

# Northeast Wisconsin Child Care Provider Survey Report

## Executive Summary

In collaboration with Kids Forward, the nonprofit agency Family & Childcare Resources of Northeast Wisconsin conducted a June 2018 online survey of child care providers located in the Northeastern region of Wisconsin. The goal of the survey was to gather both quantitative information about early learning providers in the region and qualitative information about what was most helpful in running their program, what the greatest challenges were, and what they would like changed to improve child care services. The vast majority of responses were from Brown County. Sixty percent were from licensed group centers and 65% had children participating in Wisconsin Shares in their program. The average quality rating was 3.2 out of 5 Stars. Qualitative responses included:

- **What has been most helpful in running your program?** Responses included: supportive families and communities; staff who are qualified, caring, loyal and passionate; and support from the state in the form of YoungStar Technical Assistance and Wisconsin Shares Funding.
- **What are the greatest challenges in running your program?** Responses included: finding and retaining quality staff; costs, rates, and wages; paperwork; and competing with public schools.
- **What are the greatest barriers for families who need care?** Responses included: cost of care; schedules and part time care; lack of providers or location of providers; and care for children under two.
- **What would you like changed to improve your services?** Responses included: additional funding and better wages; better pool of qualified teachers (which does not necessarily mean more formal education); and better relationships with the state.

## Background

The link to the survey was emailed to 187 regulated child care providers, and disseminated through the organization's Facebook page. Among these providers, 55 responses were returned, for a 29% response rate. Questions on this survey asked

providers about the location, type, business model, and length of operation of their child care program, and whether they participated in the Wisconsin Shares Child Care Subsidy (Wisconsin Shares) and the YoungStar Child Care Quality Rating and



Improvement System (YoungStar). Additional questions asked about what has been most helpful and the greatest challenge in running their child care program, about barriers for families needing child care, and about suggestions for changes to sustain and improve their program. A list of survey questions can be found in Appendix A. More information about Wisconsin Shares can be found here: <https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/wishares>, and about YoungStar here: <https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/youngstar>.

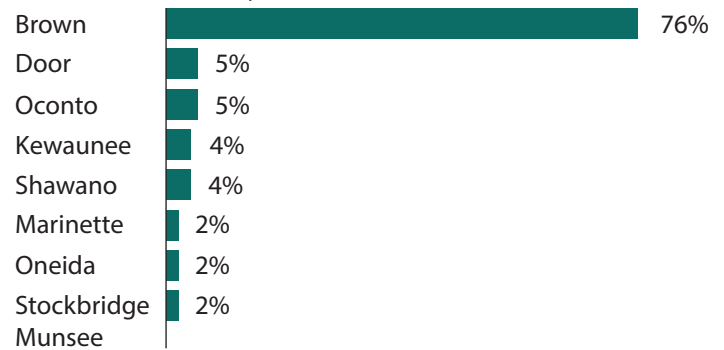
### Quantitative Results

The vast majority of respondents (76%) were from Brown County, the most populous county surveyed. Three responses or less were received from Door, Kewaunee, Marinette, Oconto, and Shawano Counties, and one survey each was received from the Oneida Nation and the Stockbridge Munsee Tribe. Child care providers responding to the survey had been operating for an average of 16.7 years, with the duration ranging widely, from less than a month to 51 years.

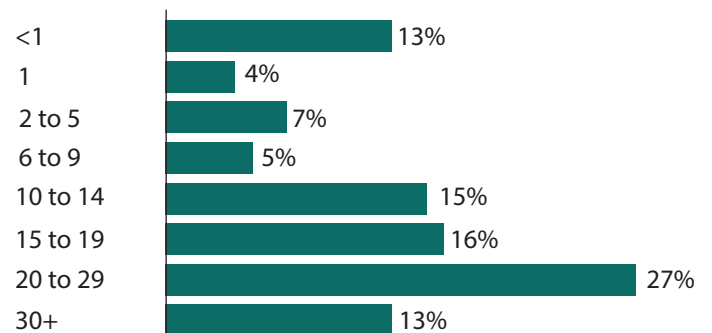
The majority of responses were from Licensed Group Centers (33). Responses were also received by Licensed Family Providers (15) and Certified



