

A woman with long dark hair, wearing a white button-down shirt over a yellow top and light blue jeans, is helping a young child cross a wooden bridge on a playground. The child, wearing a yellow shirt and blue jeans, is smiling and holding onto the woman's hands. The bridge is made of wooden planks and has metal chains and blue handrails. The background is a blurred green park setting.

**STAYING
FOCUSED ON
THE BRIDGE.**

weca
**ANNUAL
REPORT
2023**



GUIDING VISION

Our vision is a Wisconsin where early care and education is viewed as a public good worthy of long-term, sweeping, and sustained public funding. This guiding vision includes a well-compensated early childhood workforce and child care that is affordable and accessible for all families with young children.

We center diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging in our philosophy, programs, and initiatives every day.

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REFLECTIONS FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Picture a bridge. It allows many community members to get to their employer, an economy-driving local business. If you live in this community, you must drive over the bridge to get there.

This bridge is in a state of near collapse and blocked off. Employees of the business cannot get to their shifts. Not surprisingly, the employer's productivity declines, staffing challenges increase, and the economy will be affected.

What would the employer do? What would the community do? What action would state officials take?

Of course, there would be a call to quickly fix the bridge and reopen it with an investment of state dollars. The bridge is essential infrastructure for the local community and economy to function. We certainly would not ask employees of the local business to pay for the bridge repair out of their own pockets because "it's their personal responsibility," right? Of course not. It is a clear case for public investment because the bridge is a public good.

Now, picture a child care program. It allows many community members to get to work at their employer, an economy-driving local business. Parents taking their young children to the program is the only way for them to keep their jobs.

The child care sector is facing so many challenges, and that particular local program is losing its own staff. It needs revenue that does not only rely on parent fees. If that program has to reduce slots because of its own staffing challenges or close, so many employees of the local business will not get to their shifts and probably will quit. Business productivity will decline, staffing challenges will increase, and the economy will be affected.

Sounds like an infrastructure emergency, right? However, unlike the bridge scenario where we understand the need for a public investment, with child care in Wisconsin and across the nation, we DO expect families to fully foot the bill for care. And the gap between what families can pay and what care actually costs is rapidly growing.

The good news is many more people throughout Wisconsin have started to understand child care is a public good worthy of an investment of state revenue. The advocacy conversation is moving forward like never before with a growing number of people from so many counties, communities, and families agreeing child care is infrastructure. Momentum only keeps building.

Wisconsin Early Childhood Association's work over the last year represented an incredible time of adapting, growing, and innovating on behalf of early care and education in Wisconsin through this new tapestry of public understanding and a rapidly changing public and legislative context.

As 2022 closed and we moved into 2023, child care providers were preparing for the January 2024 end of Child Care Counts, a federal COVID relief-funded payment program for sustaining child care business operations. There was incredible energy and enthusiasm for child care

advocacy with many believing that perhaps this would be the year the long-term goal of significant state investment would move forward. At WECA, we deeply felt it was important to lead from this perspective and bring together a broad range of voices to advocate.

After record-setting engagement, the Wisconsin State Legislature unfortunately did not invest the \$300 million for which WECA and other key partners advocated to sustain Child Care Counts. As an organization, WECA immediately began taking steps to compile and share all the relevant resources available to support child care programs and early educators.

This was on the backdrop of all of our ongoing work and many new initiatives we advanced to grow child care capacity in key regions, support child care's business practices, and enhance the mental and emotional wellness of early educators and their families. We continued to provide our longstanding programs that improve compensation, increase access to higher education, connect providers to free business resources, and enhance food systems access.

Even after the state budget decision, advocacy continued on the need for state investment and in response to other proposed child care legislation. We, along with many others, continued to reassure advocates that, despite the decision, their voices do matter – to keep pushing. Ultimately, Gov. Tony Evers allocated \$170 million in unspent federal pandemic relief funds to support Child Care Counts into 2025, an announcement he made the week of the 2023 WECA Conference where he made a surprise visit to provide an uplifting message to the field.

Our hope for the future is soon – very soon – our conversations with providers, parents, and the public will begin from a place of abundance rather than scarcity. That we are able to share child care deserts are eradicated, child care is affordable for all families, and the early childhood workforce is earning wages and receiving benefits that match their education, experience, and dedication.

It is our conviction that the people of Wisconsin – from all counties, all communities, and all families – believe child care is a bridge that holds up a healthy and prosperous Wisconsin. That is what propels us to keep providing all of WECA's services in support of the early childhood workforce – supports that are vitally important for this incredibly essential field – until Wisconsin's key decisionmakers do what we and a growing coalition of Wisconsinites know is right.

