



Community Care and Learning Center Town of New Market, Shenandoah County VA

Thank you Yvonne Frazier for sharing your story!

Yvonne is the Healthy Families Program Manager serving Page and Shenandoah counties, and she is Director of the Board for the Community Care and Learning Center in New Market, Virginia.

Tell us about the project and partnership: Opening of a licensed childcare center in an unserved community to provide quality care for two “childcare desert” counties. Initially, nine community members with diverse skills and backgrounds in education, human services, and non-profit work, a subsidized housing property manager, a recent college graduate, the Executive Director of a local nursing home, and a town council member/retired school principal came together as the “center-to-be” board of directors. The Town of New Market became a partner soon after when we asked them to be the fiscal agent for a Virginia Early Childhood Foundation Mixed Delivery Grant application.

How did you identify the need? The need for more accessible, affordable childcare options had been identified by numerous local need assessments. We also knew that every center in the county had a lengthy waiting list, and that none accepted VDSS childcare subsidy.

What solutions did you brainstorm? We asked ourselves, “How can we create *affordable* childcare, pay staff a living wage, and keep the center sustainable, especially given the substantial start-up expenses needed to meet zoning, building, fire, health, and licensing requirements?” All existing centers in the county were religious-exempt centers or for-profit businesses. We realized we would need grant funds and donations to be sustainable and applied to become a 501c3 not-for-profit corporation. To make sure everyone was on the same page, we developed a clear mission and vision-- and let as many people as possible know why and how they could be a part of this exciting program that would benefit families and enhance community and economic development.

Who are your partners? Town of New Market, Shenandoah and Page County Public Schools, Healthy Families (home visiting program), Family Promise (for homeless families), local DSS, University (JMU) students, faculty, and organizations, Blue Ridge Area Food Bank, and Rotary, with many individuals, small businesses, and churches providing in-kind and financial support as well.

What are the actions/steps you followed? Confirm need (waiting lists of local providers). Strategically identify location for new center (not too big, but possible room for expansion). Establish Board of Directors and apply for 501c3 status (could be done before identifying the space). Complete all applications for town conditional use permit, county occupancy permit (requires professional design report outlining renovations needed to meet Building Inspection and Fire Marshall approvals (requires fire alarm system), and Health Department (food service) approval. This took us seven months. Concurrently we were seeking grants, grant partners (build on existing relationships in the community), and other funding/in-kind donations and creating start-up budget and projected operating budget. Word of mouth was most important in finding quality staff and donations; social media and flyers EVERYWHERE brought in children.

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What have the outcomes been so far? We are a fully licensed center accepting VDSS child care subsidy. Parents have been so appreciative, and thanks to grants and donations, nearly all children in care receive some level of tuition assistance. In-kind donations and service projects have exceeded our expectations. Enrollment was slow at first, but really picked up after 6 months, when we lowered the age for acceptance (from 2½ to 24 months) and folks seemed more confident we were here to stay. Just nine months after opening, we signed a lease to double our capacity and add care for infants.

Next Steps? Getting our newly rented space fully approved and licensed by July 2020 when we expect to be serving children 6 weeks through 11 years of age and offering summer “day camps”. We would then like to expand operation hours to include childcare during non-traditional hours (early/late shifts). There is still a real need to gain buy-in from businesses and corporations- whether this is simply giving our flyer to all potential/new employees, offering child care assistance as a “sign on” bonus, or donating supplies/ products/financial support to the center; finding new ways to connect with this segment of the community is critical for sustainability.

Best Piece of Advice? Patience is a virtue; but so is persistence.

Remember, and remind EVERYONE that quality childcare is important for economic development (an important consideration for businesses and families looking to come to an area), as well as children’s school success, parents’ employability, and families’ stability.

It really does “take a village” to open and sustain a childcare center. Donated and surplus items can save lots of money (other’s trash can be a childcare center’s treasure). Let everyone know-via social media, flyers, word of mouth, etc.-what you need, and be creative! Develop and maintain relationships that give back to the community- take children to visit a nursing home and area library, water the plants on Main St., set up at local events. Be part of the neighborhood!

<https://www.communitycarelearningcenter.com/> and on Facebook

Before and After Pictures:

