

Child Care Choices for Working Families

Examining Child Care Choices of Hotel Employees
& Restaurant Employees Union Local 2 Members
Working in San Francisco's Hospitality Industry



California Child Care Resource & Referral Network
The Labor Project for Working Families
Local 2/Hospitality Industry Child and Elder Care Plan

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The California Child Care Resource and Referral Network (Network), a nationally recognized nonprofit membership organization, addresses the needs of parents and child care providers throughout California. The Network's 61 member agencies inform parents and the general public about quality child care, assist child care providers in serving their communities, and encourage positive policy changes on the local, state and federal levels.

To help fulfill the Network's mission the Research Department works to capture the needs and insights from California's parents and to gather concrete up-to-date information about the 40,000 child care providers across the state. Specifically, researchers at the network collect, compile, and analyze child care data. Together these findings provide policy makers, planners, advocates, and the general public with key information about children and families in California.

For more information about the Network and its research efforts, please visit: www.rrnetwork.org.



The Labor Project for Working Families is a national advocacy and policy center providing technical assistance, resources and education to unions and union members addressing family issues in the workplace including child care, elder care, family leave, control over work hours and quality of life issues.

The Labor Project was founded in 1992 by the California Bay Area Labor Councils, AFL-CIO. Since then, the Labor Project has expanded its work to assist unions all over the nation in making workplaces more family friendly. The Labor Project is funded by union contributions and private foundations.

For more information, visit <http://laborproject.berkeley.edu>



The Local 2/Hospitality Industry Child and Elder Care Plan provides eligible employees with access to a multi-faceted benefit program designed to enable members of the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees Union, Local 2, to work in the hospitality industry while meeting their diverse child, elder and disabled adult care needs.

Since 1998, the Child Care Coordinating Council of San Mateo County, Inc. (4Cs) has managed the financial payments to union members who participate in the Local 2/Hospitality Industry Child and Elder Care Plan. The 4Cs is the Child Care Resource and Referral Agency serving parents and providers in San Mateo County.

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Family child care provider

"When the program started my son was very small. I really needed someone to take care of him when I went to work."

—SU YING, COOK, MOTHER OF THREE

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Executive Summary



Ami, room cleaner, and son

"Our son is in the extended care program at his school. We got him in right away, but others had to go on a waiting list."

— PRASOM, SERVER, FATHER OF TWO

agement-negotiated benefit plan (referred to in this paper as the Plan) that provides subsidies to offset child care and elder care costs. Despite this assistance, staff of the benefit plan assume that hotel workers still face many challenges when choosing child care. These challenges may include language barriers, the need for care during weekends or evenings, and little access to government support despite low wages.

In 2001, the Labor Project for Working Families, asked researchers at the Network to explore the challenges and barriers of choosing and utilizing child care and to identify any improvements to the Plan that would further address parents' child care needs.

Specifically, the study examined:

- Demographics, including household characteristics;
- Parents' employment and work schedules;
- Current child care;
- Current child care costs;
- Parents' decisions for care;
- Families' preferences for care; and
- Challenges with current care.

To gather this information, researchers conducted face-to-face interviews with 305 parents from the HERE Local 2 union participating in the Plan. The survey was voluntary and participants were given the option of being interviewed in English, Spanish, or Cantonese.

Introduction

Over the past five years, with welfare reform and the expansion of child care assistance on the federal level through the Child Care Development Block Grant, funding for child care services, primarily in the form of vouchers, has expanded significantly. Researchers have investigated the changes in this growing child care system, focusing on issues of child care supply, cost, quality and usage patterns of welfare and low income parents. However, only a few studies have examined these issues from a parent's point of view. This survey attempts to fill this gap in knowledge by examining the child care choices of a unique population of low-income parents, and providing insight into the barriers parents face and the decisions they make.

About the Study

This survey examines the child care choices of Hotel Employees & Restaurant Employees (HERE) Local 2 members working in San Francisco's hotel industry. Parents surveyed participate in a labor/man-

Summary of Findings

The Plan study has provided significant insights into parental choices and preferences for child care. Together these data paint a picture of the challenges parents face when balancing work and child care, and identify many of the barriers they encounter.

We know that the parents using the Plan represent a very diverse and stable part of the workforce. The vast majority of parents participating in the study were Chinese (49%), and nearly one in four families were Hispanic (22%). Respondents participating in the Plan tended to live in households where parents were married and where two adults worked full-time. However, there were a significant number of families with more than 2 adults in the home: nearly 30 percent of the households had either 3 or 4 adults. Almost half (46%) of participants lived in households that earned between \$30,000-\$49,999 a year. Thirty percent of families with 4 people in the household earned less than \$30,000 a year.

Given their low incomes, we estimate that 50 percent of these working parents qualify for, but do not receive, public child care assistance due to lack of funding. Therefore the Local 2/Hospitality Industry Child and Elder Care Plan plays a significant role in helping parents meet their child care needs.

The vast majority of parents stated they had worked some weekend hours, and more than half of the respondents worked at least some amount of time after six p.m. In these jobs, respondents also noted that their weekly schedules and the total number of hours they worked each week varied. These schedules can create challenges for parents as they try to locate and use flexible child care arrangements.

The majority of families in our study had two children (50%); 75 percent of respondents had either 1 or 2 children. Of those children whose care was subsidized by the Plan, 60 percent were school age children between the ages of six and fourteen. Preschoolers, ages 2-5 made up 34 percent of the sample and the remaining five percent were infants. Seventy-three percent of the children were in informal care, while 28 percent were in a formal child care setting. Children in informal care

were predominately school age (66%), while children in formal care were mostly preschool age children (51%).

Even with the financial support, Plan participants said child care costs still presented a barrier to finding and using their preferred child care arrangement. Half of the parents using formal care and 31 percent of the parents using informal care said cost remained a significant problem for them. Overall, the location and reliability of care was less of a problem for parents responding to the survey.

Parents were generally pleased with their current care arrangements and these settings seemed to be quite stable. When asked how long the child had been with his/her caregiver, over half the parents reported a time period from one to five years (51%). Those using informal care valued most the fact they knew or were related to the provider, while those using formal care were more likely to report that educational experiences were what they liked best.

Given their low incomes, we estimate that 50 percent of these working parents qualify for, but do not receive, public child care assistance due to lack of funding. Therefore the Local 2/Hospitality Industry Child and Elder Care Plan plays a significant role in helping parents meet their child care needs.

When parents were asked about the care they would choose if there were no restrictions or barriers to care, 67 percent of the participants with children in formal care stated they would keep the same provider, compared with 46 percent of those using informal care. A significant number of participants (32%) using informal care stated they would rather have their child in a formal care setting than in informal care.

Finally, though many families preferred their informal child caregiver, some families identified issues they would like to see addressed for their children. Those

using informal care specifically stated that they would like to see more of an educational component for kids.

Findings from this study highlight a group of families who are still able to manage financially, despite their low wages. Holding a full-time unionized job and having access to child care assistance from the Plan most likely strengthens these families and their economic stability. Families participating in the Plan are likely to present a very different picture of children and child care than other low-income families in the Bay Area. More research is necessary to try to explain both the similarities as well as differences to other families in the Bay Area and to determine whether access to this unique subsidy has an impact on the stability and choices of families' child care arrangements.

Recommendations and Policy Implications

In conducting this survey for the Local 2/ Hospitality Industry Child and Elder Care Plan, we have explored several areas that hopefully inform discussions on the services for parents working in San Francisco's union hotels. It is clear from these findings that the Plan provides critical support to a group of families struggling to work in low-wage jobs as well as balance their immediate family responsibilities.

Through the information gathered in this study, we were able to gain insights into the lives of Plan participants and to confirm how valuable this child care benefit is to children and families. The findings also point to several ways in which the Board of Trustees and Plan staff can continue to grow and improve the benefit and services available to Plan participants and their families. Below, we highlight key recommendations that emerged from this study.

■ Provide Additional Financial Assistance for Formal Care

Despite the existence of the Local 2/Hospitality Industry Child and Elder Care Plan, child care costs remain a significant barrier to accessing care. Based on an initial calculation, we suggest increasing the formal child care benefit amount by

\$150.00 to allow parents expanded access to licensed programs. This increased amount covers about 50 percent of the average cost of formal care in San Francisco, therefore providing additional financial access for families.

■ Offer Training and Resources for Informal Care Providers

Informal providers are caring for about 73 percent of the children in our survey and care in these settings is being provided to a wide range of ages. Parents choosing informal care stated that they liked this type of care, but wanted a more educational and social environment for their child. Supplying informal providers with educational materials and training would support parental choice and help enhance the quality of the care children are receiving.

