



# Start Young Gap Funding Listening Sessions

July 2024

# Summary

**Two listening session focus groups** were conducted with gap funding recipients in July 2024.

During the listening sessions, families provided insights into their experiences with Start Young's Gap Funding Program that helped cover childcare costs. Many participants expressed gratitude for the assistance, which allowed them to work, pursue education, and reduce financial stress. Participants highlighted the impact on affording quality daycare, purchasing vehicles, securing housing, and paying bills.

Participants generally favored Start Young's Gap Funding process over the Kansas Department of Children and Families (DCF) government's, citing a more streamlined, efficient, and flexible application process that allowed for more personalized support.

Overall, the gap funding enabled parents, especially single mothers, to achieve their goals and provide better opportunities for their children. Continued advocacy efforts were encouraged to increase childcare accessibility and support for families in need.

# Question 1:

Who would you describe as providing the Gap Funding (Start Young, Family Conservancy, etc.)?

# Question 1: Who Provides Gap Funding?

Most families believe that Gap Funding was provided by organizations like the Family Conservancy, individual donors, and state assistance programs. Responders often mentioned using a combination of various program to cover their overall costs.

# Question 2:

- How did the Gap Funding impact you and your family?
  - What worked well? Why?
  - What could have been better? Why?

# Question 2: Gap Funding Impact

Overall, the gap funding had a **transformative impact** by providing **crucial financial support to families**, enabling them to **access quality childcare** and **improve their living situations** while pursuing work and education opportunities.

Favorable themes that were most mentioned included:

## 1. **Affordability of Childcare**

- Gap funding helped low-income families afford quality childcare and daycare, allowing parents to work or pursue education.

## 2. **Reducing Financial Stress**

- In addition to covering childcare costs, the funding assisted with other expenses like transportation, housing, and saving money for children's futures.

## 3. **Improving Quality of Life**

- By alleviating financial burdens, gap funding allowed parents to have more personal time, reducing stress and improving mental health.

## 4. **Accessibility and Communication**

- An overwhelming majority of respondents found the application process straightforward and the clear communication from the organizations was appreciated.

# Question 2: Gap Funding Impact (cont'd)

## Relevant Quotes

- *"It has been very helpful for me to come across this program due financially be responsible for people, me and my three children."*
- *"[It] helped me move from a domestic violence situation into safe housing... So I've had a lot of great experiences with that funding."*
- *"[Start Young] helped me a lot, because the state was only paying a little bit of the daycare. The Gap Funding allowed for my kids to stay in daycare while I had just started my new job. It was really helpful."*
- *"Start Young was very, very efficient. They were very helpful. very resourceful. Wonderful."*
- *"Gap Funding helped me keep my son at daycare while I was studying for my nursing board exam."*

# Question 3:

- Explain the Start Young Gap Funding application process experience
  - What worked well? Why?
  - What could have been better? Why?



# Question 3: Gap Funding Application Process

Parents overwhelmingly praised the Start Young Gap Funding application as straightforward and easy compared to other assistance programs. Little to no critical feedback was provided. Parents cited the **streamlined funding process** and **clear, responsive communication** as making the Start Young program much easier as compared to other assistance programs.

## Relevant Quotes

- *"The gap funding process was very easy and it was not as long at all...it was nice to be able to talk to someone."*
- *"It was really helpful. It was really, it was quick and easy."*
- *"This program has been life changing. I'm so grateful for it."*

# Question 4:

- Explain the overall experience of the DCF application process experience
  - What worked well? Why?
  - What could have been better? Why?

# Question 4: DCF Application Process

Parents generally described the DCF application process as **difficult** and **convoluted**.

Challenges spanned various themes including:

1. Length and complexity of application
2. Unreasonable/obstructive requirements to qualify for assistance
3. Lack of clear guidance/instruction when applying

In summary, the DCF application process was seen as comprehensive but arduous, requiring substantial documentation and meeting specific eligibility criteria. While some found the communication efficient, others struggled with the length and complexity of the application itself.

# Question 4: DCF Application Process (cont'd)

## Relevant Quotes

- *"It was next to impossible to actually get a hold of somebody [from DCF], even if you have questions or don't understand. For someone who doesn't have any family in the area, it was quite hard to fill out the application and actually understand it all and know if I was doing it right. There was a couple of times I was denied because I had done it wrong."*
- *"The DCF process is a long, long application. I'm not gonna say that it's short."*
- *"I had a lot of frustration with DCF. So on top of the [DCF] application being wrong, and why gap funding was so essential, is because we had it and then something happened and then paperwork was lost on their end and and then I had to reapply. Then they said that my daughter was born out the country even though she was born in Missouri. So it was just a really big headache. So once again - I'm grateful for the gap funding and it was always like you [Start Young] would swoop in and be like okay, let's figure out what's going on. Let's see how we can help with communication. But yeah, DCF has definitely been a headache."*

# Question 5:

- Explain the communication you received when applying for and receiving the Gap Funding

# Question 5: Gap Funding Communication

Parents generally had a **favorable experience** with application and payment communication for the Gap Funding.

Themes where affirming feedback was given included:

1. Efficient and personalized communication
2. Helpful program staff
3. Streamlined Application Process

A small amount of adjusting feedback was given regarding the Gap Funding application status updates and the payment distribution process. Generally, the Start Young Gap Funding program had far greater reception in providing efficient communication and support to guide families through the application successfully as compared to DCF. Communication via email, call, and text worked for an overwhelming majority of participants.

# Question 5: Gap Funding Communication (cont'd)

## Relevant Quote(s)

- *"Communication was quick and efficient, with regular updates and information sharing."*
- *"Miss Crystal and Christina were the ones that were involved in my process...They were very helpful, very resourceful."*
- *"The application was straightforward with simple questions, and processing was fast."*
- *"Program was fast-tracked, with signatures and paperwork completed within a few days."*
- *"Easy-to-fill-out application form with simple questions."*
- *"Communication could have been better after filling out the application to see if I was approved. I feel like it was a window of time where no one got back to me letting me know if I was approved or not and when/where the money was. Also, [it was] unclear on how [they] would distribute payments to the agency. I had to follow-up with my child's daycare to ensure there was a payment."*

# Additional Feedback

- Parents expressed gratitude for the program, stating it was **life-changing** and a **blessing** that allowed them to **afford quality childcare while working or pursuing education**. The funding **reduced financial stress** and enabled some parents to have "me time" for **improved mental health**.
- Some suggested **extending coverage for children with late birthdays** to alleviate stress and financial burden for families. There was also a request for improved communication between the program and daycare centers.
- Participants appreciated the **lack of judgment and the support** provided by the program staff, creating a **welcoming environment**. They advocated for **continued efforts to increase childcare accessibility**, especially for low-income families and those experiencing domestic violence.
- There were calls to address systemic issues like the Kansas law requiring non-custodial parents to pay child support through the state as part of the application process, which creates barriers. **Advocacy efforts were seen as crucial for effecting policy changes.**