

STRATEGY SPOTLIGHTS: Strengthening Early Care and Education

STRATEGY #1: Improved Care For Infants And Toddlers

Municipal leaders can spearhead community efforts to ensure the very best care for their youngest citizens. With city support, communities can focus on improving the early care of infants and toddlers while their parents are working, in school, or in need of out-of-home services.

THE STRATEGY IN FOCUS

According to recent figures from the Urban Institute, more than 6 million American children under age three spend time in care on a regular basis. Statistics from The Children's Project paint a picture of the importance of high-quality early care:

- There are approximately 11.6 million infants and toddlers in the United States.
- Forty percent of infants and toddlers are in families living in or near poverty (10 percent live in extreme poverty).
- About a third of families enrolled in the federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program have a child two years old or younger.
- Of the 5 million children on TANF, about 600,000 are infants and toddlers.
- Almost half the states require TANF mothers with children under age one to work.
- Fifty-five percent of all mothers with children under age one work.
- Almost three-fourths of the infants and toddlers of working mothers are being cared for by someone other than their parent.
- Forty percent of these children are in centers and family child care; and 40 percent are in care full-time— for 35 hours a week or more.

There is a shortage of quality infant care across the country.

Improving the quality of early care is one of the best opportunities available for promoting the healthy growth and development of children and for helping parents succeed.

WHAT CITY LEADERS CAN DO

- **Bring the community together to discuss the needs of infants, toddlers, and their families.** Mayors and councilmembers can lead a town hall discussion of the needs of

infants and their families in the community. City leaders also can host early childhood forums, bringing together caregivers for a day of networking and sharing.

- **Promote health awareness for pregnant women, infants and toddlers.** City leaders can launch a public awareness campaign to ensure that pregnant women know the importance of regularly visiting the doctor; eating well and getting folic acid; and ceasing harmful behaviors such as alcohol use and smoking while pregnant. Other topics for public education efforts can include: the availability of free or low-cost health insurance and nutritional supports for low-income parents and children—for example, through WIC and Food Stamps; the importance of well baby visits and timely immunizations for all infants and toddlers; and early screening of children for disabilities or other developmental delays. As part of the awareness effort, cities and their partners can provide information materials on child health and development to all new parents through local hospitals and midwives, as well as new parent home visits.
- **Help caregivers make health and safety a priority.** City leaders can work with local health care providers to connect every infant and toddler program with health and mental health consultation and support. For example, in Seattle, Washington, the city has a team of nurses who serve as consultants to child care programs in the community. City leaders also can take the lead in ensuring that all child care in the community meets state and local licensing requirements and that caregivers follow the National Health and Safety Standards for Out-of-Home Care. (<http://nrc.uchsc.edu/CFOC/XMLVersion/Title.xml>) In addition, municipalities can throw a “Baby Safety Shower” for city employees or groups of residents. The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission and Gerber Products Company developed the Baby Safety Shower initiative to help good parents become even better ones.
- **Educate and engage parents.** City leaders can help parents understand how to select and monitor the quality of care for their infants and toddlers. Local child care resource and referral agencies can be invaluable partners in this effort. Community efforts to educate and engage parents should pay close attention to the cultures and languages of the families served. In Seattle, Washington, the city’s child care outreach includes liaisons for various cultural groups (African American, Hispanic, Asian American/Pacific Islander). The goals: to ensure that parents can find accessible care they are comfortable with; and to offer caregivers the support they need to provide high-quality, culturally appropriate care.
- **Strengthen provider networks.** City leaders can help create networks of support for family child care and kith and kin providers. These networks can offer training, organize a back-up system for when providers are sick or on vacation, and create a lending library of toys and books for young children.
- **Promote training for providers.** City leaders can help ensure that infant and toddler caregivers get specialized training in child development and family support. One idea is to work with local higher education institutions to offer courses in infant/toddler care and supervision. Mayors and councilmembers also can take the lead in establishing a

scholarship fund to help pay for training of infant/toddler providers—perhaps asking local businesses to sponsor providers in their neighborhoods. Another idea is to assign an infant/toddler specialist to work with providers and parents in every child care resource and referral agency. Last but not least, municipalities can work with local child care providers to raise awareness of appropriate care for children with special needs.

