

# Parkers Prairie

## Key Demographics<sup>1</sup>

- Pop. 1020.
- Median Income: \$58,750 (PP) vs. \$85,086 (MN).
- Poverty: 13.8% (PP) vs. 9.3% (MN).
- Racial-ethnic makeup: 92.7% white only; 0.4% Black/AA only; 6.4% 2 or more races; 2.2% Hispanic/Latinx of any race.
- English only is spoken in 97% of homes. No other language is spoken in >1% of homes.
- Population of <18: 23.7% (PP) vs. 22.6% (MN).
- Households with children: 27%; of these, 54% are married couples, 19% are co-habiting, 18% are single mother, 2% are grandparent(s) responsible for kids.

## Most Needed Family Support Services in Parkers Prairie (11/18/2024)

- Helping seniors who want to stay in their home.
- Addressing the “cliff effect” in benefit programs.
- Increasing connections across sectors.
- Waivered services.
- Making the application process easier.
- Basic life skills, such as balancing your checkbook.



<sup>1</sup> [https://data.census.gov/profile/Parkers\\_Prairie\\_city\\_Minnesota?g=160XX00US2749732](https://data.census.gov/profile/Parkers_Prairie_city_Minnesota?g=160XX00US2749732)

## How Services in Parkers Prairie and Henning Match up with Protective Factors<sup>2,3</sup>

Protective Factor	Services Available in Parkers Prairie and Henning
<b>Parental resilience</b>	Lakeland Mental Health, mobile crisis response, Alcoholics anonymous, Al-Anon.
<b>Social connections</b>	Lions, American Legion, Henning CHAT, Henning HOPE, community events, pool/splash pad, trails, parks, Prairie Event Center, Prairie Archery, Community Education, PTA/PTO, Bookmobile.
<b>Knowledge of parenting and child development</b>	ECFE, preschool screening, family home visiting.
<b>Concrete support in times of need</b>	Otter Express, WIC, thrift store, clothes closet, food shelf, backpack food program, medical, private dental offices, Children’s Dental Service, Apple Tree Dental (mobile), chiropractic, physical therapy, City police, Rural MN CEP.
<b>Social and emotional competence of children</b>	School-based mental health services; clubs such as 4H, FFA, Scouting; activities such as: sports, dance; schools; school-age care; afterschool tutoring; ECSE; preschool; Follow Along; Early Head Start.

<sup>2</sup> This is not a complete or perfect listing of all services available on the ground in Henning and/or Parkers Prairie. Also, an individual service or provider can potentially match multiple protective factors. An effort was made to match the service or provider with the best fit.

<sup>3</sup> Since initial focus groups were held in both Parkers Prairie and Henning, and they are both in the SE quadrant of Otter Tail County, existing services for both areas are included in the table as well as in the focus group results below.

## Family Resource Centers Focus Group Notes (Parkers Prairie and Henning)

### Parkers Prairie – January 30, 2024

1. *Thinking about people you know who are currently parents living in OTC (or from your personal experience) what was the biggest surprise about becoming a parent?*
  - Trying to find services. A lot of times parents didn't realize they can ask for certain things or where to go for them.
  - Finding or supporting childcare. We have a lack of available childcare. Slots get filled quickly.
  - If you quit your job due to lack of childcare, you miss an opportunity to get out into the world which can be a good outlet and connect you to others.
  - The cost of childcare is a barrier. The more kids you have, the worse the situation. There is no way to find a daycare that can take all 4. It's so expensive especially if you live on one income.
  - Connecting to resources to find and jump into. There is nowhere local to connect with. You have to drive out of town to make connections.
  - If you miss out on preschool, your kids will be behind the learning curve.
  - As your kids get older, there is a lot of change. There isn't a textbook on how to parent. Need to know in the first year what should be accomplished developmentally, etc. Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE) helps. Parents go for support and kids for peer interaction.
  - How difficult paperwork is to fill out. If you call to get help, you may or may not get help. Things get "lost in the mail." For example: application for childcare assistance. People feel overwhelmed by the application.
  - Early Head Start does weekly home visits and helps with forms and provides information. This is really helpful.
  
2. *On a scale of 1 to 10 with 1 being the least and 10 being the most, how stressed out do you think OTC parents are currently?*
  - 6 to 8 at least
  - The Christmas bills are coming due now, and heating bills go up this time of year.
  - 8 to 11 – there is nothing in this town to keep kids busy in the winter.
  - Financial stress – different times of the month – it's tough. Living paycheck to paycheck but yikes.
  - Taxes – and they keep going up. Food is more expensive.
  - It's so gloomy – the weather.
  - If kids are not in sports, there is nothing for the kids to do.

