



U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Administration for Children and Families
Office of Family Assistance



NRFC State Profile: Wisconsin September 2016

This profile describes state and federally funded programs and policies that aim to strengthen families. These programs and policies support parenting and father involvement, promote strong family relationships, enhance fathers' economic stability, and provide support during incarceration and reentry. The profile lists phone numbers and websites for the programs. This information was correct when the profile was written (in 2016) but may change over time.

Programs to Support Responsible Fatherhood and Strengthen Families

Responsible fatherhood programs focus on issues such as enhancing parenting and relationship skills, keeping fathers involved with their children, improving their economic stability, helping them pay child support, and generally helping to strengthen families.

The following state and federally funded programs are available in the state:

Organization	Services Provided	Description	Service Area and Contact Information
Center for Self-Sufficiency (CFSS)	Fatherhood/Parenting Healthy Relationships Economic Stability Domestic Violence Preventing Unwanted/ Early Fatherhood	The federally funded CFSS provides the <i>Vow to Succeed</i> program, which offers retreats, events, workshops, and weekly relationship classes for low-income youth, singles, expectant parents, engaged couples, and married couples. Event topics include family dynamics and parenting, communication skills and conflict resolution, domestic violence, money management, personal development, and self-esteem. CFSS also offers teen pregnancy prevention programs to reduce out-of-wedlock pregnancies among adolescents and prevent teen dating violence.	Southeast Wisconsin. Website (414) 270-4679
Job Corps	Economic Stability	<i>Job Corps</i> is a federally funded job training program to help low-income men and women ages 16 to 24 with educational and career goals.	There are two Job Corp centers in Wisconsin. They are located in Blackwell and Milwaukee. Website with locations and phone numbers.

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Organization	Services Provided	Description	Service Area and Contact Information
Milwaukee County Department of Child Support Services	Fatherhood/Parenting Economic Stability Healthy Relationships	The Milwaukee County Department of Child Support Services was awarded a federal grant from the Office of Family Assistance in September 2015 to provide the <i>Milwaukee County New Pathways for Families and Fathers (MNPF)</i> program. Services are provided by community based organizations and include parenting, employment, and relationships skills training. Couples counseling and mediation services are also available.	Milwaukee County. Website (414) 615-2593
Next Door	Fatherhood/Parenting Healthy Relationships	The state funded Next Door provides fatherhood education programs including <i>Fatherhood Development, 24/7 Dad, Man to Man, and Lunch and Learn.</i>	Milwaukee. Website (414) 562-2929
UMOS	Fatherhood/Parenting Economic Stability	UMOS provides workforce development services and male involvement support through Migrant and Seasonal Head Start Centers.	Milwaukee. Website (414) 389-6000
Wisconsin Department of Corrections (DOC)	Incarceration/Reentry	Wisconsin DOC offers the pre- and post-release program <i>Windows to Work</i> . Eligible participants are enrolled 3-9 months prior to release and can continue in the program for up to 12 months following release. DOC's Reentry Unit also manages the <i>Opening Avenues for Reentry Success</i> program. Participants are enrolled 6 months prior to release and can continue in the program for up to two years after release.	Serves the entire state. Website (608) 240-5015

Policies to Promote Responsible Fatherhood

Paternity Establishment

Establishing paternity gives a child born outside of marriage the same legal rights and privileges as a child born to married parents. Children gain access to family medical history and rights to inheritance, fathers' medical and life insurance benefits, social security and veterans' benefits, and child support. In addition, Native American children gain tribal enrollment rights.

To establish paternity in Wisconsin, unmarried parents can sign a Voluntary Paternity Acknowledgement form after the baby is born. The form is available at the hospital, local child support agencies, local register of deeds offices, and the state Vital Records Office in Madison. Parents may contact their local child support agency for genetic testing

before signing the Voluntary Paternity Acknowledgement form. If paternity is contested, the court will make a ruling about paternity. Alternatively, if the mother and father get married after a child is born, they may sign an Acknowledgment of Marital Child (Legitimation) form to establish paternity. This form is available at local child support agencies as well as at the state Vital Records Office, and gives each parent the same rights as if the parents had been married before the child was born.ⁱ

Child Custody

If unmarried or divorced parents cannot reach agreement concerning child custody or visitation, a legal order can be made through the court system. Either parent may be granted custody of the child, or both may share equally in physical custody and/or decision-making responsibilities. There is no legal connection between payment or non-payment of child support and rights to visitation.

