

AGENDA

Norwich Childcare Committee

October 4, 2021 8 to 9:30 p.m.

Meet in person in the downstairs conference room at Tracy Hall, Norwich VT For people who are unable to join in person, use the link below to join by Zoom

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86296036972>

877 853 5257 US Toll-free Meeting ID: 862 9603 6972

If any problems, contact Mary Layton at: 802-738-2033

1. Approval of Agenda
2. Review draft minutes for September, amend if needed, approve
3. Public comments
4. Accept correspondence
 - Communication from Doug Wilberding and correspondence, below. See also this link to the resource guide USDA released:
https://www.rd.usda.gov/sites/default/files/rd_hhs-acf_jointchildcareresourceguide.pdf
 - Also, From Sara Kobylenski: Report on a Nebraska community that set up infant and toddler care through their school:
<https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/parents-in-shickley-nebraska-desperately-needed-child-care-public-schools-stepped-up>
5. Conversation with Taryn Morrissey of American University to discuss employer sponsored care, contracting, how contracts can be used to ensure access, manage supply, improve wages, etc...
6. Update on Teacher Perspective (Rosenfeld)
7. [Act 11 PreK Study Report](#) shared with the legislature in 2019:
<https://education.vermont.gov/sites/aoe/files/documents/edu-legislative-report-act-11-pre-k-evaluation-final-report.pdf>
8. Update on Recreation program efforts to support families/provide care (Loeb)
9. Update on Burlington and use of contracting to expand access to childcare (Layton)
10. Update on Norwich Public Library/Lucinda Walker and young patrons (See item 10, attached)
11. Update on RNESU/ARK childcare partnership to serve 0-5 year olds (See item 11, attached)
12. Review steps and actions to finalize a report for the select board (See item 12, attached)
13. Plan next agenda
14. Adjourn

Norwich Childcare Committee
Draft Minutes
September 9, 2021

Persons present: Rebecca Holcombe, Neil Odell, Mary Layton at Tracy Hall, Brian Loeb, Jamie Rosenfeld, Linda Cook via Zoom teleconference.

1. The Committee decided by consensus to approve the agenda.
2. Odell moved to approve the revised July 12, 2021 minutes second by Loeb, Vote: Unanimous yes. Odell moved to approve the August 2, 2021 minutes as written, second by Layton, Vote: Unanimous yes.
3. Public Comments: there were none.
4. Correspondence: Two articles of correspondence were accepted by consensus. One from Doug Wilberding included a link to a report of the Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC), an outgrowth of the Ford Foundation, which links public and nonprofit entities to build capacity for childcare facilities. The second piece of correspondence listed on the agenda was a “one pager for MCS/parents on part time options with capacity.” In preparing the minutes I could not locate this document, so perhaps the CCC needs to accept it at our next meeting in October.
5. Conversation with Sara Kobylenski:

Information from the Couch Foundation website regarding Sara Kobylenski:

communityslk@gmail.com

“Sara Kobylenski is a strategic consultant to the Couch Family Foundation, supporting efforts to foster greater cross-sector collaboration and coordination among community based organizations working with children and families in the Upper Valley of New Hampshire and Vermont.

Prior to working with the Foundation, Sara served as executive director of the Upper Valley Haven for almost 10 years. Sara went to the Haven from her 4 year role as a field services director for the Vermont Agency of Human Services. Before that she served for 20 years as the Vermont division director for Casey Family Services and 15 years as a supervisor and direct practice social worker with other child and family services organizations. Over the years Sara has worked in numerous collaborative initiatives for improved community outcomes.

