COVID-19

GREAT FALLS CHILDCARE

INTRODUCTION TO SOLUTIONS

This document is an initial resource resulting from a community conversation designed to help meet the acute need of childcare exasperated by the COVID-19 crisis. Contributing partners include Family Connections, Great Falls Public Schools (GFPS), the Cascade City County Health Department (CCHD), and the Montana Department of Health and Human Services (DPHHS).

This consortium is collaborating to support solutions and have contributed information to this basic document as well as resources moving forward. Together we can find solutions to the problems we face—we are stronger together when we lead with empathy and support creative energy to solve problems.

Please reach out to the contacts listed for more information and resources.

The World View The dramatic and rapid change in consumer demand spurred by the response to the global Covid-19 pandemic has greatly affected industries and individual businesses. The grim reality is economic downturns do not spare many businesses from hardship, especially when demand is so heavily and suddenly stifled. However, consumer demand will return, and the economy will recover. Exactly when it will return and what that demand will look like, and, moreover, how it will be changed is a matter of speculation—we are in uncharted waters as a global and local economy.

Unchartered waters provide for peril or opportunity. The chances of opportunity are increased when one is prepared for the journey and can chart the best route to a new or familiar destination. Many businesses that have struggled over the past several months may still be treading water and looking for ways to pivot and generate new revenue opportunities.

Success will be found by businesses that create solutions to consumer facing problems.

The Problem(s) Four basic problems now exist that were not present before: increased parental responsibility for daily childcare; increased isolation for children; decreased childcare options; and decreased workplace productivity for virtual workers.

Parents have found themselves with increased levels of responsibility as the result of closed schools, and children have faced levels of isolation unprecedented in their lives. The changes have resulted in a mental toll on many.

In some cases, those able to work virtually have spent the last three months attempting to work while being a loving and effective parent. Many informal social networks that previously provided childcare have been stressed given the susceptibility of some to COVID-19. Now with workers converting out of virtual work and others returning to the workforce, many parents need childcare for their children. However, this isn't January 2020. We face a new normal.

Meanwhile, social distancing recommendations restrict the capacity of licensed and unlicensed care facilities. Parents want to be assured their children will exit the isolation of home quarantine and enter a safe, healthy care environment. That element of safety has grown to include a decreased chance for disease transmission, particularly COVID-19.

Parents need childcare and they need to be assured their children will be safe.

Call to Action The reality is fewer childcare options exist now due to COVID-19 restrictions, and parents and employers need more childcare options to return to work and/or achieve previous productivity levels. The private sector provides one of the strongest venues to develop solutions that can alleviate the childcare problems facing parents in a short amount of time. Two of the most immediate options for businesses to consider are:

- Businesses that historically serve school aged children create publicly accessible childcare options that are complementary to their existing business;

- Businesses offer childcare options for their employees either through in-house solutions, teaming up with other employers, and/or businesses and organizations that historically serve school aged children.

It is important for one to engage with their banker, accountant, insurance agent, and lawyer (BAIL) team as one looks at a childcare solution. Consulting with the applicable part of your BAIL team can help ensure you have proper insurance coverage, have addressed local jurisdictional zoning and licensing requirements, your human resource policies and hiring practices are sound, and those with a financial interest in your business know you are working hard to generate new revenue, etc. One may find they have specific knowledge related to childcare.

Great Falls Development Authority business coaches, as well as experts with Family Connections in Great Falls are available to work with those wishing to implement a childcare solution.

The City of Great Falls' Planning and Community Development Department should also be engaged with during the due diligence planning to ensure zoning and licensing requirements are met at the jurisdictional level.

The Solution(s) Leading with empathy and understanding the needs and wants of parents will allow one to provide the best possible service. Providing a safe and secure environment for children can take the form of an unlicensed or licensed childcare facility. Existing businesses that have available space and staff and can help parents solve the problem they face with their children may be able to pivot to generate more revenue. A lean and quick approach to ramp-up a childcare solution is for many businesses to start with an unlicensed solution and then work towards licensing as needed. Many parents may be reflecting on the last three months of being a "teacher" and feeling their children need something more than a conventional daycare setting, something that engages their children and maybe helps make up for lost time all while being safe and secure especially from the threat of COVID-19.