■ Identify Activities and Programs for School Age Children

A majority of children in informal care are school age. Providing parents with a list of local community resources, free programs, summer programs, and after school programs where children can interact with their peers would give parents additional options for their children when they are not in school.

■ Address Child Care Options that Accommodate Parents' Schedules

The vast majority of parents stated they had worked some weekend hours, and more than half worked at least some amount of time after six p.m. Compiling information on the availability of licensed day care centers and family child care homes with extended hours and making the information available to Plan participants will open up more child care options. In addition, an effort should be made to work with existing licensed programs to expand the supply of after hours care for children.

■ **Explore Ways to Stabilize Employee Work Schedules**

Many parents work during the evenings, early mornings, and weekends, and 45 percent of parents report that the hours they worked each week varied. This need for care during non-traditional hours is only exacerbated by changing work schedules. Giving sufficient notice of schedule changes, or working to decrease the frequency in which schedule changes occur would aid parents in obtaining and maintaining stable child care arrangements.

■ **Advocate for Low-Income Families at the State and Federal Levels**

Over half of those households with four people in this survey earned less than \$40,000 a year. While these families are technically eligible for public assistance, only two percent of families reported using any financial assistance programs. In San

Francisco, it appears few eligible families are receiving assistance due to lack of funding at the state and federal levels. Efforts at the state and federal level to increase public funding will assist HERE Local 2 families and help to ensure that all families eligible for child care subsidies can be served.

■ **Advocate for the Replication of the Plan In Other Workplaces**

The benefits provided by the Local 2/Hospitality Industry Child and Elder Care Plan play a critical role in the lives of Plan members. It is a national model that has the potential for replication within other workplace settings across the United States. Providing additional visibility to the program and its successes will help to ensure that a larger number of parents have access to the child care and family supports they so desperately need.

Introduction



Estella, laundry worker, and spouse

The child care system in California—as well as in the nation as a whole—has developed through a patchwork of programs and funding streams from the federal, state and local level. The majority of growth in child care funding to assist low-income parents occurred in the early 1990's with the creation of the Child Care Development Block Grant. However, this federal grant to states, the first significant commitment at the federal level for child care since Head Start, did not designate a particular child care program or curriculum to serve the educational needs of children. Rather, the creators of this child care assistance program embraced a parental choice philosophy. That is, states using the block grant were encouraged to deliver child care and early education resources directly to parents, usually in the form of vouchers. The idea was that government, in helping provide care for young children, should empower low-income parents to select the care that best meets their needs and the needs of the child.

In recent years, with welfare reform and the expansion of child care assistance through the Child Care Development Fund, the parent-choice portion of the child care system has expanded dramatically. Since 1990, the federal government has increased funding

"Without it [child care benefit] my wife and I would have a hard time working and we both need to with the way things are today in the work place."

— ROBERT, BELLMAN, FATHER OF TWO

for child care subsidies nearly four fold, with expenditures totaling \$4.6 billion in 2001.¹ In California, federal and state spending for voucher programs has risen even faster. The state went from spending \$266 million in state fiscal year 1997-1998 to nearly \$1.5 billion in state fiscal year 2001-2002.

At the same time, early brain research began to quantify the importance of the early years in children's learning. We know from these studies that during the first three years of a child's life, "caregiving affects the structure and functioning of the child's brain and how a child will behave, learn, feel and perform."² High quality child care has been linked with positive early learning skills, vocabulary, and early literacy and reading skills. Some studies show that high quality child care settings can have an even stronger impact on children from lower-income families.

The convergence of these findings with increased voucher funding made advocates and policymakers acutely aware of some of the limitations of a parental choice system. This system assumes, for instance, that parents have a full range of child care choices available to them. However, we know that licensed child care supply in California meets only 22 percent of the estimated need for care for children ages 0-13 with working parents.³ A voucher system also does not directly address the quality of child care available, and often quality programs are hard to find and even harder for parents to afford.

With the uneven supply and quality of care and the

challenges many families face with transportation, work schedules and limited finances for a necessary—but costly—service, many advocates and early childhood educators wonder about the options and choices parents really have. They worry that the parental choice model, absent sufficient funding and adequate variety of child care options, often does little to ensure high quality, stimulating environments where children are safe and can learn.

In this climate of parental choice, policymakers are trying to understand whether parents have a wide variety of child care choices, whether the care they can find is affordable, and finally whether children are having quality experiences while in care. But what child

While the body of research on child care supply, quality and usage has been growing, only a few studies have examined these questions from a parent's point of view.

care parents ultimately choose is governed by a complex web of factors and decisions that are neither easily researched nor comfortably legislated. Therefore, much of the research as well as the policy debate on how to improve child care has focused on more concrete issues – such as increasing the supply of licensed facilities and removing barriers that we assume keep parents from having a full range of choices.

While the body of research on child care supply, quality and usage has been growing, only a few studies have examined these questions from a parent's point of view. Research conducted by Dr. Arthur Emlen at Portland State University gives some of the few insights we have on understanding why parents make the child care choices they do.⁴ Interestingly, his work shows that parents often make child care decisions based on the concept of flexibility: how flexible a child care setting is, given their demands and supports from work, family and other social networks. Beyond this, policymakers and practitioners are still left wondering whether decisions by families are truly choices, or decisions created by barriers that might be alleviated with better policies and programs.

Researchers in California have been working to better understand these issues, but often the only families readily available for researchers to interview are parents receiving welfare. So in 2000, when the Labor Project for Working Families approached the California Child Care Resource & Referral Network about conducting a survey of working parents in San Francisco, researchers recognized the contribution this effort would make to our overall understanding of parents' child care choices.

Parents in this survey are members of San Francisco's hotel and hospitality industry union. They all participate in a labor/management-negotiated benefit that provides subsidies to offset child care and elder care costs. Despite this assistance, staff of the benefit plan assume that hotel and restaurant workers still face many challenges when choosing child care. These challenges may include language barriers, the need for care during weekends or evenings, and little access to government assistance despite their low wages. The Labor Project for Working Families and the Plan Director asked researchers at the Network to explore the challenges and barriers Plan participants face when choosing and utilizing child care and to identify any improvements to the plan that would further address parents' child care needs.

The Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees Union Local 2

The Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees Union (HERE) Local 2 represents service industry workers throughout the county of San Francisco. Local 2 is the city's largest private sector union, representing 80 percent of the housekeepers, food and beverage workers, telephone operators and baggage handlers in San Francisco's full-service hotels as well as workers at restaurants and clubs throughout San Francisco. Currently, there are 9,000 members in HERE Local 2. The union is extremely diverse, with immigrants making up approximately 70 percent of its membership.

The Local 2/ Hospitality Industry Child and Elder Care Plan

In 1994, Local 2 and San Francisco's union hotels successfully negotiated a sub-fund of their existing Health and Welfare Fund to help working parents. The fund is called the Local 2/ Hospitality Industry Child and Elder Care Plan (herein after referred to as the Plan). Modeled after the 1199 Employer Child Care Program for hospital workers in New York City, this innovative plan provides financial assistance for both child and elder care services. It was designed to help address employees' concerns regarding family care as well as employers' concerns about absenteeism and the lack of productivity, due to caregiving problems. For over four years, the Child Care Coordinating Council of San Mateo County, Inc. has administered the financial assistance component of this Plan.

Through the Plan, members that fulfill specified eligibility requirements can apply for child care assistance. These eligibility requirements are structured to reflect the work patterns of the hotel industry employees. Local 2 members who receive the Plan benefits collect a reimbursement check each quarter to offset the cost of child and elder care. Currently 50 of San Francisco's union hotels participate in the Plan by contributing 18 cents per hour for every hour worked by a Local 2 member. Approximately, 8,000 Local 2 members work at participating hotels and, at any one time, about 6,500 are eligible for the benefit.

Governed by a Board of Trustees representing both management and labor, the Plan works as a reimbursement account with 6 categories of coverage – newborn, formal and informal child care, youth programs, SAT preparation course and elder care. For this survey, the Plan staff asked us to focus on the care provided for children ages one year to 13 – the formal and informal child care benefit. Formal child care is defined as care provided in a facility, licensed or registered

by the city or state. Currently, the monthly reimbursement for formal care is \$225. Informal child care is defined as care provided by someone who is not licensed or registered by the city or state. This category includes relatives (excluding spouses and domestic partners), friends and neighbors. The reimbursement for informal care is \$100 a month.

