

WICIP DRAFT VALLEY VILLAGE

Organization Impact

The mission of Valley Village, a 501(c)3 non-profit organization, is to create a stimulating and nurturing environment where children of all abilities, regardless of socio-economic or cultural background, can benefit, grow, and learn together in acceptance of one another. This mission is accomplished daily by highly trained staff, low teacher/child ratio, curriculum, play-based learning, as well as teacher-led activities.

Valley Village, located in Saratoga, provides childcare services to those employed in Encampment (1), Rawlins (3), rural county (4), Sinclair (2), remote workers (4), and Saratoga (37) by conducting childcare for children aged six weeks through 5 years or when the child begins Kindergarten. The center currently employs 11 staff distributed across Saratoga (6) Hanna (1) Rawlins (1) Encampment (1) rural county (2).

After a private daycare closed unexpectedly in 2020, a group of parents formed a 501c3 nonprofit organization (Valley Village) and hired the necessary teachers needed to continue daycare operations. Their quick actions prevented major disruptions for the children and families.

After operating in a rental facility with limited space and ability to upgrade, in May 2023, the Town of Saratoga sold Valley Village for \$1, a building which formally housed a medical clinic. The Town's objective was to expand daycare in line with its Master Plan and facilitate the smooth operation of Daycare in the same building with Developmental Assessment and Preschool. Valley Village committed to managing the building, raising funds for repair, remodel and upgrade, AND entering into a rental Operating Agreement with ExCEL PreSchool. Valley Village

raised and invested into the building, in excess of \$1,000,000. The 6,100 sq ft building opened for business January 5, 2024.

Under the Operating Agreement with ExCEL Preschool (part of Developmental Preschool and Day Care Center of Laramie, Wyoming) the building's classrooms and restrooms are assigned to each organization, while playground, parking, utilities, are shared .

The 30 year old building needed deferred maintenance repairs. Older systems such as electrical and HVAC systems were replaced for safety and reliability. Code requirements were met: fire suppression system, fire alarm system, commercial grade dishwasher were installed. Efficiency and safety were addressed with kid height toilets and sinks, dutch doors to classrooms for openness, washer/dryer for clean everything, ADA bathrooms, classroom sinks for teachers and each classroom with an exterior exit door. All of this was within the larger project to create "right sized" classrooms to meet State DFS ratios, storage, and offices.

As of June 1, 2024 Valley Village is the only licensed Childcare operation in the North Platte River Valley. The Childcare facility is licensed for forty-eight children, and currently has 31. As more children enroll the needs grow: additional staff, furniture (chairs and cots), playground equipment and supplies.

Proposed Project

There is an outdoor, fenced play area 2/3 covered with padded artificial turf and a large concrete pad for tricycles and push toys. The area is usable and safe, but it is not complete. It lacks a play structure for 3-5 year olds, shading and the padding / artificial turf for the remainder of the play area (which is where the final toy structure will be placed).

Play structures are needed for the physical needs of growing children, by age group. This enables the strengthening of large muscle groups, enhanced balance, confidence, and courage.

Whether the children imagine they are on a pirate ship, a spaceship, or in a hobbit hole, free play is vital for learning. No matter how appealing to the eye, all structures and materials are required to be tested and rated by the ASTM.

Without shade the community elevation of 6,800 feet means that skin damage to children from the UV rays of the sun is almost guaranteed. There are no trees in the immediate area, nor space to plant trees that would take years to grow in this locale. Installing a shade structure would significantly reduce the exposure.

The shade structure will be a retractable, sturdy canvas awning and permanent pergola design attached to the north side of the building. The wind is very strong in Wyoming so every precaution must be made to prevent collapse.

The estimated cost of the play structure, artificial turf and shade structure project is \$75,000, with installations and grading.

While the building is complete and appropriate, the thirty-year-old parking lot does not meet ADA or insurance requirements. The asphalt lot has holes, deteriorated asphalt, frost cracks and uneven patching, which raises concern for the children and families who access the daycare and preschool, even more than usual because of strollers or wheelchairs.

Valley Village's insurance carrier has noted the poor condition of the parking lot and requires that it be fixed prior to the next renewal review in September 2024.

