

COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT REPORT

2022



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A Message from Child Care Resource Network

Dear Erie County Citizens,

It seems like at least once a week you will see a story on the news, online, or in a newspaper about the child care struggle many people are facing in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic has affected every part of our lives for the last few years, and while the virus still remains in our community we are making steps to return to some semblance of normalcy. COVID-19 shed a light on what many of us already knew to be a broken system, child care.

For over three decades Child Care Resource Network (CCRN) has worked with parents, child care providers, business leaders as well as local and state legislators to help increase available high-quality child care in Erie County. We've advocated to bring family friendly solutions to workplaces, and for increased investment in the New York State child care system. If there is a bright side to the ongoing tragedy that is the COVID-19 pandemic, it is that finally people seem to be recognizing child care for what it is; an essential workforce support. Without child care our communities do not work, and without increased investment in our child care system our communities will not be able to go back to work. While we have made great progress in shedding light on the cracks in the child care system our work is not over. Too many families still struggle to secure and pay for child care, while child care providers are unable to make ends meet due to the high cost of providing care and low reimbursement rates.

COVID-19 has dramatically changed the needs of our community, because of this CCRN has been conducting a two-part needs assessment. This report contains the results from part one of the assessment. From August of 2021 to January of 2022 CCRN collected online survey responses from community members gauging their relationship with child care, the family friendly policies of their workplace, and the struggles they encountered when finding and utilizing child care in our community. The goal of this survey was to take a snapshot of child care in our community from the perspective of those who utilize, or struggle to utilize the service. Part two of this survey is ongoing and will be taking a snapshot of the needs of child care providers in our community.

We would like to thank everyone who took part in the survey, and for those in our community who tirelessly advocate for child care.



Background

Erie County, New York is home to just over 950,000 people, and includes the second largest metro area in the state, Buffalo¹. After decades of decline following the collapse of the manufacturing industry in the 1980s, Buffalo and Erie County are now experiencing a renaissance. For the first time in 70 years Erie County has seen a population increase on the most recent census².

New employment opportunities created by continued investment through the Buffalo Billion and the Regional Economic Development Council (REDC) has led to the creation of more than 31,000 new jobs in the area since 2010³. New affordable housing options coupled with this job creation has created an ideal environment for population growth. Furthermore, over 15,000⁴ refugees have resettled in Erie County since 2015, helping to spur population growth and increase diversity.

Despite the economic resurgence in Erie County many families are still struggling to get by. In Erie County 13.2% of the population lives in poverty. The number dramatically increases when you look at the City of Buffalo, there 30.1% of the population lives in poverty. What is most alarming about these figures is how it relates to our youngest residents. 17.5% of families with children under 18 years of age live below the poverty level in Erie County, which amounts to approximately 17,544 families. The likelihood of poverty dramatically increases for single, female-headed households. Diverse families living in Erie County are also facing higher instances of poverty. 32.8% of all Hispanics or Latino families in Erie County are living in poverty, which is much higher than that of the national average of 17.3%. 25.9% of all African American families are living in poverty in Erie County, which is also much higher than the national average of 19.2%⁵.

Did you know

Only 18% of low-income children are enrolled in high-quality pre-K.

Affordability

When referencing child care, the term “affordability” refers to the cost of child care in Erie County and can be influenced by: market rates, availability of subsidy, modality (type of care), and hours. About every year the New York State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) releases average market rates for child care in the various regions of New York. These rates act as a guideline for the cost of child care. These market rates are used as the reimbursement model by Erie County Department of Social Services (DSS) to provide impoverished families with child care subsidy. Market rates vary depending on the county where the child care is provided, the type of setting the care takes place, and the age of the child in care (Figure 2.1)⁶.

What is important to note about market rates, is that this is the lowest amount of money a child care provider will collect for providing care. A recent study conducted by Cornell University found that in Erie County market rates do not cover current costs of care for two-thirds of child care providers who accept DSS subsidies⁷.

Figure 2.1

Erie County Weekly Market Rates

as of February 2021

(the younger the child, the higher the rate)

Day Care Center	\$215 - \$280
Family Day Care Home and Group Family Day Care Home	\$175 - \$190
School-Age Child Care	\$215 - \$245
Legally Exempt Group	\$161 - \$184
Legally Exempt Standard (in-home)	\$114 - \$124
Legally Exempt Enhanced (in-home)	\$123 - \$133

