

VERMILLION CHILDCARE ASSESSMENT 2023

PREPARED BY:

THE GOVERNMENT RESEARCH BUREAU



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INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The Government Research Bureau (GRB) at the University of South Dakota (USD) conducted a needs-based childcare assessment for the Vermillion Area Chamber and Development Company (VCDC) and their related childcare stakeholders in the Vermillion community in late 2023. The assessment was part of the Community-Based Child Care Program planning stage grant from the Governor's Office of Economic Development. Dr. Julia Hellwege, Executive Director of the GRB, and Dr. Thomas Mrozla, Assistant Professor at USD, led the assessment. The childcare assessment aimed to collect and summarize current and prospective childcare needs, assess Vermillion's childcare workforce for future demands, examine barriers and facilitators to childcare capacity, childcare workforce, and licensing, and assess strategies to support, recruit, and retain childcare employees.

This comprehensive study delves into the current childcare climate in Vermillion, South Dakota, offering valuable insights for future research and policy implementations. The research identifies a cycle of stagnation in the childcare workforce and unmet needs among families, particularly those with lower incomes and diverse backgrounds. The study combines surveys of the general public, businesses, and childcare providers with targeted focus groups to draw deductive and inductive themes. The findings reveal concerns about affordability, workforce availability, and childcare options.

Addressing the concerns raised, the study recommends measures to enhance accessibility, streamline communication, and collaborate within the childcare sector. Furthermore, it emphasizes the importance of addressing childcare worker pay, training, and supporting low income families through outreach campaigns. However, the study acknowledges limitations related to a short timeframe and holiday disruptions, impacting participation rates, especially among harder-to-reach populations.

The complete report is available upon request from the Government Research Bureau or from the Vermillion Area Chamber of Commerce and Development Company.

METHODOLOGY

The central research question that guided this study was: What is the state of child care and childcare workforce for the Vermillion Area Chamber of Commerce and Development Company (VCDC), the University of South Dakota's School of Education, and the Boys and Girls Club of Vermillion and other community groups? The study seeks to offer a comprehensive view of the current state of childcare provision and needs in Vermillion, South Dakota. The study used a multi-faceted and mixed-methods approach that included three distinct surveys and focus groups.

Surveys

The first survey targeted the general public, seeking input from community members. The survey to the general public included 48 questions a mixture of close and open-ended questions, as well as demographic information. In all, the general public survey was completed by 390 respondents. The second survey was distributed to childcare providers, including staff (home and centers) in the Vermillion community. The survey comprised a total of 53 questions total but utilized branching logic for respondents in leadership positions and employees, guiding them through tailored sets of questions. There were a total of 32 responses. Lastly, the business survey consisted of 15 questions and was distributed to managers or human resources personnel at 15 of Vermillion's largest employers. In all, 10 businesses responded resulting in a 66% response rate.

Focus Groups

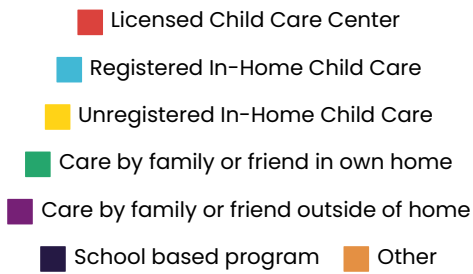
The GRB carried out four focus groups for this study. The first two focus groups were with childcare workers and providers. The guiding protocol for providers covered three areas: introduction, current work, and availability (in child care), needs and concerns you have for the childcare industry in Vermillion, SD, and digging deeper into the past, present, and future picture of child care in Vermillion, SD.

The second focus group protocol targeted participants who were members of the Vermillion, South Dakota area who have or had children or dependents in child care or worked closely with children in or previously in child care.

