

Chapter Three: Child Care and Employment

In researching this topic, refugee service providers across the country identified a strong link between reliable and affordable child care and refugee economic self-sufficiency. **Employment specialists noted that when parents have reliable child care, they experience less disruption to their working routine.** Refugees are able to go to work as scheduled and work without being concerned about the welfare of their children. In order to achieve this, it is likely that refugees will need assistance in setting up the arrangements and funding them.

Upon examining the success of other groups who are attempting to achieve economic self-sufficiency, namely families leaving welfare in order to work, a direct link exists between child care assistance and employment success. In 2004, CLASP reviewed research demonstrating this effect.⁸ The report highlighted the following findings:

- Single mothers with children who receive child care assistance are 40 percent more likely to still be employed after two years than those who do not receive such assistance.⁹ The same analysis found that former welfare recipients who receive child care assistance are 82 percent more likely to be employed after two years than those who do not receive such assistance.¹⁰
- A study of current and former welfare recipients in Michigan found that receipt of a child care subsidy led to more months of work and higher earnings.¹¹
- A study of changes in Rhode Island's child care program found that policies that expanded access to child care subsidies significantly increased the probability that parents would leave welfare for employment and work more than 20 hours per week.¹²
- A national study found that 28 percent of welfare leavers who did not receive child care assistance returned to welfare within three months after leaving, compared to only 19.5 percent of welfare leavers who did receive child care assistance.¹³

One key way that service providers can help refugees achieve self-sufficiency is by linking families to financial child care supports.

Child care issues impact multiple employees and programs in refugee serving agencies. Feedback from the field suggests that most agencies view case managers as primarily responsible for working with clients on child care issues. On the other hand, some agencies acknowledge that, because child care is intrinsically tied to securing employment, the task of

⁸ Mezey, J. (2004). *Child Care Programs Help Parents Find and Keep Jobs: Funding Shortfalls Leave Many Families Without Assistance*; CLASP.

⁹ Boushey, H. (2002). *Staying Employed After Welfare: Work Supports and Job Quality Vital to Employment Tenure and Wage Growth*; Economic Policy Institute.

¹⁰ Schulman, Karen (2003). *Key Facts: Essential Information about Child Care Policy, Early Education, and School-Age Care*; Children's Defense Fund.

¹¹ Danziger, S., Oltmans Ananat, E., & Browning, K. (2003). *Childcare Subsidies and the Transition from Welfare to Work*; National Poverty Center, Working Paper Series, #03-11.

¹² Dryden Witte, A., & Queralt, M. (2003). *Impacts of Eligibility Expansions and Provider Reimbursement Rate Increases on Child Care Subsidy Take-Up Rates, Welfare Use, and Work*; National Bureau of Economic Research.

¹³ Loprest, P.J. (2003). *Use of Government Benefits Increases among Families Leaving Welfare*; Urban Institute.

arranging it falls to employment specialists. **Regardless of agency structure, it is clear that child care issues must be incorporated into refugee clients' employment plans.** Clarifying organizational roles is integral to maximizing the effectiveness of all team members. There must be communication between case managers and employment specialists regarding child care arrangements. Furthermore, employment specialists must consider child care factors in locating employment opportunities, including:

- **Goal setting:** Clients often cannot begin working until child care is established. This delay includes the time needed to locate care and obtain financial assistance, if applicable. Refugees also have an immediate need for child care while they attend employment training and job interviews.
- **Scheduling:** Job schedules must coincide with available hours of child care, including transportation time. Clients may also need to focus on securing employment with a consistent schedule, rather than working swing shifts, to arrange consistent care.
- **Job mobility and flexibility:** Employers may offer a job to a refugee and expect him or her to start immediately. When child care cannot be arranged quickly enough, the refugee risks losing the employment opportunity. Additionally, clients may be less flexible in changing jobs, possibly to higher paying opportunities, if those positions are not located near child care resources.
- **Contingency planning:** In order to minimize work disruption, clients will need to have a back up plan if regular child care is not available, or if childcare arrangements are dependent upon the health and availability of one person. It is recommended that clients have at least three alternative options.
- **Housing:** If a client is planning on using informal child care, it is important to find housing near family members or other members of their ethnic community. If a client is interested in more formal resources (child care centers, schools, family child care providers, etc.), it is helpful to survey availability within communities.
- **Transportation:** Employment opportunities will need to be located near major transportation routes and/or near child care resources. Work schedules must be flexible enough to accommodate travel time to work and child care.
- **Budget and salary needs:** In considering minimum salary requirements, clients must factor in the cost of child care. If a job schedule involves second or third shift work, clients must consider that child care options are more limited and, when it is available, often costs more. If a client is receiving financial assistance for child care, they must consider how that rate will be affected by income earned (i.e. as they earn more the assistance decreases). Clients will most likely need information about child care subsidy options available as well as assistance in applying.
- **Identifying community partners:** When considering employer collaborations, employment specialists should work to identify partners with family friendly practices, such as on-site child care, dependent care flexible spending accounts, discounts at child care centers, etc.

By taking the time to adjust employment goals and strategies to include child care needs, employment specialists will be more effective in securing successful employment placements. This helps to boost job retention rates within the employment program, eases the transition that refugee clients face as they take their first steps toward self-sufficiency, and ensures that children are well cared for.