Sara earned her BA from Simmons College, MSW from the University of Pennsylvania and certificate in leadership from the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard. “

Sara has reviewed the Childcare Committee’s interim report to the Norwich Selectboard and is aware of outreach by Selectboard Chair Roger Arnold at the Vital Communities Municipal Leader’s group regarding improving access to childcare in Norwich. She commended Norwich for the research and outreach that has been done so far and noted that the results of the parent and provider surveys are consistent with the situation in the Upper Valley region that includes

Windsor, Orange, Grafton, and Sullivan counties. She shared that the Vital Communities Corporate Council considers the lack of childcare to be a critical threat to economic growth in the Upper Valley, along with housing and transportation. They will convene a two part symposium on this topic in October/November. Private Philanthropy is expected to be discussed as part of proposed actions.

Sara talked about the Early Care and Education Association, which provides support and representation to early childhood educators. They found that there exist in the Upper Valley 500 existing slots in childcare centers that are unable to be offered because of staffing shortages. Sara said, "They are deeply handicapped by the pay scale. Benefits are not offered." In addition it is difficult to find people willing to consider this career path. An "apprentice program" has been devised to bring potential students into classrooms so that they can decide if they would enjoy this type of work. They work with a coach who then connects prospects with appropriate college programs.

Sara mentioned the business model for early childhood education in which the expensive, intensive, individual care needed for infants has often been "subsidized" by the less expensive and more group oriented care for toddlers and pre-school students. Programs that strictly cater to preschool children but do not offer care for infants are changing the funding landscape for the industry, and forcing many home care providers out of business. The use of vouchers issued to families, funded by the State of Vermont, also affects the economic viability of the industry in that it creates volatility. Economic stability and a guarantee that programs provide the same standard of care could be better established via a grants and contracting model. In this system childcare centers are awarded grants and contracts in order to create "slots," then advertise to families as to availability. The current statutes support the voucher system rather than the grants and contracting system.

Discussion by the Committee focused on what actions might be recommended to the Select Board in the final report in light of information that has come up through research and outreach. In part this could take the form of advocacy, towards the state legislature, other advocates, local organizations such as the Vital Communities Corporate Council, etc. Odell cautioned that childcare supply and demand is a complex subject and we should be careful and thorough in our recommendations.

At this point in the meeting we decided there was not time for agenda items 6-10. The committee decided by consensus that brief written updates would be submitted for the next meeting that summarized research or actions taken:

6. Legislative update on weighting study and implications for Norwich (Odell).
7. Update on conversation with Vital Communities (Loeb).
8. Update from Brie Swenson on Recreation opportunities and limits for childcare (Loeb).
9. Update on Burlington and use of contracting to expand access to childcare (Layton)
10. Update on conversation with Norwich Public Library/Lucinda Walker on attendance by young patrons (Holcombe).

Next Action Steps:

1. Invite Taryn Morrissey of American University to discuss contracting and employer sponsored care. We will develop questions to ask her.
2. Draft a memo of measures the Selectboard could recommend to legislators.
3. Add to research the Teacher Perspective (Rosenfeld).
4. Research equity and accessibility via state documents/teacher data (Holcombe).

Layton moved to adjourn, second by Odell, vote: unanimous yes.

Childcare in rural communities. USDA and LISC

Douglas Wilberding <wilberding@me.com>

Tue, Sep 21, 2021 at 7:57 AM

To: Rebecca Holcombe <Rebecca.Holcombe@gmail.com>, Brian Loeb <loebbrian@gmail.com>, Mary Layton <marydlayton@gmail.com>

Please print and note this in your next packet. If someone could attend or connect with Nicole at LISC I think you'll find the information helpful to your committee

Doug



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Interview for TON CC committee with Lucinda Walker, Norwich Public Library.

Key takeaway for TON committee work:

As the library pivots post pandemic, they hope to pivot to being a more intentional space for young people. Walker said: “ We used to ask how to be a library and have 50 kids come in after school. Now we embrace that 50 people want to come, and are thinking about how to say “come on in, we have programs for you.” To this end: the Library is working with Brie Swenson of the Rec program to figure out how to use the community room better as a space for more intentional care. The after school program has booked the community room for an afterschool safe place, and will provide staffing to make sure it is safe, accessible and inviting.