COMMUNITY SURVEY

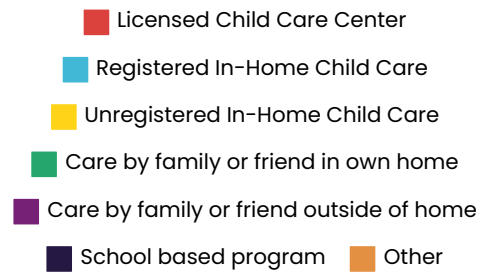
Childcare in Vermillion

Current utilization of childcare types (n=227)



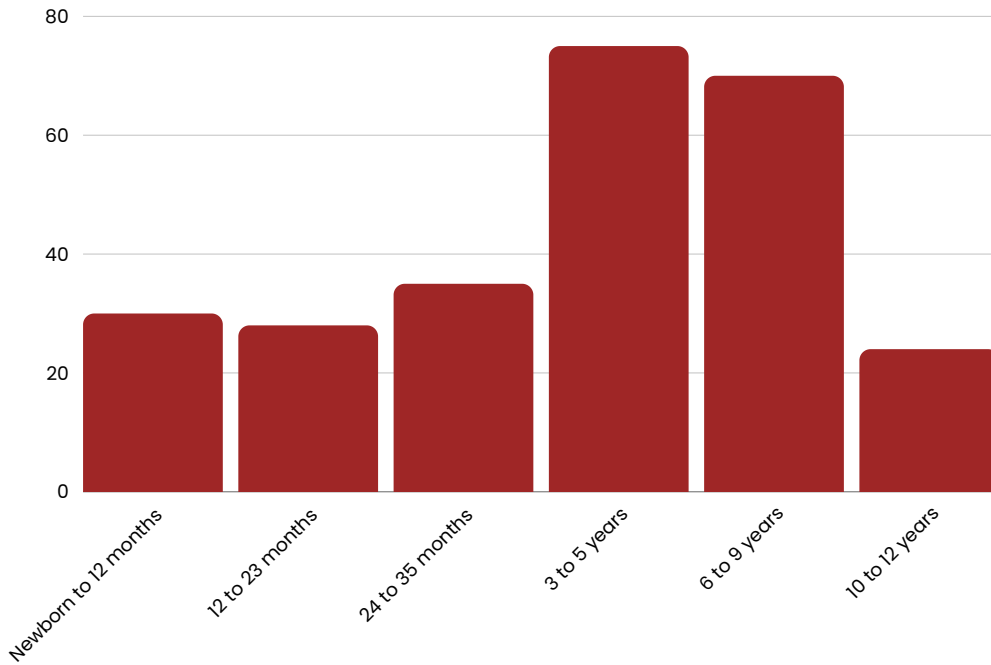
Of the 227 total respondents for this question, the largest portion (26.4%) said they use “school-based programs,” closely followed by “licensed childcare center” with 21.6%, “registered in-home child care” with 14.5%, and finally “unregistered in-home child care” and “care by family or a friend outside of home” both with 8.4%. Notably, four of the “other” respondents stated they use Boys and Girls Club, which is a school-based program.

Preferred utilization of childcare types (n=171)



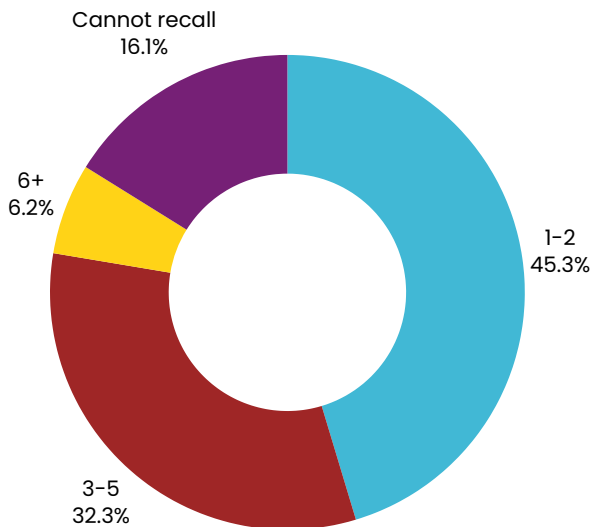
Respondents were asked what type of child care they would prefer to use. There were 171 responses to this question, with the largest number of respondents preferring “licensed childcare centers” and “school-based programs” (34.1% and 27.1% respectively). 18.8% would prefer using a “registered in-home childcare” service. 4.1% of respondents would prefer “care by family or friend outside of home” and 1.8% prefer “unregistered in-home child care.”

