

## **2020 LIAISON REPORT**

### **Story Time Child Care Liaison – Stephanie Spence**

#### **Need for Program**

Story Time Childcare Center's Director Jayne and Assistant Director Mandy were interviewed via telephone due to the COVID-19 pandemic for this program assessment.

Opening in 1991, Story Time Childcare Center (STCC) provides a licensed daycare serving infants through school aged children in rural Story County. STCC operates year round and is the only non-home based licensed daycare provider in the area. Enrollment fluctuates slightly throughout the year due to summer break and school schedules, and particularly due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Traditionally, the total number of children served remains stable, however given the unique nature of a global pandemic, current enrollment is 27 children, down from traditional enrollment numbers of 42 children. STCC Director, Jayne reports that enrollment has been slowing climbing, they currently serve 7 infants, 11 children ages 2-5 and 12 school aged children. The cost for childcare at STCC is on a sliding scale bases with a three level pay structure. Without STCC, many parents in this rural area of Story County would be without access to licensed, safe and affordable childcare.

#### **Program Strengths**

The cost for childcare at STCC is on a sliding scale bases with a three level pay structure. Monthly charges are determined by a formula that accounts for both a family's income and size. In addition to ASSET funding and private pay, STCC accepts DHS childcare funding. The amount of DHS eligible children at STCC affects ASSET funding requests due to DHS eligible children being unable to qualify for ASSET funds. The amount of DHS and ASSET funded children fluctuate thorough the year based on needs of the community. This has been especially true given the unsteady numbers during the pandemic.

STCC has been able to keep a consistent staff of 5 full time employees and 4 part time employees this year. Since STCC is an Iowa State registered childcare center, they are required to follow Iowa code regarding staffing numbers. Jayne reports they have 3 full time staff that work 40 hours per week, 2 full time staff working 30-35 hours per week and 4 part time staff working under 30 hours per week. Jayne states the staff works very well together and they have a team oriented work place that is supportive of all staff members and daycare families.

Inspections through DHS have historically been positive. The center continues to participate in programming through the Heartland AEA including the Positive Behavior Support (PBS) and Iowa Quality Preschool Program Standards. In order to save money, STCC chose to discontinue their subscription to an agency that provided preschool activities and now the staff finds and creates educational crafts on their own.

#### **Program Challenges**

Like many other child care facilities, the primary challenge facing STCC this year has been the COVID-19 pandemic. STCC was mandated closed from March 18, 2020 until May 18, 2020.

STCC applied for and received payroll protection through the CARES Act. While Jayne acknowledges that enrollment is down, she states she is optimistic for the future of STCC. She still recognizes the immense need for safe, reliable and affordable childcare in northeastern Story County.

### **Financial Outlook**

Although there have been funding challenges this year, Jayne reports the finances of STCC are stable. She acknowledges stress related to funding the childcare center, though notes that she knows they are an asset to families in Story County. Jayne states she is hopeful that once Iowa is able to move past the pandemic, she will once again have 2019 numbers in childcare (42 children last year vs 27 children this year).

### **Internal Management Practices**

Director Jayne has run STCC for 25 years, Assistant Director Mandy has been with STCC for 17 years. Jayne reports that STCC staff work well together and they try to create a family atmosphere when employees can rely on one another. This helps retain staff and creates a positive environment for both staff and childcare kids.

### **Agency Suggestions/Comments**

Jayne, STCC Director and Mandy, STCC Assistant Director were interviewed for this report. Both note the ASSET application process can be confusing at times and is time consuming, however both were quick to note they are happy to do what it takes to secure ASSET funding every year.

### **General Assessment**

STCC serves a much needed population in the Story County area. While the COVID-19 pandemic has presented many challenges to this program, Director Jayne acknowledges her role in maintaining a safe and secure environment for all of her daycare children. Jayne notes that while many things are unstable and scary due to COVID-19, STCC strives to maintain normalcy and consistency for all of its children.