



October 2022

PROJECT GROWTH OVERVIEW

Across Wisconsin, businesses are experiencing historic challenges in recruiting and retaining their workforce, while our families are facing barriers in locating accessible and affordable child care. And child care businesses are struggling to retain experienced staff.

That's why, when businesses partner with early childhood programs to cover the true cost of child care, everyone benefits. Businesses show that they care about the well-being of their employees and their families, child care programs get help covering their operating costs and paying their staff living wages, and working parents gain access to high-quality, affordable child care. Population trends show that the Wisconsin workforce will remain tight across industries. Benefits like these help businesses recruit and retain employees.

Project Growth is one of many initiatives DCF has introduced to stabilize our communities' child care systems and bolster Wisconsin's economy. To date, \$30 million has been invested in businesses, communities, child care programs, and families through Project Growth.



WISCONSIN CHILD CARE BY-THE-NUMBERS

- The average price of infant care constitutes 18.5% of the median family income in Wisconsin and 83.3% of the yearly wages of a minimum wage worker. ([2021 Needs Assessment](#))
- The child care workforce earns only a median hourly wage of \$7.46–12.99 per hour, depending on the type of program. ([2021 Needs Assessment](#)) In short, the business model for child care does not work without increased public or private investment.
- 64% of Wisconsin employers say that exploring ways to support child and family-supporting benefits is necessary to retain valuable employees in a tight labor market.
- 78% of Wisconsin business owners report that our state's economy is directly impacted by families' abilities to access affordable, high-quality child care.
- Wisconsin's demographic shifts are a central issue to the state's tightened labor market. Wisconsinites are aging. The state had 150,000 fewer residents in their "prime working age" (from 25–54 years old) in 2019 than it did in 2010, according to an analysis by UW Community Economic Development. ([The State of Working Wisconsin](#)) The labor force will continue to shrink in the coming decade, leaving public and private employers fighting over the smaller pool of potential workers.

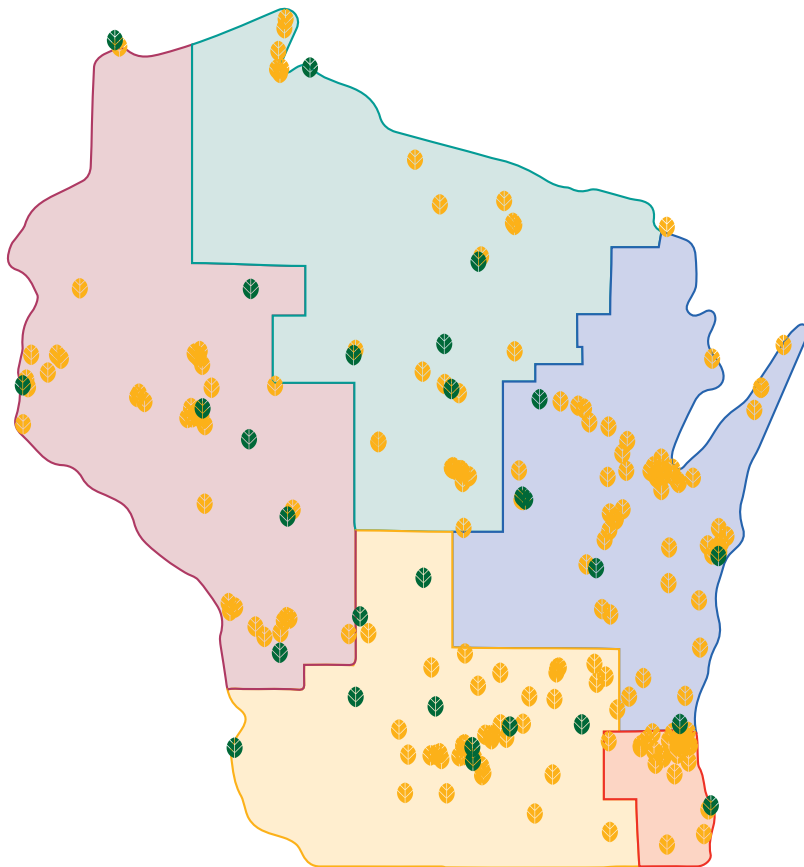
2022 IMPACTS OF PROJECT GROWTH

DCF surveyed nearly 1,000 employers from every county in the state, across a wide range of industries, to learn more about how they perceived and supported their employees' child care needs.