This report outlines what we have learned about Local 2 families participating in the Plan. We begin by providing information about the survey conducted with parents. We then report findings from the study, including information about:

- Demographics, including household characteristics;
- Parents' employment and work schedules;
- Current child care;
- Current child care costs;
- Parents' decisions for care;
- Families' preferences for care; and
- Challenges with current care.

We conclude with recommendations and policy implications based on data from this study that we hope will be useful to the Trustees of the Local 2/Hospitality Industry Child and Elder Care Plan in serving families in the future.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

Researchers, policymakers and families all have different terminology when it comes to child care. For the purposes of this study we use the terms and definitions utilized by the HERE Local 2 union in determining the amount of subsidy for parents.

INFORMAL CARE:

Care provided either in a child's home or in another person's home when the care is not licensed by the city or state. It includes care by a relative, friend of the family, neighbor or anyone unrelated to the child providing care in a home-based setting that is not licensed.

FORMAL CARE:

Care provided in a provider's home or in a facility that is licensed or registered by the city or state. It includes family child care homes as well as programs such as preschools, day care centers, and before and after school programs located at a child's school.

About The Survey



Daughter of Estella, laundry worker

The Sample

As discussed above, the Child and Elder Care Plan helps supplement child and elder care costs for members of Local 2. The goal of the data collection was to interview 450 parents who were eligible for and received a formal or informal child care subsidy during the 2000-2001 plan year. In order to be eligible for the plan, the Local 2 member must work for a hotel that contributes to the Child and Elder Care Plan and meet specific requirements regarding the number of hours worked.

The Child and Elder Care Plan, which runs from September 1 to August 31, requires participants to apply or re-apply each year. The majority of members submit their applications during application week each July, though applications are accepted throughout the year. The research team, therefore, used the application time in July 2001 to conduct face-to-face interviews with parents participating in the Plan. The survey was voluntary and participants were given the option of being interviewed in English, Spanish or Cantonese.

During the 2000-2001 plan year, 780 members received the informal child care subsidy and 238 received the formal child care subsidy. We were suc-

"This benefit helps us a lot economically. It gives us a break so we can have extra cash to cover the needs that we have."

—FIDEL, BUSSER, FATHER OF TWO

cessful in interviewing and analyzing data from 299 families. Table 1 provides a full description of the members participating in the study. The families who provided data were not chosen and interviewed at random, but were selected using a convenience method. Our sample was based on the accessibility of those participants who came to re-apply for the Plan during the application week. Therefore, the data from this study are not representative of all low-income families, or even all families working in the hotel and restaurant industries. Rather, these findings are reliable, based on standard error, in representing all families using child care within the Plan in 2001. Results reported are within a margin of error of plus or minus 5.7 percent for participants enrolled in informal care and a margin of error of plus or minus 8.8 percent for those enrolled in formal care. In other words, our sample may deviate 5.7 percentage points for informal care and 8.8 percentage points for formal care in either direction from the makeup of the total population.

The Survey Instrument

Researchers at the California Child Care Resource & Referral Network developed the survey instrument using a combination of questions identified by research advisors and project partners. In addition, questions gathered from several other survey instruments examining child care arrangements, parents' feelings and decision-making around child care, and general demographics information were also included in the study.⁵

Taking the lead from the Project Advisory Group

and the Research Advisory Group, the research team worked to craft a survey that focused on seven key areas. The survey first attempted to gather basic information on parents' current child care arrangements. The parent was asked to focus responses on the child whose care was subsidized by the Plan benefit. Parents were then asked a series of questions about

their access to child care and the reasons they chose their current provider. Parents were also asked about their overall satisfaction with their current care and their cost of care. Finally, the survey gathered employment and schedule information as well as basic demographic information and household data for each of the families responding to the survey.

TABLE 1. Plan Members Participation Rates

| Plan Participants | Number Enrolled 2000-2001 Plan Year | Number of Interviews Completed | Percentages of Families Interviewed | Languages Interviews Conducted in: | | |
|---------------------------|---|--------------------------------------|---|---------------------------------------|---------|---------|
| | | | | ENGLISH | SPANISH | CHINESE |
| Using Informal Child Care | 780 | 217 | 27.8% | 87 | 45 | 85 |
| Using Formal Child Care | 238 | 82 | 34.5% | 34 | 5 | 43 |
| TOTAL | 1,018 | 299 | 29.4% | 121 | 50 | 128 |

Findings



Son of Celia, hostess

"I needed someone flexible because if I wasn't working on the weekend I couldn't afford to pay him/her. I eventually found a provider willing to be on call on weekends and holidays- the grandmother of one of my son's classmates."

— AMI, ROOM CLEANER, MOTHER OF ONE

Below we outline the major findings from the survey of Plan participants. Note that for all sections, we report findings for the full sample, unless parents who used the formal care subsidy differed from those using the informal care subsidy. In those instances, significant differences are noted.

Demographics

Our first goal in this survey was to better understand the parents recently served by the informal and formal child care Plan. And indeed, these families represent a unique subgroup of working parents in San Francisco. At the time of the survey, a majority of families in the sample lived in the city of San Francisco (70%), while 20 percent commuted into the area from Alameda (10%) or San Mateo counties (10%). The remaining 10 percent of parents resided in Contra Costa, Solano and Sacramento Counties.

Like the general population, parents working in the hotel

industry using the child care subsidy were diverse. (See Figure 1 for the ethnicity of parents in the survey compared to San Francisco as a whole.) Parents in the survey were more likely to be Asian or Hispanic, and less likely to be White (4%) compared to the overall White adult population of the county (53%). The vast majority of parents participating in the study were Chinese (49%), and nearly a quarter were Hispanic (22%).

As mentioned above, union workers in San Francisco's hotel industry include many immigrants. Plan participants responding to the survey were predominantly from China, the Philippines, Vietnam, and Mexico (39%, 13%, 9%, and 7%, respectively). Only eight percent of parents responding to the survey were originally from the United States.

A majority of participating parents said their native

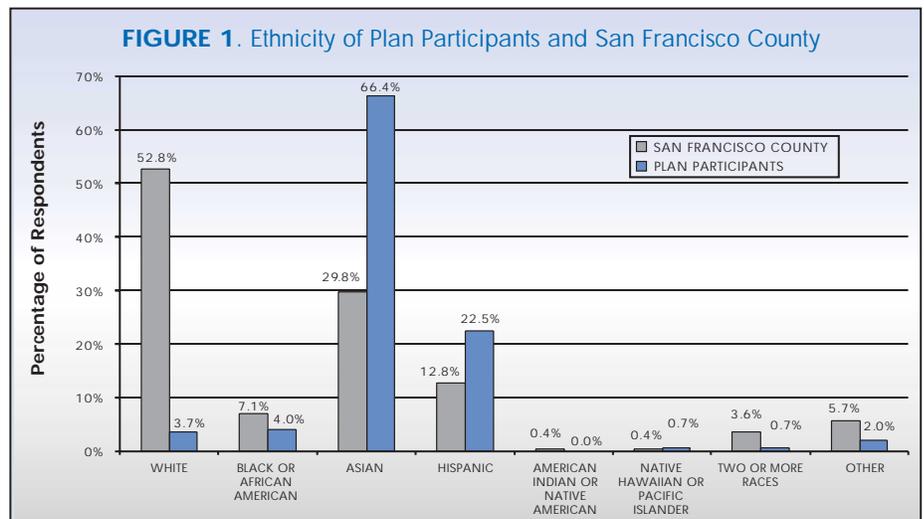
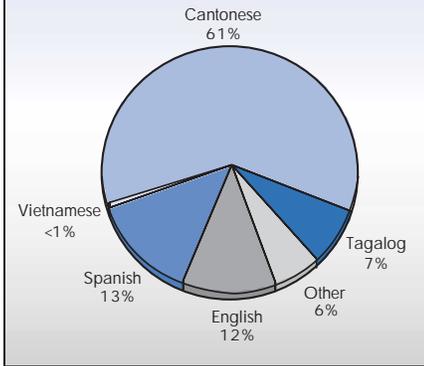


FIGURE 2. Families Who Speak One Language at Home, Primary Language Spoken



language was the primary language spoken at home. In fact, 72 percent of all respondents said they spoke only one language at home. Overwhelmingly, that language was Cantonese. (See Figure 2).

Twenty-six percent of families said they spoke two languages at home, a majority of which included English in addition to another language. Of those families speaking two languages, the predominant languages spoken were either English and Spanish (51%) or English and Tagalog (28%). For all parents, regardless of the number of languages spoken, only eight percent said English was the primary language spoken at home.

