

Strategic Plan for Child Care

Storm Lake, Iowa

February 2024

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City of Storm Lake

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	4
THE STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS.....	5
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	6
THE NEED AND DEMAND FOR QUALITY CHILD CARE	8
Market Area.....	8
Population	8
Working Families	8
Quality of Life for Residents	9
Quality of Care	9
Child Care as a Business Issue	10
Business Investment in Child Care	11
Child Care Market Analysis Key Findings	12
THE FUTURE OF CHILD CARE IN STORM LAKE	20
Vision for Child Care	20
Key Assumptions for Expanding Child Care.....	20
CHILD CARE GOALS AND STRATEGIES.....	22
GOAL 1	22
GOAL 2	29
PUTTING THIS PLAN INTO USE	42
APPENDIX.....	43
Strategic Planning Activities Summarized by Date	43

INTRODUCTION

In November 2023, First Children's Finance (FCF) completed a *Child Care Market Analysis* for Storm Lake, Iowa, which analyzed the supply and demand for child care in the Storm Lake area. In addition to direct surveys for input from parents, employers, and child care providers, FCF collected data from the US Census Bureau, Iowa Department of Health and Human Services, Iowa Workforce Development, and Iowa Child Care Resource & Referral. FCF's analysis resulted in several key findings related to the local child care market, which are summarized in the "The Need and Demand for Quality Child Care" section of this report.

Addressing a child care shortage is a challenge that requires a community response. The challenge is how to increase the supply and availability of child care to meet the needs of the families and employers, while supporting child care businesses. As a result, a solution-based community planning process spearheaded by a child care steering committee was initiated.

THE STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS

To develop this *Strategic Plan for Child Care*, First Children's Finance (FCF) focused data collection and planning efforts on how business interventions and community support could address local challenges. During November and December 2023, a series of strategic planning meetings were held. To launch this process, FCF presented the key findings from the *Child Care Market Analysis*. FCF also shared *Emerging Models and Promising Practices, Successful Child Care Models*, which highlighted child care providers and communities FCF has worked with as replicable examples. At the remaining meetings, strategic planning participants engaged in exercises to develop a vision for child care in the community, and goals and strategies to address the child care challenges identified through the child care market analysis.

Storm Lake Child Care Steering Committee

A steering committee consisting of community and business representatives will serve as the leader of this plan, including reviewing the goals, strategies, and action plans each year. To fully implement this plan, the committee may form subcommittees or task forces so that additional community members or organizations become engaged, and activities and workload are distributed. The Storm Lake Child Care Steering Committee members will be established as described in Goal 1, Strategy 1 of this plan.

Strategic Planning Participants

From November 2023 to February 2024, a series of sessions focused on strategic planning were held. A total of 13 individuals participated in the sessions which resulted in the creation of a vision for child care in Storm Lake, child care goals, and strategies to achieve each goal. Participants in the sessions represented employers, government, education, community leaders, and early childhood representatives.

Putting this Plan into Use

This *Strategic Plan for Child Care* represents a significant investment of community resources. To achieve the expected outcomes and impacts outlined in this plan, the Child Care Steering Committee will take on the role as the leader of these efforts, which may include forming subcommittees or task forces so that additional community members or organizations become engaged, and activities and workload are distributed.

The plan and progress made to date will be reviewed annually by the Child Care Steering Committee, along with discussing strategies and action plans for the upcoming year. A matrix with a summary of the planned activities for the next 5 years is provided in the Appendix to assist with assigning and tracking activities.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Every parent wants their child to be in a child care setting that not only meets their basic needs for safety and security, but also provides nurturance and prepares that child for school success. The late Jim Greenman, child care developer and advocate, stated: “A baby welcomed into a center today may spend up to twelve thousand hours in child care, more time than she will spend in all of elementary school and high school.” For working parents, choosing child care may be one of the most critical decisions they can make as the child care environment has lasting effects on the child.

When the *Child Care Market Analysis* for the Storm Lake area was completed in November 2023, Iowa Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) data showed there were 304 regulated child care spaces, with only 32 of those available on a year-round basis. With an estimated 1,251 children likely to use regulated child care, it is reasonable to conclude there is a shortage of regulated child care spaces in Storm Lake.

To address the child care shortage, a process that gathered information and data from different perspectives was used, including the results of the surveys conducted with employers, child care providers, and parents as part of the *Child Care Market Analysis*. The results were presented to strategic planning participants who then participated in a series of sessions to develop a vision, goals, and strategies with action steps to achieve those goals.

The following vision, goals, and strategies have been developed through the input and interactions with the strategic planning participants.

The vision for child care in Storm Lake is:

Sustainable investments made in quality child care options will benefit the children, families, and employers of Storm Lake.

The following goals and strategies were developed for addressing child care within Storm Lake:

GOAL 1- Engage local employers and other community partners in child care solutions.

Strategy 1- Establish the Storm Lake Child Care Steering Committee to implement this strategic plan.

Strategy 2- Inform employers and other community partners about recent child care efforts including the Child Care Market Analysis to begin engagement and support the implementation of this Strategic Plan for Child Care.

Strategy 3- Provide resources and information about child care, child care related employee benefits, child care partnerships, and employer sponsored child care models to local employers.

Strategy 4- Provide parents access to information that will assist them in understanding, identifying, and choosing child care.

GOAL 2- Increase the number of regulated child care spaces available year-round in Storm Lake, from 32 to at least 198 spaces by 2029.

Strategy 1- Increase the number of spaces within Iowa Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) registered child development homes in Storm Lake.

Strategy 2- Establish a new Iowa Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) licensed child care center that is licensed to serve a minimum of 150 children.

Strategy 3- Approach local schools with spaces already licensed by Iowa Department of Health and Human Services to determine the feasibility of utilizing those spaces year-round.

Strategy 4- Establish a peer networking group for home-based child care providers.

Strategy 5- Promote existing classes for middle school and high school students that will care for children by babysitting or nannying, and for children that may be staying home alone.

THE NEED AND DEMAND FOR QUALITY CHILD CARE

The City of Storm Lake commissioned First Children's Finance (FCF) to conduct a *Child Care Market Analysis* in 2023 to analyze the supply and demand for child care in the area. Through that process, FCF collected data from the US Census Bureau, Iowa Department of Health and Human Services, Iowa Workforce Development, Iowa Child Care Resource & Referral, and input from employers, child care providers, and parents. FCF's analysis resulted in several key findings related to the local child care market, including that there is a shortage of regulated child care spaces in the Storm Lake area. According to FCF's calculations in that analysis, the child care gap could be as high as 1,227 regulated child care spaces.

The following factors underlie the current and future need and demand for quality child care in the area. These factors were considered by the strategic planning participants as they developed community strategies.

Market Area

The market area used for the market analysis study was the 50588-zip code, which includes the city of Storm Lake, Lakeside, and the adjacent unincorporated areas.

Population

The US Census Bureau estimates that from 2011 to 2021, both the total population of the market area (50588-zip code) and the number of children ages 0 to 11 have increased. As of 2021, the total population is 13,258 and the number of children ages 0 to 11 is 2,301, which is 390 more children living in the market area than what were in 2011.

Working Families

As of 2021, there are 4,628 total households in the zip code, of which 2,554 (55%) are family households, and 1,290 (27% overall) had children under the age of 18. The median income for families with children under the age of 18 is \$66,597.

According to the US Census Bureau as of 2021, 52% of families with children ages 0 to 5, and 70% of families with children ages 6 to 17 living in the Storm Lake area have all parents in the labor force. All parents working means if there are two parents living in the home both work, or if the child lives with a single parent that parent is working. These percentages have decreased significantly over the last 10 years from 86% and 81% respectively. This decrease indicates that fewer parents are in the workforce.

Quality of Life for Residents

The child care sector serves two critical community functions. First, it is an economic driver allowing parents to work and earn income while at the same time creating jobs. Second, since the children that attend child care full-time typically spend between 35 and 50 hours per week with a caregiver who is not their parent, child care prepares children for school and life at a critical stage of their development.

In short, the child care industry is an essential component of the community infrastructure that keeps businesses growing and keeps parents working. In addition, quality child care contributes to a higher quality of life for residents as it assures that children are experiencing the kind of care that not only is safe and nurturing but prepares them for success and for growing into healthy and contributing future citizens.

Key to a positive future includes developing infrastructure and community assets that will attract families wishing to make the Storm Lake area their home. Child care plays an essential role in a healthy community eco-system. The expansion of quality child care can be a catalyst for building a community that is vital, thriving, and prosperous.

Quality of Care

Although there is no simple definition of quality child care, the Iowa Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) has recently undergone a process to better align the state's quality rating system with nationally recognized quality standards. Iowa Quality for Kids (IQ4K™) is Iowa's new Quality Rating and Improvement System for HHS licensed child care centers and preschools, registered child development homes, and programs operating under the authority of an accredited school district or nonpublic school. IQ4K provides five levels of quality (building blocks) that programs can achieve and continue to improve on. By implementing Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI), IQ4K allows programs to assess their current grade across all areas of programming and devise a structured plan to increase the overall level of program quality.¹

Furthermore, research shows that the early years (ages 0–5) are the most sensitive for brain development. Over 90% of brain growth occurs during this period. Once in school, students who receive quality early childhood education are more likely to graduate from high school, own a home, and have a job than their peers who did not attend preschool. Young children that spend time in safe and healthy environments that stimulate learning (i.e., quality early care and education programs) are more prepared when they start school and have long-term economic, academic and social benefits, and reduced costs to individuals and communities later on.

¹ Iowa Child Care Resource & Referral <https://iowaccrr.org/providers/iq4k/>

According to secondary research conducted by the Minneapolis Federal Reserve, the annual rate of return on each \$1 dollar spent on high quality early care and education is twelve to sixteen percent (12-16%), with the greatest returns realized among children in low-income families. Child care requires an investment. The delivery of quality child care is a *business issue and a business challenge for child care providers*. A commitment to delivering quality care that results in quality learning outcomes for children requires significant resources for child care businesses. Low classroom staff to child ratios, age-appropriate curriculum, teacher training and improved teacher qualifications, physical environment improvements, and more – all result in increased costs. An investment in the sustainability of existing child care providers that are committed to quality, is an investment in child care now and into the future.

Child Care as a Business Issue

As we look into the future through the lens of national, state, and local social and economic trends, the greatest hope for sustainable child care, particularly quality child care, rests in the community's ability to *develop strong child care businesses* and to *diversify the dollars going into supporting them* through both *public and private sector engagement and investment*.

