

QUALITY CHILD CARE HELPS PARENTS WORK AND CHILDREN LEARN

The need for quality child care and after-school activities is a daily concern for millions of American parents.

- Every day, 12 million preschoolers—including 6 million infants and toddlers—are in child care. This is three out of five young children.¹
- Millions more school-age children and youth are in after-school activities while their parents work. Yet, over 7 million children are left home alone on a regular basis,² often during the afternoon hours when juvenile crime peaks and children are vulnerable to risky behavior like smoking, drug and alcohol use, and sexual activity.³

Parents need child care to work and support their families.

- Sixty-five percent of mothers with children under age six, and 79 percent of mothers with children ages six to 13 are in the labor force.⁴
- In 2001, just one-quarter of all families with children younger than six—and only one-third of married-couple families with young children—had one parent working and one parent who stayed at home.⁵
- Women bring home half or more of their families' earnings in the majority of U.S. households.⁶
- One out of three children of working mothers are either poor even though their mother works or would be poor if their mother did not work.⁷

Good care is unaffordable for many families, and not enough help is available for them.

- Full-day child care can easily cost between \$4,000 and \$10,000 a year—at least as much as public college tuition.⁸ Yet one-quarter of America's families with young children earn less than \$25,000 a year,⁹ and a family with both parents working full time at minimum wage earns only \$21,400 a year.
- Most low-income families cannot get help paying for child care. Nationally, only one out of seven children eligible under federal law receives help.¹⁰ In nearly two-fifths of the states, a family earning just \$25,000 a year would not qualify for assistance.¹¹
- Over one-third of the states place eligible families who apply for help on waiting lists or turn them away without even taking their names.¹² These families face serious hardships. They struggle to meet their basic needs, often go into debt or may turn to welfare, and are frequently forced to use poor quality child care because they cannot afford better options.¹³

Child care is hard to find.

- Parents in communities across the country have difficulty finding the child care that they need. Families with infants, parents working second or third shift, and parents whose children have special needs face particular challenges finding care.
- A Philadelphia study found that only two out of ten centers were rated as good, with the rest minimally adequate or inadequate. Only 4 percent of family child care programs were rated as good. Low-income children are often less likely to receive good care.¹⁴

- A Massachusetts study found that over half of centers serving mostly moderate- to high-income children provided good quality care (57 percent), compared to just one-third of centers serving mostly low-income children (36 percent).¹⁵
- In California's low-income communities, the number of slots in child care centers per 100 children under age five is about one-third lower than in higher-income communities, according to one study. Slots are also limited in moderate-income areas, where families earn too much to qualify for child care assistance but not enough to afford high-priced care on their own.¹⁶ Overall, the supply of child care has barely kept pace with the growth in the child population.¹⁷

Child care helps shape children's futures, yet the quality of care for many children is inadequate.

- Research on early brain development and early childhood demonstrates that the experiences children have and the attachments children form early in life have a decisive, long-lasting impact on their later development and learning.¹⁸ High-quality care beginning in early childhood improves children's school success.¹⁹
- Many children are not getting the good quality care and education they need in their early years to start school ready to learn. Forty-six percent of kindergarten teachers report that half of their class or more have specific problems when entering kindergarten, including difficulty following directions, lack of academic skills, problems in their situations at home, and/or difficulty working independently.²⁰
- Good quality child care is hard to find in a marketplace where child care workers earn an average of just \$16,980 a year,²¹ and typically receive no benefits or paid leave.²²
- Cosmetologists must attend as much as 2,000 hours of training before they can get a license,²³ yet 30 states do not require teachers in child care centers to have *any* early childhood training before they begin working with children.²⁴

¹ Data from the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Household Education Survey, as cited in Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, *America's Children: Key National Indicators of Well-Being, 2002* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2002). Retrieved from the Internet at <http://www.childstats.gov/americanchildren/>.

² Kristin Smith, *Who's Minding the Kids? Child Care Arrangements: Spring 1997* (Current Population Reports P70-86) (Washington, DC: U.S. Census Bureau, 2002).

³ Howard Snyder and Melissa Sickmund, *Juvenile Offenders and Victims: 1999 National Report* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Programs, 1999); and Kathleen M. Dwyer, et al., "Characteristics of Eighth-Grade Students Who Initiate Self-Care in Elementary and Junior High School," *Pediatrics*, Vol. 86, No. 3, 2000.

⁴ "In the labor force" includes mothers who are employed as well as mothers who are looking for work. Unpublished data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics on marital and family characteristics from the March 2001 Current Population Survey.

⁵ Children's Defense Fund calculations based on data from the U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey Annual Demographic Supplement, Detailed Income Tables, "Table FINC-03. Presence of Related Children Under 18 Years Old—All Families, by Total Money Income in 2001, Type of Family Work Experience in 2001, Race and Hispanic Origin of Reference Person" and "Table FINC-04. Presence of Related Children Under 18 Years Old—Married Couple Families, by Total Money Income in 2001, Work Experience in 2001, Race and Hispanic Origin of Reference Person." Retrieved from the Internet at <http://ferret.bls.census.gov/macro/032002/faminc/toc.htm>.