Parents responding to the survey also reported their highest educational attainment level. Twenty-three percent of parents had completed some college course work. This is slightly higher than the overall adult population in San Francisco (16%). But only 10 percent completed college or postgraduate work, compared to 53 percent in the general adult population in San Francisco. Thirty percent of parents in the sample had completed high school as their highest educational level, compared to 15 percent in the general population. Thus, parents in the Plan were more likely to

have completed high school as their highest level of education but less likely to have attained a college degree than the general adult population in San Francisco. Figure 3 provides detailed education data for all survey participants.

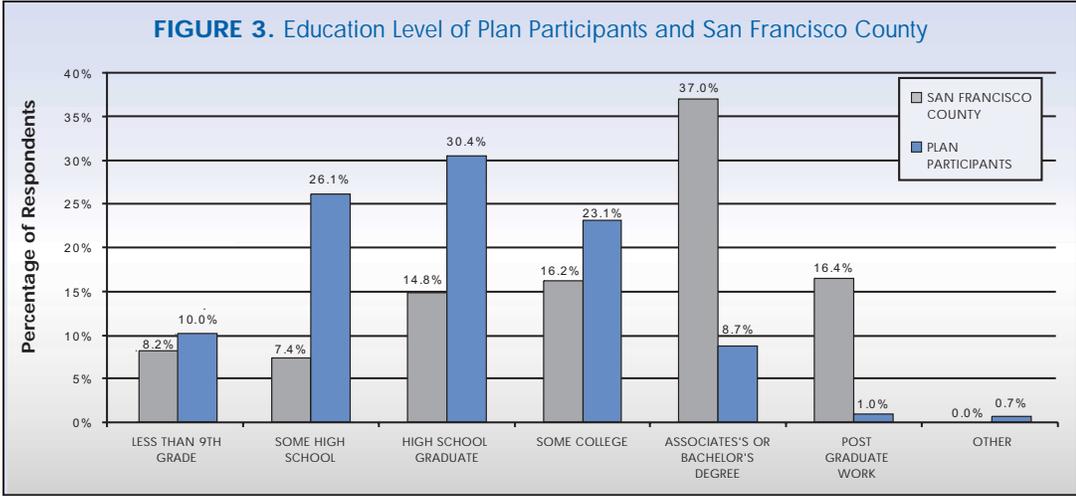
We also asked parents about the households in which they lived. For the most part, parents were married and lived in households where there were two adults working full-time. However, there were a significant number of families with more than 2 adults in the home: nearly 30 percent of the households had 3 or 4 adults. Fifty percent of families in the study had two children; 75 percent of respondents had either 1 or 2 children. Moreover, the majority of households consisted of four (35%) or five (22%) people (adults and children).

To help us understand the resources available to children, we gathered data on household income, asking parents to include contributions by all adults living in the home. Almost half (46%) of the households earned between \$30,000-\$49,999 a year. Figure 4 displays income levels of the Plan participants relative to their household size.

These findings on the composition of households are not surprising given the high cost of housing in the Bay Area as well as Census data that show larger households within these ethnic groups.⁶ However, it remains unclear to what extent, if at all, the additional adults in these households contribute to the family's core needs.

The parents responding to the Plan survey appeared to have relatively stable living arrangements. A majority of respondents noted they have lived in their current residence for more than 5 years (56%). And a striking 26 percent of the respondents had been in their current residence for over 10 years. By comparison, the Census Bureau reports that 45 percent of families at the national level

FIGURE 3. Education Level of Plan Participants and San Francisco County



with the same income earnings lived in their current home for less than three years. Local 2 survey participants' median duration in their current residence was six years while the median duration for similar families at the national level was 4.3 years.⁷ These figures demonstrate that families participating in the Plan have slightly more stable housing compared to other families with similar incomes.

Parents' Employment and Work Schedules

As a workforce, the Plan participants in our survey were primarily working in one job (91%), and working full-time in that position (87%). Again, these findings are consistent with the minimum work requirements for eligibility in the Plan's benefits. We asked parents to select their job description from a list of seven job titles provided by the union. Respondents were most often working as housekeepers (45%), servers/bussers (23%) or cooks (10%).

In these jobs, respondents tended to work the same number of hours each day. However, 45 percent of parents noted that the total number of hours they worked per week varied. The vast majority of parents also stated that they worked some weekend hours as part of their Local 2 job. In addition, more than half (57%) of the respondents worked at least some amount of time after six p.m. These findings demon-

strate the need of this survey group for flexible child care arrangements, given the non-traditional hours often worked by parents in the hotel industry.

We should note that these findings could vary significantly from other low-income populations. The parents surveyed represent a unique population whose employment is influenced by their participation in Local 2. The employees' jobs, schedules, and hours represented in the survey reflect the fact that they are members of a union and are also eligible for the Plan benefits, so by definition are more likely to be full-time workers.

Parents in the Plan indicated that they had been able to find a balance between work and family that worked for both the family and the workplace. Almost 73 percent of respondents said their employer was supportive of them and their family responsibilities. This is an important point given that child care issues had interrupted parents' work schedules in the past. Half of the families responding to the survey said that they had missed some workdays in the last 12 months due to child care responsibilities. Most parents reported missing between two and four days, while 20 percent reported missing 10 or more days because of a gap or break down in their child care arrangements. These findings demonstrate the difficulty some families have in maintaining care for their children while working, even with financial support. It is unclear how much more absenteeism would occur for these families if

they did not receive the child care Plan benefit. More research is needed to fully understand and explain these findings.

Current Child Care

The Local 2/Hospitality Industry Child and Elder Care Plan survey focused on parents receiving a child care subsidy for children ages 1-13. We found that the majority of the children whose care was subsidized by the Plan were school-age children (60%) between the ages of six and fourteen. Preschoolers (2-5 years) made up 34 percent of the

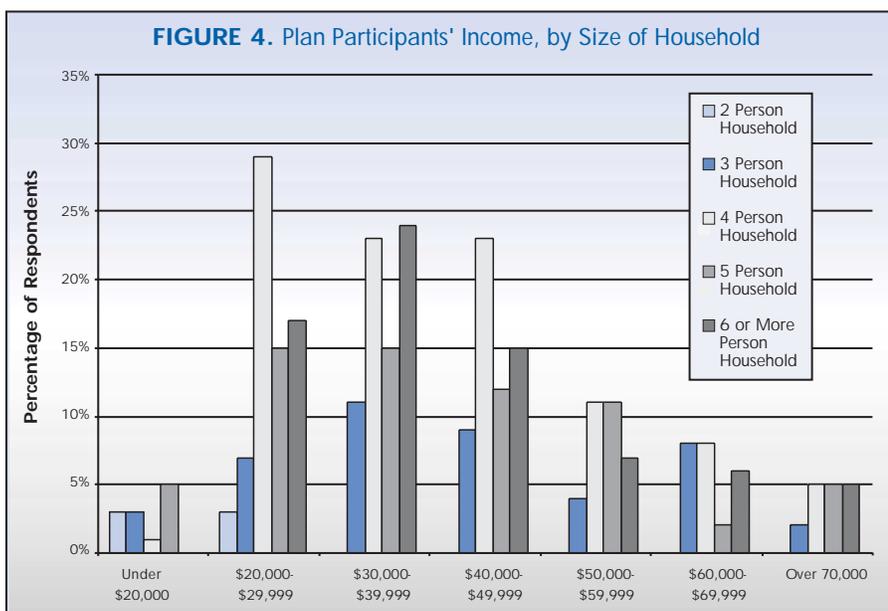
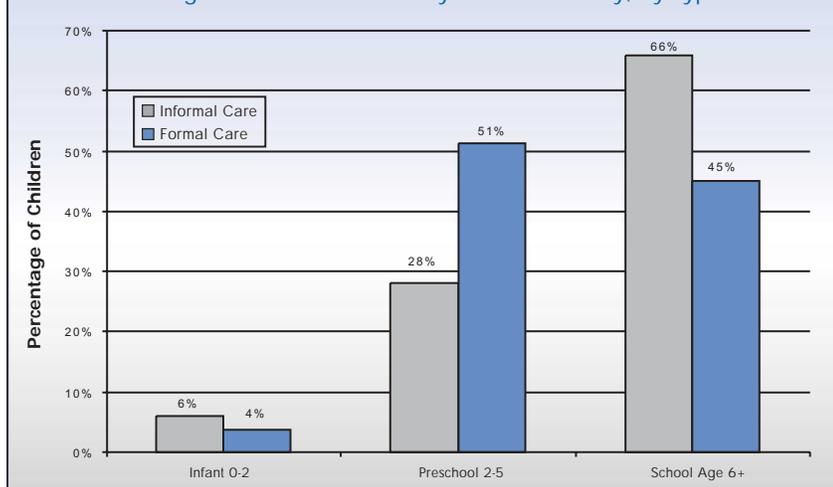


FIGURE 5: Ages of Children Served by the Plan Subsidy, by Type of Care

total sample and infants (12-24 months), five percent. Not surprisingly, the age range of children in formal care was significantly different than that of children in informal care.¹ Figure 5 shows that children in informal care were predominately school-age (66%) while the children in formal care were mostly of preschool-age (51%).