The bridge. We are staying focused on the bridge.





THE 2023 JOURNEY

When Elena, a family child care provider, wanted to transition from being a certified to a licensed program, WECA helped with friendly and culturally responsive support.

“The truth is everything is excellent,” shared Elena, owner of Little Sunshine Bilingual Family Child Care. “Good service, everyone is kind and willing to help – I would recommend this agency to more people.”

The support Elena received even extends beyond the critically important assistance she received through business coaching. Little Sunshine, a Spanish-language program, is one of the more than 3,450 regulated programs in Wisconsin that receive support from at least one WECA program or service. In addition to working with Wisconsin Early Education Shared Services Network (WEESN) for her transition to licensure, Elena participates in the T.E.A.C.H. scholarship program, receives REWARD stipends, and attends the WECA Conference.

“T.E.A.C.H. is very important for my professional development,” she said. “I have learned so much about the early childhood profession, and it has helped me become a professional. REWARD payments are a great addition and recognition for the work we do.”

WECA’s journey from fall 2022 through late 2023 was one marked by its longstanding and continued commitment to providing core supports to child care professionals and programs while also prioritizing quick response to the evolving needs of the field and launching innovative new services. WECA’s expertise and offerings in compensation, higher education, business practices, food systems, advocacy, and professional development continued to provide an unmatched depth and variety of services for more than 28,300 professionals in Wisconsin’s early childhood workforce.

“We value innovation and always act with a core philosophy in mind – that supporting the early childhood workforce has returns for young children, families, and communities,” said WECA Executive Director Ruth Schmidt. “Lifting up the value and importance of early care and education is what drives us this year and every year.”



ELEVATING EQUITY

Wisconsin’s early childhood landscape calls for work to advance equity to ensure all providers, young children, and families have the culturally and linguistically responsive care they need to thrive. The “Advancing Equity in Wisconsin’s Early Education Workforce” qualitative research study, which gathered the lived experiences of providers who identify as Black, Indigenous, or a Person of Color, was completed in 2023. The study, commissioned by WECA and led by



Dr. Toshiba Adams, Ph.D., garnered stories and experiences to further highlight the challenges faced by Black and Brown providers and elevate the importance of culturally responsive child care.

Study results show Wisconsin and the United States can no longer afford to ignore early childhood workforce disparities, particularly because a healthy workforce will positively impact child development. The study illuminates how Wisconsin's early childhood workforce suffers inequities affecting Black and Brown professionals, and that partners, researchers, funders, and concerned members of the public need to broaden their understanding of how disparities affect not only the early childhood workforce but also young children. Findings will help inform policy conversations moving forward.

“Black and Brown professionals are essential, not only because they serve as the backbone to Wisconsin’s economic viability but also because all children regardless of their race and ethnic background benefit from Black and Brown early educators’ experiential knowledge, cultural capital, and educational background,” reflected Dr. Adams. “The fact that they experience racial, social, economic, and gender marginalization yet remain in the field is a testament to their resilience, dedication, and commitment to children and families.”

INNOVATION, LEADERSHIP, AND WORKFORCE SUPPORT

WECA’s shared services network, WEESN, increased enrollment by nearly 40% as it continued to expand the services it offers. Fall 2022 brought a groundbreaking milestone – partnering with Civitas Strategies Early Start to create a revolutionary new set of tax guides specifically for child care businesses, which are available not only to Wisconsin providers but also those across the United States. This allows programs to maximize revenue in the midst of the many additional financial challenges that include inflation and the impact of Child Care Counts payment reductions.

WEESN is widely regarded as a national leader for innovation in early childhood shared services, with staff members making six presentations at a national conference dedicated to shared services models. WEESN’s focus on strong child care business practices provides essential support for providers across all types of child care programs and length of tenure for the owners and directors who enroll.

“With me being a new director, WECA has provided me with not only a reliable resource to different programs offered but also a mentorship to assist me in navigating through things as they arise,” shared Julia, director of Lov N Care Children’s Academy, a center in Kenosha. “It truly has made my position much easier with all the help and resources that WECA offers.”

“Lifting up the value and importance of early care and education is what drives us this year and every year.”

*– Ruth Schmidt,
WECA Executive Director*

In early 2023, WEESN launched another first-in-the-nation benefit, an Educator Assistance Program (EAP), to provide free and confidential access to mental health and wellness supports for all staff in WEESN-enrolled child care programs. Also available to staff's household and family members, the EAP is a welcome addition to human resources benefits not typically accessed by the early childhood field due to the financial constraints of the sector.

