



**The Dream Up! Lincoln County Working Families Infrastructure Initiative is a regional workforce project designed to remove one of the most significant barriers to employment in rural Central Wisconsin: the shortage of childcare availability. The project directly supports increased labor force participation and regional economic growth by strengthening the childcare workforce pipeline, expanding provider capacity, and improving coordination between employers and working families.**

**The Issue:** Rural Wisconsin employers face a limited labor pool driven in part by a severe shortage of childcare. Analyses from the North Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission (NCWRPC) and the Wisconsin Early Childhood Landscape Estimate identify a need of at least 600 more childcare slots in Lincoln County and 700 slots in Langlade County, preventing many parents from securing reliable care needed to maintain employment. NCWRPC's 2025 Lincoln County Child Care Assessment estimates over 230 parents may have left the workforce over the past three years due to childcare shortages, representing more than \$9,000,000.00 in lost household earnings based on the county's median income of \$38,296.00. Additionally, a 2025 study by the University of Wisconsin Institute for Research on Poverty estimates that the State's childcare subsidy program, ending in June 2026, will lead to 25% of regulated providers closing their businesses, but in rural counties, like Lincoln County, the estimate is 60%.

The Dream Up! Working Families Infrastructure Initiative will address:

**Workforce Development:** Childcaring will provide instruction for the 3 non-credit courses required to become a lead teacher, training at least 30 new childcare workers in Lincoln, Langlade, and Taylor counties, strengthening the local talent pipeline.

**Small Business Growth:** Support the launch of 20 new regulated family-home childcare businesses through targeted startup assistance grants and career development, expanding entrepreneurship in rural Lincoln, Langlade, and Taylor counties.

**Capacity Expansion:** Create 200 childcare slots by recruiting and training 30 new childcare workers, increasing access for working families and reducing waitlists in Lincoln, Langlade, and Taylor counties

**Service Delivery Improvements:** Technology and equipment upgrades for Childcaring, Inc. will expand access to training and resources across 10 rural counties, with an anticipated 20% increase in student enrollment and families served.

**Systems Impact:** Deploy the 3CWI Infant Care Reservation System, incentivizing new providers, directly contributing to the creation and sustainability of new childcare businesses in Lincoln, Langlade, and Taylor counties.

**Employer Engagement:** Host regional employer roundtables serving 100 area employers. Goal: Partner with 30 employers to improve employee retention and workforce re-entry.