Current number of children in each age group enrolled in child care (n=262)



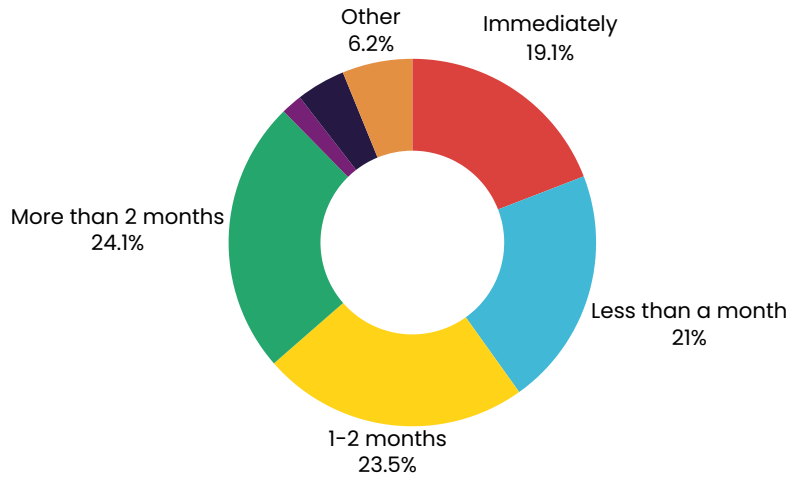
Respondents were asked to report how many children they currently have enrolled in childcare services, ranging from newborn to twelve years of age. The largest portion of respondents have children from age ranges of “3 to 5 years” and “6 to 9 years” (at 28.6% and 26.72% respectively). The other categories each consisted of around 10% of the respondents, with “newborn to 12 months” at 11.5%, “12 to 23 months” at 10.7%, “24 to 35 months” at 13.4%, and finally “10 to 12 years” at 9.2%.

Number of childcare providers contacted before securing care (n=161)



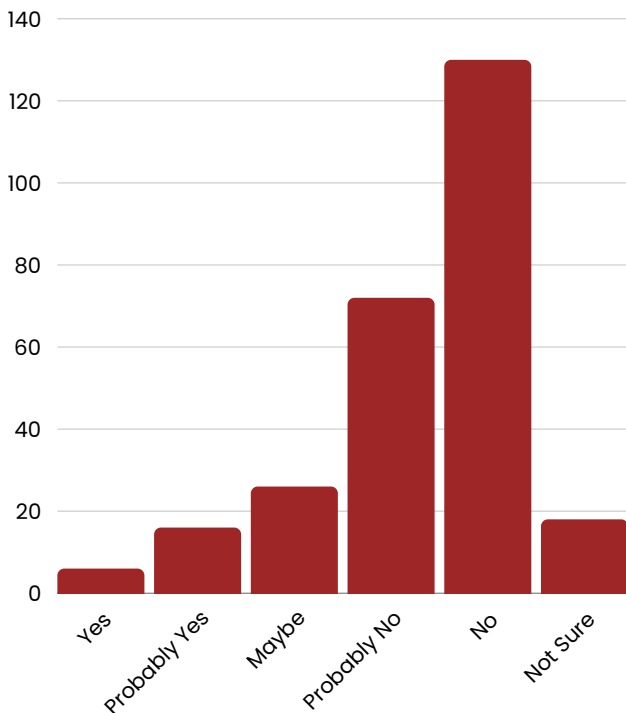
Respondents were asked to report how many childcare providers they contacted before securing care. Most respondents (45.3%) were able to obtain child care after contacting 1-2 providers. 32.30% of respondents were required to contact 3-5 providers before securing care and 6.2% contacted 6 or more providers before securing care.

