



Joe Dudek picks up his daughter from Bright Horizons Early Education & Preschool

MELINDA CLYNES | TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 27, 2018

How Detroit businesses and institutions are contributing to employee welfare with on-site childcare



Joe Dudke picks up his daughter from Bright Horizons Early Education & Preschool

Finding quality childcare and preschool can be a discouraging process for families in Detroit. This article is the third in a series that has dug into alternative childcare options for working families. Find the first article on Detroit Radical Childcare Collective [here](#) and the second article on Detroit Parent Collective [here](#).

Joe Dudek, a senior account manager at Quicken Loans, lives in Troy but works in Detroit. Dudek's wife has a professional career too; her job at GM can mean late hours.

That can be problematic when figuring out childcare for their two young kids: Jillian, who is 3, and Owen, who is 5. A childcare center close to home was never an option, as one of the parents would need to leave work in Detroit at 4:45 p.m. to battle rush hour and ensure a 6:00 p.m. pick up in Troy.

"Between my wife and I and the busy jobs we have, that's just logistically not even feasible," says Dudek.

Luckily for the couple, Quicken Loans has a childcare center, Bright Horizons Early Education & Preschool, right in the Quicken Loans One Campus Martius building. At one point, both children attended, though Owen has since moved on to kindergarten.



Joe Dudek and his daughter Jillian

Childcare located right at the workplace may be the ultimate convenience for working parents. And it's also something that businesses and institutions in Detroit have been adding to improve the wellbeing of employees and their children.

Up Woodward Avenue a few miles, Wayne State University also has two on-site childcare centers for faculty, staff, students, and community members: the Merrill Palmer Skillman Institute Early Childhood Center and the College of Education Early Childcare Center, both serving children ages 2-and-a-half to 5 years old. Even with two centers, WSU still is experiencing an overwhelming need for additional childcare.

WSU's Daycare Implementation Committee works to identify options for childcare in the Midtown area, including expanding on-site campus care. A survey done in 2014-2015 had identified a significant need for accessible, affordable childcare, particularly for infants. Faculty, staff, and students expressed interest in both full and part-time options.



**A child painting at the Merrill Palmer Skillman
Institute Early Childhood Center**

Loraleigh Keashly, associate dean of curricular and student affairs, is chair of the committee. She says that the committee continues to explore a variety of models for offering childcare. "What is clear to us is that in order to provide our community members access to affordable, flexible and high-quality care, we need to be in close connection with providers in the area and be open to exploring creative partnerships."

One such blooming partnership is with a third party childcare provider, Rainbow Child Care Center, which is preparing to open a center nearby in December. WSU students, faculty, and staff have been given priority to secure places, and several

have already done so.

Even with Rainbow and two campus childcare centers, space is in demand — and the campus centers are not equipped to provide drop-in care or emergency and sick care. Innovative options and creative partnerships will likely be part of the mix as WSU looks at options for working faculty and staff.

Cost and quality are also front and center for the Daycare Implementation Committee. "Affordability and quality of care are high priorities for our community members and thus the institution," says Keashly. "So we are also looking at ways to subsidize the costs of care to enhance affordability for our WSU community members."

Wayne State University was a forerunner in offering on-campus daycare, with the Merrill Palmer Skillman Institute Early Childhood Center established in 1922 (not officially part of WSU until 1980s). According to Anna Miller, who serves as executive director for both centers, it was one of the first "nursery schools" in the country, and a place where people would come to learn about child development.



Gardening at Merrill Palmer Skillman Institute Early Childhood Center

Merrill Palmer and its sister center across campus serve 80 to 90 children total, and parents have multiple scheduling options. Both WSU centers have waiting lists.

The Bright Horizons at One Campus Martius also has a waiting list. Although it was recently reconfigured to handle 225 children, ages 3 months through pre-kindergarten, there's still demand.

Andrew Leber, vice president of hospitality for Bedrock, is trying to address that. He says that the Rock Family of Companies is looking to expand and grow the current center at One Campus Martius and add childcare centers to sizable new developments.

"What we're finding right now is that we struggle with a tremendous amount of demand with our team members that have younger children," says Leber.

With four children himself, Leber understands first hand how tough and stressful managing schedules and getting children to and from childcare can be. "If we can

help reduce some of the friction in that process for our team members, we want to do that," says Leber. "For a parent who has a child that can take them to work, drop them off on their way, quite literally, up from the parking garage, through the elevator to a facility that in their workplace, I can't think of an easier way to help alleviate some of that stress."

Convenience and flexibility — the center has drop-in care and extended care — are hugely important factors for Dudek. Other factors that make this a comfortable choice for his family include the high-quality programming and the teachers' investment in the children.

He also appreciates the extra time he's enjoyed with his children while commuting. Time on the road can mean time to bond. "I mainly drive the kids in and take them home three days a week or more. So, to be able to have that time with them, just me and them, has been awesome."

Lastly, Dudek sees Detroit and its offering as a perk for his kids. He's taken his children to parks, festivals, food trucks, and for ice cream after work. "Just having the ability to share downtown with them, how cool it is right now," says Dudek. "Because, for me, growing up, I never had a reason to go downtown unless I was going to a baseball game."

Dudek used to work in One Campus Martius and had days where, from his home garage to the garage at Campus Martius, he wouldn't step foot outside — a welcome perk on frigid winter mornings. Today, his office is located a few buildings away.

Still, from his desk to the childcare center door it's only a six- to eight-minute walk. That proximity gives him an extra 60 minutes of work time — and a much-shortened window before he can see his daughter.

This article is part of Michigan Nightlight, a series of stories about the programs and people that positively impact the lives of Michigan kids. It is made possible with funding from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. Read more in the series [here](#).

Photos courtesy of Merrill Palmer Skillman Institute.

Read more articles by Melinda Clynes.



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