

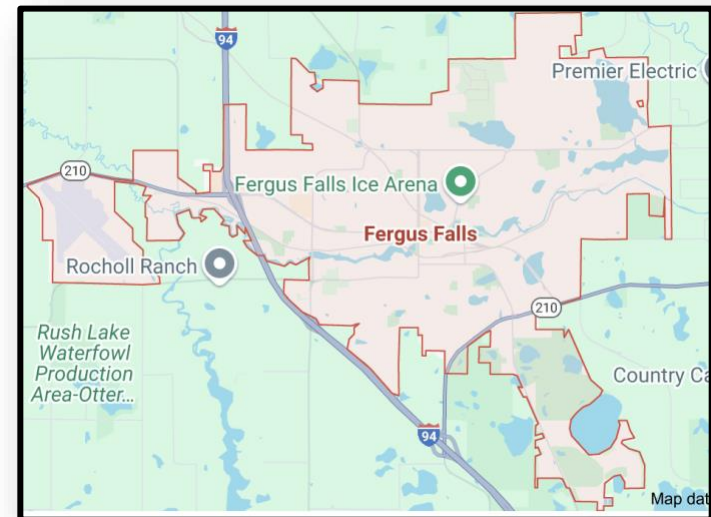
Fergus Falls

Key Demographics¹

- Pop. 14,119.
- Median Income: \$50,865 (FF) vs. \$85,086 (MN)
- Poverty: 10.7% (FF) vs. 9.3% (MN)
- Racial-ethnic makeup: 91.2% white only; 1.7% Black or African American only; less than 1% American Indian/Alaska Native only and Asian only; 4.5% 2 or more races; 2.5% Hispanic/Latinx of any race.
- English only is spoken in 97.5% of homes. Spanish speakers make up 1.6% of FF residents.
- Population of residents under age 18: 21.2% (FF) vs. 22.6% (MN).
- Households with children: 20.6%; of these, 66.4% are married couples, 11.4% are co-habiting, 14.0% are single mother, 4.7% are single father, 0% are grandparent(s) responsible for kids.

Most Needed Family Support Services in Fergus Falls (11/8/2024)²

- Transportation access and funding
- Isolation/social anxiety
- Resource booklet – physical that leads to virtual presence
- Childcare
- Mentor/buddy
- Access outside of working hours



¹ https://data.census.gov/profile/Fergus_Falls_city_Minnesota?g=160XX00US2720906

² Some suggestions may repeat or may seem out of context, as an effort was made to record each suggestion as it was stated.

- Childcare for evening into night hours
- Adult daycare for senior age
- More variety of shopping – clothing
- Rural transportation system
- Budget and planning
- Basic transportation skills
- Connections to culture
- IT skill building
- School age care – Battle Lake and Underwood
- After school tutoring – Battle Lake and Underwood
- Fatherhood programs
- Homeless services
- Transportation
- Availability outside of working hours
- Public transportation
- Subsidized childcare
- Flexible work
- Clothing drive
- Halloween costume drive
- Montessori school
- Nature school
- Children’s clothing store
- Youth sports equipment
- Winter clothing
- Homeless shelter

How Services in Fergus Falls, Underwood, or Battle Lake Match Up with Protective Factors^{3, 4, 5}