WECA also launched free Career Development Counseling services for anyone interested in navigating their educational and career journey in early childhood, ultimately fielding hundreds of calls and providing support to hundreds of clients in English and Spanish languages. Meanwhile, the T.E.A.C.H. and REWARD programs provided record-setting stipends and scholarships to educators and programs. REWARD distributed stipends to more than 12,000 recipients in its mainstay program, providing essential direct support to increase early educator wages. It also administered a special one-time stipend program for early educators who work in the city of Milwaukee through funds allocated by the city council to support early childhood initiatives. T.E.A.C.H. awarded scholarships to nearly 1,300 recipients, helping provide extremely affordable higher education opportunities while boosting wages as a result.

New and existing food systems supports added to a year defined by responsiveness and great need. The Food Program served more than 500 providers and 5,100 young children through food reimbursements, and WEESN's food systems programming offered resources in many forms, including garden grants, a new garden tips program, food box distribution, and other tools.

"I thought the food was awesome," a provider shared about Farm to ECE food boxes. "It gave me an opportunity to introduce new foods to the children in my care."



ADVOCACY, COALITION BUILDING, AND CONNECTION

State budget advocacy ramped up at the beginning of the year and continued long after the formal budget process ended in the summer. The effort had many highlights, including advocates coming together in spring 2023 for a record-setting Child Care Advocacy Day. The event, led by WECA and Raising Wisconsin, welcomed 300 attendees who met with nearly all Wisconsin state legislators at the Capitol in support of a significant state investment to continue the Child Care Counts program, which provides payments to child care programs to increase compensation, keep tuition rates manageable, and assist programs in staying open since the start of the pandemic.

Advocates also sent a record-breaking number of letters to state Legislators and decisionmakers, parents told their stories for a social media storm on A Day Without Child Care, and employers participated through employer-legislator forums, webinars, and a business sign-on letter in support of a public investment of \$300 million for Child Care Counts. WECA also launched engagement events and held several trainings to help share advocacy resources with the field to support the broad advocacy campaign. While the Legislature ultimately did

not invest the broad coalition's ask of \$300 million, the spotlight shined on child care by providers, parents, employers, and community leaders created unmatched momentum and a foundation for the future.

"It was fantastic - well put together, organized, and inspiring," an early educator shared about their experience at Advocacy Day. "It was such a great experience to be able to network with other providers in our area. The whole experience was a good one, and I am proud of all involved."

Advocacy remained in the spotlight at the 2023 WECA Conference, a fall hybrid event with three days of sessions in Middleton, Wis., and more than 800 total attendees across in-person and virtual opportunities. The event featured a surprise visit from Gov. Tony Evers where he gave credit to the important work of the field, lauded the broad visibility of advocacy efforts about child care, and highlighted his decision to allocate \$170 million in unspent pandemic-relief funds to continue Child Care Counts through mid-2025.

Through engaging sessions on timely early childhood topics and generous support from sponsors and exhibitors, the conference was considered an inspiring event by all who attended. The annual offering continues to play a central role in the hundreds of hours of professional development credit and training offered by WECA for Wisconsin's early childhood workforce each year.

This is a tribute to WECA's roots and founding in 1971, when it provided the first statewide conferences for Wisconsin's child care providers, and the long journey of growing and innovating in the decades that have followed.

"WECA serves as a resource and continues to set standards that support providers in an educational capacity," a provider shared. "Thanks, WECA."

"WECA's leadership for public investment will strengthen the economy, allow families to thrive, and help close some of the state's most brutal inequalities."

*- Laura Dresser, Associate Director,
High Road Strategy Center
(formerly COWS)*



BY THE NUMBERS

WECA is a statewide nonprofit organization with significant local reach. It exists to support early childhood educators, child care programs, and tens of thousands of young children, families, and communities across Wisconsin. The following is WECA's impact in fiscal year 2023 (Oct. 1, 2022 through Sept. 30, 2023).

