

Childcare within a CCRC – Improving staff and resident quality of life

This project serves to review the feasibility of creating a daycare or early education center at Mennonite Village to provide relief to employees and offer intergenerational interaction and learning opportunities for residents.

1. With a sprawling CCRC campus, Mennonite Village has a large resident and employee population. A common staffing issue faced in all areas of Mennonite Village relates to employee child care availability. This project looked at options for offering a childcare component for staff to benefit from while also providing opportunities for residents to interact with young children during activities. This endeavor could improve employee attention, retention and satisfaction while also improving resident quality of life. I was motivated to start this project after facing my own challenges with locating a trustworthy and affordable daycare for my young child.
2. The one tangible benefit that has come from this project is that a relationship has been formed with the Good Shepherd Lutheran Preschool and Childcare center in Albany, Oregon. There has been one scheduled activity where a group of Assisted Living residents spent time at the Preschool, interacting with children and playing games, which was highly successful for both the children and seniors. An intangible benefit has been that a discussion about adding childcare has begun, though this organization is slow to consider new projects or implement them. I learned in starting this project that the concept of adding childcare has been introduced a number of times over many years.
3. To work on this project I involved the Chief Operating Officer of Mennonite Village, Donna BreMiller, who is very supportive of a childcare center. I also communicated with other retirement communities in Oregon and Washington who offer daycare to discuss what works for them, rates, etc, as well as a local daycare center. I involved the Licensing Specialist from the State of Oregon Office of Childcare who oversees the Albany area to discuss logistics of creating and staffing a childcare center. From her I received via mail a packet of Rules for Certified Child Care Centers.
4. I communicated with stakeholders by phone primarily. I did have an in-person discussion with the Director of the Good Shepherd Lutheran Preschool and Child Care. I also met in-person with Donna BreMiller.
5. The primary challenge of this project was and will be obtaining support at the highest level of Mennonite Village. When I selected this topic for my project, my direct supervisor informed me that he would need to ask the CEO if this was an acceptable project before I could begin and I had to wait for the green light. Other challenges involve financial structure of a childcare center, determining how to add a childcare center to the organizational structure of a retirement community, creating or renovating an existing space to utilize, and ensuring there will be staff who can afford to enroll their children in an institutional daycare setting, as the cost would amount to a significant portion of direct care staff pay. Another challenge would be determining the age range of children that this center would serve. Staffing ratios vary based on the age of the children in care and available space for a childcare center would dictate the number of children that could be served.
6. To date I have not discovered how to overcome most of these challenges. As listed in responses 2 and 5, there is little support from the top Administration of Mennonite Village for new projects and decision-making is slow. This is an organizational challenge beyond my project. Donna BreMiller expressed her passion for childcare options for staff and is very interested in the idea.

An option to overcome the challenge of financial support relates to having another entity actually run the daycare/preschool center in a dedicated space that is provided by Mennonite Village. If a space could be retrofitted to meet State guidelines for a childcare space then a director could be hired to oversee a center at Mennonite Village. I spoke with the Director of Good Shepherd Lutheran Preschool and Child Care and she felt that her Board of Directors would support her overseeing and staffing a childcare site at Mennonite Village. Her current center is very successful and typically has a wait list.

As for overcoming the challenge of space, there are existing active living homes near the current Health Center that could be renovated once vacated. This same idea has been used previously to create the current Adult Foster Home at Mennonite Village. Another option would be to plan for the building of a new childcare center as part of the Mennonite Village expansion that is planned for the future.

The challenge of affordability could be addressed with the Foundation and/or Administration. Perhaps scholarships could be made available through the Foundation or a discount given to employees. This itself creates a new challenge, as a number of non-staff member families would be needed to pay the full rate to offset a discount. There is also an option to receive DHS payments for childcare though that would result in a reduced rate being accepted for children who qualify.

Discovering which age range would best be served could be accomplished by a survey of staff. This survey could also determine employee interest and cost threshold.

7. I was surprised to learn that the Director of Good Shepherd Lutheran would be interested in overseeing a satellite daycare center at Mennonite Village. She was very enthusiastic about the prospect. I was also surprised to learn that Donna BreMiller heavily supports the idea of a childcare center and she encouraged me to continue the pursuit by writing up a formal plan to present to her and the CEO. I was also surprised and discouraged to learn more about the costs of institutional daycare centers, as I believe it would be cost prohibitive for the staff population that would be intended to be served.
8. Leadership behaviors:
 - a. Searches outside the formal boundaries of his/her organization for innovative ways to improve what we do.
 - b. Appeals to others to share an exciting dream of the future
 - c. Develops cooperative relationships among the people he/she works with
9. I have worked to step out of my comfort zone to interact with more peers and persons outside of my organization. This program has helped me to open up to networking opportunities in order to learn from my peers and discuss challenges that we are all encountering. With that, I have also felt more confident approaching outside entities, like the local daycare center, in order to work toward a common goal. I feel that I have been working on listening more to my fellow co-workers to understand their perspective. I have been broadening my horizons to take into consideration what other organizations are doing to retain employees and appeal to residents.
10. To continue leadership development I plan to watch the leaders around me more carefully to discern the skills that I find to be most successful and admirable. I also plan to involve myself in continuing education opportunities surrounding leadership and learning from my peers. Involvement in educational conferences where I can interact with leaders in this industry and I can work on improving my networking skills will also serve me well. I hope to find a stronger voice within myself to utilize within my organization to possibly effect change or at least inspire discussion.