



Family Child Care Study 2007

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Thank you also to the 250 family child care providers who completed the survey.

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By Beth Sullins

Family child care is the child care arrangement of choice for many families. The home-based environment, small groupings, and mixed ages of children appeal to families of young children, who want their children in a smaller, more intimate environment. Often, family child care providers can be more flexible with operating hours, and can meet the need for extended hour care in early morning, in the evening, or on weekends.

In Oklahoma, family child care is licensed by the Department of Human Services (DHS) Division of Child Care, and defined as “a family home which provides care and protection for seven or fewer children for part of the 24-hour day.” (Licensing Requirements for Family Child Care Homes and Large Child Care Homes, 2006). Large Family Child Care Homes, defined as “a residential family home that provides care and supervision for eight to twelve children for part of the 24-hour day”, are also licensed by DHS. Currently, there are 2,166 small family child care homes and 1,230 large family child care homes in Oklahoma.(1)

The Child Care Resource Center, (CCRC) the Resource and Referral Agency for Tulsa, Creek, Rogers and Wagoner Counties and based in Tulsa, has offered support and services to the family child care community for over 20 years. In addition to operating a referral service to connect families with child care home providers, the agency operates the Child Care Food Program, a Toy Lending and Resource Library program, support for National Association for Family Child Care (NAFCC) Accreditation for providers, and ongoing training opportunities.

Over time, services geared toward family child care providers have come and gone, based on funding, grants and staffing. Currently, no formal support program for family child care providers exists in the area. To address this issue, CCRC surveyed 805 family child care home providers in the four-county service delivery area in Spring 2007 to obtain information from providers regarding their current services, their Star Level, training needs, and desired program supports from CCRC. Each licensed child care home in the four-county service area was mailed a copy of the survey, and providers were given the opportunity to complete the survey by Internet or mail or fax. A total of 250 surveys were completed and returned (a 32% return rate).

Major Findings

Demographic Information

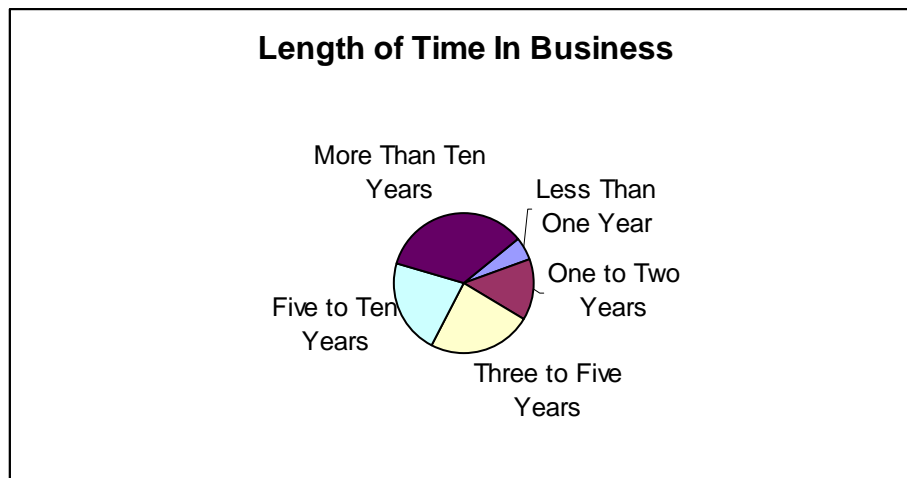
In the four-county service area (Tulsa, Creek, Rogers and Wagoner), 476 small family child care homes are licensed and 316 large family child care homes are licensed.(1) Of the 250 survey respondents, fifty-six percent (137) were licensed as small family child care homes; 44% (109) were licensed for eight or more children.

Family child care providers typically provide care for all ages of children, from birth to age 12 (and in some cases, older children). The 250 child care home providers care for 1,882 children,

ages six weeks to twelve years. Of these children, 836 (44%) were infants and toddlers (ages 0-2); 685 (36%) were pre-school age (ages 3-5); and 361 (19%) were school-age (ages 6 and up). When asked if they offered care for school-age children, 72% of the providers said they did, and of those, 80% offer care before school, after school, and during school breaks.

