

The City of La Crosse

# Child Care Survey Data Report

CHILD CARE DEVELOPMENT PROJECT

Created By:

The Parenting Place in Partnership with The City of La Crosse | January 2024



## Executive Summary

The findings from the Child Care Development Survey not only depict the current state of child care within The City of La Crosse but demonstrate the impact of the Child Care Development Project. Below are data points that display the impact of the project thus far, as well as identify the challenges child care programs are facing within the city of La Crosse.

- Funding from this project, supported staff recruitment and retention efforts so that 89 **empty** child care slots could be filled in 2023. There are currently 136 **empty** child care slots, located in licensed group child care centers within The City of La Crosse due to unfilled staff positions.
- 81 **new** child care slots were added to the City of La Crosse through the start-up of 3 new child care programs (1 group center and 2 family child care programs) and 1 group child care center expansion.
- 67% of group child care centers are operating at a reduced capacity due to unfilled staff positions. Child Care Directors identified the following as the biggest challenges to teacher recruitment and retention: wages, benefits, burnout due to the difficult of the work, under-appreciation for the profession.
- 39 open teacher positions (January 2024), compared to 70 open teacher positions in January 2023.
- 65% of current family child care providers plan to remain open more than 5 years. The most common reason for closing in the near future is retirement.

Through this data, it is evident that **the Child Care Development Project has had a positive impact on child care in our community, however child care challenges and barriers within the City of La Crosse still exist.** The data reveals that when funding is directed towards the child care workforce there are less open teacher positions which results in fewer empty child care slots in our community.

## Background:

The City of La Crosse has actively been discussing child care challenges and possible solutions in the community for many years. With a deep understanding of the worsening child care crisis and a vested interest in working toward solutions, in January 2022 the City of La Crosse made the decision to dedicate approximately \$2 million of ARPA Covid Relief funding to combat the issues with both immediate relief and sustainable programs.

The Child Care Development Project began in July 2022 when The City of La Crosse partnered with The Parenting Place to utilize The City of La Crosse ARPA funding to increase the availability of child care within The City of La Crosse. In order to evaluate the extent of the issue and analyze the impact of the project, an annual survey is administered to City of La Crosse child care programs. This survey was first created and administered in January 2023. The intent of this

survey report is to demonstrate the state of child care within the city of La Crosse including barriers, challenges, and successes as well as analyze changes in select metrics. The information in this report is comprised of both numerical data and anecdotal data from regulated child care programs within The City of La Crosse.

This report documents the findings from a survey distributed in January 2024 to all regulated child care providers located within The City of La Crosse. The survey had a 91% completion rate which includes data from 12/13 group child care centers, 11/13 family child care programs (4 certified and 7 licensed), and 7/7 school age programs.

Quotes and data included may refer to the following programs and grants administered in 2023, which utilized \$246,000 of The City of La Crosse ARPA funding:

- Workforce Recruitment and Retention Stipends (January 2023 - \$167,000)
  - o *Financial Stipends to retain existing child care providers and to recruit additional child care providers to fill the empty positions with The City of La Crosse*
- Child Care Start-up and Expansion Grants (ongoing throughout 2023 - \$54,000)
  - o *Financial support to individuals or organizations who are starting a new child care business or expanding a current child care business*
- Back-to-Capacity Grants (November 2023 - \$25,000)
  - o *A next step financial grant targeted specifically to support existing child care centers and school age programs who are operating at a reduced capacity to support intensive recruitment efforts towards unfilled staff positions*