Protective Factor	Services Available in Fergus Falls, Underwood, or Battle Lake
Parental resilience	Lakeland Mental Health Center, private therapists, mobile crisis response ^{***} , Kindred Family Focus, Solutions Behavioral Healthcare, A Place to Belong, Community Addiction Recovery (CARE), Community-Based Behavioral Health Hospital (CBHH), Al-Anon ^{***} , Alcoholics Anonymous ^{***} , Narcotics Anonymous ^{**} , Lake Region Halfway House, North Star Behavioral Health, Nystrom and Associates, Strong Self.
Social connections	Parent support groups, Rotary, Lions ^{***} , Kiwanis, American Legion*, Woman Aid ^{****} , Veterans of Foreign Wars and Ladies' Auxiliary, American Association of University Women, YMCA, community events, bowling alley ^{**} , movie theater, pool/aquatic center/splash pad, trails ^{***} , parks ^{***} , fitness center ^{**} , community garden, Community Education ^{***} , Public Library, Bookmobile ^{****} , Otter Cove Children's Museum (including "on the go") ^{***} , University of Minnesota Extension, PTA/PTO.
Knowledge of parenting and child development	ECFE ^{***} , family home visiting ^{***} , preschool screening ^{***} .
Concrete support in times of need	MAHUBE-OTWA, Otter Tail County Human Services and Public Health, Salvation Army, Otter Express – Battle Lake as of 1/2025 ^{**} , WIC, housing vouchers, thrift stores, clothes closet/free store, food shelf ^{**} , backpack food program, Lutheran Social Services, Children's Services Association, The Barbara House, The Matthew House, Garitz Grove, HRA, private dental offices ^{**} , medical clinics ^{**} , Pregnancy Resource Center, Apple Tree Dental, massage, chiropractic, MAHUBE-OTWA Family Health Clinic, physical therapy, Adult Education/ESL*, Someplace Safe, City police department ^{**} , Rural MN CEP, Career Force, Freedom Resource Center, Productive Alternatives, TranSEM, free bike repair.
Social and emotional competence of children	School-based mental health ^{***} ; clubs such as: 4H ^{***} , Future Farmers of America ^{**} , Scouting*, Girl Scouts; activities such as: sports ^{***} , dance ^{***} , and music ^{***} ; summer camps; youth book club; BIO girls ^{**} ; church youth groups ^{***} ; gymnastics ^{***} ; Tae Kwon Do; trap shooting; car repair club; schools ^{***} ; school-age care; afterschool tutoring; ECSE ^{***} ; preschool ^{***} ; Follow-Along Program ^{***} ; Early Head Start; Head Start; childcare centers ^{**} ; School Resource Officer*.

³ This is not a complete or perfect listing of all services available on the ground in Fergus Falls, Underwood, or Battle Lake. 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.

⁴ Most of the services listed are in Fergus Falls only. Those located in Fergus Falls and Underwood are indicated with *, Fergus Falls and Battle Lake, by **. Services located in all three towns are marked with ***, Battle Lake only with ****, Underwood and Battle Lake only *****.

⁵ Since initial focus groups were held in Fergus Falls, Underwood, and Battle Lake, and they are all in the SW quadrant of Otter Tail County, existing services for all three areas are included in the table as well as in the focus group results below.

Family Resource Centers Focus Group Notes

Note: We conducted three focus groups in Fergus Falls – two with community members and parents and the other with childcare providers. We conducted one focus group each in Underwood and Battle Lake.

Fergus Falls Community Members and Parents #1 -- January 29, 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?*
 - Kids are very demanding of your energy. They take up so much time.
 - The cost of childcare and why it's so high.
 - The value of a grandma.
 - When you don't have family support, it's hard. There are lots of people who are not connected in any way.
 - As a single mom, the biggest surprise is the lack of options or lack of people with knowledge of childcare resources.
 - Having kids in multiple generations, the technology, and the expectations to keep up with it. The resources of where to go to find it.
 - To have some centralized space with resources. Having one forum where everybody can go and have access to it. Not income restricted or knowledge restricted.
 - A lot of parents who need help will not reach out for it. They don't know where to go. This impacts all income levels, whether new to community or not.
 - We need a safe space for the younger generation.
 - Filling out of forms – it's often unclear what they are asking. It's hard to access benefits.
 - New math!
 - Childcare is not being treated as a crucial part of the economy. It's not subsidized. There are tax rebates and assistance in some cases, but many more could use help.
 - You have to know how government works, taxes, etc.
 - People who are raised at higher incomes may not understand the assistance available to them when raising their own family.
 - The childcare assistance forms are terrible.

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?
 - If all kinds of people are using a facility, then people will feel more comfortable using it.
 - 9 to 10
 - Economic issues. People don't see any future because they are in survival mode. They can't see any way out of their current situation.

