

Chapter Two: Understanding the Child Care System

The child care system can be intimidating to those not familiar with it. As with any system, it has its own lingo, structures, and policies. Becoming familiar with this system is necessary for those providing services to refugees. Becoming more comfortable with the system will enable service providers to act as guides for refugee clients. **Fortunately, there are key agencies in every community that can help refugee serving agencies to understand and take advantage of the child care system.** These agencies are potentially key partners with whom refugee serving agencies can form collaborative relationships.

Finding Care

Each state has a **Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) contact**. These organizations provide referrals for local, licensed providers. They also educate families about their child care choices and available financial help. In addition, CCR&Rs provide training and technical assistance to child care providers. To find your CCR&R, you can:

- Contact [Child Care Aware](#) at 1-800-424-2246
- Visit *The Administration for Children and Families (ACF) Web site*. Contact information is listed under “State Profiles” on the [National Child Care Information Center’s \(NCCIC\) Web site](#). Scroll down to the map and click on your state. Then click on Contacts at the top of the page. You will find a “Child Care Resource and Referral” header listing your state agency.

Connecting with your CCR&R can be useful in many ways. Using their resource and referral network can help locate safe, qualified child care in your community, including:

- Child care for younger children
- After school programs
- Youth development activities for older children

CCR&R staffs are also available to:

- Assist refugee parents in applying for financial assistance for child care including state child care subsidies and local monies that may be available
- Collaborate with refugee serving agencies to organize trainings for refugees providing child care, such as trainings to help refugees gain employment as licensed child care providers, or trainings on health and safety information to help informal providers increase their quality of child care.

It is important to note that local CCR&Rs may not have experience working with refugees. They may not have staff capacity to meet the language needs of refugee clients, or they may be unfamiliar with refugees’ documentation and their entitlement to benefits. However, CCR&Rs are charged with the task of responding to all parents. Reaching out to these agencies to explore cross-service training opportunities and ways to link services can help refugee serving agencies to meet the child care needs of their clients.

CCR&Rs do not provide referrals to unlicensed providers. Connecting with unregulated providers requires a grassroots approach, utilizing networks that may be established through

ethnic communities, churches, community associations and other groups. Refugee service providers can assist refugees by: linking them with other users of informal child care; contacting religious organizations to use bulletin boards or service bulletins to advertise needs; posting requests on bulletin boards at Mutual Assistance Associations, libraries, and recreation centers/community centers; and contacting local colleges' department of student affairs to post child care requests. Students who are taking child care courses and looking for work experience can make ideal child care providers.

Most refugees are expected to set up child care quickly and to be able to adjust that care to accommodate work schedules. By contrast, most information distributed to the mainstream audience is geared towards a much longer planning process. Listed below are the times typically necessary for parents to arrange child care:

- **Family child care providers:** Parents typically need six to eight weeks to arrange this.
- **Child care centers:** These facilities generally have contracts with families and begin to know how many openings they may have about nine months in advance. Full time openings for infants and toddlers can be limited, and part time openings can be even harder to find in most areas. Many centers do keep waiting lists to fill unexpected openings. Pre-employment staff and case managers can act as important resources by maintaining relationships with CCR&R and child care providers and by being aware of child care options in their community.
- **Preschool or nursery school programs:** This type of care applies to 3- to 5-year-olds. Programs usually enroll children during the winter or early spring for the following fall. In most areas, these programs run only during the school year, for a few hours each day, two to five days per week.
- **In-home care:** Such care generally takes about eight to twelve weeks to set up. A parent can recruit individually or through an agency.

Paradoxically, refugee families are often expected to make child care arrangements in a shorter timeframe than what is expected of mainstream U.S. families. In order to meet the child care needs of refugees, employment counselors and case managers should explore child care options and potential waiting lists in their area, in order to inform refugee clients and encourage local child care providers to expand services, where needed.

Encourage refugee clients to research child care options and to develop contingency plans in the event that there are changes in the parents' schedule, illness, or some other unforeseen change in child care arrangements. One study documented that nearly 40 percent of children under the age of five with working mothers have more than one regular child care arrangement each week.⁴ There are numerous circumstances that necessitate a back up child care plan. For example, most out-of-home providers will not provide care to sick children, in-home providers might take a day off or quit, work schedules may shift, etc. It is important to work with refugee clients to anticipate these circumstances and to develop a short-term child care plan. Child care arrangements made during the initial resettlement process might need to be adjusted as needs change. As refugee families become economically self-sufficient, a wider range of child care options may be available to them.

⁴ Capizzano, J., Adams, G. (2000). *The Number of Child Care Arrangements Used by Children under Five*; Urban Institute.

