

Wisconsin Child Care Advisory and Recommendation Exchange (WI-CARE) Meeting Minutes April 10, 2026

12:00 p.m. – 1:00 p.m.

Attendees

WI-CARE Child Care Provider Members

- Bianca Hill, Milwaukee
- Carol Jackomino, Rhinelander
- Christine Larson Salerno, Milwaukee
- Cynthia Reineking, La Crosse
- Jen Kalis, Onalaska
- Joahna Shelton, Spooner
- Jose Martinez, Statewide
- Kishaunda Ransaw, Milwaukee
- Margarita Ugalde, Madison
- Rose Catlett, Middleton
- Ryann Counce Barnes, Milwaukee
- Shelly Boelter, Hager City
- Sheri Bishop, Pulaski
- Suzette Mayotte, Ashland
- Tanisha Johnson, Milwaukee
- Thanh Bui-Duquette, Eau Claire
- Tricia Peterson, Juneau

DCF Staff

- Alex Gagnon (notes)
- Andrea Cammilleri (facilitator/tech)
- Cassidy Peterson (tech)
- Daria Hall (facilitator)
- Kassidy Farrey (notes)
- Jason Rahn (facilitator)
- Kelly Todd (notes)
- Sherri Underwood (facilitator)

Meeting Notes

Welcome, Reminder of Meeting Norms

Presented by: Daria Hall, Policy Initiatives Advisor, DCF Division of Early Care and Education

- Daria read through the meeting norms and meeting agenda.

Parent/Caregiver Communications, Resources & Referrals

Presented by: Andrea Cammilleri, Division of Early Care and Education Administrator's Office



- Andrea shared what DCF is hoping to learn from this meeting:
 - How referrals between your program and community partners are working and how they could be improved
 - How you communicate with parents/caregivers to
 - Inform them about quality and your philosophy of care
 - Offer parent education and support
 - What topics or formats of communication are most successful/challenging for you with families
 - What DCF and other partners like Child Care Resource & Referral agencies (CCR&Rs) could offer to support you with communications and referrals
- Andrea mentioned that that DCF is also talking directly with parents/families regularly about these topics through its [Parent/Caregiver Advisory Cabinet](#) (PCAC).
- Andrea shared preliminary results from a recent PCAC survey.
- DCF has several mechanisms for communicating with parents:
 - Through local and regional partners like CCR&Rs
 - Through DCF's website and social media
 - Through direct service providers like child care providers, who are usually the first ones families come to for information

Child Care Resource & Referral (CCR&R) Services Across Wisconsin

Presented by: Sherri Underwood, Bureau of YoungStar

- CCR&R services fall into four main categories:
 1. Referrals and resources for families, providers and communities
 - Enhanced referrals for families
 - Consumer education on quality care
 - Technical assistance for families
 2. Training for child care providers
 3. Data collection and monitoring
 - Business Information Form (BIF)
 4. Local partnerships and child care supply building efforts
- Data collection and monitoring looks at child care supply and demand data and the info gathered in the BIF, such as child care rates, enrollment, waitlists, languages, availability of care for special populations.
- Enhanced child care referrals include
 - No cost, highly customized support for families to locate and access available slots
 - Vacancy and waitlist data upkeep
 - CCR&R calls to providers on behalf of families who need care
- Other CCR&R resources for families include consumer education on child care quality and regulation plus technical assistance such as referrals to human services and community early childhood resources.

Question 1: What's working/not working with regard to referral services from Child Care Resource & Referral agencies? How could it be better?