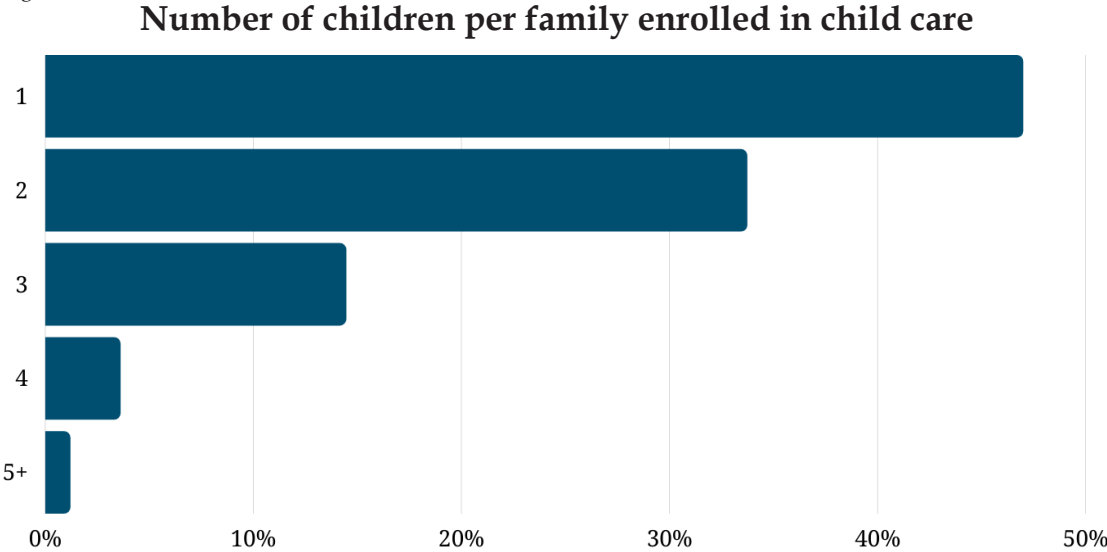


Did you know

More than 1 million new neural connections are formed every second in the first years of life.

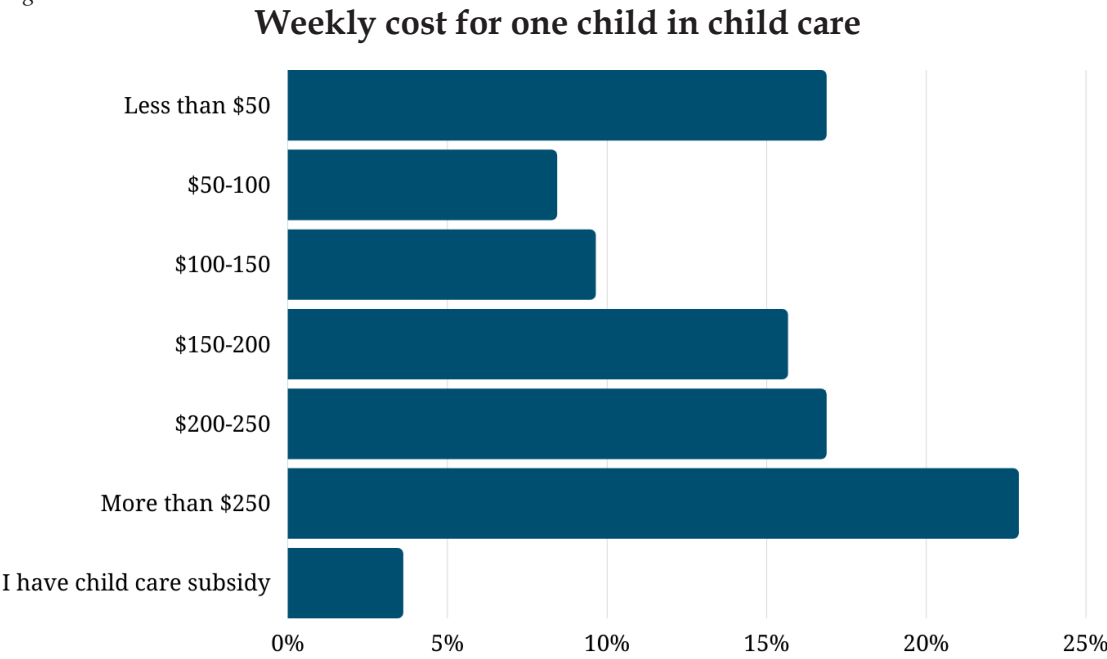
In the Community Needs Assessment affordability was a big concern for many families. Of the 244 people who completed the survey, 53% indicated they currently had child(ren) under 12. Of those with children under 12 almost 70% were using some form of child care. Overwhelmingly families were only utilizing care for one or two children at a time (Figure 2.2).

