



## **Opening of Care 4 Kids to Families on the Wait List: A Detailed Overview for Early Care and Education Providers**

The Office of Early Childhood (OEC) is pleased to inform Early Care and Education providers that, effective immediately, we will begin to accept families from the Care 4 Kids wait list. Starting November 8<sup>th</sup>, families currently registered on the wait list are beginning to be sent letters telling them they can apply for a Care 4 Kids child care certificate. OEC and our Care 4 Kids program will work hard to determine eligibility and admit families from the wait list as quickly as possible.

### **Background and Context**

The Care 4 Kids program was closed to most new families as a result of federal requirements that increased costs of the Care 4 Kids program without increasing available funding. At the time the program closed, we stopped requiring full applications and instead registered eligible families for the Care 4 Kids wait list. Now, with a state budget in place and participation numbers lowered to an affordable and manageable level, we are able to begin enrolling a larger number of new families in the Care 4 Kids program.

### **Welcoming Families from Wait List**

OEC is now reaching out to families currently on the wait list to make them aware that they can apply for a Care 4 Kids certificate. Families on the wait list are being sent requests to apply in phases, beginning with the highest priority groups and those families who have been on the wait list longest. This priority phasing is consistent with requirements under the Care 4 Kids program regulations.

Families will receive a letter and application packet that will need to be returned to Care 4 Kids within 30 days. Families that do not return their applications by the designated due date will be removed from the wait list so we may consider other wait listed families. The 30-day time period doubles the previous minimum 15-day response time. The extended period is more family friendly, while balanced with our goal to rapidly enroll families.

In addition to the letter encouraging families to apply if they believe they are still eligible for Care 4 Kids, we will provide the following additional support to families:

#### *Awareness*

- The Care 4 Kids program will make follow-up phone reminder calls to families who are sent a letter that they can now apply to the Care 4 Kids program.
- A second reminder notice will be mailed to the families 15 days after the first letter.
- Information that the Care 4 Kids program is now open to families on the wait list will be promoted on the Care 4 Kids website and elsewhere by the state and the Care 4 Kids program.
- Recognizing some families may have moved, the Care 4 Kids team will rapidly act when mail is returned to identify the new addresses of those families, and send a new application packet with an extended deadline.

#### *Application Assistance*

- The Care 4 Kids program team is available by phone at 1-888-214-KIDS (5437). Families with questions or seeking assistance in completing an application are encouraged to call. Call support is available in English and Spanish with interpreter service for other languages available on demand.
- The Care 4 Kids program will hold “Application Help Sessions” in the evenings as needed to help parents complete the Care 4 Kids application. These help sessions will be located in communities throughout the state.
- The Care 4 Kids website will provide detailed information for families on the process to take families off the wait list.
- Through an extensive process involving family feedback, we have made the application form and process as simple and straightforward as possible.

The Care 4 Kids program will work as quickly as possible to enroll eligible families. Recognizing the time required to determine eligibility for hundreds of new families, we will ask for families’ patience as we move as fast as we can to process applications.

#### **Funding**

Of note to both families and providers, OEC intends to make maximum use of our authority under the regulations and Federal law. This means that eligible families’ certificate funding can be adjusted to begin *up to 15 days before the date at which we receive their application* (rather than once eligibility is determined). Particularly notable to families with children already in a

care setting, this means it is in families' interest to submit their Care 4 Kids application as soon as possible.

### **Going Forward**

Families on the wait list should apply once they have received the above-referenced Care 4 Kids letter informing them they may apply for the program. Families who do not receive this letter in the first phase are encouraged to call to determine their estimated place on the wait list.

At this time, new families not currently on the wait list should first register for the wait list through Care 4 Kids. Basic eligibility questions will apply to new waitlist sign-ups. Following our regulations, we will then reach out to these families to apply from the wait list priority group (and within each priority group, by length of time spent on the wait list).

The federal requirements mean that Care 4 Kids remains resource constrained in Connecticut. Unfortunately, in the near term, Care 4 Kids will not be immediately open to all eligible families. This follows the practice of most other states. The level of interest among newly eligible wait list families will determine how many families we can admit and serve, whether or not additional families beyond those on the current waitlist can be admitted, and, if so, when would that occur.

### **How can ECE Providers Help?**

OEC welcomes provider support in raising awareness about the opening of the program to those currently on the wait list. We also recognize our providers are well positioned to help families understand that (1) due to costs and funding constraints, the program is not the same as before, (2) we will admit families off the waitlist as fast as resources and eligibility determination obligations allow, and (3) that Care 4 Kids will serve fewer families but with a more generous benefit over the long-term.

As always, providers are also welcome to assist families in the complete, accurate and timely submission of their applications to Care 4 Kids.

We welcome and encourage any feedback that can help us improve the current process and make enrollment simple for families.