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AT ISSUE/CHILD CARE



Photos by Hailey Hoffman/The Astorian

Children eat their snacks at the Sunset Empire Park and Recreation District summer camp program in Seaside on Wednesday.

## Child care remains a barrier for many families on North Coast

By KATIE FRANKOWICZ  
*The Astorian*

Despite a national conversation about the importance of child care, an infusion of federal dollars, checks to families and a resurgence of local discussions about how to better support and enhance care options, Clatsop County's child care desert is as desolate as ever.

Eva Manderson, the director of Northwest Regional Child Care Resource and Referral, can point to a few positives that emerged from the chaos of the coronavirus pandemic: Some facilities that closed last summer or operated at limited capacity have reopened or expanded. New providers have entered the market, with many beginning operations with key foundational business practices already in place. The number of child care slots is near pre-pandemic levels.

But the county still has more children in need of care than there are slots available. Child care providers struggle to keep prices affordable for families, attract quality staff and turn a profit.

There are still few choices for lower-income families. There are few places that offer evening or weekend care for parents who work nontraditional hours — for example, people in tourism-related jobs that increasingly power the region's economy.

Most facilities have a waitlist — very long waitlists in some cases.

"The problem hasn't gone away and child care hasn't become sustainable all of a sudden," Manderson said.

In 2020, the county had more than 5,000 children under 13 but only 780 slots in child care centers and home care situations, an imbalance that has varied little in recent years, according to data gathered by Oregon State Uni-



A child puts his mask on at summer camp through the Sunset Empire Park and Recreation District.

AT ISSUE/CHILD CARE

Two years after Clatsop County was declared a child care desert, there is little urgency at the local government level to solve the problem.

The Astorian asked policymakers, providers and parents about the challenge.

Let us know what you think in a letter to the editor: [bit.ly/2kuTOPZ](https://bit.ly/2kuTOPZ)

versity researchers.

The researchers also found that the median annual price of child care was around \$9,840 — slightly higher than the price of tuition at Oregon public universities.

### Lil' Sprouts

On Monday, Astoria leaders started to discuss what to do about the city-run day care program at Lil' Sprouts

Academy. The center, opened nearly a decade ago because of the need for child care in the community, serves around 30 children. It is one of the few centers of its size on the North Coast to also provide care for infants.

On Tuesday, the city announced Lil' Sprouts would close until Sept. 1 after an employee tested positive for the coronavirus.

The center relies heavily on lower-paid, part-time labor and operates at an unsustainable loss — to the tune of around \$25,000 a month.

Lil' Sprouts maintains a waitlist of around 150 children. City staff field new inquiries about child care — and the waitlist — every week. The center could accommodate up to 70 children, possibly more if the city were to build out more classrooms.

Jonah Dart-McLean, the city's parks director, would need to hire 10

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## Vaccine mandate issued at schools

Brown requires teachers and staff to get vaccinated

By KATIE FRANKOWICZ  
*The Astorian*

All teachers, support staff and volunteers in Oregon's K-12 schools will be required to get vaccinated against the coronavirus under a new mandate announced by Gov. Kate Brown.

School workers will have until Oct. 18 to get vaccinated, or six weeks after the U.S. Food and Drug Administration approves the vaccines, whichever is later. The FDA has authorized the vaccines for emergency use to combat the virus.

Health care workers will also be required to get a vaccine. Previously, Brown said health care workers could forgo vaccination by submitting to weekly testing for the virus.

Brown acknowledged that the vaccine mandate for educators and school staff will be controversial, but she said she is willing to take the heat for the decision.

Her announcement comes as virus cases and hospitalizations surge across Oregon because of the more contagious delta variant.

Most new cases and hospitalizations have occurred in unvaccinated people, but vaccinated people and children are also getting sick.

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## State discloses outbreaks at memory care, hospital

By GRIFFIN REILLY  
*The Astorian*

The Oregon Health Authority has disclosed coronavirus outbreaks at Clatsop Care Memory Community and Columbia Memorial Hospital.

The memory community in Warrenton had 20 virus cases with the first reported on Aug. 8, according to the health authority's weekly outbreak report, which covers virus cases through Sunday night.

An administrator at the memory community put the number of virus cases significantly higher than the state's report.

Channon Larson, the director of operations at Aidan Health Services, which oversees the facility for the Clatsop Care

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## Shipwrecked canceled over virus concerns

Event was set for Saturday at county fairgrounds

By NIKKI DAVIDSON  
*The Astorian*

Days before the launch of their new summer fundraiser, the Shipwrecked Music Festival, the United Way of Clatsop County's board was called to an emergency meeting.

A health care administrator was pleading with organizers

to cancel the event. The administrator shared concerns that large-scale outdoor gatherings like the Clatsop County Fair had contributed to the surge of new coronavirus cases.

"They shared insights with what's happening at the hospital, patients overflowing into the hallway and ER patients needing to be screened outdoors," said Kassia Nye, the United Way's executive director. "When this information came to light, the United Way board started discussing what it would

feel like if we contributed to that issue."

Katrina Morrell Gasser, the board president, said the uncertainty left the board conflicted. The fundraising organization wanted to prioritize the health and safety of the community, but had also already paid \$15,000 out of pocket to host the event.

The Clatsop County Public Health Department reported more than a dozen local outbreaks last week, but had not released details tracing infections back to specific places or events.

The Astorian first asked the county about potential virus cases at the county fair in the days after the fair wrapped up on July 31. The newspaper did not get a response until Thursday afternoon.

"Public Health has linked some local COVID-19 cases to the 2021 county

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