The business community has a stake in child care. Businesses, communities, and regional economies all benefit from short-term and longer-term benefits of quality child care:

- Employee retention and decreased turnover;
- More productive employees, who know their children are receiving quality care;
- Ability to attract and keep the best employees and a younger workforce;
- Increased employment and career advancement opportunities at growing child care businesses;
- Spin-off jobs as a result of the multiplier effect of child care business development and retention;
- Less remedial expense as children are prepared to be successful in school;
- Sharp reductions in public expenditures on criminal justice, welfare and other remedial services; and
- A well-prepared future workforce: the essential bedrock of regional economic growth.

An immediate cost that impacts families and child care businesses is child care employee turnover. "Studies by American Management Association and others report a range between 25 percent and 250 percent of annual salary per exiting employee. Entry-level, unskilled positions are at the lower end of the cost range, while executive, managerial and sales positions are at the

higher end.”² A 2006 article by Saratoga, a service offering of PricewaterhouseCoopers, lists the following turnover costs and consequences:

- Lost productivity during a vacancy.
- Diminished productivity of the team and managers who are covering for a vacant position.
- Diminished productivity of the team and managers who are training the new hire.
- Increased labor costs due to overtime or contractor’s needs.
- Hiring and onboarding costs.
- More difficult to quantify impacts may include decreased customer satisfaction, increased future turnover, and loss of institutional knowledge.

Combined, these turnover-related costs represented more than 12% of pre-tax income for the average company.³

Business Investment in Child Care

There are multiple opportunities for businesses to invest in child care, meeting both the employee and employer needs, while also promoting a positive image of their business in the community. Employers can support their workers by investing in child care. Support of individual child care businesses can come in multiple forms. First Children’s Finance believes the following examples are all viable options:

- Sponsor spaces within a child care center(s) or home(s). These spaces are then reserved for that business’s employees.
- Fund a child care scholarship that is available to employees whose income exceeds the Iowa child care assistance income threshold, but still struggle to afford child care. This could be in the form of a reimbursement and may provide different levels of support for families with different incomes.
- Business or corporate giving grants or community investment funds.
- Donate space for on-site child care that is available to both employees and the community.
- Invest in building a child care facility that bears the corporate or business name.

All contributions, at various levels of support are needed, recognized as significant, and promote a positive image of the business or corporation providing that gift or support.

² Spremulli, Michael. (2011, June 22). *Employee Turnover on the Rise*. Retrieved from <http://www.chrysaliscorporation.com/employee-turnover-on-the-rise/>

³ *Driving the Bottom Line: Improving Retention*. Copyright © PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP, 2006. Retrieved from <https://www.shrm.org/hr-today/news/hr-magazine/Documents/saratoga-improving-retention.pdf>

Child Care Market Analysis Key Findings

Most notably, the child care market analysis showed there is a need for more *regulated* child care in the Storm Lake area. According to the US Census Bureau, there are an estimated 2,301 children ages 0 to 11 in the Storm Lake area (50588–zip code). First Children’s Finance estimates, 1,251 of those are from families that want to use HHS regulated child care, either a licensed center or a registered child development home. As of November 2023, there are 304 regulated child care spaces, of which 32 are available year-round. This means the deficit for regulated child care could be as high as 1,227 spaces.

Based on the data and research from the *Child Care Market Analysis* that was completed for the Storm Lake area in 2023, First Children’s Finance identified the following key findings:

Finding 1: Families with All Parents in the Labor Force is Declining

According to the US Census Bureau as of 2021, 52% of families with children ages 0 to 5, and 70% of families with children ages 6 to 17 living in the Storm Lake area have all parents in the labor force. All parents in the labor force means if a family is headed by a couple, both parents are working and if it is headed by a single parent that parent is working.

Families with All Parents in the Labor Force



Through the employer and parent surveys, a few comments were received that indicate there are parents who have had to quit working to stay home with their children because of a lack of child care. US Census Bureau data shows that the percentage of families in the Storm Lake area with children and all parents working has declined over the last 10 years. In 2011, those percentages were 86% and 81% respectively, and in 2016 they were 70% and 84% respectively.

While every community and each family is unique, an additional comparison can be made between the Storm Lake area, Buena Vista County where Storm Lake is located, the state of Iowa, and the United States. As a whole, the state of Iowa is known to have a high percentage of families with all parents working and is often ranked number one, in addition through First

Children's Finance's experience, communities and counties in Northwest Iowa often have a high percentage of families with all parents working. The following table shows a comparison of these different geographies.

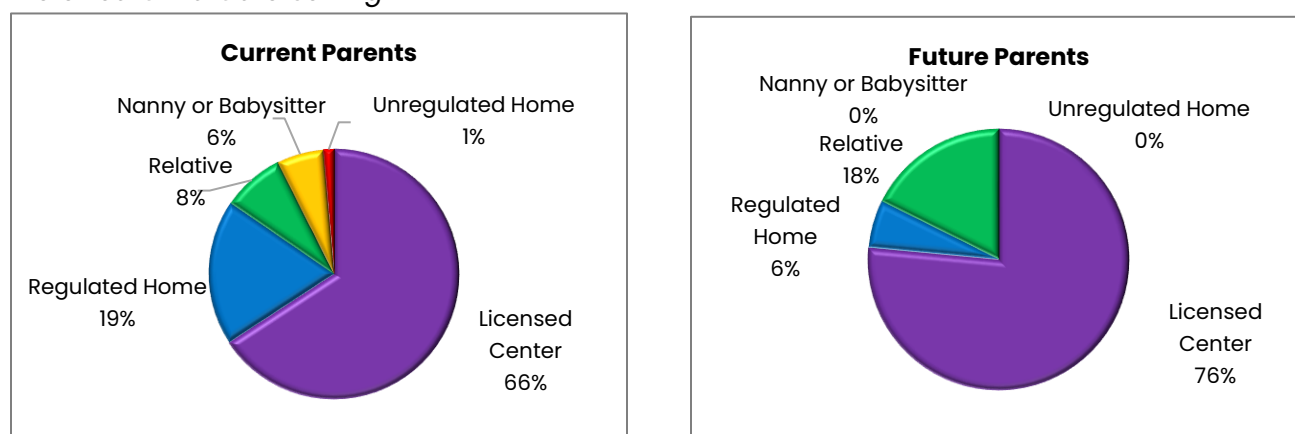
Comparison of Families with All Parents Working (2021)

	With children age 0 to 5	With children age 6 to 17
Storm Lake area	52%	70%
Buena Vista County	63%	72%
Iowa	76%	81%
United States	67%	72%

Finding 2: Parents Want Regulated Child Care that is Available Full-Time and Year-Round

Through the child care needs surveys completed by parents in August and September of 2023, parents were asked several questions about their child care needs and preferences. The most preferred child care arrangement chosen by current parents on the child care needs survey was a licensed child care center, which is preferred by 85%, followed by an HHS registered child development home (19%). Among future parents the top choice is again a licensed center, which is preferred by 76%, followed by a relative (18%). Overall, 88% of parents (both current parents and future parents combined) prefer a setting that is regulated by Iowa Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), either a licensed center or a registered home.

Preferred Child Care Setting



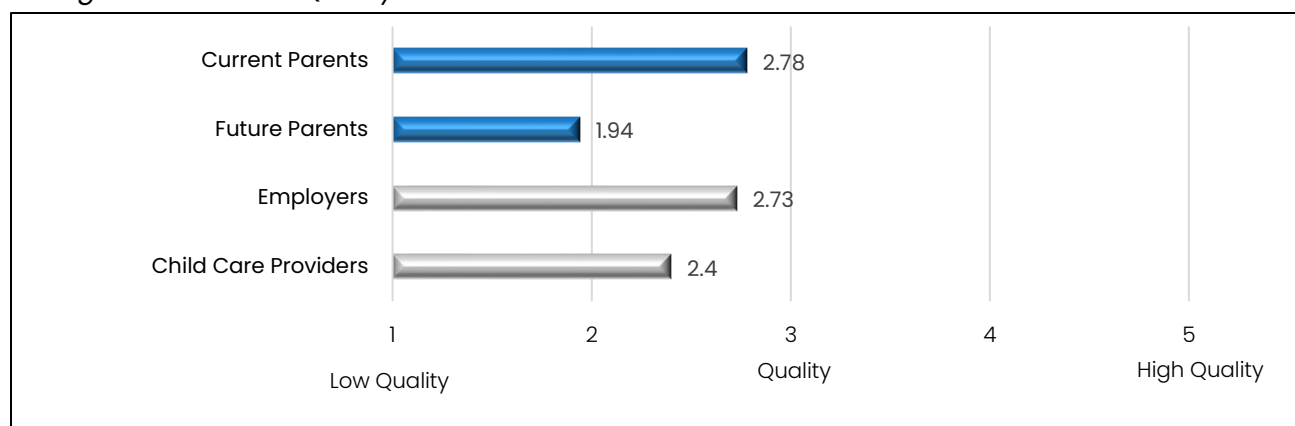
When asked if they were selecting child care today, parents indicated they would prefer to drop-off children during the 7:00 am hour (62%) and pick them up during the 5:00 pm hour (27%), Monday through Friday (97%-99% per day). Separately parents were asked when they prefer to use based on the age of their children. A majority of parents (75%) with children ages 0 to 5, but not in kindergarten, indicated they prefer year-round care for this age group. Parents with school

age children were split, with 40% indicating they want year-round care and 44% indicating they want care during the summer, only so children are not home alone.

Finding 3: Parents are Concerned with the Quality of Some Child Care Options

Parents were asked to rate the quality of child care in Storm Lake on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being low quality, 3 being quality, and 5 being high quality. The weighted average among current parents was 2.78, and among future parents it was 1.94, indicating parents feel the quality of care available is less than adequate. In addition, employers rated quality 2.73 and child care providers rated quality as 2.40.

