



First Children's Finance

Dream Up! Grant Summary

Viroqua Area Public Schools

Vernon County, WI

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Table of Contents

Strategic Supply Planning	1
Core Team	3
Community Insights	4
Quality Rating and Improvement System Overview	6
Workforce	7
Data Overview	8
Core Team Planning Meeting	9
Goals	10
Project Recommendations	11
References	12

Strategic Supply Planning

The Strategic Child Care Supply Planning Process is a facilitated community planning process designed to engage a Core Team of community leaders to support and expand the child care capacity in their community. First Children’s Finance works with the Core Team to understand the current child care landscape and create goals to address child care needs.

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Background

Viroqua Area Public Schools– Vernon County, WI

The Viroqua Area Public Schools were selected to engage in community consultation regarding the supply of child care, through the Dream Up! Child Care Strategic Supply Planning Process. Funding for this work is provided by a *Preschool Development Grant (PDG)* received by the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families. In this process, a Core Team lead by Sharon Engh, from the Viroqua Area Schools Early Learning Center, participated in a process that included:



- 8 hours of facilitated meetings by First Children’s Finance National Team Staff
- Identification of goals to increase high-quality child-care slots
- Planning support, facilitation, and technical assistance from First Children’s Finance
- A Strategic Child Care Supply Plan that guides Viroqua Area Public School’s Core Team in efforts to increase its supply of high-quality child care.

Community Information

The Viroqua Area Public Schools is based in Vernon County, Wisconsin. Viroqua Area Schools are located in a rural area the Western Region of Wisconsin. They applied for the Dream Up! Strategic Supply Planning Process and were awarded participation with the Fall Dream Up! Strategic Supply Plan Cohort. Each application included a geographic region the Core Team planned to focus on, referred to as ‘the community’. The Viroqua Area Public Schools included the zip codes and corresponding communities listed in Figure 1 as their geographic region and defined community. This geographic region has approximately 15,500 residents and is the focus of this Strategic Supply Plan.

Cities	Zip Codes	Cities	Zip Codes
Viroqua	54665	Esofea	54667
Bud	54665	Westby	54667
Liberty Pole	54665	Newton	53063
Avalanche	54665		

Figure 1: Defined Zip Codes | Community Application Process

Core Team

The following people participated in the Core Team meetings to address the child care supply needs in Viroqua Schools defined community. The primary contact for this project is Core Team Lead, Sharon Engh, Director at Viroqua Area Schools Early Learning Center.

Name	Organization Affiliation
CORE TEAM LEAD: Sharon Engh	Director Viroqua Area Schools Early Learning Center
CORE TEAM :	
Jared Hickey	Child Care Advocate The Parenting Place
Trina Erickson	Library Director Macintosh Memorial Library
Dawn Rumppe	Director Viroqua Daycare
Tom Burkhalter	District Administrator Viroqua Area Schools
Deb Clark	4K Teacher Viroqua Area Schools
Shelly Teadt	Planning Director Couleecap
Chris Clemens	Executive Director Viroqua Chamber Main Street
Michele Engh	Pastor Immanuel Lutheran Church
Sue Noble	Executive Director I, Vernon Economic Development Association
Cari Redington	Administrator Vernon County
Cathy Reed	Student Services Director Viroqua Area Schools
Justin Running	Future Mayor Viroqua Business Owner
Tamara Schultz	Business Owner
Nate Torres	Administrator Viroqua City
Audra Weiser	Education Director The Parenting Place
Katie Winkelman	Cub Scouts Leader Special Ed Paraprofessional Viroqua Area Schools
Tiffin Ivens	Vernon County Birth-3 Coordinator The Parenting Place
David Hartberg	CEO Vernon Memorial Healthcare
Susan Fossum	Director Vernon County Birth-3 Coordinator
Robyn Wolfert	Child and Family Services Manager Head Start Children and Families, Inc.
Kristin Berra	ECE Teacher Viroqua Area Schools

Community Insights

Research by the Core Team was conducted and provided as part of the application process. First Children's Finance provided additional research and statistics regarding child care needs and sustainable child care solutions. During Strategic Supply Plan meetings, this data was reviewed with the Core Team to better understand their community's child care challenges.

