

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



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.

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.

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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.