Ratings of Child Care Quality



Through multiple open-ended questions, parents provided additional insight into their perception of child care quality. Related comments include:

- *...There are other in-home day care providers who are not licensed and take care of more than the regulated amount of children.*
- *No one had openings or the environment was unsafe.*
- *Hardly [any child care providers are] registered.*
- *...she has too many kids at a time.*
- *[My 6-year-old] gets bored because it is geared towards younger kids and most of the provider's attention is on the younger kids.*
- *Too many kids in the current daycare.*
- *Low quality and out of town.*
- *...if we had a daycare that took any child... it would be helpful for working parents instead of us trying to find a sitter who overcharges and doesn't have a license to care for children. We don't know if our kids are being cared for correctly while at work.*
- *Very simply the availability of high-quality child care in Storm Lake is the biggest challenge.*
- *Finding a reliable but most importantly safe child care. (Biggest challenge)*

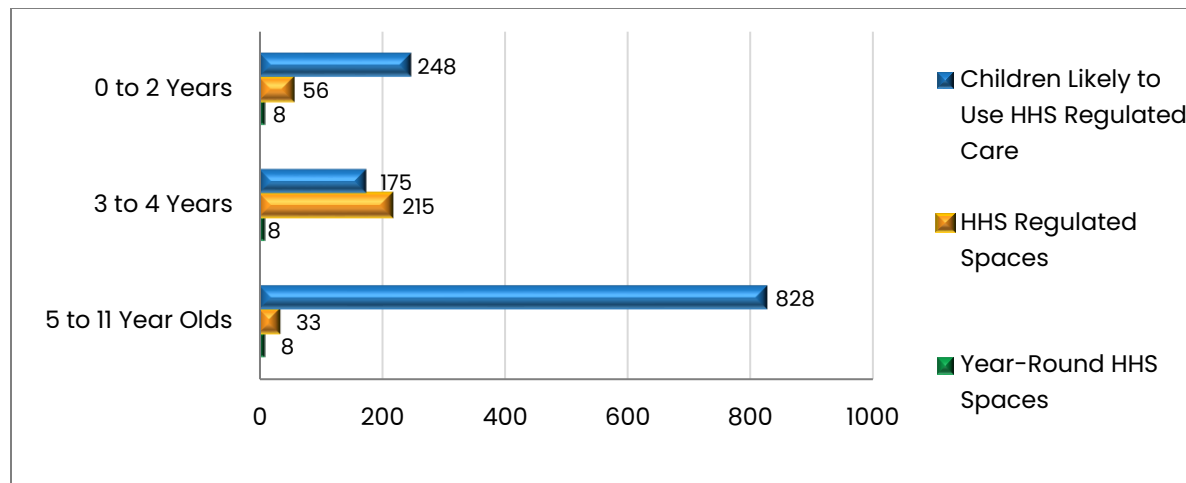
- *Safety for their children. (Biggest challenge)*
- *Quality care in a clean, safe environment. (Biggest challenge)*

Finding 4: There is a Shortage of Child Care Spaces Among All Age Groups

In the Storm Lake area, there are 2,301 children ages 0 to 11. Of those, First Children's Finance (FCF) estimates 1,422 have all parents working. Based on the percentage of families that have all parents working, and parents' preferences of child care settings, First Children's Finance estimates that approximately 1,251 of those children are from families that would likely use HHS regulated child care. According to Iowa HHS, there are currently 304 HHS regulated spaces, of which 32 are available year-round.

When broken down by age group and only full-time year-round child care spaces are considered (part-time preschool and school year only spaces not included), calculations show there is a shortage of 240 spaces for ages 0 to 2 (infant, toddler, and two's), 167 spaces for ages 3 to 4 (preschool) and of 820 spaces for school age children.

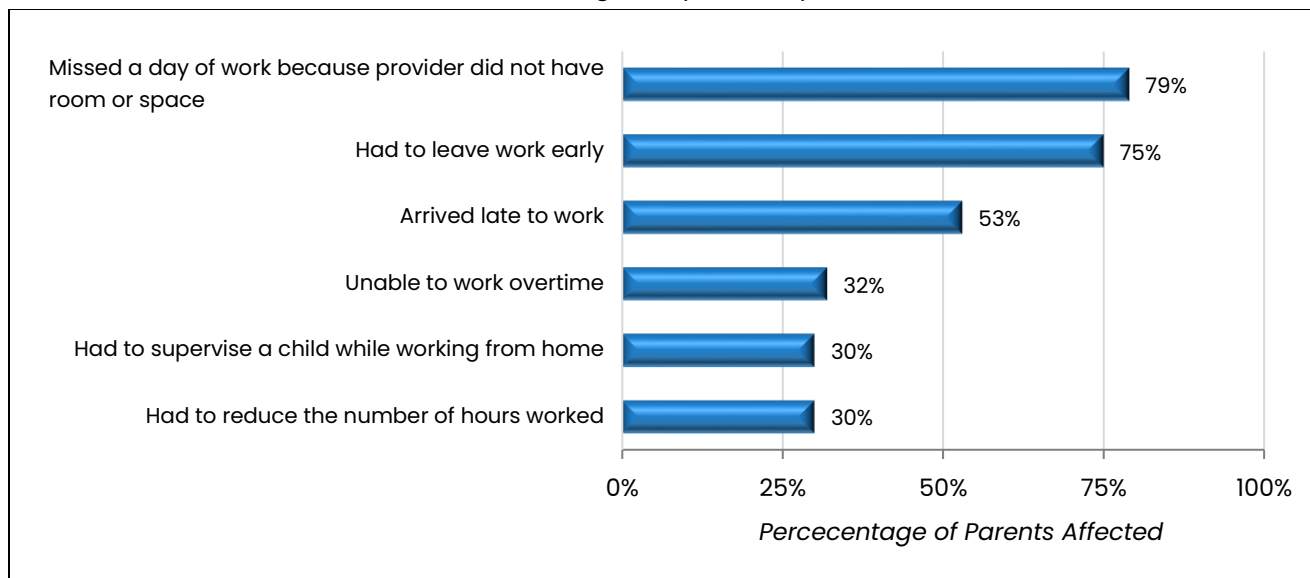
Children Need Care vs. Child Care Spaces



Finding 5: Parents Indicate Child Care Challenges are Affecting their Job

Over the last 12 months, parents have experienced child care challenges that have in turn affected their job. The adverse effects experienced by 30% or more of the parents that participated in the child care needs survey were: missed a day of work because the provider did not have room or space (79%), had to leave work early (75%), arrived late to work (53%), unable to work overtime (32%), had to supervise a child while working from home (30%), and had to reduce the number of hours worked (30%). See figure on next page.

Most Common Effects of Child Care Challenges Reported by Parents



Separately, 22% of parents indicated that in the last 12 months they or their spouse or partner has declined employment or withdrawn from the workforce due to child care, while 12% indicated they or their spouse or partner is not working (unemployed) due to child care challenges.

Finding 6: Child Care Challenges are Limiting Employment for Nearly One-Half of Parents

Through the child care needs survey conducted as part of this study, parents were asked if child care challenges are currently limiting their or their spouse's or partner's employment (ex. working part-time when full-time preferred, or not working within preferred field). Forty-six percent (46%) indicated it is. Those parents were asked to explain, some of the comments received were:

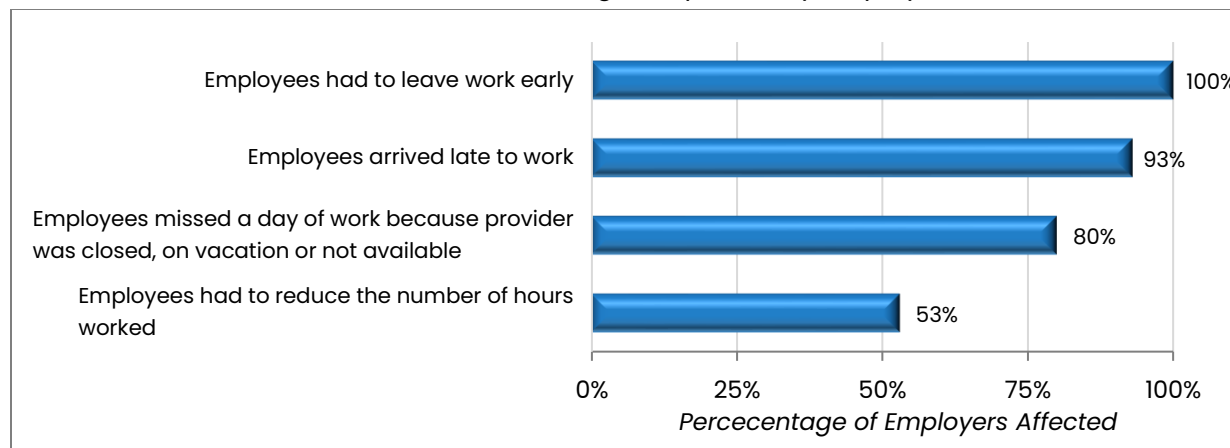
- *Unable to work late or extra hours.*
- *Partner desperately wants at least a part-time job, desires full-time employment, but unable to due to lack of child care.*
- *Prior to three weeks ago, work schedules had to be arranged around who could stay home with the baby because we could not find daycare for over a year.*
- *Unable to work additional hours, holidays, or weekends due to inability to have childcare, limited hours due to childcare needs.*
- *Once my maternity leave is over, I will have to work part-time from home until a spot opens at a daycare center in a nearby town.*
- *Can only work a few mornings a week due to limited daycare.*
- *Can't work the hours I'd prefer because no one to watch our baby.*

Finding 7: Employers Indicate Employees are Missing Work Due to Child Care Challenges

Through the child care needs survey conducted as part of this study, employers were asked in what ways child care challenges have affected their employees in the last 12 months. The top 4

adverse effects that were experienced by participating employers were employees had to leave work early which was experienced by 100% of employers, employees arrived late to work which was experienced by 93% of employers, employees missed a day of work because the child care provider was closed, on vacation, or not available which was experienced by 80% of employers, and employees had to reduce the number of hours they worked which was experienced by 53% of employers.

Most Common Effects of Child Care Challenges Reported by Employers



Employers were also asked about employee productivity and absenteeism due to child care challenges. Sixty-seven percent (67%) of employers indicated they had challenges related to productivity due to employee's child care challenges, while 74% of employers indicated they had experienced employee absenteeism due to employee's child care challenges. For each question employers were allowed to make additional comments. Some of the comments received were:

- *Mostly from the standpoint of maternal leave. Extended leave can cause delaying in projects getting completed. (Productivity challenge)*
- *We often run short and 90% of planned production and line speed due to absenteeism which may be due to child care issues. (Productivity challenge)*
- *Before and after school issues. (Productivity challenge)*
- *We have had employees have to bring a child with them due to lack of childcare and have them sit in the lobby or business center while mom works. (Productivity challenge)*
- *We have high daily absenteeism and then the impact is required Saturday work to make up lost production or adjusted work schedule to work 9-hour days. (Absenteeism)*
- *We have had several instances over the last year with employees calling off due to lack of child care. (Absenteeism)*
- *Employees have had to work from home or make schedule accommodations due to a lack of child care. It mostly impacts new employees who are trying to establish consistent child care in a new area. (Absenteeism)*

Finding 8: Child Care Providers Indicated They Are Not Utilizing Opportunities that May Improve Business Operations

Through the State of Iowa there are currently multiple opportunities for licensed centers, registered child development homes, and some non-registered homes that are intended to improve business operations (including retaining staff and improving quality) and potentially supplement income. Current opportunities the child care providers participating in the survey were less familiar with and had lower participation are: T.E.A.C.H., Child Care WAGE\$ IOWA, FieldPrint Fingerprinting, state funding to utilize child care management software, and Child Care Assistance pilot program for the child care workforce.

