

# Finding child care providers a challenge in Umatilla County

By JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN  
STAFF WRITER

Leaving a child in someone else's care can be stressful for any parent, but it can be amplified by the challenges many families face finding a child care provider in the first place.

Local parents said while there are providers available, it can be tough to find one that meets their needs, including scheduling, price range, or the type of experience they want their child to have.

Rosa Holt, a mother to a 4-month-old boy, said finding a provider who works with her schedule has been the biggest challenge.

Holt, a nurse at Good Shepherd Medical Center, started sending her son to the on-site day care at Good Shepherd as soon as she returned to work. She said they were reliable, and she liked that they did educational activities with even the youngest children. But the hours weren't conducive to her schedule, and she eventually began sending her son to a private provider in Echo, where the schedule was a bit more flexible.

"As a nurse, in the medical field, we're always working," she said. "Nurses who work the night shift have nowhere to send their kids."

For Casey White-Zollman, the vice president of public relations at Blue Mountain Community College, the biggest challenge was simply finding someone to watch her infant son. He's now 2 years old, but he has been cared for by a nanny since he was 7 months old.

Though they looked at day care options, White-Zollman said there was a lack of availability with providers who watch children under a year old.

Even for toddlers, she said, many places require children to be toilet-trained, something White-Zollman said was a little premature



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Assistant Charlene Carnahan reads from the book "Have You Got My Purr?" to a group of children at Busy Bees Day Care on Friday in Hermiston.

for her 2-year-old son.

She and a colleague ended up doing a "nanny share," where they jointly hired a nanny to watch both their children at the same time. White-Zollman said that situation is unique, but has worked well for them.

Even so, she said, it can be stressful to find a day care, and she said she knows some parents start searching, and even put their names on waiting lists, even before a child is born.

"I know there are a number of day cares in town that people are very happy with," she said. "It just didn't work out for us."

### Desert of options

A study by Oregon State University's College of Public Health and Human Sciences reflects the same problems — a statewide lack of child care, especially for infants. Entitled "Oregon's Child Care Deserts," the report, published in Janu-

ary 2019, states that all but three Oregon counties are "child care deserts" for children under the age of 5, and all 36 counties are child care deserts for children ages 0 to 2. The study defines "child care deserts" as having three times as many children as there are available child care slots.

The study also looks at the availability of publicly-funded child care, which includes Head Start programs. Those programs are available to qualifying low-income families, and according to the study, 54 percent of available child care slots in Umatilla County are publicly funded. In Morrow County, it's 66 percent.

Part of the challenge with caring for infants is that the ratio between infants and adults must be lower than that between adults and older children.

That can be a strain on providers, both financially and time-wise.

Mary Shaver, who runs Busy Bee Preschool and Childcare out of her home in Hermiston, said she is licensed to have up to 16 children at her in-home day care at a time, but only accepts children 2 years and older.

Shaver, who has been providing child care in Hermiston for about 30 years, said most of her families find her through her website, but she gets a fair amount through word of mouth, as well.

"I think a lot of day care providers keep in touch with each other, and if one doesn't have an opening, they see if another one does," she said.

### Filling the need

Shaver said it's been many years since she had to go through the licensing process, but she gets reviewed twice a year by the state, with one planned visit and one unannounced inspection.

Additionally, she said, providers have to stay up-to-

date to be certified, taking 15 credits worth of classes and training every year.

For those looking to become child care providers, the Childcare Resource and Referral department is a starting point.

The agency, which is under the umbrella of Umatilla-Morrow County Head Start, provides assistance to both parents and child care providers. They connect parents with providers, as well as resources to help with costs. They also offer training and aid for providers as they start out and serve as a liaison between providers and the state, which does the licensing.

Tobie Sass, the child development director for the UMCHS Childcare Resource and Referral program, said the process to get licensed as a child care provider isn't hard, but can seem daunting.

"We help people start to finish," she said. "If you're

not sure you have safety equipment, we can provide it."

They also loan out books and toys to help new providers get started, and write grants to provide first aid and safety equipment for new providers. They conduct pre-licensing inspections, and will also teach classes, such as "Recognizing and Reporting Child Abuse and Neglect," "Techniques and Tips for Supporting Children with ADHD," and "The Development of Empathy in Young Children." Many of the courses they teach are free, or cost \$5.

Some of the classes are more focused on professional development, or learning how to teach children new activities. Shaver said she recently went to a class that teaches how to use puppets as a learning tool and help kids gain language skills.

### Priorities

Some families look to check several boxes before sending their child to a provider. Holt said the most important question she and her husband asked was whether providers required children to be immunized.

"As someone who works in the medical field, I'm very pro-immunization," she said. The hospital day care required kids to be vaccinated, as does her son's new day care.

She said one of the challenges with the hospital day care, other than cost, was the rate of late charges — the day care charged \$10 per minute for the first 15 minutes a parent was late, and \$20 minute for the next 15.

Shaver said the interview goes both ways.

"I have to determine if the child will fit in with the group we've got," she said. "And I'm interviewing the parents. I want to know they're good parents, and are spending time with their kids."

# Hermiston firefighters climb stairs to fight cancer

By JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN  
STAFF WRITER

Firefighters are no stranger to scaling heights and putting themselves in strenuous situations to save others.

But in March, 10 Hermiston firefighters will voluntarily climb 69 floors of stairs, covering 1,356 steps in a quest to raise money for leukemia and lymphoma research.

This is the 10th year that the Umatilla County Fire District 1 will have a team at the SCOTT Firefighter Stair Climb. The event, which takes place at Seattle's Columbia Center on March 10, draws firefighters from around the western United States, as well as a few international participants, according to UCFD Battalion Chief Corey Gorham.

Gorham said over the past nine years UCFD's fundraising efforts have yielded more than \$10,000, all from community donations. Overall, the event, which started in 1991, has raised more than \$17 million for leukemia and lymphoma research.

Gorham, who was one of the first team members

to participate 10 years ago, started because he thought it would be fun to support the cause and have something to train for.

But in 2012, the event's purpose became more meaningful to him.

"In 2012, my youngest daughter was diagnosed with leukemia," he said.

His daughter went into treatment, and is now in remission — it's been three years since her last treatment. But he still likes to involve his family in the event, and has had them come to Seattle for it.

In addition, he said, several other team members have had family members affected by blood cancers or other cancers.

"I do it in honor of my grandpa, who I lost in 2000 to leukemia," said UCFD paramedic Danny Hinton. He is in his fifth year of the Stair Climb.

The event is popular, and usually sells out within the first 20 minutes that sign-ups are open. The team does

some additional training for the climb, putting in work on the stair mill at the gym, and adding in a few extra leg days. On the day of the climb, they suit up in full firefighter gear, including coats, boots and air tanks.

Climbers' times vary widely. According to last year's results, the fastest finisher completed the stair climb in 11 minutes and 55 seconds, and the last finishers took more than two hours — but the point of the event is more than climbing the stairs in the shortest amount of time.

"There are survivors and honorees that come to watch, support and cheer on the climbers," Gorham said.

Some firefighters who are cancer survivors also do the climb.

UCFD hosted a fundraiser at Club 24 on Monday, Feb. 18, with a table set up collecting donations. To donate, people can also visit the website [www.firefighterstairclimb.org](http://www.firefighterstairclimb.org), or contact UCFD at 541-567-8822.



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Hermiston battalion chief Corey Gorham and his daughter, Maggie, 12, who was diagnosed with leukemia in 2012. Gorham and a team of Hermiston firefighters will be competing in the SCOTT Firefighter Stair Climb, a cancer fundraiser, in Seattle, on March 10.

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