**NEWSLETTER: PARTNER UP! COHORT 3 APPLICATION PERIOD OPEN**

**HEADING:**

Local businesses are teaming up for success with grant funding from Project Growth.

**COPY:**

Wisconsin businesses and early childhood programs have a great opportunity. An opportunity to partner up, work toward shared goals, and receive money and support along the way.

Project Growth is an initiative designed to help solve the challenges facing Wisconsin’s child care system. How? By awarding grant funding to communities that work together to add benefits, find child care solutions, and innovate.

And the best part? There are concrete benefits beyond the funding that businesses and child care providers receive from Partner Up! grants.

Benefits for businesses include:

* Staying competitive in a tight labor market by offering attractive benefits
* Increasing employee productivity
  + Employees who know that their children are in safe, reliable, and high-quality environments are more engaged
  + Employees are more reliable when they are available to come to work
* Strengthening the local community and economy and feeling good knowing your employees get a great benefit that strengthens their families and your business

Benefits for early childhood programs include:

* Affording quality workers, training, materials, and facilities
* Retaining quality staff through offering higher pay
* Stabilizing enrollment numbers by having reserved business subsidized spots
* Making long-term connections with businesses and organizations that can help improve the quality and scope of your care

Why is there a need for initiatives like Project Growth? Because Wisconsin’s child care system has faced so many challenges over the years — and dealing with an ongoing pandemic hasn’t helped. Families and other caregivers are struggling to find quality, affordable care, which has affected their ability to work. Businesses across the state are having trouble finding employees in a tight labor market — putting a strain on local economies. And child care providers are continuously battling to stay afloat and retain quality workers.

How did we get here?

At its most basic level, the [child care crisis in Wisconsin](https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/files/childcare/communities/pdf/early-childhood-snapshot-infographic.pdf) is due to years of inadequate investment and lack of focus on the brain-building, expert work of providers. Working families need quality child care, but programs don’t earn enough to pay high wages or cover costs because most families can’t afford the high tuition. This dilemma makes it challenging for parents and caregivers to stay working, so communities can’t maintain a high quality child care workforce or attract new business.

Wisconsin is not the only state facing a child care crisis, but we are among the first to invite all communities and businesses to be a [part of the solution](https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/files/childcare/communities/pdf/community-approach-infographic.pdf). After all, that’s how Wisconsin solves problems — together.

The Wisconsin Department of Children and Families (DCF) is calling on communities across the state to get involved. When you team up and apply for a Dream Up! grant, you are helping lead the way toward solving Wisconsin’s child care challenges.

**The competitive applications period will run April 12-May 12, 2023 at 5 p.m. CST**

To learn more about Project Growth, get involved, or apply for a Partner Up! grant, visit [ProjectGrowth.WI.gov](https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/childcare/projectgrowth).