IMPACT

Total financial support for early childhood workforce: **\$22,545,757**

Early childhood educators served:

87% of Wisconsin's early childhood workforce
28,308 professionals

Child care programs served:

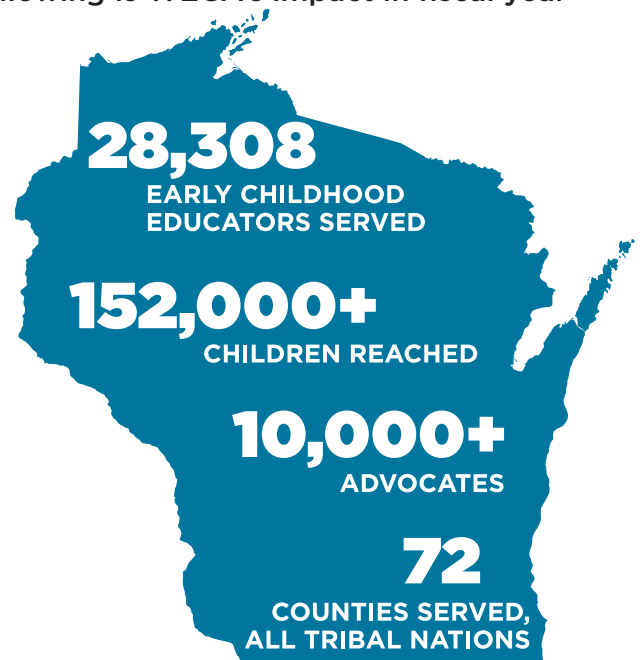
77% of all regulated programs in Wisconsin
3,452 programs

Children reached: **152,000+**

Advocates: **10,000+**

Members: **1,518**

Local reach: **72 of 72** counties, all Tribal nations



ADVOCACY, ENGAGEMENT, AND COALITION-BUILDING

WECA is an advocacy leader that supports early care and education, the early childhood workforce, and coalition building across Wisconsin.

Letters sent to legislators: **100,000+**

Early childhood providers engaged: **16,000**

Advocacy Digest recipients: **5,000+**

Advocacy Day attendees: **300**

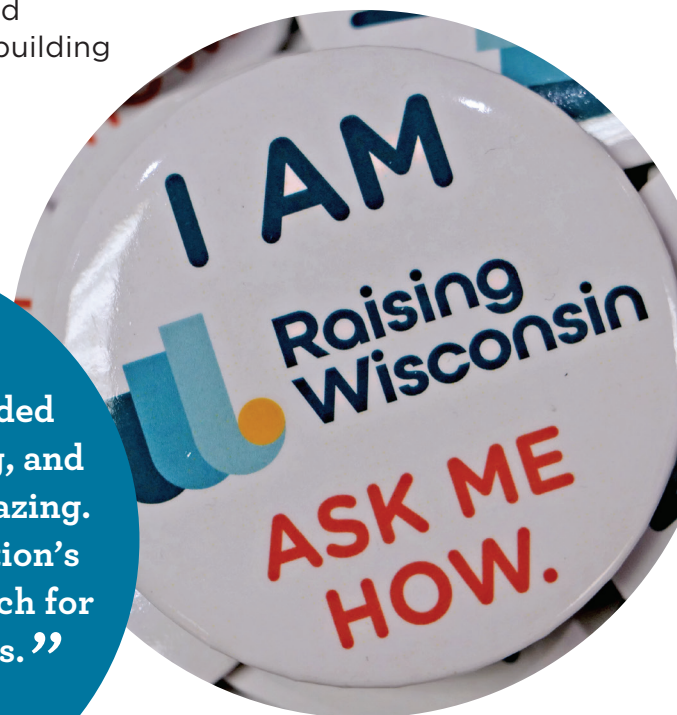
Parent advocacy network connections: **200+**

Engagement forums, trainings, and events hosted: **28**

Regional parent engagement leaders: **4**

“This model you provided for training, organizing, and activating people is amazing. I’m in awe of this coalition’s work. Thank you so much for all that you do for us.”

– 2023 Advocacy Day attendee



FOOD PROGRAM

The **Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)** is a federally funded voluntary program that helps partially reimburse for the cost of healthy meals and snacks to qualifying child care facilities. WECA is one of six Wisconsin CACFP sponsors and is eligible to serve family child care programs in all 72 counties and all Tribal nations.

Providers served: 525

Children reached: 5,100

Meals and snacks provided: 2,750,000

Value of reimbursements to providers: \$3,025,030

\$3,025,030

**VALUE OF
REIMBURSEMENTS
TO PROVIDERS**

MEMBERSHIP

WECA is the state affiliate of the **National Association for the Education Of Young Children (NAEYC)**, the largest professional association of early childhood educators and professionals in the United States.