Looking across all children in the study, most children were cared for outside of their own home. Two-thirds of preschool-age children (65%) received care either in an informal caregiver's home or a formal child care setting. Comparatively, 44 percent of infants and 54 percent of school age children were in settings other than their own home.

Figure 6 provides a more detailed break down of the types of settings being used for each age group of children in the survey. Note that most families utilize a home based setting (either in their home or a provider's home) for infants and school age children, and use more structured care in centers for preschool-age children.

We asked parents using care outside the home about accessibility to that care. Though San Francisco has a high overall supply of licensed care compared to other counties and the county itself is small—only 47 square miles—we wanted to understand a little about the location and convenience of care being chosen by participants in the Plan. Most

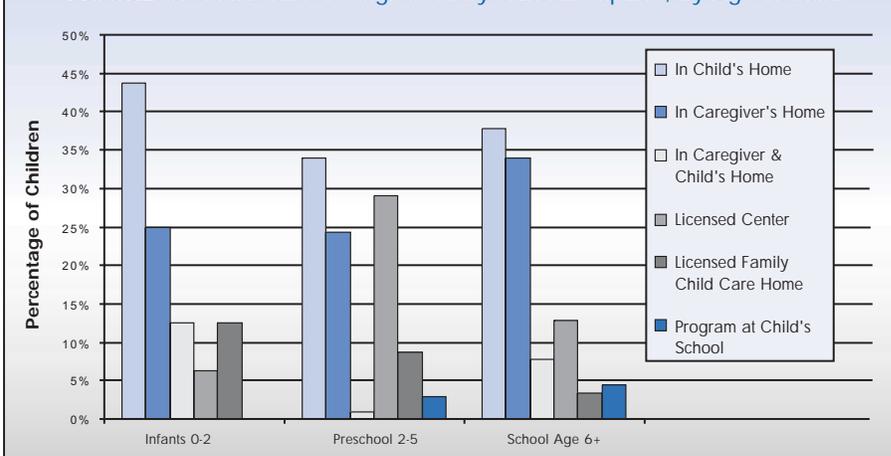
often, parents said the care they currently used was a 5-15 minute drive away from either home or work (41%). The remaining parents used care that was next door (6%), within one or two blocks (26%), or over 15 minutes (27%) from either home or work.

We also examined the overall type of care selected within the formal and informal categories. Of those families receiving a formal child care subsidy, two-thirds of the children were in a licensed center (66%). The rest of the

children were in a licensed family child care home, or in a program at school. Figure 7 provides information on the types of child care settings chosen by the Plan participants within each benefit category.

Of the care provided in an informal setting, 51 percent was provided in the family's own home, 41 percent was in a caregiver's home, and the remaining eight percent had care provided in both the caregiver's and family's home. Among those who used informal care, two-thirds used care provided by relatives (67%). A majority of these providers were either the child's grandparent (51%) or aunt (28%).

The survey also asked parents to report the number of hours children spent in the child care setting subsidized by the Plan (referred to below as the main provider) as well as the total hours of care children received from all providers. Eighty-seven percent of parents reported that their children spent all of their

FIGURE 6. Child Care Settings Used by Plan Participants, by Age of Child

LICENSED CHILD CARE SETTINGS IN CALIFORNIA

Licensed child care in California can be either in a family child care home or a child care center.

LICENSED FAMILY CHILD CARE HOME:

Family Child Care Providers care for either 8 (small home provider) or 14 (large home provider) in his or her own home. Providers can care for children in mixed age group settings.

LICENSED CHILD CARE CENTER:

Child Care Centers are licensed by the state to provide care, normally operated outside the home, usually in commercial buildings, churches, or on school property. Care can be provided to infants, preschoolers and/or school-age children, usually in a group setting.

CA Department of Social Services, Community Care Licensing Division

care time with their main formal/informal provider, rather than moving among several providers. On average, infants spent 43 hours a week, preschoolers spent 39 hours a week, and school age children spent 32 hours a week with their child care providers. As expected due to time in school, school-age children spent the least amount of time in their main child care

setting compared to infants and preschoolers.

We asked parents about their access to care during non-traditional hours, such as weekends, early mornings, evenings or overnight. We know from information collected by local resource and referral agencies that few licensed providers offer care during these hours. In San Francisco, only one percent of licensed child care centers and 33 percent of licensed family child care homes offer care during these hours. Parents surveyed noted that approximately half (54%) of the child care providers they used offered care during non-traditional hours. Informal caregivers (68%) were more likely to offer care during these hours than formal caregivers (18%).ⁱⁱ

The child care arrangements reported by participating families were surprisingly stable. When asked how long the child had been with his/her caregiver, over half of the parents reported a time period from one to five years (51%). In addition, those using informal care had been with their caregiver significantly longer (4.9 years on average) than those using formal care (2.8 years on average).ⁱⁱⁱ These findings differ from past research that has shown informal care as more unstable than other child care settings.⁸ Figure 8 shows

the differences between the number of years spent with either an informal or formal provider. It is important to note the differences between informal and formal care could also be impacted by the age range of children using each type of care.

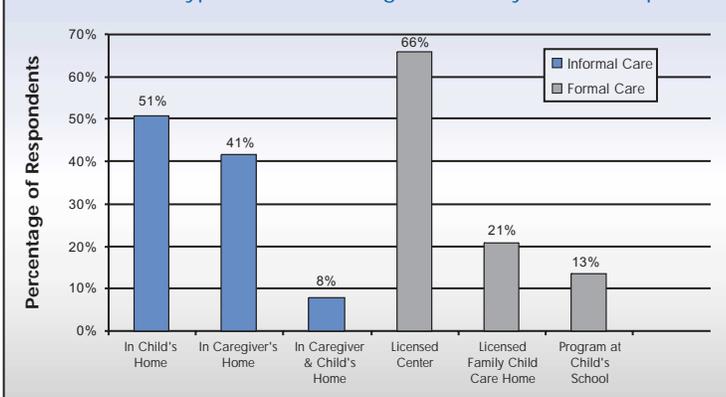
When we probed deeper into the stability of care, we found that the majority of the parents in this study had not changed providers in the last year (91%). Only seven percent of infants, 13 percent of preschoolers and seven percent of school-age children had changed providers during the 2000-2001 plan year.

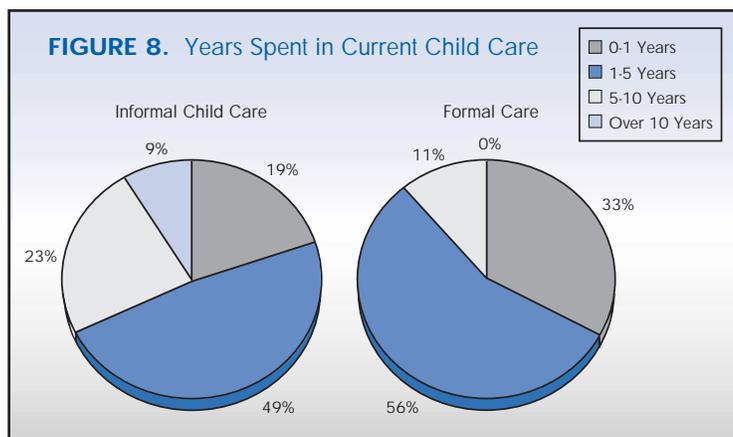
Among those families who had changed providers, switching once was most common (77%), although this varied by the age of the child. Preschool age children experienced a change in providers more frequently than infants or school age (usually changing once). The few school age children that did experience a change in child care providers (7%), changed on average two times during the past 12 months. The most common reason why parents reported changing care was because their caregiver stopped providing care (42%). Despite some stability issues for a few school age children, parents in this study seem to have found consistent child care arrangements for their children.

