

Children with Disabilities are in Good Hands

Agency: Liberty Center

Service: Provides out-of-school time childcare in a structured environment for youth with special needs ages 3-21 and their siblings.

Need: There are over 2,300 individuals under the age of 20 with a disability in the Sioux Falls area. In 2008, 87 students were served through Liberty Center's childcare service.

What does that mean to me? Families with special needs children have affordable childcare geared towards their unique needs. Children receive the care they need, while parents are able to continue working and supporting their families.

Finding high quality, affordable childcare can be trying for most parents. But for Connie it was a huge challenge.

Connie's twelve-year old twin girls were diagnosed with Retts Syndrome when they were two. Retts Syndrome is a developmental disorder that begins in early infancy. Most children with Retts seem to be born with normal developmental patterns until they're about six months old. Symptoms are autistic-like, and include rapid regression of abilities such as speaking and walking, seizures and a variety of other challenging symptoms.

"I didn't know where to take them," said Connie, "I actually dropped them off at a childcare facility one morning and when I came to pick them up that evening they told me not to bring them back."

Connie and her husband contemplated every option – working opposite shifts, one of them quitting their job, and hiring in home help. But each came with a huge sacrifice; lack of time and bonding as a family as well as lack of dollars to adequately care for their children.

That's when they found the Liberty Center, an after-school and summer daycare program that provides care for special needs children and their siblings.

"I don't know what we would do without them," said Connie. "The Liberty Center has been such a blessing."

At the Liberty Center children receive individualized attention and staff members are properly trained to effectively care for each child. "It's like a family. The girls love it," said Connie, "They do more for our girls than most people would care to."

Connie and her family aren't alone; there are more 2,300 children with special needs in Sioux Falls.

Thanks to Sioux Empire United Way, Liberty Center will be able to offer high quality and affordable childcare for special needs children in four locations. Helping parents like Connie, "I have peace of mind. I never worry about the girls while I'm at work. I know they're in good hands."