Unlicensed Solutions

If you have a building, grounds, existing staff, and are looking to pivot your operations, providing childcare services outside of standardized daycare may be an option. Examples include day camps, weeklong summer camps, education, and recreational opportunities as opposed to a standard daycare. Many families will be okay with an unlicensed solution that provides engaging opportunities for their children in a safe and secure environment; however, unlicensed should not be confused with cutting corners or not doing as much as possible to guarantee the safety and security of children. Conducting background checks on employees and/or hiring cleared staff such as public school teachers, maintaining CPR/First Aid certifications, and following basic vaccination and disease testing protocols should not be overlooked.

Business Pros:

- One can scale-up an unlicensed operation that provides childcare as the result of a larger service in a shorter amount of time than waiting on state licensing.
- Identifying how to use your business resources to provide a service that results in childcare needs being met allows one to pivot without fully redefining their business as a daycare center.
- One-time COVID-19 related grants may be accessed as funds remain available.

Business Cons:

- As an unlicensed facility, lower income parents are unable to receive government support to help offset childcare costs. As a result, the potential customer base is technically decreased. Private donors or sponsors may be needed to provide scholarships.
- Lack of state licensing—even though childcare is a function of a larger service—may be seen by some parents as a negative and the facility will need to assure parents their services will provide an equivalent level of safety and security to their children as a state licensed daycare facility.
- Unlicensed facilities are currently unable to access government support for onsite food services. However, unlicensed facilities can work with Great Falls Public Schools to pre-order and pick-up food for children available through the summer food program.

Licensed Solutions

Traditional childcare services focused on providing daycare as a leading service are generally required to be licensed in the state of Montana. During the COVID-19 crisis, the state of Montana has relaxed the requirements for licensing making it quicker and easier to gain a license.

Business Pros:

- State licensing opens your business to accessing available grant resources made available through the CARES Act and other government resources which pre-date the COVID-19 crises such as onsite food assistance.
- State licensing allows parents to access Montana's Best Beginnings Scholarship to help offset childcare expenses.
- State licensing can offer parents a level of certification many parents feel comfortable with to ensure their children will be in a safe and secure environment.
- A licensed facility can be included in agency and non-profit referral lists to parents in need of childcare opening an extended referral network.

Business Cons:

- State licensing may take more time than desired to meet the immediate acute problems.
- State licensing may not contribute to the overall goals of a business looking to pivot temporarily or simply offer childcare as the result of a larger service if they are already meeting and exceeding state requirements.

The Montana Department of Health and Human Services provides a resource page focused on COVID-19 relief and current childcare needs and resources:
https://dphhs.mt.gov/hcsd/childcare/COVID#:~:text=The%20COVID%2D19%20pandemic%20has,providers%20impacted%20by%20COVID%2D19.&text=Family%20Programs%3A%20%243%2C000%20maximum

For more information about providing licensed or unlicensed childcare services in Great Falls contact Family Connections. Connecting with Family Connections can open a door to education, support, and grant opportunities, as well as an effective and knowledgeable staff ready to help. They also currently have a supply of touchless thermometers available for childcare providers:

Family Connections
202 2nd AVE S Suite 201
Great Falls, MT 59405
406-761-6010
800-696-4503
heatherm@familyconnectionsmt.org
http://familyconnectionsmt.org/

Additionally, the Montana Department of Health and Human Services stands ready to answer questions related to seeking emergency and non-emergency childcare licensing:
Jodi Linne, DPPHS Licensor 453-0526, JLinne@mt.gov
https://dphhs.mt.gov/qad/Licensure/childcarelicensing

COVID-19 SAFETY

Regardless if one chooses an unlicensed or licensed solution to provide childcare to the Great Falls community, ensuring the safety and security of children, employees, and parents is of vital importance. Given the serious public health concerns related to COVID-19, federal, state, and local public health entities have provided guidance for those offering childcare services and general business activities. Their guidance should be considered the *minimum* standards to follow during the new normal. It is important to consistently check available government resources in order to keep abreast of any new or changing recommendations. Beyond potentially contributing to a negative public health outcome, ***choosing to not adhere to public health recommendations opens a business to legal claims of liability from customers, employees, and others (learn more here)***. Businesses should explore whether additional state grant programs could help address meeting public health guidelines, and Family Connections has a supply of touchless thermometers available for childcare providers.