In Wisconsin, if the parents are unable to reach a custody agreement on their own, they must meet with a mediator. If mediation does not lead to agreement, parents must ask the court to make custody decisions in the best interests of the child. The court may award joint or sole legal custody. Joint custody means that parents share equal rights to make major decisions about their children and must consult with each other. Sole legal custody means only one parent has the right to make major decisions. Joint legal custody is presumed unless there is an agreement otherwise or specific reasons for a court to grant sole custody, such as domestic violence. Physical placement refers to the time when children are in either parent's care. It is different from custody, and during physical placement parents have the right to make routine daily decisions about their children's care. Most court orders provide a placement schedule of the times the children are to spend with each parent. Placement schedules can vary from brief time with one parent and the remainder with the other to the same amount of time with each parent. ⁱⁱ

Child Support

The Federal Child Support Enforcement Program was established in 1975 as Title IV-D of the Social Security Act to locate noncustodial parents, establish paternity and establish and enforce child support orders. General services available in all states and territories include voluntary in-hospital paternity acknowledgement, genetic testing, explanation of state guidelines for determining child support orders, and review of child support orders at least every three years at the request of either parent. State child support offices are responsible for the collection and distribution of child support payments and can modify orders when appropriate. If a parent is behind in their payments, the office may use enforcement tools such as license revocation (including drivers, professional, recreational or occupational licenses), seizure of assets, property liens, passport denial, and federal and state tax refund offsets.ⁱⁱⁱ

The Wisconsin Department of Children and Families (DCF) provides child support services in Wisconsin and offers job search assistance for non-custodial parents through the W-2 Non-Custodial Parent and Children First programs.^{iv} Policy and contact information for local Child Support Agencies are available online. Go to the [website](#) or call (608) 267-3905 for more information.

The Family and Medical Leave Act

The federal Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) protects employees who have worked with the same organization for at least twelve months and worked at least 1,250 hours within the past year. It contains provisions for both fathers and mothers to take time off after the birth or adoption of a child, or during a serious illness, without fear of losing their jobs. Employees in companies with 50 or more employees are entitled to up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave, over a one-year period, to care for a new child, recuperate from a serious illness, care for a seriously ill family member, or handle issues arising from a family member's call to active military duty. The FMLA also gives employees the right to take up to 26 weeks of leave to care for a family member who is seriously injured or becomes ill while on active military duty.^v

In Wisconsin, employers with at least 50 employees must give eligible employees up to six weeks in a calendar year for the birth or adoption of a child, as well as up to two weeks in a calendar year to care for a relative or domestic partner

with a serious medical condition. In addition, employers must give eligible employees up to two weeks in a calendar year for their own serious medical condition.^{vi}

Head Start

Head Start is a federally funded school readiness program for young children from low-income families. The program, currently delivered by about 1,700 local organizations – public and private, non-profit and for-profit – provides preschoolers with comprehensive services, such as education and health screenings, with the goal of building their skills across five school readiness domains: language and literacy, cognition and general knowledge, approaches to learning, physical development and health, and social and emotional development. Head Start encourages the role of parents (both mothers and fathers) as their child's first and most important teachers. Programs build relationships with families that support positive parent-child relationships, family well-being, and connections to peers and community. Early Head Start, also managed by the federal Office of Head Start, is directed toward children up to the age of three and their parents. While the program is federally funded and managed, local agencies make decisions regarding service delivery based on the specific needs of their communities; for example, some may opt to include home-based services for families in their programs. Most states have multiple Head Start programs providing services for fathers.

To find information on Head Start programs in Wisconsin, go to this [website](#).

Policies to Promote Economic Stability

Child Care Assistance

The Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) works with states to provide support for children and their low-income families. Subsidized child care services are available to eligible families through certificates (vouchers), grants, or contracts with providers. Fathers and mothers may select a child care provider that satisfies applicable state and local requirements, including basic health and safety requirements.^{vii}

Wisconsin Shares, the state's Child Care Subsidy Program, provides child care assistance for low-income working families. Parents, foster parents, relatives, and persons acting in place of a parent, who meet income requirements are eligible for child care subsidy if they need child care to participate in the following activities: 1) employment, 2) high school (if parent is under 20 years old), 3) approved employment skills training while employed, 4) FoodShare Employment and Training (FSET) work search or work experience activities, or 5) Wisconsin Works (W-2) activities. Qualifying families must choose a child care provider that is regulated and participating in the YoungStar quality rating and improvement system. The family's income and size determines the amount of assistance they receive.^{viii}

Rental Assistance

The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) provides rental assistance to low-income families and individuals through a number of methods. HUD subsidizes privately owned apartments, allowing low-income tenants to rent them at reduced rates. In the Public Housing program, local housing agencies manage rental housing for low-income tenants, while HUD provides professional and technical assistance in their planning, development, and management. The Housing Choice Voucher Program, better known as Section 8, provides eligible families and individuals with vouchers that they can use to pay for all or part of the rent at housing units of their choice. Generally, eligibility for the HUD rental assistance programs is based on annual gross income, assets, family size, and other considerations such as elderly or disabled status. Local housing agencies generally set the fixed eligibility rules for their regions, determine assistance amounts, and manage waiting lists for assistance.^{ix}

Wisconsin has no additional state provisions for rental assistance.