Current Child Care Costs

Most of the Plan participants did not use other financial assistance programs besides the Plan subsidy (98%). Though many families appear to be eligible for State child care subsidies, we know that in California, there are not enough dollars to ensure all eligible parents receive the help they need. For example, according to

FIGURE 7. Types of Care Settings Chosen by Plan Participants





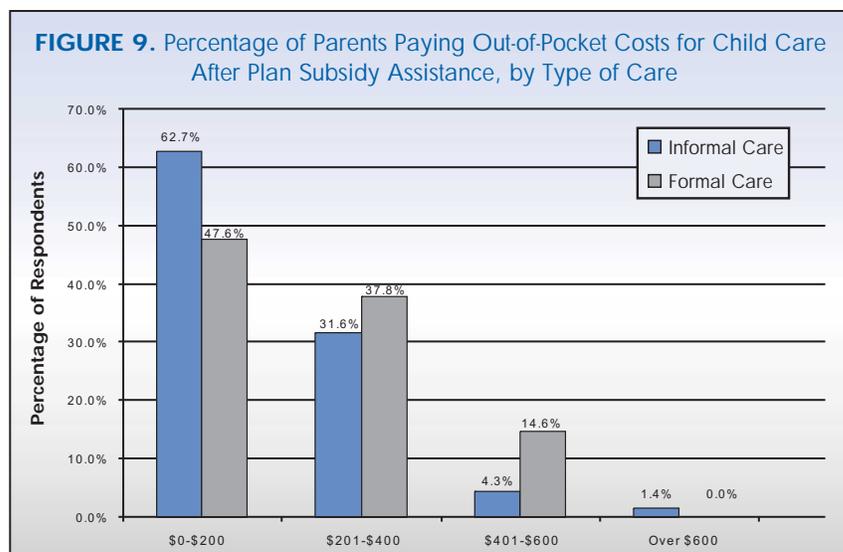
average, higher for parents using formal care than the costs paid for those using informal care.^{iv} The cost of care varied by the age of the child receiving care. The average out of pocket cost was highest for preschoolers (\$284) followed by the cost for infants (\$243). Parents spent the least amount per month for school age care (\$186). The fact that most preschool age children in the survey were in formal care could explain the increased costs associated with that age group. Typically, formal child care costs are

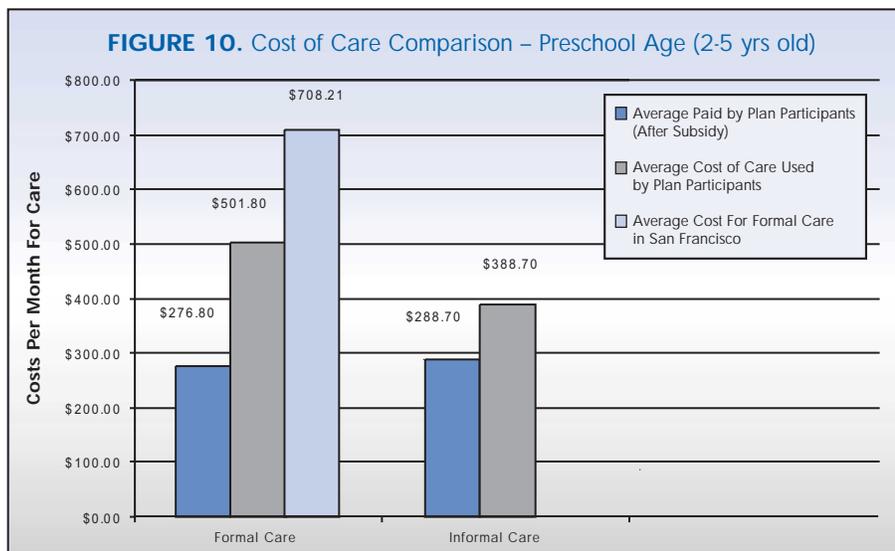
higher than informal care.

the California Department of Education, in the year 2000, a household of four people would have been eligible for child care subsidies if their annual income fell below under \$39,000. Based on the annual income that the survey respondents with a four-person household reported, about 50 percent of participants earned less than \$40,000 annually, which means many of the participants are potentially eligible for the State's child care subsidies. But, agencies in San Francisco administering the subsidy system report that families making above \$16,600 rarely receive child care assistance.⁹ Most of these families therefore would end up on a waiting list for government help in paying for child care services. In addition, a majority of the parents surveyed did not have anyone else who was available to provide free care or help pay for the care (87%). As such, parents paid all additional costs not covered by the Plan. Among the parents who had free help or help paying for child care (13.5%), the vast majority of them were assisted by a spouse or by relatives.

Figure 10 shows the differences between the cost of care and the amount parents paid after the subsidy and any other financial assistance they received. Most of the parents that we surveyed lived in San Francisco (70%), and reported paying much less for full-time care than San Francisco's average rates for child care as reported in the 2001 Regional Market Rate Survey of California Child Care Providers (RMR). This survey collects data on the overall average rates charged in licensed centers and family child care homes (formal care) in each county in the state. For example, the preschool-age, full-time monthly tuition charged for child care in the county is \$708.21 (an average of center based care and licensed family child care). In contrast, parents using formal care for preschool age children chose providers charging an average of \$502. The rates of formal providers chosen by parents participating in the Plan were over \$200 a month less than

Figure 9 shows the amount of money parents paid out of pocket, after being reimbursed through the Plan. Almost two-thirds of the parents who used informal care paid no more than \$200 a month (63%). On average, these families paid \$209 a month for their child's care. Nearly half of the parents who used formal care paid no more than \$200 a month (48%), and on average, parents using this type of care paid \$255 a month. The costs paid by Plan participants surveyed were, on





average rates charged by formal care providers in the county.

Overall, the providers’ rates chosen by parents were offset by the Plan subsidy. Rates for formal care averaged \$502 a month, as mentioned above, and rates for informal care averaged \$389 a month for preschool age care. But because of the Plan child care subsidy parents’ out of pocket expenditures for child care averaged \$277 for formal preschool age care and \$289 for informal preschool age care.

Parents’ Decisions For Care

Navigating the child care world can be a daunting task when parents first start looking. Depending on the age and needs of the child, parents have difficult choices to make, and in many areas, parents have few options. According to the California Child Care Resource & Referral Network, San Francisco County has a high supply of child care—ranking second in the state—yet still only meets 41 percent of the estimated need for child care. Furthermore, as we have mentioned, finding care during non-traditional hours can be even more difficult. Parents, therefore, must search for child care that best meets the needs of the child as well as their own work schedules.

We found that in choosing their current care setting, parents were more likely to have found their provider through a personal relationship than through a community agency. Among parents not using care

provided by a relative, nearly 24 percent already knew their current provider and almost half (46%) reported that a friend, relative, or co-worker referred them to their current provider. Parents in the Plan using formal child care were more likely to be referred by someone they knew (51%), or by a school (20%) and less likely to already know their provider (9%). Families using informal care were more likely to already know their provider (41%) or be referred by someone they knew (48%).^v These

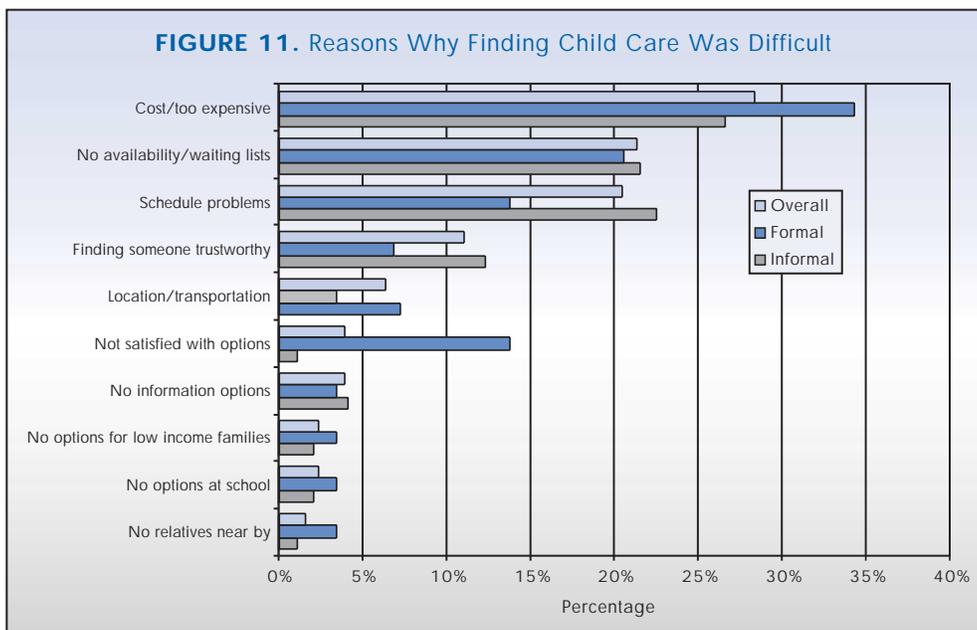
findings are consistent with most other research that shows parents tend to use social support systems like friends, relatives and neighbors for information on child care choices.