- **Advocate for additional resources.** Municipal leaders can be strong advocates for increased funding for, and attention to, the needs of infants and toddlers in state and federal policy. Mayors and councilmembers can speak out on issues from paid parental leave and health insurance coverage to funding for early care and education programs. Among the advocacy strategies to use: collecting stories and other information on the needs of families in the community to share with policymakers; and encouraging parents of young children to speak out about improving the quality of care and providing paid family leave.
- **Operate or fund an Early Head Start program.** Early Head Start (EHS) is a federally funded, community-based program for low-income families with infants and toddlers and pregnant women. Municipal governments are eligible to receive Early Head Start grants. For more information: Early Head Start National Resource Center, <http://www.ehsnrc.org>. Cities also can add local funding to expand Early Head Start services. For example, in Albuquerque, New Mexico, the city runs La Madrugada Early Head Start, providing early intervention programs for families with children from birth to age three.

RESOURCES

Zero To Three— Zero To Three continues to expand its programs and services. Together with professionals in the early childhood development, as well as with parents, they work to advance the field that benefits the nation's youngest children. You will be able to find everything from publications and reference guides to programs, projects and professional developmental services. For more information see: <http://www.zerotothree.org>

Early Head Start National Resource Center— The Early Head Start National Resource Center is a storehouse of early childhood expertise that promotes the building of new knowledge and the sharing of information by coordinating with the Head Start Bureau's On-line Learning collecting, and disseminating information relevant to comprehensive early childhood programs that is timely, accessible, and easy to use. For more information see: <http://www.ehsnrc.org>.

Better Baby Care Campaign— The Better Baby Care Campaign is a national initiative to encourage and support states, tribes, and local communities to promote the healthy development of babies, toddlers, and their families. Better Baby Care is a comprehensive, research-based effort to inform public policy, build public will, advance professional education, and enhance practice so that all babies and toddlers will have good health, strong families, and positive early learning experiences. For more information see: <http://www.betterbabycare.org/>.

National Child Care Information Center— The National Child Care Information Center (NCCIC), a service of the Child Care Bureau, is a national clearinghouse and technical assistance center that links parents, providers, policy-makers, researchers, and the public to early care and education information. For more information see: <http://nccic.org>.

Baby Safety Shower— A Baby Safety Shower is a learning party where all the activities revolve around home safety themes. Parents and caregivers have fun -- and leave with new ideas about keeping their babies safe at home. For more information see: <http://www.cpsc.gov/cpspub/pubs/shower/shower.html>.

STRATEGY #2: Stronger Kith And Kin Care

Roughly a third of all children who are in non-parental child care are cared for by a family member, close relative, or friends. This care is frequently referred to as “kith and kin care.” Parents choose kith and kin care for a variety of reasons. Families are more likely to turn to this type of care if they have infants or toddlers; if parents work part-time, variable or nontraditional hours; or if there are few affordable or culturally appropriate child care options nearby.

THE STRATEGY IN FOCUS

While much attention has been paid to improving the quality of center-based care, family day care, and parenting skills, the quality of kith and kin care is often overlooked. City officials can take the lead in efforts to improve kith and kin care by convening stakeholders (e.g., other child care providers, child care resource and referral agencies, libraries, and family support centers) and by offering support and training to kith and kin caregivers. Local kith and kin initiatives can be operated at a citywide level or use neighborhood institutions (e.g., child care and family support centers) as a hub.

