

Concrete Goods as a Primary Support for Washington Families

Concrete Supports means in times of need, families have access to whatever they need to handle the challenges they face, and to be successful. By helping families find and access the help they need, it can lessen parental stress and through that, lessen the risk of possible neglect or maltreatment.

Supports can come in many forms. Food to help alleviate the grocery bill. A monthly stipend to help with rising costs everywhere. It can be help finding housing or healthcare, education or counseling.

Family access to these supports is necessary to maintain security and ensure that children's daily needs are met. Unfortunately, not everyone has access to these goods or basic needs supplies when they need them. More and more families find themselves struggling to provide these basic needs as we grapple with the ongoing impacts of a global pandemic.

Intersection of Family Economic Insecurity & Child Welfare Involvement

Economic hardship and resulting parental stress impact a parent's ability to show up for their children and family. Chronic stressful conditions such as extreme poverty, living paycheck-to-paycheck, constant worry about making ends meet, can result in what scientists call "toxic stress." Research shows that if families experience at least one material hardship, the likelihood of being investigated for neglect increases nearly three times. If families experience multiple types of hardship, after experiencing no hardship, the likelihood of being investigated for physical abuse jumps to nearly four times.

Child Welfare responds to allegations of child maltreatment with CPS investigations that sometimes leads to family separation, which, in turn, can perpetuate intergenerational trauma and structural racism. This approach is inherently limited in its ability to address the root causes of child maltreatment.

"The future prosperity of any society depends on its ability to foster the health and well-being of the next generation. When a society invests wisely in children and families, the next generation will pay that back through a lifetime of productivity and responsible citizenship." -FrameWorks Institute

Concrete supports in times of need: Access to concrete supports and services that addresses a family's needs and helps minimize stress caused by challenges



"We had some families in tears when they received their grocery cards; though it doesn't seem like much, it was a huge help to our families." (Service Provider / Education Service District)

Washington State's Concrete Goods Approach

In recognizing the impact of the pandemic on families as well as the effectiveness of concrete supports in times of need, the Washington State Legislature allocated \$2 million to the Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) for the purchase and delivery of concrete goods to low-income families for SFY 2022 and SFY 2023.

The Strengthening Families Washington (SFWA) team, under the Division of Partnership, Prevention, and Services, worked with teams across DCYF to identify partners in communities that have expertise in engaging low-income families and have built trust in their communities.

CONCRETE GOODS DISPERSEMENT			
Grocery Gift Cards/ Groceries	Diapers/ Baby supplies	Cleaning Supplies	Gas Gift Cards/ Gas
	Hygiene Supplies	Gift Card – Other	Bus Pass and/or Transportation
		School/Learning Supplies	Clothes
			Rental Assistance or Temp. Housing

Most reliable **economic predictors of child welfare involvement**



(Conrad-Hiebner, 2020)

Strongest predictors of investigated neglect reports



(Slack, 2011)

"Thank you, guys, so much for the gift card. I really appreciate it - it helps me and my daughter out a lot." (Parent)

Strengthening Families Prevents Child Abuse & Neglect

Prevention of child maltreatment is possible. One example of an evidence-based prevention strategy is providing concrete goods to families in times of need to buffer parental stress and supports children's needs to be met. This approach applies one of the key ideas within the Strengthening Families Protective Factors ([Center for the Study of Social Policy](#)):



Parental Resilience: I can overcome hard times.



Knowledge of Parenting and of Child/Youth Development: I know where to go to find out about parenting skills and my child's developmental growth.



Social Connections: I have people who know and support me



Concrete Supports: I know where to turn for help.

