



# Stevens County Pod Model

*Morris, MN*

## Established

July 2023

## Background & Basic Info

Since 2010, Stevens County has been actively addressing the childcare shortage that has impacted their community. Over the past decade, the county established a childcare committee and organized town hall meetings for families and providers to discuss solutions. Recognizing the challenges of staffing a new center, they opted against building one, focusing instead on family-based care as a more affordable option for families. However, they encountered another obstacle: the housing affordability crisis. This issue led to existing providers closing their businesses and prevented aspiring providers from purchasing homes to operate their childcare services.

In 2022, with the availability of one-time ARPA funds, Stevens County allocated \$1 million to develop six interconnected "mini-homes" designed for family childcare providers to run their businesses. To ensure the facility met licensing requirements, the county collaborated closely with the Minnesota Department of Human Services throughout the planning and construction phases. The project was completed at a total cost of \$1.2 million.

Following construction, the county conducted interviews to select providers for the facility, prioritizing new providers and those offering care for children ranging from infants to school age. The six homes were filled almost immediately after being advertised, with five additional providers placed on a waiting list.



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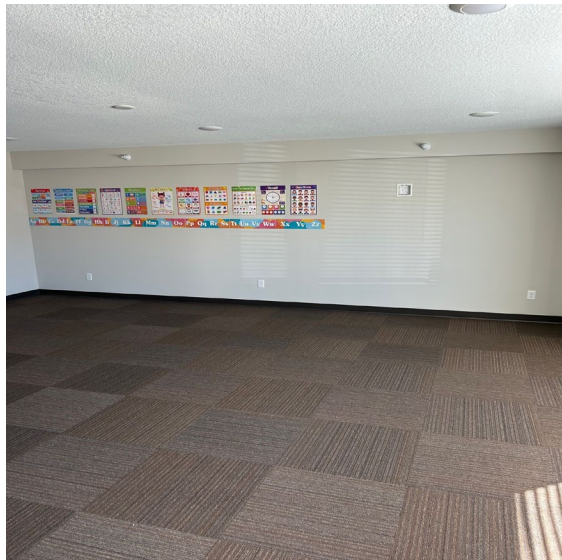


[www.co.stevens.mn.us/1182/Child  
care-PODS-Information](http://www.co.stevens.mn.us/1182/Child-care-PODS-Information)

## Facility

Stevens County has implemented a unique solution to combat its childcare shortage by developing six interconnected “mini-homes,” each designed as a single-family living space. These 980-square-foot units feature one bedroom, a full bathroom, a kitchen, a living area, and an on-site washer and dryer. Each home also includes a fenced outdoor play area, separating each facility from one another.

Stevens County was very thoughtful when building these so that in the event that the childcare use did not work out that they could be used as residential units.



## Cost Breakdown

The following is a breakdown of the expenses for the mini-home project in Stevens County. Aside from a noted grant, the project was funded primarily through the County's ARPA funds:

- **Land:** \$127,000
- **Design:** \$18,000
- **Underground site work:** \$98,000
- **Fence, playset, and shed:** \$60,000 (grant-funded)
- **Curb, gutter, and asphalt:** \$53,000
- **Construction:** \$1,000,000
- **Total Project Cost:** \$1,356,000

## Rent

For the first year, providers pay \$100 per month in rent, plus utilities. After the initial year, the rent increases to \$150 per month and remains fixed at that rate. Providers must commit to a three-year lease. The County handles major maintenance, snow removal, and monthly garbage disposal, while providers are responsible for minor maintenance tasks.

## Challenges and Successes

### *Challenges*

The Stevens County Pod Model has proven to be highly successful overall. However, the selection process for providers has been challenging due to the high number of qualified applicants. Preference is given to new businesses and providers who plan to care for infants through school-age children. Despite filling the spaces, there are still prospective providers in the county who would utilize similar facilities if available. The County aspires to expand this pod model in the future.

Funding has also been a significant challenge. The project has been referred to as a “once-in-a-generation” initiative due to the reliance on one-time ARPA funds. Without the county board's decision to allocate these funds, the project would have taken much longer, or it may not have happened at all.

### *Successes*

While many successes have come from this experimental model, one that stands out has been the ability to professionalize family daycare for the providers in the pods. The providers enjoy having space to come to work and leave at the end of the day, helping with the work/family balance. Another benefit of this model has been the support providers within the model are able to offer one another. Although they cannot comingle during the day, they are a great support network for each other after hours.