n 1989, Iowa established Shared Visions, a comprehensive child development program that serves children between the ages of 3 and 5. Children from families with incomes below 130 percent of the federal poverty level must fill at least 80 percent of the available program slots. The remaining 20 percent of these slots may be filled based on secondary risk factors, with parents paying a fee based on a sliding scale. Low birth weight, developmental delay, homelessness, or having a parent who is a substance abuser or incarcerated are some of the risk factors considered for eligibility. Programs may operate from 3 to 10 hours per day, because agencies that receive competitive grants structure programs to meet community needs. Since 2000, a 10 percent reduction in state funds has resulted in shorter hours of operation for some programs. Grantees—public schools, Head Start centers, child care centers, and other nonprofit agencies—increasingly rely on in-kind services and local funds for support.

State funding for Shared Visions was $6,868,353 in 2003–2004. Grantee accreditation by the National Association for the Education of Young Children, development of Early Learning Standards, and training on the ECERS-R have all contributed to Iowans’ efforts to enhance the quality of services for children and their families.