



CCR's Family Services

Because a strong early childhood lasts a lifetime.

Child Care
Resources

40
Years
1969 - 2009

Just Another "Normal" Day for Jodi: The state-funded scholarship program provides sustainability for families with low income

For Jodi, a typical day starts at 6:00 a.m. She gets herself ready and then wakes up her two daughters to get ready for the day. Her oldest daughter must be out to the school bus before 8:00. Then, after dropping her youngest daughter off at child care, Jodi makes it to work by 8:30 without a minute to spare.

She works at her first job until 2:45, and then must drive to another town to work her second job until the end of the business day. Jodi's mother picks up her two daughters and watches them until she gets home around six, a long 12 hours after her day began. Jodi works around 36 hours per week.

Some days, Jodi will work a third job at night. Or, she will complete online coursework through the University of Montana-College of Technology. Jodi is working towards her Business Management degree, a two-year program that will take her a total of seven years to complete after all of the obstacles she has had to battle over the years; but nonetheless, still a degree and an accomplishment.

Jodi has been on the Best Beginnings Scholarship program through Child Care Resources for nine years. "My life would

be a wreck without this program," she said. The state-sponsored scholarship program helps Jodi cover the cost of child care, an expense that is second only to rent and mortgage payments for annual household expenses.

Without the assistance of the scholarship program, Jodi would most likely not work at all because child care costs are so high. "There are less expensive providers, but I would not put my child anywhere that is a scary place," she said. "That is why this scholarship program has been an absolute blessing."

For Jodi, the Best Beginnings Scholarship has allowed her to "maintain a normal life" – well, as normal as juggling three jobs, two daughters as a single parent, and school can possibly be.

Child Care Resources is currently helping over 620 families pay for the cost of child care through the Best Beginnings Scholarship program. Last year alone, the state paid over \$3.5 million in child care assistance in Missoula, Ravalli and Mineral County through this program.

Improvements in Scholarship Paperwork Processing Over the Years

The Best Beginnings Scholarship program requires a small, yet significant stack of paperwork for each client, all of which is processed by Family Services' caseworkers. There has been a large shift from processing by hand to working on computers over the years.

In the early 90s, all paperwork was completed by hand on triplicate forms. Family Services only had one computer used to write letters. Debbie Charlick, Child Care Resources caseworker for nearly 17 years, explains that "there was no email and no faxes, but lots of phone calls." The department was also significantly smaller with one supervisor, one caseworker and one part-time referral person.

Now, Family Services has one supervisor and five caseworkers with an average caseload of over 620 clients. The numbers have definitely grown but the Scholarship paperwork is computerized and more efficient. Though email and fax are utilized frequently, the department still receives an average of 250 calls per week.

The referral program has also evolved over the years. In the beginning, one part-time referral person conducted interviews with the parents and picked providers that seemed to be a good fit. (This also shows the difference in the number of child care programs, because there are currently over 170 child care programs in the Missoula area – far too many for one person to remember each facility and personally choose children that fit the program.) Family Services now has a Referral Specialist who works from a computerized database to match families to providers. Referrals can be processed in minutes rather than days.

Jodie Rasmussen worked at CCR for 13 years. She believes that over the years Family Services has offered "better communication about services families are receiving and how to evaluate and interact with child care providers."

The changes in Family Services over the years has allowed caseworker processing to be more efficient and for CCR to ultimately help more families.

Four Decades of Family Services' Progress

1969

1969 –
The Missoula and Mineral County Community Coordinated Child Care, Inc. (Missoula 4-Cs), later to be renamed Child Care Resources (CCR), was founded in March and 550 families were using child care.

1974 –
CCR developed a referral list of child care providers.

1975 –
2,100 children needing after-school care were identified. Three homes opened in the Lowell school area to serve up to 30 children.

1976 –
Formal child care referrals for families seeking child care began.

1978 –
The Montana legislature adopted a sliding fee scale for child care subsidy payments for low-income families.

1979

1981 –
Due to funding cutbacks, the referral program was transferred to Five Valley's Health Information Clearinghouse.

1984 –
The agency changed its name to Child Care Resources (CCR).

1986 –
CCR resumed offering child care referrals.

1988 –
CCR began education efforts with area businesses regarding child care needs and benefits and promoted the referral program.

1989

1989 –
CCR expanded services to Ravalli County.

1990 –
The Montana legislature passed the Montana Act for Better Child Care, establishing funding for Child Care Resources and referral agencies to promote quality child care.

1992 –
CCR's referrals expanded to Ravalli County.

1994 –
The state transferred the low-income child care subsidy payment processing program to R&Rs, including CCR.

1998 –
CCR's average monthly child care subsidy caseload expanded 30 percent over the prior fiscal year.

1999

1999 –
In response to parent needs, CCR implemented the *Benchmarks of Quality* to offer more information when selecting child care.

2001 –
An internet-based referral program, NACCRRRA, was implemented, allowing CCR to update provider information and vacancies and better serve parents looking for child care.

2002 –
Due to a budget shortfall, a waiting list was implemented in the Scholarship program, causing many families to lose child care and return to welfare.

2003 –
CCR started its first fundraiser, the *Climb for Kids* event at Snowbowl. This fundraiser targeted families that fell through the cracks of the state-funded Best Beginnings Scholarship program by providing temporary funds for emergency child care. These funds became known as the Hand Up Fund.

2005 –
CCR partnered with several other Missoula County agencies in a grant that provided full-time compensation to Missoula County child care providers who were serving part-time low-income scholarship families.

2006 –
Child Care Resources closed the Hamilton office and all scholarship cases were transferred to the Missoula office.

In 2003, CCR started its first fundraiser to raise money for a scholarship program to later be named the Hand Up Fund. This fund was established to provide short-term, partial child care payment scholarships for families who needed help outside of the Best Beginnings program.

State-funded child care scholarships specify income and work requirements which, unfortunately, make some families ineligible. If a parent is not receiving welfare assistance, but is seeking work, the family is not eligible. Similarly, state funding is not available to support care while a parent seeks medical attention. Summer programs may also be unlicensed and therefore not permitted.

The Hand Up Fund allows Child Care Resources to:

- Help parents with short-term child care during job interviews.
- Assist parents with child care so they can seek housing, counseling services and apply for work as they leave a domestic violence situation.
- Provide child care support to a parent who needs medical treatment.

CCR has effectively provided child care scholarships to families outside of the state's guidelines for four years using the Hand Up fund, resulting in family self-sufficiency in the Missoula region.

2009

Child support payments paid out by families on the Best Beginnings Scholarship are no longer calculated into the family's income, making more families eligible for the program.