WHAT CITY LEADERS CAN DO

- **Organize focus groups to understand the issues.** Before seeking to improve kith and kin care, it is important to understand why parents are choosing this care, what difficulties caregivers face, and what type of help they would welcome. The Alabama Kids & Kin project, run by VOICES for Alabama’s Children, organized a number of focus groups for caregivers and parents. Among the questions: What activities do you feel are important for children? Do you feel you could benefit from training? And, how would you feel about participating in a special day for relative care providers?
- **Help parents and caregivers clarify expectations.** While there are many benefits to using a relative or friend as a child care provider, this can also be a difficult situation for both the parent and the caregiver. Cities can help all parties by providing a tip sheet or resource guide for parents and/or caregivers. The materials can help people identify potentially sticky issues up front (e.g., expectations regarding time, feeding, safety, discipline, holidays, and payment) and ideas about how to address these concerns effectively.

- **Nurture networks and support groups.** Most kith and kin providers do not consider themselves child care workers and, as a result, are not a part of any professional networks. While these caregivers may feel that they do not need formal supports, several studies have documented an interest in informal networks or support groups that allow kith and kin providers to let off steam, share ideas, and get support. Meetings can take place in caregivers' homes, in a community center, or in some other comfortable space for the providers. A network of kith and kin caregivers also could take on some additional roles, such as: publishing a newsletter; coordinating a system to share toys, books or equipment; or setting up a system to provide back-up care.
- **Expand home visiting programs to cover kith and kin care.** Some communities have developed home visiting programs specifically for kith and kin providers. More often, communities have chosen to expand home visiting programs serving parents to include kith and kin caregivers. Home visitors can connect caregivers to community resources and can help them understand and address issues of child development, discipline, and health and safety within their home environment.
- **Connect providers to food assistance.** USDA's Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) can help qualifying caregivers provide healthy meals and snacks to children in their care. To ensure that providers qualify, this program includes home visits, which can provide opportunities for interaction with caregivers who may not seek out other supports or resources. City leaders can play a leading role in educating caregivers about the availability of food assistance.
- **Organize or cosponsor trainings and workshops.** City-run workshops can address issues from child development and home safety to stress management for caregivers. Workshops can be offered at a community center, at a faith-based institution, or as part of a network or support group structure. A smaller group of caregivers who are interested in becoming licensed family day care providers may also be interested in business training. For kith and kin providers who would rather not come to trainings, the materials from these workshops may be provided in a written booklet or on a video for use at home.
- **Make educational information and materials available.** Cities can provide child development curriculums or activity ideas. These materials can be translated into other languages and designed to address multicultural issues, where appropriate. Another key support that a city can provide is a lending library for books, toys, puzzles, games, and videos. This can be administered through the public library system, a kith and kin provider network, or mobile units that make the rounds to participating caregivers on a regular schedule.
- **Offer health and safety assistance to providers.** Initiatives to improve kith and kin providers' access to health and safety information can fall under the jurisdiction of a number of city agencies (e.g., the health department, fire, police). Some ideas include: providing caregivers with written information; offering free first aid kits or home safety kits; having police provide demonstrations of the proper use of child car seats; providing free smoke detectors and information on planning escape routes; offering CPR training;

and disseminating information about free and low-cost health insurance options for children.

- **Offer mini-grants and/or loans to improve the quality of care.** Community mini-grant or loan programs designed to help child care centers or family child care providers can also be applied to kith and kin caregivers. Alternatively, communities can establish a separate fund exclusively for kith and kin care. These funds can help caregivers purchase equipment and toys, make safety improvements, create outdoor play areas, and pay for child development courses.

CITY EXAMPLES

- The Minneapolis Day Care Organization, which is a part of the Minnesota Child Care Resource and Referral Network, has created a series of Neighborhood Provider Groups (NPG) for kith and kin providers. The groups meet on a regular basis and are usually peer led. Currently, there are 21 neighborhood groups within the city. These groups are networks for support and often bring in trainers to help providers meet training and licensing requirements.
- Almost half of all children in Denver, Colorado are cared for by kith or kin. In 1999, Denver began a project to target kith and kin child care homes in its efforts to improve the quality of early care and education in the city. The city created "Great Kids @ Home," a college-level certificate program offering accredited early education courses specially adapted for kith and kin care providers. Partners in the program include the Community College of Denver, the Denver Children's Museum, and the city's Department of Human Services and Office of Housing and Neighborhood Development.

