

Sunshine Academy day-care grows after garnering non-profit status



Wendy Nugent

Immie Smith, center, enjoys herself Wednesday afternoon at Sunshine Academy in Newton. Among other students pictured are Skylar Lee, left, and Tannis LECuyer, right.

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By Brandon Rush

[Newton Kansan](#)

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NEWTON —

Last fall, things were looking pretty bad for one of Newton's child-care centers.

"We were in pretty sorry shape," said Diane Yunghans, director of the Sunshine Academy Learning Center at 215 N. Meridian in Newton. "We lost 30 families in one month due to layoffs and the bad economy."

It was around this time Yunghans came up with a unique idea — turn the academy into a non-profit facility in order to become eligible for grants and services that would vastly improve the quality of the center, as well as ease any financial troubles for the parents of the center's children.

"It seemed like some of these parents are working just to pay for day-care, and it was killing them," Yunghans said. "We want to help families out."

So, after a lot of work, grant applications, and some seemingly troubled times, when Sunshine Academy opened its doors on the morning of September 24th, it was a nonprofit child-care center. And it had the grants to back it up, as well.

"We were awarded our first grant from the United Way for staff training," Yunghans said. "The United Way has also allowed us to provide child-care 'scholarships' for four or five families at a time, and it's just wonderful to take the burden off of the parents."

The center has since received other grants, including one from a program called Child Start, which allowed for the Sunshine Academy's staff to receive even more in-depth training as well as providing the funds to build a new classroom for the now 40-80 children the center has enrolled since becoming a nonprofit organization, and the center still has some spots open for full-time and part-time care of children in the community.

With their next grant, however, the center plans to focus on becoming the first fully-accredited special needs facility in Harvey County – something that is very important to Yunghans, as she is the mother of an autistic child. They would also like to be able to resurface their playground.

How is Sunshine Academy doing overall, though?

“We're seeing a difference,” Yunghans said. “It's much better now. We're almost full again, and we have the support of the parents. This is exciting for our center on many levels.”

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