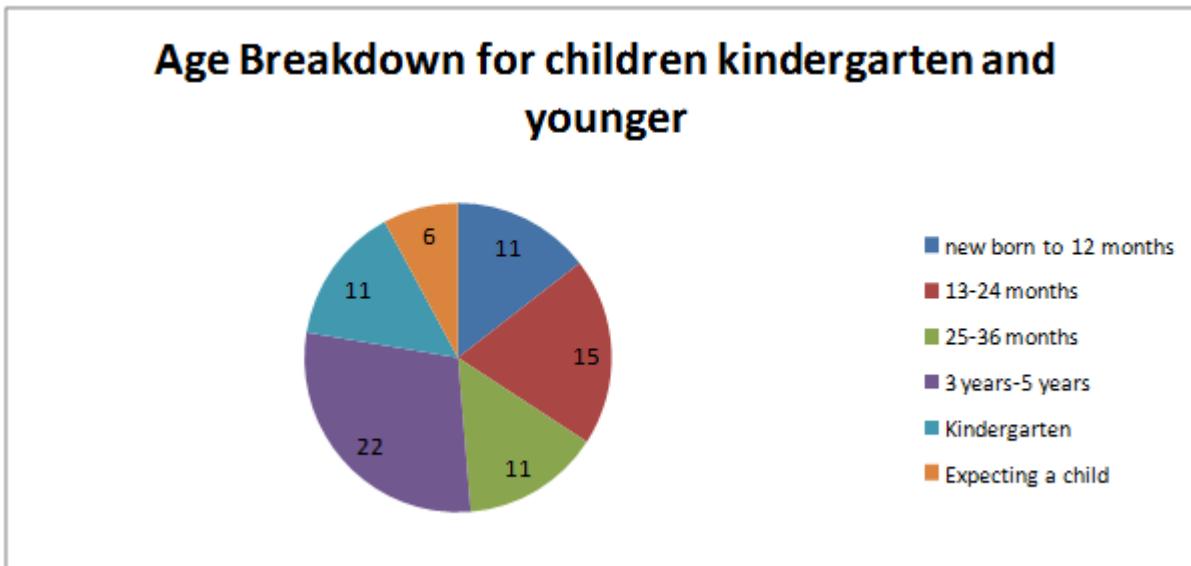
One hundred twenty seven children were represented in this survey, age newborn to grade 6. Out of those 127 children, survey findings indicate that Hettinger has 76 children ages newborn to age 6, in need of child care services.

According to Adams County Social Services, Hettinger currently has the capacity in licensed facilities to

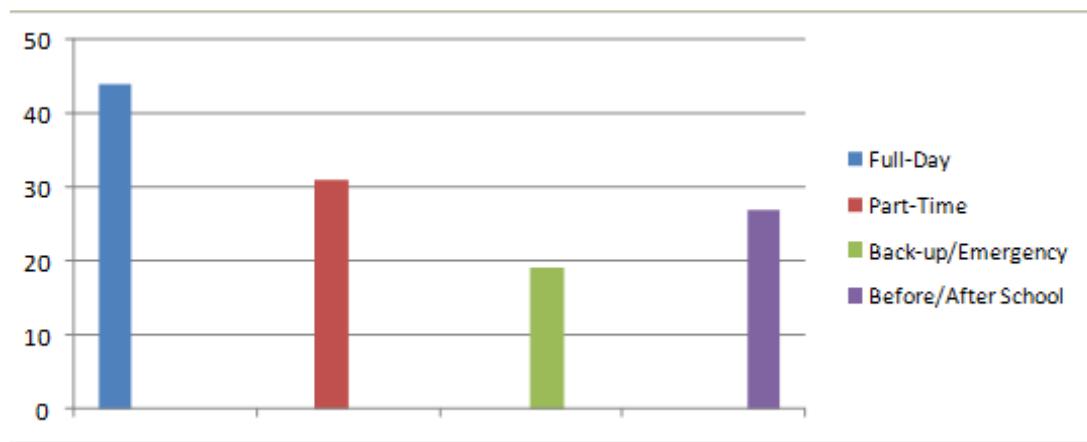
provide for 62 children. Furthermore, anecdotal findings reveal that this capacity is likely to reduce because one provider has given parents who use her care notice of her pending retirement and another longtime provider may make a similar decision in the coming years.

Children's ages:

- 11 are age newborn to 12 months
- 15 are age 13-24 months
- 11 are age 25-36 months
- 22 are age 3 yrs-5 yrs
- 11 are in Kindergarten
- 6 mothers are expecting a child in the next six months
- TOTAL 76 children