Interview notes:

The Norwich Library is still taking precautions related to covid that limit its current capacity, but the pandemic has motivated thinking about how the library can be a space for families and children post pandemic.

Prior to the pandemic, many young people came to the library to stay until it was time for them to go home, but this was unplanned, and not staffed, so it was always a bit of a challenge.

During the pandemic, the library has been able to welcome people back in, but still has to encourage them to not stay.

As the library pivots post pandemic, they hope to pivot to being a more intentional space for young people. Walker said: “ We used to ask how to be a library and have 50 kids come in after school. Now we embrace that 50 people want to come, and are thinking about how to say “come on in, we have programs for you.”

This school year, the library hopes to be open more hours, but it is still not in a place to have folk come and stay-- the capacity isn't there during the pandemic.

The Library is working with Brie Swenson of the Rec program to figure out how to use the community room better as a space for more intentional care. The after school program has booked the community room for an afterschool safe place, and will provide staffing to make sure it is safe, accessible and inviting.

In addition, she is seeing a change in what parents expect. For example, last week a bunch of parents, separately, came in and tried to sign up for the library's “tutoring program”, but that program doesn't actually exist. Walker wonders whether some of the new families are not finding the breadth and depth of offerings they may be accustomed to in prior locations.

What people are asking for is not out of the ordinary, nor unreasonable, but it's just that the Upper Valley hasn't provided that in the past.

Part of this is new families, often remote workers, and have not made inroads into the community, and maybe don't have the information families might have after being here a while.

Part of the need might be also how work is changing-- more families need to have both parents work.

Possible suggestions: The library has been trying/thinking about how to work more cooperatively with other entities-- e.g. rec department, or with family place to share resources in ways that create support and opportunities for families.

There may be an opportunity to work to create partnerships regionally to create safe, affordable, and attractive options for families.

TON CCC_Update : Example of school district: child care partnership (contractual relationship)

The Rutland Northeast Supervisory Union has been working with community providers to find ways to stabilize and ensure access to child care for 0-5 year olds in the community.

The RNESU relocated students across existing facilities, to free a small school building for a 0-5 child care program. By targeting a 0-5 program, the partnership protects access for 0-3 children, while providing PK for 3-5 year olds.

The school district lets a private child care center use the school building year round, with no rent or utilities cost. In other words, the municipality donates the use and maintenance of the facility, which substantially reduces the cost of operation for the child care. RNESU then pushes in a teacher for the 10 hours of preK right in the building, so parents can have a seamless child care and preK experience without disruption to their work day. Having the school district push in PK to the provider ensures access to a qualified PK teacher, which is a condition of having access to the PK subsidy. (Note: this arrangement also protects the 0-5 care provider from losing 3-5 year olds to PK only providers, which would undercut their business model.)

Importantly, the arrangement allowed the child care providers to dramatically expand the number of children they were able to serve.

Access to the facility at no cost allowed the child care provider to raise pay, expand supply and keep tuition for care lower. Providing support in the form of a building, as opposed to individual subsidies, targeted the municipal support in a way that protected access for 0-3 year olds, expanded supply and strengthened the provider. Hopefully, higher pay reduces staff turnover, and lower tuition makes the program more accessible to working families.

Related news article:

<https://vtdigger.org/2019/05/12/school-enrollment-declines-empty-classrooms-used-daycare/>

DRAFT DRAFT DRAFT

--Tentative/preliminary description of the problem, pulled from previous reports, conversations with the providers, and the conversation with Sara Kobylenski.

--Initial punchlist of decision criteria/recommendations

The economy of the industry:

1. Costs of care are high across the region, and highest for the youngest children.
2. The business model problem or challenge for care provision is the same across both nonprofit and for profit providers
3. Historically, providers have balanced the high cost of care for young children (aged 0-3) by enrolling older children (3-5). The smaller ratios needed for young children incentivize creating relatively more slots for more lucrative older (aged 3-5) children. Thus, successful solutions need to be mindful of the whole age span, not just the 3-5 year olds.
4. Providers are stuck between the already-high cost of care and the need to raise wages.

