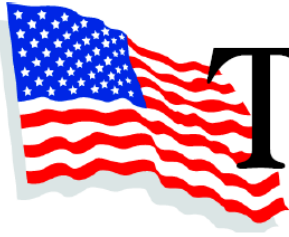


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## Ashland, Bayfield counties losing vital support for families

### ABC Family Resource Center closing today

By **SARA NEMEC**  
Staff Writer

Single-mom Nichole Geiger of Ashland is about to lose some of the support that she's relied on for more than five years to help rear her children. Starting today, Geiger and other families in Ashland and Bayfield counties will go without a community resource that has provided free assistance to them for over two decades.

The ABC Healthy Families/ABC Family Resource Center, 210 MacArthur Ave., will close its doors today due to a lack of funding. The center provided services to families including parental education and workshops, a play center, resource assistance, super-

vised visitation and access to phones and a computer.

At any given time the center was working with 25 to 35 different families in their home visit program. Per year, the center estimated that 50 to 60 area families would come to the nonprofit for various other services.

"I feel like I am losing a whole lot of support right now," Geiger said, admitting that she cried for hours after finding out the center would be closing. "I'm going to miss the caring atmosphere that they have."

Geiger said the center and its workers helped support her as a first-time parent of children with developmental disabilities. They gave her a car seat and stroller and took her to a seminar dealing with children and ADHD. When money was tight, they provided her with diapers and,

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## CENTER: Families not only ones who are grieving over loss

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at a holiday gathering, introduced her kids to Santa.

"They probably wouldn't have got to meet Santa otherwise," she said.

The center's closing is largely due to losing funding from The Children's Trust Fund, which was the source of about 80 percent of the center's funding. The CTF has financially supported 20 resource centers and 10 community response programs in Wisconsin, but has recently reduced that number to nine in the state. Now the closest site is in Hayward.

In April, the ABCHF Board of Directors made the tough decision to close after they learned they wouldn't receive funding from CTF. Executive Director Barb Christensen said the choice wasn't an easy one and said she knew it would put pressure on area families who relied on their services.

"Some of the families that we've been working with are a little frightened," Christensen said. "So, over the past couple of months we've been trying to work with people so they know what resources are still out there."

One such Ashland resident is Roxanne Bates. Bates said she's visited the center for about a year, taking advantage of parenting advice and access to a computer.

"I'm a little lost, I guess,"

Bates said about the center closing. "I depended on them. If I needed anything, I could just call and ask."

The area families aren't the only ones mourning the loss of the resource. Center staff members are also saddened by the closing, said Program Director Gayle Gonsior. But Gonsior also said the memories of the people she and her staff have helped will carry them through.

"To have people say that it's really made a difference for them is really great," Gonsior said, noting that one woman came to her years later to thank her personally. "She said to me, 'You'll never know the impact you made on my life.' She said to me, 'You saved my life.'"

Currently, the center is donating their wares to other area nonprofits and shelters. Gonsior and Christensen both said the ordeal felt bittersweet: On one hand removing items from the center makes the fact that it's closing more real. On the other hand, they said it felt good to know they were able to help other groups like themselves continue their work.

The center is selling some of its newer big-ticket items such as computers. The money from the sales will be donated to needy families, they said.

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