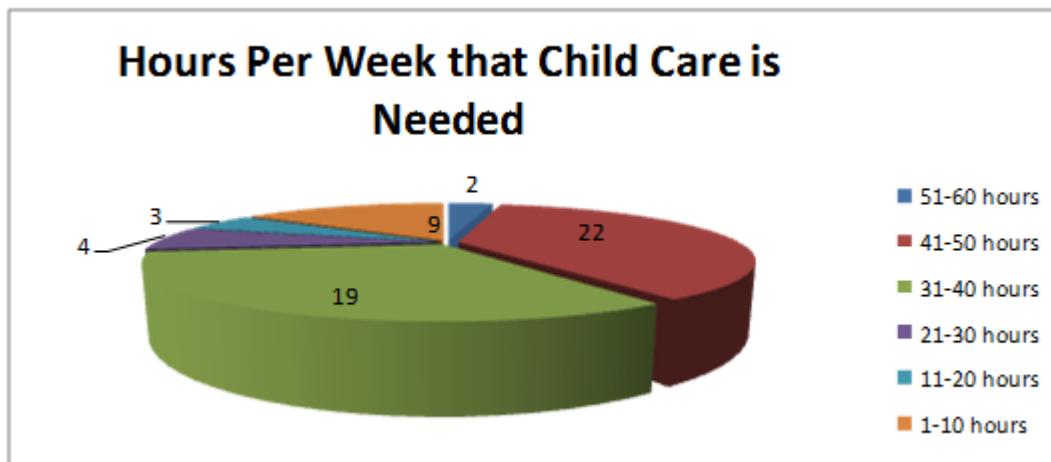


58 of the respondents have used child care for one or more of their children, during the past 12 months. 56 of the respondents anticipate needing child care in the next 12 months. Most of these respondents need full-day care: 44 respondents, or 65%, have children who need "full-day day care"; 31 indicated they need part-time or non-traditional hours for child care (i.e.: full time care in summers; extended hours on weekends; shift work; seasonal hours; non-traditional work hours) and 19 respondents have children who are in need of back-up or emergency care. Although not the focus for this immediate project, 27 respondents have children who need before and after school care.



Following the question asking respondents about the general category of care they needed for their children (full time, part time etc.), a question asked them to select between categories of the number of hours of care they needed each week. Responses were:

- 2 indicated 51-60 hrs
- 22 respondents indicated 41-50 hrs
- 19 indicated 31-40 hrs
- 4 indicated 21-30 hrs
- 3 indicated 11-20 hrs
- 9 indicated 1-10 hrs



Currently respondents use a variety of child care arrangements. 41 of the respondents use family or group child care; 19 respondents have a relative in their home to watch the child(ren); 17 respondents use a relative or non-relative's home for their child care needs; 11 respondents use an unlicensed family child care; 10 respondents have a non-relative come to their home; and 1 respondent uses the before/after school program.

The Treib family welcomes foster children into their family. Unfortunately they have had to refuse several children three to four times because Hettinger does not have room at a licensed child care facility. In order for the Treib's to open their home to more foster children they would need to make sure that there are spaces available at a licensed child care facility.

Respondents indicate sometimes using a patchwork of methods to meet their child care needs. Different types of child care used per week; only a little over half of respondents are able to use only one method of child care, the other 50% use two or more types of child care.

Respondents shared that the care they use can be unreliable, or are not their ideal arrangement. Twenty two respondents changed child care programs at least once in the past year; a little less than half of these have changed two to four times in the past year. The most cited reason for the change was due to loss of the child care provider.

One respondent stated that they would like to change providers, but there simply are no options. Another respondent indicated that her two children were in separate child care programs for a while; she switched providers when a spot became available for both of her children to go to the less expensive child care arrangement.

When asked to select any issues that has been a problem for respondents during the past year:

- 25 respondents (45%) indicated drop-in or back-up care
- 18 (33%) indicated scheduling to match needed hours
- 17 (31%) indicated finding care for infants (0-2 years)
- 14 (25%) indicated illness of caregiver
- 13 (24%) indicated quality of care
- 10 (18%) indicated dependability of caregiver
- 9 (16%) indicated finding weekend care
- 6 (11%) indicated dealing with mandatory overtime

Several respondents commented about their experience of Hettinger having an almost desperate need for more providers in the area, sharing in various ways that the providers who do a wonderful job are older and will not be doing it much longer.

Some problems involve observations shared in the comment section of the survey or during interviews conducted related to the project. Following relates one respondent observation:

A couple of years ago, Liz Hallen was forced to move her two children to four different child cares facilities in less than a year. She had to change child care providers three times due to the facilities closing. This has been very frustrating and stressful for Liz, who works full-time out of her home. Since there are a limited number of providers in the area, her current child care provider has asked the parents to give up their spot if they do not intend to use it after the school year is over. Liz has decided to pull her oldest child from this particular child care facility after this school year is over, as she knows that her provider has a very long waiting list. This means that her oldest would be home with her while she works, during the summer months, and when school is not in session.

Since Liz works with the public on some level, she knows many parents and grandparents who have had to quit their jobs to watch the kids, especially when families grow to have 2 or more children. When she talks to people who are thinking of moving to Hettinger, she stresses the importance of being able to find child care. She knows of at least two people who have interviewed at the hospital but could not accept the job because of not being able to find child care. She says that she knows child care is a huge issue in the town, and she would personally prefer a home child care facility, but will take what is available. Her children are currently at a group child care facility which is licensed for up to 30 children.

Conclusions

The Co-op Child Care team engaged in this project reviewed previous studies reporting the need in Hettinger. We also spoke with people in the community who also shared that child care supply does not meet the needs of parents. The survey we conducted confirms these earlier findings.

The project we are undertaking is action-based. Our goal is to engage community members to help to address the child care shortage cooperatively. Attached to this report is a description of various cooperative models of child care. Each of the models has been used successfully in other communities. They can be used in combination or one model can be exclusively used.

We look forward to working with you on this project.

Working Group members

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