Breakout Room 1 Notes

- From a CCR&R board member standpoint, I know that families often need immediate, direct support rather than being referred elsewhere. A key challenge is that some individuals struggle with using online tools due to limited digital skills. I see CCR&R staff doing a strong job supporting families—especially newcomers to this country—by guiding them through available resources and helping them understand how to access services, whether by phone or online. Typically, families call first, then CCR&R staff help them navigate options and connect with appropriate agencies. From a child care program leadership perspective, referrals often come through word-of-mouth, with families reaching out after hearing about programs. Once connected, we try to ensure families know how to access additional services if needed.
- Staff provide strong support and guidance and some families prefer that direct assistance over using online systems, while others like having the information available on-demand, highlighting the need for both approaches.
- I do not have experience with CCR&R services in my county and do not have specific suggestions for improvement. However, CCR&Rs should work on strengthening connections with providers and increasing families' awareness of available options in their community. Accessing training opportunities through the CCR&Rs has been beneficial.
- Our CCR&R has been great—communication via their newsletter, their website is easy to use, and they have a director cohort with licensing staff and other licensed centers. The CCR&R could improve their connection with providers in rural areas and offer more training options at different times.
- **DCF Facilitator:** What other positive or negative experiences have you had with referrals in your community?
- We have had many successes with Birth to 3 referral by explaining the importance of it and being there to support families along the way. It starts with educating parents about the importance of early intervention and building strong relationships with families. Many families feel more comfortable accessing services within the child care center rather than in their homes, as the center feels like a safer environment. Some families are open to these services, but others remain hesitant because they may not yet feel comfortable or may not believe their child needs support. As a result, our team focuses heavily on education, particularly at the infant and toddler stages, to help families understand the value of early intervention.
- In general, it's been really hard with our school district and kids with disabilities, even bringing services to children with disabilities into some of our centers. I also want to note the elephant in the room: sometimes there is just a true lack of providers. It's not the CCR&R's fault—there is just no one to refer them to.

Breakout Room 2 Notes

- I have a positive relationship with our CCR&R; we have received referrals from them but not an abundance of them. Among referrals we do receive, those parents have enrolled their child and they trusted the referral so it was beneficial for that reason. We do use our CCR&R for resources, for classes, their make-and-take room, relationships with their staff. Overall it's beneficial to our program.
- Often I receive emails from the CCR&R asking if I have openings; I almost never do, so it's almost like they're behind in their search. My openings fill quickly since I advertise elsewhere. I don't know if I should reach out to the CCR&R first but I do appreciate their outreach when someone is looking for child care.
- I run a family child care. I know all the people at the CCR&R very closely. They try to have different classes, but because our region is so small, we don't have as many classes or resources. But if I do need help I can call them for help. I liked make-and-take it classes and they used to have a monthly meeting. I would sometimes touch base to hear what's new with them as a board member on the WI Family Child Care Association, so they've been helpful with that.
- Last year I had a child who was anticipating going to 4K. I was concerned she was not ready for it. I contacted the CCR&R for back-up; they came to my center, did some work with her one-on-one and encouraged the parent to maybe stay another year in my program. They delayed going to 4K til the next year. Having another person in my field back me up was valuable. They also gave pamphlets and guidance to help and got the school to come out and support, as well. She's now in 4K this year and that extra year has helped so support from the CCR&R was great.

Breakout Room 3 Notes

- I would like to see closer collaboration between the CCR&R and school district. I think sometimes it's very relationship-dependent. Personally, I have relationships with some of the people that work at my local CCR&R so if there is something that comes up in my role as a coordinator for preschool, I can connect people. But the person who was in the role before me in this school district didn't know who to contact or what CCR&R services are offered. It would be great if the CCR&R would get together with people in the community and school district for a touch base or check-in, maybe once or twice a year.
- I feel like our CCR&R does a great job. I have a very good relationship with them. The problem that we have is that typically the people who are looking for child care will call me and I will tell them I don't have an opening. Then they'll call the CCR&R and then call me again and say that they got my number from the CCR&R, but I still don't have an opening. The CCR&R does a really great job and what I found heartwarming is that they will reach out for people. We had a military family that was coming into town for a contract. The CCR&R went out on a limb to try and make things work for people.
- I would say the CCR&R is not the first place I see families go when seeking openings, nor is it the first place I'm going to refer families seeking openings, because I know the second you fill out the BIF, it is out of date. I'm going to refer families to another high-quality center that I know is proven in my area that I have a relationship with, to do a soft handoff. Particularly in our area, things move quickly. Always expanding trainings and keeping them very affordable and accessible, like virtual, is helpful. I know we have a