Viroqua Area Schools provided demographic data in their initial application that highlighted the community's need for affordable child care solutions.

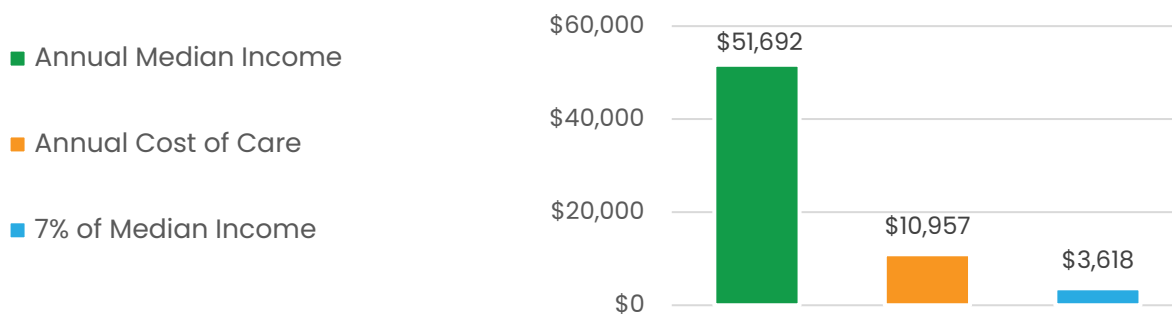
The reported demographics included:

- *There are currently no vacancies for infants (0-12months) at Vernon County centers.*
- *42% of students are considered 'economically disadvantaged'.*
- *There are several families who have been traveling 30 -45 miles out of their work area to access child care.*
- *100% of responding Vernon County centers report staff shortages and waiting lists.*

*Excerpt from Dream Up! Application

Figures 2: Vernon County Annual Cost of Care | PDG Sandbox

Vernon County Annual Cost of Care



During the Strategic Supply Planning process, First Children's Finance shared with the Core Team the data regarding the annual cost of child care in Vernon County. Figure 2 shows that the average annual cost for care in Vernon County is \$10,957 which is 21.2% of the median income. This is over double what is affordable according to the Federal Government, 'affordable' defined as 7% of a family's income but is still under what the true cost of providing high-quality care would amount to yearly. True cost of care is not just what a provider charges a family or receives in the state child care subsidy; true cost is what it costs to provide high-quality early learning experiences, including the value of personnel and non-personnel resources used to manage a program, as well as resources that last for multiple years. In Wisconsin, research conducted has the true cost of care at \$1,800 a month for an infant. Families simply cannot afford the true cost of care, leaving providers required to charge less than what it truly costs to provide high-quality care.

Supply Demand Gap Analysis

As part of the Strategic Supply Planning Process, the Core Team was provided with information to help them understand factors that contribute to child care challenges. First Children’s Finance leveraged different data sources to create an illustrative picture of the demand for child care in the community (see Figure 3). These data sources include U.S. Census Bureau, Wisconsin’s Department of Children and Families Data, and First Children’s Finance research and data.

The Supply Demand Gap Analysis completed by First Children’s Finance for Viroqua Schools dated August 2022, shows a deficit of 237 slots for children birth to 5 living in households where all available parents are in the workforce. As a result, First Children’s Finance found capacity of licensed and regulated full day year-round care in Viroqua School District at only 55 children.

Figure 3: Supply Demand Gap Analysis | First Children’s Finance Analysis

Zip Code	City	Licensed Family Child Care	Licensed Group Child Care Center	Certified Child Care	Expected Child Care Capacity	Expected Number of Children Under Age 5	Expected Child Care Need
54665	Viroqua, Bud, Liberty Pole, Avalanche	1	0	1	9	50	41
54667	Esofea, Westby	2	1	0	46	222	176
53063	Newton	0	0	0	0	20	20
TOTAL		3	1	1	55	292	237



How Is the Need Supported Today?

When there is a gap in the licensed and regulated child care slots available in a community compared to the children potentially needing care in the community, families find unique ways to meet their needs outside of licensed or regulated child care. The following are common ways that parents may fill their need for child care and may be present in Viroqua Area Schools.