#### Locations of Surveyed Providers



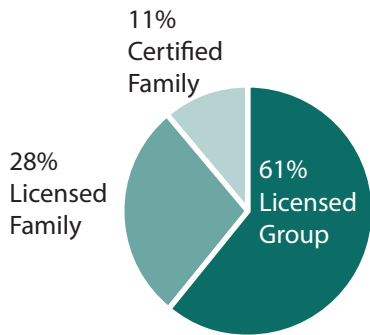
#### Years of Program Operation for Surveyed Providers



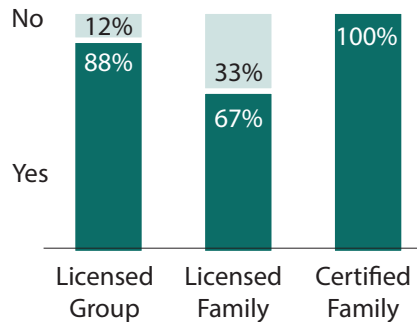
Source: Family and Childcare Resources of Northeast Wisconsin  
[www.kidsforward.net](http://www.kidsforward.net)

# Characteristics of Surveyed Providers

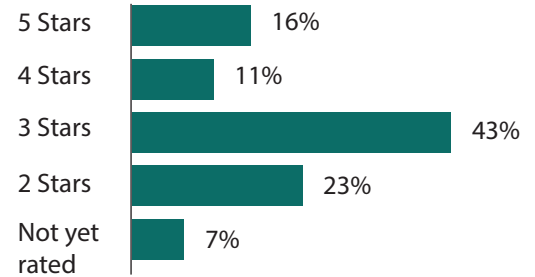
Child Care Provider Type



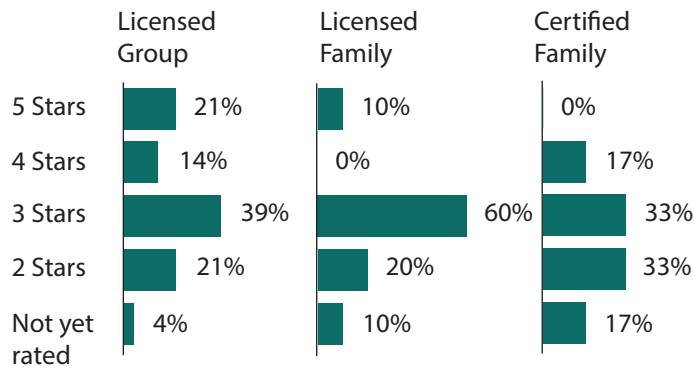
Provider Type by Shares Enrollment



YoungStar Rating



YoungStar Rating by Provider Type

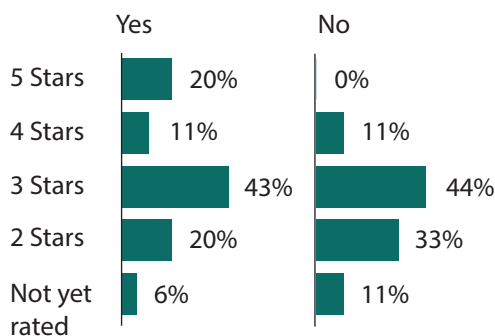


Family Providers (6). One provider did not report a type. Thirty-six providers (65%) currently had children enrolled who were receiving Wisconsin Shares, and nineteen (35%) did not. A higher percentage of Licensed Group providers than Licensed Family providers reported serving children enrolled in Wisconsin Shares.

Forty-five providers (82%) were participating in YoungStar, and 10 (18%) were not. Eight of the 10 not participating were in Brown County. The average Star rating (among providers with a rating) was 3.2. Three providers were not yet rated, and one provider reported participating in YoungStar but did not report a rating. Ten providers were rated as 2 Stars, nineteen as 3 Stars, five as 4 Stars, and seven as 5 Stars. Providers rated as 4 or 5 Stars are considered high quality child care. Among providers with a rating, 12 were in this high quality range, all located in Brown County.