- There was a good speaker on entrepreneurial work – business plans, etc.
- Foster families. Someplace Safe is used for visits. Frustration with the system when they have to jump through hoops to get information. Even those working with the State or County are frustrated with finding resources. It's important to have a fun space for kids.
- Not all are in the 9 to 10 range – some are 7 to 8 also. It depends on what a family is going through at the time. Economic is the biggest concern I hear. Also, time management – how to work it all together. Jobs, kids, activities.
- It's different in Perham vs. here in Fergus Falls – there's a different atmosphere. Perham families have more resources because of where they work. Employers are paying 1/3 of their childcare bills.

3. *Based on the parents you know and talk to, what are the top sources/types of stress they are facing?*

- Co-parenting
- Children's mental health
- Reverberations from COVID – kids are still struggling because of what they missed
- At the Y, it's grappling with where they are at academically and also behavior. Kids being completely disrespectful, "I don't have to do what you say." We haven't heard this type of talk before.
- We lost the "big sister-little sister" aspect of our community during COVID.
- I worry about the lack of a safe space for kids to go to/predators. They don't know how to respond appropriately to adults.
- Lack of support – people want to get help but don't know the resources, which are limited.
- There's a need for mentorship.
- Parents get frustrated when they have to dig for information.
- In early childhood we see a large uptick in behavioral issues/social emotional issues/mental health – parents don't know what to do or where to go.
- Sometimes kids need opportunities to hang out with mom and dad rather than "therapy" – they need an outlet
- There is stigma with needing any mental health support. The cause of issues can even be a developmental delay. If you can get to the root cause, then it's worth a referral.
- Early intervention is the best.
- Parents are doing the best they can, but they have their own trauma history.
- We need a family dodgeball night where you can throw things at people.
- The Y has family Nerf night.
- Fear of mass shootings/gun violence.
- No time or space to do things with other people.
- It's a hard time but also a lucky time to be a parent.

4. *What are our strengths as an OTC community that support and protect children and their families?*
- Dads are more involved in parenting in this generation.
 - We have a well-developed community of faith/churches – if people are involved.
 - There is an excellent peer support network for SUD issues/recovery
 - More support from OTC themselves offering grants to CC providers.
 - The County is more active in helping now vs. before – appreciate that.
 - Monetary availability, but you just have to know where the resources are – like scholarships for private schools.
 - Otter Cove, etc. things to do with kids – this library is awesome!
 - The YMCA, Salvation Army are great resources.
 - Free resources like horse drawn wagon rides, community events that draw people in.
 - Drive to see Christmas lights.
 - Access to ECFE classes is more difficult outside our area – community based and in-home. They have a sliding fee scale. ECFE can be moms who “know what’s going on”/have privilege and flexibility in their work schedules. More accessibility would be great.
 - Transportation can be a barrier.
 - Community Ed is open to everyone, and through the school.
 - Depends on the time they offer things – day, evenings, etc.
5. *What are some of the existing resources that support and protect children and families? Where are they located?*
- Pediatrician at the local clinic. There were times when she was the only pediatrician and so hard to get in.
 - Public Health people! So much we had to do and change during the pandemic.
 - Early Childhood Special Education – these are excellent services
 - 4H, FFA types of clubs for kids
 - Pathways of Hope – Salvation Army
 - Someplace Safe provides emotional support and a visiting house for parents for co-parenting
 - Lakeland Mental Health
 - Parenting classes/birthing through hospital.
 - Early Childhood Family Education from 6-7 at the library
 - Bike routes, walking, rollerblading
 - Otter Cove – especially for early learners and homeschoolers
 - New pool “Splash pad”
 - Bowling alley

- Movie theater
 - Child protection – they are good to work with.
 - At nighttime there is an activity for teens – called TAYA – possibly hosted at the Y.
 - Extracurriculars such as dance – there are lots of scholarships available
 - Swimming – the AmericInn – free vouchers for their pool and also the Y – open gym etc.
6. *Thinking about services and supports for children and families, what gaps are there and where in OTC are the gaps located?*
- You really have to dig for the information you need, and you lose enthusiasm.
 - It can be hard to break into the community as a newcomer, or if you are not involved in a church.
 - There is not much in terms of mosques – in Pelican Rapids there is.
 - Police, etc. having coffee with community members – fire dept, ambulance, etc. – to make the connection with community members.
 - There is still a gap between business and industry and the childcare sector.
 - Transportation.
7. *What can we do to increase support to children and their families?*
- So many jobs – it’s even hard to apply for them. People get hired by nepotism. It’s hard to get into a place, especially if you have a criminal record.
 - Addressing childhood trauma issues
 - Reducing stigma in asking for help.
8. *Is there anything we didn’t ask that you want us to know about families and children in OTC?*
- Healthcare system is good in Fergus Falls.

