

Young Children Are Counting On Their Communities and Its Leaders

One of the biggest challenges child care professionals face is educating the public about the VALUE of the work we do. This year during Week of the Young Child and especially on Worthy Wage Day is the year to **SHOW** them. Rhetoric about the value of early care and education comes cheap and easy, but the practice does not. Introducing:

The Child Care Job Shadow • • • • •

What is a Job Shadow?

All around the country child care professionals will be inviting local leaders into all kinds of early childhood programs to experience the demands and responsibilities of working with young children. The Chamber of Commerce calls it a "Job Shadow" when they invite high school students to spend time "shadowing" a local professional. The purpose of a Child Care Job Shadow is to educate local leaders about the importance of quality care and education for young children, and to emphasize the role of training and skill in maintaining quality programs. In 1994 the Michigan Worthy Wage Campaign tried this out during Week of the Young Child and met with great success.

Why a Job Shadow? Shadowing an early childhood professional is sure to be an eye-opener to many who may be in a position to provide needed resources or influence policy. In some cases, it could also gain important media attention and becomes a public education tool: After the "guest's" shift with children, the press is invited to watch as they receive a mock "paycheck"—for the amount they would have earned as the staff member or provider they were shadowing—and to share their experience of the day!

Step by Step...

- I. **The Decision.** Deciding to conduct a Child Care Job Shadow can be made at an individual program level, but it could also become a "group effort". Seek out your colleagues, set up a committee within your local affiliate or engage a support group. Identify programs who are willing to participate.
- II. **The Choice.** Spending time in a child care setting is not going to be the top priority for a decision maker, unless you help to make it a priority. Begin with a wish list of folks you could invite:
 - Business leaders
 - Labor leaders
 - Influential people
 - Leaders in Service Organizations
 - Elected officials
 - Sports celebrities
 - News personalities
 - EC Program sponsors...

- III. **The Invitation.** Many of the people on your list may have busy schedules; you need to approach them NOW. You may want to check out their willingness to participate first with a personal phone call, followed up by a formal invitation (a sample invitation follows). If he or she is not available on Worthy Wage Day, ask for another time during the Week of the Young Child. **In order for this to be a statewide action, we need as many as possible to be on the same day: April 27!** This is what will bring media attention to the event. The invitation could be hand-delivered with some children from your program or adorned with some children's artwork.
- IV. **Inform the Media.** Ask the invitee if he or she has a public relations person with whom you should be dealing. You need to have the most up-to-date information on Worthy Wage Day activities, as well as statistical data for our state. Call WECA for this information if you need it. In addition to working with the invitee's press person, you can call on all of your contacts in the media to alert them to this event... or perhaps you have a WOYC publicity committee to work with... No media is too small or too large! A sample press release will be given to all AEYC affiliate reps on the WECA Board or you can call WECA to receive a copy.
- V. **The Job Shadow Day.** In your invitation and prior discussions, decide how much time the "shadow" will be with you. Encourage him or her to spend as much time as possible—a day would be great, but at least a couple of hours. You might advise that dress be casual—in case a toilet overflows, or some noses are runny that day. Encourage the guest to be ready to participate and have fun, and to talk with other staff, parents, and children. If you have some of the guest's employees as parents at the center, you might invite them to come to lunch to discuss the importance of consistent and quality care for their children. We don't want to bombard the guest with negativism; but we do want some realistic information to be exchanged. Don't forget to take pictures!
- VI. **Information to be Shared.** You should have a packet of information for the guest to have on hand during the day, as well as to take back to work with him or her. This information should have some statistics about your program, a profile of the staff, feedback from parents as to their need for children to be in good care while they are working, and any other relevant information. You might also prepare a ceremonial check for the time worked to be presented at the end of "their shift", to graphically illustrate how low the wages are!

Job Shadow

VII. **The Follow-Up.** Be sure to send a thank you note for his or her participation IMMEDIATELY! Again, this is a nice place to add some work from the children. Contact and thank any of the reporters who may have picked up on your story, too. This is a great way to publicize your center while celebrating Worthy Wage Day.

Be sure to let [redacted] know in advance if you will have a job shadow day! It will be important for our media efforts!

[This information was adapted and reprinted with permission from "Worthy Wage Tool Kit," produced by the Michigan Worthy Wage Coalition, copyright 1994. To order a complete copy of the "Tool Kit," call 1-800-LR-WORTHY.]



Sample Letter

Sample invitation letter. Please personalize and change this letter to fit your needs. A letter may come from a group (as this one does) or directly from a program.

Dear Mayor [redacted],

We represent a group of local citizens who care deeply about the quality of care and education for young children in our city. High quality programs are essential not only to the health of children and families, but also to the prosperity and well-being of the entire community.

Despite the importance of skilled and stable teachers and family child care providers for children's healthy development, our child care system is plagued by low wages and chronic turnover of staff. This crisis has given rise to the national Worthy Wage Campaign, a volunteer effort to raise awareness about the importance of high quality programs and to advocate for a new system that does not ignore the economic needs of qualified teachers and providers.

Therefore, in recognition of the dedication and skill provided daily by the early childhood teachers and caregivers in our city, we are conducting a "Child Care Job Shadow" on April 27, 1995. A job shadow is when local child care businesses open their doors to community members for the purpose of educating them about their work. Spending even a few hours working along side a skilled teacher or caregiver is evidence enough that the demands and responsibilities of working with young children deserve a worthy wage.

We are inviting you to participate by spending some of your time working in a child care center or family child care home on that day. Afterwards, we will invite the local press to attend a ceremony in which you will be presented with a "check" for the amount you would earn as a qualified early childhood teacher or provider in our community. We also hope you will sign the Worthy Wage Principles.

We hope you will make a commitment to join other local leaders by participating in our "worthy wage job shadow" on April 27. We will be calling in one week to schedule your participation. We look forward to talking with you then, and to answering any questions you may have.

Sincerely,

_____ and _____

Co-chairs of the Dane County Association for the Education of Young Children



Creative Learning Preschool
27 East Main Street
Madison, WI 53703

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Pay to the order of

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Child Care Professionals Working for Change

For