**TOTAL NUMBERS OF REGULATED CHILD CARE PROGRAMS LOCATED WITHIN THE CITY OF LA CROSSE:**

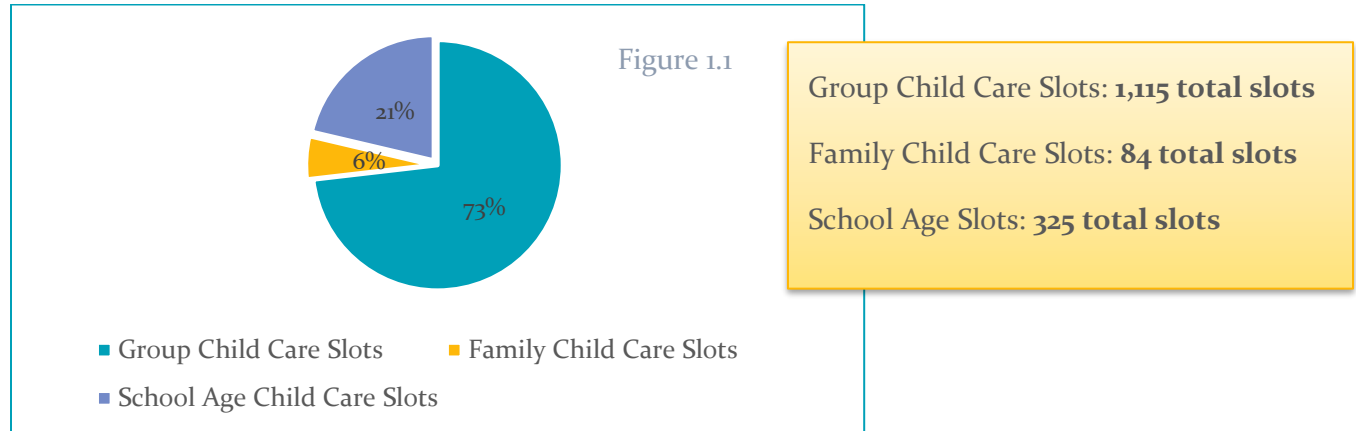
|              | Group Child Care Centers | Family Child Care Programs | School Age Sites | Total: |
|--------------|--------------------------|----------------------------|------------------|--------|
| January 2023 | 12                       | 14                         | 7                | 33     |
| January 2024 | 13                       | 13                         | 7                | 33     |

## Section 1: Child Care Enrollment Data

The following information focuses specifically on child care enrollment, including current child care capacity and data on the children enrolled in regulated child care programs.

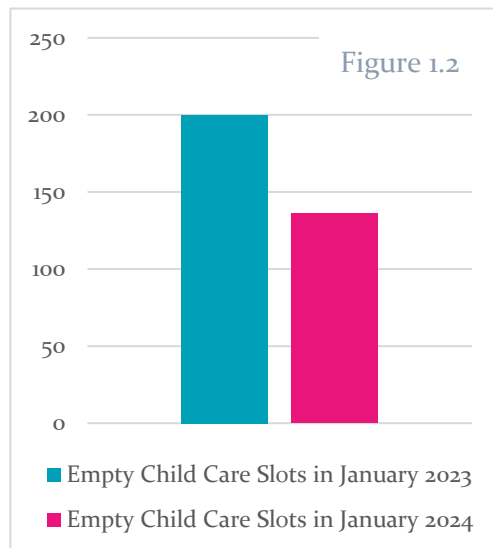
### REGULATED CHILD CARE CAPACITY

The total number of regulated child care slots within the city of La Crosse in January of 2024, based on physical capacity of the sites, was 1,524 distributed as follows:



Data was pulled from a DCF source, and includes the regulated capacity for all 33 regulated child care programs located within The City of La Crosse as of January 2024.