Fergus Falls Community Members and Parents #2 – January 29, 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?*
 - Not being able to set your own timetable.
 - Having a preemie not expected to live that survived and went on to thrive in life.

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?*
 - The younger generation is much more stressed out than we were.
 - 6
 - Younger parents say: “You don’t understand us. You had things easier.” No, we didn’t.
 - You don’t try to change the culture of the community. You accept the culture and then you will be accepted into it. Then you can make changes from the inside.

3. *Based on the parents you know and talk to, what are the top sources/types of stress they are facing?*
 - So busy, even with a child in activities they’re afraid to say no to additional activities.
 - They don’t want to be “socially banned”/shunned by not participating – they fear they won’t get asked again.
 - Lots of stress during COVID, even academically.
 - You’re responsible for your own actions, and as long as the parents know they’ve done the very best job they can, they can sleep at night.
 - Kids are controlling the family from the cradle. Kids have that much power, and parents have given away their power to parent lots of times. The child is in the driver’s seat.
 - Once you’ve given away your role as a parent, it’s difficult to get it back.

4. *What are our strengths as an OTC community that support and protect children and their families?*
 - Strong educational system
 - Good and caring superintendent.
 - Many churches to choose from. We have so many, we are in the Guinness Book of World Records! When we disagree at church, we go and start a new one. This sends the message that it’s ok to disagree.
 - Great mental health organization: Lakeland
 - Very caring Human Services (Otter Tail County)
 - A week ago, there was a scare regarding the potential for school violence. This validated the active shooter training.

5. *What are some of the existing resources that support and protect children and families? Where are they located?*
 - Community Education
 - 4H, FFA
 - Afterschool activities – could be a long list
 - YMCA
 - Salvation Army
 - Churches – faith community
 - All located in this area.

6. *Thinking about services and supports for children and families, what gaps are there and where in OTC are the gaps located?*
 - Money is lacking for students in need – for programs – scholarships. Using a payment plan can help.
 - Community Ed – we do not take people from other communities because they need to be served by their home community.
 - Housing is a gap
 - Help in gathering things like clothing for organizations as needed.
 - Weekend backpack program – food insecurity – this takes the financial burden off the United Way
 - Breakfast and lunch for everyone in school helps.
 - Volunteers

7. *What can we do to increase support to children and their families?*
 - Model behaviors that you want others in the community to see.

8. *Is there anything we didn't ask that you want us to know about families and children in OTC?*
 - *Years ago, they tried to establish a youth center, but it was not successful.*
 - *A place for kids to be – 4th grade and up. Gateway drug is smoking and then they go to other things to meet their needs later on, and if you are not smart you will have to find a vice.*
 - *Before and after school tutoring program.*

Fergus Falls Childcare Providers – 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?*
 - The expense of childcare.
 - The amount of time to get in and out of the house and go do something.
 - Parents are under a lot of stress especially if they have both older and younger kids.
 - Everyone is so busy and tired.
 - The amount of laundry.
 - How messy they can make something – example was given of destroying the house from getting a hold of a simple water bottle.
 - The cost of everything: diapers, formula, clothing, strollers, everything.
 - It's hard giving your kids quality time when you are working – including at mealtimes.
 - Skill building – having the time to teach them when life is so busy.

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?*
 - I'm less stressed now compared to when we lived outside Fargo – smaller towns may be less stressful. The cost of living is lower.
 - Single parents are a 10/10.
 - The last two years, the scale has been higher, with the price of everything going up: food, gas, utilities, to buy a house. It's gone from an average of 6 to 8.
 - Having a support system of family nearby helps reduce stress.
 - The Childcare Assistance Program requires lot of paperwork. Lakes and Prairies – Parent Aware has its own paperwork on top of that for Parent Aware. If they didn't have to keep repeating forms with the same info that would be nice. It's added work for someone who is already struggling financially. We are taxing people who are really trying hard to make it.