Federal Guidance: https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/

The guidance from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) offers anyone currently engaged in childcare, or looking to provide services, an in-depth set of tools. Written guidance is provided based on the type of childcare being offered (daycares, schools, summer camps, sports activities, etc), as well as whether it is a new service or an existing one. Recorded webinars are available to walk through guidance more interactively, and decision trees are provided to help one understand what is needed.

State: https://covid19.mt.gov/

The state provides a central repository of the Governor's declarations and guidance related to the staged reopening of Montana. Of particular interest is Governor Bullock's Phase Two Reopening Directive and the Phased Reopening Plan.

City/County Guidance: http://www.cchdmt.org/covid19/

The Cascade City County Health Department has issued guidance for businesses operating and reopening. They are an important and vital resource in combating the spread of COVID-19, as well as the competent local authority.

Contacts

A community team working together is available to help answer questions and provide resources from business coaching to childcare best practices during this time of COVID-19. Below are the initial contacts that can help you as you work towards solving Great Falls' childcare needs either by offering a childcare solution or getting involved with the community team supporting solutions.

Great Falls Development Authority:

Jason Nitschke
Vice President and Regional Small Business Center Director
JNitschke@GrowGreatFalls.org
(406) 750-0314

Family Connections:

Heather McCartney-Duty
Outreach and Consumer Education Specialist
heatherm@familyconnectionsmt.org
(406) 761-6010

Additional Tools:

The subsequent pages contain:

-Example Health Promotion Protocols for Childcare Centers

-Example Checklist for Establishing an Emergency Childcare Solution

Health Promotion Protocols for Childcare Centers

Please review the CDC Decision Tree for childcare centers: https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/Childcare-Decision-Tree.pdf

Here is some guidance on general health promotion strategies to help meet CDC recommendations.

General Recommendations:

- Encourage staff to practice every day prevention measures to help reduce the spread of respiratory illnesses:
    - Practice good hand hygiene
    - Cover coughs and sneezes
    - Practice social distancing
    - Frequently disinfect commonly touched hard surfaces.
    - Stay home when they are sick
    - Wear cloth face covering
- If a staff member is home sick they should not return until they meet the CDC criteria for returning to work: https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/if-you-are-sick/steps-when-sick.html

Drop off/Pick Up Procedures:

- It is recommended to have a drop off/pick up location that is outside of the classroom or area where children will be.
- Hand sanitizing station set up with instructions for children to sanitize prior to entering the classroom.
- Health screening form to include documentation of daily temperatures.
- Children with a fever >100.4 or other symptoms of illness should be excluded according to guidance of CDC and/or local health department guidance.
- Consider designating waiting areas to remind families to socially distance themselves while waiting.
- For more information on screenings and procedures visit: https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/guidance-for-childcare.html#pickup

Hand Hygiene

All Children, staff, and volunteers should engage in hand hygiene at the following times:

- Arrival to facility
- After breaks
- Before and after preparing food or drinks*
- Before and after eating or handling food or feeding children*
- Before and after administering or assisting with medication
- Before and after toileting or diapering*
- After coming into contact with bodily fluid*
- After playing outdoors*
- If hands are visibly soiled*

*Hand washing recommended instead of hand sanitizer

Hand washing:

1. Use water and soap
2. Lather and scrub hands for at least 20 seconds
3. Rinse and dry

www.cdc.gov/handwashing

Hand sanitizer: may be used throughout the day. All sanitizers should be at least 60% alcohol.

- Supervise children to help avoid ingestion.
- Use "1 pump" of sanitizer and rub over all surfaces of hands

Food Preparation and Meal Service:

- If a cafeteria or group dining room is typically used, serve meals in classrooms instead. If meals are typically served family-style, plate each child's meal to serve it so that multiple children are not using the same serving utensils.
- Sinks used for food preparation should not be used for any other purposes.
- Caregivers should ensure children wash their hands prior to and after eating.
- Caregivers should wash their hands before preparing food and after helping children to eat.
- Try to avoid children sitting next to one another or across from each other at meal times (social distancing).