Legal Unlicensed (unregistered) Care / Family, Friends, & Neighbors

Friends, family, and neighbors may provide care for up to three (3) children without a license; however, under Wisconsin law, no person may provide care and supervision for four (4) or more children under the age of seven (7) for less than 24 hours a day. Care for four (4) or more children under the age of seven (7) would require a provider to obtain a license to operate a child care center from Wisconsin's Department of Children and Families.

Illegal Unlicensed/Unregistered Care

Child care is provided in a setting that requires licensing or regulation, but the provider has chosen to provide care without the proper license or following regulatory guidelines.

Under-Employment / Shift Alignment

Parents may work split shifts, work part-time, or limit their work hours to stay home with their children. There may be children in the community whose parents have left the workforce and are not looking for employment because of child care challenges. These families are not included in the data in this report, but parents may enter the workforce if viable child care options were available.

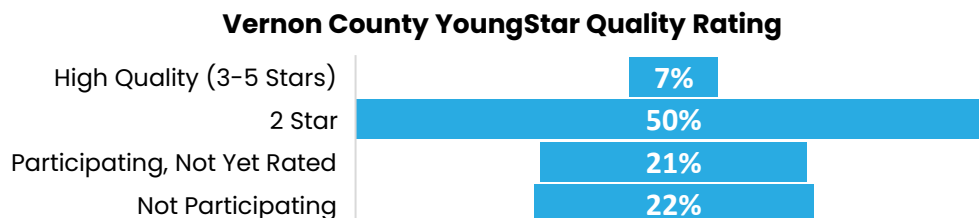
Out of Area Care

Parents with children in the region studied may take their child to care outside of this report's area. This may be due to parents' work location, access to care, or other reasons.

Quality Rating and Improvement System Overview

First Children's Finance examined state-wide information about the number of child care programs that are participating in the YoungStar Program (see Figure 4). YoungStar is Wisconsin's child care Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) that identifies programs that go above and beyond the general licensing requirements to obtain higher quality in their child care program.

Figure 4: Vernon County YoungStar Rating | PDG Sandbox



Workforce

Child Care Workforce

First Children’s Finance examined the child care workforce in Wisconsin. Many individuals in the workforce have formal educational backgrounds and more than a decade of experience. However, more than half of early childhood educators rely on some form of public assistance and do not receive benefits. The Institute for Research on Poverty at the University of Wisconsin–Madison reported a 40% turnover rate in the Early Childhood Education field. Figure 5 shows data collected for the Western Region of Wisconsin and shows 19% of the workforce anticipates leaving the field within the next two years. The cost of care is high for families, and the cost of delivery is high for providers. Often, the impact is reflected in child care worker wages. The First Five Years Fund researched the average compensation rate for child care workers and found in Wisconsin; the average hourly rate is \$10.66. The annual salary of \$22,170.00 is below the poverty line for a working family.



Early Education Workforce Survey

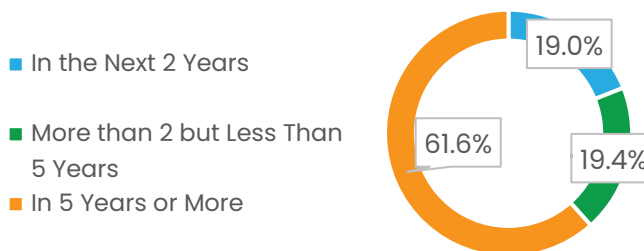


Figure 5: Survey of Center-Based Teachers | Institute for Research and Poverty

Primary Industries

Additionally, First Children’s Finance examined the top industries in Vernon County using available census data. The top industries (see Figure 6) can impact child care needs based on when shift workers are needed, as well as beginning and end time of employee shifts. In Vernon County two of the top industries are manufacturing and retail trade. Often, these industries call for second and third shift employees. Without sustainable child care options during these shifts, hiring new employees and retaining current employees in fields such as manufacturing can quickly become a challenge.

During Strategic Supply Plan meetings with First Children’s Finance, the Core Team was asked to brainstorm ways to address the need of child care for all types of working families within their community.

