

Sturgeon Bay Celebrates Grand Opening of Child Care Center

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Door Community Child Development Center expands to serve working families with help of Workforce Innovation Grant funding.

STURGEON BAY — Gov. Tony Evers, together with Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC) Secretary and CEO Missy Hughes and Wisconsin Department of Children and Families (DCF) Secretary Emilie Amundson, yesterday joined Door Community Child Development Center for a ribbon cutting ceremony of their new facility in Sturgeon Bay. Photos from the governor’s visit are available [here](#) , [here](#) , and [here](#) .



“No matter where you go, child care centers play a vital role in bolstering local economies, supporting working parents, and making sure our kids have the care they need to grow, learn, and thrive,” said Gov. Evers. “Child care is necessary to connecting the dots so our kids and families, employers, and industries can be successful. Through our Workforce Innovation Grant Program investment, this center will have a positive impact on Door County and the local economy, with nearly double the capacity and new uses for the entire community to enjoy.”

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Gov. Evers, in December 2021, [announced](#) the United Way of Door County would receive \$3.5 million through his Workforce Innovation Grant to make changes to existing child care facilities in the county. The governor announced the [Workforce Innovation Grant Program](#) as part of a \$130 million workforce initiative to encourage regions and communities to develop leading-edge, long-term solutions to the workforce challenges the state faces in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic. The ribbon cutting ceremony on Monday marks an important milestone for the project supported by Gov. Evers and the Evers Administration.

“Child care provides more than just a safe place for children; it’s essential for building strong and healthy families who will contribute to our workforce of the future,” said Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development (DWD) Secretary Amy Pechacek. “These are the kinds of investments that will help Wisconsin develop its homegrown talent and continue our state’s winning economic performance.”

“Child care is essential infrastructure for our economy,” said WEDC Secretary and CEO Hughes. “Our incredible workforce relies on access to affordable and quality care to move our economy forward.”



According to data provided by DCF, 30 percent of ZIP Codes in Door County are considered child care deserts, meaning there are few to no high-quality options for child care in the neighborhood or community. With the new 18,600-square-foot building, Door Community Child Development Center’s capacity has grown from 83 to 150 children, and that capacity now allows the center to provide programming for Head Start and area school districts.

“This state-of-the-art facility is a prime example of what happens when early learning, economic development, and other community partners come together and innovate,” said DCF Secretary Amundson. “Not only is the community increasing access to quality, affordable child care, they are also gaining a flexible community space for families to make new memories.”

The new center was designed not only to spark learning and fun for the children who attend but also to create new opportunities for revenue to support the child care professionals working there and families in the community. The center now has a large community room set up as a children’s play space, which can be rented out for birthday parties and holding events such as family cooking classes and art classes. The center also includes a special sensory gym with a

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cocoon swing, adjustable lighting, monkey bars, ziplines, and more that can provide a space for children to safely self-regulate their bodies and emotions.

“We are also trying to find new ways for all families to be able to attend,” said Alexis Fuller, one of the center’s founders and its executive director, who leads efforts to fundraise tuition scholarships and rainy-day funds for families and staff support. “We make sure there are no hurdles for them to be successful.”

The Workforce Innovation Grants are administered by WEDC and DWD. Approximately \$3 million of the grant allocation was spent on this new \$6.7 million center at 5617 Gordon Road in Sturgeon Bay. The remaining funds were used to make improvements at the county’s other nonprofit center, Northern Door Children’s Center in Sister Bay, as well as help both centers boost wages and benefits to attract and retain staff.

“We are excited to begin the next phase of the grant with Door Community Child Development Center,” said United Way of Door County Executive Director Amy Kohnle. “In this new space, we will be able to pilot various efforts that we hope will bring different revenue streams into the center, which will reset the old business model. We look forward to sharing these practices and lessons learned with others across the state of Wisconsin. The investment made at Northern Door Children’s Center has already resulted in a steady income stream.”

Gov. Evers proposed continuing the Workforce Innovation Grant Program in his 2023-25 biennial budget proposal with a \$200 million investment to address the pressing workforce challenges facing nearly every sector and every community in the state. Republicans in the Wisconsin State Legislature failed to include this provision in the final biennial budget.

Gov. Evers has made it a priority to address Wisconsin’s workforce challenges, including by investing in efforts that support affordable, accessible child care, such as the Child Care Counts Program. Since the Child Care Counts program’s inception in 2020, more than [\\$650 million](#) has gone directly to childcare providers to increase wages, provide benefits, expand access to care, and more. The program has helped more than 4,440 child care providers keep their doors open, ensuring the employment of 22,000 child care professionals and allowing providers to continue care for more than 113,000 kids.

In October, Gov. Evers announced he was [directing](#) \$170 million in emergency funding to DCF to continue the [Child Care Counts Stabilization Payment Program](#) at current levels through June 2025. While the emergency stopgap measure does not meet the same funding levels Child Care Counts has received previously, it will still provide direct relief to over 4,400 child care providers across the state to help ensure child care providers can afford to keep their doors open and continue providing care for kids to keep workers in Wisconsin’s workforce. The Door Community Child Development Center at its original location received \$621,703 in Child Care Counts funding since Fall 2020. As of December 2023, the Door Community Child Development Center was serving 78 kids.