- The taxes are so high, but there is nothing for kids to do. Wages don't always keep up.
  - 27 for single parents
  - 10. There has been a dramatic increase in social-emotional dysregulation, and an increase in behaviors. Kids are a barometer.
  - Diversity is limited in Parkers. It impacts kids who have diverse backgrounds.
3. *Based on the parents you know and talk to, what are the top sources/types of stress they are facing?*
- Bullying in schools is extremely high. They talk about zero tolerance but it's a load of [...].
  - The teachers' hands are tied for discipline because no parents will stand behind them.
  - Everybody needs to be on the same page.
  - Parents are clique-y – kids see this and they emulate this.
  - For example, pregnant teenagers are treated poorly.
  - Kids with fetal alcohol syndrome experience this also. They miss social cues, don't play sports, etc. so they are treated poorly or left out.
  - The school in general could be more supportive. For example: consult with parents before imposing consequences. This problem could be impacted by the budget.
  - We need someone to listen, child protective services is not effective. We need a middle ground or mediator.
  - Co-parenting is stressful.
  - Need more communication with the school.
4. *What are our strengths as an OTC community that support and protect children and their families?*
- The Early Head Start program is a great resource. There should be better communication to parents about this resource because it helps my child learn skills.
  - This is a safe community and it's close knit.
  - Everybody's kids run around town.
  - Small town police department, with an awesome chief! Some small towns have to use the County Sheriff, but we have our own. Everyone feels comfortable talking to them. It's worth the cost and it makes a big difference. It's important that they are engaged in the schools.
  - There are some options for childcare and 3 and 4-year olds in the school. We have our own school which helps with building community.

- The superintendent and principals are good.
- Lots of support from community groups. They donate a lot for all ages of kids.
- School buses – if you had trouble on the bus, they would deal with it.
- Everybody knows everybody.
- Can be hard to get connected with anybody here.

5. *What are some of the existing resources that support and protect children and families? Where are they located?*

- If there were more things in town for kids and families to do, it would be easier to interact and make friends.
- Prairie Archery is one example of different things for kids to do.
- Hopefully a farmers' market (planned) can be paired with family activities.
- Existing community garden could be bigger. People don't understand how they can be a part of it.
- The community came together for Halloween party.
- We have an event center with no events – except the smelt fry.
- We want a skating rink/arcade/bowling alley that we can use all winter.
- The shake shop is a hangout place. It would be nice to have a coffee shop.
- The outdoor pool.

6. *Thinking about services and supports for children and families, what gaps are there and where in OTC are the gaps located?*

- There could be a time for families to all come in and brainstorm to come up with ideas of things to do. The City doesn't have to be a part of everything. The businesses like to help.
- A gap or barrier is people just don't know how to find each other. Networking or asking people to play a role.
- Singles group for empty nesters or -- would be nice to have things to do and groups to do it. Could meet at City Hall.
- If there were more organized events, there would be a lot of participation.
- Open the door to the events center.
- The kids between 9 and 15 or 16 that don't do sports and don't drive. What are they supposed to do??
- When adults with disabilities want to work, how do they get transportation to get to work if they want to live out in the country?

7. *What can we do to increase support to children and their families?*

- There needs to be things to do in a small town for those who do not participate in sports, especially for winter.
- We haven't had an active Community Ed here. We have a new Community Ed Director...maybe have a meeting and see what we would like to have.
- Community open meetings for information/feedback.
- How can we do this in each community without needing to rent space – want to make resources available in every community? There are a lot of people who can't drive.
- Transportation for people without cars – there is none -- at least offer something more central.

8. *Is there anything we didn't ask that you want us to know about families and children in OTC?*

- Viking Library Service – is there a way to partner with the bookmobile?
- Have a traveling worker to partner with locations across the County because the County is so geographically large.
- Put info on the Otter Tail County website – the schedule and locations.
- MAHUBE OTWA – They should be getting people out into the community.
- Food shelf is 1 x month for a few hours.
- 

## **Henning – January 23, 2024**

1. *Thinking about people you know who are currently parents living in OTC (or from your personal experience) what was the biggest surprise about becoming a parent?*

- I was surprised that I was becoming a parent. I was a young parent.
- Financial pressures. Rental, day care and heat assistance all played a role in helping a friend get back on their feet. You don't need to feel embarrassed to use these services.
- How scary it can be to lose your security.
- How scary it is due to the level of responsibility for another human being.
- If you have a large gap between kids, you can forget the skills you learned earlier in terms of how to parent. A lot of recommendations change during that age gap timeframe.
- Lactation consultants are a great help.
- First night home with a new baby – could not get him to stop crying.
- All the emotions that come with it/postpartum emotions.

