

Child Care *Matters*



Why is child care an important issue?

Child care is an essential element for the success of our families, our businesses and our community. Parents who live in Lane County are concerned about the quality of child care and after-school activities available for their children.

- Every day, 26% of children under age 13 in Lane County – that's 13,623 children – are in regulated child care every day.ⁱ
- The majority of parents of young children require child care to work or attend educational programs.
- After-school and summer programs protect school age children during times they are vulnerable and at risk.

Lane County is currently experiencing a slow rate of economic growth.ⁱⁱ Even so, demand for child care remains high.

- Approximately 85% of fathers, and 65% of mothers of preschool age children, are in the labor force.ⁱⁱⁱ
- The labor force of lower-income parents has significantly increased due to economic conditions and changes in requirements to satisfy welfare reform. This has placed a tremendous burden on the child care system in our area, both in terms of capacity and affordability. Many parents in Lane County struggle with having access to and being able to sustain quality child care.
- Middle and upper income families have also increased their demands upon the child care system.
- Even in families where one parent does not work outside of the home, more than 60% of children under the age of six are enrolled in some type of child care and educational program.^{iv}

Child care improves the lives of our children.

- Quality child care helps children's readiness to be successful in school.
- Studies show a direct correlation between quality early care and learning experiences and the reduction of criminal and anti-social behavior.^v
- Child care has been identified as a primary prevention of child abuse.^{vi}
- Quality child care helps our future adults lead high-caliber, economically productive lives.

How is child care important to the economy of our area?

Child care benefits our lives today and in the future. Child care enables our community members to work, attend educational programs, and pursue other activities. It provides our community with immeasurable quality of life and increases our economic stability.

Child care increases our local economy. It produces employment and income-generating business opportunities. This results in public sector tax revenues both from child care facilities and as a result of the sales, property and income taxes from child care workers and small business owners.

Child care is attractive to business. Adequate child care benefits area businesses. As with other types of infrastructure – roads, water supply, energy - it provides the infrastructure needed to help recruit and retain new employers in our area.

Child care saves money. Quality child care reduces the burden of costs for a myriad of social services, including special education, lowers school drop-out rates, decreases level of criminal activity, increases long-term earning potential, and reduces poverty.^{vii}

Why is professional development for child care providers important?

Less than adequate child care has been reported in a number of studies designed to measure the many dimensions of quality child care. The findings are so consistent as to raise broad concern about the quality of care in early childhood settings. One study reported that of more than 400 centers studied in four states, only 8% of infant classrooms and 24% of preschool classrooms were of good or excellent quality.^{viii} In addition:

- The education credentials of staff that work in child care centers are often inadequate relative to the skills required.^{ix}
- Staff turnover is high, ranging from 25% to 50% each year. This means that children are constantly adapting to new caregivers.^x
- Staff compensation, including wages and benefits, is exceptionally low. Child care staff are among the lowest paid workers. Staff compensation, including wages and benefits, is significantly related to the quality of care provided.^{xi}

Children in quality child care settings have shown positive outcomes such as cooperative play, sociability, creativity, ability to solve social conflicts, self control, language and cognitive development. Provider-child interactions provide the context in which quality is more likely to occur. Such features such as responsiveness of the caregiver, individualization of care, language used in the classroom, and appropriateness of learning activities are the key dimensions of quality that affect outcomes for children.

What solution is needed?

Child care and education teachers need our support in two important ways. They need opportunities to increase their educational levels and they need compensation for their important work.

In 2002 Lane County piloted “Lane County Cares”, a program that helps cover cost of training for child care teachers while simultaneously supplementing their income with modest wage compensation ranging from \$1,000 to \$4,000 per year. The training requirements are based on the Oregon Professional Development Registry, administered through Portland State University. The Lane County Commissioners awarded \$50,000; additional funds have been leveraged through a six-county federal grant. The Lane County portion of that grant award is \$138,436 over three years, ending June 2005.

Lane County benefits. To date, the Cares program has benefited more than 750 children in Lane County.^{xii} Currently there are at least twelve care providers on a waiting list for this program, and the list continues to grow. Many more care providers are eligible and can be recruited with little effort. Funding in the amount of \$ 50,000 is needed to enroll them in the Cares program, a cutting-edge, successful program that addresses the need to increase professionalism and compensation for early childhood care and education professionals, thereby increasing the quality of child care in the Lane County community.

Important Note: The Eugene City Council approved this funding request May 2004 in the amount of \$50,000.

References

ⁱ Weber, Roberta. (2002) “Data for Community Planning 2000 Oregon Population Estimates & Survey Findings,” Oregon Child Care Partnership, Oregon Childhood Care and Education Data Project, Linn-Benton Community College.

ⁱⁱ Bureau of Labor Statistics, (2004) “Unemployment Rates,” United States Department of Labor. The January 2004 unemployment rate is at 8.1, higher than the 7.7 Oregon rate, and significantly higher than the national average of 5.7.

ⁱⁱⁱ Bureau of Labor Statistics, (2000) “Report on the American Workforce,” US Department of Labor.

^{iv} Tout, Kathryn, Martha Zaslow, Angela Roman Papillo, Sharon Vandivere, (2001) “Early Care and Education: Work Support for Families and Developmental Opportunity for Young Children,” Urban Institute.

^v Cleveland, Gordon and Michael Kashinsky, (1998) “The Benefits and Costs of Good Child Care.

^{vi} Bethea, Lesa, M.D, (1999), “Primary Prevention of Child Abuse,” American Family Physician, University of South Carolina School of Medicine, Columbia, South Carolina.

^{vii} Children’s Defense Fund, “1999 Key Facts.” (1999)

^{viii} Cost, Quality and Child Outcomes Study Team (1995), “Cost, quality, and child outcomes in child care centers public report.” Denver: Economics Department, University of Colorado-Denver.

^{ix} National Center for Early Development and Learning, Frank Porter Graham Child Development Center, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, under the Educational Research and Development Centers Program.

^x Whitebook, M., Howes, Cl, & Phillips, D. (1989). “Who Cares? Child care teachers and the quality of care in America: Final report, National Child Care Staffing Study.” Berkeley, CA: Child Care Employee Project.

^{xi} Ibid.

^{xii} Cares Project Reports, (2004) Lane Family Connections, Lane Community College.