3. *Based on the parents you know and talk to, what are the top sources/types of stress they are facing?*
 - Spirited children with behavioral issues. There's nobody to talk to around here about managing behaviors at childcare and at home. It would be nice to have someone to talk to instead of just linking us.
 - Empowering Kids in Perham is a good resource
 - Video games and cellphones are stressful for parents who don't know where to draw the limit.
 - They don't know how to play with their kids, or what their child needs at different ages. Parents struggle to talk to their kids on the kids' level.

- Things that seem obvious to childcare providers are not always obvious to parents. Parents themselves may be on the phone at dinner. Common sense to us isn't so common to others.
- Parents don't realize skill building goes in steps. They have to prepare a child for potty training, for example, not just expect the child to do it right away.
- Financial issues – some are experiencing this.
- There might be things under the surface that aren't obvious – relationship issues, work environment, addictions.
- There is lots of drug use among ages 20-35 (roughly) compared to years past. It's more than pot that's being used – harder stuff, too.
- Use of drugs around children goes on also.
- We are a small enough community that everybody helps out and watches out for each other's children. Everybody's helpful.

4. *What are our strengths as an OTC community that support and protect children and their families?*

- Our churches – youth group or Sunday school – a place for kids to see a good example and learn and grow.
- There is a strong sense of community inside the schools, for example in Henning.
- A lot of towns have a lot of support for the schools and a support system within the school.
- OTC Social Services.
- Otter Cove, ECFE, Perham Community Center (PACC) – these are good places for family interaction.
- Boy Scouts, gymnastics, dance – there are lots of activities. Tae Kwon Do, the bike system in town, the YMCA.
- There is strong support for music – they start with violin, but there is also choir and also sports.
- I love that it's safe, it's beautiful, I love the lakes, I have family here.
- Prairie Wetland Center, state parks. We don't have good shopping though!
- God's Acres, going geocaching is fun.
- Perham and New York Mills support the “shop local” concept.

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

- Someplace Safe – They have a domestic violence shelter and information on trafficking and services for teens who have been abused. (Fergus Falls, other sites)
- CICC: Center for Inclusion for Child Care (Concordia in St. Paul helps with this)
- Blessing Closet – free clothing and household items
- Richville Methodist Church and other churches have free items. People come from Pelican – could help families just getting started.
- Lakes and Prairie Childcare Aware/Parent Aware

- West Central Initiative – I received a grant for a fence, they do trainings, donate to Otter Cove, and help families struggling/needing extra support.
 - Cross Point Alliance Church, Lutheran Church– they provide cribs and blankets.
 - There are lots of support systems in place.
 - People whose first language is not English – they stick to themselves or use a friend as an interpreter.
6. *Thinking about services and supports for children and families, what gaps are there and where in OTC are the gaps located?*
- There's nothing for older children except bowling. Once you get to be 9, there's nothing in terms of activities.
 - If they're not involved in sports or music, there is less to do – church youth groups are an exception.
 - We need like a teen center.
 - There is a video game night at one of the churches.
 - With open enrollment – lots of Fergus Falls kids who go to Underwood School. It's a smaller community with smaller classrooms. Also Battle Lake. Kids can be shifted from school to school.
 - Lakeland Mental Health in Fergus Falls, counseling centers downtown.
 - Homeless Center for youth in Fergus Falls.
 - Inpatient treatment for youth and adults.
 - Youth treatment centers is a gap.
 - We have a lot of activities, but they are not free activities. Once they age out of Otter Cove, there's not much.
 - Libraries -- but they have to be quiet.
 - The Y has stuff for younger kids.
 - 4H
7. *What can we do to increase support to children and their families?*
- Teen center/activities for kids over age 9.
 - Going back to basics – If there's a new mom in the neighborhood, can you bring her dinner?
 - A formal welcome wagon used to exist.
 - Foster grandparent – possible expansion of this program.
 - Counseling at school or in the evenings rather than having to miss school and having the mom run around during the day and possibly miss work.
 - Big brother-big sister – do we have this? We could use a mentorship program.

