

Crescent City childcare centers facing shut down receive grant

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Three Crescent City nonprofit childcare centers were on the brink of shutting down by the end of the year — victims of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic — when they received a \$20,000 grant this week to prevent staff layoffs and keep serving 49 children and their families.

“We were literally going to have an emergency board meeting this month to decide whether to close the three centers down in January. It was that dire of a situation,” said Melodee Mitchell, director for the Del Norte Child Care Council. “These families are working families and this would have directly impacted their ability to work — and we would have had to lay off employees, who would be forced to draw unemployment.”

The grant will allow the three centers — at Mary Peacock Elementary, Little School of the Redwoods and Redwood Elementary — to operate until April, 2021. The centers operate under the auspices of the nonprofit Del Norte Child Care Council.

The grant was provided by the COVID-19 Regional Response Fund created in March by Wild Rivers Community Foundation and Humboldt Area Foundation. The fund offers rapid assistance to struggling nonprofits, charitable organizations and agencies in Del Norte, Humboldt, Curry and Trinity counties.

Keri Mosey, coordinator for WRCF's Nonprofit Alliance, heard of the potential closures and encouraged Mitchell to apply for the grant.

"Through our relationship with these community groups, we are building a powerful, trusted network of support that makes it easier to lift one another up as we all try to get through these difficult times," said Mosey.

Mitchell said the lack of financial assistance from the state or federal governments has left childcare facilities across the state scrambling to keep their doors open. Many of these centers, like the three in Crescent City, are solely dependent on enrollment fees to operate. Making matters more difficult, COVID restrictions reduced the number of the children that can occupy any given center, while at the same time the closure of all Del Norte Unified School District classrooms has significantly increased the demand for child care.

"While other industries have received support from Congress to ensure they can remain open during the pandemic, child care has yet to see meaningful investment," Mitchell said. "This is a critical industry that supports economic recovery and family financial stability. With lower enrollment rates, less revenue and increased expenses, child care providers cannot hang on much longer. Many have already permanently closed."

Heidi Bachman, director of the childcare center at Redwood Elementary, said parents who currently enroll their children at that center are still working at places such as Sutter Coast Hospital, Pelican Bay State Prison, Del Norte Unified School District, a local petroleum company and Del Norte County offices.

"Parents were stressing out about what they will do if we shut down. These families and these kids need us," Bachman said.

Learn more about the COVID-19 Regional Response Fund — and how to donate or receive grants — at hafoundation.org/Giving/COVID19 or call 707-465-1238.