fantastic resource room at the CCR&R. I also know that it services a pretty wide geographic range without public transportation being able to get to it. The hours and capacity available are also limiting. For some, it is super great, but for those that are further out or in adjacent communities, it doesn't really make as much sense. There are definitely areas for continued growth and expansion. Before funding shifted, there was a lot more momentum, and now that things have decreased, I noticed a difference in their scope, range, and capacity. It can be hard because if you're looking at star rating only, that's not 100% representative of the quality of the program. I have seen outstanding 5 stars. I've also seen outstanding 2 stars. Many of my own programs are 2 stars because it does not make sense for us to go through a higher rating process. When searching, families are going for word of mouth, hands down. They're going for what is closest to their child's school, their home, work, and word out mouth. They are going to social media, Facebook or Google. They're not going to say, "Oh, I know about this CCR&R," because that information isn't relevant or accessible in a way that they need.

- I agree, families are not using CCR&Rs to find child care. I think some parents do know about YoungStar and ratings, so they may check the YoungStar website in addition to social media and word of mouth.
- I totally agree. I have been a provider since 2014, and during that time span, have only gotten maybe four calls. Mostly they have been to update my BIF. Most of the children that I have are from word of mouth or through other agencies. Sometimes it is from a person that works on the same block or neighbor, like a soft handoff. I do my best to follow back up with calls, but it's a city with a large population of children with lots of rotation in and out, and we're always trying to fill an open spot.
- I would also like to add that I try to have a relationship with my CCR&R. My grandparent works at our local CCR&R, so I do have a relationship there. I do get referrals, but they're soft handoff referrals. I reach out to the CCR&R when I have family engagement events.
- I want to ask something. So as a family provider, everything looks differently from my standpoint versus a center. How is the relationship built with the CCR&R?
 - **DCF Facilitator:** Information about ways to be involved should be on [each CCR&R's website](#). Or you can call them any time to ask about the services and supports they recommend for providers.

Question 2: What information do you communicate with families about quality care? What additional information would you like for parents to have about child care and the broader systems supporting children and families?

Breakout Room 1 Notes

- Developmental milestones can be difficult for families to understand, as well as how to support their children in reaching them. Some families come in with big goals, while others come in with no goals at all. Because of this, there's a need for more foundational information about developmental milestones. It's also important for us to educate families about prevention and early intervention, such as Birth to 3 services, since families often push back simply because they do not fully understand the importance.
- Families often come to us with language development questions, asking if we offer other a focus on one language or both English and Spanish. Families want to know if we



support Spanish and how we help them learn English so that's an opportunity to explain our dual-language approach, which supports a child's primary language while also introducing English. Families tend to respond positively to this. Young children are especially capable of learning multiple languages due to early brain development. Sometimes for native English speakers, the benefits of learning an additional language appeals to them. They also ask if they can visit the centers any time. We encourage them to do that, for example to have lunch with the kids if they have time.

- Our CCR&R is very helpful in assisting families in finding childcare that fits their needs. However, the system is not one-size-fits-all—resources, options, and grants vary significantly by county and child care programs' level of access to their services depends on location.
- In our monthly newsletters, we focus heavily on communicating what quality care looks like at our program. We aim to keep communication open about areas for improvement and regularly share information about trainings that may be helpful for families.
- Families frequently ask basic questions related to safety and health, such as what happens if their child gets sick and what the center's policies are.
- I make a point to tell families that my program does not take shortcuts and I encourage them to explore other childcare options as well, so they do not assume all programs are the same.
- Some of the more unique or challenging questions we get typically come from families who have had negative experiences at other centers, are relocating, or are comparing programs. For example, families may ask why our center does not use a specific approach, such as Conscious Discipline. In those cases, I explain our use of other models, such as the Pyramid Model, and noted that these "unexpected" questions usually come with a specific context or reason.