Ages of Children	Percent	Number of Children
0-9 months	10	191
10-23 months	17	313
2 years	18	332
3 years	16	301
4 years	12	235
5 years	8	149
6 and up	19	361
Total	100	1,882

Respondents were spread out among zip code areas. The largest number of respondents are grouped in North Tulsa (70) followed by mid-town Tulsa (32) and Broken Arrow (30). South Tulsa (21), Claremore (18), and East Tulsa (17) are home to a significant number of providers. Of the 250 child care providers, the majority (56%) have been in business over five years. Thirty-four percent have operated their child care home for more than ten years. Five percent have been in business less than one year, 14% have operated for one to two years, and 24% have been licensed from three to five years.



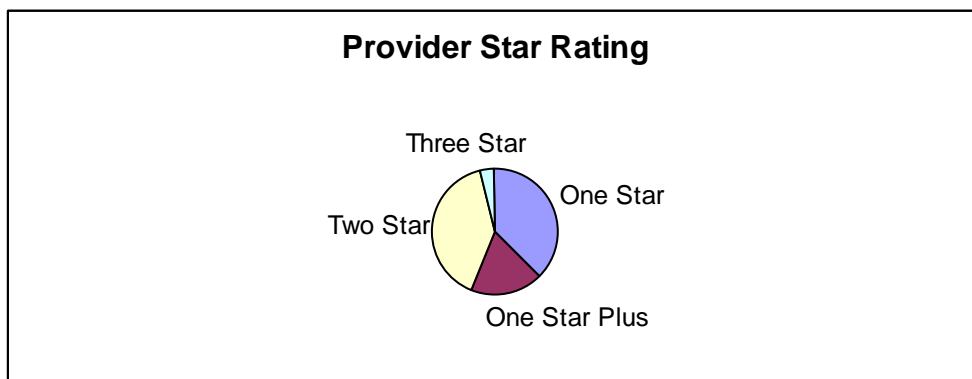
Zoning is often a contentious issue for family child care. Some local communities require family child care home providers to obtain a Zoning Clearance Permit, while others do not allow home-based businesses, which include family child care, to operate at all. The City of Tulsa requires small family child care home providers to be Zoned, but does not allow or recognize Large Family Child Care Homes. Large Family Child Care Homes in the City of Tulsa operate outside of Zoning regulations, which is a cause of concern. If a complaint is filed against a Large FCCCH, providers can be forced to pay legal fees, and other fees as decided by the City, and in some cases are forced to close or move. When asked if the provider's home was Zoned, 73% of

respondents indicated they had obtained a Zoning Clearance Permit, while 18% said they had not, because they lived in a rural area that did not require zoning. Another 9% weren't sure whether they were zoned or not. As 44% of the survey respondents indicated they operate Large Family Child Care Homes, it is clear that there are many homes operating outside of the City's Zoning Code.

Overwhelmingly, family child care providers speak only English in their homes (95%). Four percent are bilingual in Spanish, and four providers (1 %) are fluent in Sign Language. Five providers (1%) are currently caring for children who speak Spanish.

Star Levels and Accreditation

Family child care providers are ranked by Star Levels (as indicated by the Reaching for the Stars system operated by the Division of Child Care, DHS). Those levels are "One Star", "One Star Plus", "Two Star", and "Three Star". The "Reaching for the Stars" system is tied to the subsidy system for low-income families. Providers must be at the "One Star Plus" level or higher in order to receive child care subsidy payments. Of the 250 respondents, 68% (169) indicated they do accept DHS subsidy. Thirty-two percent do not. The largest number of respondents (101 or 40%) are at the "Two Star" level. Eighteen percent of the homes are "One Star Plus". Thirty-seven percent (93) are "One Star" homes, which means they meet minimum Licensing standards and in many cases do not participate in the optional Stars system.



Ten of the homes (4%) indicated they are "Three Star" (which also means they have achieved National Accreditation by NAFCC). However, when providers were asked if they were accredited by NAFCC, 28 providers indicated "Yes". Another 60 providers answered "Don't Know" for the accreditation question. When those providers who were not accredited were asked if they were interested in learning more about accreditation, 76 (30%) of the providers indicated they would like to learn more.

Professional Memberships/Services

One of the markers of quality child care is involvement in a professional organization. There are three local family child care associations (Tulsa County Family Child Care Association, Northside Child Care Network, Owasso Child Care Association). Seventy-nine providers (31%) indicated they belonged to one of these associations. Locally, two professional support

organizations offer membership (Tulsa Technology Center and Child Care Resource Center); 22 providers indicated membership in these. NAFCC has 13 local members.