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

- Infant childcare – there are huge shortages.
- There is a baby boom right now so it's just going to make the shortages worse.
- Think it would be beneficial to have like an FRC.
- Home visiting for newborns is helpful.

Underwood – 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?*

- The cost of childcare -- if you can find it.
- Especially summer childcare is hard to find, and expensive.
- Having children of various ages, keeping them busy will help them become good citizens. Could be a job, wholesome community activities, Otter Cove. What is there for teenagers to do?
- The rural community doesn't have transportation. There is no way for a parent to get their kid from school to wherever. Or to summer activities that happen in the middle of the day.
- Wadena Friendly Rider was an option where we used to live. They only go certain places, but it was enough. The Otter Express is different.
- The hours of operation for childcare doesn't work for all careers (for example, nursing).
- Even if you do find childcare, the hours are sometimes hard to work with – they don't reflect anybody's work hours. It can be tight in coming from school.
- There is childcare at the school for afterschool and summer care, plus they added regular childcare.
- Before school care would be helpful. The school bus is so early. If the school could open a little earlier, I would pay for it. It could help with the shortage of bus drivers. A 2 hour bus ride and getting up so early is not feasible.

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?*

- 10!
- Varies based on the ages of your children, but definitely 5-10.
- 9-10 for a lot of parents I know.

3. *Based on the parents you know and talk to, what are the top sources/types of stress they are facing?*

- At 8:00 on April 1 they open parks and rec registration for the summer camp -- and it fills up in 5 minutes.

- The Y does something too for summer care.
- The cost is still high.
- The Y is not open good hours – it's not worth it.
- Financial stress.
- The quality of care is a stressor. You have no choice over whether the quality is good, you just need an open slot.
- *Those that are taking infants may be doing it because of the higher fees rather than what's best for the children.*
- A stressor is the nutrition that my kids get. Healthy food is so expensive.
- The free breakfast and lunch at school are helpful.
- There are not enough resources for teenagers, especially if they are in a situation with depression, etc. Is the government putting limits on what they can actually do? Kids can fall between cracks.
- Better avenues of getting help didn't turn out well, or otherwise they are too costly.
- Staying healthy. We have brutal winters. Keeping kids active is challenging.
- They have Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE) which is so crowded it doesn't work.
- Open gyms would be nice.
- Different activities are really costly. Limited options/slots: swimming, gymnastics, etc.
- Social media is a stressor, especially for teenagers. There is no help in this aspect from anybody. We try to teach the dangers of it, etc.

4. *What are our strengths as an OTC community that support and protect children and their families?*

- Community. When we put something in place, it goes. For example, Otter Cove.
- Being in a smaller community is a strength because we are more connected.
- We feel safer. There is a better support system. Fundraisers, benefits, you feel attached to a family going through something. Example of a family who experienced a fire and there were people volunteering to help.
- Our kids know friends and teachers outside the school system.
- People who have responsibilities and the ability to help out have more skin in the game because they have those relationships.
- Parents carpool to help each other – small town.
- There's a camaraderie in our faith that helps us feel more comfortable.
- Churches themselves provide resources: Ruby's pantry, playgrounds, activities

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

- Someplace Safe
- Thrift store

- Blessing Closet – free will donation and items to take
- Bethel has a “foster closet” – for families who take in foster kids, they can hand out things that are needed.
- The CBHH has a Safe Place for Newborns.
- There is a 24/7 phone number for mental health
- The SRO at school – it’s a must. It builds relationships.
- In the community, we know the firefighters – they are somebody’s dad. It is more community-based.
- County resources – how much are they allowed to offer?
- Rural MN CEP
- Scholarships, etc. to attend private school.
- MAHUBE-OTWA – help with housing, HeadStart
- ECFE