Breakout Room 2 Notes

- I recently became accredited within the last month. I was always a five-star program and I always want to take classes and improve myself. Putting that information out there and letting parents know that I'm looking to improve and take classes is something that parents like to hear.
- Lots of parents ask how long I've been in my profession and whether I have the resources to help them.
- I've been in the field for more than 15 years and that gave me an opportunity to work with many agencies including Birth to 3. I've shared resources with families such as the Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ), UW newsletters, and child development newsletters, among others.
- There is such a huge demand for child care so if families know there's an opening, they don't have a lot of questions. A lot are looking for family child care, and that's what I offer. I give them my philosophy and answer their questions. If there's an opening, parents pretty much grab it. They don't have a lot of questions.
- I share information about our curriculum but not our philosophy.



- I have had families that came and solicited our services. I share our program philosophy with them and give them a tour. After that I give them two weeks and they decide if they want to take the spot. I also mention to families that they can come and observe for a moment.
- I'm a certified provider, I take three kids. Every parent I have in the door, I tell them what I do and they ask to sign the contract. Parents are so desperate to find care and if there's an opening they will take it if they feel comfortable after touring. I don't get a lot of questions since I spell it out in the interview and they leave happy.
- One unusual or surprising question I got was why I don't allow food from outside, unless they let me know. It's because of allergies and I also have a dog, who would go straight for the food.

Breakout Room 3 Notes

- As far as what communication we provide with the families about quality care, we try to be the image of quality care on a daily basis. I do share our accreditation information with our families. Helping families understand what quality care looks like from a different perspective. Not necessarily from us, but from an understanding of why and how what we do supports children. I think parenting classes can help parents understand the importance of keeping their children in their early care programs. Helping us help our parents by providing information that might not come directly from us.

Question 4: What other resources would improve communications and support for families? From DCF? From partners like CCR&Rs? From others?

Breakout Room 1 Notes

- I like to include resources in monthly communications with families, focusing specifically on the types of questions parents are asking teachers.
 - **DCF Facilitator:** Where do you find materials that are worth sharing with families?
 - For newsletters, staff often pull information from websites to provide families with a wide range of topics, including health and education. There are many useful resources already available online that can be adapted for parent use. There is a need for clear, digestible licensing information that providers can reference when explaining why certain rules must be followed.
 - We also use resources from colleagues, "backpack" materials from the National Pyramid Model, content from conferences, and general online searches for content to include in newsletters.
- One common challenge is that some families do not want their children to nap, but licensing requires that children be given the opportunity to rest for at least 30 minutes. If children fall asleep, they must be allowed to sleep. It can be difficult to explain these requirements to families, along with other licensing-related



constraints such as staff-to-child ratios and limited staffing flexibility. It would be helpful to have simple, easy-to-understand materials from DCF that explain requirements like nap policies, ratios, and the importance of outdoor play.

- It would be helpful to have DCF materials emphasizing the importance of regular physical exams—such as the requirement for children under two to have a physical every six months—as many families struggle to provide documentation, and staff spend significant time following up. We'd appreciate more DCF support in explaining why we need these records.
- **DCF Facilitator:** Are newsletters the primary vehicle for communicating with families or do you use any others, like social media?
- We primarily streamline communication through an app and do not rely heavily on social media. While we do use Facebook, more families are opting out of social media, which can make it less effective.
- Our experience with Facebook has been mixed. At one point, each center had its own page to provide location-specific updates, but this required significant time and effort to maintain, and families were not always satisfied with the level of information shared. If social media is used, it must be done consistently and well. In the past, we also used an app, but security concerns became a challenge. Moving forward, it would be helpful for DCF to recommend or endorse specific apps that providers can confidently use for communication.

