

United Way of Southwest Wyoming

Serving Lincoln, Sublette, Sweetwater and Uinta Counties

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UNITED WAY ADDRESSES CHILD CARE SHORTAGE

Sweetwater County---United Way of Southwest Wyoming began a process in January 2008 to identify critical areas of need in Sweetwater County.

Under the direction of Kathy Tacke, Director of Community Impact, four focus groups were formed which comprised a cross section of community members from all disciplines. They were assigned the task of identifying critical issues within the subject areas of families, children, independence and safety. All four groups identified the need for adequate and affordable child care in Sweetwater County as one of their targeted areas of need.

In response, United Way began looking at ways to increase child care options by forming collaborations and partnerships with interested community members and potential business stakeholders.

Expedition Academy, YWCA Daycare, and Young at Heart Senior Center all have or will receive funding from United Way's Ray Lovato Child Care Community Impact Grant to provide additional child care in Sweetwater County.

In 2007 the United Way Board of Directors approved a 50 percent start-up matching grant of \$51,010.00 for the onsite daycare at Expedition Academy in Green River. This year the daycare is open to School District Number Two teachers at market value, allowing the daycare to be self-sustaining. "The daycare would not be open and running this year, if it had not been for the support we received from United Way," said Craig Sorensen, Superintendent of School District Number Two.

In 2006 the YWCA Daycare was granted \$58,717 to expand their daycare building that will make room for 40 additional children.

At the July 2008 Board meeting the United Way Board of Directors approved a \$40,000 Ray Lovato grant request from Young at Heart. This grant will provide Young at Heart the ability to contract with an expert child care management company as they build and open a high quality early learning child care center within their new facility. Scheduled to open spring 2009 the child care center will have over 60 openings. The purpose of the Ray Lovato Grant is to fund and support identified community needs in Sweetwater County. Grant funds may be used for operational and capital expenses directly related to the service delivery of the program.

In addition to these grants local volunteers from the United Way Community Investment Team allocated \$155,934 from the 2007 Annual Campaign to the Sweetwater County Child Development Center Preschool to serve 95 children. This is increased funding over previous years. "Because of the community's generosity the preschool was able to expand and add two more classrooms, one in Rock Springs and one in Green River, serving 40 more children," said Suzanne Zutter Director of United Way of Southwest Wyoming.

United Way is now supporting an additional 195 child care slots in Sweetwater County, but research supports that it is not enough.

An assessment performed by the University of Wyoming Survey and Analysis Center (WYSAC) in 2005 documented that parents want high quality dependable child care; infant care is a priority; and that lack of reliable child care contributes to worker absenteeism and tardiness.

The survey also concluded that an estimated 36 percent of children need child care (respondents either currently used child care or did not currently use child care, but wanted to do so). The survey estimates that by 2008 there will be an additional 342 to 480 more children who need child care in Sweetwater County.

The Wyoming Children's Action Alliance states in their Spring 2008 Policy Brief No. 1 that "The most critical licensed care shortage is for children ranging in age from 1 to 24 months. The shortfall ranges from 82 percent in Sweetwater, the county having the most difficulty meeting the demand for child care, to 50 percent (also critically short) in Albany."

According to the 2006 Child Care Needs Assessment commissioned by the Department of Workforce Services, "For incoming workers with families, child care is increasingly regarded

as an essential service by parents who desire to pursue and maintain full-time jobs. If the availability of child care constrains the potential opportunity to work and earn income, these family households will likely relocate to another community or state where child care is more readily available.”

“In our research we are finding that Sweetwater County is severely struggling to meet child care demands, and to meet parents’ demand for high quality child care,” said Kathy Tacke, Director of Community Impact for United Way.

The 2006 Child Care Needs Assessment also found that, “A majority of Wyoming child care center classrooms are performing very poorly in most of the six dimensions used to assess quality [safety and health, learning environment, scheduling, curriculum, interacting, individualizing].” The study results showed that family child care businesses, which were judged on somewhat different criteria than centers, were generally providing higher quality care than centers; however, 78 percent of family based businesses received a grade of D or F for learning environment.

United Way will continue to explore solutions to the child care shortage, stating that it is evident that programs must be subsidized. Communication has begun with key community partners to create solutions and form collaborations that will ensure the success of new and existing programs.

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