The Licensed Group providers had generally higher YoungStar ratings collectively than the Licensed Family providers. The providers currently serving children receiving Wisconsin Shares also had generally higher YoungStar ratings collectively than the providers not currently serving children receiving Wisconsin Shares.

YoungStar Rating by Shares Enrollment



## Qualitative Results

A qualitative analysis of responses to the open-ended survey questions identified a number of different themes for each question. Themes are

Source: Family and Childcare Resources of Northeast Wisconsin  
www.kidsforward.net

described below under a heading of each question, and summarized with a paraphrased example representing descriptions in that theme. The count of times a theme was mentioned in responses is also provided, in a frequency table for each question found in Appendix B. Themes mentioned only once are grouped together as Miscellaneous. Because responses could include several themes or none, the frequency count may not match the survey response count.

### **What has been the most helpful in running your child care program?**

#### *State / YoungStar Support.*

Child care providers described YoungStar help and support, funding from YoungStar, being able to renew and get a 2 Star rating, and support and technical assistance from YoungStar consultants as helpful. Becoming certified, consistency from licensors, and the assistance of Wisconsin Shares for parents was also described in this theme.

#### *Supportive Families & Community.*

Child care providers described help from supportive parents, word of mouth from families, positive relationships and good communication with families, a supportive community, and personal family and friends as helpful.

#### *Staff.*

Child care providers described great staff who are qualified, caring, experienced, flexible, loyal, knowledgeable, and passionate as helpful.

#### *Training / Education.*

Child care providers described trainings, classes, and continuing education as helpful.

#### *Financial.*

Child care providers described donations from the community, micro-grants, their program fees, and business loans as helpful.

#### *Peers.*

Child care providers described advice and help from other company directors, child care providers, and other professionals available to reach out to as helpful.

#### *Resources.*

Child care providers described good child care resources and other information to give to families as helpful.

#### *Personal Qualities.*

Child care providers described being experienced, organized, and knowledgeable about rules and regulations as helpful.

#### *Administration.*

Child care providers described support from their agency's corporate or main office as helpful.

#### *Preschool / 4K on Site.*

Child care providers described the ability to have a preschool program or a Four-Year-Old Kindergarten (4K) program at their center as helpful.

#### *Miscellaneous.*

Child care providers described several additional things as helpful, such as being able to work at home, online assistance, flexibility, their computer software system, County Human Services staff, and advertising through social media. One provider also reported that nothing was helpful, and one reported that not participating in YoungStar was helpful because of all the hoops to jump through.

### **What are the greatest challenges in running your child care program?**

#### *Finding & Retaining Quality Staff.*

Child care providers described finding experienced, qualified child care teachers, aides, and substitute teachers as a challenge. They also described high turnover, some children's

behaviors, and a decrease in interest and a lack of respect for the profession as challenges, as they worked to maintain child / teacher ratios and keep teachers on staff with the qualifications necessary for the provider to earn a certain YoungStar rating.

#### *Costs, Rates, & Wages.*

Child care providers described the balance of trying to keep their program affordable yet high quality as a challenge, including the pressure of paying the wages that employees are asking for, and the cost of retaining enough quality teachers and aides. They also described funding, being paid a fair rate, the rising fees and costs of licensing and regulation requirements, increasing prices, paying their bills, managing the EBT cards and not knowing what the parent payments are, and receiving so little income after expenses as challenges.

#### *Enrollment & Part Time Care.*

Child care providers described maintaining sufficient and consistent enrollment as a challenge, especially full time enrollment. Seasonal changes in enrollment and scheduling teachers for children in only part time care were also described as challenges.

#### *Time Management.*

Child care providers described time management for everything beyond direct child care as a challenge, as well as time for activities they would like to do with the children in their care, having energy and time for themselves and their own family, taking time off, and getting organized.

#### *Paperwork.*

Child care providers described keeping up with all the paperwork as a challenge, especially the paperwork involved in accounting, EBT (the payment system for Wisconsin Shares), Wisconsin Works (W-2), the Child Care and Development Fund, the state and the food program, and taxes.

