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PHOTO BY JACQUELINE DEVINE

Asha Nouwen, head teacher at New Horizon Academy located on Windermere Way in Shakopee, plays with Grace Pearson, left, and Skylar Putnam.

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Rollercoaster for child care

Local centers take hit from pandemic

BY JACQUELINE DEVINE
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Over the past year and a half, child care centers around the nation have suffered throughout the COVID-19 global pandemic. Child care providers are now speaking out on how it has negatively impacted their industry.

Since the pandemic began and schools moved to virtual learning, millions of parents have had to work from home. Fearing for the health and safety of their children, many parents have opted out of child care services which in turn has led to labor shortages.

New Horizon Academy CEO and Minnesota Child Care Association President Chad Dunkley said there are currently 72 New

COVID impact

This story is part of an ongoing series by Southwest News Media, reporting how COVID-19 has impacted our community.

Horizon Academies throughout the state. He said the last year and a half has been a rollercoaster for all child care providers across the country. Minnesota was no exception.

"Back at the last end of March of last year, New Horizon Academy was serving over 10,000 Minnesota children, and in a matter of weeks we went to serving about 2,200. We were really struggling with what do we do now," said Dunkley. "Pre-pandemic we had over 3,100 teachers here in Minnesota and at one point we had about 1,000. We've continued to hire and more families have returned. Today, we sit a little over 2,100 teachers here."

Dunkley said he understands that child care is a critical piece of infrastructure for

those families that don't have the luxury of staying home and knows the importance of staying open for them.

"Minnesota was one of the first states in the country that did a significant public policy push to ask Minnesota legislators to come up with a grant program because we didn't have enough children to pay the bills and we needed to serve our communities," said Dunkley. "We were first in the country to get Peacetime Emergency Child Care Grants for child care providers and since then, the federal government has sent a couple of rounds of rescue money to help child care providers weather this pandemic."

According to Child Care Aware of Minnesota, the Peacetime Emergency Child Care Grants were distributed in three grant rounds from April through June 2020. As part of their COVID-19 Response Supplemental Budget, Gov. Tim Walz and Lt. Gov. Peggy Flanagan proposed an initial \$30 million in funding for emergency grants for licensed

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