

Family Living Programs

UW-Extension Addresses the Issues of Child Care

Situation

High quality early care and education programs have a big impact on children's later success in school and life. High quality child care is also good for Wisconsin's working parents and businesses.

In Wisconsin, approximately 190,000 young children attend some type of out-of-home child care in regulated group centers or family homes. About 40,000 of these children, whose families have low incomes, receive state child care subsidies to help pay for care. Recognizing that welfare reform cannot succeed unless child care is provided for low-income families, the state's Department of Workforce Development has invested heavily in child care, combining the federal Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) and Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) funds to create a seamless child care subsidy system for the state.

Wisconsin's working parents are getting a hand from outreach programs of UW-Extension. In recent years, UW-Extension faculty have conducted action-research projects with local communities across the state that have led to new child care programs being established. This project created new child care slots and jobs in communities ranging from Washburn to Peshtigo to Milwaukee.

Employed parents also worry about the quality of those child care programs, so UW-Extension has been equally involved with quality improvement efforts. UW-Extension also was contracted by the state to lead a multi-year, multi-million dollar effort to improve the quality of child care across the state.

Response

UW-Extension addresses the issues of child care in five ways:

- **Directly through teaching child care staff.**
For several years we have provided a year-long series of six educational programs to Wisconsin child care staff in 40 counties. The program, Better Kid Care, was hosted at county UW-Extension offices that downlinked a video program from a satellite relay, then conducted local discussion groups.
- **Indirectly through train-the-trainer programs.**
UW-Extension Family Living Agents share their resources with Child Care Resource and Referral staff and others who train child care teachers.
- **Through distance education.**
Since 1977 we have provided a professional newsletter to the state's child care programs, bringing them research-based knowledge about best practices. Today the state inserts our quarterly Child Care Connections newsletter in its mailing to every one of the 10,500 regulated child care programs in Wisconsin. Evaluations have shown that programs use the Connections articles in staff training, and make changes in their practices based on our articles.
- **Through community development.**
UW-Extension Family Living Agents have conducted need assessments with businesses and communities, and taken the lead in organizing efforts that led to over 100 new child care programs

starting in Wisconsin. In most cases these are new businesses that create new jobs as well as making parental employment possible.

- **Through policy-relevant research and public policy education.**

The UW-Extension Wisconsin Child Care Policy Research Partnership provides regular Issue Briefs and Policy Options Papers to state policy makers. In partnership with the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development, UW-Extension has also conducted evaluations of several major state programs (the Early Childhood Excellence Initiative, the Quality Improvement Grants Program, and the Child Care Scholarship and Reward Program), and is helping state government to create a data sharing system that can combine child care information from several management systems. For two decades we have advised state and county government on child development policies.

UW-Extension's Unique Capacity for Collaboration

Why do child care staff attend our local workshops? Why do they read our statewide publications? Why does state government seek our expertise, and why has the federal government selected us as one of eight national centers to conduct policy research on child care?

- **Knowledge of the content area.** Our staff includes Ph.D.s in child development and people experienced in teaching and directing early childhood programs.
- **Capability in adult education and training.** UW-Extension sets the standard for bringing the research-based knowledge of the university to the professionals, practitioners and public who can use it. This is true for both the skill of our county-based educators, and the capabilities of our teaching technologies (e.g., satellite-linked video networked to every county of Wisconsin; statewide radio and computer networks; web-based teaching, etc. We think of ourselves as the "adult education" and "applied research" arm of state government.
- **The state-local network.** Local UW-Extension Agents covering every county in the state are linked with university-based researchers in a single organization. This state-local partnership is central to making us the premier technology-transfer organization in the world.
- **Evaluation expertise.** Our evaluations are rigorous and influential. They are often published in scientific and policy journals. No scientific methodology is beyond our potential capability.
- **We are unbiased.** In the end, any influence we have depends upon our reputation as fair brokers of research-based knowledge.

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