Figure 2.2



The cost of care varied widely (Figure 2.3), this can be attributed to varying modalities of care, the ages of children in care, and the hours of care needed weekly. It is important to note that this figure does not consider the increase in child care costs the parents of school age children often incur over the summer. Anecdotally some respondents indicated that during the school year they were not paying for care for their school age children but pay almost \$300 a week during the summer months.

Figure 2.3



Did you know

Parents with children in high-quality childhood education see sustained parental wage growth.

Most respondents who are currently utilizing child care were unable to receive a child care subsidy from DSS (51.81%). Just over 18% of respondents were eligible for subsidy but about 6% were unable to utilize it at the time of survey. Also, important to note, 30.12% of respondents currently utilizing care were unsure if they were able to receive a child care subsidy. In Erie County households making up to 200% of the Federal Poverty Level are income eligible for child care subsidy (Figure 2.4).

Figure 2.4

Child Care Subsidy Income Eligibility Guidelines (DSS)⁸

as of February 2022

Family Size	Monthly Income	Annual Income
1	\$2,146	\$25,760
2	\$2,930	\$34,840
3	\$3,660	\$43,920
4	\$4,416	\$53,000
5	\$5,173	\$62,080
6	\$5,930	\$71,160
7	\$6,686	\$80,240
8	\$7,443	\$89,320
+ each additional	\$756	\$9,080

Since 2016, Erie County has been one of the eight New York State counties where residents can qualify for The Workforce Development Institute's Child Care Subsidy Facilitated Enrollment Program (WDI CCSFEP). This program is designed to help families reduce the hardship gap that occurs when their wages are too high to qualify for traditional child care subsidy through DSS, but they are still not making enough to make ends meet (Figure 2.5).

Figure 2.5

WDI CCSFEP Income Eligibility Guidelines⁸

as of February 2022

Family Size	Maximum Family Income
2	\$47,905
3	\$60,390
4	\$72,875
5	\$85,360
6	\$97,845

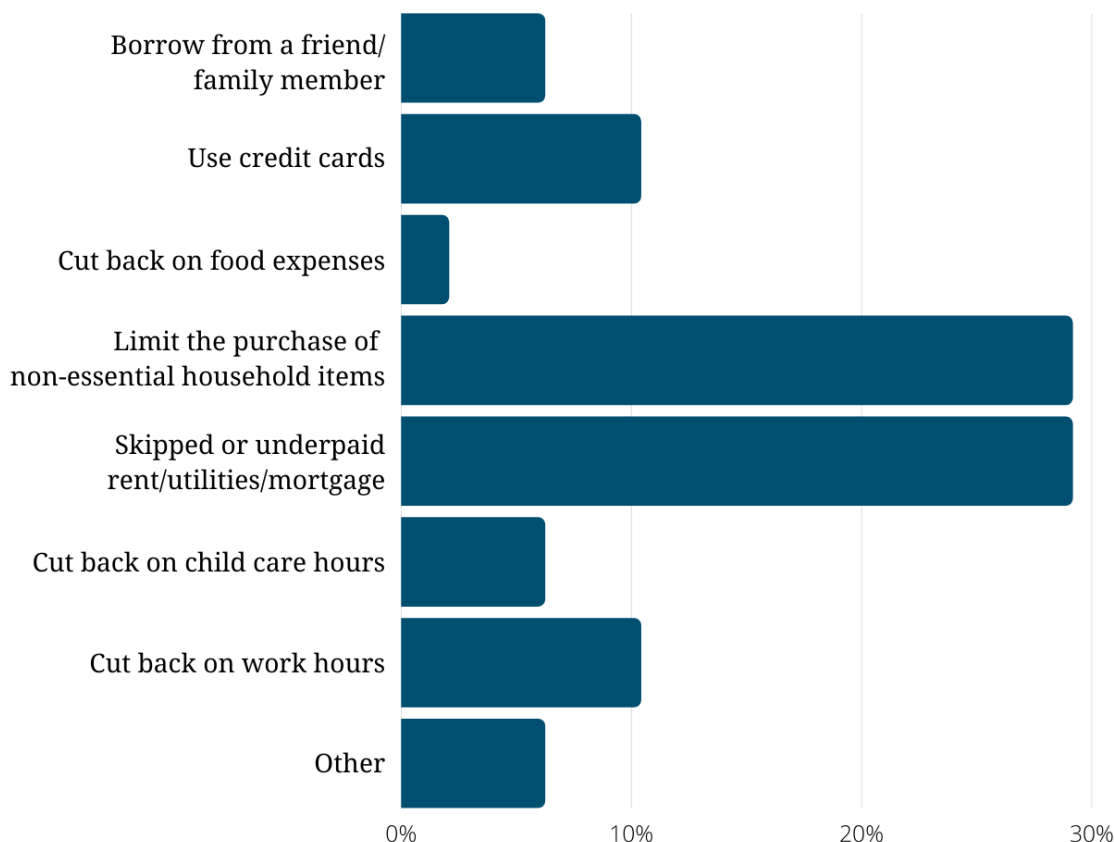
Did you know

86% of children who are eligible for support from some federal programs do not receive it because of a lack of federal funding.