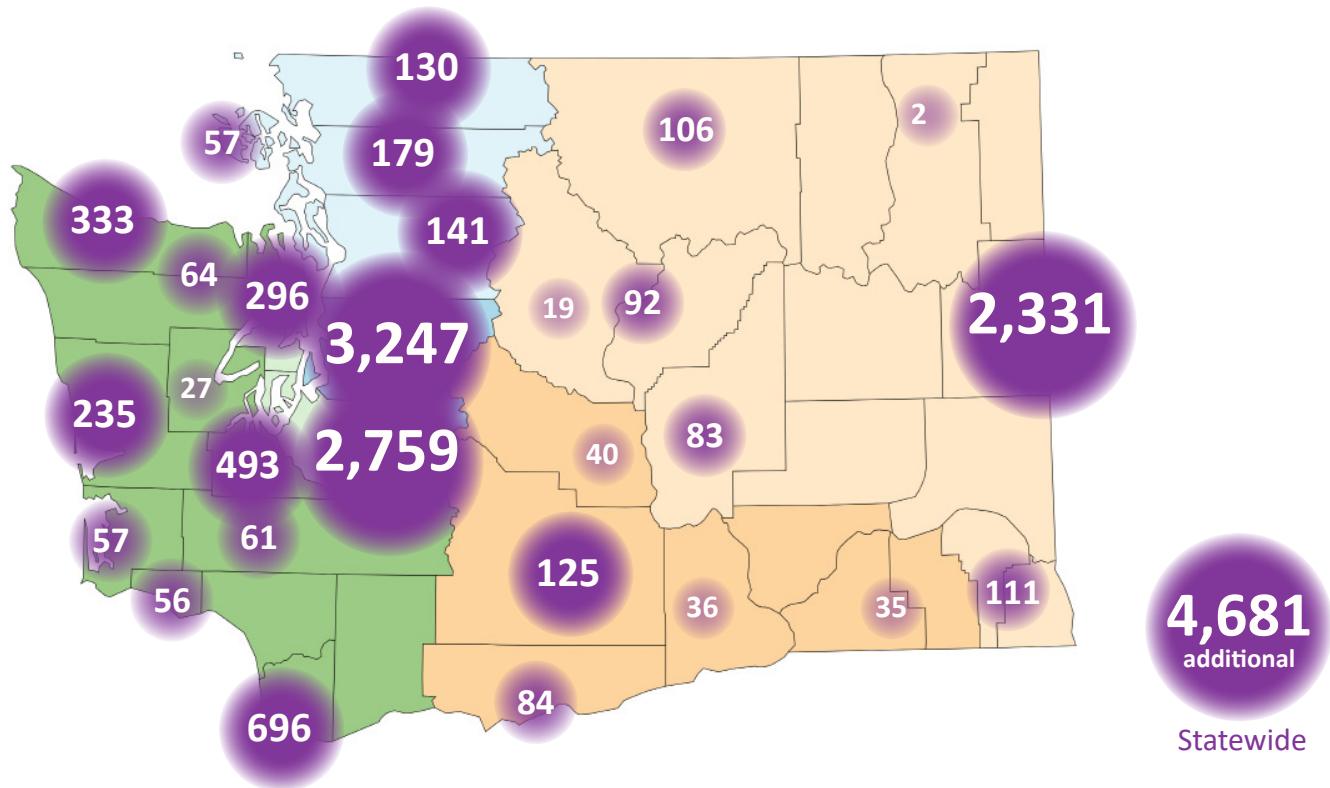


Social and Emotional Development: I know how to help my children talk about their feelings.

Engaging families, programs, and communities using these five key ideas increases family strengths, enhances child development, and reduces the likelihood of child abuse and neglect.

Number of Families Served

by 96 organizations statewide



"Thank you for brightening the day for families by providing gift cards. The recipients who received the cards were very grateful and it was wonderful to help them in such a positive way." (Service Provider | Early Learning Center)

The Impact of Concrete Goods

Nearly 100 different organizations worked to provide resources to nearly 17,000 families in SFY22. Of the \$1.9 million allocated in 120 contracts across these DCYF teams and divisions, these organizations spent more than \$1.7 million.

Some organizations that distributed concrete goods included early learning programs, family resource centers, food banks, social services organizations, places of work, diaper banks, health care centers, and crisis centers.

Citations

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