

Milwaukee Brighter Futures

A Better Community Through Prevention

Summary of Meeting: Jan 19, 2010

Quality child care critical for children

Options outlined for improving system at January meeting

Not only is quality child care critical to the development of children, but it is important to the economic development of the community.

Representatives of the Public Policy Forum of Milwaukee appeared at the January Brighter Futures meeting at Aurora Family Service, to discuss the Forum's recent paper on child care, "The Price of Quality." <http://www.publicpolicyforum.org/pdfs/PriceOfQualityRevised.pdf>

Anneliese Dickman, research director for the Forum, said the survey was the result of the interest of the Forum's Board on whether early childhood education could be used for economic development, as well as to develop a higher paid workforce of child car workers. She said the study looked "at whether the benefits of early childhood education outweigh the cost of quality child care."



Dickman

The study took about three years to complete, she said, adding that "we started with agreeing with earlier research that early childhood education does

benefit children." The Public Policy Forum is one of Milwaukee's important nonpartisan research centers, and has been serving the community for more than 100 years.

Melissa Kovachs, Public Policy Forum researcher, said that "early childhood education affects all of the community." She outlined the Wisconsin Shares system, which is the state's method of subsidizing child care costs for low-income families. There are two types of care: Family child care, which is either licensed by state to serve eight or fewer children, or by the county to serve six or fewer; and group child care, licensed by the state. Both are eligible for payments through Wisconsin Shares, which last year paid \$350 million to families in Milwaukee County.

While much has been spent on child care, Kovachs said, what has been missing is the issue of quality child care.

There's a gap between how parents view child care and what professionals view as most valuable, she said. Research shows the parents often do not value the benefits from quality child care as the professionals do. Parents, for instance, gave highest marks to the "care"



Kovachs

given by persons as shown by the 'warmth' of the caregiver.

Only four percent of parents contacted in the survey got referrals from a referral agency like Four Cs. Most, she said, relied on informal referrals, such as from friends or relatives.

Kovachs said that the short-term benefits of quality child care, coupled with early education, include higher school readiness. Some long-term benefits include better job prospects and lower special education costs, along with broad positive broad societal impact, involving such matters as corrections, juvenile delinquency, etc.

High quality does cost more, Kovach acknowledged, but it does return a benefit, with studies showing savings anywhere from \$3 to \$7.75 for each dollar spent on quality care. She cited the Perry Preschool pilot program where some 7% of the children who were in the early childhood education program were chronic offenders at age 25 compared to 35% among those who were not enrolled.

Barriers to quality child care was shown through research that surveyed 414 providers in Southeast Wisconsin, she said. Costs kept coming up as the main barrier, since training of staff costs money, as does accreditation. Wisconsin Shares provides the same dollars for high and low quality care, and does not have

incentives for high quality care. The market is not providing incentives for quality, she said.

Another barrier is that parents don't have enough knowledge about what constitute high quality, she said.

She said the Public Policy Forum does not advocate for any particular solution, but that it did offer possible options, which include:

To maintain status quo, which is less costly at about \$5,600 per child per year in direct care for southeast Wisconsin.

To offer an incremental approach to current system, which may be politically more doable at about \$8,000 per child.

To implement a Quality Rating and Improvement System. The state has passed such a system, but has appropriated no new money. Kovachs said some 20 other states have such a system. It would make comparable information about child care providers available to families, who might say: "I don't want my child in a 2-star system when he or she could be in a 5-star system."

To target quality improvement, by intervening in a targeted area.

To develop a "Cadillac system" that would reform the entire system to require high quality in all programs. It would maximize the benefits across the whole region and cost about \$11,000 per child.

Kovachs said it is up to policy makers and the public to weigh the benefits of providing quality care and then to act accordingly.

Clarence Johnson, of St. Charles Youth and Family Services, agreed the child care issue is "huge," and that the state should look to find out about the outcomes in other states that have used the Quality Rating system. "If we could spend all this money bailing out Wall Street, why couldn't we use this money to bail out the early childhood education system?" he asked.

Kovachs said there's no need to "reinvent the wheel" since some states have successfully used other programs, such as endowments or are offering subsidies to encourage parents to place their children into quality programs.

Dickman noted that Wisconsin law permits districts to offer 4 yr kindergarten and most districts do offer it. She added that some states are continuing preschool programs even where there are early kindergarten programs.