State Child Care Subsidies

The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA) established the existing structure of funding streams for child care assistance programs.

Overview of Funding Streams

The federal program addressing child-care assistance for low and moderate-income families is called The Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF). This program channels block grants (Child Care and Development Block Grant, CCDBG) to each state to subsidize child care.

These funds are intended to subsidize care of the parent's choice (family child care, relative care, child care centers, etc.). Furthermore, states receive dedicated funds for child care through the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) block grant. States have the ability to transfer non-child care specific TANF funds to the CCDBG fund. Due to different funding sources, most states have one program for families receiving TANF and a separate voucher program for working families not receiving TANF. Since 2002, federal funding for child care has not increased despite the continued rise in the cost of child care.⁵ As a result, many states have restricted access (by instituting waiting lists or by freezing intakes) and limited eligibility (by lowering the income level needed to qualify).

Who to Contact

To access benefits, contact your state child care subsidy agency. Typically, this is the Department of Health and Human Services in your state. To find out who to contact, go to "State Profiles" on the [National Child Care Information Center's \(NCCIC\) Web site](#). Scroll down to the map and click on your state. Then click on Contacts at the top of the page. You will find a "Child Care Subsidy Agency" header listing your local agency. This agency will provide you with information about eligibility and how to apply for assistance. You can also call your local Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) contact for help in determining eligibility and the application process. They may also be able to direct you to local funds and scholarships available.

Amount of Subsidy

Each state sets its own rate of payment. The guideline is for states to reimburse child care providers at or above the 75th percentile of market rates (based on a current market rate survey). However, not all states follow this rate of reimbursement. Some states require the family to contribute a co-payment.

The amount of the subsidy is dependent on the family's income, number of and ages of children, and what type of provider the family chooses (whether it is a center/group, licensed family provider, self-certified family provider, approved relative, etc.). Typically, only working families are assigned a co-payment, while families receiving the subsidy through TANF are not usually given a co-payment.

Length of Process

The application and approval process varies from state to state, taking an average of 30 days to complete. If applying through a program for working families, parents are frequently given a list of providers that accept vouchers. Typically, these slots are limited and it is common to be put

⁵ Matthews, H., Ewen, D. (2004). [Child Care Assistance in 2004: States Have Fewer Funds for Child Care](#); Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP).

on a waiting list. Locating slots for infants can be difficult. As a family starts to earn more money, their subsidy is decreased. Numerous states report the dilemma that some families are not eligible to apply for the subsidy until employed, but neither can they find a job until child care is arranged. Also, depending on demand, there may be a waiting list in some states to even apply for the subsidy program. If a family is applying through TANF's welfare to work program, typically there is a faster turn around time in locating child care and greater flexibility in funds available as compared to other programs.

On a national level, case managers and employment counselors report that the application process is too involved for refugees to undertake alone. Furthermore, some refugees report that the amount of the subsidy does not justify the effort required to get it. This is especially true for lower reimbursement rates for kith and kin providers. For example, according to Action for Children, the Illinois Child Care Assistance program in 2004 reimbursed \$9.48 per day for a full-day of Family, Friend or Neighbor Home Care for a 4-year old.⁶ In 2003, North Dakota Department of Human Services reimbursed approved relatives providing 25 or more hours of care per week at a rate of \$70 per week for an infant up to 2 years and \$65 per week for children ages 2 to 13.⁷ As a result of these low rates, kith and kin providers may choose to operate outside of the subsidy system. Additionally, if these individuals are providing care for a number of children, they may be required to be licensed through the state.

Opportunities for Collaboration

Reaching out and making connections with local child care subsidy agencies can help to streamline the application process. To better assist refugee clients, invite a representative from the local child care subsidy agency to train staff members about the subsidy process. States such as Arizona and New York exemplify good practice by designating a specific contact person at their child care subsidy agency to handle refugee applications for assistance.

Refugee resettlement and child care providers can work to encourage more ethnic providers to work in the system, thus providing more linguistically appropriate child care options. Refugee child care providers can benefit from trainings offered by CCR&Rs whether or not they are licensed. Kith and Kin providers could benefit from training offered by CCR&R, which can include training such as child safety, child proofing a home, parenting, and child development classes. Through partnerships between refugee resettlement agencies and the CCR&R, potential refugee candidates can be identified who would be interested in learning about opportunities to become child care professionals in their community.

⁶ Illinois Action for Children. *Child Care in the Homes of Family, Friends or Neighbors* (2004)

⁷ North Dakota Department of Human Services (2003). [Child Care Sliding Fee Schedule](#). Retrieved August 2005.