Cleaning and Sanitizing Toys:

- Toys that cannot be cleaned and sanitized should not be used.
- Toys that children have placed in their mouths or that are otherwise contaminated by body secretions or excretions should be set aside until they are cleaned by hand by a person wearing gloves.
- Clean with water and detergent, rinse, sanitize with an EPA-registered disinfectant, rinse again and air-dry. You may also clean in a mechanical dishwasher.
- Machine washable cloth toys should be used by one individual at a time or should not be used at all. These toys should be laundered before being used by another child.
- Do not share toys with other groups of infants or toddlers, unless they are washed and sanitized before being moved from one group to another.
- Set aside toys that need to be cleaned. Place in a dish pan with soapy water or put in a separate container marked for "soiled toys." keep dish pan with water out of reach of children. Washing toys with soapy water is a preferred method for cleaning. Try to have enough toys so that the toys can be rotated through cleanings.
- Consider wiping down outdoor play equipment regularly.

Social Distancing Strategies:

- If possible, child care classes should include the same group each day, and the same child care providers should remain with the same group each day. Try to keep siblings in the same room or group.
- Set activities out 6 feet apart.
- When sitting at a table try to avoid sitting children directly next to or across from one another.
- Consider staggering outdoor play times as necessary to avoid large gatherings.

Procedures for confirmed or suspected COVID case within facility

- If a staff member reports possible COVID symptoms and/or is undergoing COVID testing please do the following:
    - If the individual is a staff member ensure that they do not return to work until they have a negative test result confirmed.
    - If a staff member tests positive they may not return to work until the following criteria are met:

    - If a staff member is sick and does NOT get tested for COVID please refer to the return to work criteria: https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/disposition-in-home-patients.html
- If a child or someone in the child's household is undergoing testing the child will be excluded until the test results or negative. If anyone in the household tests positive local health department officials will advise the family on self-isolation.

Please DO NOT notify families or staff of individuals undergoing testing. All individuals have a right to privacy. Whenever a COVID test comes back positive the health department will oversee contacting individuals who may have been exposed. If you have questions please contact the City County Health Department: 406-454-6950.

References:

Center for Disease Control and Prevention. (2020, April 21) *Guidance for Childcare Centers that Remain Open.* Retrieved May 29, 2020 from: https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/guidance-for-childcare.html

Example Child Care Program Checklist

This is still actively coming together. We are working on a procedural document for businesses starting from scratch, but in effort to get you going, here's what we'd recommend you do:

- Review the GFDA White Paper to choose your direction
    - This should include determining whether to become licensed and how to access grants and scholarships.
    - Contact local county, city, or town to evaluate zoning and licensing considerations on both commercial and in-home daycare operations.

- Become familiarized with CDC guidance for youth and summer camps
    - https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/summer-camps.html
    - This website was put together by a task force in Missoula which provides some context as well.

- Identify your headcount capacity for your facility
    - Work with Katie Brewer at Cascade County Health Department on this calculation, if necessary.

- Identify an age range for participants
    - School age kids generally range from 5-12.

- Work on protocols for daily care
    - Great Falls Public Schools has shared the attached Health Promotion Protocols for Childcare Centers they used for their HANDS program.
    - GFPS also shared the attached COVID-19 Childcare Questionnaire for daily drop off.

- Address staffing
    - We are recommending some best practices on this topic to ensure consumer confidence, to include:
        - Background checks
        - CPR/First Aid
        - Immunization history
    - If there is a need, GFPS has offered their background check system.
        - If there is a need to hire, GFPS and Family Connections have also pushed out information to faculty/staff and child care professionals seeking summer work. These folks should have all three of the above.

- Work on programming for daily care
    - It may be best to touch base with Heather McCartney-Duty at Family Connections on this as well.

- Prepare signage and communication strategy for on-site and promotional campaign

- Address timing and pricing for the camps
    - This could be by the week. I know of one camp charging $135 per week.

- Logistics for food (breakfast and/or lunch)
    - Jessa Youngers at GFPS is the contact to participate in their summer food program. Call ahead to order, based on daily headcount and pickup at nearby drop sites 268-6047.
    - See attached 2020 Summer Feeding flyer for pickup sites.

- Marketing
    - This is the mapping survey for summer/afterschool programs and also has resources: http://www.mtafterschoolalliance.org/
    - Family Connections refers to licensed care programs.
    - Utilize existing marketing channels.