Number of childcare providers contacted before securing care (n=161)



Respondents were asked to report how long they searched before securing child care. The largest portion of respondents reported that it took them more than 2 months (24.1%) or 1-2 months to secure child care (23.5%). 21.0% of respondents reported that they received child care in less than one month, and 19.1% reported that they received care immediately. The rest of the respondents reported that they either have an immediate need and have not been able to obtain child care (1.9%), have a future need and have not been able to obtain child care (4.3%), or have a future need but have not started looking (6.2%).

Sufficiency of Vermillion’s childcare options (n=268)



Respondents were asked to report their attitudes towards the sufficiency of childcare options in Vermillion. Most of the respondents reported negatively, with 48.5% reporting “no” and 26.9% reporting “probably no.” A small portion of respondents responded positively, with 2.2% reporting “yes” and 6.0% “probably yes.” The final groups responded “maybe” at 9.7% and “not sure” at 6.7%.

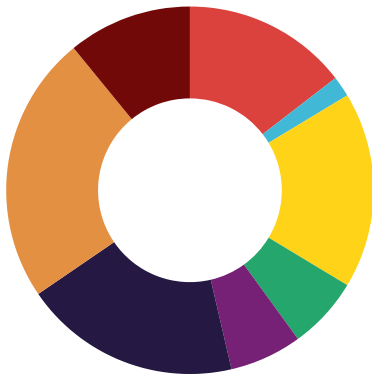
Obstacles from obtaining adequate child care (n=289)

Cost	27.7%	80
I have not had any obstacles in obtaining adequate child care	19.7%	57
Scheduling Conflicts	9.7%	28
Transportation	8.3%	24
Lack of Resources	8.0%	23
Available child care options are not the right fit (e.g. cultural, religious, social reasons)	7.6%	22
Safety Concerns	6.6%	19
No current need for child care	3.5%	10
Provider must accept state childcare assistance	3.1%	9
Social, emotional, and/or behavioral challenges	2.4%	7
Medical Needs	1.0%	3
Other:	2.4%	7
Total	100%	289

Respondents were asked what obstacles prevent them from obtaining adequate child care, with the highest reported obstacle being cost at 27.5%. Each of the other obstacles had varying levels of acknowledgment, with 1 to 10% of respondents reporting them. Nearly one in five (19.7%) reported not having any obstacles in obtaining adequate child care.

Amount spent on child care per child and per week (n=128)

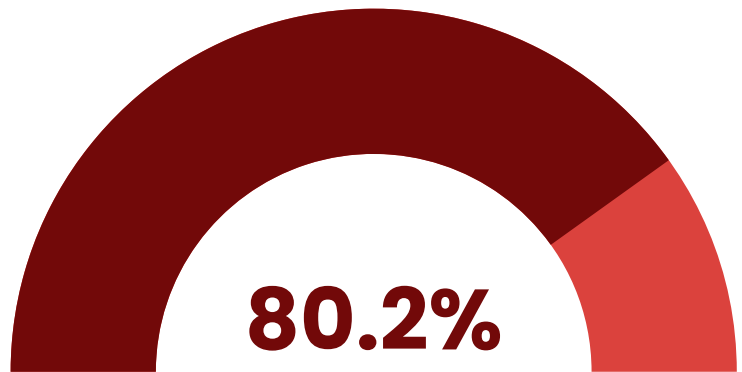
- \$181-199/ week and above
- \$151-180/ week and above
- \$121-150/ week and above
- \$101-120/ week and above
- \$81-100/ week and above
- Less than \$81/ week and above
- \$200/ week and above
- Other (for example hourly, mo...