Capacity issues:

1. Lack of staff is closing existing slots, and precludes opening of new slots. This was true in several of the providers with whom we spoke.
2. Low wages contribute to the lack of slots. Even if people have the credentials, they can't afford to stay in the job, and they burn out if not supported, no matter how good they are.

Business implications:

1. $\frac{3}{4}$ of Norwich respondents reported having to reduce work hours or leave a job to provide child care at home, because they couldn't find a slot. That represents a reduction in the workforce.
2. Lack of paid leave, especially during covid, has forced some EC teachers to leave the workforce, and some parents to leave the workforce.

Equity:

1. Economically disadvantaged children are not evenly distributed across programs, suggesting that many children are not in economically diverse settings (range from 100% children on subsidy to 0% children on subsidy)

Choice:

1. $\frac{3}{4}$ of Norwich respondents reported having to reduce work hours or leave a job to provide child care at home, because they couldn't find a slot.
2. People are trying to find slots. Access and affordability are the main drivers for families, not choice, given the lack of supply.

Management of supply:

1. Regionally, there is high demand and low supply of full time child care, with the most acute shortage being infant care.
2. The state does not target subsidies in ways that might protect provision of care for 0-3 year olds, or manage supply to ensure access.
3. Municipally, by subsidizing a local provider to provide after school care in Norwich, the municipality is “contracting” in a way that expands the supply of after school care in town.
4. The Rec Program, by partnering with the library, is targeting care and leveraging town assets to expand the supply of care for after school needs.

Perceived risks in VT’s current proposed policy direction in VT:

1. There is a difference between a policy strategy of subsidizing access, versus a policy strategy of taking public ownership of access to child care, whether subsidized or not. To quote Sara Kobylenski, “By using a subsidy and voucher structure, we are still working on an assumption that access is a ‘roll your own’ kind of deal to have the child care.”
2. Subsidy and voucher based systems frame access as the responsibility of families, not the municipality. In these systems, different families have different levels of access. Parents can apply the subsidy if they can find a slot and can afford it (e.g. afford the balance of the tuition.)
3. The current VT policy emphasis on subsidies and vouchers doesn’t provide universal programs or ensure access to established and reliable programs, especially for infants and toddlers.
4. The committee's work to date suggests that market rates are rising faster than inflation, but the number of slots is dropping. There is some concern that adding partial subsidies in a market in which there is a persistent and acute shortage of supply may simply drive up rates, without expanding access.
5. In contrast, in a model based on municipal provision, the municipal entity is responsible for ensuring supply and providing access. By way of example: Kobylenski pointed back to the report, which noted the wait list for the MCS program is bigger than the number of slots it can provide. If PK were a publicly provided program, MCS would expand slots or contract for slots to provide access to those families currently on its waitlist.
6. In addition, VT’s current strategy of paying for education and credentialing of providers is worthy. However, if these providers are not paid a viable wage, reducing their cost of entry won’t keep them in the positions.

Bucket list of general considerations for the committee to consider presenting to the select board:

1. Recommend that the legislature figure out how to support paid leave: providers recommended it, so that families can stay home with sick children, families asked for it,

and access to it could significantly reduce the cost of infant care for families. The committee noted that with care of infants costing up to \$25k per year, paid leave would be a significant benefit to young families.

2. Use contracting, rather than vouchers or portable subsidies, for any municipal support of child care. Do this to manage supply and relationships with providers in ways that make slots available, at the age levels and for the families that need it, in ways that guarantee supply (e.g. not hypothetical access, as Kobylenski explained). Contracts also ensure stable and predictable revenues to providers, which makes it easier for providers to plan and support staff.
3. Explore how to better use or leverage existing town assets to expand safe affordable care (e.g. through the rec and library programs and existing partnerships with providers).