RESOURCES

National Kith and Kin Child Care Initiative— The Institute for a Child Care Continuum at Bank Street College has been engaged in work with family, friends, and neighbors who provide child care for other people's children. The National Kith and Kin Child Care Initiative aims to achieve acceptance of kith and kin child care as an integral part of the child care system. For more information see: <http://www.bankstreet.edu/kithandkin/index.html>.

Better Baby Care: Promoting Family-Centered Child Care— This brochure from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Child Care Bureau discusses how family-centered child care begins with the premise that families are the center of children's lives. Programs that are family-centered reflect and respect the unique characteristics of all members of a child's family. This includes not only the child and the child's mother and father, but also all other significant adults who are involved in caring for the child. For more information see: http://www.betterbabycare.org/promoting_main.html#kith.

National Child Care Information Centers: Family, Friends, and Neighbor Resources and Organizations— Many children are now being cared for by family, friends, and neighbors in home settings. Family, friend, and neighbor care is also known as "kith and kin" care or

"informal care," as opposed to the care provided in more formal and professional center-based and family child care markets. The following is a sample of resources with information about family, friend, and neighbor (FFN) care. For more information see: <http://nccic.org/poptopics/kithandkin.html>.

Publications:

Informal Child Care: Highlights from Recent Research, National Center for Children in Poverty. The research synthesized in the report highlights some important insights into the nature and use of forms of care chosen by many families with young children. These families want flexible, reliable, affordable child care provided by caregivers who share their values and are sensitive to their children. The report reveals a consistent, growing body of research related to the usage of these forms of care and to parents' considerations when choosing it. Available at: http://www.nccp.org/pub_kkh01.html.

Child Care by Kith and Kin: Supporting Family, Friends, and Neighbors Caring for Children. A few efforts are underway to reach out to kith and kin caregivers who are not interested in becoming family child care businesses, which may be a significant proportion of those caring for children. However, as part of the series on Children and Welfare Reform, NCCP has identified a number of new and emerging strategies to engage kith and kin child care providers and the families they serve. Available at: http://www.nccp.org/pub_cwr98e.html.

STRATEGY #3: Caregiver Recruitment, Retention, and Professional Development

Many factors influence the quality of child care and early education programs, but no other factor matters more than the education and experience of early childhood providers. Recognizing this, a variety of cities, counties, and states have initiated programs to improve the quality of early childhood caregivers and teachers through investments in recruitment, wages, benefits, and professional development.

THE STRATEGY IN FOCUS

Researchers have found a critical link between the quality of children's early care and education and their development and educational growth. The research also shows that the quality of child care is directly connected to the wages, education, and retention of child care employees.

Among the biggest problems: low compensation. Child care providers are among the lowest-paid workers in the United States. Poor wages force qualified staff to leave child care jobs for higher-paying work, decreasing the quality of available care.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2005), child care workers in the United States make, on average, \$8.15 per hour. These wages are lower than the average wage for baggage porters and manicurists. Although the pay generally is very low, more education usually means higher earnings. Preschool teachers were most often employed in child daycare services (63 percent); religious organizations (9 percent), local government educational services (9 percent), and private educational services (7 percent). Median earnings for preschool teachers are \$19,270. Preschool teachers make an average

Other statistics on the early childhood workforce highlight additional challenges for caregiver recruitment, retention, and professional development efforts:

- Approximately one in four child care workers are not covered by health insurance. Benefits vary, but are minimal for most childcare workers. Many employers offer free or discounted childcare to employees. Some offer a full benefits package, including health insurance and paid vacations, but others offer no benefits at all.
- About 2 out of 5 childcare workers are self-employed; most of these are family childcare providers.
- The percent of child care workers with bachelor's degrees or higher is: 69 percent for center directors; 33 percent for center teachers; 12 percent for center assistants; and 17 percent for family child care providers.

City leaders can implement a number of strategies to boost caregiver pay, increase retention rates, and expand educational and professional development opportunities for child care employees.