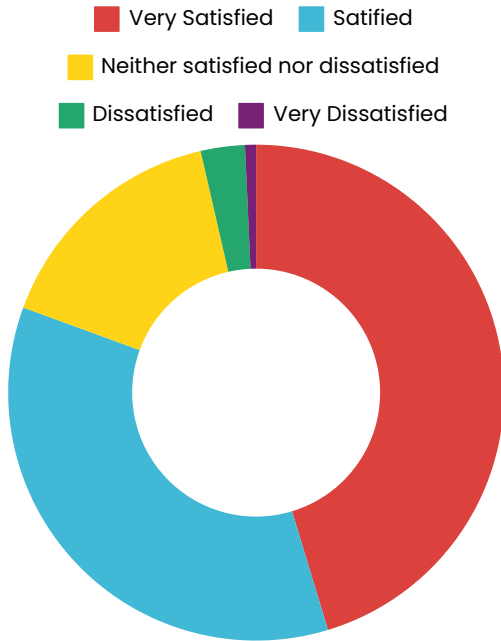
Respondents were asked what they spend on child care per child. The largest portion of respondents reported spending \$200/week or above (20.3%) and the second largest group reported spending less than \$81/ week at 16.4%. The rest of the respondents reported spending between those two sections, with 15.6% reporting spending \$151-180/ week, 14.8% spending \$121-150/ week, 12.5% spending \$181-199/ week, and 5.5% for both \$101-120/ week and \$81-100/ week.

Respondents were asked to rate the quality of their childcare arrangements on a scale of one to ten. A majority of respondents (80.9%) reported the quality of their childcare arrangements a seven or higher. The rest of the respondents (19.1%) reported the quality of their child care between one and six.

Figure 13 Mean of quality score (right) (n=131)



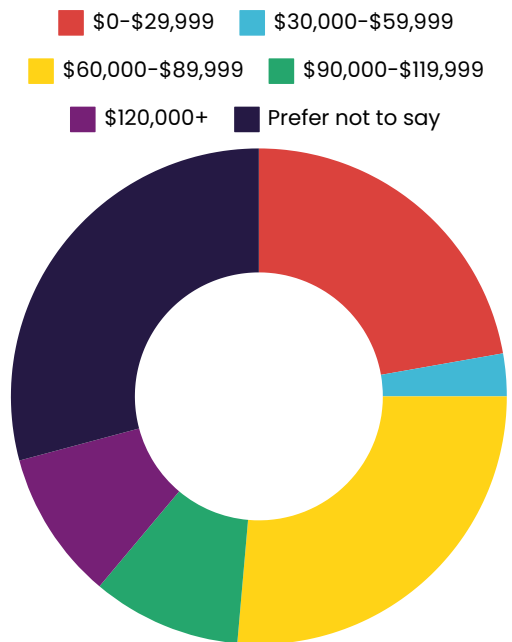
Satisfaction levels for current childcare arrangements (n=139)



Respondents were asked to report their satisfaction with their current childcare arrangements. 80.6% of respondents reported either satisfied or very satisfied with their current arrangements, 15.8% were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with their current arrangements, and only 3.6% were either dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with their childcare arrangements.

Annual household income of respondents (n=261)

Respondents were asked to report their annual household income. The largest portion of respondents (25.8%) reported an annual household income of greater than \$120,000. This was then followed by 22.3% of respondents reporting \$60,000-\$89,999, 19.23% reporting \$30,000-\$59,999, 15.4% reporting \$90,000-\$119,0999, and finally 10.8% of respondents reporting \$0-29,999. 6.5% of respondents selected “prefer not to say” for this question.



BUSINESS SURVEY

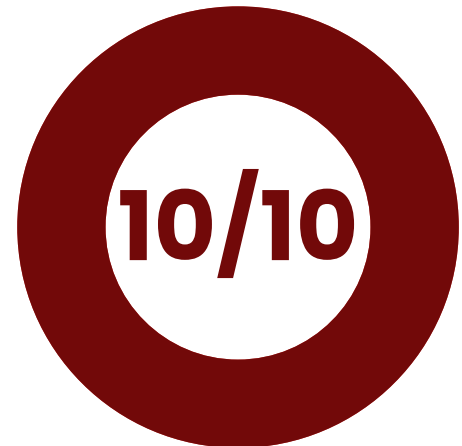
Satisfaction with childcare options



Seven out of ten employers indicated that they or their employees were dissatisfied with the current childcare options in Vermillion. Meanwhile, three respondents reported a neutral stance, expressing neither satisfaction nor dissatisfaction with the available childcare services.

