



Kearney child care provider converts old school into new place of learning

By Liz Stewart on July 29, 2026

■ Lending

Para la versión en español, [haga clic aquí](#).

There are some nice perks to living in a building that was once a school, especially if you run an in-home day care, says Hannah Mast, owner and operator of Pleasant Hill Childcare in Kearney, Nebraska.

“My home used to be a school that was then converted to an upstairs/downstairs duplex,” said Hannah. “The advantages of that have been wonderful. I have a separate entrance that my day care families can use, as well as a separate kitchen and storage space. We also have a full basketball court, so lots of concrete for the kids to ride bikes on.”

The biggest challenge of creating her dream home/business was getting a special use permit for zoning, which took time and, in turn, made Hannah’s business licensing process take months rather than weeks.

Since finalizing the paperwork, Hannah and her family have transformed the building, cutting out the dividing wall between the duplex units. Their main living space is upstairs, with two of their kids’ bedrooms downstairs. The day care occupies the downstairs only, with a bathroom primarily used by the children.

Although Hannah opened her business in February 2025, she is not new to the world of child care. Her parents ran an in-home child care program while Hannah was growing up, and when she was about 10, they bought a child care center. Hannah worked with her parents at the center from age 12 until she moved to Oregon with her husband.

The couple moved back to Nebraska in 2008. After taking several years off to raise her own children and provide a home for foster children, Hannah started working with her parents at their day care center again.

“My parents retired last year and sold their center,” Hannah said. “While I was not interested in buying and running a center, I still wanted to offer care to the families I worked with there. That is what brought me to where I am now, running an in-home child care program.”

Last fall, Hannah had the opportunity to participate in the [Childcare Accelerator Award Program](#) presented by the Center for Rural Affairs Women’s Business Center (WBC), Stearns Bank, and the Association of Women’s Business Centers. The Center’s WBC was among seven across the country selected to serve as accelerator hubs and to receive grant funding.

Designed to help licensed child care providers scale operations, expand services, and improve sustainability in their communities, the program included 10 Nebraska child care providers. They engaged in hands-on training sessions and gained personalized technical assistance and guidance

93

Shares

“I learned about bookkeeping and tax prep and got assistance getting my LLC set up,” said Hannah. “The skills have given me the organization tools that have helped build my confidence in running my own business.”

It’s important for her to be able to offer safe and child-friendly spaces for all of the children in her care to learn and grow best, she said.

“I am very thankful to have gotten to be a part of this program,” she said.

Hannah received funding through the program to help with upgrades to her business. She was able to recoup some of the startup costs involved in opening her new program as well as redo the day care bathroom.

Pleasant Hill Childcare is a second home to the children of seven local families. Hannah cares for the children like they’re her own, Monday through Friday, 7:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Her program is at full capacity although she often gets inquiries about openings.

“These families are my favorite part of running my business,” Hannah said. “I am blessed with really great ones. Seeing the children light up with joy is pretty amazing.”

The Childcare Accelerator Program was made possible by Stearns Bank in partnership with the Associated Women's Business Centers. The Nebraska program is held in partnership with Sixpence Early Learning and Nebraska Educational Service Units. The Childcare Accelerator Award Program ran from Aug. 23 to Oct. 13, 2025.

For more information, visit cfra.org/small-business-training.