

Rural child care options needed ^[1]

Editorial

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EXCERPTS

No parents would consider taking a child to work with them on a construction site, yet every day children accompany their parents into farm fields and barns.

Lack of child care in rural areas has led some families to reconsider country life and some, lacking alternatives, take children into potentially dangerous situations involving machinery or large animals. The main hindrances to rural child care are distance, lack of suitable facilities, lack of trained care providers and inflexible hours of existing day-care facilities, particularly during farmers' busy seasons. Rural people also have difficulty accessing child care because their assets may disqualify them from government subsidies.

Like everyone else, farmers want their children to be safe, and what's safe for the child is usually safer for the parent in terms of reduced distraction and greater peace of mind.

Relatives and neighbours may have provided child-care help in the past, but today's rural depopulation and scattered families limit that option.

Off-farm employment for one or both parents also influences child care. Commutes to jobs may require an out-of-the-way trip to a day-care centre or babysitter's house.

Families in rural areas need the same access to quality child care that is available in urban areas. But how?

The community of Miami, Man., is a good example of how a community can help rural families with the child-care issue. In 1997, it formed a committee to investigate and confirm need. Then the rural municipality gave a grant of \$10,000, two building lots in town and a tax waiver. The credit union provided a pre-approved mortgage. Provincial grants and local fundraising helped raise more money.

The day care and nursery school opened two years ago and now nearby communities are following the example.

The Miami experience proves rural communities can find solutions to this important problem.

Provincial and federal governments can contribute through grants for building or renovation. Government should also reassess its rules and consider whether farming parents should be assessed for subsidy on the basis of net income, not total assets.

There is also a government role to play in providing adequate training for care providers.

A healthy atmosphere in which to raise children is a common reason people cite when moving into rural areas. Let's make it true for all of our children.

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