More than half of parents (57.83%) indicated that they have trouble paying for child care at least some of the time, and when money runs short they take a variety of measures to cover the cost of care (Figure 2.6) The top four measures taken by parents were limiting the purchase of non-essential household items (29.17%), skipping or underpaying utility bills, rent or mortgage (29.17%), using credit cards (10.42%) and cutting back on work hours (10.42%).

Figure 2.6

How parents pay for child care when money runs short



Did you know

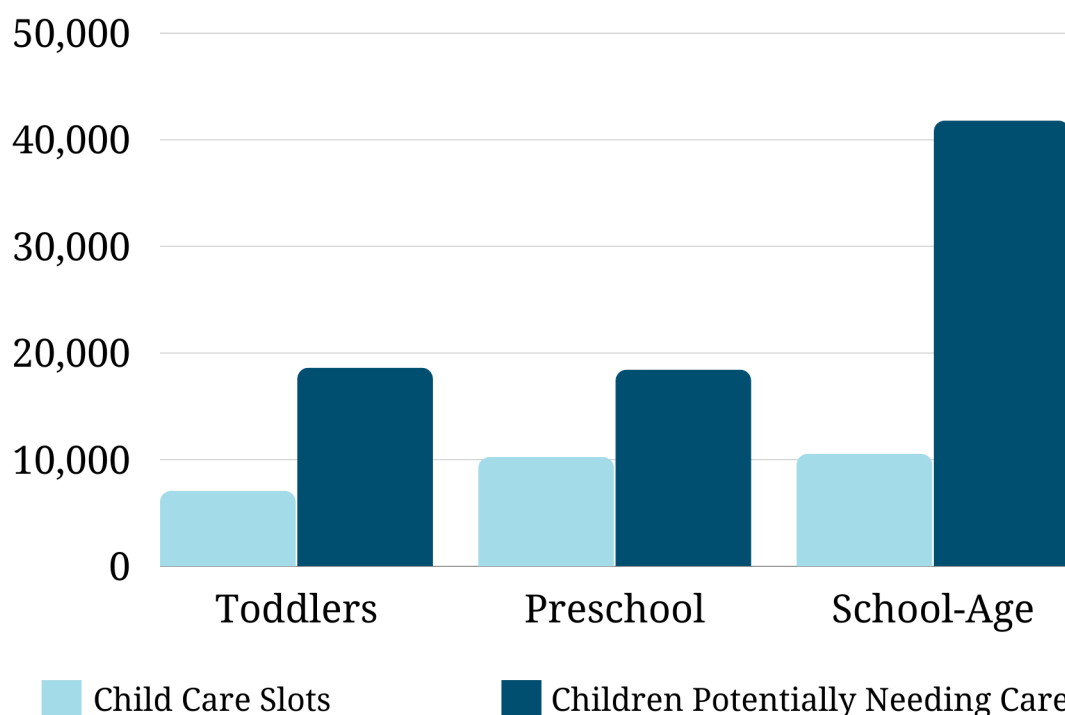
When a child enters kindergarten ready for school, there is an 82% chance that child will master basic skills by age 11, compared with a 45% chance for children who are not school ready.

Accessibility

In Erie County, there are just under 111,000 children⁹ under the age of 12 and over 78,700 of those children have all parents in the workforce¹⁰. By the same measure there are 27,772 slots¹¹ in licensed or registered child care programs for children in Erie County (figure 3.1).

Figure 3.1

Child Care Slots Compared to Children in Erie County



Working families need access to high-quality child care and after-school programs. There are many child care options and arrangements, with most families creating a patchwork of care for various situations. Child care arrangements fluctuate based on the age of the child, the work schedule of parents, if the child is sick, and for older children arrangements change based on the school calendar. There are many child care options and arrangements: center-based care, home-based care, after and before school programs, legally exempt care, child care provided by a friend or relative, and parents working split shifts to care for their children without needing external child care supports. While many factors influence a family's need for child care, the data suggests a large gap between the need for child care and the availability of licensed or registered child care to meet that need.

Did you know

More than 75% of mothers and half of fathers pass up work opportunities, switch jobs or quit their job due to a lack of paid leave or child care.