The asphalt parking lot is comprised of 3 sections, each owned by a separate entity: Valley Village, Town of Saratoga, Local dentist. They have agreed to combine the needed work into one large project which will reduce the cost to each entity. Repairs will include major crack repair and a 3" chip seal overlay.

Valley Village's share is estimated to cost \$80,000.

The Valley Village Board of Directors is actively raising funds through individuals, foundations, and grant organizations. Time constraints are limiting the organization of typical methods of raising funds, such as the annual late summer fundraising events.

Project's Impact

Serving our children: Children at daycare benefit from developing social skills, listening, sharing, and healthy emotions. Children from economically disadvantaged backgrounds reap long-term benefits from preschool.

The continuation of the services at this facility to meet the needs of the children, also impacts the life of the valley, its ability to attract young families and working professionals, its ability to staff the new Critical Access Hospital and its ability to retain young people once they are here and begin growing their families.

Some of the families served by Valley Village work in the service and hospitality industry which is essential to the tourism economy of Saratoga and the surrounding areas. The local economy depends on business owners being able to satisfy their employment needs. There is also the added economic benefit of increased payroll in the economy.

Valley Village works to provide fresh produce and locally grown beef. By offering healthy food for lunch and snacks, families may be less vulnerable to food insecurity.

Strong economic benefits: *A 2006 study by W. E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research concluded that “either high-quality preschool, or business subsidies, increase the present value of the earnings of state residents by about \$3 for every \$1 of resources devoted to these alternative policies.”*

The licensing capacity of Valley Village for infant and childcare, means parents could return to the workforce, which could positively affect the 9.5% overall poverty rate and 12% poverty rate among children in Saratoga. Balancing meaningful employment with traditional family responsibilities can be challenging, but a daycare center with a fostering and protective staff may make the decision easier.

Childcare in Saratoga for two children is estimated to be over \$18,000 per year. While this may be limiting to some families, it may allow career development in other families.

Project's Results

This project request is for one-time funding to finish the new childcare facility. The success will be determined by the daily use of both the parking lot and play yard.

The parking lot repair project must meet all industry standards for civil engineering, contractors must follow these specifications, and all methods and materials will be tested. The project's success will be measured against these standards. In addition, a smooth surface will be

achieved immediately upon completion. The lot will be accessible to everyone, and the functional surface will be used daily for families and children.

The play structure and shade structure commercially purchased and professionally installed.. The Valley Village board of directors has evaluated several companies and based their choices on prior experience with these companies, recommendations of other clients as well as price and customer service. Again, stringent safety standards must be met. Standing intact after the first severe weather event, will be proof of its success.

Measuring the success of an expanded creative and safe play area can be done by teacher observation of growth in gross motor skills, balance, confidence in the children. The preschoolers will possess skills such as taking turns and sharing, as well as demonstrating empathy and curiosity, all which are learned and practiced during free play time. The educational goal of the facility is to have the children pass kindergarten-ready assessments conducted by the local school district.

A child's mind and body grow daily. This project plays a large part in their lifetime of knowledge and development.

Project's Community Support

In addition to Excel Preschool (which pays nominal rent to Valley Village), the organization has collaborated with

Carbon County School District #2 and many local businesses.

Funds for the remodel were raised in multiple ways. Donations from local businesses and individuals account for about 30% of the first four phases of Valley Village's facility project. Grant funding (about 70% of the total project costs) was provided by DFS Childcare Stabilization Wave 2, Hughes Charitable Fund Grant, Bridge Street Bargains Grant, White Family Foundation Challenge, Swanson Family Foundation Challenge, Newman Family Foundation Grant, Nord Family Foundation Matching Gift, and Beull Foundation Grant.

Other Funding Sources

The Valley Village Board of Directors is actively seeking funds for the parking lot and play yard. They have launched a "Pennies for our Play Yard" campaign by distributing several cleverly decorated donation jars in most local business locations. They are also participating in the annual WyoGives in July.

The attached Project Budget outlines the funding sources and the expenses incurred for the first four phases of Valley Village's facility project. This grant request is for the fifth and last phase of the project. Because of grant requirements, Valley Village is not eligible to apply for additional funds from most of the foundations which previously awarded the organization.

