

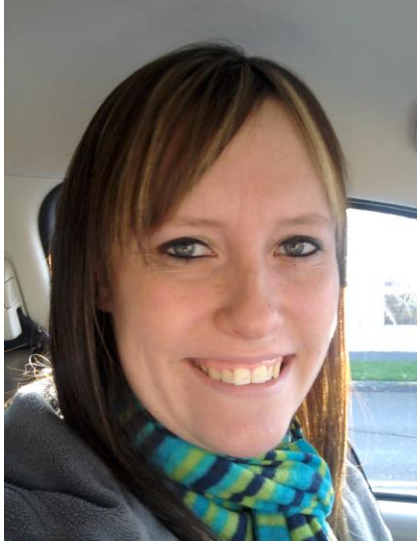
Faces of Working Connections

Written Testimony Submitted to House Health & Human Services
Appropriations Committee, January 12, 2011, 1:30 pm.

Contact: Katy Warren, 206.291.2021, katy@wsaheadstarteaceap.com

Kari Ablinger, Castlerock, WA

I grew up in extreme poverty, in a family dependent on public assistance. As the oldest of 7 children, I decided early that things would be different for me, and I have worked hard to be successful and self-sufficient.



Working Connections was a key to that self sufficiency. I received the WCCC subsidy from 2003-2007 for my two children, Trevor and Brookelyn. This program was a blessing at a critical time in our lives - I was attending community college to make life better for our family. There is no way I would have been able to continue my education without this help. As a result of that short term subsidy, I received my Associates' degree in Early Childhood Education and am now a full-time employee (Assistant Teacher) in Head Start. I am now working towards my Bachelor's degree - just one year left - and do not need extra

help for childcare. I will be the first person in my family to receive a B.A.

Working Connections enabled me to thrive - to stay off welfare, to support my family and to see a future for my children that is very different than what I grew up with. Please keep supporting working families!

Bethany, Olympia WA

I have a 4 year old son named Adam, and have been using WCCC for a few years until December when I finally got a permanent job with the state. It seemed like a miracle to finally get this good job in this economy, but now I make 80 dollars too much to be qualified for this program. I don't receive child support and am a victim of domestic violence. I don't have any family that can watch him and can barely afford to put food on the table as it is. I cannot afford full price child care and have no idea what I'm going to do when my 30 day grace period my son's daycare gave to me is up. I earn \$2016 before taxes, I pay \$100 for medical

I don't know what I'm going to do... I really needed this program and am drowning without it. Sadly, in my situation and at my income, I can't actually *afford* to work if I am to feed my son and myself and keep paying rent.

from that, my rent is \$700, my electricity is \$200, food is at least \$300, gas is about \$150 a month, and with Working Connections my child care was \$220.

With my childcare going up to \$975 a month I can't afford to make ends meet. I'm on my own and scared for my and my son's future. I work hard, set and achieve the goals I make, and it feels like I keep getting punched in the stomach. I recently had an emergency where I had to have surgery in October and now am in debt due to my medical bills. I don't know what I'm going to do... I really needed this program and am drowning without it. Sadly, in my situation and at my income, I can't actually *afford* to work if I am to feed my son and myself and keep paying rent.

Nicole Matthews, Kent, WA

Working Connections has been a literal lifesaver for my family. Without this program my life would essentially stop and I would become stuck and eventually start moving backwards which completely contradicts the progression I have made since starting my employment and education paths. I have been able to get off of

Low income families like mine depend on this small subsidy to be contributing members of the economy, make life better for their children, and know that their children are thriving in a safe and supportive environment.

TANF and do not desire to ever again receive TANF. In fact, staying out of the welfare system is one of my top priorities. Working Connections allowed me to obtain employment and I currently have held a position for almost 18 months. I have also completed a certificate program and am finishing an AAS program this quarter with the intent on obtaining a full-time job as a Paralegal as well as continuing my

education. I am a full-time student working 2 part-time jobs and I ultimately plan to obtain a BA then a Law Degree. ALL of this is only possible because I receive WCCC subsidies.

Being a severely isolated single mother of 2, it should go without saying just how difficult it is to not only stay on track with all of my education and employment but more importantly to find real quality care for my children. The care I have had for my kids has been amazing. It allows me to be successful every day because I know they are in a safe environment where they are learning, playing, enjoying their friends, receiving healthy foods & snacks and being incredibly supported by their teachers. As hard as I work to be the greatest mother I can be, I can say with complete certainty that without WCCC my children would not be excelling as much nor would they have met all of their goals on time. In fact, they have exceeded their goals early, allowing them to be better prepared for entering primary school.