Between 2016 and 2022, Erie County experienced a net loss of 37 child care programs¹². Multiple factors influenced these closing including the high cost of providing child care, low reimbursement rates, staffing shortages driven by low wages, and the COVID-19 pandemic (Figure 3.2). The Community Needs Assessment showed that this gap is felt in the community with over 50% of parents indicating that they had trouble, or are currently having trouble securing child care.

Figure 3.2

Child Care Program Closures Over Time

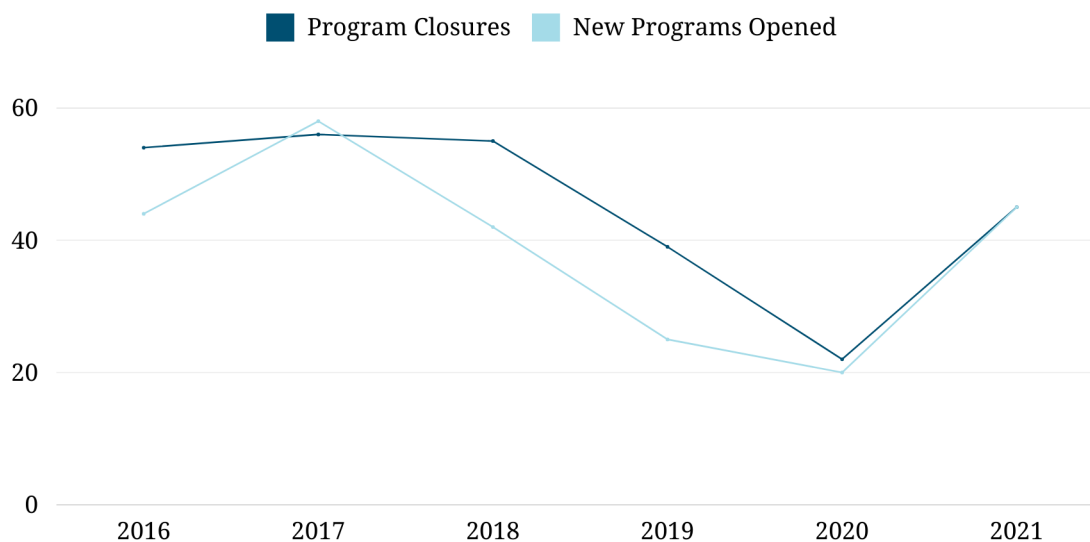


Figure 3.2 shows the number of programs closed and opened in a given year. This does not account for child care providers who have stopped providing care but have not reported that they are permanently closed to OCFS.

Further exacerbating the issue are Child Care Deserts. A child care desert is any census tract with more than 50 children under age 5 that contains either no child care providers or so few options that there are more than three times as many children as licensed care slots. New York State ranks 5th highest in the nation with 64% of the state considered a child care desert¹³. In Erie County, 65% of the county can be considered a child care desert. Child care deserts affect families in urban, suburban and rural locations. The top five child care deserts in Erie County communities are North Collins, Lawtons, Angola, Gowanda and Clarence Center. The top five child care deserts in the City of Buffalo are zip codes 14213, 14206, 14204, 14222, and 14216¹⁴.

Did you know

Only 65% of 3-5-year-olds are enrolled in early childhood programs in America. That is below the OECD average of 80%.