The T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® Iowa program is part of a comprehensive national strategy that provides teacher education and compensation to Iowans who work with children birth to five years old. The program is offered by Iowa Association for the Education of Young Children (Iowa AEYC). Staff who utilize T.E.A.C.H. receive pay increases or bonuses and scholarship dollars towards their formal education while achieving individual professional development goals, which leads to staff retention. T.E.A.C.H. participants average a much lower turnover rate, 5-6% annually, compared to the national average of around 30%. Additionally, participants agree to continue working in their current child care program. Through the child care provider survey, only 1 program indicated they have used T.E.A.C.H., while 2 are familiar but have not participated, and 2 are not familiar with the program.

Child Care WAGE\$® Iowa (WAGE\$) is a salary supplement program offered by Iowa Association for the Education of Young Children (Iowa AEYC). Individuals receiving WAGE\$ can earn an annual stipend between \$525 and \$9,200 annually (in addition to their regular pay), depending on their education level and the child care program's Iowa Quality for Kids (IQ4K) level. The amount of the annual supplement increases as more education is completed and as the child care program maintains or increases their IQ4K rating. Through the child care provider survey, only 1 program indicated they have used WAGE\$, while 1 was familiar but had not participated, and 3 are not familiar with the program.

FieldPrint Fingerprinting can be used for meeting the requirements for licensed centers (and preschools), registered child development homes, and child care homes accepting child care assistance to conduct background checks on all staff and in some cases individuals residing within the home (if home-based care). These federal record checks are required every 4 years. Child care providers can use FieldPrint at no cost. Through the child care provider survey, 2 programs indicated they have heard of but haven't used FieldPrint, and 3 programs are not familiar with the program. None of the 5 programs have actually utilized this program.

Child care management software (CCMS) is software specifically designed to help child care programs automate their day-to-day operations so that staff have more time to spend with children. Child care programs that utilize CCMS can increase efficiency in their operations, reduce costs, and collect all payments that are owed. Currently regulated child care programs in Iowa that are using or sign up to use one of two selected CCMS (brightwheel and Playground) are eligible to have their CCMS license paid for by the State of Iowa for up to 12 months. Participating programs are also eligible for up to \$1,000 technology grant/support to enable the use of a CCMS. Through the child care provider survey, the 1 provider indicated they are currently participating in this program, while 1 provider is aware of but not using, and 3 programs are not familiar with the program.

Child Care Assistance (CCA) pilot program for the Child Care Workforce went into effect July 5, 2023. This program allows the child care workforce to apply for Child Care Assistance (CCA) for their own children even if they are over the family income limit. To be approved, the child care worker must meet all other CCA eligibility criteria excluding household income, but if approved, the result could be free child care for child care staff. Through the child care provider survey, 2 programs indicated they are a current participant of the CCA pilot program, while 3 programs indicated they are familiar with but are not participating in the program.

THE FUTURE OF CHILD CARE IN STORM LAKE

Vision for Child Care

The following vision for child care was developed through input and interactions with the strategic planning participants. This vision will help guide the future of child care in Storm Lake.

Sustainable investments made in quality child care options will benefit the children, families, and employers of Storm Lake.

To accomplish this vision means a focus on and resources committed to:

- Creating more spaces within regulated child care environments.
- Recruiting and developing child care professionals that provide a variety of child care options.
- Developing local resources to assist parents in finding and paying for child care.
- Informing employers and the community on the value and importance of quality child care.

Every parent wants their child to be in a child care setting that not only meets their basic needs for safety and security, but also provides nurturance and prepares that child for school success. The late Jim Greenman, child care developer and advocate, stated: “A baby welcomed into a center today may spend up to twelve thousand hours in child care, more time than she will spend in all of elementary school and high school.” For working parents, choosing child care may be one of the most critical decisions they can make as the child care environment has lasting effects on the child. Finding child care is a challenge; options for quality, regulated child care that meets the needs and preferences of families is even more challenging. Community and business leaders all want the same thing – quality, affordable child care that meets the needs of families, employers, and the community as a whole – not only today, but into the future. From the beginning, the intention of this project was to develop a community-wide solutions-based plan for the expansion of *quality* child care, not to just add more child care spaces.

Key Assumptions for Expanding Child Care

The expansion of quality child care carries with it some key planning assumptions. These assumptions will guide the implementation of the *Strategic Plan for Child Care* for existing and new quality child care.



Commitment to program quality- All child care programs that choose to participate in child care expansion efforts and receive incentives (should any be made available) and other resources, will commit to quality. This commitment includes training, curriculum enhancement, and other business and classroom standards, including being a licensed center or registered child development home with the Iowa Department of Health and Human Services.



Serve all ages- The current child care shortage includes a shortage of infant and toddler care (under age 2), which is more costly to provide than care for older children, due to lower staff to child ratios. Provider participation in the child care expansion effort means a commitment to provide care to infants and toddlers, as well as other ages of children.



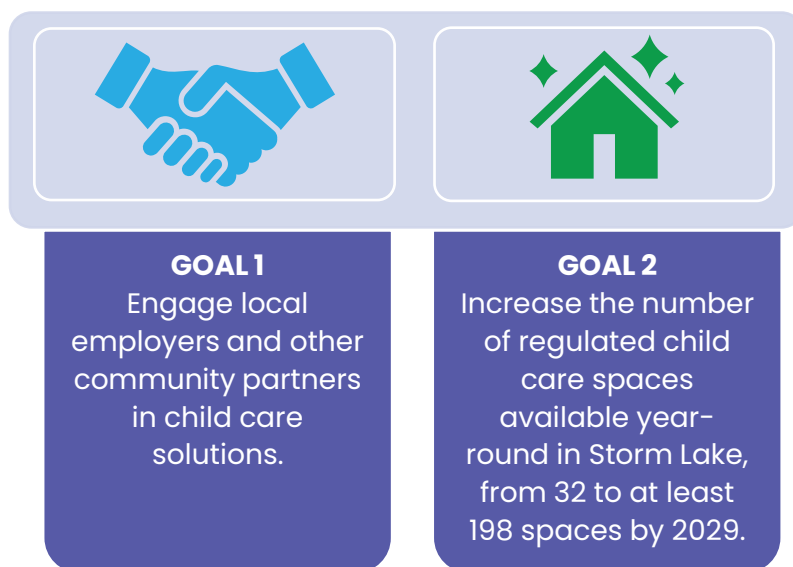
Meet quality requirements in physical environments- There exists a direct link between the quality of the physical environments and quality in the classroom practices. To the degree possible in existing child care and in new development of child care, attention will be given to quality child care physical environments – facilities and playgrounds, including meeting (or exceeding) standards as a licensed center or registered child development home as set by the Iowa Department of Health and Human Services.



New child care development needs to promote community-building- New child care development carries with it an opportunity to use development and design models that build a sense of community and become desirable community assets for the long term.

CHILD CARE GOALS AND STRATEGIES

The strategic planning process is an opportunity to leverage multiple view points and ideas related to addressing the child care challenges identified through the 2023 *Child Care Market Analysis* of the Storm Lake area, including the child care needs surveys completed by employers, child care providers, and parents. Through a series of strategic planning meetings, participants engaged in activities and conversations to develop these goals and strategies to address the child care challenges across the county.



GOAL 1

Engage local employers and other community partners in child care solutions.

Child care is an essential component of the community's infrastructure that keeps businesses growing and keeps parents working. In the 50588–zip code, 85% of families with children ages 0 to 5 and 84% of families with children ages 6 to 17 have all parents in the workforce. Involving local businesses and other community partners will result in solutions that meet the needs of parents while also helping employers recruit and retain the workforce they need, while also setting up the community for additional growth.

Strategy 1– Establish the Storm Lake Child Care Steering Committee to implement this strategic plan.

A steering committee will be appointed to serve lead efforts to implement this strategic plan. Initial members of the Storm Lake Child Care Steering Committee will be appointed by the City of

Storm Lake. The initial steering committee will consist of 5 to 7 individuals, with at least 1 representative from Storm Lake City Council. The remaining steering committee members will represent local employers, educational institutions, and community organizations, to assure diverse backgrounds and leadership skills.

Once the initial steering committee is appointed, the steering committee will function independently, with no affiliation with or obligation to the City of Storm Lake. Vacancies on the steering committee will be filled by appointment by the remaining steering committee members and must maintain the size and composition of the initial committee. The steering committee may choose to create subcommittees in order to distribute the workload of the activities outlined in this plan. The size and composition of each subcommittee will be determined by the steering committee based on the expected activities and need for additional support.

Action Plan

July 2024 through June 2025 (Year 1)

- The City of Storm Lake will appoint 5 to 7 individuals to serve as the Storm Lake Child Care Steering Committee.
- The Storm Lake Child Care Steering Committee will meet to develop committee procedures to guide operations. These procedures will include, but will not be limited to, term lengths and limits for committee members, removing or adding new committee members, frequency of committee meetings, how decisions will be made, and how subcommittees will be formed and operate. Once procedures are established, the committee will review the *Strategic Plan for Child Care* to determine which activities are to be completed in Year 1 and which of those activities will be the responsibility of the steering committee and which activities will be delegated to subcommittees. Individuals will be identified to serve on the needed subcommittees.
- The Storm Lake Child Care Steering Committee will contact the individuals identified and form the subcommittees. Each subcommittee will be given a list of activities they are responsible for completing and an approximate timeline. Each subcommittee will report back to the steering committee at least quarterly, and that report will be shared at the next steering committee meeting.

July 2025 through June 2026 (Year 2, repeat annually)

- At the first meeting after the start of the second year of this plan, the Storm Lake Child Care Steering Committee will review the activities from the strategic plan that were completed in Year 1, determine which activities will occur in Year 2, and determine which of the activities from Year 2 will be the responsibility of the steering committee and which

activities will be delegated to subcommittees. New subcommittees will be established as needed.

- Each subcommittee will be given a list of activities they are responsible for completing and an approximate timeline. Each subcommittee will report back to the steering committee at least quarterly, and that report will be shared at the next steering committee meeting.

Expected Outcomes and Impacts

A steering committee consisting of community and business leaders will implement this strategic plan, while using their skills and expertise to bring additional resources to the community's child care efforts. Incremental outcomes will be the committee establishing subcommittees and assuring the action plan for each year is accomplished, or if needed revised to a more suitable timeframe or action steps. The ultimate impact of the steering committee will be the community achieving the goals of this strategic plan by 2029.

Strategy 2- Inform employers and other community partners about recent child care efforts including the *Child Care Market Analysis* to begin engagement and support the implementation of this *Strategic Plan for Child Care*.

Informing employers and other community partners about the need for regulated child care in Storm Lake, along with the goals and strategies in this plan, will lay the groundwork for efforts that will make child care more accessible in Storm Lake. An annual review of the progress of this plan, followed by a report to employers and community partners will demonstrate the progress that is made.

