The Children’s Journal
News from Campus Child Care for parents, advocates, and all who work to provide quality early care and education for children and their families.

FALL 2023

WECP Welcomes Nancy Saevang

We are pleased to announce that Nancy Saevang has been promoted to the role of director of the Waisman Early Childhood Program (WECP) at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, leading a staff of 17 early educators and caring for about 100 children ages 1 to 8 years. Nancy graduated from the University of Wisconsin-Madison with a bachelor’s degree in human development and family studies and a minor in Asian American studies. She began her career with WECP as an undergraduate in 2013. In 2016, she was hired on as a full-time lead teacher. With the many hats that she has worn in WECP, Nancy brings a vast skill set to this new position. She is eager to build on past learning opportunities and to create an environment where teachers and children with varying needs can thrive.

Aside from her professional career, she has two little ones, Kendall (4-year-old) and Greyson (8-month-old), who are her “pride and joy.” The family enjoys spending time outdoors and exploring the Madison area.

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I hope that your transition into autumn has been smooth, and that you’re enjoying the abundant gifts of the harvest. As we continue to navigate the lingering effects of the pandemic, the role of leadership in our child care centers has come to the fore. Our directors are the pillars of these programs, providing unwavering guidance to children, families, and early educators. However, they often find themselves isolated, without adequate support systems.

This situation calls for innovative leadership and creative action steps that target the success and well-being of our directors.

Drawing upon insights from the Harvard Business Review article “What Good Leadership Looks Like During This Pandemic,” I have developed a new initiative: the UW–Madison Campus and Network Child Care Center Director Leadership Training and Peer Mentor Network. This program is designed to provide opportunities for directors to connect with peers who understand their unique set of circumstances. The aim is to cultivate strength, resilience, and a continued commitment to the field of early childhood education, thereby helping to mitigate director turnover.

The Leadership Training and Peer Mentor Network will consist of a cohort of 12-14 child care center directors. This cohort-based approach fosters the sharing of critical leadership perspectives, experiences, and insights, encouraging the exploration of ideas and practices that contribute to high-performing child care curricula. We will meet regularly, with the option for directors to meet individually with me for more in-depth consultation on center-specific issues. By bringing together both experienced and emerging leaders, we wish to give rise to a new generation of child care center directors, ensuring the future success of our centers.

We are deeply grateful to the Evjue Foundation for funding this project. Our child care centers are foundational to our university’s and state’s economy. They support children and families in the present while investing in the future. As we continue to adapt to the changing landscape of society and its impact on our programs, we remain dedicated to providing the best possible support to our directors, the early educators in their centers, and the families they serve.
On a Mission to Support Parenting Students

Our revised Mission Statement highlights one of our most critical roles on campus: empowering parenting students to achieve their professional goals by administering child care tuition assistance and providing family support programs. As the OCCFR Parent Resource Specialist, I work closely with this invisible population, and they continue to amaze me every day. Parenting students are my super heroes. Raising young children is an all-consuming job that takes your time, money, and on some days, your sanity. Likewise, academic pursuit requires a comparable commitment. As one student parent aptly puts it, doing both at the same time is “sheer insanity,” yet parenting students show up every day, and most finish with a higher GPA than their non-parenting peers.

The parenting students at UW–Madison are a diverse group of undergraduate, graduate, and dissertating students from many countries and economic levels, all with a shared goal — to complete their degrees while their children learn and thrive in high-quality child care.

That is where we enter the picture. We support our student families by administering child care tuition assistance, providing parent education classes and one-on-one coaching sessions with experts in child development and family studies, and offering family-friendly events to help our families connect with each other. It is important to let them know that they belong on this campus when they don’t always feel welcomed.

At the end of each semester, we watch with pride as our parenting students walk across the stage at commencement, knowing that we have truly made a difference in the lives of these young families during their tenure at UW–Madison. I cannot imagine any job more rewarding.

— Barbara Douglas
Parent Resource Specialist
Office of Child Care and Family Resources

Teacher Spotlight

My road to the early childhood profession has not been linear, but caring for young humans has always been my calling. My undergraduate degree is in art, which I taught in elementary school until I had children. When my youngest finished preschool, I realized that I still wanted to be there. So, I taught for 11 years at a parent cooperative while finishing my MFA in design studies. This is how I discovered the Child Development Lab, where I have worked for 10 years.

What is something important that a child has taught you? Children help me slow down, be curious and open to what the world has to show. Here is an example. In my room, a child had been playing with a basket of wooden tools. When she was done, I reminded her to clean up. As I surveyed the classroom, I could see that the tools had not yet been put away. As I headed toward the child, a reprimand at the ready, I observed what she was doing. She was in fact putting the toys away as I had requested, but was deeply engaged in testing out each one before placing it in the basket. This child helped me to rethink clean-up time. There was no need for a frantic, intense rush; I learned from this child how to do clean-up better with mindfulness and intentionality.