⁶ Whirlpool Foundation Study by the Families and Work Institute, *Women: The New Providers* (New York, NY: Families and Work Institute, May 1995).

⁷ Unpublished Children's Defense Fund tabulations of Census Bureau data from the March 2002 Current Population Survey.

⁸ Karen Schulman, *Issue Brief: The High Cost of Child Care Puts Quality Care Out of Reach for Many Families* (Washington, DC: Children's Defense Fund, 2000).

⁹ Children's Defense Fund calculations based on data from the U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey Annual Demographic Supplement, Detailed Income Tables, "Table FINC-03. Presence of Related Children Under 18 Years Old—All Families, by Total Money Income in 2001, Type of Family Work Experience in 2001, Race and Hispanic Origin of Reference Person." Retrieved from the Internet at <http://ferret.bls.census.gov/macro/032002/faminc/toc.htm>.

¹⁰ Children's Defense Fund calculations using data on the number of children served from U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, *FY 2003 Budget in Brief*, February 2002, and data on the number of children eligible from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, as presented by Julie B. Isaacs at the State Administrators Meeting in Washington, DC, August 13, 2001.

¹¹ Danielle Ewen, Helen Blank, Katherine Hart, and Karen Schulman, *State Developments in Child Care, Early Education, and School-Age Care 2001* (Washington, DC: Children's Defense Fund, 2002).

¹² Danielle Ewen, Helen Blank, Katherine Hart, and Karen Schulman, *State Developments in Child Care, Early Education, and School-Age Care 2001* (Washington, DC: Children's Defense Fund, 2002).

¹³ See, for example: Deborah Shlack, Mary Daly, and Lee Bradford, *Faces on the Waiting List: Waiting for Child Care Assistance in Ramsey County* (Ramsey County, MN: Ramsey County Human Services, 1999). Survey conducted by the Minnesota Center for Survey Research at the University of Minnesota; Philip Coltoff, Myrna Torres, and Natasha Lifton, *The Human Cost of Waiting for Child Care: A Study* (New York, NY: The Children's Aid Society, December 1999); and Casey Coonerty and Tamsin Levy, *Waiting for Child Care: How Do Parents Adjust to Scarce Options in Santa Clara County?* (Berkeley, CA: Policy Analysis for California Education, 1998).

¹⁴ Improving School Readiness Project, *Early to Rise: Improving the School Readiness of Philadelphia's Young Children* (Philadelphia, PA: United Way of Southeastern Pennsylvania and School District of Philadelphia, November 2001).

¹⁵ Nancy L. Marshall, Cindy L. Creps, Nancy R. Burstein, Frederic B. Glantz, Wendy Wagner Robeson, and Steve Barnett, *The Cost and Quality of Full Day, Year-round Early Care and Education in Massachusetts: Preschool Classrooms. Executive Summary* (Wellesley, MA: Wellesley Centers for Women and Abt Associates Inc, 2001).

¹⁶ Bruce Fuller and Emlei Kuboyama, "Cracks in California's Child-Care System," *PACE Newsletter*, Vol. 3, No. 1, Spring 2001, pp. 1 and 5.

¹⁷ Bruce Fuller, Shelley Waters Boots, Emilio Castilla, and Diane Hirshberg, *A Stark Plateau—California Families See Little Growth in Child Care Centers* (Policy Brief 02-2), (Berkeley and Stanford, CA: Policy Analysis for California Education and San Francisco, CA: California Child Care Resource and Referral Network, July 2002).

¹⁸ Carnegie Corporation of New York, *Starting Points: Meeting the Needs of Our Youngest Children* (New York, NY: Carnegie Corporation, August 1994), executive summary, p.4.

¹⁹ Lynn A. Karoly, Peter W. Greenwood, Susan S. Everingham, Jill Houbé, M. Rebecca Kilburn, C. Peter Rydell, Matthew Sanders, and James Chiesa, *Investing in Our Children: What We Know and Don't Know about the Costs and Benefits of Early Childhood Interventions* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1998).

²⁰ Sara E. Rimm-Kaufman, Robert C. Pianta, and Martha J. Cox, *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, Vol. 15, No. 2, 2000, as cited in Early Education Clearinghouse, "Kindergarten Teachers Perceive Difficulty in Transitions to School," *Facts in Action*, Associated Day Care Services, November 2000.

²¹ U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Table 1. National Employment and Wage Data from the Occupational Employment Statistics Survey by Occupation, 2001." (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Labor, 2002). Retrieved from the Internet at <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/ocwage.t01.htm>.

²² Marcy Whitebook, Carollee Howes, and Deborah Phillips, *Worthy Work, Unlivable Wages: The National Child Care Staffing Study, 1988-1997* (Washington, DC: Center for the Child Care Workforce, 1998); and Suzanne Helburn, et al., *Cost, Quality, and Child Outcomes Study* (Denver, CO: University of Colorado, 1995).

²³ Conversation with Norma Lee, Executive Director, Cosmetology Advancement Foundation, December 18, 2001.

²⁴ Children's Defense Fund analysis of data compiled by the National Child Care Information Center from licensing regulations posted on the National Resource Center for Health and Safety in Child Care's Web site, <http://nrc.urhsc.edu>, November 2002.