- The survey showed that 73% of respondents agreed that providing employees with resources to support their child care needs is a strategy that all employers should consider to address workforce/labor shortages.
- Many also cited barriers in providing such benefits.
- The majority of respondents shared that federal or state government incentives would increase the likelihood that their company could implement or expand child care resources.

Grant Program Participation Map

The Project Growth program directly responds to these challenges through two grant initiatives: Dream Up! and Partner Up! Together, these investments provide concrete benefits for Wisconsin businesses, child care programs, and employees while ensuring a focused, stable workforce in Wisconsin.



 Dream Up!  Partner Up!



Across Wisconsin, businesses, communities, and child care programs participating in Project Growth initiatives are already reporting increases in employee productivity, job satisfaction, and loyalty to their employers.

To date, Project Growth has served:

199

businesses

420

families

28

communities

312

child care programs

“ We have staff who are incredibly grateful for this child care funding and partnership. And it's also been incredible for the local daycare centers. They're being able to actually invest in additional staff, opening more spots, and investing in their infrastructure a little bit. This grant has been an incredible opportunity for our staff and the community.

-Employer

OVERVIEW: PARTNER UP! GRANT PROGRAM



The Partner Up! grant program is administrated by Supporting Families Together Association (SFTA) and provides \$21 million in funding to support partnerships between businesses who purchase slots at existing regulated child care programs. The funding from Partner Up! can be used to increase staff compensation, pay expenses, reserve child care slots for local business employees, improve the quality of a child care program, and more.

Since the program's launch in May 2022:

- Employers have retained workers and reported an increase in employee satisfaction.
- Child care programs have retained high-quality teaching staff and recruited new team members.
- Employees reported being more likely to continue working for their current employer and are experiencing fewer child care-related disruptions.

Industry Participation for Partner Up!

Child care providers are currently half of the employers participating in Partner Up! Additional participating employers represent the following industries:



As far as Partner Up! goes, we wouldn't be where we are without it because a huge chunk of my income would be going to child care, if I decided to bring in any income at all. We have been renting our home and within next month will be able purchase our home and that certainly wouldn't have happened without the Partner Up! program. We wouldn't have been able to get a mortgage loan with one income, but now we have two incomes — that's been huge.

-Employee

Partner Up! Impacts:

199

participating
businesses

906

child care
slots

12.6%

of employee
participants
are people of
color

35.3

average
employee
age

\$50,000

household
income below
\$50k for 1/3
of participants

97%

of families in
the program
were able
to continue
with their
current child
care program



OVERVIEW: DREAM UP! GRANT PROGRAM

To date, the Dream Up! Supply-Building grant program has invested \$8.1 million to support building child care supply through a collaborative community approach facilitated by First Children's Finance (FCF).

Since the program's launch:

- 28 cross-sector community teams have been awarded \$75,000 supply-building grants.
- 70 family- and center-based child care providers from the Dream Up!-awarded communities have enrolled in free business leadership training offered by FCF and will each receive a \$5,000 stipend upon completion.
- Hundreds more providers will be offered business leadership training later in 2022.

The first 12 Dream Up! communities in Wisconsin have completed their core team meetings and are finalizing their child care supply-building plans, including goals, action items, and budgets. Several communities are pursuing or have secured additional financial resources in addition to the \$75,000 Dream Up! community award. Activities include:

- Planning community/employer surveys and events to learn more about local child care needs.
- Building the child care workforce to re-open classrooms that are closed due to lack of staffing.
- Engaging high school students in course work to become providers.
- Supporting family (in-home) providers in enhancing and growing their programs.
- Preparing to open new child care centers through strategic community partnerships.
- Identifying potential resources and asking for support from state and local leaders.



Dream Up! Impacts:

28

communities

70

providers

“ This grant is a way that we were able to help build that economic development and stability for our community, which lifts all the boats. This is something that has really helped our community in general. This grant is bringing about \$300,000 into our little community. That's huge! It's a fantastic win-win.

-Employer

Want to learn more?

Visit ProjectGrowth.WI.gov or contact wipdg@wisconsin.gov to learn more about Project Growth's latest initiatives and our community-based approach to improving child care in Wisconsin.



Project Growth is currently funded through the Preschool Development Grant – Birth to 5 (PDG B-5) award, the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act (CRRSA), and the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA).

The Department of Children and Families is an equal opportunity employer and service provider. If you have a disability and need to access services, receive information in an alternate format, or need information translated to another language, please call the Division of Early Care and Education at 608-422-6002. Individuals who are deaf, hard of hearing, deaf-blind or speech disabled can use the free Wisconsin Relay Service (WRS) – 711 to contact the department.