

Host, Monica

From: OmaVic McMurray [omavic@me.com]
Sent: Thursday, January 14, 2016 12:12 PM
To: Host, Monica; Del Moral, Varinia
Cc: Oma Vic
Subject: a few burning thoughts

Hi Monica and Varinia,

It was good to see you two.

Monica, I appreciated your telling the history, I am so proud of Madison!
Also explaining how things work...

Varinia, it was good to hear about the access to child care.
Do you have the income guidelines for me to share with a few families I know?

After we met last summer I thought about what keeps low income families from getting into Bridges.

Here are some ideas to take down the current barriers:

1) Paying upfront, like private pay families do, even if that first payment has to be marked as a separate funding source such as a 'one time' transitional payment.

I know you did (do?) something like this at one time. Since Varinia didn't mention it I assume not. It is an important piece. The greatest heartache in the FCC business has been collecting fees for services already provided from low income families. Who wants to play Scrooge? In addition to 'shaking down' poor families to pay up the loss of a 'continual relationship' is almost guaranteed when families leave owing money. Most children who attend Bridges come back to visit after they leave, nurturing a sense of belonging in the greater community (I think this is a common practice in family child care, it is a 'childhood touchstone', and very important in developing a sense of adulthood responsibility. When a family leaves with payments due they usually don't stay in contact, bad feelings are had... I understand the ways of the City budget is to pay for services after the fact but am wondering if there could be some money set aside to pay up front.

2) Providing payment through a fair notice of 'Dis-enrollment'. For me, I have stabilized my program by requiring a 90 day termination notice.

On the other side of the enrollment is parents giving a fair notice for the child to leave the program so the provider can fill the spot. Currently private pay families give a 3 month notice. Even though these days it doesn't take much to fill a spot it wasn't long ago I needed the 90 day notice to do it (and there are times of the year I still may, such as after school starts in Sept.), I found out during the great recession that everything shifts significantly with the economy and families find that child care expenses are easy to cut back when you dis-enroll from a regulated program and resort to family, friends, and neighbors. As you know, families in poverty often have a lot more changes in their lives that effect enrollment (eviction, family dynamic shifts, job loss...). Providing care for low income families is like building a revolving door in the center. Not only is there significant loss in the broken relationships that the child/ren have with each other and families the staff but this leaves some 'spots' unfilled and the program with a financial burden. If there were strategies in place to support the provider from experiencing the financial loss from the 'revolving door when providing child care to often unstable families' this would shift everything. Perhaps families coming into the city funding could be matched with the accredited programs that have an opening, when it makes sense logistically. I use to reserve a space for a teenage mom but stopped that practice due to the financial loss I could no longer endure while trying to pay my staff a City of Madison living wage as well as a humane benefit package for days off and financial support for health care/ retirement... I miss having a diverse group, I like what we all learn from each other but unfortunately at the same time I am committed to paying my staff a wage that keeps them at Bridges. Making a commitment to have access to accredited care means creating policies that stabilize the children who are being supported by reflecting business practice that works in the private sector*.

*After being a part of WI Child Care Providers Together AFSCME I do know that doing this would also mean that you would have to protect the city funds by requiring that the providers show proof that the spot is empty for the period payment is being

requested. Perhaps they could submit their attendance sheet (unless this challenges privacy issues though Bridges has policies that give permission for such a transaction).

3) By removing the emotional conversations around payments, through support from the City, it allows an intentional conversation to be had.

Creating a process to engage the family in developing values for universal child development practices, such as those in the United Nations Universal Rights of the Child (it is a sustainable childhood lifestyle: being safe, respected, challenged developmentally, ...). This is a critical piece in high quality child care (I know my previous words of 'accountability' rankles the compassionate side of us so I'm trying to find another tone). As you know, there are many ways to do this, the main idea is to create an intentional coalition between families and our community for our children.

For example:

a 'one on one' conversation at the City when the family is getting funding could be one step that helps the parent understand how important it is to provide consistent experiences for their child and that is why the City is doing this.