Action Plan

July 2024 through June 2025 (Year 1)

- The City of Storm Lake will host a meeting where First Children's Finance will present the key findings and child care gap analysis from the *Child Care Market Analysis* and an overview of the goals and strategies from this *Strategic Plan for Child Care*.
- The Child Care Steering Committee begins identifying individuals to participate on subcommittees to begin implementing specific strategies in this plan.

July 2025 through June 2026 (Year 2, repeat annually)

- The Child Care Steering Committee will review the strategic plan strategies to identify which activities are completed and which require action in the upcoming year. Once activities for the upcoming year are identified, the committee will determine what entity will be responsible and develop a timeline.

- The Child Care Steering Committee provides an annual update on the progress and upcoming action steps to local employers and other community partners. These updates could be shared in a number of ways, including a presentation at the annual meeting of a local organization, inclusion in an annual report, newsletters, or press releases.
- The Child Care Steering Committee will highlight success stories resulting from the strategies in this plan, including new child care providers, child care business expansions, and partnerships between child care programs and employers and community partners.

Expected Outcomes and Impacts

Engaging employers and other community partners in the child care conversation will result in increased support for parents in the workforce and for child care programs. Informing employers and community partners of the *Child Care Market Analysis* and the *Strategic Plan for Child Care* may result in additional support and future engagement in implementing the strategies of this plan. As updates are shared and progress is demonstrated, it may lead to additional employers and community partners becoming involved.

Strategy 3– Provide resources and information about child care, child care related employee benefits, child care partnerships, and employer sponsored child care models to local employers.

There are a variety of ways employers can support their workers who use child care. Through the surveys conducted as part of the *Child Care Market Analysis*, 53% of employers indicate they include child care information in employee orientation and 33% indicated they include it in the employee handbook. When parents were asked the same question, only 1% indicated that their or their spouse's or partner's employer offered either of these.

Separately, employers were asked which child care solutions they are willing to consider. The top options selected by employers were, to appoint an employee to serve on the Board of Directors of a child care program (40% of employers), provide in-kind services to reduce expenses of a child care program (ex. bookkeeping, maintenance) (27%), make a donation or financial contribution for scholarships for your employees (27% of employers), and make a donation or financial contribution to build, remodel, or expand a child care center (20% of employers).

Action Plan

July 2024 through June 2025 (Year 1)

- The Storm Lake Child Care Steering Committee in partnership with Storm Lake United will develop a plan to provide resources and information to employers about how child care and child care related benefits can be a workforce recruitment and retention strategy, along with the types of benefits and options for the level of involvement an employer may

choose. The first step will be to develop a plan for sharing information. The plan will include key messages to be shared, methods of delivery, timeline, assignments of tasks, and if any costs will be incurred and how those will be paid for. Some examples and key messages that could be included are:

- Employers include child care information in orientation materials and employee handbooks. Information could include contact information for Child Care Resource & Referral (CCR&R) to utilize the parent referral service, Iowa Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to apply for Child Care Assistance to help pay for tuition, and the local Early Childhood Iowa (ECI) area to apply for preschool tuition scholarships.
 - Child Care Resource & Referral, parent referral service to find child care: <https://iowaccrr.org/families>
 - Iowa Department of Health and Human Services, information for families: <https://hhs.iowa.gov/programs/programs-and-services/child-care/child-care-tools-and-resources>
 - Buena Vista Crawford Sac (BVCS) Early Childhood Iowa to inquire about preschool scholarships: <https://bvcsearlychildhoodiowa.org>
- Dependent Care Flex Spending Accounts (FSA), allowing employees to set aside their own pre-tax dollars to help pay for child care.
- Lifestyle Spending Accounts, where the employee can use the funds for work-life balance benefits including child care tuition. These spending accounts are funded by the employer; however, employees may have to pay income tax on the funds.
- Options for employers to directly supplement child care costs for their employees, including paying all or a portion of the tuition directly to the provider, or reimbursing an employee for child care expenses.
- Employer-funded scholarships for their own employees through either the employer, a specific child care provider, or a local fiscal agent.
- Employer partnerships with child care programs for reserved spaces, enrollment priority, or tuition discounts for their employees, in exchange for on-going financial support.
- A significant annual financial commitment to a child care program, such as donating an amount equal to a child care center director's annual wage.
- Presentation of replicable models of employer sponsored or supported child care.
- Allowing schedule flexibility or work from home options (for appropriate positions), when an employee's child care arrangement is temporarily not available, such as a child not being allowed to attend child care due to sickness or the provider being on vacation.

July 2025 through June 2026 (Year 2, repeat annually)

- The Storm Lake Child Care Steering Committee will review the prior year's efforts to determine what information needs to be shared on a regular basis. Information will be updated and shared annually, or as necessary.

Expected Outcomes and Impacts

Providing information and resources to employers can increase their involvement in child care, including offering child care related benefits that result in increased support for the local workforce. If employers incorporate child care benefits or child care information into materials such as handbooks or orientation information, employees that are parents will feel supported and may feel that child care is more accessible. Employers that are able to offer benefits that have a financial aspect such as flex spending or tuition scholarships may also experience positive outcomes such as improved employee attraction and retention.

Strategy 4- Provide parents access to information that will assist them in understanding, identifying, and choosing child care.

Every parent wants their child to be in a child care setting that not only meets their basic needs for safety and security, but also provides nurturance and prepares that child for school success. For working parents, choosing child care may be one of the most critical decisions they can make as the child care environment has lasting effects on the child.

Child Care Resource & Referral provides services and information to help parents make informed choices about the care of their child. In addition to providing parents referrals or names or specific child care providers, the agency also has information about choosing quality child care, a checklist of questions for interviewing child care providers, and information about child care regulations and voluntary quality initiatives in Iowa.

For families that struggle to pay for child care or preschool there are options available. Child Care Assistance (CCA) is available to the children of income-eligible parents to help pay for care at Iowa Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) approved child care programs while a parent or caretaker works or attends school. An additional source for families that wish to participate in preschool is the scholarship or voucher program available through Early Childhood Iowa (ECI).

Action Plan

July 2024 through June 2025 (Year 1)

- The Storm Lake Child Care Steering Committee will lead efforts to inform parents of the current child care environment in Storm Lake and how to navigate finding child care. The

first step will be to develop a plan for sharing information. The plan will include key messages to be shared, methods of delivery, timeline, assignments of tasks, and if any costs will be incurred and how those will be paid for. Some examples and key messages that could be included are:

- Parent referral services available through Child Care Resource & Referral (CCR&R). The steering committee will compile information to be shared and develop a plan for distribution including possible content, timeline, method of distribution or platforms where information will be shared. Some of the information that will be included is contact information for the regional CCR&R office, website link, and a QR code with:
 - Community entities including (but not limited to): City of Storm Lake, Storm Lake Community School District, St. Mary's School, Storm Lake United, and employers.
 - Current parents and expecting parents. To reach expecting parents Buena Vista Regional Medical Center will be asked to partner to distribute information.
- Realities of getting into child care and waitlists at local child care programs. Information will be shared via social media, and with local entities including City of Storm Lake, Storm Lake Community School District, Storm Lake United, and employers, and those entities asked to share with their clients and constituents.
- Iowa Child Care Assistance (CCA) program through the Iowa Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and encourage parents to complete the form on the HHS website in order for HHS to determine if they are eligible.
- Buena Vista, Crawford, Sac (BVCS) Early Childhood Iowa (ECI) services and programs, including (but not limited to) the income-based preschool scholarship program.

July 2025 through June 2026 (Year 2, repeat annually)

- The Storm Lake Child Care Steering Committee will review the prior year's efforts to determine what information needs to be shared on a regular basis. Information will be updated and shared annually, or as necessary.

Expected Outcomes and Impacts

Current and future parents will have easy access to information and resources that support their individual child care needs. Parents will become familiar with CCR&R child care referral assistance and gain knowledge to help them understand the different types of care and know what to look for in a quality environment.

GOAL 2

Increase the number of regulated child care spaces available year-round in Storm Lake, from 32 to at least 198 spaces by 2029.

In the 50588–zip code, which includes Storm Lake, Lakeside, and the surrounding unincorporated areas, there are 2,301 children ages 0 to 11. Of those, First Children’s Finance (FCF) estimates 1,422 have all parents working and approximately 1,251 of those are from families that prefer to use an Iowa Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) regulated child care setting. According to HHS, as of August 2023 there are a total of 304 spaces in regulated child care settings (centers and homes), with only 32 of those available on a full-time, year-round basis.

There are several forms of early care and education available in Iowa to meet each family’s varying needs and preferences. In Iowa, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) oversees programs that fall into three categories—Licensed Centers, Registered Child Development Homes, and Child Care Homes. The level of regulation and requirements placed on the provider varies among the three categories.

Through the parent surveys conducted as part of the *Child Care Market Analysis* for Storm Lake in 2023, it was determined that 66% of current parents and 76% of future parents prefer to use an HHS licensed center, while 19% of current parents and 6% of future parents prefer to use an HHS registered child development home.

Licensed Centers

Licensed centers include child care centers (including child care programs operated by school districts), preschool programs, and Head Start. A center can care for larger groups of children, which are typically separated by age groups according to specific staff-to-child ratios. All centers are required to have an Iowa HHS inspection prior to opening and an unannounced annual inspection after that. A center must renew their license every two years. A licensed center may apply for a Child Care Assistance Provider Agreement and may participate in the voluntary Iowa Quality for Kids (IQ4K) quality rating improvement system.

Child Development Homes (a.k.a. Registered Homes)

Anyone caring for more than 6 children at a time is required to register with the Iowa Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). Registered child development homes can provide care for up to 8, 12 or 16 children at a time depending on the registration level and the ages of the children present at any given time⁴. Registration levels A, B, or C are based on the providers’ experience

⁴ When there are children 24 months or younger present, the provider may not be able to care for the maximum number they are approved for.

and if there are any assistants or co-providers present. These programs are required to have an Iowa HHS inspection prior to opening and an unannounced annual inspection after that. A registered child development home must reapply for registration every two years. A registered child development home may apply for a Child Care Assistance Provider Agreement with Iowa HHS and may participate in the voluntary ChildNet program and Iowa Quality for Kids (IQ4K) quality rating improvement system.

Child Care Homes

Child care homes can care for 6 or fewer children at any given time. These programs are not required to register but have the option to do so. A child care home may apply for a Child Care Assistance (CCA) Provider Agreement. A child care home must reapply to HHS every two years to continue their agreement for CCA. Child care homes serving children eligible for child care assistance must complete an unannounced inspection once per year to assure compliance with health, safety, and fire standards. These providers are not eligible to participate in ChildNet or IQ4K.

Strategy 1- Increase the number of spaces within Iowa Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) registered child development homes in Storm Lake.

