

# A Normal Childhood

**Agency:** Youth Enrichment Services

**Program:** Infant and Toddler Care

**Service:** Provides quality childcare to children ages four weeks to 36 months. The program offers children a fun, safe, nurturing atmosphere for discovery by using developmentally appropriate curriculum that helps each child develop at his or her own pace.

**Need:** The average cost in SD for a year of childcare for an infant is more than \$7,000. A two parent family with both parents working full time for \$10.00/hour would need to spend more than 25% of their gross income on center-based care for one infant and one preschooler.

**Impact:** Research shows that from birth to age three is a time of much development for children. Connections made in the brain, and education received will have a life time of impact on children. Scholarship assistance at Youth Enrichment Services provided by Sioux Empire United Way ensures that at-risk families are able to afford quality childcare for their infants and toddlers.

For a mother, the birth of their first child is a momentous occasion, filled with emotions never felt before. For Liz and Allen, it was also a time filled with never before heard of medical terminology and worry for their daughter Jerzey, born with heart defects.

“Jerzey had her first open heart surgery at 5 days old to repair a section of her aorta,” explains Liz. “At 11 days old another surgery was needed to fix a hole between the two chambers of her heart.”

Because of her medical condition, Jerzey’s doctor recommended waiting to enroll her in childcare until she was four months old. “I had worked up until I had Jerzey, and then because of her surgery and the extra care she needed I wasn’t able to go back to work right away. Things were tough with the loss of my income, and the medical costs.”

As the time approached for Jerzey to start at childcare Liz began her search for a center that would be able to meet her daughter’s special needs. Because of Jerzey’s condition, her caretakers would need to be cautious about how they picked her up. Jerzey also wasn’t able to spend time on her tummy, an activity many children her age enjoy. A special diet was necessary, and it was important that she wasn’t allowed to cry for more than 10 minutes because of the stress it placed on her body.

“I wanted a center that had multiple staff so I would know that there was accountability and always someone to watch over her. I found everything I wanted at Youth Enrichment Services,” adds Liz. “The location is convenient for my work and our home. The staff here are wonderful and even at her age they still do activities with them.”

The Infant and Toddler program at Youth Enrichment Services uses a creative curriculum that involves learning through play, exposing children to different textures, engaging their curiosity, and more. The quality care is available to families with limited-income thanks to your support of United Way. 25 families utilized scholarship assistance in 2009 to better afford the cost of care.

“The scholarship assistance helps so much,” adds Liz. “To be able to afford this quality of care means so much to us. It helps Jerzey to be a normal child. She is going to be able to grow up, develop, and socialize with other kids her age. And that means so much to me as a mom.”