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

- For children’s mental health, there is a lack of counselors.
- Mobile crisis team is limited by manpower and what they can do – it should be expanded.
- We have experience with different treatment facilities. There is nothing here in Otter Tail. Neither inpatient nor outpatient. Kids who go to facilities for help but get treated like a criminal, where they are just sitting in a room – this doesn’t help youth. There are kids who don’t have anywhere to go so they get shipped off somewhere else. This is a gap. In DL there is a school – you can go to – a sober high school. ALCs are a resource, but sober HS is different.
- Readiness for school/K – diagnosis of learning issues. There is a stress factor of not knowing if your child needs additional help.
- As a parent, you are the expert on your child because you see them all the time – parents need time with the specialist to describe behaviors, not just 1-1 evaluation with the child.
- The facilities that are in existence for teenagers...some employees are great, most have good intentions, many are not good. More resources = higher pay = better employees.
- There are so many resources out there. How do you even know what exists?
- For emergency assistance, if a person is in crisis, how do they have the means to go around to the County, MAHUBE OTWA, Salvation Army, churches, etc. to get all the help they need?
- Working with other entities in the County to give out information.

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

- Having pamphlets available to explain what’s available to you in a crisis, the daycare list, etc.

- A lot of daycares have stopped taking school age kids – activities or camps during the summertime also. That middle school age group gets missed.
- Help financially. The only thing I needed help with is daycare costs, but I didn't meet the threshold for help. More options to meet the needs of that middle gap who are struggling.
- Same thing for the Y – how do we afford this? It's hard to make ends meet.
- Daycare cost is more than my mortgage.
- Activity, soccer fees, etc. start once they go to school even if daycare costs are only short term.
- Social media. We need some kind of education for kids. If you do "X," these are the consequences – like bullying for example. Snap chat – bullying and predators.
- Law enforcement to come into school and make these types of presentations.
- There is so much bad on social media – people out there will exploit your children.

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

- Nothing additional.

Battle Lake – 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?*

- Co-parenting – having to rely on each other -- to do every aspect of parenting together.
- I was shocked that there weren't any day care options, plus the cost.
- We don't have daycare for our infant. We are cobbling it together with relatives.
- Other generations never dealt with this.
- Lack of childcare options in the summers. First Lutheran is offering some care options, and they will walk kids to summer rec.
- They are limiting spots. Are there scholarships?
- Battle Lake – shocked by how few childcare options there are.
- The level of isolation is different once you have kids.
- If your tendency is to be more introverted, that makes it worse.
- If you work remotely, it's easy not to leave the house for 4 days.
- Marital issues when you are co-parenting. Parenting styles can differ.
- Housing – we had to build our own home because there were no other options. Battle Lake has gotten so expensive.
- Taxes.

- Competing with people who are retiring here. There are no rentals left. It costs so much to live here. VRBOs and Air B&Bs are driving up real estate costs.
 - Day care costs more than a mortgage payment.
 - Tiny Tykes is not affordable – the new childcare center in town.
 - Last year we did drop-in care for my son at the childcare center because preschool is not 5 days a week. But if they don't have staffing, they can't take my kids.
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?*
- When I go and substitute teach, my gauge is the majority of students are stressed to the max, and that has got to be a correlation to parents.
 - Over the last 2-3 years, parents are very stressed.
 - Seeing a range, depending on variables and situation. One part of someone's life can be super stressful and others are ok. The last 2-3 years, people are more stressed.
 - The environment shapes your stress level.
3. *Based on the parents you know and talk to, what are the top sources/types of stress they are facing?*
- Childcare – lack of/cost
 - Screens, phones, apps, people are on them all the time
 - For kids during COVID, everything was so different, they are having a hard time adjusting back to normal.
 - We can get back to being better. We can mold the younger generation.
 - There is a lack of down time. They have to go to every sport/activity. There are too many activities – kids need to be bored once in a while.
 - Things for kids to do in town, these are lacking. There are no hang out places for parents who would take their kids and use it. Mountain bike trails. Recreational opportunities.
 - Ages 12-17 is the age we are missing – they are not connected to the community. Their parents may be checked out. They need life skills and learning healthy relationships.
 - During distance learning we had to get a phone for academics, so that's how we got into it.
 - We turned off our daughter's camera.
 - You can't live on \$20 an hour in this community.
 - There is a generational disconnect. "We had 18% interest rates and we bought a house." Real estate is comparatively more expensive than when Boomers were buying homes.
 - They are trying to grow the town, but it's all on the high income end.

