



# Prairie Playhouse Childcare Center

*Appleton, MN*

In September of 2021, Prairie Playhouse moved to a new location within the Appleton-Milan Elementary School.

## Established

Prairie Playhouse Childcare Center was established in 1997. It is a non-profit childcare center that leases space from the Lac qui Parle Valley School District and operates within the Appleton-Milan Elementary building.

## Background

The Appleton Prison Corporation played a big part in starting up Prairie Playhouse Childcare Center, as there was a great need for childcare for the employees of the Prairie Correctional Facility, which is now closed. The inmates did a lot of the construction and renovation work to prepare the old Appleton High School to be a childcare center. When Prairie Playhouse was established in 1997, it was a 24-hour daycare to accommodate for night shift workers at the prison.


### *What Has Changed*


In the First Version of this case study, Prairie Playhouse rented space in the former Appleton High School Building from the City of Appleton for \$300 per month. Since then, they have relocated to the Appleton-Milan Elementary school building after the school district use a school bond and expanded the elementary school building.

Prairie Playhouse leases their space from the Lac qui Parle Valley School District for \$360 per month. This cost includes utilities, internet services, office space, staff lounge, and custodial services for the hallway.


Prairie Playhouse has an infant room, transition infant/toddler room, and preschool room. Each room has its own bathroom.


Prairie Playhouse has access to three new playgrounds on the west side of their building. The school age children utilize the gym/cafeteria when they come after school, in the summer they will have their own classroom. Because of the larger classrooms size in their new location, they are able to expand their capacity by 35 children, allowing up to 105 children to be enrolled. Previously, their capacity was 70 children in their old location.

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### Schedule

Prairie Playhouse is open Monday through Friday from 6:00 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. with the exception of major holidays.



### Food

Prairie Playhouse contracts meals with the Lac qui Parle Valley ISD for breakfast and lunch during the school year and the first week of summer. The food is prepared by the school and the children eat their lunch in the school cafeteria. They provide their own afternoon snacks and will prepare their own meals during July and August, using the school's kitchen. They utilize the Child and Adult Care Funding Program to help pay for the food.

## Enrollment & Fees

### Enrollment

When Prairie Playhouse moved to the elementary school, their license allowed for them to expand by 35 more children. Prairie Playhouse recruits new families mostly by word of mouth. Through advertising in newspapers, it spreads awareness of the childcare center. They also utilize their Facebook page and signage outside of their building.

Age Range	Number of Children License Allows	Number of Children Enrolled
<b>Infant</b> 6 weeks – 16 months	16	12
<b>Toddler</b> 16 months – 33 months	22	12
<b>Preschool</b> 33 months – 5/6 years	45	24
<b>School Age</b> 5/6 years – 12 years	22	21
<b>Total</b>	<b>105</b>	<b>69</b>

### Fees

Age	Full-time 25+ hours/week	Part-time Up to 25 hours/week	Drop-in
<b>Infant</b>	\$140/week	\$89/week	\$35/day
<b>Toddler &amp; Preschool</b>	\$116/week	\$76/week	\$33/day

Age	Full-time 25+ hours/week (summer)	Part-time Up to 25 hours/week (summer)	Drop-In (summer)	11-20 hours/week	Up to 10 hours/week	No School Daily Rate
<b>School Age</b>	\$103/week	\$73/week	\$31/day	\$46/week	\$30/week	\$22/day

## Staff

Prairie Playhouse is a stand-alone non-profit that currently employs 17 people.

Staff turnover and a child waitlist creates a need for new/additional staff, especially teachers. In efforts to fill positions, Prairie Playhouse advertises in local and area newspapers, posts ads on Facebook, and advertises job openings at area community colleges with early childhood education programs.

Currently Employed	Position	Starting Hourly Pay
4	Teachers	\$16.00
2	Assistant Teachers	\$14.00
3	Aides	\$11.00
4	High School Students	\$9.00

There is one Director, one Assistant Director, and one substitute Aid employed at Prairie Playhouse.

## Financing

### *Start Up Costs*

When Prairie Playhouse was established in 1997, the startup costs of \$26,000 were covered by the Appleton Prison Corporation as there was a great need for childcare for the employees of the Prairie Correctional Facility in Appleton. The correctional facility is no longer operating and the Appleton Prison Corporation no longer provides any funding.

One major source of revenue includes donations from charitable gambling. The Minnesota Gambling Control Board (<https://mn.gov/gcb/>) regulates the “lawful (charitable) gambling industry to ensure the integrity of operations and provide for the lawful use of net profits. Charitable gambling is conducted only by registered nonprofit organizations.” Prairie Playhouse leases sites for lawful gambling operations at Shooters Bar and Grill and the Paddle Bar in Appleton.

### *Current Operating Budget*

Annual Operating Revenue	Amount
Grants/fundraisers/donations	\$65,760
Fees/tuition	\$247,827
Food program reimbursement/county payments	\$16,571
Charitable Gambling Funds	\$23,850
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$354,008</b>
Annual Operating Expenses	Amount
Operational Expenses	\$83,987
Payroll	\$268,094
Rent	\$3,711
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$355,792</b>
Loss	\$1,784

## *Loans & Grants*

Prairie Playhouse applies for various grants annually. Some of the major ones include the Swift County Daycare Grant for \$12,500, Child Care Aware grant for \$2,500, and the Appleton Community Foundation grant for up to \$3,000. A majority of their grants/fundraisers/donations revenues came from the State of MN Covid Relief Funds in 2021.

## *Other Sources*

Prairie Playhouse conducts multiple fundraisers every year—Papa Murphy’s pizza sales, t-shirt sales, family photo sessions, and pastry sales. They market these fundraisers by posting on their Facebook page and by word of mouth through the families they serve.

# Challenges and Successes

## *Challenges*

Filling staff positions has been a challenge for Prairie Playhouse, especially during the COVID-19 Pandemic.

Another challenge they have dealt with is achieving and maintaining the licensing requirements as they change often. It takes a lot of time to make changes to policies and procedures and make sure the changes get implemented in the classrooms.

## *Successes*

Prairie Playhouse has had success in increasing the number of children attending Prairie Playhouse, which has been great for the community, as many rural areas face childcare shortages. The community and grants have been an asset to the childcare center to continue to improve the quality care they offer.

Moving into their new location at the elementary school has been a great success, providing a better facility and room to grow.



Shared cafeteria with the elementary school.



One of three new outdoor spaces at their new location.