Through the parent survey conducted as part of the *Child Care Market Analysis*, it was determined that 19% of current parents and 6% of future parents prefer to use an HHS registered child development home. When the *Child Care Market Analysis* was completed for Storm Lake in December 2023, there were 3 registered child development homes with a collective capacity of 34 spaces. Overall, there are 1,251 children ages 0 to 11 living in Storm Lake that are likely to use regulated child care, in addition there are families living outside the city limits and in neighboring communities that would prefer to bring their children to Storm Lake for child care.

Anyone caring for more than 6 children at a time is required to register with the Iowa Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). Registered child development homes can care for a maximum of 8 (level A), 12 (level B), or 16 (level C) children at a time depending on the ages of children present. Registration levels are based on the providers' experience and if there are any assistants or co-providers present.

This strategy will focus on increasing the number of regulated spaces within registered homes in two ways, by establishing new registered child development homes and by converting non-registered home-based child care to registered child development homes.

Action Plan

July 2024 through June 2025 (Year 1)

- The Storm Lake Child Care Steering Committee will appoint a subcommittee to compile information to share with individuals not currently providing care that might be interested in establishing a new registered child development home and currently unregulated home-based child care providers. Information and resource providers that may be contacted include:
 - Child Care Resource & Referral of Northwest Iowa (CCR&R)- When registration is required for a home-based provider, the benefits of registration, and contact information for individuals to receive assistance with the registration process. Benefit information may include the ability to access state and federally funded programs like Child Care Assistance, Child Care Wages, and Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP).
 - Buena Vista Crawford Sac (BVCS) Early Childhood Iowa- Information on the *Business Investment Program (BIP)* grant for costs related to startup, expansion of a child care program, and to help an already existing registered home that wishes to participate in quality initiatives such as Iowa Quality for Kids (IQ4K) cover costs associated with making improvements for that program.
 - City of Storm Lake and Storm Lake United- Local funding and small business incentives that can be used to start new or expanding existing child care programs, including who to contact for more information.
 - Identify individuals, organizations, and businesses that offer consulting, technical assistance, and training for child care providers that can be a resource for individuals wanting to start a home-based new child care business. Already known child care specific supports include Child Care Resource & Referral (CCR&R), First Children's Finance, Iowa Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), and Iowa State University Extension and Outreach, while already known non-child care specific supports include Buena Vista University-Lamberti Center for Rural Entrepreneurship, Iowa Central Community College, Small Business Development Centers (SBDC), and SCORE.
- The subcommittee will use the information compiled, along with input from BVCS Early Childhood Iowa and CCR&R, to develop a campaign targeted at individuals that might be interested in establishing a new registered child development home and currently unregulated home-based child care providers. The campaign will include details on the targeted audience, specific topics or information to share, methods of delivery (ex. social media, individual conversations, press releases, etc.), timelines, costs (if any), and assignments. The plan will include providing information in multiple languages, and informing individuals that are contacted of options for child care related trainings,

technical assistance, and other information in languages other than English. Part of the specific topics or messages will focus on the benefits of being registered with HHS, including access to local and state level incentives and programs that can provide business support and potentially increase a provider's income.

- After the campaign is developed, the subcommittee will implement the plan in order to increase the awareness of the community and non-registered child care providers as to when registration is required, and the benefits and opportunities that are available to providers that are registered with HHS including access to local and state programs that can provide business support and potentially increase a provider's income and being included on CCR&R's parent referral list.
- A representative of the subcommittee will contact Child Care Resource & Referral (CCR&R) to discuss options for those interested in becoming a registered child development home to participate in *Child Care Ready*, including inquiring if offering a local or regional in-person series is feasible. Child Care Ready is a professional development series that includes coaching, mentorship, and best practices for individual child care professionals. The educational series offers all of the pre-certification training required to start a registered home child care business, including: *Essentials Preservice Series*, *Mandatory Reporter Training*, *CPR/First Aid*, *Business Practices to Consider*, *Emergency Preparedness Training*, and follow-up support. Participating providers also have the opportunity to work on the following requirements for becoming a registered child development home either through the classes or with a consultant: application process, fingerprinting (18 & older), background check (14 & older), telephone requirements, and pre-inspection checklist.
- The subcommittee will compile a list of currently operating unregulated child care providers. Members of the subcommittee or the steering committee will contact each of the individuals identified to assure they have the compiled information and encourage them to connect with CCR&R for assistance with the registration process.
- If the Storm Lake Child Care Steering Committee, the subcommittee, or any community partners become aware of an individual interested in becoming a home-based child care provider or converting their non-registered home to a registered home, the committee member will connect the individual with CCR&R for assistance with the registration process.
- If the Storm Lake Child Care Steering Committee, the subcommittee, or any community partners become aware of an individual interested in becoming a home-based child care provider or converting their non-registered home to a registered home, the committee member will connect the individual with BVCS Early Childhood Iowa for information about the *Business Investment Program (BIP)* grant, which can assist with

costs related to startup, expansion, and participating in quality initiatives such as Iowa Quality for Kids (IQ4K).

July 2025 through June 2026 (Year 2, repeat annually)

- The subcommittee will repeat the process of identifying potential providers and connecting them to Child Care Resource & Referral for assistance with the registration process. The committee will also provide potential providers with information on the most up-to-date incentives available at the community level.
- The subcommittee conducts an annual review of the recruitment process and makes adjustments as needed.

Expected Outcomes and Impacts

The expected outcome of this strategy is the creation of at least 2 additional registered child development homes by the end of 2029. These providers will be a combination of individuals starting a new home-based child care business and already operating non-registered providers becoming registered with the Iowa Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). The maximum capacity of a Level A registered child development home according to HHS regulations is 8 children. By adding 2 new registered child development homes, the outcome will be 16 new HHS regulated child care spaces.

Strategy 2– Establish a new Iowa Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) licensed child care center that is licensed to serve a minimum of 150 children.

Through the parent survey conducted as part of the *Child Care Market Analysis*, it was determined that 66% of current parents and 76% of future parents prefer to use a licensed child care center. As of December 2023, there are 304 regulated spaces in Storm Lake. Of those 272 are within licensed centers or preschools, but all of those spaces are school year only preschool spaces. Currently, there are an estimated 1,251 children in Storm Lake ages 0 to 11 that are likely to use regulated child care.

Action Plan

July 2024 through June 2025 (Year 1)

- The Storm Lake Child Care Steering Committee will form subcommittees consisting of both committee members and community volunteers. Initial subcommittees will include Business Plan, Facility, and Capital Campaign.
- The Business Plan subcommittee will develop a sustainable business model, which may be done using technical assistance or consulting from a third-party. The process will include developing financial projections for the first 5 years of operations that reflect a

sustainable business model. Adjustments may need to be made until a sustainable model is found. Key assumptions for the projections include:

- Capacity of the center by age group or classroom.
- Projected enrollment by age group or classroom.
- The number of staff needed to maintain the HHS required staff-to-child ratios for the projected enrollments.
- Operating assumptions that include the following income and expenses:
 - Tuition rates and structure.
 - Non-tuition income- Including Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), Child Care Assistance, donations, and fundraising.
 - Staff wages and benefits.
 - Food costs.
 - Insurance.
 - Rent or mortgage payment.
 - Supplies.
 - Training and professional development costs.
- Once a sustainable model is found, the Business Plan subcommittee will develop a detailed business plan, starting with the assumptions from the business model, which may be done using technical assistance or consulting from a third-party. Key components of the business plan may include (but not be limited to):
 - Description of business ownership or governance (how decisions are made).
 - Quality initiatives such as curriculum and child assessments to be used.
 - Staff education and qualification requirements, both HHS requirements and any additional education or requirements that go above and beyond the HHS requirements for licensing to meet voluntary quality initiatives.
 - Partnerships.
 - Update annual budget projections from the business model to reflect operational decisions made during the business planning process.
 - Start-up costs including construction or remodeling (including permits, engineering, utility connections, etc.-if needed).
 - Funding sources for construction and start-up costs.
 - Timeline for construction or remodel and opening.

July 2025 through June 2026 (Year 2)

- The Facility subcommittee will review “*Comm. 204 Care Centers and Preschools Licensing Standards and Procedures*” to gain a basic understanding of the regulations for child care centers. <https://hhs.iowa.gov/sites/default/files/Comm204.pdf>

- The Facility subcommittee will identify existing buildings and vacant lots to be considered for a new child care center.
 - Existing Buildings- The Storm Lake Child Care Steering Committee will contact the building owner to discuss willingness to sell the property, or if necessary, to lease the space for child care. The properties will be toured by the committee, and the local HHS licensing consultant when possible.
 - Negotiate purchase or lease of building.
 - If leased, determine if the property owner or the child care program will pay for renovations.
 - If leased or co-located, negotiate lease and terms of use, including shared spaces or shared services, such as meals or bulk purchasing of supplies.
 - Hire an architect to develop plans and cost estimates for any renovations or modifications that are necessary to meet both fire marshal and HHS requirements.
 - Vacant Lots- The Storm Lake Child Care Steering Committee will contact the land owner to discuss acquiring the property, or if necessary, a long-term lease option.
 - Negotiate purchase or lease of land.
 - Hire an architect to develop building plans and cost estimate for constructing a new facility.
- Once a potential site has been identified, the Facility subcommittee will develop a project budget, consisting of cost estimates for purchasing land, construction or remodeling (including permits, engineering, utility connections, etc.-if needed), software and technology, furnishings and equipment for the classrooms, commercial kitchen, office, and playgrounds. This may require the assistance of an architect, engineer, or other third-party consultant.
- The Business Plan subcommittee and Capital Campaign subcommittee will research economic development or small business incentives that may be available for this project. If incentives are available, update the financial projections from the business plan and capital campaign plan as appropriate. Incentives to investigate include, but are not limited to:
 - Property tax forgiveness or abatement (if the entity is expected to pay property taxes).
 - Tax Increment Financing (TIF).
 - Local Option Sales Tax (LOST).
 - Utility hook-ups or extension of utilities to an undeveloped lot.
 - Donation of land to build a new center.
 - In-kind donation of services such as lawn maintenance or snow removal.

- Local revolving loan fund.
- The Capital Campaign subcommittee will use the project budget developed by the Facility subcommittee to develop a fundraising plan. Key components of the plan will include:
 - Start-up costs including the Facility Committee's project budget, plus initial hiring and training costs and 3 to 6 months of operating expenses.
 - Develop donor levels, sponsorship and naming opportunities, and recognition.
 - Identify a fiscal agent or develop a system to track donations, provide tax receipts, and collect annual pledges.
 - Identify potential grant sources.
 - Identify potential private donors, individuals, organizations, and businesses.
 - Plan fundraising events.
- The Storm Lake Child Care Steering Committee will identify individuals to serve as the initial Board of Directors, who will in turn establish a nonprofit organization. Once formed, the Board will begin working with and overseeing the already established project subcommittees. The initial Board of Directors will:
 - Develop and file Articles of Incorporation with the Iowa Secretary of State.
 - Develop and adopt bylaws.
 - Apply to the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) for 501(c)(3) nonprofit status.
 - Apply for an Employer Identification Number (EIN).
- The Board of Directors will launch the capital campaign, with support and assistance from the Capital Campaign subcommittee, and additional community volunteers as needed.