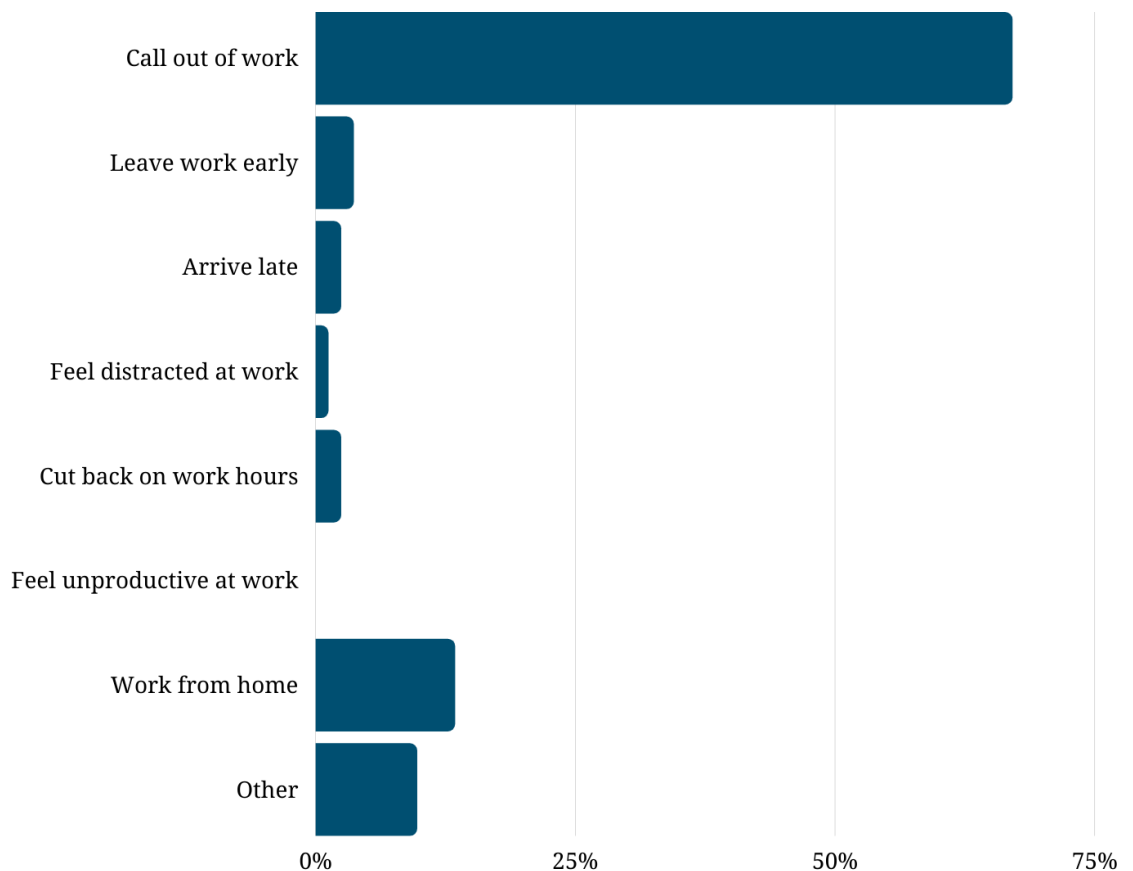
It is one of the worst rates among developed economies worldwide.

Difficulty securing child care does not just affect the family, but has ramifications on the business community and the economy as well. Nationally an estimated \$57 billion is lost due to the child care crisis every year. This estimate includes lost earnings for working families, as well as lost productivity and revenue for business. All of this signals significant economic impacts for working parents, employers, and taxpayers¹⁵.

Locally, 52.44% of respondents indicated that they miss 1-4 days of work a month because of child care issues. When asked what they do when they are unable to find care (Figure 3.3) parents most often indicated that they call out of work (67.07%), followed by work from home (13.41%).

Figure 3.3

What Parents Do When They Cannot Secure Child Care



Did you know

Approximately half of Americans live in neighborhoods or communities with little or no access to quality child care.



