

## **Introduction**

The Inspiration Station LLC is a daycare and preschool center located in Dickinson, ND, owned and operated by Ashley Rasmussen and Erika Sickler. We have been providing childcare services for a combined 8+ years. We started out as a small in-home, group daycare ran out of Ashley's house. We were able to care for 12 children under our license. Ms. Ashley "gave up" her home to provide these services – to follow code and licensure requirements, Ashley had to install flood lights, No Smoking stickers, floor plans, etc. throughout her house – all of which you would not find in a normal household. All the "extras" not only created a burden on her home, but it also created a financial burden that we were expected to come up with funds to make sure we were up to code. During that time, we were able to use a government supported grant to help offset the costs.

Fast forward to 2025, we have been operating The Inspiration Station for 2.5 years and able to care for up to 57 children under our license in our new facility. The decision to expand was not made easy. During the process, we researched many statistics and ran many business plans to make sure we could be financially stable as childcare is an expensive business to run. We had to consider our own personal bills at home, and the expenses included in running a small business. Please note on top of the usual water, heat, and internet bills, we also had to consider nutritious and delicious groceries, a large printer for all the fun activities, large playground equipment, and most importantly a fair wage to ensure reliable, dedicated staff. Although our license can hold up to 57 children, that does not mean we can meet that number without appropriate staffing. We have relied heavily on grants such as the Quality Improvement Grants and the Inclusion Grants to purchase adequate materials, needed supplies, and costly business expenses to help keep our tuition low but also maintain our dedicated staff by supporting their classroom needs.

## **The Effect**

There are many statistics reporting that childcare is becoming more and more unaffordable for families due to high operating costs, staffing shortages, and inadequate public funding. Many workplaces can offer annual raises and a benefit package, and as a childcare center we always hope we can do the same for our employees. Childcare is the foundation for our children's future. Childcare workers are some of the most important people in the children's lives as 90% of brain development happens before age 5. To maintain a high quality, reliable staff, we have always kept up on training and other programs that help us improve. Some of the programs and grants we have worked with include the Bright and Early, Quality Improvement Grant, Inclusion Grant and working with USpire. Currently we are rated a Step 2 and would love to continue to achieve a Step 3 status. If the funding of 7 million is reduced to 5 million, many childcare programs would be placed in a burden. These funds have helped so many facilities improve their program through supportive training and resourceful materials. To continue this kind of care, childcare programs would have no other option than to increase tuition, putting families into a burden on whether it works in their budget to pay for childcare. This creates a domino effect. A mother, who works as a nurse, decided she must stay home now to watch over her children, leading to the ER being short staffed when your grandmother needs immediate care. A trucking company, who has lost too many drivers due to

not having reliable childcare, can no longer make deadlines for delivery. Whether you have children or not, everyone needs childcare, everyone is relying on that worker to show up to their shift to create that chain reaction and make things happen. Don't be the first domino. Don't reduce childcare funding.

### **Conclusion**

The Inspiration Station has a total of 7 employees. Some of whom are mothers to children, and others young adults just starting out. We like to brag about how wonderful and dedicated our staff truly is – showing up to work each day for a below average wage. We do it because we truly love and care about the children in our care, just as you show up to fight for the people, because you have a passion for the job. And just like politics, childcare is not a business for the faint of heart. We have relied on the childcare funding for materials, supplies, and staffing throughout all our years of providing childcare. We are asking for continued support of the funds at \$7 million. Reducing funding will have a very heavy impact on childcare facilities to operate at a safe ratio, finding reliable staff, and being able to provide affordable care to families in need. Inspiration Station is a place where little minds are inspired to learn and create brilliant ideas; a fun and caring childcare center for children to play and explore. This is our motto we live by daily, please help us continue.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Ashley Rasmussen & Erika Sickler