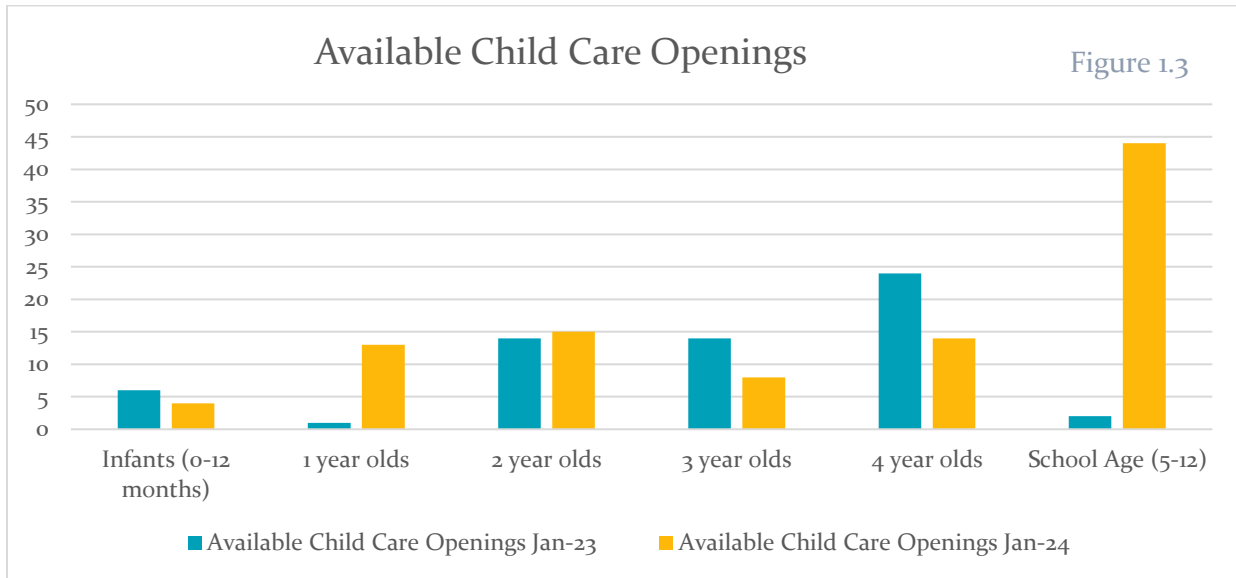
Of those 1,524 child care slots, there are **136 empty child care slots** due to child care teacher shortages. Sixty-seven percent of group child care centers reported they are unable to operate at their licensed capacity because of unfilled teacher positions. Within The City of La Crosse there are a total of 7 closed classrooms (65 child care slots) and 11 classrooms operating at a reduced capacity (71 child care slots) due to unfilled teacher positions. In comparison, the number of empty child care slots in January 2023 was 200, however 25 of the 136 empty child care slots in January 2024 are in classrooms/programs that were not yet open in January 2023 and were not counted in the original 200 empty slots. Which means that **89 empty child care slots became available** from January 2023-January 2024 through target efforts of the child care development project.



“We used the Back-to-Capacity grant to hire a cook, an assistant teacher and a preschool teacher and we are now able to operate full staffed and at capacity”

- Child Care Director

When surveyed, child care programs indicated they had the following number of available child care openings:



Many programs indicated that these openings are not able to be filled due to the slot being held for another child or the slot is not easily fillable due to the specifics of the available child care slot. Those specifics may include age of the child and being able to move up into the next age category when needed. Program specifics also play a factor in empty child care slots such as hours, location, and parents being able to pay increased tuition prices.

### CHILD CARE WAITLIST INFORMATION

When surveyed, 67% of child care programs indicated that they maintain a waitlist. The majority of the other 33% indicated they had no reason to maintain a waitlist due to the high demand of child care in the community.

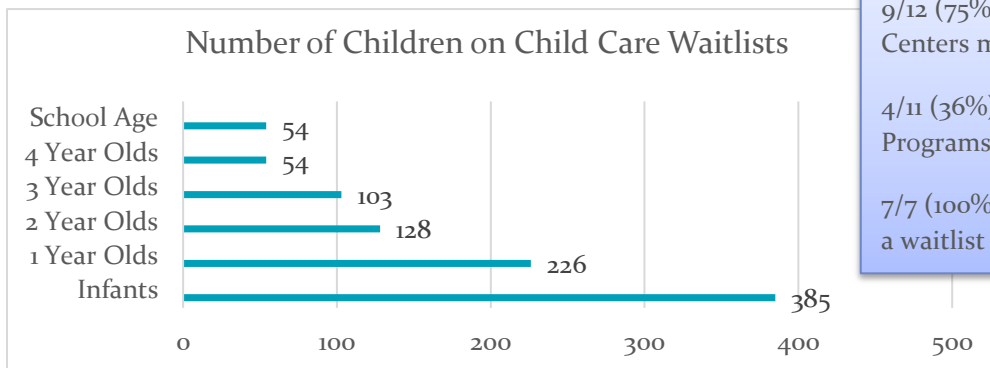
“Finding child care can be very difficult – families are often left choosing child care based solely on where there is an available slot or a low tuition”

