

The Impact of Early Learning Scholarships: Corinne's Story

"It literally changed my life," shares Corinne Martin on the impact of an Early Learning Scholarship for her family. These scholarships help families pay for quality early care and education starting at birth and continuing through kindergarten entry. Corinne and her daughter Oaklyn live in St. Louis Park, where Oaklyn attends Rise Early Learning Center and Corinne works as a Recovery Navigator at Metro State University.

A New Beginning

A Florida transplant with no family in Minnesota, Corinne struggled with addiction and the isolation of an abusive marriage. She maintained her sobriety through pregnancy but relapsed after giving birth to Oaklyn. After Child Protective Services intervened and removed Oaklyn from her care, Corinne knew that she needed support. "It was the worst thing. That was my rock bottom," she shares.

Corinne's CPS case manager introduced her to Wayside Recovery Center, where she began her recovery journey and worked to get Oaklyn back. "They helped me get Oaklyn back and then I was like, *Oh my God, I can do this on my own.*"

Corinne and Oaklyn were living in a shelter while Corinne continued her recovery and navigated the challenges of applying for social service programs for her small family. As a single parent without a car or family nearby, she felt isolated. "It's just so hard. You can't do anything. And I had no friends or family here." Staff at the shelter encouraged her to apply for an Early Learning Scholarship, and she eventually qualified and received funds to help pay for a quality child care program for Oaklyn.

Benefits of Whole-Family Support

Oaklyn now attends Rise Early Learning Center, which is a Parent Aware rated child care program co-located within an affordable housing complex in St. Louis Park. At Rise, families benefit from wrap-around support and family resource events that focus on topics like toilet training, nutrition, and emotional regulation.

When she talks about the impact of child care on Oaklyn's development, Corinne highlights social-emotional learning and awareness of her feelings. "She's a social butterfly. She loves being around other kids and it's really opened up her vocabulary," she shares. "They're helping her with emotional communication, like recognizing her big emotions and communicating them."

"It's so hard to do this on your own," Corinne shares. "So having access to non-judgmental parenting advice from people that know your daughter is so important."

Corinne recognizes the impact of the Scholarship on her relationship with Oaklyn. "I was able to take care of all the stuff that I needed to take care of. I was able to be more present with Oaklyn and value our time more."



Corinne is working toward her certification as a Licensed Alcohol and Drug Counselor through Minneapolis Community and Technical College. “(The Scholarship) just marked independence for me. The ability to enjoy my time with my daughter and be able to work and go to school.”

When reflecting on how the Early Learning Scholarship impacted her family, Corinne shares, “It opened my world up because I wasn’t able to get a job or start to go back to school. It really did save me and Oaklyn.”

By Maggie Zepp, Early Childhood Advocacy Coordinator, Think Small

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