July 2026 through June 2027 (Year 3)

- The capital campaign continues.
- The Board of Directors will develop detailed administrative and financial policies outlining how the organization will operate.

July 2027 through June 2028 (Year 4)

- The capital campaign continues.
- The Board of Directors will review and update the business plan including start-up budget and timeline, and operating budget projections.
- Construction or remodeling underway.

July 2028 through June 2029 (Year 5)

- The capital campaign continues.
- The Board of Directors will review and update the business plan including start-up budget and timeline, and operating budget projections.

- The Board of Directors will hire a Center Director. Steps of this process include:
 - Finalize Center Director job description and appoint a hiring and interview team. Post the job description and begin accepting resumes.
 - The Board of Directors submits the potential Center Director's qualifications to the local HHS child care consultant for approval.
 - A job offer is made, pending approval from Iowa Department of Health and Human Services, and the individual's credentials sent to HHS for approval. The qualified individual must meet the educational and experience requirements as stated in *"Comm. 204 Care Centers and Preschools Licensing Standards and Procedures"*.
 - Upon approval from HHS, conduct a full background check including fingerprints and HHS required physical examination.
- The Center Director, with approval from the Board, will finalize job descriptions for all other staff positions, determine immediate staffing needs, and begin the hiring process. As staff are hired, perform the required background checks, and assure each individual has completed the required physical examination and training.
- The Center Director, with support from the Board of Directors, will develop documents and materials required for licensed centers, including:
 - Staff and parent handbooks.
 - Enrollment forms.
 - Set-up system for child and personnel files.
 - Emergency preparedness plan.
 - Annual calendar for first 2 years, including planned closures and important dates, such as HHS licensing renewal.
- The Center Director, with support from the Board of Directors, will set up billing and attendance software, including staff scheduling and timesheet management.
- The Center Director will oversee the delivery of furnishings and equipment, and classroom set up. The Board of Directors will be asked to assist as needed.
- The new center is open.

Expected Outcomes and Impacts

The expected outcome of this strategy will be the creation of a minimum of 150 new child care spaces within a licensed child care center that are available full-time, year-round for children ages 0 to 12, by the end of 2028. Adding these spaces will increase the child care supply in Storm Lake, making it easier for parents to find care in their preferred setting and location, giving them peace of mind so they can work.

Strategy 3– Approach local schools with spaces already licensed by Iowa Department of Health and Human Services to determine the feasibility of utilizing those spaces year-round.

As of December 2023, there are 200 spaces within the Storm Lake Community School and 48 spaces within St. Mary's School that are regulated by Iowa Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) for preschool or child care. Currently, these spaces are only during the school year. To fully utilize the regulated spaces that already exist in Storm Lake, the Child Care Steering Committee will contact each school to explore options for the schools to extend their offerings to provide child care in the already licensed spaces on non-school days and during the summer. The *Child Care Market Analysis* will be utilized to show the need for year-round care, especially for school age children. If the schools do not want to provide care but are willing to allow another entity to use the space when it is not in use by the school, the steering committee will make a connection between the schools and any child care entities that could offer child care in these already approved spaces.

Action Plan

July 2024 through June 2025 (Year 1)

- The Storm Lake Child Care Steering Committee will contact Storm Lake Community School District and St. Mary's School to determine if they are willing to expand their offerings to include child care on non-school days and during the summer. If the programs are not interested, they will be asked if they are willing to rent space to another entity that would provide child care.
- If the schools are interested, the Child Care Steering Committee will provide support if needed.
- If the schools are not interested but willing to rent space to another entity, the Child Care Steering Committee will assist in finding the entity to provide the child care programming in the space. Once the entity is found, the steering committee's involvement will end and specifics of the partnership between the school and the renter will be determined by those entities.

Expected Outcomes and Impacts

If Storm Lake Community School District were to operate their school age program year-round or allow another entity to rent space, there is a potential to increase the number of regulated year-round spaces by 200. If St. Mary's were to operate their program school age program year-round or allow another entity to rent the space that has already been licensed by Iowa Department of Health and Human Services, there is a potential to increase the number of regulated year-round spaces by 48. If both programs were willing to either provide year-round care or would partner so that the spaces already regulated by Iowa Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) could be used by another entity, the total number of regulated year-round spaces in Storm Lake

has the potential to increase from the current total of 32 spaces by 248, to 280 spaces, if all spaces were utilized.

Strategy 4– Establish a peer networking group for home-based child care providers.

To encourage more home-based child care providers to become registered child development homes, a local child care provider networking group will be established. This networking group will be an opportunity for non-registered home providers to begin learning about the benefits of being a registered provider from peers, before working with a regulatory agency. While the primary purpose of the group will be to share first-hand experiences related to being a registered home provider, it is expected resources and support related to child care practices and stable business operations will also be shared.

The Storm Lake Child Care Steering Committee will identify home-based providers that are currently registered or retired but were previously registered to lead the group. Once individuals have been identified and agree to lead the networking group, the group will function independently, with no affiliation with or obligation to the Storm Lake Child Care Steering Committee or the City of Storm Lake.

Action Plan

July 2024 through June 2025 (Year 1)

- The Storm Lake Child Care Steering Committee will contact current and retired child care providers that are or were registered child development homes, to find one or two individuals that are willing to coordinate a networking group. Once those individuals are identified and have agreed, the steering committee will assist the coordinators to plan initial networking events and possible topics.
- The networking group coordinators will identify both registered and non-registered home providers, inform them of the purpose of the group, and invite them to the upcoming events.

Expected Outcomes and Impacts

This networking group will be an opportunity for non-registered home providers to begin learning about the benefits of being a registered provider from peers, before working with a regulatory agency. The ultimate impact of this strategy will be measured by the number of new regulated child care spaces are available in Storm Lake in 2029.

Strategy 5– Promote existing classes for middle school and high school students that will care for children by babysitting or nannying, and for children that may be staying home alone.

When there are not enough regulated child care spaces within a community some parents will seek other options, such as hiring local youth to babysit or nanny, or leave school age children home alone, especially after school and over summer break. These child care arrangements are not regulated and require no training.

Action Plan

July 2024 through June 2025 (Year 1)

- The Storm Lake Child Care Steering Committee will promote options for classes intended for children that will be babysitting or nannying or that may be home alone. This information can be incorporated into the promotion plan being developed to inform parents of the current child care market in Storm Lake (Goal 1, Strategy 4 of this plan).

Known classes that may be included when they are offered are:

- Iowa State University Extension and Outreach’s “Babysitting Clinic”. This class is for 7th grade and up that want to provide babysitting services. Sessions included CPR for Adults, Infants, and Toddlers and Basic First Aid, Babysitting Basics & Responsibilities, Basic Care, and Safe Play.
- Iowa State University Extension and Outreach’s “On Their Own & Ok”. This class is designed to help 4th through 6th grade students develop their self-care skills to make good decisions while staying home alone. This workshop reinforces how to act in an emergency, helps young people handle boredom without technology, and recommends age-appropriate chores.
- American Red Cross’s offers “Babysitting Basics” online course. This class is for youth ages 11 and up. Topics include how to provide care for infants and children; how to stay safe; what to do in an emergency; how to choose age-appropriate activities; and how to recognize and handle a variety of behaviors. Students will also learn the basics of starting a babysitting business.

July 2025 through June 2026 (Year 2, repeat annually)

- The Storm Lake Child Care Steering Committee will review the prior year’s efforts to determine what information needs to be shared on a regular basis. Information will be updated and shared annually, or as necessary.

Expected Outcomes and Impacts

The expected outcome of this strategy is two-fold, increasing safety and increasing the future child care workforce. Through the child care needs surveys completed as part of the *Child Care Market Analysis*, comments were received from parents noting some children are staying home

alone and that some families are hiring middle and high school students to care for their children during the summer months. Providing these classes will prepare those children to be home alone or take care of younger children, including knowing how to react if there is an emergency. As more students participate in these classes, it is the hope of the Child Care Steering Committee that those youth begin to become interested in a career in the field. As these youth enter high school, they may choose to work part-time in a child care program and eventually move on to earning a Child Development Associate® (CDA) Credential™ or a college degree in Early Childhood Education.

PUTTING THIS PLAN INTO USE

This *Strategic Plan for Child Care* represents a significant investment of community resources. To achieve the expected outcomes and impacts outlined in this plan, members of the Storm Lake Child Care Committee will need to remain engaged and lead efforts, which may include forming subcommittees so that additional community members or organizations become engaged, and activities and workload are distributed.

The plan and progress will be reviewed annually by the Steering Committee, along with strategies and action plans for the upcoming year reported to the community. A matrix with a summary of the planned activities for each of the five years is provided in the Appendix to assist with assigning and tracking which activities are complete.

APPENDIX

Strategic Planning Activities Summarized by Date

The following pages summarize the activities of each strategy in the “Child Care Goals and Strategies” section of this plan. This alternative format is intended to help the child care committee have a condensed list of the activities to be completed each year. This matrix can be convenient for reviewing activities to determine what has been accomplished, as well as to assign activities for the upcoming year. The activities listed in the following tables are a summary, the full details of each activity can be referenced in the description of the corresponding goal and strategies in this plan.

