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MEDIA ALERT  
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### **Beyond the Bell Working to Fully Staff Sites, Get Students off Waiting Lists**



Leadership at Beyond the Bell, one of Siouxland’s largest before and after school programs, is working tirelessly to recruit, hire and train more staff so that they can serve the overwhelming number of students currently placed on waiting lists.

“Right now we are working with our partners in the community, including the area colleges, to recruit more workers. We are receiving around 10 quality employee applications a week and conducting interviews as quickly as scheduling allows.” says Jalisa Oetken, Beyond the Bell’s Employee Development Specialist. “Even with a fair amount of applications coming in, we are seeing a trend that only about 20% continue with the full hiring and employment process.”

Staffing issues forced the program to limit the number of students that could be served at each site last week as the 2022-23 school year began for students at Sioux City Community Schools, Bishop Heelan Schools, and South Sioux City Community Schools, which began a little earlier – August 15th. “We are working as intentionally as we can, with the staff we have, to spread staff out across our 25 locations to meet the high demands of those on the waitlists.” says Oetken. “It’s hard to give parents a definitive answer to when their child will get off the wait list because we can’t control the amount of applicants coming in.”

“Since the pandemic hit, staffing has been a major issue,” Program Director Jenna Andrews states, “This isn’t just a Beyond the Bell issue, it’s a nationwide child care crisis issue. The pandemic revealed the many shortfalls of the childcare system, and we are now seeing it hit hard locally.”



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“We have been as proactive as possible – we have raised starting wages twice in the last year to be more competitive and have been offering retention bonuses to all staff that are hired and stay on with us. We offer paid training and bonuses to complete that training within 30 days, as well as an attendance incentive to increase the hourly wage, and encourage staff to keep showing up to their scheduled shifts.”

Despite these incentives, there is still a shortage of workers. “Beyond the Bell is committed to offering quality care, so we can’t just hire someone on a Monday morning and then have them working at a site by Monday afternoon,” Andrews continues, “All staff have to pass a state and federal background check, complete pre-employment physicals, and be properly trained. Student safety is our number one priority, and we take it very seriously.” Andrews points out that Beyond the Bell is licensed by the Iowa Department of Human Services, requiring specific training for each worker at site, and ensuring a worker to student ratio of 1 adult to every 15 students. “Childcare in Iowa is highly regulated, and that is to ensure safety of the children being served. Unfortunately, the double-edged sword is that it often comes with roadblocks and takes a long time to onboard staff.” These regulations are part of the list of items being addressed within the Governor’s Child Care Task Force that launched in November 2021 to address the childcare shortages and barriers to work in childcare in Iowa. The full report can be found here: <https://www.futurereadyiowa.gov/childcare-taskforce>

Over the last year and into the next, Andrews has been selected to be a representative for two committees that will work directly with state and federal lawmakers to address the issues both providers and families are facing when it comes to childcare. “I’m proud and honored to be working with our state and federal legislators and congress to help resolve the many issues we are seeing right now in our field. We have to keep child care affordable for families and recognize the value providers bring to the economic stability of children, families, and communities.” said Andrews.

Andrews is sympathetic to families that were caught without care at very little notice.

“We had a glitch in our new online enrollment system in which families were not notified of waitlist status until right before, or even right after, the program began. I want all families to know how sincerely sorry we are for this inconvenience – as a working mother of young children myself, I know how frustrating it can be to not have quality care available for your children. We are working as hard as we can to get every family served as soon possible, and we are implementing procedures to try to prevent this from happening again.”

Parents and guardians with students on waitlists can expect to be notified via a phone call and an email when available spots open up.



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Beyond the Bell is a before, after-school and summer program supported by federal 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers grants in Iowa, the Sioux City Community School District, South Sioux City Community Schools, United Way of Siouxland, Nebraska Children and Families Foundation, and private parent fees. The program is administered by Siouxland Human Investment Partnership (SHIP).

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*Beyond the Bell helps children reach their potential by providing a safe place to grow, learn & play.*