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event designed to help potential providers**

By RACHEL COLEMAN • Leader & Times At a Community Conversation meeting hosted by the Liberal Area Coalition for Families, director Sarah Mersdorf-Foreman heard people express two big questions: “Where can I find daycare for my young children?” and “How does a person open a home-based daycare business?”

This Saturday, a Daycare Fair sponsored by the coalition will offer answers. From 10 a.m. to noon at the Liberal Friends Church, 1650 N. Western, people will be on hand with answers and advice.

“I met a lot of people who expressed an interest in setting up a home daycare, but they aren’t sure how to start,” said Mersdorf-Foreman. “We will have people available to talk about the different steps, and resources available. This would be a great opportunity for them to come and ask questions.”

The Daycare Fair offers information on the following topics:

- Evaluation and inspection of daycare providers, administered through the Seward County Health Department; and
- Food reimbursement through the Child & Adult Care Food Program, administered by the USDA;
- Practical tips on setting up a daycare business from local providers who are already doing so.

Not only will interested parties be able to get answers to their questions, “they’ll be able to put a face with the name, and get to know the people who they would actually be working with if they wanted to start a daycare,” said Mersdorf-Foreman. “These are the local people who are actually overseeing the daycare providers. Some of them will be coming from Garden City, but they help providers in Seward County.”

Mersdorf-Foreman knows that many people in Liberal need help as they struggle with a dearth of daycare options. The recent announcement that the First Baptist Church preschool will close its doors at summer’s end triggered a sense of frustration and even panic among parents of young children.

“People continue to call the Coalition for Families to ask if we have a list of individual childcare

providers,” said Mersdorf-Foreman, who often finds herself replying, “I don’t know the answer to your questions, but I can get you in touch with the people who do.”

“The coalition doesn’t have the resources to set up a childcare center, even though we wish we could,” Mersdorf-Foreman said. “The Daycare Fair is something we felt was feasible. The time and resources — including light brunch snacks donated by Spencer Browne’s Coffee House — for the fair are all volunteer.”

Looking further down the road, the coalition continues to search for grant funding to alleviate some of the daycare obstacles.

“When people look at starting a home daycare, there are all these unseen expenditures,” Mersdorf-Foreman said. “Fire extinguishers, smoke detectors, play equipment ... there’s a lot of cost involved, and we’re seeking sources to offset that expense.”

Though privately operated daycare centers are business ventures, the coalition doesn’t shy away from offering startup assistance.

“When you look at helping a daycare provider, it’s really for the well-being of the community,” she said. “When kids are supervised, in a safe, structured environment, it’s good for the community. It benefits everyone.”

Saturday’s come-and-go event is a step in that direction.

“I would like people to feel confident that this is a process they can do,” said Mersdorf-Foreman. “I’d like them to walk away feeling there are resources available to help them accomplish their goal, and knowing how to access them. That’s my goal.”

The Daycare Fair will open at 10 a.m. Saturday and run through noon at Liberal Friends Church, 1650 N. Western Ave. The come-and-go event is free and offers light brunch refreshments. For more information, contact the Liberal Area Coalition for Families

at 655-7177.

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