

Child care poses rural dilemma ^[1]

Author: Bell, Ian

Source: Western Producer

Format: Article

Publication Date: 22 Oct 2002

EXCERPTS

Parents and communities in need of affordable, quality child care were given inspiration during the Rural Voices Forum.

The forum drew delegates from mainly Manitoba and Saskatchewan to talk about how people can overcome the barriers to establishing things like day cares in their communities.

"My only goal is to empower people to do it," said Jane Wilson, co-consultant for Rural Voices, a two-year project devoted to promoting rural child care through community participation.

In an interview, Wilson said one of the challenges for establishing more child care in rural areas is the perception that smaller communities may not have enough children to warrant such a service.

Another challenge is finding a suitable building and then meeting all the building and fire code requirements. Finding people with appropriate training to work in a licensed day care can be daunting, as well.

People confronted with those kinds of challenges need to remind themselves why quality child care is important, Wilson said.

One of her concerns is for the safety of farm children. There are times when parents take their kids to the field in tractors or trucks because they don't have other options, such as a day care that stays open for extended hours during the seeding and harvest seasons.

"If you work in Winnipeg or Brandon, dads don't think of taking their kids to a construction site. We have to start thinking of farms as work sites."

She said they're working with colleges to develop a training program for childhood educators who would work in day cares and nursery schools. With that model, it would be possible for college instructors to travel into rural areas where there are groups of people in need of the training.

Mentoring is also being worked on so that people wanting to establish a child-care service in their community could seek the experience of others who have already tackled it.

One of the goals of Rural Voices is to examine government policy toward child care in Manitoba and Saskatchewan. That examination, with input from rural residents, will help determine whether a further review of those policies is warranted.

Government policy is important, said Wilson, because it establishes a benchmark for the level of service that people should expect, regardless of whether they live on a farm, in a town, or in a city.

"Policy makes it an even playing field for everyone. It doesn't make it piecemeal. That's exactly what we have right now, is piecemeal."

Early this year, the Manitoba government introduced a five-year vision to promote affordable and accessible child care for everyone.

While encouraged by that initiative, Wilson said government needs to be sure it attaches the same importance to the needs of rural and remote areas as it does to those of urban families.

In interviews toward the close of the forum, two mothers described how important day care is to them and their efforts to help establish that service in their communities.

When Donna Riddell and her husband moved to Miami, Man., a few years ago, they could not find the day care they needed within the community.

Donna worked in Carman, a half-hour drive away, and each morning she would have to take her children there for day care. Having children with her during the daily commute was a concern, especially in the more treacherous winter driving conditions.

A committee was formed in fall 1997 to explore the need for child care in Miami. One of its first tasks was to do a survey.

"The response was overwhelming," said Riddell. "There was an astonishing need for child care in Miami."

One of the most important tasks after that was finding a site in Miami. Houses, the hockey arena and the community hall were considered.

"Nothing was suitable," said Riddell. "We struggled with that for over a year."

It was decided that the best option was to build a facility specifically for a day care and nursery school.

Riddell said there were a couple of things that helped make that effort a success. They went to the local rural municipality and were given ample support, including a grant of \$10,000, two building lots in Miami, and a waiver on their taxes. They also secured a pre-approved mortgage from the local credit union for \$60,000.

That gave them the foundation to apply for provincial grants and to continue with local fundraising efforts.

In March 2000, the day care and nursery school opened under the name Miami Children's Facility. There were at least 16 full- and part-time children enrolled.

For the community, it fit with the goal of promoting economic development. For Riddell, it offered the comfort of knowing her children were in a safe environment with daily learning activities and a chance to get acquainted with other children in their community.

"I felt secure having more kids after that. I knew I was going to have quality child care for them."

Besides offering day care, the facility serves as a family resource centre and it delivers a prenatal and infant nutrition program in partnership with the local regional health authority.

The success of that effort led to the establishment of nursery schools in the nearby communities of Graysville and Roland. Those centres are networked with the Miami Children's Facility and also do family resource work.

"You've got to make it happen," said Riddell. "It doesn't just land on your plate."

When Wanda Janssens moved to Langenburg, Sask., two years ago, she discovered there wasn't a licensed day-care facility available. She soon set out to impress upon the community the value of such a service.

"We're trying to get across the message that even though we have good care, we want to bring in licensed care with learning and child care as one. I think there's a great demand."

She found that one of the challenges was creating community awareness of the need.

With that hurdle now overcome, the emphasis is on buying a building for the child-care centre, which would be for infants and children up to age 12.

"My main goal is to have a safe place for children, all children."

Being able to network with people who have undertaken similar efforts is valuable, said Janssens, an early childhood educator and facilitator of the project at Langenburg.

She is inspired by people like Jane Wilson, but said there are no immediate plans to extend the child care being established at Langenburg into surrounding communities.

"That would be a very good goal, but I'm going to start small."

- reprinted from the Western Producer

Related link: CRRU ISSUE file: Rural child care Canada ^[2]

Region: Canada ^[3]

Saskatchewan ^[4]

Tags: rural ^[5]

Source URL (modified on 27 Jan 2022): <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/05/08/child-care-poses-rural-dilemma>

Links

[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/05/08/child-care-poses-rural-dilemma> [2] <https://childcarecanada.org/resources/issue-files/rural-child-care-canada> [3] <https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/7864> [4] <https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/7858> [5] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/rural>