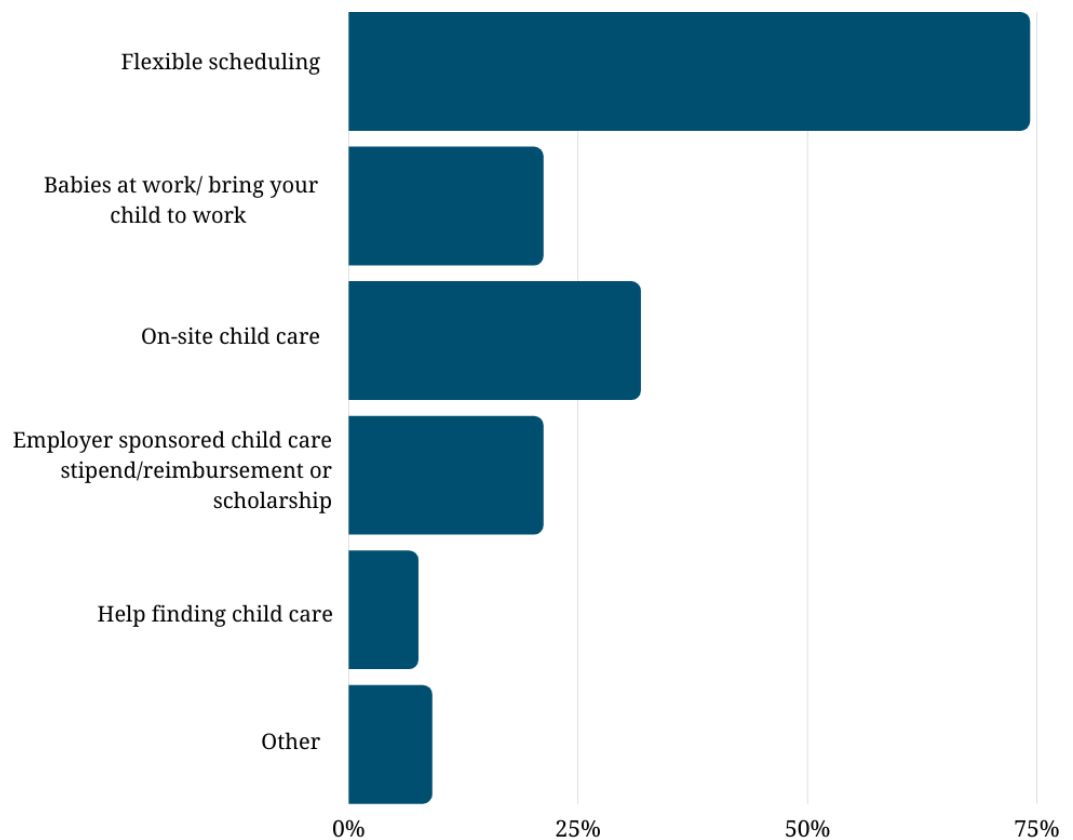
Community Impact

By and large Erie County residents reported having similar feelings towards child care. With 89.82% of respondents either strongly agreeing (87.17%) or agreeing (2.65%) that child care is essential to our community. Furthermore over 90% of respondents either strongly agreed (86.34%) or agreed (3.96%) that quality child care has a positive impact on our community.

Respondents also overwhelmingly agreed that businesses should care if their employees can secure child care (79.74% strongly agree and 9.25% agree). However there seems to be a disconnect with the business community. Over half of respondents (56.39%) indicated that their employer did not offer any type of family-friendly benefit. For those whose employers did offer family friendly benefits flexible scheduling seemed to be the most common with 74.24% indicating it was offered to them (Figure 4.1), followed by on-site child care (31.82%).

Figure 4.1

Family Friendly Practices Offered by Employers



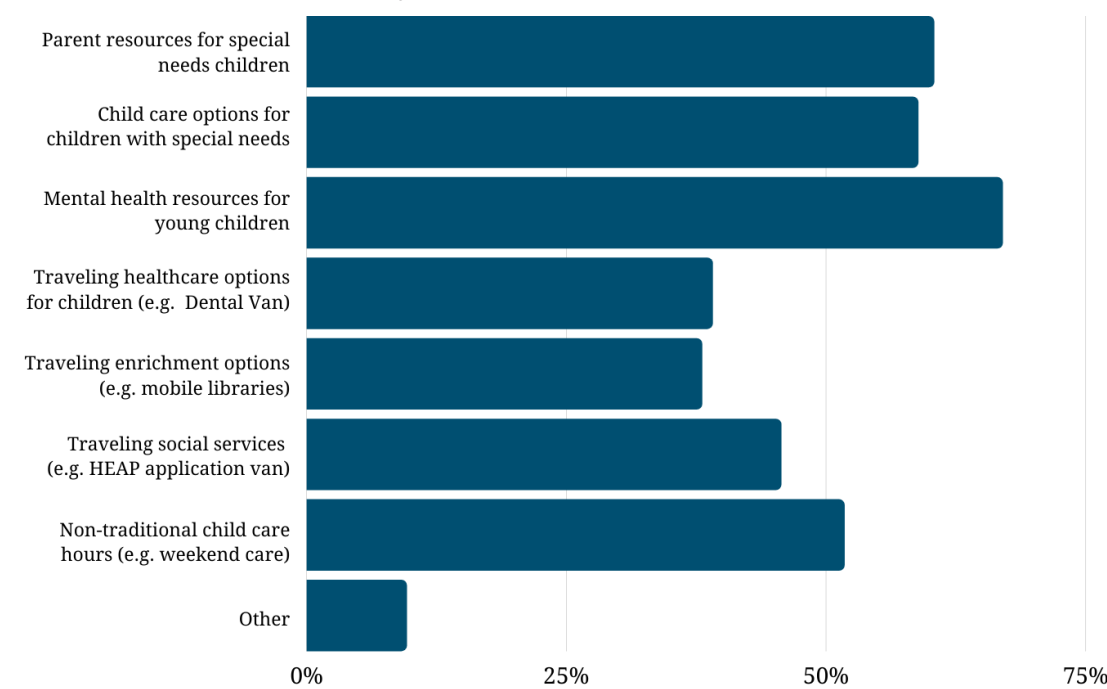
Did you know

Participants in high-quality early childhood education also show long-term gains in the form of lower rates of incarceration (46% reduction), lower rates of arrest for violent crimes (33% reduction), and a reduced likelihood of receiving government assistance (26% reduction).

Looking at the community more broadly respondents identified several perceived service gaps in Erie County (Figure 4.2). Community respondents indicated that they would most like to see more mental health resources for young children (67.01%), parent resources for special needs children (60.41%), and child care options for children with special needs (60.41%), and child care options for children with special needs (58.88%).

