

# Child care: Finding qualified staff is one of the main challenges

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Kids, the in-home child care Hunter's been running out of her Lewis and Clark home since 1997.

"Do you want to be a child care provider or a babysitter? Because there's a difference," Hunter said.

As a registered home-based provider with two-year licenses from the state, she is inspected yearly by the Office of Child Care. As another part of her licensing, Hunter said she goes through regular training about child abuse, neglect, food handling, first aid, CPR and other subjects related to her profession.

To further improve her program, Hunter participates in the new Quality Rating and Improvement System (<http://bit.ly/1DiJYVc>), a child care improvement program rolled out in Oregon in 2013 that Mestrich recommends for all providers. The program offers providers like Hunter financial incentives to improve their operations, curriculum and staff training. Several providers in Astoria, Seaside and Jewell are rated as Committed to Quality, the introductory level of the program, which provides a search engine on its website of rated providers.

"Right now, it would be a very good decision," she said of someone else opening a child care center. "Your startup isn't that significant."

Other than during the financial crash of 2008, Hunter said she's always had plenty of demand for child care and a profitable operation, with about nine families on her waiting list.

## Preschools

New and existing preschool providers lined the walls of Warrenton Grade School's cafeteria Saturday, pitching their programs to local parents.

Since Coryell's Crossing closed late last year, Mestrich said several new operations have opened up, taking infants, preschoolers and children visiting after school. Many are run



EDWARD STRATTON — The Daily Astorian  
Adrienne Hunter, who operates Simply Kids child care center out of her home, said she had to make several basic modifications, including, clockwise from top left, a sign-in sheet for arriving and departing kids, covering fluorescent lights, childproofing outlets, erecting fences around a small pond, keeping first aid kits and making a bathroom accessible to children.



JOSHUA BESSEX — The Daily Astorian  
Leah Cox, a teacher at Soar With Us, leads students in a game of letter-recognition bingo. Cox, who has a masters in elementary education, has been with Soar With Us since its beginning.



EDWARD STRATTON — The Daily Astorian  
Adrienne Hunter converted her basement into a child care center and preschool, called Simply Kids, which she's been operating since 1997.

## Become a child care provider

Family Care Connection, the Child Care Resource and Referral program in Clatsop County, is looking for new child care providers in the county to increase resources in our communities, and help meet the needs for parents who need child care in order to go to work.

Tara Mestrich is the Child Care Resource and Referral coordinator and quality rating and improvement specialist for Clatsop and Tillamook counties.

"I have noticed that the number of referral calls have increased significantly in the last several months," Mestrich said. "I receive calls from frustrated parents who tell me they are unable to find child care that meets their needs, or they tell me that the child care programs don't have any openings."

"There is also a new surge of pregnant mothers calling with concerns about finding suitable child care once their baby is born and they need to go back to work."

There is a lack of infant care, weekend care and extended-hour care for working parents.

Family Care Connection can help set up a child care business for anyone who loves children and has the necessary skills to nurture and care for them. The program helps child care providers through the licensing process, offers required and ongoing early childhood education and training and helps build a business by including its information in referrals to parents who are looking for care. The program also works with providers who are license-exempt and providing care for friends and family.

Family Care Connection is part of OSU Extension Service in Clatsop, Lincoln and Tillamook counties. The program offers referrals only and does not provide recommendations. Parents are given consumer education materials and consultations on the steps to take to make informed decisions about finding care for their children. For more information about the program, or about becoming a child care provider, call Mestrich at 503-325-1220 or 277-333-4960. Visit the program's website at <http://bit.ly/1OewQn1>

by former in-home providers expanding, from Kelsy Fausett's Sea of Dreams Childcare in the Gateway district of Astoria to Tami Williams' Mrs. Tami's Daycare & Preschool in a former truck garage in Seaside

that she and her husband retrofitted.

Becka Blacksten, owner of Soar With Us in downtown Astoria, was one of the first to set up a preschool center in Warrenton after the announce-

ment from Coryell's. Late last month, she moved into a former title company building in downtown Astoria and started accepting infants to school-age children. Her 4-year-old daughter also attends her preschool.

"I wanted a tutoring center and preschool," she said. "The child care just kind of fell in."

One of the main challenges Mestrich said providers face in expansion is finding qualified staff. Blacksten said she lucked out, gathering a qualified staff in a short amount of time, including a preschool teacher with a masters in elementary education. Also part of her staff is her mother, an aide; and her husband, Joe Ernst, a former Les Schwab employee and now a budding language arts and science teacher.

"I'm more tired at the end of the day here than I was over there," Ernst said, adding he'd never previously thought about child care as a career, but is loving it nonetheless.

The Child Development As-

sociate credential is one of the most widely recognized in early childhood education. Ernst said he's earning his online, spending \$269 and the equivalent of a college term to do so, along with 1,500 hours of experience on the job. That shouldn't be hard, he added, considering he's at the preschool 10 hours a day.

Mestrich said she is a member of the Oregon Registry (<http://bit.ly/1J2VbdU>), which helps track professional development of early childhood education providers through Portland State University.

"I help providers take online classes," she said, adding there are scholarships available and steps to help providers continue their education, and much of the education is online.

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