In addition to finding child care information, we also wanted to understand the process parents went through in choosing appropriate child care. We asked parents what type of screening or selection process they used before choosing their current provider. Most parents reported that they visited other facilities (40%) before they chose their current caregiver. Thirty-three percent of parents interviewed other providers, 25 percent checked references on providers they were considering, and 50 percent of respondents stated that after looking for child care, they considered staying home and caring for the child themselves.

Fifty-five percent of participants stated that it was somewhat or very difficult to find child care. When asked why it was so difficult, the top three reasons given were cost, availability/waiting lists, and schedule problems. Figure 11 shows the additional reasons parents reported difficulty finding child care. Only 14 percent of all parents in the survey reported they had a "very easy" time finding care.

Despite the challenges of finding and choosing the right care for their children, 52 percent of parents said they found care immediately. Of those who found care immediately, over half were using an informal care provider (58%) and 38 percent of those using a formal

FIGURE 11. Reasons Why Finding Child Care Was Difficult



liked their provider (89%), and felt safe and secure (92%). Seventy-six percent of parents surveyed stated they never worried "if their child was ok while they were at work" and three quarters of the parents (76%) said there was "nothing that they disliked or wanted to change about the care" their child was receiving.

Figure 13 displays what parents liked most about their current care

care provider. Of those that did not find care immediately, 43 percent took a month or less to find care, 29 percent said it took between one and three months, 15 percent said it took between four and six months, and 13 percent took over seven months to find care.

As shown in Figure 12, convenient hours, convenient location, and provider's trustworthiness were the top three reasons parents selected their current child care provider. However, these factors varied between those families using informal care and those using formal care. Formal care recipients were more likely to have concerns about whether the program was monitored closely,^{vi} whether the provider cared for different ages,^{vii} or whether the provider cared for siblings.^{viii} On the other hand, parents using informal care were more likely to state they chose their current provider because the person spoke the same language^{ix}, was "like family"^x or was "trustworthy"^{xi}.

Overall, a majority of parents stated that they were satisfied with their current child care arrangement. They felt their child had always been happy in their current child arrangement (84%),

provider. The treatment and education their child received was ranked highest by parents when asked about their satisfaction with their child's care. But parents also liked the convenience their child care arrangement provided them. Those using informal care said that knowing the provider or having a family member provide care, in their view, was the best care and most preferred for their child. In addition, parents using informal care were significantly more likely to say the nutritious food their child received during care was what they liked most,^{xii} while those using formal care were more likely to report that education experiences were what they liked best.^{xiii}

FIGURE 12. Reasons Why Parents Selected Current Child Care Provider

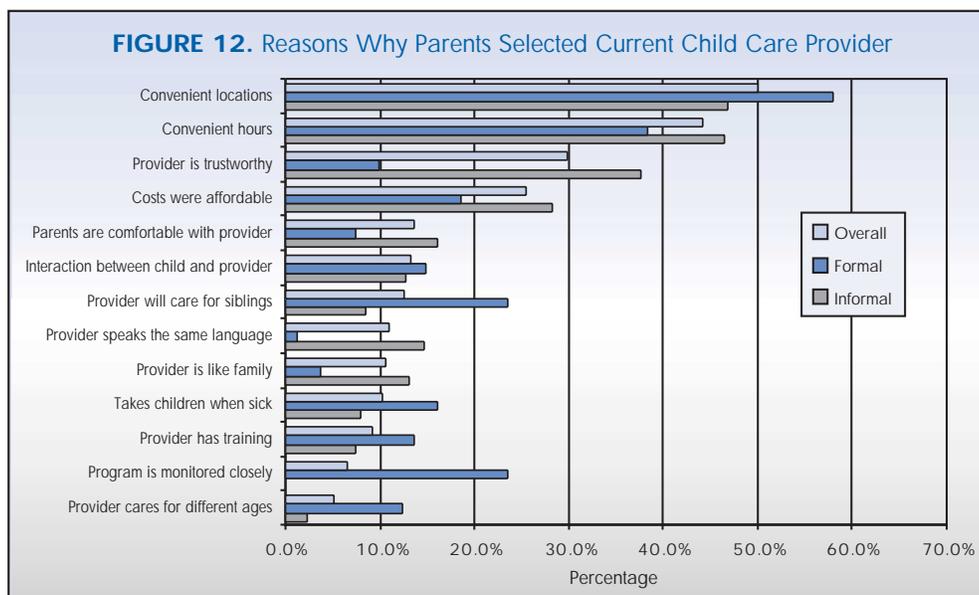
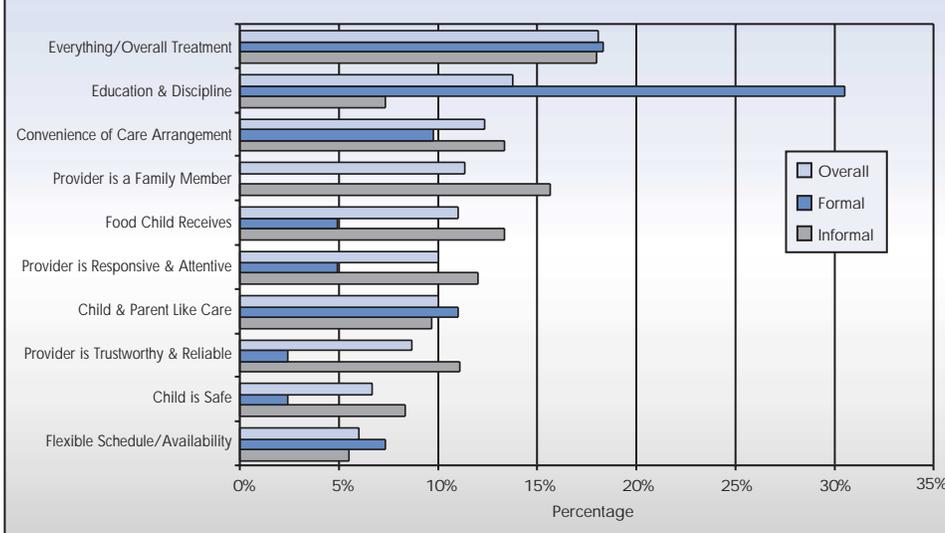


FIGURE 13. What Parents Liked Best About Their Child Care Arrangement

Families' Preferences for Care

Parents seemed satisfied with their current child care arrangements. Yet, when asked if they would have preferred some other child care arrangement than their current provider, a quarter of parents (25%) using informal care and 18 percent of those in formal care said that they would have preferred another arrangement. When those parents were asked what prevented them from using another arrangement, 40 percent of families using informal and 29 percent using formal care selected "cost of child care" most frequently. After costs, the barriers that families mentioned varied for those using formal care arrangements, with no other single barrier preventing most parents from choosing the care they would prefer for their children. However, for those using informal care, availability (13%), or conflicts with their schedule and hours of care (13%) were noted as issues that prevented them from choosing their ideal type of care.

Knowing that many parents might be hesitant to reveal concerns with their current care provider, we also asked parents what their ideal child care setting would be. These questions were designed to better obtain parents' true preferences for care, outside of the barriers and tradeoffs such as cost, availability, or scheduling that they might face when choosing their current care setting. When parents were asked about the care they would choose if there were no restrictions, a majority of those using formal care (67%)

stated they would keep the same provider and another 17 percent stated they would choose another type of formal child care. Of those using informal care, 46 percent stated they would keep their same provider while 32 percent selected formal care as their ideal child care setting.

The main reasons parents cited for wanting formal care were the desire for "more social interaction with other children" and "more formal education for their child." These sentiments were similar to

the answers given when parents choosing to stay with their formal care provider were asked why they felt that this type of care was best for their child.

For the 46 percent of families using informal care that stated they would keep the same provider, two-thirds (69 percent) were using a family member. Parents participating in the Plan subsidy stated they "believed a family member provided better care" and parents reported they had a higher level of trust and familiarity with their relative.

Challenges with Current Care

Regardless of whether they were satisfied with their current care or not, parents reported that barriers in utilizing their current provider remained. We anticipated a list of these challenges and asked parents to identify the issues they struggled with most. Specifically we wanted to know how much of a problem costs, hours, location, transportation, and reliability of care were for parents.

Fifty percent of the parents using formal care and 31 percent of the parents using informal care said that cost, even with the Plan subsidy, was a significant problem for them. About 30 percent of parents using both formal and informal care said the hours of care and scheduling posed either a "big problem" or "somewhat of a problem." Overall, the location of care and reliability of care were less problematic for most parents responding to the survey.

