

Hello, my name is Robin Fuehrer and I am the director of Community Church Child Care, a new daycare program here in Bismarck.

It's interesting that I am here speaking to you about how we can bring more people and resources to the field of early childhood education, because, I am, yet again, in the middle of a hiring process this week. My previous hiring phase was 6 months ago- I had over 100 applicants, was in contact with 68 of them, managed to schedule interviews with a dozen or so, had 6 of them no show the interview, hired 4 and had 2 of those no show either the background check or their first day of work. Of the two left one is still with me and the other has moved on to another daycare program. So, yes, I would say the field is in need of some major support!

There are so many things that I would love to speak to but in order to keep things short I will talk briefly today about three things. The importance of the early childhood period. The need for more and better qualified teachers. And, lastly, an overview of how we used grant funds in our program last year, and the needs we face this coming year.

90% of Brain Growth Happens Before Kindergarten

At birth, the average baby's brain is about a quarter of the size of the average adult brain. Incredibly, it doubles in size in the first year. It keeps growing to about 80% of adult size by age 3 and 90% – nearly full grown – by age 5. If you have been hearing anything about early childhood lately you like are familiar with this information. I wanted to point out a little bit about where a child in daycare spends most of that brain developing time. Of the 168 hours in a week a little more than half are spent sleeping, leaving about 84 awake hours. In our program a child in full-time care will spend likely 50 hours a week, 10 hours a day, in care. That leaves about 34 hours of awake time with family or in other activities. That means that many children will spend the majority of their awake, brain developing hours in a daycare program- where one on one time is almost nonexistent and ratios are often pushed to the max to maximize dollars. If we want to make an impact on future test scores, executive functioning skills and emotional regulation skills we must lay the best foundation possible in the earliest years- before children are even old enough for pre-school!

In order to have maximum impact on these most important earliest years we must have more and better qualified people working with these children. The current climate of early childhood is one of low pay, little to no benefits and very high turn over. Sounds like just the job you're looking for right? Sounds like the kind of job you would encourage your children and grand children to pursue, right? It is, arguably, one of the most vital careers to lay the foundation for our future society, and it is considered, by many, an entry level position at best. We must put resources into elevating this field. And, as a director, I am at a loss as to how to do this. I am in a unique situation for a program and so funds are more available to pay my teachers better but I am still in competition with fast food restaurants for starting pay. We need your help.

Lastly, I want to thank you for all of the support and funds that have been coming our way already. I can't imagine what our program would be like without that support! I want to focus specifically on the inclusion support that we have received. We are a program with a little over 40 students enrolled (we could go to 76 if staffing and remodeling costs weren't a factor but I digress) and of those children, 15 have special needs. I don't know if this is higher than most, or an accurate representation of programs statewide. The inclusion grants have helped us to have teachers who are specifically focused on our children with special needs. They are able to take the children individually and in small groups to work on executive function and regulation skills so the children can reach their fullest potential while in a classroom setting. There have been other grants that helped with adaptive equipment and materials, and although those are greatly appreciated, these materials get left unused without staffing to help implement them. This year's inclusion grant is less than the last, so I have decisions to make about how best to continue helping our kids with special needs while also having a financially stable program.

What our children need to be successful as they enter school and eventually the workforce is meaningful human connection with adults who are well trained, who know they are doing valuable work, and most importantly who deeply care for the children in their care and believe that they can make a lasting difference in a child's life. Thank you.