



## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **Walnut Daycare Facility Set to Become a Reality**

*SWIPCO Helps Play Haven Child Care Secure \$600,000 CDBG for New Facility*

**WALNUT-** A new childcare facility is on track to become a reality in Walnut after Southwest Iowa Planning Council helped secure a \$600,000 Community Development Block Grant for the project.

The facility is set to be created in one wing of the current Peace Haven Retirement Home in Walnut and will be operated by a newly developed 501c3 organization called Play Haven. The total project cost is expected to be \$1,030,000 and other funding includes a \$500,000 grant from the Lakin Foundation. Play Haven has been doing fundraisers and collecting local donations to help cover the remaining amount needed to complete the project.

Obtaining childcare is a challenge in the region and this facility will be a big help to area residents looking for the service. Currently, a single in-home daycare provider exists in Walnut to serve a population that is estimated to have 85 children under the age of ten. That's just the need within town. The Iowa Child Care Resource and Referral, a state-run organization focused on connecting families with quality childcare, shows that Pottawattamie County is facing a severe shortage of approximately 6,942 childcare slots to meet demand. The new Play Haven facility in Walnut is designed to serve up to 65 children.

Rachel Hamilton with Play Haven is very excited that this project is coming to life, "We've been working for three years towards this and it's so exciting that is happening. I'm thrilled for our community. The partnership with Peace Haven will create such a positive impact on two vital age demographics, seniors and children."

Access to safe, reliable, and high-quality childcare close to home will help eliminate the need for area residents to make long commutes for care or piecemeal care arrangements. This can also help working families reduce employment-related disruptions and support greater workforce participation in the region.



Hamilton said inspiration for the project came from her own children who have struggled to find childcare and were asking for help, saying “I think we need to look at this issue in a different way other than grandparents retiring early to take care of grandchildren.” That is how this dedicated group got started and eventually Peace Haven was brought up as a potential space. “When this conversation started there were close to a dozen Walnut residents expecting children, with limited childcare spaces to serve them,” said Hamilton.

A unique aspect of this project will be the opportunity to connect the youth and elderly populations with the connection to a retirement facility. Children and senior residents will participate in shared, structured activities to enrich quality of life and community connection for all involved. Hamilton said they’ve been working hard to make sure it’s a partnership that’s respectful of the residents and enriching for both groups.

The new Play Haven facility is also expected to create 10-12 new jobs, ranging from educators, assistants, and administrative staff.

“This has an opportunity to impact the community on a larger scale as well. We’ve already been talking about the need for housing and the potential for wrap-around care, that can set the table for growth,” Hamilton said.

SWIPCO is proud to have helped obtain this important funding for a resource that should benefit the Walnut community for many years to come. Recently, a similar facility was completed in Malvern, with SWIPCO playing a key role in securing the necessary funding. As part of its commitment to community development, SWIPCO continues to collaborate with member cities and counties, supporting a wide range of grant programs to foster growth and innovation.

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