#### *Child Behavior.*

Child care providers described the behavior problems of some children as a challenge, especially when parents do not share that information with them. They described how there can be a lack of support in dealing with these problem behaviors (especially if children do not qualify for support through the Birth to 3 program), and that this can take the joy out of teaching.

#### *Family Behavior.*

Child care providers described working with parents as challenging, such as parents wanting their children enrolled for a low cost, or navigating the uncertainty of when parents will drop off or pick up their children from care.

#### *Competing with Public Schools.*

Child care providers described public schools getting in the child care business, keeping older children that go to early preschool, and navigating staffing for the part time days of children in 4K as challenges.

### **What are the greatest barriers for families that need care?**

#### *Cost of Care / Funding.*

Child care providers described the high cost of child care as a barrier for families, that finding affordable care can be a struggle for both middle-income and low-income families, and that the parent co-pay subsidy does not always match the need.

#### *Openings / Space.*

Child care providers described not having the space or available openings to enroll new children as a barrier for families, especially during the hours they might be seeking.

#### *Schedules / Part Time Care.*

Child care providers described not being able to offer part time care or care during morning and

evening hours as a barrier for families, and not being able to be flexible with schedule changes as a barrier for families.

#### *Care for Children Under Two.*

Child care providers described not having the space for children based on the child ratio rules as a barrier for families, especially families that have a child under two years old.

#### *Authorization / Paperwork / Wisconsin Shares.*

Child care providers described understanding the system, paperwork, navigating through the Wisconsin Shares process (including the time it takes to keep up to date with schedule changes), and getting authorizations for care before the care can begin as barriers for families.

#### *Lack of Providers / Location.*

Child care providers described the lack of overall providers, especially regulated providers in their area, as a barrier for families, and that sometimes the location is not convenient.

#### *Miscellaneous.*

Child care providers described several additional things as barriers for families, including the complication of policies that do not allow children who are ill to attend when parents still need to work during their child's illness, good teachers at the centers, underemployment, referral, issues with the call center, and busing children to school.

### **What would you like changed to help you sustain and improve your child care services?**

#### *Money / Grants / Better Wages*

Child care providers described having several financial aspects of their work changed to help sustain and improve their services, such as having working capital and cash flow, having the funds to hire more staff and pay them a good salary or bonus, finding ways to reduce costs to compensate for the time being put into running a center, and having funding to help families

start prior to authorizations. They expressed concerns that fewer people are going into the early childhood field due to the low pay and lack of benefits. They also described needing to lower tuition rates and find a way to offer affordable child care to families. Providers suggested that the state help meet the higher wage demand through the YoungStar program, offer more grant programs to help with costs and operating (not just special projects), provide funds to help purchase supplies or equipment, and that a licensed facility should be enough for funding.

#### *Regulations / Paperwork / YoungStar & Licensing Alignment.*

Child care providers described less paperwork, the time it takes for families to get an authorization, and a preference that Licensing and YoungStar be on the same page as changes that would help to sustain and improve their services. Providers suggested a review of state codes related to child care, the opportunity to have a say in any changes made to codes, and less focus on compliance with regulations that were described as petty or nit-picky that providers did not consider to impact the quality of care. The age restriction of children 7 and under was suggested to be changed to 5 and under in regulations. The YoungStar rating for Family Child Care providers was also described as not easy to comply with. Providers suggested returning to the old payment method, because the EBT card was too much of a hassle when parents are in charge. Sometimes providers described repeatedly reminding parents for payment and then waiting for the payment to post.

#### *Staffing & Qualifications.*

Child care providers described a better pool of qualified teachers who could become qualified faster and get on the Registry faster as changes that would help to sustain and improve their services. Providers also described creating a county or regional list of qualified substitute teachers as a change that would help to sustain

and improve their services, so that smaller providers could more easily maintain coverage when staff is sick or on vacation. They also expressed concerns that although YoungStar requires their teachers to have formal early childhood education in order to earn higher Star ratings and more benefits for the provider, some of their best staff are not those who have taken college classes or those who have college degrees. They suggested that they would like to see more encouragement at the high school level to go into child care for those who cannot go to college.