1. Educational Services, Health Care and Social Assistance

2. Manufacturing

3. Retail Trade

Figure 6: Top Industries in Vernon | U.S. CENSUS 2021

Data Overview

1 Certified Family Child Care programs (*DCF Licensing Information)	3 Licensed Family Child Care programs (*DCF Licensing Information)
1 Licensed Group Child Care programs (*DCF Licensing Information)	7% of providers have a 3–5 Star Rating (DCF Sandbox Data)
91% of zip codes are considered child care deserts (DCF Sandbox Data)	292 children under 5 with all parents in the workforce (*ACS 5 Year Estimates)
55 *current expected child care capacity (*FCF Calculation May 2022)	237 birth to age 5 slots needed (*FCF Calculation)
\$913 average monthly cost of care (DCF Sandbox Data)	15,572 Viroqua Area Schools defined zip code population

Core Team Planning Meeting

Throughout the winter of 2023, the Core Team, a group of community stakeholders interested in the supply and sustainability of child care met to discuss the child care shortage in Viroqua School District, and to develop strategies to increase the number of high-quality child care slots. Below are the primary topics addressed in the conversations and the goals developed to address the child care shortage.

Workforce

Access to Care

Community Awareness

After discussing these core topics, the focus was placed on primary areas of need, where current resources should be directed, and where additional resources are needed. The Core Team created the following goals to support the child care needs in the community.



Goals



SMART Goal:

By August 2023, a system will be created to offer child care providers and staff compensation for furthering their education, completing professional development training and fulfilling requirements to become a high-qualified child care worker.

Project Team Members: Audra Wieser, Sharon Engh, Cacia Tippie, Trina Erickson, Michelle Engh, Dawn Rumppe

Objective of the Goal: By offering these services to new and existing individuals in the workforce, Vernon County will increase the awareness of the importance of a high-quality child care workforce throughout the community.



SMART Goal:

In the Summer of 2023, a 'mini-library' will be opened to child care providers and parents; this service will provide resources, learning toys, curriculum, incentives and books to help child care providers sustain their child care centers and to help parents support the learning environment within their homes.

Project Team Members: Sharon Engh, Tom Burkhalter, Mary Mulvany-Kemp, Nat Torres, Beth Vold, Cathy Reed

Objective of the Goal: By creating this system, parents and child care workers will have a wealth of resources to use every day; this will provide a high-quality and positive learning environment, as well as help with the retention of child care workers within the industry. Having this resource at no cost will help the sustainability of smaller centers, as well as provide the educational benefit of allowing children the ability to read at home.



SMART Goal:

In the next six months, the Early Learning Center will purchase resources to create a positive environment for staff, children and families. Resources include supplies and equipment for classrooms and the outdoor playground area, room furnishings for completion of a large motor room and resources for staff meetings.

Project Team Members: Sharon Engh, Tom Burkhalter, Mary Mulvany-Kemp, Nat Torres, Beth Vold, Cathy Reed

Objective of the Goal: By creating this high-quality environment, the community will have a safe and educational environment for children and families, as well as increasing the retention of child care workers by immersing them in an environment of available resources.

Project Recommendations

The Viroqua Area School District in Wisconsin is passionate about their children and has a group of committed individuals that are invested in the child care landscape of their community. First Children's Finance recommends that the Core Team engage in the following activities:

1

Always run financials before committing to a project – look for a broad base of community support.

As new and expansion child care projects are discussed to support the child care needs of the community, run financials and feasibility reports specific to child care programming. Having an accurate understanding of enrollment needs, staffing requirements and tuition rates is needed to create sustainability in the current child care climate.

2

Continue to engage the community in this project.

Develop an outreach strategy to educate the community on how to support quality child care programs. Access to quality child care programming impacts not only the children and families needing care, but the workforce and local economy. Investing in child care programs builds school readiness in children, provides parents the opportunity to join the workforce and helps local businesses retain staff to keep their doors open.

3

Continue to involve existing providers – they are part of the solution.

Ongoing support for all types of existing child care is vital to their sustainability. Efforts should be made to ensure current child care providers continue to feel supported and have access to resources they need to stay in the field. The resources available through the 'mini-library' are a great start; networking and surveying providers to better understand their needs will help to build this library to an amazing community asset. The feedback gathered about the needs and wants of providers can also be used to support and attract members of the community who may be interested in opening a child care, so everyone in the field feels valued and the supply of child care is increased.

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