-Group Child Care Director

### Total number of children on child care waitlists:

950 (Compared to 1,233 in Jan. 2023)

Figure 1.4



9/12 (75%) of Group Child Care Centers maintain a waitlist

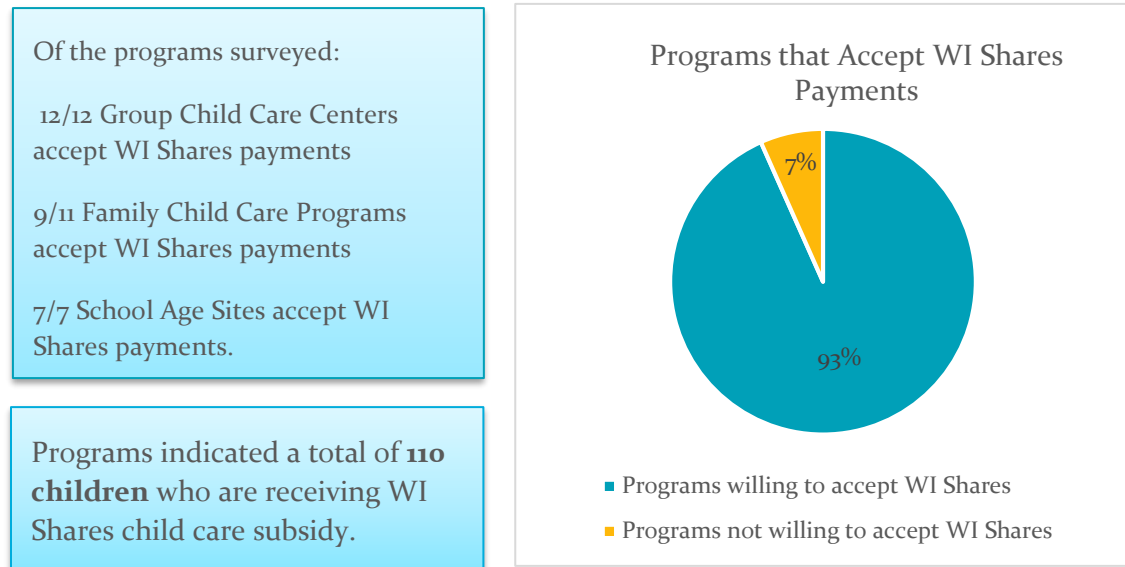
4/11 (36%) Family Child Care Programs maintain a waitlist

7/7 (100%) School Age Sites maintain a waitlist

## WI SHARES INFORMATION

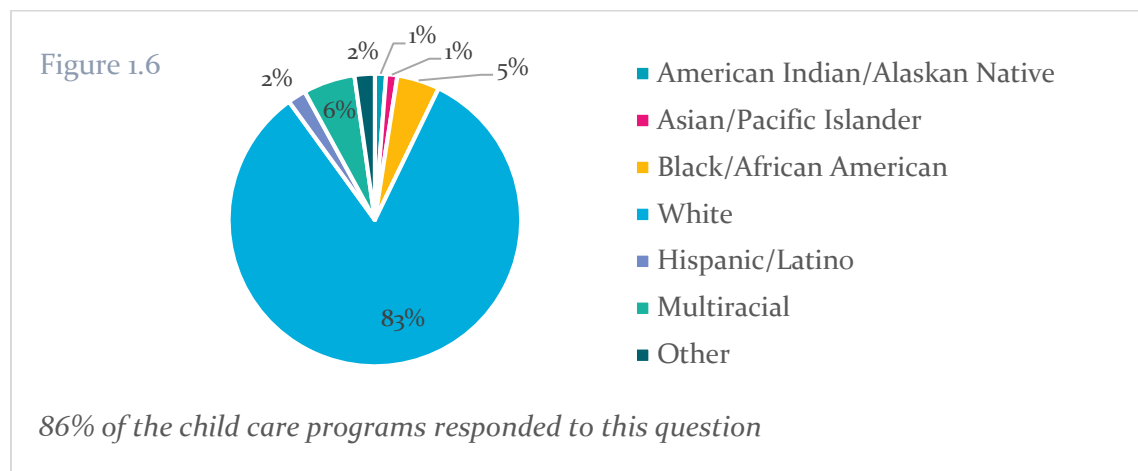
WI Shares is Wisconsin’s child care subsidy program. WI Shares is available to income eligible families to assist in child care costs. For child care programs to receive WI Shares payments, programs must participate in the state’s QRIS (quality rating and improvement system), YoungStar. Because of this stipulation, not all regulated child care programs are able or willing to accept families who receive WI Shares payments.