Total members: 1,518

Week of the Young Child® celebration events: 5

Members registered for NAEYC Public Policy Forum: 34

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND TRAINING

WECA offers extensive professional development and training opportunities and career development counseling services for early childhood educators. Many professional development and training opportunities provide Wisconsin Registry credit.

Hours of content viewed: 3,000+

Attendees: 850

Total professional development hours offered: 55

Keynote presentations: 3

Sponsors, exhibitors, and in-kind donors: 50

Format: Hybrid (in-person with virtual engagement opportunities)

Total WECA professional development hours offered*: 142

**Includes WECA conference, general WECA training opportunities, and Wisconsin Early Education Shared Services Network (WEESN) offerings.*

weca 
conference

“The conference was the best thing I’ve ever been to in my life. I was inspired!”

– First-time in-person attendee

REWARD WISCONSIN STIPEND PROGRAM

The REWARD program distributes thousands of direct payments to eligible early childhood educators throughout Wisconsin each year. In fiscal year 2023, it also began administering a special one-time stipend program for early childhood educators who work in programs in the city of Milwaukee.

Total REWARD Wisconsin stipends awarded: 18,706

Total REWARD recipients: 12,108

Total value of stipends awarded: \$11,473,425

Average stipend amount (every 6 months): \$613

Total city of Milwaukee early childhood workforce stipends awarded: 4,477

Total city of Milwaukee recipients: 2,803

Total value of city of Milwaukee stipends awarded: \$2,238,500

Stipend amount awarded every 4 months: \$500

T.E.A.C.H. EARLY CHILDHOOD® WISCONSIN PROGRAM

T.E.A.C.H. provides scholarships to early educators to help them complete nearly free credit-based early childhood coursework through the Wisconsin technical college system, University of Wisconsin system, and private and Tribal colleges. WECA offers free career development counseling services to help clients determine their educational and career pathways in early care and education and serves as a vital partner for institutions of higher education across Wisconsin.

Individuals receiving T.E.A.C.H. scholarships: 1,284

Children served by T.E.A.C.H. scholars: 39,200

College credits earned: 10,013

Total courses completed: 3,538

Scholars worked in:

515 group centers

123 family child care programs

Average wage increase for center employees who completed contracts: 4.9%

Average grade point average: 3.42

Value of technology stipends awarded: \$639,484

CAREER DEVELOPMENT COUNSELING AND HIGHER EDUCATION PARTNERSHIPS

Number of career development counselors: 3

Career development calls/emails fielded: 434

Career development clients served: 288

Value of career pathways grants awarded: \$75,000



“There are people that want to help me and see me grow and because of this I have been able to participate in T.E.A.C.H., open a business, and now learn more about ways that I can continue to grow in my field and learn as much possible.”

– Career development counseling client

WISCONSIN EARLY EDUCATION SHARED SERVICES NETWORK

WEESN is a national leader in providing shared resources to help child care programs develop strong business practices that save time, increase revenues, and make their jobs less stressful.

PROGRAMS ENROLLED: 2,189*

Group centers: 1,216

Family programs: 973

**Growth of 39% from 2022.*

ENROLLMENT BY TIER

Tier 1: 1,652

Tier 2: 260

Tier 3: 277

Tax credits recouped by enrolled programs:

\$3,035,920**

***Through a partnership with Civitas Strategies that included provider coaching.*

93% of enrolled programs say WEESN is valuable by saving them time in business management

89% of enrolled programs say WEESN is valuable by saving them money in business management

Number of children reached: 89,081

Program site visits: 4,447

Unique programs visited: 720

Total coaching hours: 4,013

Training hours offered: 72

Programs served by substitute educator pool: 68

FOOD SYSTEMS SUPPORTS

Children served: 8,720

Participating programs: 199

Garden grants provided: 36

Garden tips texts sent: 25



\$3,035,920

**TAX CREDITS
RECOUPED BY
ENROLLED
PROGRAMS**

“With programs like this, we are moving in a great direction by being able to increase teachers’ pay, improving the classrooms, and being an asset to our community.”

*– Kristin, Group Center Director
Tax Credit Coaching
Participant*



**SUPPORT
IN 2023**

WITH GRATITUDE: PHILANTHROPY AND DONORS

WECA is a trusted steward of public and private funds that support early care and education advocacy and the early childhood workforce across Wisconsin. Thanks to the ongoing support of generous donors and partners, WECA is able to provide programs and services at little to no cost to an under-resourced early childhood field. We deeply appreciate all who help us advance our vision of child care as a public good.