2. *On a scale of 1 to 10 with 1 being the least and 10 being the most, how stressed out do you think OTC parents are currently?*
  - On the surface, it looks like 6, but if you talk to people personally, they are way more stressed out than they appear to be.
  - Everybody has that “social media status” or “best foot forward” that people hide behind when in reality there is a lot more stress.
  - There are lot more mental health concerns than people talk about openly.
  
3. *Based on the parents you know and talk to, what are the top sources/types of stress they are facing?*
  - Money
  - Their own mental health
  - Work-life balance
  - The amount of time it takes to get something done, level of busy-ness at each age. The issues causing stress change at each age.
  
4. *What are our strengths as an OTC community that support and protect children and their families?*
  - I moved here 3 years ago, and I was pleasantly surprised over such things as people watching out for my kids when they walk to the Post Office.
  - In a small town, people will generally help you. Participants shared a story about kids getting out a ladder to get into a house that was locked and a random person in town intervened before something dangerous could happen. There was a further story about providing first aid to a child and then telling the child, “Don’t tell your mom you got hurt until later; she has a big meeting tonight.” Someone rode a kid’s bike home when the kid needed to ride in the car instead.
  - This community cares about each other.
  - People will assist those who need help. There was an example of a prayer service for a child who died – there was a huge turnout to support the family.
  - The community would welcome and want to rally around and offer more opportunities to help one another such as an FRC. There are many service organizations already, including churches.
  - Somebody mowed my lawn when I was in the hospital.
  - You can ask anyone for help if you need it and people show up.
  - There are so many who need help that don’t ask. Why? Pride? Stigma? If they have problems, they want to hide it. Maybe they have that mentality of you need to pull yourself up by your bootstraps?? Or is that even real?
  
5. *What are some of the existing resources that support and protect children and families? Where are they located?*
  - Service organizations: Henning Hope, Henning Chat, Lions, Rod and Gun, Fire Department – they do a lot of community building.
  - During COVID, the Fire Dept would drive the trucks around town and stop and play the sirens at the house when it was someone’s birthday.

- Henning Hope puts on seasonal celebrations, community celebrations, Christmas gifts, coat and boot drive.
- Food shelf is open on Mondays.
- Sheriff's Dept wanted to help with clothing requests, but it was already covered.
- Salvation Army – provides outerwear, boots
- “Caring Closet” at school
- Donations from businesses
- If you make the right call, there is always somebody who can help somebody – there is good networking

6. *Thinking about services and supports for children and families, what gaps are there and where in OTC are the gaps located?*

- In our area, there is small percentage of people with different races, languages, mixed race
- It feels like the community is pretty accepting.
- Would someone from a different background feel like an outsider?
- It's hard when you have that language barrier.
- During the recent OTC Workforce convening they shared that food insecurity is very high in OTC.
- The summer food program is not well attended. Transportation may be an issue – there are people outside town who need it but can't get to it.
- Often, kids don't have emergency contacts. That's a result of a lot of parents not having any backup. They may not be from here and may not have family nearby. It takes being brave and asking for help but that is difficult? Who do you call if nobody comes to pick up a child.
- There are existing safe places to go in town
- Some families rely on older children – they don't have a “buddy system” – who do you trust enough to be your backup if you aren't available for your kids (as a single parent).
- There is a high percentage of single parents who may be lacking supports.

7. *What can we do to increase support to children and their families?*

- There may be an extra stigma that goes with being a single mom, but do single dads really have it all figured out any better than moms?
- Single dads – people may feel they have it figured out when they don't.
- Maybe not as many services are targeted to dads.
- We need more support in general for single parents
- Providing information about what is available e.g. Henning Hope.
- Liked the idea of a potential “pop-up” FRC that would come to Henning sometimes.

- People would benefit from additional resources but wouldn't seek them out.
- The way services are delivered can't be stigmatizing or people won't show up.
- As an example, Children's Dental Service comes to school, but how many people know about it?

8. *Is there anything we didn't ask that you want us to know about families and children in OTC?*

- The main obstacles to employment are housing, childcare, transportation.
- The average 1 bedroom rental in OTC is \$771 not include utilities. A 3 bedroom rental can go for \$1200+. This is seen as very expensive.
- Another obstacle is what we pay. We can't keep up with inflation. Groceries especially. Property tax, etc. Plus, savings, 401K – you are supposed to be doing all that, but where does the money come from?
- LinkedIn has a really good home budget video.
- Budgeting would be a great resource to offer.
- "Live where you work" is a bit disingenuous because there is no workforce housing available here.