- Community support for parenting – taking a village to raise kids.
- Not everybody is open to helping, but they are willing to criticize
- There is so much information about parenting – what is right? If you make a choice, it’s questioned.
- Half of Battle Lake’s population is seasonal. This drives up home prices. But that’s what is supporting our downtown and keeping it alive.

4. *What are our strengths as an OTC community that support and protect children and their families?*

- This is a small, tight knit community where we know all the kids.
- I will speak up if someone else’s kid is out of line.
- A lot is based around religious institutions. Once they know there is a need, people will act.
- This community is less tight knit than surrounding communities.
- It feels like people know your business.
- The motivation to help is awesome, but execution can go awry.
- There is a stigma in asking for help, not knowing who to turn to. You need a safe space, someone to point me in the right direction. It’s not easy to ask for help.
- Working with government can be frustrating because things move slowly.
- There are people at school who will help, but if the kids aren’t connected, they don’t get help.
- The system has to maintain confidentiality.
- The more you are relating to people, that opens up the conversation to share problems and resources.
- There’s a food shelf in town
- With civic clubs like the Lion’s club, the younger generations (even our parents) are not getting involved. It’s the older people keeping in going. Time is at a premium these days.
- Meeting times for civic clubs may be at times when families are busy.
- Early Childhood Family Education times are at 10:00 a.m. on a weekday which is not convenient for many.
- They do offer evenings here now.

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

- *The school. A lot of families reach out as a starting point when they need to be connected to something.*
- *Churches*
- *School-based mental health comes to town 1 x a week.*
- *Like Henning Hope – do we have a comparable group. Women Aid is the Battle Lake version.*
- *Waffle Wednesdays at First Lutheran provides snacks and education*

- *That's a gap for kids who are resistant to receiving assistance through a religious organization.*
 - *Youth sports camps – huge strength of the community.*
 - *If it's not athletics, there aren't a lot of options. Only a few options.*
 - *LACC events help.*
6. *Thinking about services and supports for children and families, what gaps are there and where in OTC are the gaps located?*
- Anything outside Fergus Falls or Perham, there are gaps. To access activities, we drive to those areas to participate in, for example, like Otter Cove.
 - Coffee – No place to meet with another parent and let the kids play while you talk. That's lacking here.
 - There's no space for teenagers to exist without getting into trouble. They need an outlet.
 - There are lots of extracurriculars at the school. A lot of that needs parental involvement and transportation, and some kids don't have that.
 - One thing I enjoy about waffles is the multigenerational thing.
 - If there was a grandma that was there and taught the teens something, that'd be great. We need hangout options. At that age, they are too cool to do a lot of things.
 - Community connections for teens. There is always someone going to cause trouble.
7. *What can we do to increase support to children and their families?*
- Stop the older generation from holding on to property so it can go on the market.
 - Increase easy access to lactation support outside the hospital.
 - Public Health nurses will only come for your first child.
 - Make support accessible and inform people of it. Remove barriers such as finances and transportation.
 - People are more open to receiving help when it's in an informal setting.
 - Making it clear it's ok to bring your kids with you.
 - Be an active listener.
 - Increase access to sports – parents can't get them there – for example summer rec – parents can't get them there.
 - Sometimes we will never get parents to step up but think about supporting the children.
 - Ask kids themselves what they need.
 - A space where parents connect with kids around.
 - Helping people form a mom network.

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

- I'm glad there's a lot of kids here. The school is getting better.
- The need is for support is so huge.
- The main support needs are mental health and substance abuse and food.
- You feel atypical if you are in a two-parent household all living together.
- Kids get passed around to relatives and this feels like an unstable environment.
- My high school age nieces experience online bullying. Snap chat conversations, etc.
- Bad self-esteem of very young children.
- The number of children with anxiety.
- Autism – or any special need to that degree – there are no resources in the town. They would need to go to Perham or Fergus Falls or further and be on a waiting list.
- Unless it's severe enough, and you qualify there is nothing for you.
- There is no mental health therapist in town.
- Adaptive recreation is a need.