Figure 1.5



## CHILD DEMOGRAPHICS

Child care programs reported the following demographic information about enrolled children:



Child care programs indicated that a total of **63 children** in regulated care have an identified special need or disability. Some of the external services children receive include; birth-to-three, speech, occupational therapy, physical therapy, services through the school district, and

vision therapy. Of the 63 total children, there were a reported 6 children in family child care programs, 31 in group child care and 26 in school age programs.

## Section 2: Group Child Care and School Age Staffing Data

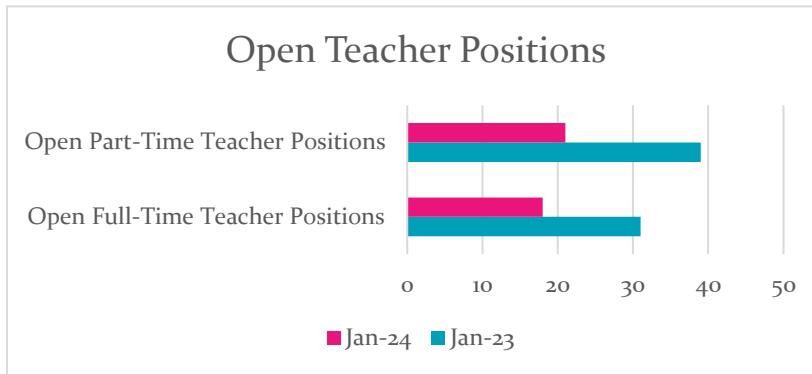
As indicated above, 67% of group child care centers are unable to operate at their licensed capacity due to unfilled teacher positions. Directors indicated that the biggest challenges to teacher recruitment and retention came down to:

- Wages
- Benefits
- Burnout due to the difficulty of the work
- Under-appreciation for the profession

### OPEN STAFF POSITIONS

In January 2024 there were a total of **39 open child care teacher positions** compared to 70 in January of 2023. When asked about barriers to child care success, 10/12 child care directors identified staffing as one of the top 3 barriers to child care success within the city of La Crosse.

Figure 2.1



“We have been severely understaffed this year, to the point of having 6 open shifts a day at times. I have just hired staff this month to finally fill most of the open shifts, but we are still short on a couple of days. This was my first year as director, and staffing was definitely by biggest issue.”

