

SONOMA COUNTY CHILD CARE PLAN INFORMATION FOR BUSINESS

Goal 5: Quality, affordable and accessible early care and education programs are considered a critical part of the infrastructure that sustains the economic growth and community development of Sonoma County.

Community Input Regarding Business

Government, business and the private sector must become involved in child care issues and work in partnership to ensure success. In Sonoma County, businesses are becoming more educated about the relationship between child care and the economy via the Economic Impact Report for Child Care (EIR), presented throughout the 2002-2003 fiscal year. The report also shows how stable child care reduces employee absenteeism and turnover, increases productivity and creates a more stable, committed workforce. It also demonstrates that the child care industry generates revenues and employs workers equal to other major industries in the County.

The child care field must develop instruments that speak to the needs and priorities of business leaders. Business leaders in turn must share resources and expertise that would allow child care workers to develop sound business practices. Sonoma County needs an intermediary - either a person or a group - who can translate and interpret both the needs of business and child care.

Many businesses are very concerned with the family/life issues of their employees, and yet lack expertise in setting up and maintaining benefits and programs that support employees. Businesses could use a single point of entry into the child care world - a "one stop" center that can provide businesses with the guidance needed to determine employees' child care needs. Child care could use the participation of key businesses in establishing model or pilot projects that excel at providing family/life benefits. Forums and meetings between key business and child care leaders could further frame the future goals of this vital partnership.

Strategies to Promote Business Involvement

- 1. Engage business leadership, collaborate with business partnerships and support round tables to explore ways to exchange expertise between business and child care industries and model best practices.**
- 2. Develop relevant data to inform employers of the benefits of supporting child care and youth activities.**
- 3. Make presentations to key businesses, government and community organizations throughout Sonoma County using current and relevant data, such as the "Economic Impact Report of Child Care in Sonoma County," to illustrate the impact of the child care industry on local economy.**
- 4. Establish a centralized resource center to provide businesses with information and consultant services or referrals on developing early care and education facilities and work/family policies and benefits. Make presentations to Human Resource Managers and work with local businesses and government to create options for parents, including family friendly policies, parental leave and extended leave.**

Indicator 1

BUSINESS:

Business leaders understand the relationship of child care and early learning to employment and economic sustainability as demonstrated by their support of work/family policies and benefits.

Performance Measures

1. More employers subsidize, provide as a benefit, or offer child care options to their employees.
2. Model businesses build child care facilities or establish linkages with neighboring child care programs and act as mentors for other interested business leaders and employers.
3. A "one stop" center is established, publicized and accessed by the business community to improve work/family benefits.

BENEFITS TO EMPLOYERS Of Supporting Families' Child Care Needs

- Decreased Employee Absenteeism
- Increased Employee Retention and Loyalty
- Increased Employee Morale and Productivity
- Enhanced Employee Recruitment
- Increased Workforce Candidates Pool
- Improved Business Image and Recognition in the Community
- Community Benefits
 - improved employee labor skills
 - higher family earning potentials
 - decreased unemployment
 - decreased family reliance on government support programs
 - strengthened local economic infrastructure (supports and attracts working families)
 - cultivates future labor force through high quality early education and child care

“... the US Department of Health and Human Services (found that) employers who support the child care needs of their employees experience improvements in recruitment and retention, employee morale, productivity, and business image. In fact, two thirds to three fourths of employers found that the benefits of offering child care alternatives, flexible schedules and other family leave policies either exceeded the costs or were cost-neutral.”

“The savings to society generated by every dollar invested in high quality child care and learning programs: \$7 saved for every \$1 spent.” (From “For the Children: A Comprehensive Plan for Child Care and Learning Programs, Sonoma County 2005-2010” by the Sonoma County Child Care Planning Council.)

Some Ideas of Ways to Support Families' Child Care Needs

In order from free/low-cost to higher cost:

- Offer Flexible Work Arrangements
 - gradual return to work after childbirth or adoption
 - flexible start and stop workday times
 - occasional work at home
 - allowing movement from full-time to part-time
 - job sharing
 - flexibility when children's needs arise unexpectedly
- Offer Dependent Care Flexible Spending Account (Section 125 Plan)
- Develop relationships with local child care programs and the local Child Care Resource and Referral Agency, e.g. meet the program director, serve on their Board of Directors
- Allow employees to use Sick Leave to care for dependents
- Inform parents about Earned Income Tax Credit
- If work type and environment are appropriate, allow parent to bring child to work when mildly ill or provider unexpectedly unavailable
- Survey employees about child care needs
- Provide Parent Education/Support activities at lunchtime
- Have Emergency Child Care Fund for back-up or emergency child care needs
- Provide two hours per year for parent to visit child care – unpaid or paid
- Provide paid Sick Leave
- Purchase slots at local child care programs
- Provide partial or full child care subsidies
- Build a child care center at the worksite