



Assessing Community Needs for Child Care

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The need for child care has been documented nationally through state and national efforts, publications, and demographic studies by public, private, and federal agencies and organizations that serve the interests of children and families. Much of the documentation of the nation's child care needs is attributed to the dramatic increase in the numbers of working parents (particularly mothers) of very young children and the numbers of school age children who are without parent/adult supervision after school hours. Although there is merit to the national and state data, there is also the need for individual communities to gather and analyze data that is specific to their own localities. Such a process would facilitate collaboration among various levels of a community to identify and prioritize service and resource needs.

The purposes for conducting a community child care needs assessment are varied. These purposes include creating an accurate picture of the supply of child care, identifying unmet needs for child care, developing an estimate of available child care services for non-traditional care and special needs children, determining causes of inadequate care, gathering data on funding sources for child care programs, and determining the best use of child care funds. A primary purpose of the assessment also is to obtain locally derived data and information that can be used to guide community based decisions and policy making around the issues of child care.

An assessment of community child care needs requires preliminary thought about perceived community needs relative to child care. Planning and processing, logistics of designing, administering, and analyzing the information and data are all critical components in considering a community assessment. Efforts should be made to engage the interest and attention of various levels of the community to recognize the project as a necessary and viable process. This process is often time consuming and demanding on community

resources. The process also involves a systematic approach to data collection, data analysis, and reporting of results.

In addition to surveying families, data would need to be collected on various demographic factors related to families, parents, children, and the community, such as the rate of growth for the locality. Both quantitative and qualitative data can be gathered and later analyzed using statistical procedures and content analysis.

The Child Care Needs Assessment Survey

The purpose for doing the survey determines the survey design. For example, to identify unmet needs for child care among lower paid employees, survey items may include basic aspects of the employee's job, basic demographic facts, financial situation, current child care arrangements, and preferences for child care arrangements.

Questions for assessing the child care needs of families in rural communities may include: where do children spend their after school hours? what problems do parents have with care arrangements? at what age do parents feel children can be left home alone? what educational information is needed by children in self-care? And how often and for what time periods do families need child care?

Other questions for respondents could be relative to identifying present source(s) of child care for preschool children, rating their satisfaction with these arrangements, and giving the total weekly cost of child care. Respondents not currently using a day care center could be asked whether they would use such a center if the cost was reasonable and the location was convenient.

It is essential to ensure confidentiality of the respondents and their answers during the data collection and reporting phase of the study. Include a cover letter that

explains the purpose of the survey and assures the respondents that their answers will be kept confidential and reported in such a way that no person can be identified. The questionnaire (survey) should contain no identifying information and no name or address list should exist.

The following sample survey suggests items for consideration in the survey design.

A Community Child Care Needs Assessment Survey (sample)

This is an assessment of child care needs of the (locality name) community. If you have parenting responsibilities, we would appreciate your time in helping us assess your needs. Please complete the survey and return no later than (give time frame). Thank you for assisting us with this effort.

1. Would you use child care services if they were available to you?	Yes	No
2. If yes, please complete the remainder of the survey.		
3. Are you currently using child care services?	Yes	No
If yes, please identify the type of services you use:		
AGE RANGE	# of Children	\$ COST/CH
Infant (Birth to 11 months)	_____	_____
Toddler (11 to 36 months)	_____	_____
Preschool (3 to 5 years)	_____	_____
After School Care (K-6th grade)	_____	_____
After School Care (7-9th grade)	_____	_____
4. Please mark the type of child care needed:		
Full Time	_____	
Half Days (5 days a week)	_____	
Partial Week (2 or 3 times/wk)	_____	
Half Days-Partial wk (2 or 3 times/wk)	_____	
After School Care	_____	
Night Care or Evening Care	_____	
Sick Child Care	_____	
Other:	_____	
5. Please mark the location/type of care you are currently utilizing:		
Type/Location	_____	_____
# of Children	_____	_____
Age(s) of Children	_____	_____
Day Care Center	_____	_____
Family Care Center	_____	_____
Provider in my own Home	_____	_____
Spouse/Partner	_____	_____
Care by family members	_____	_____
After School Care	_____	_____
Care by older sibling	_____	_____
Other: _____	_____	_____
6. Are you satisfied with your current child care arrangements?	Yes	No
If no, please explain:		

14. Please check the amount you consider reasonable to pay for child care PER MONTH/WEEK/PER CHILD during the regular school year. Check only one.
- a. No pay required _____
 - b. \$ 1-24 _____
 - c. \$ 25-40 _____
 - d. \$ 41-60 _____
 - e. \$ 61-80 _____
 - f. \$ 81-100 _____
 - g. \$ 101-125 _____
 - h. Over \$125 _____

15. Have you had any of these child care related problems during the past year?
Check problem areas.

Yes, I have had this problem

- a. Cost of care _____
- b. Finding temporary care _____
- c. Finding care for sick child _____
- d. Finding care for child with special needs _____
- e. Location of care _____
- f. Transportation to/from care _____
- g. Dependability of care _____
- h. Quality of care _____
- i. Scheduling child care to match work schedule _____

Thank you very much for your assistance!!

The decision to conduct a community assessment of child care needs should be a community decision involving collaborative efforts at various levels. The process involves a systematic approach to data collection, data analysis, and reporting that involves staff time and use of community resources.

References:

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