Child Care Resource Center Services

CCRC operates a referral service for all licensed and legally-exempt child care programs, which helps parents find care and helps providers find clients for their programs. CCRC also operates the Child and Adult Care Food Program for child care homes, (CACFP) and a Toy Lending and Resource Library for home providers and the public.

The referral service is available to all child care programs; in order to receive referrals; programs must complete a series of questions and update their information with the referral service every six months. Eighty-five percent of respondents say they are listed with the referral service while 15% (31) answered “No” or “Don’t Know” to this question.

The Toy Lending Library (Library) is only available to licensed or permitted family child care homes, and members pay a yearly membership fee to check out materials from the Library. Providers typically must visit the library in person to check out materials and can keep them for two weeks. Thirty-one percent of respondents (78) indicate they are members of the Library, while 69% (83) said they are not. For those who are not members, reasons for not joining or using the Library included: Location (Distance) and Hours of Operation (26 or 31%); “Don’t Know About It” (13 or 15%); Lack of Time on Provider’s Part (10); “Just Haven’t Gotten Around to It” (10), and “I already have toys” (10). Five providers indicated they plan to join at some point.

CCRC sponsors the CACFP for child care homes, and contracts with about 25% of all licensed family child care homes in the area. We asked if providers used the CACFP (not necessarily the CCRC Food Program) and 75% of them do participate in the Food Program. For those that do not, the reasons were: “Too Much Paperwork”, “Not Worth it Financially” and “I Only Care for Infants and the Parents Supply the Food”.

Special Needs Care and Training

The need for child care providers who are trained to work with children with special needs (children with mild to severe physical or cognitive disabilities) continues to grow. Currently, 20% (46) of respondents are caring for children with special needs. Of these, 48% indicated they have enough support to care for them, while 52% do not. When asked what areas were lacking in support, they indicated “more training” and “financial support for additional staff”. Providers obtain special needs training from a variety of sources, including Tulsa Technology Center (48%), TIC-TOC (“Training Inclusive Child Care = Terrific Opportunities for Children”, operated by the University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center) (31%), and Tulsa Community College (27%). A few providers who have bachelor’s degrees attended special needs training in college.

Professional Development and Training

Family child care providers must obtain a minimum of 12 clock hours per year, and if they are at the Two Star level or above, the training requirement increases to 20 clock hours per year. A wide variety of training opportunities exist in the Tulsa area for child care providers to obtain training, from two-hour workshops to day-long conferences to college credit courses. For the purposes of this survey, we wanted to find out where people were receiving their training, how they preferred to get their training, and what type of training was needed.

Tulsa Technology Center (Tulsa Tech) is the source of training for the majority of respondents – 138 (56%) obtain their training at Tulsa Tech. Conferences (53%) and CCRC (44%) were utilized by many providers, following by Tulsa Community College (32%), on-line courses (18%), mail/correspondence courses (18%) and the Center for Early Childhood Professional Development (CECPD) (18%). Other options were local family child care associations, TIC-TOC, and watching videos/reading books.

When providers were asked how they preferred to obtain their training, on a scale of 1 to 5, the first choice was “Saturday Conferences”, followed by “Two-hour workshops”, and “On-Line Classes”. The least popular choices were “5 to 10 Hour Courses at Technology Centers” followed by “Classes by Mail”.

Based on their Star Level and credentials (Child Development Associate or CDA, Certificate of Mastery, Associates’ or Bachelors’ degree), providers need a variety of levels of training. DHS and CECPD define training courses as either Tier One (clock hours only) or Tier Two (advanced, minimum of four-hour trainings often with Continuing Education Units (CEUs) attached). Providers reported that the majority of their training needs to be “Tier Two” (113, or 55%) and/or with CEUs attached (81, or 39%). Forty-five percent of providers need only “Tier One” training hours.

When asked what topics for training providers would attend, the top two content areas were Behavior/Guidance (76%) and Curriculum/Activities (71%). Sixty-eight percent of providers would like Child Development; 60% need Infant/Toddler care training. Also popular choices were Health & Safety (50%), Recordkeeping and Taxes (46%), Room Arrangement (46%), and Make and Takes (44%). Overwhelmingly, family child care providers prefer training that is aimed specifically toward family child care; 92% would be more likely to attend training that is specifically for family child care homes.

Finding time to attend training is a challenge for many family child care providers. With a typical 12-hour workday, families of their own, and a business to run, many providers are reluctant to sacrifice their personal time to attend training. If they do attend training, they prefer it to be on weekday evenings (72%) or on Saturday mornings (70%). Thirty-three percent (80) opt for training on Saturday afternoons.