Effect on Employee Recruitment

All ten employers indicated that the availability of childcare options in Vermillion affected their ability to recruit employees with four reporting definitely yes and six reporting probably yes.



Effect on Employee Retainmentment

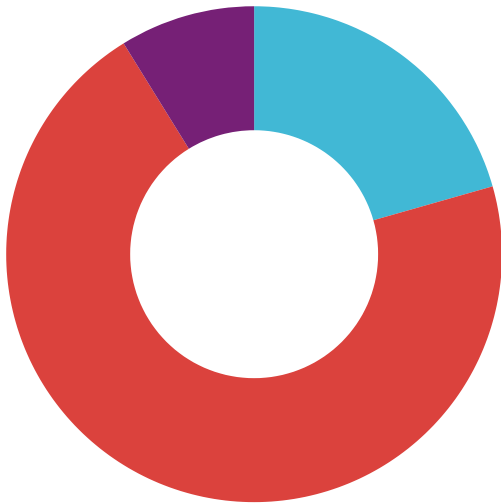


Nine respondents indicated the availability of childcare options in Vermillion affected their ability to retain employees with four reporting definitely yes and five reporting probably yes. One employer responded that childcare options in Vermillion probably did not affect their ability to retain employees.

PROVIDER SURVEY

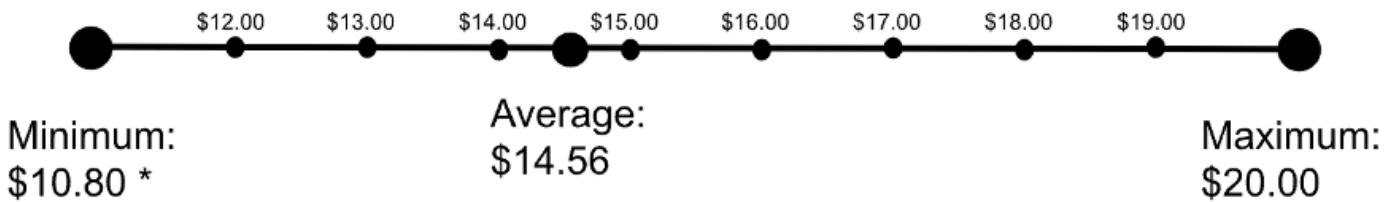
Provider Position (n=32)

- Owner, Operator, Manager, or Director of...
- Staff providing direct care to children but...
- At-home Child Care (providing care in th...



Of the 32 respondents, 75% identified as staff, while 15.6% were owners, operators, managers, or directors of childcare establishments. There were 9.4% who identified as at-home childcare providers. However, we note some concerns as some of these respondents appeared to identify later as owners of in-home childcare establishments, rather than as indicated in the question where at-home providers are defined as those providing care in the child's home.

Staff Wages (n=13)



The range of wages among childcare staff providers was from minimum wage \$10.80/hr (*note that the minimum wage in South Dakota has now increased to \$11.20 for 2024) to \$20/ hr. The average wage was \$14.56.

Workplace Conditions (n=16)

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
I would prefer to work more hours each week	18.8%	6.3%	18.8%	50.0%	6.3%
I feel appreciated by my employer	6.3%	0.0%	25.0%	18.8%	50.0%
I feel appreciated by families	0.0%	6.3%	12.5%	25.0%	56.3%
I see myself working in child care for a long time	6.3%	6.3%	25.0%	31.3%	31.3%
I regularly feel over-worked	6.3%	31.3%	12.5%	18.8%	31.3%