The 2nd step would involve the child care program and the family in a formally recognized process, introducing topics, that nurture the relationship with the family and program with the goal of supporting continuity... in the child's life. ~I do understand that by being accredited we should do this naturally but it seems that a dialogue is needed, so we are all on the same page, that we are trying to stabilize children's lives in these turbulent times.

a potential topic:

The constant interruptions of cell phones, plan changes, policy shifts... is having a huge toll on us as a society. I think too many children are learning through experience to 'not care' because things change so rapidly after a phone call...

another potential topic:

The passive interaction children experience with technology is conditioning them to not actively participate in life. We may not see this with the toddler but it is a common complaint from observers about school agers.

I believe it is our job to get families on the 'same page', not culturally but in terms of raising their child to be a contributing member of our community. Just like the first years in brain development is so critical, parenting development is critical.

4) Finally, ensuring the full cost of copayments are made to meet the program tuition rate.

Perhaps the first month is paid by the city with the family still being responsible to pay their share within 30 days.

When I hear that child care is expensive, that my program is 'so expensive', and worthy wages are good *but* we have to provide access to low income families... what I am hearing is that we need to subsidize low income families.

I did that.

I did that for about 30 years, now my body is slowing down and I *need* help from paid coworkers.

Also, another layer of our 'job description' landed in the 'child care industry' lap without truly recognizing the cost.

As you know, in our attempt to advocate for quality child care we zoomed in on the revolutionary knowledge of brain development as a tool to advocate for more funding. Now, in addition to the body care of our group of children, and nurturing each child's spirit we also provide an education that we are being encouraged to formalize, with great intention (which I support) through all that we learn from classes and conferences such as launching into literacy. Portfolios and circle time and parent communication... all good but somehow this got added to the backs of the workforce without any significant funding for it. 10 years ago my program charged \$67.50 per day. Today, I have my first family enrolled at what actually costs them \$75.39 per day, \$1200 per month, when vacation and holidays are factored in. Bridges projected income for 2016 is \$112680.00. 10 years ago I ran my program on an average of 110 hours a week. For the past 8 years it never runs with less than 125 hours of labor and efficiency is our mantra.

So how does that translate?

A living wage of 12.45 + ~10% employer tax = \$13.70 per hour wages x 125 hours per week = \$1712.50 x 52 weeks = \$89,050.00 which leaves me with \$23,630.00 to pay for program expenses, business insurance, IRS formulated business use of my home, utilities... it's tight, real tight. Needless to say I personally don't earn as much as my coworkers but I do enjoy the benefits of lowered housing costs, Obamacare and United Way's Health connect program. These personal benefits make it work for me. I can't subsidize low income families because 'the industry' is already forcing us to subsidize the children's education and that's enough. Those in the ECE field that don't directly work with children but are in positions to help raise funds need to advocate (I know many folks do) to financially stabilize our programs by recognizing the true time that it takes to provide quality child care and by supporting programs that pay a living wage and humane benefits to the staff. I believe they could help us raise some of our own funding by utilizing their non profit status and administrative staff to link us to the organizations we are in, the standards we meet, the success we have and the need to raise funds. There are many alumni families that we could

tap into to help defer costs. It starts with calling what the true cost is and then raising the funds to reach the goal. I get the feeling when asking Satelite, and WECA, to create such an entity for those of us in Family Child Care that they see it as competition for the funds they need to raise.

BTW We are not there yet, I hope the living wage goes up to \$15 per hour.

~if I won last nights lottery I would have donated money to both Satelite and WECA ~and about 20 other non profits favorites.

I'd like to check in before the meeting, reflect on your feedback so I can take time to hone this some more...

Thanks again for coming last night, it was my favorite part of the evening. I think everything else (except naming the new director) has already been said in emails and being that the meal was \$20 I didn't bring my staff, or buy myself dinner, so I missed out on the socialization piece. I wish it would have been a potluck so we could all afford to go.

In peace,
and with great Hope for a world-wide Joyful New Year!

OmaVic McMurray