I urge the committee not to cut Working Connections. We are working hard and taking the steps necessary to get off and stay off state assistance, and pulling the rug out at this point would be devastating to thousands of families.

Natasha Fecteau, Bremerton, WA

My Name is Natasha Fecteau. I have been the administrative staff for a small landscaping company in Kitsap County since 2007. I was awarded the WCCC child care subsidy in September and it has made a HUGE impact on both my 5 year old son and myself. Last year I was able to enroll him in a Head Start program for 3.5 hours a day but he had to spend the remainder of the day with me in my office. You can imagine how bored he would get and how difficult it was to accomplish my



responsibilities for work. I ended up putting a small T.V. set in one room and he spent his time "plugged in and zoned out", which affected his performance at pre-school - he now has an IEP. My boss is very understanding but on several occasions my employment was in jeopardy because of the effect on my job performance. In addition, the relationship between my son and I became strained because as a small child he didn't know why I couldn't play with him during the day or why I was constantly telling him to "wait until I'm done" he became disagreeable at home and since we were spending all but 14 hours a week together neither of us was very happy. Since receiving the subsidy I've been able to enroll him in a childcare facility where he gets lots of interaction and quality instruction, and is happy to see me at the end of the day and my boss remembers why he hired me!

My situation is unique. Most families do not have the option of taking their child with them but even if they do it doesn't mean it's a good situation. If I had not been able to receive this assistance when I did I would not have a job right now. Please, please consider all the parents that need reliable consistent childcare in order to perform their duties at work with excellence. AND consider the children that need to have the support and structured care in which they develop trust and the other important lessons of early development. I understand that money is tight right now but this is truly an investment in our future.

Anonymous Parent, Seattle WA, 37th Leg. District

I've been on WCCC since 2004 and I didn't have any problems until they did the eligibility deductions. In 2009 they went from \$3,200/ month for 3 people down to \$2,600. It cost \$400 a week for each child, which was not possible with my income, so I reduced my hours at work to maintain the subsidy. This meant that I lost health care benefits, but was able to keep my children in a safe place. We budgeted very carefully, and had no money for leisure. I feel it's very important for children to be around peers their age, rather than just with an adult. They take field trips and have good teachers. I enjoy quality care over home because it's a school atmosphere and an easy transition from daycare to school.

In December 2010, I lost my child care subsidy. I either could forfeit my position at work or lose childcare. If I didn't find someone to watch my kids, I would have had to quit my job. By the grace of God, my significant other's mother offered to help me and is watching my kid since Jan 1st. Who knows what will happen if she chooses not to do that. With the cuts, I was forced out of childcare. I value the daycare experience so I worked hard to get them in quality care. The company I'm working for is about to go bankrupt and I don't know what I will do then.

Legislators should not make it so hard for the parents that are trying to make it better for themselves and their children. I know some people take advantage, but most people don't. It's not right. The ones on public assistance are not the only low income families in Washington. Because we're working hard, it shouldn't make us not eligible. It's just another struggle.

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The income brackets for 3 person household should not be what it currently is. I don't think they calculated every day expenses that go into living. The cost of living in Seattle is really high. The numbers of income should be higher than it is. What they pay for entry level positions is not realistic for people to survive. I work to keep expenses low - \$530 rent, \$585 car and insurance, etc - but my monthly income, including my income and child support, is \$3400 - just \$200 more than I would pay to have my two children quality child care for the month. How can anyone expect to afford this?

Cambria Silva de Jesus, Kirkland WA

Consistent support from Working Connections has made it possible for Cambria to find and keep permanent, full-time work, do well to support her two kids, and be assured that her children are getting care while she's hard at work.

"I am striving every day to make a better future for my family," she says.

Over the years, Cambria worked hard to increase her hourly pay from minimum wage to \$14. But every day, Cambria, Omar and baby Sayre still struggle.

In 2009, their beloved husband and father, Carlos, died tragically in a highway accident. "I'm carrying this all by myself," says Cambria of her struggle to hold her family together.



Basic expenses are a fight day-to-day, and month-to-month, says Cambria, who bends over backwards to pull everything together from a variety of sources, including clothing bin donations, regular nonprofit assistance from Hopelink, dramatically reduced basic food stamps, and frequent trips to the food bank.

