

Child care: Parents already desperate for care

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The Astoria School District announced Thursday that it will offer remote learning only for the start of the school year. Most other Clatsop County school districts are planning a hybrid model where children are in school several days a week and working from home the rest of the time.

“That creates a need for child care the three days your kid is not in school,” Manderson said of the hybrid models, “and I don’t know our communities have child care available to fill that need.”

Parents are already desperate for care.

Tami Williams, the owner of Mrs. Tami’s Daycare and Preschool in Seaside, recorded a new answering machine message to deal with the growing number of calls she was receiving each day. The center cannot take any more children right now, she said.

Before the coronavirus, she was able to have up to 49 children in the center at a time, which translated to about 70 children enrolled on a daily basis, coming and going on different schedules.

Now she is limited to 22 children, split into stable groups and with the older children separate from the infants.

Williams has reordered her open-concept space, moving a shelf and installing a gate to create distinct areas.

If a child from one group arrives in the morning, followed by a child from a different group, Williams can’t just handle them with one employee. She needs staff to oversee each group. Only a few staff members are designated to float between groups.

“I’m physically, literally going in the hole being open, but I have so many essential workers (as clients) that I feel like I need to stay open for them,” Williams said.

Reopening is likely hardest on centers, Manderson said. Their profitability depends on serving a higher number of children. Her organization is looking to recruit more small, licensed providers.

“I think for child care we’re just trying to think about how we get more people reopened and how we recruit new providers while being mindful that families might want

something different than before,” Manderson said.

The city-run Lil’ Sprouts Academy in Astoria just returned to a version of normal operations in June, but the number of children it can serve has dropped from 60 to about 42. Some families who had children enrolled at Lil’ Sprouts are now back on waitlists as the center continues to provide emergency care slots to essential workers.

‘IT WAS SO HARD BEFORE. NOW IN SOME PLACES, THE CARE THAT WAS AVAILABLE HAS KIND OF BEEN DECIMATED BY THE WORRIES AND THE VIRUS ITSELF, AND THOSE ARE SEPARATE AND CONNECTED.’

Eva Manderson | director of Northwest Regional Child Care Resource and Referral

It remains a challenge to break children into stable cohorts and then figure out how to staff those groups. The center has winnowed out toys that are harder to keep sanitized or that are especially attractive as chew toys to younger children.

Overall operations feel stable and sustainable, said Jonah Dart-McLean, the city’s parks director. Still, little costs are starting to add up, he said. Material costs have increased by 15% or 20%, if not more. They are buying more single-use items.

Waitlists

Denise Giliga, who operates Astoria Playhouse Preschool, a smaller version of the Shooting Stars Child Development Center she ran until earlier this year in Uniontown, has always operated with a waitlist. It was long even before the corona-

virus arrived.

But now, she said, “I think the desperation of parents is a bit more forceful. They say, ‘I’ll put money down!’”

Though it was a hard call to close Shooting Stars’ doors and scale back services at the end of February, Giliga now says it happened at the perfect time.

“Not for the community and not for child care, but I couldn’t imagine surviving on that overhead,” she said.

Jeri Normandin, who runs Jeri’s Starfish Minis In-Home Daycare, a small day care in Astoria, said the ever-changing state rules are difficult to navigate. She has lost a lot of money in the past few months due to downsizing.

But she didn’t hesitate to register as an emergency day care.

The business helps pay the bills, it is work she is passionate about and she was already serving many families who are essential workers: police officers, hospital workers, military families.

“If they don’t have day care then they can’t help other people out in the community either,” she said.

Right now, she is figuring out how Oregon’s new mask rule for younger children will work in practice. She has around eight children 5 years and older who will likely need to wear masks.

It can be a tricky balance to both follow public safety guidelines and ensure children’s emotional and social needs are met, providers said. After all, one of the first things many younger children want to do when a masked caregiver is near is pull their mask off their face, a new spin on peekaboo. Older kids in one room want to know why they can’t go visit a baby sibling in another room.

But for the most part, kids have carried on like always, providers said.

“They’ve done really, really well,” Williams said. “Seeing us with a mask on scares the babies but they’ve gotten used to it. They can see us smiling with our eyes.”

Sometimes, when children first arrive, she will step back and pull her mask down quickly just to show them her face before she puts it back in place.

“They’ve come to realize we’re still the same person underneath there.”

Coin shortage: Recirculated coins make up more than 80% of supply

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not had incoming coins for three weeks. To help with coin circulation, the store has been using the Coinstar machine to recycle coins.

The Federal Reserve said business and bank closures during the pandemic have disrupted the supply chain and normal circulation of coins.

An increase in online shopping and the use of electronic payments to avoid handling cash have helped slow the flow of pennies, nickels, dimes and quarters to brick-and-mortar businesses.

According to the Oregon Bankers Association, recirculated coins represent more than 80% of the supply.

In early July, the Federal Reserve established the U.S. Coin Task Force, a group of industry leaders representing major participants in the coin supply chain. The goal of the task force is to reduce the consequences and duration of

pandemic-related disruptions to coin circulation.

The task force aims to have the first set of recommendations by the end of July.

Coin circulation has improved as states reopen from virus restrictions, but the Federal Reserve said “the coin inventory issues will resolve once the economy opens more broadly and the coin supply chain returns to normal circulation patterns.”

The Oregon Bankers Association is encouraging consumers to deposit spare change at their local banks or coin-cashing machines to help banks meet demand.

“There is adequate coin in the economy,” Linda Navarro, the president and CEO of the bankers association, said in a statement. “However, the slowed pace of circulation means that a sufficient amount of coin is not readily available where needed.

“We need to jump-start recirculation of coins.”



Port: 28 ships scheduled next year

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“This wasn’t something that was a surprise at all,” Will Isom, the Port’s executive director, recently told the Port Commission. “I’m expecting at some point that this could get extended even further. I’m not optimistic at this point that we’ll be getting any cruise ships in here within the calendar year. I think, at minimum, we’ll be looking at next spring.”

Two visits — the Seven Seas Mariner on Oct. 1 and the Norwegian Sun on Oct. 15 — remain on the schedule from what was supposed to be a record season of 33 cruise ships carrying more than 70,000 passengers to Astoria. The port has become a popular day stop for ships heading north and south along the West Coast.

Bruce Conner, the Port’s cruise ship marketer, held out hope that at least one will visit this year. “We’d love one to come by, just stop by, to show that we’re still in busi-

ness,” he said.

The Port had tried to lay up idle cruise ships and their crews but was stymied by an outbreak of the virus at Bornstein Seafoods next to its main pier. Isom and Conner agree that opportunity has likely passed, with most ships hunkered down and waiting for the industry to reopen.

The Port is so far scheduled to receive 28 cruise ships next year carrying up to 70,000 passengers. Conner said cruise companies are itching to operate as soon as possible to show their product is safe, but not to expect ships at more than partial capacity.

“If you see a ship with 3,000 people, it’ll flow right around between 1,500 and 2,000,” he said.

“They are anticipating no vaccine, this type of thing — ‘Let’s plan for the worst scenario,’” he said. “And they’ve really come a long way in doing their best to ensure that it is a clean, clean, clean, clean environment.”

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