

Little Saints Daycare going strong in year 5



Some images of the fun times the children of Little Saints Daycare have had recently.



"I feel dread sometimes when the phone rings," said Little Saints Director Traci Loeffelholz.

Why the dread? Well, after five years of being part of the daycare located in Ss. Andrew-Thomas School in Potosi, she knows that the call is likely going to be from a parent looking to find a place for their child, and Loeffelholz is anticipating having to tell that person they simply do not have any room.

Not only do they not have any room, but they also have a wait list, and like so many daycare facilities, they have much more demand than space or staff.

Started five years ago, Little Saints is going strong. Looking to expand to a fourth classroom, that will be double the space they had when they started in 2017, they handle approximately 30 all-day children, as well as 30 school-age children coming after school.

That number 30 is also about what the waitlist is for the facility.

"I get a phone call every week asking if we have room," Loeffelholz said. "And unfortunately, we don't. And the chances of somebody calling right now and able to get in are basically impossible, just because there's so many people on the waitlist before them."

Little Saints, like other daycares, gives a priority to siblings of existing students for any open spots. They also have a priority for members of the school they are housed in.

She quipped that if someone were to build a daycare in Potosi that was as big as Little Saints, it would be full the next day without affecting their numbers at all - the demand is that high.

Like so many other daycares, spacing and staffing limit their numbers. Guidelines only allow eight children under the age of two per room.

So why not add more space or staff?

"Daycare is such a hard profession to find people who want to work in daycare, because you don't work in daycare for a paycheck," Loeffelholz said, noting that they have to do what many daycares do, balance the fees they charge to cover the costs of renting the space and paying the staff and insurance and taxes.

According to a study done by UW-Madison, nearly 22 percent of individuals in the

childcare field state they are looking to switch careers within the next two years.

That is not the case with the staff at Little Saints, which has not had much turnover. Both Loeffelholz and Assistant Director Jessica Welch have been with the program since it started, and the rest of the staffing has been stable.

"That's phenomenal," Loeffelholz stated, who added that she was 'slightly terrified' about having to hire a new teacher in the future if they add another classroom, not just for how tough it may be, but if it will change the dynamic of the staff they have.

"We have such a good team. Everyone is always willing to help like, 'oh I can stay those extra hours' if someone who isn't feeling good, or they're just all pitching in to help the flow and making the important decisions."

In daycare that connection is important between staff, and the families that come to it. Loeffelholz noted that for the staff that left, they have continued friendships, getting Christmas cards, while with the families, she hears things like "you are like second parents to our kids."

The strong support, and having built up funding allowed Little Saints to weather COVID.

"It definitely was very hard on our business," Loeffelholz said. With many parents working from home, and the health worries early on, the numbers dipped at the daycare. Families paid a holding fee to keep their spots, but for those considered 'essential' workers, their children still came.

Being in Ss. Andrew-Thomas, the daycare benefited from the close tie to the school. The school now has a 3k program, and many of the students split time between the school (which operates the program on Tuesdays and Thursdays in the morning) then walk down the hall to spend the rest of the day at the daycare.

Loeffelholz said that having a space where there is a gym, a playground, and other activities - the daycare will go to programs the school hosts.

The location has helped the daycare be successful. Loeffelholz noted that attempting to find another space would be difficult, and building such a space would likely be cost prohibitive for most, especially considering the liability for running a daycare.

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