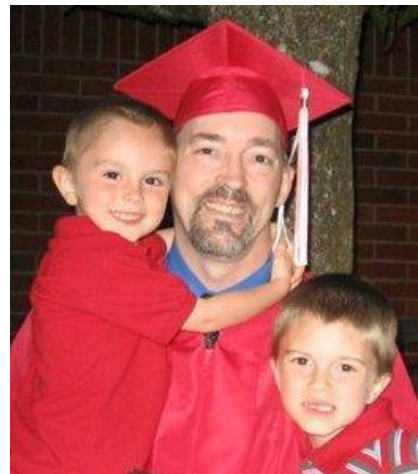
With living costs still high, and the added cost of Cambria's Working Connections co-pay doubling this year from \$104 to \$208, Cambria took a small pay cut to stay under eligibility guidelines and keep her child care for her kids.

"My daughter looks forward to going to her child care center every day," Cambria says. "She can sing all her ABCs. She can count to 10. Not a lot of two-year-olds can do that. I have been really thankful to my provider, and it's a second family for Sayre."

Cambria, Sayre, and Omar must now face the prospect of losing Working Connections, when it's something they have counted on to provide family stability and safety in the hardest of times.

James McBride, Longview WA

James was able to have his two children in quality full-time care while he worked to get his AA in Automotive Tech at Lower Columbia College. Now James has graduated, and is working part-time while looking for a full time job in a very depressed economy in Longview. He is supporting his family, and Working Connections is paying for 9 half-days of child care each month, so his younger son Xander can be in a safe and supportive place when he's not at Head Start. James relies on his relatives to take care of the kids during his job search, but he's grateful to have the support of Working Connections to enable him to work at all.



Michelle Baker, Spokane Valley, WA

Michelle Baker is a single mother of two, an 8-year old autistic son and a 5 year old daughter. On January 1st, she was eliminated from the Working Connections programs for being \$170 over income, as they decided to assume she would receive the maximum allowable for her son's SSI.

I'm just racking up a bill at the child care center and waiting for when I can get my IRS check, to buy a couple of months. I don't want to be on welfare, and never have been, but I have no idea how we're going to make it. I may have no choice."

Michelle works full time as a manager at an adult residential care home, where she has been since 2009. She goes to

work at 6:30 am and returns at 4:15, so the family needs 3 hours a day of before and after school care for her two children. Until January 1st, Michelle received Working Connections Child Care and paid a copay to make it possible to work full time and meet her work responsibilities. She has never been on TANF, and receives no other state support of any kind. She has no family support, and is currently owed more than \$25,000 in back child support, which neither the state nor she has been able to collect.

Michelle is now in an impossible situation. Her monthly take-home is around \$2450, including the SSI, of which \$800 goes to rent, \$461 to car payment, insurance, and gas, and now a minimum of \$1000 to the child care provider for before and after school care – more when there are late-start days and school vacations. This leaves less than \$200 per month to pay for food for three, clothing, incidentals, utilities, and all other expenses.

"I honestly don't know what I'm going to do," said Michelle. "At the moment I'm just racking up a bill at the child care center and waiting for when I can get my IRS check, to buy a couple of months. I don't want to be on welfare, and never have been, but I have no idea how we're going to make it. I may have no choice."

Tischa Simpson, Spokane, WA

I am a single mom of 3 kids who recently lost my subsidy for childcare. It has been a devastating loss for my family. Here is my story:

6 years ago, I became a single mom, and applied for a subsidy. At that time, all 3 of my children were in daycare full time, and there was no way that I could afford to pay the costs of daycare. I applied for WCCC and had received a subsidy until October of 2011. At that time, due to budget cuts, I was denied further coverage, as my income was over the limit by \$23. Really? Because I missed the income limit by such a small amount I am now expected to pay over \$1500 a month in childcare? My first thought was where do I find the extra funds to pay?

What has this meant for my family? My kids, now ages 10, 7, and 6 are now "latch key" kids. I leave for work in the morning, and they stay home alone before leaving the house to walk to school.



Also, they have had to leave a great learning environment where they were able to socialize with other kids their own ages. Now in the afternoon, they are watched by a private care giver, and while she is a great asset to our family, she is not the educational and social setting that the kids miss dearly.

My hope was to have the assistance of the WCCC through the summer of 2012. Then in the fall, all 3 of the kids will be in school full time, and I was going to make other arrangements for their care. I was counting the days until I could call and let WCCC know that while their assistance was greatly appreciated, I was now able to afford child care for my children, and would be happy that monies that were being paid for my assistance could help another family.

