

On the go!

Before- and after-school care options can be a unique, active and inexpensive experience for kids of all ages.

by Molly Hover, for The Bulletin Special Projects



You're a busy parent with young children who all have different schedules from you and, often, there doesn't seem to be enough hours in the day. The solution may be a lot simpler (and less expensive) than you think: before- and/or after-school care.

It might seem overwhelming to choose the best fit among the plethora of child care programs offered in Central Oregon. Questions such as "How do I know my children will be safe and happy?"; "How much will this cost?"; "How are they going to get to and from school?" and "Are they old enough to be home alone for a few hours?" may dance in parents' heads.

Understanding the unique aspects of the various programs available can help families make the choice that is most beneficial for both parents and children. Programs in Bend, Redmond, and Sisters school districts have on-site educational care that teaches children healthy habits (mind and body) and even lends a helping hand with homework.

Bend Park & Recreation District operates KIDS INC, which gives kids at Bear Creek, Buckingham, Elk Meadow, Pine Ridge, Juniper, Lava Ridge, Jewell, Ensworth and Ponderosa elementary schools a place to go before and after school Monday through Friday. The program also operates after school at Highland, High Lakes and Miller elementary schools.

"We provide opportunities for socialization through art activities, games and community service projects," said Rebecca Curfew, a coordinator for KIDS INC. And when all that activity begins to wear the kids down, healthy snacks including fruits and vegetables are on hand to boost their energy.

Students at Three Rivers Elementary school in Sunriver who need after-school care can enroll in Fun After

School Times (FAST) Camp. Operated by the Sunriver Owners Association (SROA), FAST Camp involves kids in community service, takes them on educational field trips, directs games and crafts as well as offers homework assistance.

"It's an extension of learning through experiential and hands-on opportunities," said Emily Savko, SROA Recreation Program Manager.

"The mission of FAST Camp is to provide the Sunriver community with affordable after school care that encourages children to explore new activities and develop social skills," Savko added.

La Pine Park & Recreation Department is working hard to create a similar program for students at Rosland and La Pine elementary schools.

"We've taken the surveys and know the need is out there," explained Karen Miller, Community School and Summer Program Coordinator for La Pine Park and Recreation District. "We are in the process of fundraising and securing grants in order to start the program. We are about half way there and are hoping to start in January."

Kinder Quest and Adventure Quest, offered through Redmond Area Park and Recreation District (RAPRD), focuses not only on crafts and science projects, but also gives Redmond's elementary school kids at John Tuck, Sage, Tom McCall and Vern Patrick a chance to burn off some energy with various gym and field games as well as an introduction to sports. Other activities such as origami, creative writing, finger painting and beading are offered, creating a well-rounded experience.

"Participants also have a chance to make friends with students that they may not regularly interact with during normal school hours," said Al Butler, program coordinator.



Photos courtesy KIDS INC.



Care Options in Central Oregon • Here is a sampling of local programs. The area offers many choices.

KIDS INC

www.bendparksandrec.org

FAST Camp

www.sunriverowners.org

Adventure and Kinder Quest

www.raprd.org

Latchkey Kids

www.latchkey-kids.com

On-site before- and after-school child care programs are safe and fun for kids while also convenient for parents whose schedules don't line up with school hours. However, certain situations can leave parents wondering if it's all right to let their children be home alone for short periods of time, seeing themselves to and from the bus stop.

While Oregon's law essentially states that a child needs to be 10 before they are left alone, that requirement is not a definitive guideline. According to the Oregon Department of Human Services, it's more about determining if a child is being neglected.

Consideration to the child's maturity level, the environment they are in when at home, and how long they have to be alone is the best way for parents to decide if it's the right choice for their child. It's also important to remember that making children responsible for themselves can cause a lot of unnecessary anxiety.

Latchkey Kids Calling Program,



Photo courtesy KIDS INC.

offered through Database Systems Corp. (DSC), offers parents who do opt to let their child stay alone some peace of mind. The program works by placing phone calls to a home while a child is scheduled to be there alone. The child must acknowledge the computerized phone call by pressing "1" on the phone's dial pad. If there is no answer after a few tries, the computer program automatically sends an alert message to parents.

Whether you choose to enroll your

children in a before- and after-school program, or employ one that keeps them safer when they are home alone, there are many options that can buy you just a little more time in your day. Beyond those outlined here, other programs throughout the area also offer before- and after-school child care hours with transportation to and from school, giving working parents with young kids a way to balance it all out, safely and happily.



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