**Define your Community; Childcare in Farmville, Virginia**

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When taking the time to define the community around you, it is important to take into account the various needs present. To best do this, it is crucial that the evaluator addresses the community’s main concerns to build rapport. By doing this, it will allow for a more interactive needs assessment to be conducted and as a result, better solutions may be proposed. Throughout this paper, the lack of affordable child care will be defined along with the history and future considerations, types of needs being assessed, and assessing the needs from multiple perspectives.

**Who is your Community?**

Farmville, Virginia is a relatively small town with a population of 7,325 people (Farmville, Virginia population, 2022). Due to the history of Farmville and the shutting down of schools, the community values their children and the future generations getting an adequate education. Throughout the community, there are many different needs that must be assessed to improve the livelihood of its members. One issue that needs to be assessed is the affordability and accessibility of child care throughout the town. Roughly 17% of households have children in need of child care. Most of the child care centers in Farmville do not provide transportation for children, so some families may be unable to get their children to and from the centers due to an 8-mile town range. Additionally, there are no identifiable key leaders in Farmville due to underrepresentation which is resulting in minimal advocacy for more affordable and accessible child care. In Farmville, approximately 64% of those utilizing child care are White families, whereas only 27% of families are Black or African American (Farmville demographics, 2020). The average annual price for two children in child care in the area is $11,204, which is approximately one-third of the $33,133 median household income. Furthermore, the average household income is $51,067, which is down 11.7% from the year before. However, child care prices are rising due to financial issues stemming from COVID-19 (Farmville demographics, 2022).

A main issue surrounding child care is the lack of people certified and willing to work in this field. Additionally, after COVID-19, child care centers could not afford to stay open due to the lack of need at the time, but centers have a desperate need for employees now. Currently, there are 11 main child care centers located in Farmville and only 36% of them accept children starting at one month old. Also, 27% of child care accepts children starting at 2 years and the remaining child care starts at 3 years. This presents a problem for parents who are in need of returning to work but are unable to find child care accessible to them. Approximately only 18% of the child care centers in Farmville provide transportation for the children. The median capacity for each child care center is around 65 children, with one center being 10 children only at a time (Farmville Childcare, n.d.).

**Past and Future**

 When defining the problems associated with the lack of childcare in Farmville, VA, it is important to take into account the history of what childcare has looked like in the past in our nation. Many centuries ago, as early as the 1500s, child care took place and was provided by enslaved African women. Nursery schools then opened for children that were of poorer families, but were quickly approached with segregation laws that impacted child care (ChildCare, 2022). In the 1800s, orphanage homes were created and in the 1900s, much more progressive work was done. Job assistance programs encouraged Black and Latina women into domestic labor jobs and “Mother’s Pension” was advocated and pushed for (ChildCare, 2022).

 As time moved forward throughout the 1900s, stakeholders started lobbying to acquire federal monetary support for public day care. Head Start created an eight week summer program, soon to be followed by a nine month program, that provided services for more than 560, 000 children and families in 1965, followed by Early Head Start established to service infants and toddlers (ChildCare, 2022). In the early 2000s up until today, there have been several advancements made for childcare, but there is still room for improvement. There has been more research on children so caretakers know how to best care for children, along with political action conducted through Congress (ChildCare, 2022).

 In terms of modern day child care in the United States, it is very important. All children regardless of their social identity deserve to have affordable and accessible child care, as this can be beneficial to the growth of the child, the family, and its individual members (Hamm et al., 2019). As of 2019, it is said that approximately 15.7 million children ages infant through 12 utilize some form of childcare. It is said that children require less child care when the academic school year starts, but it was found that schools are closed for about 29 days throughout the school year (Hamm et al., 2019). Therefore, this is where the need for affordable and accessible child care programs come into play.

 When considering that women are primarily the childcare providers for children, it is important to discuss the negative implications that this may have on them and their lives. For example, if there is a lack of affordable and accessible child care, many women have to stay home to care for their children which prevents them from bringing in an income. Less of an income can stunt the family from paying bills on time and having basic needs met. Therefore, it is important to be knowledgeable about the historical trends of child care and what we need in the future.

**Types of Needs Being Assessed**

In the NASW Code of Ethics, one of the core principle values is service to vulnerable populations (2022). Children and families who lack access to affordable child care can be considered a vulnerable population because they are being placed at risk for not having their basic needs met. This problem correlates to the needs of economic health, education, a sense of community, and built environment within the child care community. When thinking about what is needed in the future for this community, these four needs must be alleviated to allow for a more cohesive community.

Having a strong economic health will allow parents and caregivers the opportunity to afford child care, and as a result, will allow them to work and maintain jobs. In terms of education for the children at child care facilities, in the future it is important to hold educators and providers accountable for providing the public with information about curriculum and education standards. By doing this, it will allow for a stronger sense of community. A strong sense of community is vital in areas with limited affordable child care because this allows for other community needs to be met. Overall, having a multifaceted built environment will allow for economic health, education, and a sense of community to be enhanced.

**Assessing the Needs from Multiple Perspectives**

There are four different needs in the Multiple Perspectives that are assessed; these needs include the normative need, the perceived need, the expressed need, and the relative need. The normative need, which is the need that experts have defined, was addressed as a lack of affordable and flexible child care for all. The perceived need, which is the need of the people who are experiencing a problem, is needing child care so they are able to go to work and be able to provide for their families. The expressed need, which is seen by those who are actively seeking out services, would be accessible and affordable, or even free, child care due to the fact that they are unable to work without child care, but are unable to afford child care if they are not working; it is a constant, unbreakable continuum. The last Multiple Perspectives need is relative need, which is comparing needs and services from one geographical area to a different area and analyzing the similarities and differences. For this relative need, there could be comparison to other small towns, or even relating it to the free universal preschool program that is being implemented in Multnomah, Oregon studied by King and Dodson (2021) and utilizing it as a model for Farmville, Virginia.

While analyzing this community problem, it is important to acknowledge this is an ongoing issue that families are facing everyday. Struggling to find affordable child care and possibly needing to locate transportation to the child care in the local Farmville, Virginia area is an impossible situation that occurs for most lower income families. The problem will continue to rise and worsen the economy along with influencing family financial poverty unless actions are taken to prevent it. Actions that could possibly prevent the problem are a change in child care policies (current child care centers adjusting their tuition to accommodate for lower income families, or finding a solution so tuition can be eradicated) or the creation of new centers being built in the community that from the beginning accommodate for lower income families, and possibly widening the range to all families, a variety of options for hours to appease students and parents who work non-traditional hours, and providing transportation for children. This idea will decrease the severity of the problem while increasing economic growth; it will allow parents the ability to work, pay bills, afford groceries and other necessities, as well as creating more job opportunities for other individuals to work at the child care facilities.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, after taking the time to review this paper, the reader should be able to better understand the significant problems associated with the lack of affordable child care. It is evident that the lack of affordable child care is a problem nationally, regionally, and locally, and affects many families with varying incomes. By addressing this problem, this can potentially alleviate future concerns with child care and familial needs. Child care has many benefits for the child, parents, and the community, and therefore, should adequately be assessed to make for a more cohesive community.

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