- Group Child Care Director

#### Number of full-time teacher positions open: 18

- Group Child Care Centers: 18
- School Age Programs: 0

*Compared to 31 in January 2023*

#### Number of part-time teacher positions open: 21

- Group Child Care Centers: 10
- School Age Programs: 11

*Compared to 39 in 2023*

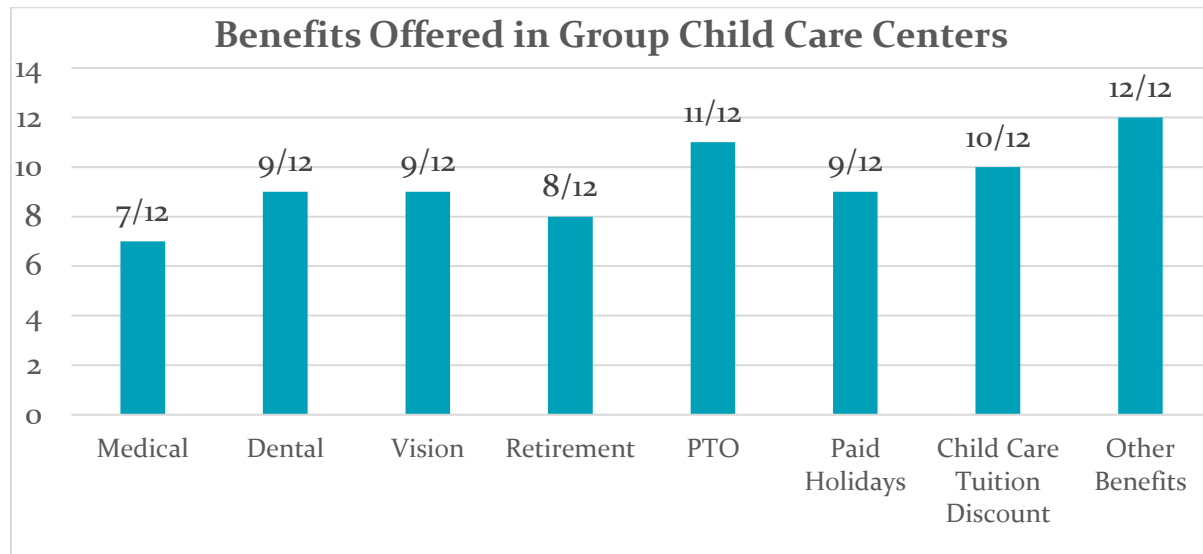
“If we could retain and find more staff we could add other classrooms to our license to create more slots for children”

-Group Child Care Director

## WAGES AND BENEFITS

Child care turnover often comes down to child care programs unable to offer competitive wages. The average starting pay for a **teacher qualified position is \$16.14/hr** compared to \$15.14/hr from January 2023. The average starting pay for an **assistant teacher qualified position is \$14.50/hr** which is up from \$12.68/hr from January 2023. School age sites reported an average of \$12.75/hr for their staff.

Figure 2.2



### **Other benefits included:**

*EAP assistance, free meals during worktime, professional development stipend, supplemental health insurance options, tuition reimbursement, short-term disability, long-term disability, and pet insurance*

## TURNOVER

In 2023, the total **child care staff turnover was 112 individuals**. That included 84 individuals from group child care centers, for an average of 7 staff/center and 28 individuals from school age sites, for an average of 4 staff/site. In comparison, in 2022 child care staff turnover in group child care centers alone was 111 individuals for an average of 12.34 staff/center.

A total of 2 (17%) group child care centers had a change in director in 2023 and a total of 3 (43%) school age sites had a change of director in 2023.

When asked about barriers to child care success one family provider shared the following:

“Burn out for providers, having to keep enrollment fees lower to be affordable for families, lower enrollment fees make it difficult to make a living”



## Section 3: Family Child Care Retention Data

In 2023, three family child care providers located within the city of La Crosse closed and two new family child care providers opened for a net loss of one site. When current family child care providers were asked how long they plan on remaining in business 2 providers responded 1-2 years, 3 providers responded 2-5 years, 5 providers responded 5-10 years, and 1 provider responded more than 10 years. **The most common reason for closing in the near future is retirement.** The average number of years in regulation for family child care providers is 18.49 years, with the longest being 39 years and the shortest being 3 months.

## Conclusion:

It is evident, that although this project has led to significant positive impacts on the state of child care within the City of La Crosse, barriers and challenges still exist. While the total number of slots has increased, it is still far from adequate to support the demand of working families in the area. Workforce shortages and being able to recruit and retain quality child care teachers and providers still remains the #1 barrier to child care success. The Child Care Development Project will use the next two and half years to continue to develop innovative strategies that build on the existing child care infrastructure to maintain the long-term sustainability of the project. This will increase the availability of child care and ensure the sustainability of existing child care within the city of La Crosse.

“This past year has been amazing with all the help that has arisen in this crisis! I hope through community awareness these fundings and support will be able to raise the standards through which we care for our future leaders!

-Family Child Care Provider

## Contact Information:

For questions or to learn more about The City of La Crosse Child Care Development Project please contact:

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