Figure 4.2

What Community Members Think We Need More Of



It is important to note that while respondents indicated that our community “needed more of something” there may be current service providers that have just not reached all of their target market for various reason.



Did you know

The availability of early childhood education programs attracts homebuyers and increases property values by \$13 for every dollar invested in local programs.

Conclusions

All of this data suggests a fragmented child care system that isn't working for anyone. Parents are struggling to find and pay for child care, while child care providers are not being paid a living wage to continue providing child care, and the community is suffering as a result.

Residents of Erie County are lucky in that they have several elected officials serving at the local, state and federal levels who understand the child care crisis and are working to support the child care industry and working parents. In 2021 two different pieces of legislation were introduced in the New York State legislature that, if passed, would provide universal child care.

Outside of legislative solutions for the child care crisis, solving this problem will require buy-in from the business community. Obviously not all workplaces can support or are appropriate for on-site child care, or flexible scheduling. However, there are many things that business can do to support the working parents they employ. Connecting with and supporting local Child Care Resource and Referral agencies (CCR&R's), like CCRN, who help to increase the supply of quality child care, and can provide parents with support in finding child care is one option. Area businesses can also partner with local child care providers to fill available child care slots with children of employees who need care. Additionally, the business community can advocate on behalf of the parents they employ with legislative leaders for continued investments in child care.

When we look across the state there are several promising practices coming out of the business community that could be replicated to help struggling families while simultaneously supporting the local economy. Corning Enterprises, a glass manufacturer based in Corning New York also has a plant in Canton New York and other rural communities. They recognized that child care was a barrier for their employees and ultimately for the company's success. So, Corning has taken the initiative to subsidize child care costs for their employees. Corning pays child care providers directly for these subsidized slots so that Corning Employees receive discounted child care, and the child care programs can increase quality. They initially started the program over forty years ago to attract women into the workforce .

Locally, Rich Products was the first major Buffalo area employer to create an on-site child care facility for its employees. Rich's Family Center was initially opened in 1990, and expanded in 1997 because of

Did you know

In 2020, 94% of parents adjusted their career path due to child care expenses, 42% reduced their work hours, 26% switched to another job and an additional 26% left the workforce altogether.

its popularity¹⁸. As a result of the success Rich Products has seen from their on-site child care a handful of other local businesses have followed suit.

Because CCRN recognizes that child care is difficult for many families, and that bonding with a caregiver is crucially important to early development, CCRN began a babies at work program almost 10 years ago. This program allows new parents working at CCRN to bring their baby with them to work until the child is mobile.

Ultimately there is no one single fix to the child care crisis and it will take public-private partnership to solve the problem. But it is crucial to the recovery of our local economy and to the ongoing success of our community to take dramatic steps towards stabilizing the child care industry for everyone involved.



Did you know

A lack of child care causes businesses to lose an estimated \$12.7 billion annually due to employee absenteeism.

Demographics

Erie County Race and Hispanic Origin Demographics¹

White alone	79.3%
Black or African American alone	14.0%
American Indian and Alaska Native alone	0.7%
Asian alone	3.8%
Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander alone	3.8%
Two or More Races	2.1%
Hispanic or Latino	5.8%

Community Needs Assessment Racial & Ethnic Demographics

White or Caucasian	73.40%
Black or African American	14.78%
American Indian and Alaska Native	2.46%
Asian or Asian American	2.96%
Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander	.49%
Hispanic or Latino or Spanish Origin	7.96%
Other Race Not Identified Here	1.48%

Community Needs Assessment Age Range

18-24	1.98%
25-34	17.85%
35-44	35.15%
45-54	19.80%
55-64	17.33%
65+	7.92%

Community Needs Assessment Annual Household Income

Under \$15,000	9.09%
\$15,000 - 29,999	14.14%
\$30,000 - 49,999	29.29%
\$50,000 - 74,999	16.67%
\$75,000 - 99,999	13.13%
\$100,000 - 150,000	14.65%
Over \$150,000	3.03%

Community Needs Assessment Gender Identity

Male	4.43%
Female	92.61%
Non-binary	1.48%
Prefer not to answer	1.48%

Did you know

Early childhood education leads to better health later in life.

Those who receive early childhood education (birth-age 5) have lower rates of chronic disease and lower health care costs, contributing to a 13% return on investment.

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¹⁹All Did You Know Facts were retrieved from: <https://www.ffyf.org/why-it-matters/>

Did you know

High-quality early learning programs aimed at disadvantaged children help close the achievement gap, increasing IQ scores by up to 10 points.



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