Conclusions



Child in formal care

The Plan study has provided significant insights into parents' choices and preferences for child care. Together these data paint a picture of the challenges parents face when balancing work and child care, and identify many of the barriers they encounter.

We know that the parents using the Plan represent a very diverse and stable part of the workforce. The vast majority of parents participating in the study were Chinese (49%), and nearly one in four families were Hispanic (22%). Families participating in the Plan tend to live in households where parents are married and where two adults work full-time. However, there were a significant number of families with more than 2 adults in the home: nearly 30 percent of the households had either 3 or 4 adults in the home. Almost half (46%) of participating parents lived in households that earned between \$30,000-\$49,999 a year. Twenty-nine percent of families with 4 people in the household earned less than \$30,000 a year.

Given their low incomes, we estimate that 50 percent of these working parents qualify for, but do not receive, public child care assistance. Therefore the Local 2/Hospitality Industry Child and Elder Care Plan plays a significant role in helping parents meet their child care needs.

"Being a single parent, it's [child care benefit] made my life easier as far as coming up with money for after hours for my son."

— CAROL, SERVER, MOTHER OF ONE

The vast majority of parents stated they had worked some weekend hours, and more than half (57%) of the respondents worked at least some amount of time after six p.m. In these jobs, respondents also noted their weekly schedules and the total number of hours they worked each week varied. These schedules can create challenges for parents as they try to locate and use flexible child care arrangements.

Most of the families in our study had two children (50%); 75 percent of respondents had either 1 or 2 children. Of those children whose care was subsidized by the Plan, 60 percent were school age children between the ages of six and fourteen. Preschoolers, ages 2-5 made up 34 percent of the sample and the remaining five percent were infants. Children in informal care were predominately school age (66%), while children in formal care were mostly preschool age children (51%).

Even with financial support, Plan participants, like most parents, said child care costs still presented a barrier to finding and using their preferred child care arrangement. Fifty percent of parents using formal care and 31 percent of the parents using informal care said that cost remained a significant problem for them. Overall, the location of care and reliability of care was less of a problem for parents responding to the survey.

Parents were generally pleased with their current care arrangements and these settings seemed to be quite stable. When asked how long the child had been with his/her caregiver, over half of the parents reported a time period from one to five years (51%). Those

using informal care valued most the fact they knew or were related to the provider, while those using formal care were more likely to report that educational experiences were what they liked best.

When parents were asked about the care they would choose if there were no restrictions or barriers to care, 67 percent of the participants with children in formal care stated they would keep the same provider, compared with 46 percent of those using informal care. A significant number of participants (32%) using informal care stated they would rather have their child in a formal care setting than in informal care.

Finally, though many families preferred their informal child caregiver, some families identified issues that they would like to see addressed for their children. Those using informal care specifically stated they

would like to see more of an educational component for kids.

Findings from this study highlight a group of families who are still able to manage financially, despite their low wages. Holding a full-time unionized job and having access to child care assistance from the Plan most likely strengthens these families and their economic stability. Families participating in the Plan are likely to present a very different picture of children and child care than other low-income families and even other immigrant families in the Bay Area. More research is necessary to try to explain both the similarities as well as differences to other families in the Bay Area and to determine whether access to this unique subsidy has an impact on the stability and choices of families' child care arrangements.

Recommendations & Policy Implications



Cecelia, hostess, and son

In conducting this survey for the Local 2/ Hospitality Industry Child and Elder Care Plan, we have explored several areas that hopefully inform discussions on the services for parents working in San Francisco's union hotels. It is clear from these findings that the Plan provides critical support to a group of families struggling to work in low-wage jobs and balance their immediate family responsibilities. Through the information gathered in this study, we were able to gain insights into the lives of Plan participants and to confirm how valuable this child care benefit is to children and families. The findings also point to several ways in which the Board of Trustees and Plan staff can continue to grow and improve the benefit and services to Plan participants and their families. Below, we highlight key recommendations that emerge from this study.

■ Provide Additional Financial Assistance for Formal Care

Given the importance of child care to working parents and the high cost of care in San Francisco, the existence of the Local 2/Hospitality Industry Child and Elder Care Plan is a vital tool in making sure that the hospitality industry workers of the City have access to quality child care. However, it is

"It [child care benefit] is very beneficial for my family and me because it helps me pay for child care so I have money for other needs."

— CECELIA, HOSTESS, MOTHER OF ONE

clear that child care costs still remain a problem for families. In addition, 32 percent of parents using informal care expressed the desire to have their children move to a more formal child care setting where their children can receive more social interaction and education. An increase in the subsidy established for formal child care could assist these parents in choosing formal care. An increase will also ease the financial burden on those currently using formal care, of which 50 percent cited the cost of care as a significant problem for them.

At the request of the Trustees, the Network estimated an increase dollar amount for parents using formal care. Based on an initial calculation, we suggest increasing the formal child care benefit amount by \$150.00. This increased amount covers approximately 50 percent of the average cost of formal care in San Francisco, therefore providing additional financial access for families.

■ Offer Training and Resources for Informal Care Providers

Informal providers care for about 73 percent of the children in our survey and care in these settings is being provided to a wide range of ages. Providing age specific training around health and safety, nutrition, and age appropriate educational tools will improve the knowledge and skill sets of those individuals providing informal care. We found that parents choosing informal care wanted a more educational and social environment for their child, but also valued the flexibility informal care provided

them and the opportunity to have a trusted family member care for their child. Supplying informal providers with educational materials and training would support parental choice and help enhance the quality of the care children are receiving.

■ Identify Activities and Programs for School Age Children

A majority of children in informal care are school age. Considering that most parents find their providers through personal relationships, they might not be aware of the activities and programs that currently exist for school age children. Providing parents with a list of local community resources, free programs, summer programs, and after school programs where children can interact with their peers, would give parents additional options for their children when they are not in school.

■ Address Child Care Options that Accommodate Parents' Schedules

The vast majority of parents stated they had worked some weekend hours, and more than half worked at least some amount of time after six p.m. Almost one quarter of the parents using informal care said it was very difficult to find care due to scheduling problems. These findings suggest the need for flexible child care arrangements. In fact, half of the parents using informal care stated what they liked most about their child care was the convenient hours. Compiling information on the availability of licensed day care centers and family child care homes with extended hours, and making the information available to Plan participants will open up more child care options. In addition, an effort should be made to work with existing licensed programs to expand the supply of after hours care.

■ Explore Ways to Stabilize Employee Work Schedules

In addition to working evenings, early mornings, and weekends, 45 percent of those surveyed indicated that the hours they worked each week varied. Parents' need for care during non-traditional hours is only exacerbated by their changing work schedule. Giving sufficient notice of schedule changes, or working to decrease the frequency in which schedule changes occur would aid parents in obtaining and maintaining stable child care arrangements.

■ Advocate for Low-Income Families at the State and Federal Levels

After examining the total household income of the families surveyed, we found that over half of those families with four people earned less than \$40,000 a year. While these families are technically eligible for public assistance, there are only enough public funds available to serve low income working families earning less than \$16,600 a year in San Francisco. Efforts at the state and federal level to increase public funding will assist HERE Local 2 families and help to ensure that all families eligible for child care subsidies can be served.

■ Advocate for the Replication of the Plan In Other Workplaces

The benefits provided by the Local 2/Hospitality Industry Child and Elder Care Plan play a critical role in the lives of plan members. It is a national model that has the potential for replication within other workplace settings across the United States. Providing additional visibility to the program and its successes will help to ensure that a larger number of parents have access to the child care and family supports they so desperately need.

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⁹Phone conversation with San Francisco Children's Council using average family size and incomes of non-CalWORKS and non-Family Preservation families being served between July 1, 2001 and June 30, 2002. This figure is an estimate.

ENDNOTES: TESTS OF SIGNIFICANCE

| | |
|------|-------------------------------|
| i | t (297) = 2.40, p <.05 |
| ii | χ^2 (1) = 60.40, p <.001 |
| iii | t (280) = 6.74, p <.001 |
| iv | t (289) = -2.39, p <.05 |
| v | χ^2 (9) = 32.92, p<.001 |
| vi | χ^2 (1) = 53.42, p<.001 |
| vii | χ^2 (1) = 12.12, p<.001 |
| viii | χ^2 (1) = 12.01, p<.05 |
| ix | χ^2 (1) = 10.73, p<.05 |
| x | χ^2 (1) = 5.55, p<.05 |
| xi | χ^2 (1) = 21.44, p<.001 |
| xii | χ^2 (1) = 4.37, p<.05 |
| xiii | χ^2 (1) = 26.87, p<.001 |

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