Training locations can be an issue for many child care providers, especially those in rural areas who must travel long distances to attend classes. When asked if they would attend training at the Child Care Resource Center, 78% responded “yes”. Twenty-two percent (53) responded “No”, and commented on where they would prefer to attend training. Of those, Broken Arrow or far South Tulsa was preferred by 43% (23), followed by Owasso/Claremore (25%). A smaller number of providers would like training West of Tulsa (4), Wagoner (3) or Midtown (2).

A variety of child care conferences are offered throughout Oklahoma each year, including a statewide Family Child Care Conference and the Fall Early Childhood Conference sponsored by the Child Care Resource Center. Sixty-eight percent of providers have attended a child care conference in this area, and of those, 49% attended a conference less than a year ago, 35% attended a conference one to two years ago, and for 15%, it has been two years or more that they attended a conference. When asked if the conference met their needs for training, 95% responded ‘yes’. For the other 5%, a variety of reasons were given, such as “I can’t attend on Saturdays” and “I can’t afford it.”

Other Services to Offer

Providers were asked “Other than to provide training, what services do you think CCRC could offer to family child care homes?” The 53 open-ended responses were positive, and the majority stated “Nothing, you already do it all!” Other suggestions regarded training on a variety of topics (7), in-depth consultation and/or outreach (8), and business/tax support (4).

Finally, when asked for other comments at the end of the survey, some providers expressed frustration with the child care system, with the families/parents they work with, and the need for more free training for child care providers; however, the majority of comments (29) expressed thanks for CCRC staff and programs. One provider stated, “I appreciate the family child care support CCRC provides. You have always been there when I needed you or your services. Continue to grow and adapt.”

Summary

The industry of family child care has changed significantly over the past two decades. Providers are asked to be more like teachers, while providing loving and family-style environments to young children. The number of Large Family Child Care Homes is increasing each year. Large homes can care for more children, increase income levels of providers, and have additional staff available to help care for children. The prevalence of Four-Year-Old programs in public schools has changed the makeup of family child care; the need for preschool care is not as great and the need for infant/toddler care continues to grow. In addition, family child care providers generally offer more flexibility for school-age children (transportation, extended hour care) than a child care center or school-based program can.

Meeting the training and support needs of family child care is challenging, as this survey reveals. Providers are not able to get substitutes to attend training during the day, do not typically have budgets set aside for training, and in some cases cannot obtain training locally due to distance or

transportation issues. While there is a significant amount of training available for the child care community, it is not always convenient, or targeted towards the unique needs of family child care providers.

With the advent of the “Reaching for the Stars” system, providers are more aware of national accreditation for their program and of increased professional development. Currently 12 providers are accredited by NAFCC (according to NAFCC, August 2007), or one percent of all licensed homes; however, 76 providers expressed interest in learning more about accreditation. CCRC can meet this need by examining a system of support for accreditation for child care homes including training, on-site technical assistance, and grants where possible.

The increase in Two-Star and higher child care home providers has increased the need for Tier Two/CEU training credits, as seen by the 55% who indicated the need for Tier Two training. As for topics of training, Behavior/Guidance, Curriculum/Activities, Child Development, and Infant/Toddler Care are the top choices and needs of providers. Developing Tier Two and CEU credit trainings on these topics, offering them in the evenings or on Saturday mornings, and specifically for family child care homes, would begin to address the need for training.

CCRC’s services overall meet the needs of providers, except concerning the hours and location of the Toy Lending Library. One-third of providers who haven’t joined the Library state the inability to get to the Library for this reason. Possibilities for meeting this need include taking Learning Luggage, resource books and children’s books out to providers in their communities monthly, or extending the hours of the Library to meet the needs of providers. Extending checkout limits (for example a one-month return policy instead of two weeks) may help providers who find it hard to get to CCRC every two weeks.

As the child care landscape continues to grow and change, family child care will be an integral part of supporting working families. As stated earlier, family child care providers offer more flexibility in hours and days of care, and are often the only formal child care option on weekends. Providing additional professional development opportunities, networking and assistance to family child care providers can and will positively impact the lives of thousands of young children in the Northeastern Oklahoma area. CCRC, as the leader in implementing quality enhancement services for early childhood programs, plans to expand its services to meet the needs of providers in all four counties, and ultimately improve the quality of care available for families.