In responding, **Joyce Mallory**, executive director of the Malaika Early Learning Center, said education begins early in life and continues throughout life. The quality of care was affected, she said, when regulations were reduced with the development of W-2. She said the W-2 system created family centers and deregulated care. Mallory said that W-2 agencies encouraged a lot of persons to go into child care as a way of getting a job and reducing the numbers of persons receiving cash benefits. Many persons just weren't qualified, she said. "You need to know something about how to provide care."

The first question should be what kind of qualifications the teachers have, Mallory continued. "We can't keep kids all day with a worker who has no high school



Delishia Johnson and Joyce Mallory

education," she said. The recent disclosures of fraud in the system illustrate the need for a better infrastructure and monitoring. Room sizes are critical, too, Mallory added. While some of the options may be costly and run up to \$10,000 to \$12,000, the savings in future costs

from lowering additional special education needs and juvenile crime rates may make it worth it, she said. Mallory urged those who work with families to help educate them on the need for quality care and to support policies such as the proposed Quality Risk program.

Delishia Johnson, a career development coordinator for 4 Cs (Community Coordinated Child Care), noted that many childcare workers don't have experience to provide the type of early childhood education that is critical. Early relationships are valuable, since 80% of child's brain is developed in first 3 years, she said. A lot of providers don't have experience with caring practices, she said, adding "You can't do what you don't know."

She continued: "It used to be a calling to teach children. Our children are suffering because the teachers don't view it as a calling."

She noted that many child care centers are located in buildings that used to be spaces for taverns, gas stations and laundromats. "Some childcare centers still have the bar in the middle of the care room," she said.

Clarence Johnson said that many quality child care centers have slots available for children, but parents often choose less educationally rich family care centers because of convenience or cost.

Mallory said there are slots available in quality centers, but that parents choose not to go to.

Jan Buchler, of The Parenting Network, also noted that parents never know the difference between a “licensed” and an “accredited” center, often accepting that the “license” confers some sort of expertise upon the center. Parents need to understand the paying the \$30 a month co-pay may be in the child’s best interests.

Milwaukee Child Abuse Prevention Services (MCAPS) Coalition Report: Jan Buchler

The Steering Committee of the MCAPS group has an opening for two more members; the committee includes also the chairs of the key committees of MCAPS.

During 2009, MCAPS initiated various programs, including:

Welcome Baby, a program that is early this year in COA, the Vincent Family Resource Center, the Children’s Service Society Family Resource Center, St. Stephen’s Family Life Center and La Causa. The program hopes to expand to other centers later.

Statewide Awareness to Action program to prevent childhood sexual assault. She said any agency may request a presentation to parents and workers of the “Stewards of Children” program that involves means of protecting children against sexual assault.

Buchler urged persons interested in the programs to contact her.

Teen Pregnancy Prevention Network Report:

Jody Rhodes, of Neulife Center, reported on two projects of the Network:

Teen Summit. During 2010, the Network is planning three summits, and is looking to place them in either middle or high schools. She asked BF participants for recommendations of schools for the programs. The

Summits offer places for workshops and exhibits of services to teens, along with some fun activities for a day.

Youth Ambassadors is a group of teens interested in supporting teen pregnancy prevention initiatives. She urged agencies to refer additional teens to the program.

JoCasta Zamarripa, of Planned Parenthood, is the new co-chair of TPPN. She reported on the Family Unity Night celebration that the Network is planning for the second Thursday in October (Oct. 14). The group is hoping to expand its impact this year, with greater publicity and more involvement of the agencies.

Zamarripa said the effort deals with urging families to have dinner together since it promotes “communication” between parents and children, with the longterm results being better education, less teen pregnancy and better outcomes. “It’s an all-around good thing,” she said.

Racquel Bell, the BF coordinator, said ALL BF agencies will be asked to suggest families that would be interested in participating in the Family Unity Night effort. Such families could help for the core of those interested in promoting the event.

United Neighborhood Centers of Milwaukee (UNCOM) Report: Terrence Maggitt.

He said he will be monitoring the agencies as they submit outcomes data and referring to the logic models. He will be visiting agencies, he said. Those having questions may call him at 305-4512 (cell) or 978-2003 (office). His role is to track the program activities of the agencies, he said. The process is a “useful tool,” he said. He is available to assist the agencies.

Announcements:

Pathfinders is opening a drop in center for youth for ages 14-25. Information available at <http://pathfindersmke.org>.

St. Charles Youth and Family Services is offering 2 ½ days of workshops for adults to be come a trained in the Community Building process. Clarence Johnson said the workshops have proven to be successful with various groups of people. Look for announcements.