



Press Release

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SMARTSTART PUBLICLY LAUNCHES FUND TO HELP 4,000 LOCAL CHILDREN
& THEIR LOW-INCOME WORKING FAMILIES HELP PAY FOR CHILD CARE EXPENSES
250 CHILD CARE PROVIDERS TO ATTEND WAKE CARES 4 KIDS EVENT THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 21

Raleigh, N.C. – The average cost of quality child care in Wake County totals more than \$700 per month—three times the cost of tuition at a 4-year state college or university—according to the Department of Public Instruction. Approximately 4,000 low-income, working parents, are currently on a waiting list for financial assistance to help pay for child care. Eighty-five percent of Wake County families who are eligible for a portion of their child care payment to be subsidized earn less than \$25,000 annually.

“The inability for low-income working families to access and pay for quality child care is a huge issue and impacts work stability,” said **Pam Dowdy, executive director of Wake County SmartStart.** “Unfortunately, our community is not aware of the realities these families face. Many parents choose inconsistent, unregulated child care settings risking their children’s well-being in order to maintain employment and meet their families’ basic needs.”

To address this county-wide problem and help provide affordable, quality child care options for families, Wake County SmartStart will announce a new campaign, Wake Cares 4 Kids, to an audience of 250 child care providers during a 10-Year Anniversary event **Thursday, September 21, from 6:30 to 9 pm** at the **Embassy Suites in Cary.** The Wake Cares 4 Kids campaign will include the launch of a new website and public service announcements to raise awareness and generate corporate support and individual donations in support of affordable, high quality child care options for working, low-income families.

The event will also celebrate accomplishments, and focus on future challenges and goals for ensuring accessible and affordable high quality child care in Wake County, which includes expanding state funding for child care with the Wake Cares 4 Kids Fund targeting support from private sector. Jack Levine, a well-know child advocate from Florida, will deliver the keynote message to child care providers as they rally behind this new campaign. By raising more awareness and support for this issue, Wake County SmartStart plans to help provide more access to higher quality child care for a portion of 4,000 children and low-income working families waiting for financial assistance. SmartStart plans to approach employers in the coming year to support the Wake Cares 4 Kids Fund. Donations raised will be directed to child care for Wake County working families, many of whom have been waiting longer than 18 months for child care financial assistance. Providing accessible, high quality child care is already one of Wake County SmartStart’s top priorities. Currently the organization directs more than 40 percent of its 2006/2007 fiscal budget, or nearly \$8 million to support families with child care subsidies for high quality child care facilities. These funds help pay for high quality early education programs for nearly 1,500 children ages 0 to 5 across Wake County at an average cost of \$700 a child per month. For more information on local child care realities, ways to help and the Wake Cares 4 Kids Fund, go to www.wakecares4kids.org.

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As a local partner of the North Carolina Partnership for Children, **Wake County SmartStart** works with national, state and local agencies, as well as other nonprofits that serve Wake County children, ages birth to 5, and their families through vital programs. Wake County SmartStart works to improve the quality, accessibility and affordability of child care settings, provide preventive health services and support families in a variety of ways. The organization also promotes, supports, and advocates for the needs of young children living in Wake County. To obtain more information on Wake County SmartStart’s allocation of state funds and its activities with local partner agencies, visit www.wakesmartstart.org.