Baker Childcare & Early Learning Center

Baker, MT

Families in Fallon County have been without a licensed childcare provider since 2019. Vaughn Zenko, the executive director of the Southeast Montana Area Revitalization Team (SMART) and the Eastern Montana Economic Development Authority (EMEDA), knew he had to step up and fill this gap.

To begin the process of creating a licensed childcare facility, Vaughn turned to the Zero to Five Montana program and the SBDC for guidance. They needed help with strategic planning, business planning, and financial projections assistance. Through its partnership with the regional SBDC, Zero to Five SBDC provided 30 hours of technical assistance in market research, startup assistance, and more.

Vaughn and the EMEDA Board found accessing capital necessary to start the program difficult. Thanks to the community, land was donated and private funds were found. With these funds, they were able to acquire two modular buildings to house a Head Start facility and a licensed childcare program.

Unfortunately, when the capital access problem appeared solved, a weather disaster struck. In the summer of 2024, severe storms hit the area, knocking over one of the buildings causing delays and increasing budget costs. Thanks to donations solicited from across the state, they were able to offset the cost of the building. By October 2024, over $7,000 worth of furniture, fixtures, equipment, toys, and books were donated to the program.

With Baker Childcare and Early learning Center planning to open in the winter of 2024, 11 jobs will be created in the Head Start and licensed childcare facilities providing early care and education for 38 children, bringing workers back in the workforce to be employed by the center and enabling dozens of other under-employed or not working residents to re-enter the workforce.

ZERO TO FIVE MONTANA

MILES COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Elizabeth Smith Regional Director
Jason Nitschke Senior Child Care Business Advisor



"Finding a licensed childcare facility in Fallon County has been hard for parents and care takers. With Jason's help, we learned how to start the business and establish goals we wanted to reach. Without the donations of our community and every else, we would not be here today."
Carrie Schwartz and Vaughn Zenko, Directors