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Grant shoots for accredited day cares

By Tomesha Thompson

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United Way of Northeast Louisiana received a \$50,000 grant from JPMorgan Chase Foundation to help start the Northeast Louisiana Childcare Loan Fund.

The loan fund will allow credit-worthy child-care centers to get loans up to \$10,000 to help them work toward national accreditation.

The Enterprise Corp. of the Delta partnered with United Way to help identify credit-worthy facilities in Ouachita and Lincoln parishes.

"Things like the credit quality, ability to pay back loans and the character of the borrower will be looked at to determine whether centers qualify for loans," said Ed Sivak, senior program officer of ECD/Hope Community Credit Union.

The corporation, headquartered in Jackson, Miss., hopes to enhance quality of life for low- and moderate-income residents of the Midsouth.

Sivak said the grant would serve as collateral for a portion of loans received by child-care centers.

Accredited child-care centers may improve economic development in Louisiana, said Janet Durden, president of Northeast Louisiana United Way.

"We have been told by large companies that accredited child-care centers are one of the things they look for when moving to a new community," said Durden. "Accreditation is an expensive process."

Only two centers in northeast Louisiana are accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children, which is recognized as a standard for excellence.

Louisiana Tech University Early Childhood Education Center in Ruston and Tiny Town Early Childhood Center in Calhoun are the two.

Possible applicants and contributors should contact the United Way of Northeast Louisiana at 318-325-3869 or toll free at 800-644-9886.