



For Immediate Release

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New Child Care Facilities Ready to Open in Leelanau County

The *Infant & Toddler Child Care Start Up* (ITCS), a working group within the Leelanau Early Childhood Development Commission (LECDC), announced today that owing to their continuing efforts, more child care facilities are opening in Leelanau County.

Kriya Miller, and her husband Matt, have opened a new home-based facility in Solon Township called *Little Valley Daycare*. Kriya enrolled in the ITCS last summer and is now fully licensed by the State of Michigan to provide quality child care in her home. The ITCS team coached her through the licensing process, helped her purchase needed equipment, and helped fund the physical improvements required to prepare her home to meet State and local child care regulations. The ITCS also mentored her in early child care best practices, as well as business planning. “I honestly don’t know if we would have gotten started without ITCS”, Kriya said, “just because of the initial hurdles. I needed that extra financial support and that extra nudge.”

A new child care provider is slated to open in Northport, also through the efforts of the ITCS. The Village of Northport is partnering to offer a building that was built as a child care facility, but closed in 2019. With community support, the building has been renovated; the new provider plans to open this summer.

The Northport facility will be the first to open in Michigan as a unique “micro-center.” The ITCS has been given a special, first-ever variance by the LARA Child Care Regulatory Bureau (the Michigan state bureau overseeing the licensing of child care facilities). This new concept is a beta-test for other communities. It allows licensed providers to utilize a variety of spaces outside their home (a church, office space, school, etc.). With an approved variance from LARA, care is provided by a home-based provider, under the existing center-based regulations.

Currently, there are two basic sets of child care facility regulations in Michigan; home-based and center-based. Home-based facilities can accept up to twelve children with a minimum of two licensed caregivers. However, for a variety of reasons, all too often, people who want to be home-based child care providers are unable or unwilling to provide care in their own homes. The typical center-based child care facility is more expensive to operate because they have more staff and more regulations, but can accommodate many more children. The micro-center variance will alleviate some of these barriers for a people wishing to become a child care providers.

ITCS approached Suttons Bay Schools to utilize an unused elementary classroom; this micro-center can potentially accommodate up to twelve children. A new ITCS provider is currently completing the licensing process and is planning to open this summer.

The Maple City area will also realize a new child care facility thanks to a local church, and it is planning to open this summer. ITCS was able to assist the new provider and she plans to accommodate six to twelve children. The church location is another example of the micro center concept and is currently making some minor renovations to meet state licensing requirements.

To ensure these new facilities provide high quality child care, and are successful, sustainable businesses, each of the new providers has participated in two training series.

The Leelanau Children's Center, an anchor partner of the ITCS initiative, administers the developmental learning program for new providers. It also monitors their progress throughout the ongoing operation of the new facility and mentors the providers when requested. Providers learn how to establish both parent and child relationships, how to teach developmental learning experiences, how to model appropriate child behaviors, and how to apply *Michigan's Great Start to Quality* framework designed to strengthen the family framework.

The Leelanau Peninsula Economic Foundation (LPEF), another anchor partner, recognized the critical need for child care as a means to expand the local workforce. An LPEF board member provides a "financial boot camp," created by Venture North Funding, a commercial development financial institution focused on helping entrepreneurs start new businesses. To ensure sustainability, the new providers are required to develop their own unique business plan to prepare them for the realities of opening a small business. Most importantly, these two training programs equip them with the tools they need to be the quality child care providers that they aspire to be.

"We are so happy to see our efforts over the past year finally culminating in facility openings," said Patricia Soutas-Little, chair of the LECDC. "This has been a much longer process than we had imagined when we started developing this assistance model. There are many nuances in child care, and we needed to get creative and invent a systematic approach that addresses the myriad of details. Fortunately, we have some great partners- in both individuals and communities- that are passionate about helping us achieve our child care expansion goals. "

The ITCS model was created by LECDC in an effort to address the severe lack of child care resources in Leelanau County. The shortage of child care is a nation-wide problem right now and Leelanau County has seen an increasing number of facilities close their doors in recent years. The ITCS initiative is an effort to reverse that trend.

The ITCS initiative was made possible by a grant of \$318,000 from The Early Childhood Investment Corporation (ECIC), a private non-profit corporation located in Lansing. ECIC is hoping that the model developed in Leelanau County can be used throughout the State to expand the number of quality child care facilities in rural communities.

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Note: Photos attached