

NEWS from the North Dakota Department of Human Services

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Program Expands to Help More Early Childhood Service Providers Who Care for Children with Special Needs

BISMARCK, N.D. – Licensed early childhood service providers who care for children with special needs can now benefit from additional support and resources for their programs through an expanded Inclusion Support Program offered by the N.D. Department of Human Services. The program assists both home and center-based providers in creating and maintaining an inclusive environment that allows children with disabilities or developmental delays to learn, grow, play, and develop alongside their peers in a natural setting.

“Building capacity for inclusive early childhood environments and providing parents of children with special needs with more child care and early educational choices is really the backbone of this program,” said Maggie Anderson, executive director of the N.D. Department of Human Services.

The Inclusion Support Program is a multi-faceted approach to increase early child care options for children with special needs ages birth through 12 years. The program makes funding available to licensed early childhood service providers for supporting staffing needs while caring for children with diverse abilities and needs. The program can also assist with funds for modifying an early childhood setting to address the health and developmental needs of children with disabilities. Modifications could include building ramps, widening doorways, or purchasing equipment or materials that support inclusive early childhood programming.

Another component of the Inclusion Support Program includes technical assistance for providers from an experienced inclusion specialist who offers educational resources, connections to community resources, on-site observations, and helpful strategies for meeting the diverse needs of children in care. The inclusion support services are offered at no cost to providers.

Early childhood service providers must be licensed by the N.D. Department of Human Services to be eligible to apply for the program. Providers also need a letter from a child’s therapist, physician, or other health care provider that outlines the need for additional supports and a care plan for each child in care with special needs.

For more information on applying for an inclusion support grant, visit www.nd.gov/dhs/services/childcare/inclusion.html or contact Jennifer Barry, early childhood services administrator with the N.D. Department of Human Services, at 701-328-2316, toll free 800-245-3736, ND Relay TTY 800-366-6888, or jlbarry@nd.gov.

Providers may also contact a Child Care Aware inclusion specialist for technical assistance at 701-934-5964 or toll free 888-223-1510.

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Anderson said the department has provided information about the grant program to about 1,320 licensed early childhood service providers in the state as well as to other partners and organizations who work with children and families.

The Inclusion Support Program was first created with funding from the 2011 Legislature and later expanded by lawmakers during the 2013 Legislative session. This expansion is part of a comprehensive effort to meet the needs of North Dakota families and early childhood service providers. Another recent effort is the implementation of *Bright & Early North Dakota*, which provides extra support and recognition to providers who achieve and maintain levels of quality in addition to licensing.

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