What is your greatest accomplishment as an early educator? I am most proud of my accomplishments in the area of outdoor education. Classrooms do not need four walls. With all our age groups, we take advantage of the natural and urban environment that surrounds our building by having the children use these "beyond" spaces. This place-based learning connects children to the environment and community in which they live. With real time, hands-on adventures, they learn about the space and materials that surround them, taking ownership, interest, and even some responsibility for its care.

What brings you joy outside the classroom? Outside the classroom I enjoy expressing my creativity through watercolor painting. I love spending time with my four grown children, their partners, and our collective seven cats and a dog. My family keeps me centered and happy.

— Linda Dykstra,
Senior Early Childhood Education Teacher,
Child Development Lab,
UW–Madison
The Crossroads of Child Care and Paid Parental Leave: Family Well-being

Paid parental leave and child care often go hand in hand, except that one is an employment benefit and the other is a crucial but expensive service for parents with young children. Currently, UW–Madison is one of several Big Ten universities not to offer paid parental leave; although, pressure continues to mount on campus leadership. In June, four UW–Madison labor unions, representing faculty, staff, and graduate workers, urged administrators to include 12 weeks of paid family leave for graduate students and employees in the university’s next budget. Their efforts represent an ongoing push to procure this valuable benefit for faculty, staff, and graduate students.

The financial repercussions of the child care crisis have been well documented, especially for families with lower incomes. Not only is the cost prohibitive, but there is not enough capacity to go around. However, what often falls between the cracks of the economic hardship of unpaid leave and the hefty price tag of child care is family well-being. The struggle to pay the bills coupled with the time commitment required to raise healthy children and to create necessary opportunities for self-care leaves parents at an impasse.

Access to quality caregiving is endemic to an equitable and inclusive workplace culture. Not only does it give work-life balance a fighting chance, but it also begins to address the emotional health of our youngest and their parents. The developmental outcomes that result from parents spending dedicated time with their young children are innumerable: increases self-confidence, lowers risk of behavioral problems, promotes joy and resilience, to name a few. Nurturing strong parent-child relationships creates an environment in which our youngest thrive. This should be our priority as a campus community. We believe that it is time for policy makers to invest more in the care infrastructure for families and to focus less on the bottom line.

Development News

The Day of the Badger (DOTB) annual fundraiser took place on March 28 and 29 for exactly 1,848 minutes (the year that UW–Madison became a reality) to support important campus initiatives and to celebrate Badger pride. It was our first year of inclusion in DOTB, and our first foray into the world of digital fundraising. Since this was a live event with a short window for giving, the pace was fast and furious. This experience taught us many valuable lessons about the benefits of electronic giving, especially the minimal cost of production and ease of access for our constituents. We are infinitely grateful to Marlene Hartzman for her generous $10,000 matching gift. Marlene, we couldn’t have done this without you!

The Day of the Badger attracted 32 first-time donors to campus child care. Their gifts accounted for approximately 76 percent of total DOTB gift income. Other notable outcomes include a gift average of $218 and four gifts of $500 or more. With the major gift of $10,000, we raised almost $20,000. The New Campus Child Care Initiatives was the DOTB fund designation. The purpose of this fund is to support child care initiatives focusing on developing new or updating existing facilities, enhancing programming, expanding and improving service, as well as providing discretionary support for the Office of Child Care and Family Resources. Now that we have one DOTB under our belt, we are eager and ready for next year’s event.

In this great big university, it is the little ones who matter most to us! Children are at the heart of everything we do. Your gifts

• Enable children to thrive in high-quality child care centers.
• Ensure that they receive affordable access to child care while their parents earn degrees or work on campus.
• Empower campus early educators to create innovative learning environments in their classrooms.

The impact of our office stretches across every school, college, and department on campus. We are foundational to the Badger success story! Thank you for giving back in such a meaningful way!

— Teri Stratton
Annual Giving Manager
Parenting Student Voices...

My children, Finn and Lucy, moved to Madison at ages 3 and 4 from Los Angeles and were luckily accepted into the Preschool Lab at UW (now the UW Child Development Center). It was a wonderful opportunity for them to learn and grow so close to me on campus, and they were in very good care. The past year, with many a late night at the library and missed bed times, my son, Finn, would wake me up every morning and say, "Did you finish your dissertation?" It was such a relief in April to finally tell him one morning, "Yes, it is finished!" Our whole family was very invested in my degree completion and is feeling very relieved. When I walked across the stage of the communication arts graduation ceremony, Finn called out, "Way to go Mom!" and brought tears to many an eye in the audience. I’ve since accepted two positions, one research/academic and one full-time industry, both of which allow us to stay in Madison. We’ve fallen in love with the town and all it has to offer our family.

Maureen Mauk, PhD
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