Breakout Room 2 Notes

- One thing that I would love that other communities have is a substitute for me. Even just going to the dentist, I don't get to go. I hurt my back doing snow blowing and I have to do appointments at 4:30, so I sit and suffer with that problem, since I don't want to be a burden to my parents. They would understand, but in my heart it's hard to do. And I would love a substitute pool for occasional rest and relaxation.
- Substitute teachers are always in need! It would be a great idea to have a group of substitute teachers to assist--especially for family programs! Group centers could benefit too!
- I do Facebook messages back and forth with families. At Easter, I do an easter egg hunt and post to parents so they can see the different ways we interact with them. Texting and phone calls also work. I do a lot of calling or tell them after hours they are welcome to give me a call, too.
- We do a lot of email and texting correspondence. We host a Christmas party and parent conferences twice a year.
- I communicate via text message, email, parent conferences, monthly gatherings, birthday celebrations, and at daily drop off and pick ups.
- I also use texting, Facebook and verbal communication.
- I use Facebook, too. It's such a great avenue for openings. And mostly I text and email.

- Referrals from past parents have been beneficial. Child care networking in the area and via Facebook groups have been helpful for me over the last 11 years.
- I have about a 3-year wait list now. I have word of mouth so I don't really need advertising.

Breakout Room 3 Notes

- Families need to understand the importance of keeping children in programs, especially those children with social-emotional issues, where they can get better. Having DPI, the school system, and superintendents all get behind support us and helping younger children.
- Schools are certainly a support. We need to meet people where they're at with trusted messengers. That's going to potentially be physicians, churches, or at community parks. The most impactful is when it's word of mouth through trusted messengers. And that takes time, not just coming in, swooping in and out. So I think that's where libraries come in as well. And I know that there are some of these connections already there. Opportunities to develop and strengthen training curriculum tracks, and constantly offering these is helpful. Training on things like setting up your classroom environment, dramatic play, science sensory. This is when learning occurs. There should be a free and open source for training with open-ended questions, educating on how this aligns with licensing and YoungStar, all of these crosswalks. We know there is constant turnover in the profession because staff aren't getting the support they need, and can't pay for additional trainings, especially when they have to be in the classrooms and covering every other position in the center. We need to have free, accessible training tracks that maybe every CCR&R does on even just the basic learning environment and centers. This can also create an open door, a personal connection, to build on those relationships.

Next Steps

Presented by: Andrea Cammilleri, Division of Early Care and Education Administrator's Office

- Update CCR&R contract requirements
- Apply your guidance to ongoing work with tribal and county governments, Family Resource Centers, other partners
- Enhance DCF communications for parents/caregivers

Wrap-Up

Presented by: Daria Hall, Policy Initiatives Advisor, DCF Division of Early Care and Education

- Next meeting: Apr. 10, 2026 at 11:30a.m.; Topic: Parent/Caregiver Communications, Resources & Referrals

Action Items

- Work to ensure that CCR&Rs equitably support providers and families across all parts of their service areas, including rural areas.

- Expand parent/caregiver education to help them understand the value of early intervention.
- If not already happening, foster ways for CCR&Rs, school districts, and potentially other early childhood leaders in communities to gather once or twice a year.
- Consider different ways to make BIF vacancy data more up-to-date and relevant.
- Promote awareness among families of CCR&R enhanced referral services.
- Increase family awareness of developmental milestones and how to support children in reaching them.
- Some families and communities would benefit from more information about the value of keeping their children in quality early care and education programs.
- There is a need for clear, digestible licensing information that providers can reference when explaining why certain rules must be followed (see examples above around napping, ratios, and regular physical exam documentation).
- It would be helpful for DCF to recommend or endorse specific apps that are the most secure and providers can confidently use for communication.
- If DCF shares materials for parents/caregivers, make them easy to text or include in newsletters and/or apps. Social media received mixed reviews from providers but some would use it to share information with families.
- Find ways to offer free, accessible training opportunity pathways at every CCR&R on the learning environment, play-based learning, etc. This would introduce new professionals to CCR&Rs to begin forming relationships and awareness of other supports they can access through the CCR&R.

English

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Spanish

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