

WEDC: Wisconsin's Workforce Innovation Grant to allow YMCA to expand child care and youth programming in Green County

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MONROE, WI. FEB. 14, 2022 – A state Workforce Innovation Grant worth up to \$3.7 million will help turn the Green County Family YMCA's plans to expand and create a child care center and Youth Development Wing into reality.

"The Green County community has really come together to not just create needed child care spots but to support children, the dedicated professionals who care for them and all families," said Missy Hughes, secretary and CEO of the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation. "A variety of groups will be offering everything from mental health services to mentoring in this facility. I believe those investments will pay off with a healthier, happier workforce."

Hughes, Department of Children and Families Secretary Emilie Amundson, Department of Administration Secretary-designee Kathy Blumenfeld and Department of Workforce Development (DWD) Secretary-designee Amy Pechacek took part in a roundtable discussion about the grant Monday at Monroe's Ludlow Mansion.

"Wisconsin's record-low unemployment and strong labor force participation rate mean that equitable access to quality, affordable childcare is more important than ever," Pechacek said. "The Green County YMCA and its partners are leading the way with a model that holds promise for communities statewide to enhance childcare and youth programming."

In December, Gov. Tony Evers announced that 12 projects across Wisconsin would receive up to \$59.5 million in Workforce Innovation Grants to help tackle some of the state's most pressing workforce challenges from child care to worker training.

"Child care needs are workforce needs, and this innovative and collaborative project is needed now more than ever to support our hard-working Wisconsin families," Blumenfeld said.

The Green County family YMCA plans to build a 5,000 sq. ft. state-of-the-art child care and preschool wing for licensed programs and classes, as well as an addition of a 6,000 sq. ft. Youth Development Wing. The YMCA is partnering with Big Brothers Big Sisters, Vitality Youth Services, Jacob's Swag, Avenues Counseling, and the Multicultural Outreach Program to provide services and programs in the Youth Development Wing.

"Research continues to show that children who have access to high-quality, affordable care are more likely to live healthier lives and do better in school and adulthood," Amundson said. "The YMCA's plan to expand services and supports for children of all ages will not only benefit the children and families the program serves but the community as a whole."

While the YMCA currently offers a preschool program and afterschool care, the expansion will allow them to serve children ages 6 weeks through 18.

"This will allow us to significantly expand the number of people we serve," said Luke Smetters, director of membership and community engagement for the Green County Family YMCA.

Beyond making more child care spots available, the expansion will allow the YMCA and its partners to offer a variety of youth programming – from mentoring to mental health services.

"Having a foundation that is diverse, multicultural and truly including everyone is really important," said Victoria Solomon, associate professor of community resource development with UW-Madison's Division of Extension – Green County. Solomon is also part of the Green County Multicultural Outreach Program, a partner of the YMCA, which will host some programming in the new wing.

Beyond offering support to youth of all ages and backgrounds, it's important to offer

programming and support for the adults in these children's lives – both family and the child care professionals at the center, said Megan Schilt, a licensed professional counselor and founder of Avenues Counseling.

Avenues is hoping to work with adults as well as children to build a culture that recognizes the importance of caregiving and supports it, Schilt said. The hope would be that this could reduce burnout amongst child care staff and stress amongst parents.

“We're stressed. We're maxed out and that carries down to children,” Schilt said. “This building, this space could be a hub where we can build positive experiences and relationships for children.... We're trying to raise an awareness of how we can all be of support to one another.”

The Workforce Innovation Grants are paid for by \$100 million in federal American Rescue Plan Act funds. Applications for a second round of funding open Feb. 22. More information on the program can be found here: wedc.org/workforce-innovation-grant