

Wisconsin Shares Opens Doors to Quality Early Learning for More Children

By Laure Blanchard, Executive Director, Wausau Child Care

Most parents of young children in Wisconsin work. Because of that strong work ethic 68% of our children less than 6 years old have all parents in the workforce, according to federal census data. Over 55,000 children from low-income working families receive Wisconsin Shares assistance that allows parents to work while ensuring that their child is supervised and cared for by adults in child care centers, preschools and family child care homes. Without that assistance, those parents would either be unable to go to work or they would be forced to place their children in unsafe, unsupervised settings.

Wisconsin Shares support is in jeopardy in the state budget now under consideration. The funding level proposed is insufficient to meet demands, and proposals are on the table to reduce eligibility levels, raise parent co-pay levels, substantially reduce payments to the child care programs providing services, and establish waiting lists.

Wisconsin Shares started as a promise to low-income parents coming out of the welfare system as a way to keep a job with assurance their children were well cared for. The program has been successful in meeting that goal. We should not break that promise. It needs to be fully funded, without the changes proposed that negatively affect children, families and programs.

As a director for multiple child care centers that offer quality early care and education to children who receive Shares benefits, I understand the concerns of low-income families. Parents shouldn't have to be wealthy to be able to find placement for their children in a safe, regulated, high quality early learning environment. Getting a job, keeping a job and feeling their child is safe while they are working is a reality taken for granted by many parents in Wisconsin, but for many low-wage earners these basics are a continual struggle.

Research and common sense tell us that the quality of early education experiences does matter. All parents should have the opportunity to enroll their children in a high quality early learning environment where every child emerges ready for school. To build for our future we should be talking about improving the quality of early learning opportunities, not cutting programs like Wisconsin Shares that provide access to quality early care and education.

Legislators need to hear how essential Wisconsin Shares is to working families. I encourage you to call Legislators and ask them to support Wisconsin Shares. The Legislative Hotline will tell you who your representatives are: 1-800-362-WISC (9472)