#### *Education / Training / Resources.*

Child care providers described more education as a change that would help to sustain and improve their services, including grant funds for educational opportunities for staff, educational opportunities that would help improve their YoungStar rating, more resources for help and support, a hotline for questions with accurate answers, and training for all staff within the schools they serve.

#### *Relationship with the State.*

Child care providers described a better relationship with the state and state employees as a change that would help to sustain and improve their services, such as seeing the state work with them more as a team versus being judged, having Licensing and YoungStar work more with the providers instead of being experienced as a threat, and an understanding from the state that they are only human and can only do so much. Some providers also described concerns that the YoungStar program hindered and scared away good child care providers.

#### *Equal Competition.*

Child care providers described changes related to competing with public schools and unregulated child care providers as helpful to sustain and improve their services. Providers explained that school districts offering early education for younger and younger kids during the entire

calendar year (and the schedules of only providing care when children were not in these settings) was impacting their ability to be financially sustainable. In addition, providers described being federally funded like the school districts, and for their child care teachers to be treated like elementary school teachers, as changes that could help to sustain and improve their services. Providers described passing a law to ensure that anyone caring for children be required to be licensed or certified as another change that would be helpful, and that competition from unregulated child care providers was financially unsustainable. Similarly, changing the rules for unregulated home providers for ages 7 years old and up to require that these providers also count their own children in their counts, and report their income (as licensed providers do), would be a helpful change that could create an even playing field for rates.

#### *Time.*

Child care providers described operating time and tools to help with time management as changes that would help to sustain and improve their services.

#### *Child Behaviors.*

Child care providers described clear guidelines for teaching children to listen, and more support for teachers and parents dealing with behaviors that are challenging (such as having a consultant for these issues) as changes that would help to sustain and improve their services.

#### *Miscellaneous.*

Child care providers described several additional things as changes that would help to sustain and improve their services, including going back to the old ways, being able to care for more children, becoming a breastfeeding friendly center, incorporating more health and fitness into lesson plans, help coordinating multiple part time children to take one full position, and a way to offer affordable child care to families.

## Appendix A

### Northeastern Wisconsin Child Care Provider Survey Items

- Which county is your child care program in?
- What zip code is your child care program located in?
- What type of child care program do you operate?
- How long has your child care program been in operation?
- Is your program for profit or non-profit?
- Is your program currently participating in YoungStar (you have submitted a contract)?
- If your program is participating in YoungStar, what is your program rated?
- Is your program currently serving children receiving Wisconsin Shares subsidies?
- What has been the most helpful in running your child care program?
- What are the greatest challenges in running your child care program?
- What are the greatest barriers for families that need care?
- What would you like changed to help you sustain and improve your child care services?



## Appendix B

### Frequency Count of Themes in Qualitative Responses

<b>What has been the most helpful in running your child care program?</b>	
State / YoungStar Support	14
Supportive Families & Community	9
Staff	8
Training / Education	5
Financial	5
Peers	3
Resources	3
Personal Qualities	2
Administration	2
Preschool or 4K on Site	2

<b>What are the greatest barriers for families that need care?</b>	
Cost of Care / Funding	33
Openings / Space	10
Schedules / Part Time Care	9
Care for Children Under Two	5
Authorization / Paperwork / Wisconsin Shares	4
Location / Lack of Providers	3
Miscellaneous	7

<b>What are the greatest challenges in running your child care program?</b>	
Finding & Retaining Quality Staff	21
Costs, Rates, & Wages	13
Enrollment & Part Time Care	7
Time Management	7
YoungStar / Regulations	7
Paperwork	5
Child Behavior	4
Family Behavior	4
Competing with Public School	3

<b>What would you like changed to help you sustain and improve your child care services?</b>	
Money / Grants / Better Wages	16
Regulations / Paperwork / YoungStar & Licensing Alignment	13
Staffing & Qualifications	7
Education / Training / Resources	7
Equal Competition	6
Relationship with the State	4
Time	2
Child Behaviors	2
Don't Know / Nothing	5
Miscellaneous	5