WHAT CITY LEADERS CAN DO

- **Establish wage supplements and retention grants.** Publicly-funded wage supplement programs generally provide funding directly to early childhood workers or to early care and education programs that pass the benefits along to staff. Benefits are designed to increase wages above what centers (or families) could otherwise pay. Some wage supplement programs require centers to pay teachers a minimum wage to which the supplemental grants will be added to ensure that public funds are accomplishing the goal of higher wages
- **Promote public-private partnerships to improve wages.** Another strategy for helping to boost wages is to encourage businesses to make donations. These can be cash gifts or in-kind assistance, such as donated equipment and other materials, that free up other funds for child care providers to put into higher staff wages.
- **Provide access to benefits for early childhood workers.** Municipal officials can help early childhood workers gain access to key benefits, such as health insurance. Among the strategies: allowing child care providers who receive public subsidies for serving low-income children to access the health coverage offered to municipal workers; and helping to develop a network of local child care providers that can serve as an umbrella agency with combined health insurance purchasing power. In Deerfield Beach, Florida, child care teachers at the Intergenerational Child Care Center are considered city employees. As a result, they receive city health insurance and other fringe benefits, including participation in a 401(k) supported by the city.
- **Support and reward professional development.** Professional development programs can help ensure that providers have the resources and incentives to get advanced training in early childhood development and education for young children. One of the best-known programs is the Teacher Education and Compensation Helps (TEACH) model that was started in North Carolina and has spread to many states across the country. TEACH and other professional development programs provide partial funding for tuition, books, travel, and paid release time. These programs generally also link training with higher wages; as providers receive more training, they are rewarded with increased wages or bonuses.
- **Develop career ladders.** Municipal leaders can work in collaboration with community nonprofits to develop mentoring or apprenticeship programs to attract and support new workers in early childhood care and education. These strategies match experienced teachers and caregivers with new staff to encourage the transfer of accumulated wisdom and to help young caregivers develop a deep commitment to early care and education. In Austin, Texas, for example, three local agencies (the community college, the child care resource and referral agency, and the city's subsidized child care office) partner to provide a mentoring program for workers in at-risk centers. As an added incentive, many programs compensate more experienced teachers for their mentoring work.

CITY EXAMPLES

- San Francisco, California has two unique programs aimed at improving wages and increasing retention of child care workers. The first is Child Care Wages PLUS, which provides direct wage supplements to providers. The program establishes “wage floors,” set hourly wages that are linked to the education and experience of the provider. Through Child Care Wages PLUS, the city provides close to \$4 million each year to subsidize wages for workers in center-based care serving low-income children. The second San Francisco initiative is CARES (Compensation and Retention Encourage Stability). It aims to increase retention rates by offering stipends for child care professionals to pursue a bachelor’s degree. The initiative also provides mini-grants to child care professionals to design projects that improve staff retention and stabilize the child care workforce. Last but not least, “quality improvement grants” of up to \$15,000 are offered to help improve staff retention—for example, through bonuses and 401(k) plans.
- In partnership with a local junior college, San Jose, California offers a 10-month training program for family child care providers to help them obtain certification. The city subsidizes the cost of the training, with the junior college providing the curriculum and instruction. Participants must repay the costs of the training if they drop out of the program. Once providers complete the training, they receive a \$1,000 stipend and their family child care home can be designated as a “Smart Start” program.

RESOURCES

National Child Care Information Center— The center offers selected resources on the early childhood workforce. For more information see: <http://www.nccic.org/cctopics/workforc.html>.

The Center for the Child Care Workforce— The center offers research, resources, and information on training opportunities for child care professionals. The center also has a free network that provides the latest news and updates about topics affecting the lives and jobs of early care and education professionals. For more information see: <http://www.ccw.org>.

T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood Project and Health Insurance Project— The T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood Project gives scholarships to child care workers to complete course work in early childhood education and to increase their compensation. In 1990, Child Care Services Association created the Teacher Education and Compensation Helps (T.E.A.C.H.) Early Childhood® Project to address the issues of under-education, poor compensation and high turnover within the early childhood workforce. For more information see: <http://www.childcareservices.org/>.