

MAKING CHILD CARE PRIORITY NUMBER ONE



Marin County – a progressive, affluent, well-educated community where one in five residents is a child – experiences shortages of quality child care, similar to other California communities. The Marin Early Care and Education Strategy Alliance believed local residents could and should make improving child care a top priority, so it hired Fern Tiger Associates to consider the potential for a countywide social marketing campaign or other ways to increase awareness about child care.

The first phase involved assessing community perceptions of child care. FTA interviewed opinion leaders from diverse sectors and designed and managed a survey of Marin residents. Both processes showed that other issues were higher priorities than child care and that residents believed employers should play a role in providing child care benefits.

Based on the findings, FTA recommended learning more about the perceptions of small business before embarking on developing a plan for more affordable care for working parents. (Usually large companies are targeted as audiences for information about social needs, but more than 90% of Marin’s businesses employ less than 100 people.) A survey of small business leaders and research into private sector child care partnerships around the country followed. Specific strategies and implementation efforts are being developed to meet the community-identified need.

The household survey found that Marin residents believed early education was for preschoolers, not infants or toddlers. Roughly half felt that child care was a concern for parents, but was not an issue that affected the lives of young children or the community at large. Upon learning that early brain development is a key to children’s later success, residents identified businesses – the future employers – as the most critical audience for the information.

THE MARIN EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION STRATEGY ALLIANCE, comprised of child care advocates, business owners, elected officials, and the Marin Community Foundation, was convened in 2000 to identify ways to make child care a top priority for Marin County residents.

The Child Care Outcomes Project



EXAMINING THE LINKS

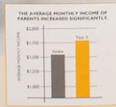
In high-cost Marin County, 95% of families participating in the Child Care Outcomes Project met the government's definition of "very low income" at the time they enrolled their children in the local child care agencies and were first assessed by researchers. Many of families would be considered as working poor, with average household incomes of about \$18,000 per year (roughly a quarter of the median income in Marin County). In order to work and succeed, they needed care for their children, ranging from infants to 14-year-olds. More than 90% of these children lived with both parents, about half with a single parent, and the remaining with other relatives or caregivers. Most families were used to care: nearly all had four or more children. About half were ethnically Latino, a quarter white, and less than one-fifth African American. Nearly two-thirds of parents and one-third of all children were described as having limited English proficiency.

Through the six agencies, the vast majority of parents received support and education opportunities to attain

"Child care was the reason I never went on welfare, the reason I got my terrific job, and the reason my daughter is so knowledgeable and intelligent. I have never regretted what I can provide for her because I know it will count for 'chance'."

special events with other families, advisory or informal services, or enhanced child-focused programs. For children at least one agency, families also benefited from a school-based course such as English as a second language, bilingualism opportunities, and family-oriented free transportation and home visits, and the advantage of early entry into the workforce as well as programmatic involvement in the community.

On average, 70% of families were employed, compared to 50% of the general population. The majority of parents were employed in the service sector, and many were employed in the same industry as their children's caregivers.



Source: Child Care Outcomes Project, 2008-2011. Data based on 100% of families.