Year 1 July 2024 through June 2025		
Activity	Responsible Party	Date Completed
The City of Storm Lake will appoint the Storm Lake Child Care Steering Committee. (Goal 1, Strategy 1)		
The Storm Lake Child Care Steering Committee will meet to develop committee procedures and to determine which activities are to be completed in Year 1. (Goal 1, Strategy 1)		
The Storm Lake Child Care Steering Committee will form the subcommittees. (Goal 1, Strategy 1)		
The City of Storm Lake will host a meeting to present the <i>Child Care Market Analysis and Strategic Plan for Child Care</i> . (Goal 1, Strategy 2)		
The Child Care Steering Committee begins identifying individuals to participate on subcommittees. (Goal 1, Strategy 2)		
The Storm Lake Child Care Steering Committee in partnership with Storm Lake United will develop a plan to provide resources and information to employers. (Goal 1, Strategy 3)		
The Storm Lake Child Care Steering Committee will lead efforts to inform parents of the current child care environment in Storm Lake and how to navigate finding child care. The first step will be to develop a plan for sharing information. (Goal 1, Strategy 4)		

Year 1 Continued		
Activity	Responsible Party	Date Completed
The Storm Lake Child Care Steering Committee will appoint a subcommittee to compile information to share with individuals not currently providing care that might be interested in establishing a new registered child development home and currently unregulated home-based child care providers. (Goal 2, Strategy 1)		
The subcommittee will use the information compiled, to develop a campaign targeted at individuals that might be interested in establishing a new registered child development home and currently unregulated home-based child care providers. (Goal 2, Strategy 1)		
The subcommittee will implement the plan to increase the awareness of the community and non-registered child care providers. (Goal 2, Strategy 1)		
A representative of the subcommittee will contact Child Care Resource & Referral (CCR&R) to discuss options for those interested in becoming a registered child development home to participate in <i>Child Care Ready</i> . (Goal 2, Strategy 1)		
The subcommittee will compile a list of currently operating unregulated child care providers. (Goal 2, Strategy 1)		
The Storm Lake Child Care Steering Committee, the subcommittee, and community partners will connect individuals interested in becoming a home-based child care provider with CCR&R for assistance in becoming registered. (Goal 2, Strategy 1)		
The Storm Lake Child Care Steering Committee, the subcommittee, or any community will connect individuals interested in becoming a home-based child care provider with CCR&R for information about the <i>Business Investment Program (BIP)</i> grant. (Goal 2, Strategy 1)		
The Storm Lake Child Care Steering Committee will form subcommittees to establish a new center. (Goal 2, Strategy 2)		
The business plan subcommittee will develop a sustainable business model. (Goal 2, Strategy 2)		

Year 1 Continued		
Activity	Responsible Party	Date Completed
The business plan subcommittee will develop a detailed business plan, starting with the assumptions from the business model. (Goal 2, Strategy 2)		
The Storm Lake Child Care Steering Committee will contact the schools to determine if they are willing to expand their offerings to include child care on non-school days and during the summer. (Goal 2, Strategy 3)		
If the schools are not interested in offering child care but willing to rent space to another entity, the Child Care Steering Committee will assist in finding the entity to provide the child care programming in the space. (Goal 2, Strategy 3)		
The Storm Lake Child Care Steering Committee will find one or two individuals that are willing to coordinate a networking group, and assist in planning an initial networking event and possible topics. (Goal 2, Strategy 4)		
The networking group coordinators will identify home providers and invite them to the upcoming events. (Goal 2, Strategy 4)		
The Storm Lake Child Care Steering Committee will promote options for classes intended for children that will be babysitting or nannying or that may be home alone through the promotion plan being developed to inform parents of the current child care market in Storm Lake. (Goal 2, Strategy 5)		

Year 2 July 2025 through June 2026		
Activity	Responsible Party	Date Completed
Storm Lake Child Care Steering Committee will review the activities from Year 1 and determine which activities will occur in Year 2. (Goal 1, Strategy 1)		
Each subcommittee will be given a list of activities they are responsible for completing and an approximate timeline. (Goal 1, Strategy 1)		
The Child Care Steering Committee provides an annual update on the progress and upcoming action steps to local employers and other community partners. (Goal 1, Strategy 2)		
The Child Care Steering Committee will highlight success stories resulting from the strategies in this plan. (Goal 1, Strategy 2)		
The Storm Lake Child Care Steering Committee will review the prior year's efforts to determine what information employers need on a regular basis. Information will be updated and shared annually, or as necessary. (Goal 1, Strategy 3)		
The Storm Lake Child Care Steering Committee will review the prior year's efforts to determine what information parents need on a regular basis. Information will be updated and shared annually, or as necessary. (Goal 1, Strategy 4)		
The subcommittee will repeat the process of identifying potential providers and connecting them to Child Care Resource & Referral for assistance and information on the most up-to-date incentives available at the community level. (Goal 2, Strategy 1)		
The subcommittee conducts an annual review of the recruitment process and makes adjustments as needed. (Goal 2, Strategy 1)		
The facility committee will review " <i>Comm. 204 Care Centers and Preschools Licensing Standards and Procedures</i> " to gain a basic understanding of the regulations for child care centers. (Goal 2, Strategy 2)		
The facility committee will identify existing buildings and vacant lots to be considered for a new child care center. (Goal 2, Strategy 2)		

Year 2 Continued		
Activity	Responsible Party	Date Completed
The Facility Committee will develop a project budget, consisting of cost estimates with the assistance of an architect, engineer, or other third-party consultant. (Goal 2, Strategy 2)		
The Business Plan Committee and Capital Campaign Committee will research economic development or small business incentives and update the business plan and capital campaign plan as appropriate. (Goal 2, Strategy 2)		
The Capital Campaign subcommittee will use the project budget developed by the Facility subcommittee to develop a fundraising plan. (Goal 2, Strategy 2)		
The Storm Lake Child Care Steering Committee will identify individuals to serve as the initial Board of Directors for the new center. (Goal 2, Strategy 2)		
The new Board of Directors will formerly establish the nonprofit organizations. (Goal 2, Strategy 2)		
The Board of Directors of the new center will launch the capital campaign. (Goal 2, Strategy 2)		
The Storm Lake Child Care Steering Committee will review the prior year's efforts of promoting classes for children babysitting or staying home alone, to determine what information needs to be shared on a regular basis. (Goal 2, Strategy 5)		

Year 3 July 2026 through June 2027		
Activity	Responsible Party	Date Completed
Storm Lake Child Care Steering Committee will review the activities from Year 1 and determine which activities will occur in Year 2. (Goal 1, Strategy 1)		
Each subcommittee will be given a list of activities they are responsible for completing and an approximate timeline. (Goal 1, Strategy 1)		
The Child Care Steering Committee provides an annual update on the progress and upcoming action steps to local employers and other community partners. (Goal 1, Strategy 2)		
The Child Care Steering Committee will highlight success stories resulting from the strategies in this plan. (Goal 1, Strategy 2)		
The Storm Lake Child Care Steering Committee will review the prior year's efforts to determine what information employers need on a regular basis. Information will be updated and shared annually, or as necessary. (Goal 1, Strategy 3)		
The Storm Lake Child Care Steering Committee will review the prior year's efforts to determine what information parents need on a regular basis. Information will be updated and shared annually, or as necessary. (Goal 1, Strategy 4)		
The subcommittee will repeat the process of identifying potential providers and connecting them to Child Care Resource & Referral for assistance and information on the most up-to-date incentives available at the community level. (Goal 2, Strategy 1)		
The subcommittee conducts an annual review of the recruitment process and makes adjustments as needed. (Goal 2, Strategy 1)		
The capital campaign for the new center continues. (Goal 2, Strategy 2)		
The Board of Directors will develop detailed administrative and financial policies outlining how the organization will operate. (Goal 2, Strategy 2)		

Year 3 Continued		
Activity	Responsible Party	Date Completed
The Storm Lake Child Care Steering Committee will review the prior year's efforts of promoting classes for children babysitting or staying home alone, to determine what information needs to be shared on a regular basis. (Goal 2, Strategy 5)		

Year 4 July 2027 through June 2028		
Activity	Responsible Party	Date Completed
Storm Lake Child Care Steering Committee will review the activities from Year 1 and determine which activities will occur in Year 2. (Goal 1, Strategy 1)		
Each subcommittee will be given a list of activities they are responsible for completing and an approximate timeline. (Goal 1, Strategy 1)		
The Child Care Steering Committee provides an annual update on the progress and upcoming action steps to local employers and other community partners. (Goal 1, Strategy 2)		
The Child Care Steering Committee will highlight success stories resulting from the strategies in this plan. (Goal 1, Strategy 2)		
The Storm Lake Child Care Steering Committee will review the prior year's efforts to determine what information employers need on a regular basis. Information will be updated and shared annually, or as necessary. (Goal 1, Strategy 3)		
The Storm Lake Child Care Steering Committee will review the prior year's efforts to determine what information parents need on a regular basis. Information will be updated and shared annually, or as necessary. (Goal 1, Strategy 4)		
The subcommittee will repeat the process of identifying potential providers and connecting them to Child Care Resource & Referral for assistance and information on the most up-to-date incentives available at the community level. (Goal 2, Strategy 1)		
The subcommittee conducts an annual review of the recruitment process and makes adjustments as needed. (Goal 2, Strategy 1)		
The capital campaign for the new center continues. (Goal 2, Strategy 2)		
The Board of Directors will review and update the business plan including start-up budget and timeline, and operating budget projections. (Goal 2, Strategy 2)		

Year 4 Continued		
Activity	Responsible Party	Date Completed
Construction or remodeling of the new center underway. (Goal 2, Strategy 2)		
The Storm Lake Child Care Steering Committee will review the prior year's efforts of promoting classes for children babysitting or staying home alone, to determine what information needs to be shared on a regular basis. (Goal 2, Strategy 5)		

Year 5 July 2028 through June 2029		
Activity	Responsible Party	Date Completed
Storm Lake Child Care Steering Committee will review the activities from Year 1 and determine which activities will occur in Year 2. (Goal 1, Strategy 1)		
Each subcommittee will be given a list of activities they are responsible for completing and an approximate timeline. (Goal 1, Strategy 1)		
The Child Care Steering Committee provides an annual update on the progress and upcoming action steps to local employers and other community partners. (Goal 1, Strategy 2)		
The Child Care Steering Committee will highlight success stories resulting from the strategies in this plan. (Goal 1, Strategy 2)		
The Storm Lake Child Care Steering Committee will review the prior year's efforts to determine what information employers need on a regular basis. Information will be updated and shared annually, or as necessary. (Goal 1, Strategy 3)		
The Storm Lake Child Care Steering Committee will review the prior year's efforts to determine what information parents need on a regular basis. Information will be updated and shared annually, or as necessary. (Goal 1, Strategy 4)		
The subcommittee will repeat the process of identifying potential providers and connecting them to Child Care Resource & Referral for assistance and information on the most up-to-date incentives available at the community level. (Goal 2, Strategy 1)		
The subcommittee conducts an annual review of the recruitment process and makes adjustments as needed. (Goal 2, Strategy 1)		
The capital campaign for the new center continues. (Goal 2, Strategy 2)		
The Board of Directors of the new center will review and update the business plan and budget projections. (Goal 2, Strategy 2)		
The Board of Directors of the new center will hire a Center Director. (Goal 2, Strategy 2)		

Year 5 Continued		
Activity	Responsible Party	Date Completed
The Center Director will finalize job descriptions for all other staff positions, determine immediate staffing needs, and begin the hiring process. (Goal 2, Strategy 2)		
The Center Director will develop documents and materials required for licensed centers. (Goal 2, Strategy 2)		
The Center Director will set up billing and attendance software.		
The Center Director will oversee the delivery of furnishings and equipment, and classroom set up. (Goal 2, Strategy 2)		
The new center is open. (Goal 2, Strategy 2)		
The Storm Lake Child Care Steering Committee will review the prior year's efforts of promoting classes for children babysitting or staying home alone, to determine what information needs to be shared on a regular basis. (Goal 2, Strategy 5)		