The cutbacks by the state to this program have far reaching impact. Further cuts will mean more kids are home alone when they should be in safe quality care. It will also mean that parents cut back their hours, which means less income for families. Who does this hurt? Our children. Please, before making more cuts to a program that helps so many, look at what will be lost for the little bit that might be gained.

David, Longview, WA

David's children have been through a lot. In 2010 they were taken from their drug-addicted mother by CPS and put into foster care, and in early 2011 he was granted custody of his two children, 2 and 3, and their 8 year old brother who David is in the process of adopting. David has worked hard to turn his family around and is dedicating his life to improving the lives of his children. He is 20 months clean and sober, and is using Working Connections Child Care subsidy to ensure that his children are safe and thriving while he goes to Lower Columbia College full time (19 credits this quarter) to get his Early Childhood Education AA degree. David wants to break the cycle of poverty and drug abuse for his family, and wants to use this temporary subsidy to become self-sufficient and a role model for his children and for other parents and children caught in the same situation.



Anonymous Parent, Seattle WA, 46th District

I came back to Washington State in 2008 escaping a domestic violence situation with two suit cases to help my children. I was in a shelter for a 2 year program to get on my own. I worked really hard to get on my own in less than a year. So I worked hard to be on my own. Since I've been on my own as a single parent, I have had my childcare cut for being \$12 over income. I have worked really hard

from a bad situation to remain full time employed since. I feel like I'm being punished as working poor for being a single mom. The dad gets SSI –but we don't get any child support from him. I've thought about getting a second full time job – but it would be more expensive because I will need more daycare. I can't work harder and I can't work longer, I'm kind of stuck. We go to the food bank every week as a primary source of food.

I work full time and I have to go to work and pay childcare. It's like working for childcare. They say I make too much money, but I can't pay for rent, childcare and food. I went from having help to no help over night. It's a rough situation and it's frustrating when I hear they are going to cut it back more.

From two suit cases with two kids I have climbed up from the muck of the muck. I have worked hard and legislators need to understand there is no transition or support. They need funds to transition. Allow single parents a year to wean them off rather than just cutting us off.

I don't have very many choices with childcare, I have to go with what's available and the boys and girls club is accessible. They were at a great place when we were getting assistance, at

Montessori full time. Now I just need someone to watch them before and after school so, I can go to work.

To me it feels like the cost of groceries is through the roof and child care is \$10 hr, that's more than I make. As a single mom as hard as I have worked to get out a domestic violence situation and get off assistance I feel like I'm being punished. It's a battle every day. To know everything I work for is just to make sure my kids are taken care of. I never feel like I'm going to get ahead and the feeling that I'm going to fall right back in is frustrating as a parent. The state forces us to go to work and look for work when we get assistance, but they don't provide a bridge to success. You get dropped. No support for the transition. Its sink or swim. The bottom line is, it's not fair to any of us.

Tina Neumann, Airway Heights, WA

I originally lost my job back in 2010 and had a hard time finding another job. I was doing some volunteer work at SVP and went on TANF at that time. I was offered through Career Path Service's on the job training, so I took it. I then was working and was getting job training in a 6-month administrative assistant training course. With the economy in Spokane, I still could not find a job when I completed the program. I then went back on TANF, enrolled in school and took part in the worksource program which didn't really help me at all. I took a job with a cleaning company

Because I lost my child care I had to quit my job. So now I have to go back on TANF and jump through all the same hoops again.

It's a never-ending cycle.

that had me working 5 days a week with about 30 to 40 hours. Due to company cutbacks, I was reduced to about 5 to 15 hours a week, and in the process of losing the hours, I also lost my working connections subsidy. So because I lost my child care I had to quit my job. So now I have to go back on TANF and jump through all the same hoops again. It's a never-ending cycle.

Jessica, Vancouver WA

Jessica is a single mom of one kindergartener. She recently divorced an abusive husband, and did not have much family support or understanding of the system. In the time that it took her to re-situate herself after the divorce, she lost her childcare because she got a very small raise that she thought would help her in her new role of single parent. Her raise was in cents, and put her over the limit by \$11. She tried to work out scheduling with her boss but things became so difficult for them to bend around her that they demoted her. She went from about \$16 hourly to \$11 hourly. Now she could barely pay her rent and called on friends to help with the electricity, but she was eligible for child care again. By then Jessica had suffered a huge loss of confidence and became very depressed. She had lost her hope in dealing with the system. Jessica had worked at her company for years, starting at the bottom as a teacher's aide & rising to becoming a worker in the corporate office. Now, because of the childcare issues...she went right back down to the bottom, lost work time due to child illnesses and other emergencies, and is now unemployed and starting over.