

impact

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Early education summit meets community need for quality child care and education

AT A GLANCE

The community of Salmon came together to identify and meet the needs of early learners and children and families when faced with a child care crisis.

The Situation

Salmon, Idaho's largest day care and preschool center announced it was closing its doors in early 2018. Thirty-five families that utilized the center were affected and began looking for alternative care for their 47 children. Parents began to realize there was a severe lack of child care and preschool in the community. Almost half of all eligible youth in Salmon were not enrolled in preschool. Only one preschool program and one licensed day care was in operation. With 10 percent of Salmon's population age nine and under, it was apparent there was a serious need. Several families were contemplating transferring out of the area where child care was more available. Some families considered parents working less hours or not at all to take care of their children.

Our Response

Concerned parents approached University of Idaho Extension, Lemhi County educator Katie Hoffman to host an early education summit. Hoffman had successfully held summits on hunger and education that had resulted in community action and solutions. The parents had hope the summit would bring people together to address the need, identify solutions and mobilize action. The early education summit was hosted in



The sign and playground of one of the new state licensed day care and preschool programs in Salmon. Photo: Katie Hoffman.

February of 2018. It was well attended by potential providers, state agencies and concerned parents. Major community employers like the local hospital and federal agencies shared information and stayed informed. They were aware of the risks of losing their workforce if parents couldn't find care. Child care and early education were discussed. An asset map of the community was made to identify community resources and gaps. The summit, facilitated by Hoffman, first reviewed the statistics on early education. The group split into smaller groups and had table discussions using prompting questions to have a meaningful conversation on the challenges, the goals and possible solutions to the child care and preschool crisis. The smaller groups each shared, and ideas were condensed down to action items. The participants then prioritized those

action items. A list of the top priority action items were identified and action teams were formed. The action items were 1) a short term solution to the center closing and establishment of new providers, 2) training and licensing for care providers, 3) coalition for providers and 4) a child care directory. Each action item had a sign-up sheet to form an action team with each item as a goal of the team.

Program Outcomes

The first priority action team, a short term solution to the center closing and establishment of new providers, gained traction and a large attendance. Led by Hoffman, the group prioritized goals and set to-do lists to start making changes in the community. The group consisted of concerned parents and potential providers. The group spoke to the Lemhi County commissioners and city council letting them know the needs of families in the community. They formed partnerships with large employers in the community who were also looking to meet the needs of their employees and potential new hires. These partnerships include the federal agencies promoting connecting resources like spouses of seasonal hires to parents needing summer care. The Salmon Early Education Team also began to support new care providers by helping them network with other providers, navigate state licensing and local ordinances, connect with training resources and advertise their services. Since the hosting of the summit and mobilization of the action team, five new licensed day care and/or preschools have opened in the community.

The Future

Since the summit and opening of new centers, the action team has focused on more of the lower priority items. Local providers are joining to host trainings required for state licensing. Frequently the smaller providers did not have enough staff to bring state trainers to the area. Partnering together has given them the numbers they have needed to bring in trainers. The providers stay in communication through an email list and frequently share opportunities and trainings.

A child care directory was created and maintained by Hoffman. It is located electronically on the county website and copies have been provided to the schools, library and current providers. It is updated annually.

Current preschool providers have begun to do economic studies to measure the validity of expanding their services to meet the needs still present in the community. The community currently has four additional preschool providers, but there is still a need for youth coming into kindergarten unprepared. Two of the providers also offer after-school care for older youth. The new center openings have created eleven new jobs in the community. Area providers are contacting University of Idaho Extension to bring in enrichment curriculum like handwashing and nutrition as well.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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