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly the Food Stamp program, provides low-income individuals (both men and women) and families with funds delivered in an electronic benefit transfer card, or EBT card)

that can be used to purchase food. SNAP is administered within the Department of Agriculture's Food and Nutrition Services and is federally funded, but applications, delivery, and outreach are handled at the state or local level. In general, individuals and households are eligible to receive SNAP if they have less than \$2,250 in countable resources and earn less than 130 percent of the poverty line in gross monthly income. However, characteristics of recipients (for example, age or disabled status) can affect eligibility requirements, and states have flexibility in determining eligibility, particularly with regard to what is considered a countable resource. In 2014, the average monthly SNAP benefit per individual was \$125.35.^x

In Wisconsin, SNAP is called FoodShare Wisconsin. Individuals and families may see if they might be eligible and apply for benefits online.^{xi} Applicants must complete an interview by phone or in person to receive benefits, and will be notified of the application status within 30 days after the agency receives the application. Everyone receiving FoodShare benefits must be registered for work unless an individual meets exemption criteria. Additionally, Wisconsin provides Priority FoodShare services for eligible applicants within seven days of applying.^{xii}

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)

The Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program grants federal funds to states for developing and implementing their own welfare programs that provide assistance and work opportunities to needy families.

The Wisconsin Department of Children and Families operates the state's TANF program, which is known as Wisconsin Works (W-2). W-2 provides employment preparation services, case management and cash assistance to eligible families, including non-custodial parents (as described in the Child Support section). These services are subdivided into four placements: Community Service Jobs (CSJ), for individuals lacking the basic skills needed to function in a regular job environment; W-2 Transition (W-2 T), for individuals facing employment barriers; Caretaker of an Infant (CMC), for custodial parents of infants younger than 8 weeks of age; and At-Risk Pregnancy (ARP), for mothers in the third trimester of pregnancy who have a medically verified at-risk pregnancy.^{xiii}

Other Helpful Resources

Wisconsin Fathers for Children and Families

WFCF operates a telephone helpline, publishes "Today's Dads" newsletter, and supports the role of responsible fathers in the raising of children. In addition, they educate the public, courts, and legislators about the important role fathers play in raising children. WFCF also organizes *Fathers' Night Out* meetings, which provide networking opportunities and support for fathers. For information about available services, visit the [website](#).

References

ⁱ For more information on Paternity Establishment in Wisconsin, see <http://dcf.wi.gov/bcs/paternity/default.htm>

ⁱⁱ For more information on Child Custody in Wisconsin, visit <http://www.wisbar.org/forPublic/INeedInformation/Pages/Child-Support-Residential-Custody-Placement.aspx>

ⁱⁱⁱ For more information on the federal Office of Child Support Enforcement, see www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/css.

^{iv} For more information on DCF's non-custodial parent services, see <http://dcf.wisconsin.gov/w2/ncp.htm>.

^v For more information on the Family and Medical leave Act, see <http://www.dol.gov/whd/regs/compliance/whdfs28.pdf>.

^{vi} For more information on the Family and Medical Leave Act in Wisconsin, see http://dwd.wisconsin.gov/er/family_and_medical_leave/default.htm

^{vii} For more information on the Child Care and Development Fund, see <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/occ/about/what-we-do>.

^{viii} For more information on Wisconsin Shares, see <http://dcf.wisconsin.gov/childcare/wishares/eligibility.htm>.

^{ix} For more information on Rental Assistance, see http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD?src=/topics/rental_assistance.

^x For more information on SNAP and to find services in your state, see <http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/apply>.



^{xi} For information on determining eligibility for FoodShare Wisconsin, see <https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/foodshare/eligibility.htm>

^{xii} For more information on FoodShare Wisconsin, see <https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/foodshare/index.htm>.

^{xiii} For more information on Wisconsin Works, see <http://dcf.wisconsin.gov/w2/wisworks.htm>.