Respondents were asked to report their level of agreement statements pertaining to their workplace. A majority (56.3%) said they somewhat agree or strongly agree with the statement “I would prefer to work more hours each week.” 18.8% neither agreed nor disagreed, 6.3% somewhat disagreed, and 18.8% strongly disagreed with the statement. 68.8% of respondents answered in agreement to the statement “I feel appreciated by my employer.” 25.0% felt neutral about the statement, and 6.3% strongly disagreed. 81.3% somewhat agreed or strongly agreed with the statement “I feel appreciated by families.” 12.5% answered neutrally, and 6.3% somewhat disagreed. In response to the statement “I see myself working in child care for a long time,” 62.6% answered in agreement, 25.0% said they “neither agree nor disagree,” 6.3% somewhat disagreed and 6.3% strongly disagreed. Just over half (50.1%) of respondents agreed with the statement, “I regularly feel over-worked.” 12.5% neither agree or disagree, 31.3% somewhat disagree and 6.3% strongly disagree.

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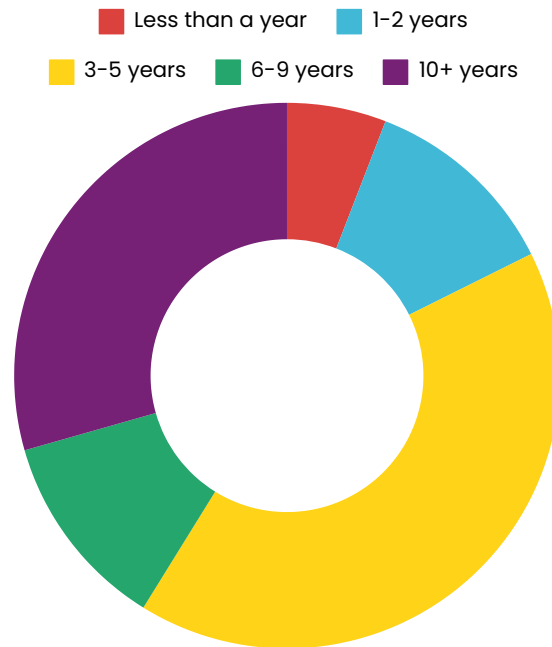
Level of Agreement with statements regarding workplace (n=16)

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
Follow the highest safety standards	0.0%	6.3%	6.3%	12.5%	75.0%
Follow the highest health standards	0.0%	6.3%	18.8%	12.5%	62.5%
Offer regular engaging child development activities	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	18.8%	81.3%
Offer opportunities for parents to evaluate the program	0.0%	6.3%	25.0%	37.5%	31.3%
Offer opportunities for parent engagement or activities	0.0%	12.5%	25.0%	25.0%	37.5%
Offer nutritional meals	0.0%	6.3%	6.3%	31.3%	56.3%
Staff have opportunities for training/ professional dev.	0.0%	0.0%	12.5%	31.3%	56.3%
Staff are paid a competitive wage	25.0%	12.5%	25.0%	18.8%	18.8%
Child to staff ratio is too high	6.3%	25.0%	25.0%	31.3%	12.5%

The vast majority of respondents indicated that they “strongly agree” that their workplace “follow the highest safety standards” (75%), follow the highest health standards” (62.5%), and “offer regular engaging child development activities” (81.3%). There was a greater variation in responses in regards to “opportunities for parents to evaluate the program,” where 31.3% “strongly agree,” 37.5% “somewhat agree” and 25% “neither agree nor disagree.”

The responses were similar for parent engagement opportunities where 37.5% “strongly agree” and an even split (25% each) either “somewhat agree” or “neither agree nor disagree.” A slighter majority of respondents “strongly agree” (56.3% each) that their workplace “offer[s] nutritional meals” and that “staff have opportunities for training.” Respondents were split on the question of “competitive wages.” Only 18.8% “strongly agree” that wages are competitive with 25% strongly disagreeing. In terms of child to staff ratio, only 12.5% “strongly agree” it is too high, while most (50%) either “somewhat disagree” or “neither agree nor disagree.”