CONFERENCE EXHIBITORS

Community Coordinated
Child Care (4-C)
Concordia University Wisconsin
Cultivate Behavioral Health
& Education
Demco
Discount School Supply
Early Childhood
Health Consultation
Early Learning Ventures (ELV)
Families & Schools Together
ForeverLawn Milwaukee
Joy Gallivant
Kidokinetics Greater
Milwaukee Area
Madison College
PaperPie
Satellite Family Child
Care System
The Discovery Source
Wisconsin Alliance for
Infant Mental Health
Shine Early Learning
(YoungStar Connect)

CONFERENCE SPONSORS

American Family Insurance
Institute for Corporate and
Social Impact
Celebrate Children Foundation
City of Madison
Civitas Strategies
Early Learning Ventures (ELV)
First Business Bank
Greater Watertown Community
Health Foundation
Gundersen Health System
Hatch Early Learning
Kaplan Early Learning Company

PBS Wisconsin Education
School Specialty Childcraft
Supporting Families
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 Total Administrative
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 Infant Mental Health

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 American Family Insurance
 Institute for Corporate and
 Social Impact

City of Milwaukee
 Greater Beloit Economic
 Development Corporation
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 Greater Watertown Community
 Health Foundation
 Hopewell Fund
 National Association of Counties
 National Association for the
 Education of Young Children
 (NAEYC)
 Otto Bremer Trust
 Partnership for a Healthier
 America
 Pritzker Children's Initiative
 Rock County
 Roots & Wings Foundation
 Schlecht Family Foundation
 Shine Early Learning
 Waupaca County
 Wisconsin Department of
 Children & Families
 Wisconsin Department of
 Public Instruction
 Wisconsin Food Hub
 Cooperative
 Wisconsin Partnership Program

**“WECA is an expert in
 their field and is leading the
 way in making the Wisconsin
 early childhood system stronger. We
 honor and respect their knowledge
 and experience, and we try to show that
 respect by reducing the burdens funders
 often impose on grantees. That means
 we provide unrestricted funds and
 multi-year commitments.”**

– Roots & Wings Foundation

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Executive Director



Jeanette Paulson
Director of Workforce
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M.Ed.**
The Goddard School -
Verona



Alex Ysquierdo
Wisconsin Supplier
Diversity Program

2023 FINANCIAL REPORT

Wisconsin Early Childhood Association, Inc.

Statement of Activities

Year Ended September 30, 2023

	2023	2022
REVENUES		
Federated Campaigns	\$8,015	\$7,127
Government Grants	31,052,610	15,817,824
Individuals, Corporations, Foundations	964,771	1,918,068
Inkinds	4,982	1,400
Recipient and Center Fees	244,628	182,353
Annual Conference	144,723	30,940
Membership	30,594	29,283
Fees for Services	113,092	119,854
Interest	60,400	5,174
Miscellaneous	9,639	60,518
TOTAL REVENUES	\$32,633,454	\$18,172,541
EXPENSES		
Program Services	\$31,653,629	\$16,307,059
Supporting Activities	860,208	934,938
TOTAL EXPENSES	\$32,513,837	\$17,241,997
Change in Net Assets Without Donor Restrictions	736,608	601,154
Change in Net Assets With Donor Restrictions	(616,991)	329,390
Increase (Decrease) in net assets	\$119,617	\$930,544

STAY CONNECTED

ADVOCATE

Sign up for the **Advocacy Digest and Alerts** e-newsletter to stay in the know about advocacy and policy developments, actions you can take, and more.

INVEST

A donation to WECA of any size is an investment in transforming early care and education in Wisconsin.

JOIN

WECA/NAEYC membership is a connection to professional development and networking, resources, and advocacy opportunities.

FOLLOW

Like and follow WECA on Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, and YouTube!



ENGAGE

Sign up for the WECA Impact Updates Newsletter, a source of highlights about collective progress and opportunities to strengthen Wisconsin's early care and education system.



Scan this the code with your smartphone camera to get connected today!



“We knew very little about child care before connecting with WECA, and our collaboration brings a level of expertise and regional and state resources that we wouldn't otherwise have had. We are so grateful to have the team in our corner to help us advance this work.”

– Marianne Torkelson, Chair
Jackson County Child
Care Network

weca

Wisconsin Early
Childhood Association

2908 Marketplace Drive
Suite 101

Fitchburg, WI 53719

Ph: 800-783-9322

www.wisconsinearlychildhood.org

This institution is an equal opportunity provider.

Some of WECA's programs and services are funded by the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families (DCF).