

DCF: Announces Community Innovation Grant Recipients

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MADISON —The Department of Children and Families (DCF) has awarded roughly \$850,000 in Community Innovation Grants (CIG) to eight organizations across the state to expand available early care and education opportunities for young children ages birth to five and their families.

The grants, which are funded from the state's Preschool Development Grant - Birth to 5 (PDG B-5) award, ranged in size from \$50,000 to \$150,000 and support innovative programs and partnerships that address areas of equity, access, affordability, quality, and workforce as highlighted in the state's Birth to 5 Statewide Strategic Plan. The grants are also being utilized to develop stronger public-private partnerships that will serve as models for future community investments in other parts of the state.

"Having access to high-quality early care and education opportunities is critical for our communities to thrive," said DCF Secretary Emilie Amundson. "These grants are a deliberate step to begin engaging community businesses and organizations to connect with their early care and education system to learn about their role in supporting a healthy local economy."

Through local investment activities like the CIGs, the department is working to connect the dots across state and local programs to better serve all Wisconsin children and families. New opportunities for funding will be available in the coming year and beyond as the state continues its work to improve Wisconsin's early childhood system. DCF encourages anyone who could be a stakeholder to apply.

The organizations receiving grants in this first round of funding include:

Childcaring, Inc., is assisting families in gaining access to high-quality, affordable early care and education by expanding its Good Start Grants program to three new counties. The program provides personalized assistance to families by helping them find care that best meets their needs, as well as additional funding to cover the costs. Additionally, Childcaring, Inc., will be providing local centers with stipends to help achieve or maintain a YoungStar rating.

Children's Services Society Black River Falls is helping families in Jackson and Trempealeau counties reduce barriers to accessing services using Family Resource Navigators. Local families will be connected to navigators who will provide tailored assistance and create solutions across a variety of service areas, including early care and education, health and social services, schooling, and community-based services.

Family Resource Center St. Croix Valley is expanding early care and education opportunities by engaging the business community through sponsored workshops and a pilot program with three local businesses. Additionally, they are expanding their Early Childhood Parent Cafes program and offering opportunities for families to have an on-farm experience to increase awareness on healthy eating and nutrition.

First 5 Fox Valley is implementing the nationally recognized evidenced-based Help Me Grow model in Outagamie, Calumet, and Winnebago counties to promote cross-sector collaboration. The model will help build on existing resources and strengthen relationships between partners. Additionally, First 5 Fox Valley is expanding development screening and assessments for infants and toddlers to ensure they receive the necessary supports needed to thrive.

Lutheran Social Services (LSS) of Wisconsin and Upper Michigan, Inc. is supporting the social-emotional development of children and reduction of expulsion in early care through its Trauma Informed Care for At Risk Preschool Children program. Staff will work closely with child care providers, parents, and caregivers to help them identify strategies and develop tools that will assist them in addressing behavior issues.

The Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa is expanding access to high-quality, affordable early care and education to families living within the Red Cliff Reservation and its surrounding communities through the opening of the

Zhawenimikaang Childcare Center. Both Red Cliff Early Childhood Center and Zhawenimikaang Childcare Center will offer scholarships to help parents pay for care, assist families in accessing public transportation, and provide farm-fresh produce and eggs. Additionally, the centers will support the integration of Ojibwe language and culture into programming.

United Way of Green County is ensuring the early care and education community and families are prepared to support the needs of all children. This is being accomplished by providing evidenced-based trauma-informed care training across local programs and by expanding access to infant and toddler mental health consultation. Additionally, United Way of Green County is helping bolster the early care and education workforce through free professional development opportunities and a mentorship program.

Wisconsin Alliance for Infant Mental Health is strengthening the early care and education workforce through a comprehensive professional development program. Providers in Dane and Milwaukee counties will have the opportunity to select a focus area meaningful to them and attend trainings and group sessions where they will learn and network with other providers in their communities.

To learn more about DCF's efforts to improve the state's early childhood system and upcoming opportunities to participate, visit DCF's PDG webpage or follow @WisDCF on Twitter and Facebook. This release is also available via PDF file and on the DCF press webpage.