How long have you worked in child care? (n=17)



Respondents were asked how long they have worked in child care. Of the 17 respondents, a little over 41% (41.2%) reported three to five years in child care. Respondents with ten-plus years of experience in child care were recorded at a little over 29% (29.4%). Respondents with one to two years and three to five years were tied with a little over 11% (11.8%). Respondents with less than one year in child care were almost 6% (5.9%).

COMMUNITY VOICES

Themes:

- 1) workforce availability
- 2) cycle of circumstances
- 3) accommodation issues

"But there is a daycare crisis. But, it's specific to certain things. People keep saying, well, there's a daycare crisis. Well, I don't think there's a childcare crisis. I think we're having a people crisis. I think we're having an affordable childcare crisis."

- Focus Group Participant

"I think they need a little bit more hourly wages, so they can make it in the world. And, I think some of the people leave because they can't, they don't have, that's their only source of income."

- Focus Group Participant

Participants in the focus groups identified as a provider or worker in a traditional childcare center, an in-home childcare setting, or a faith-based childcare institution. Some participants had been in the field over 20 years, while some participants were newer to the profession.

The focus groups demonstrate a need for interventions and support for childcare workers and providers with wages and resources available to them. Area childcare providers cannot compete with area businesses offering higher wages, leaving workers going towards a job with higher pay, even if they prefer to work in childcare.

"I think that all circles back to, in order to pay quality staff, we have to charge more. It's just a circle, and we have rules that we follow from the state for ratios. We have to have that number of people, we can't change any of that. Our hands are tied."

- Focus Group Participant

"No, there's plenty of jobs. We need people, you know."

- Focus Group Participant

The childcare industry in the Vermillion, SD area will continue to have staffing shortages and accommodation issues for childcare workers and providers if the bigger issue of pay, workforce, not meeting capacity, and lost revenue are ignored.

The following comments come from community survey participants who took part in a public survey that examined the current childcare climate in the Vermillion, SD area. From the public survey emerged four significant themes.

"Surveys like this asking people their perspectives on childcare is important. Continuing to include families currently needing these services (or could need them) will make for the best ongoing planning and good outcomes."

- Survey Participant

"My feelings are if we have adequate and abundant childcare options in Vermillion it would also help attract new residents. Childcare and School options are high attractors to Communities and we want to be a sought out location."

- Survey Participant

Themes:

- 1) Cost
- 2) Educational/recreational opportunities
- 3) Staff support/issues and communication issues
- 4) Time
- 5) More options/better quality

In the public survey, participants were asked, "What else would you like the people who work on childcare access issues in the Vermillion area to know? Any suggestions for how they can support you?"

"Childcare providers are so underpaid, I wish we could do something to address this. It would be nice to know my child's teacher was being supported financially to get her CDA and be able to raise the quality level for all the children in her care."

- Survey Participant

"Free preschool, free lunches, and free transportation for all kids. Easiest way to break the cycle is to start when they are as young as possible, and I would be happy to pay more in taxes (etc.) to help make that possible."

- Survey Participant

RECOMMENDATIONS

Accessibility

- Address current regulations. The study recommends addressing and clarifying current regulations. Streamlining and clarifying the process for individuals wanting to expand or create a new childcare center to lessen the barriers of miscommunication. Additionally, the city of Vermillion should consider current childcare ratios and safety standards regarding state and federal funding interventions.
- Streamline communication and collaboration. The study recommends a more streamlined approach for families and workers in the childcare industry. Moreover, a communication and collaboration method for childcare area workers and families can assist with finding emergency, drop-in, and/or weekend care and fill vacancies at local childcare centers and at-home care.

Affordability

- Address childcare worker pay and training. The study recommends examining what funding is available to increase childcare worker pay and/or bonuses to retain and recruit individuals to work in the challenging childcare field. Direct subsidies to providers for offsetting wage increases are another possibility. Moreover, it is important to address training and certification shortfalls to address retention and children's needs.
- Address low-income families of diverse backgrounds. An outreach campaign to eligible families who qualify for childcare assistance may lessen the cost of child care for low-income families, including those with household incomes just above current financial aid thresholds.

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