



# Cultivating Connections...

## Between Economic Development & Child Care

### Community Coalitions for Child Care

#### Introduction

Across New York, the framing of child care as economic development has made possible new partnerships, bringing together employers, civic leaders, non-profit organizations, child care resource and referral agencies, economic developers, and planners in an effort to increase the supply and quality of child care. Creating and maintaining coalitions can be difficult, but coalitions offer the possibility of affecting real change in a community.

Several trends are making community coalitions for child care increasingly important. Some evidence suggests that women's labor force participation rates have stagnated or even declined in recent years, perhaps due to time constraints on working mothers (New York Times, 2006). Whether or not these labor participation figures reflect long-term trends, it is clear that work-life conflicts hurt not only working mothers, but employers. When communities lack adequate child care, employers struggle to recruit and retain workers, and face absenteeism and morale problems among their employees. Parents' absences from work due to child care breakdowns cost U.S. employers \$3 billion each year (Shellenback, 2004).

The U.S. labor force is undergoing a profound transformation as baby-boomers age and their children enter the workforce. This new cohort will demand high-quality child care in its communities, and it will be increasingly important for employers and economic developers to provide it if they wish to attract and retain new employees. This problem is particularly pressing in upstate New York, a region that has struggled in recent years to attract young workers – especially professionals with the kinds of skills sought by employers. If upstate New York is to remain economically viable, it will need to be attentive to the needs of these workers.

Child care is essential to the long-term economic vitality of upstate New York. Not only does child care provide many jobs in upstate New York, but

each child care dollar spent in New York generates over \$2 in economic output (NYSCCCC, 2004). Early education ensures that the children of upstate New York will be well-prepared for school, improving the quality of high school graduates. Investments in early education yield long-term benefits in the future workforce.

#### New Partnerships

Stakeholders in improving the child care infrastructure include more than just parents and child care providers. Labor force trends show that child care is an urgent problem that needs to be addressed on a community-wide scale. This issue brief will profile several successful coalitions working on increasing the supply and quality of child care in New York State, and discuss how their successes can be replicated. Each of these coalitions views child care from a broader perspective in which economic development plays a major role. Each offers lessons on how to manage coalitions to bring about lasting change.

#### Profiles

##### *Chemung County:*

##### *Child Care and Workforce Development*

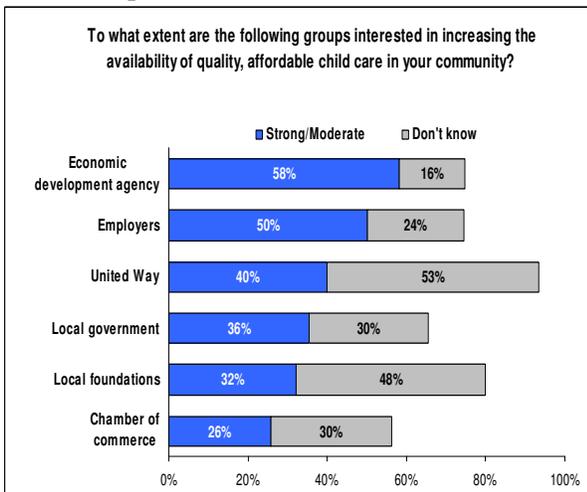
A few years ago, the Chemung County Child Care Council (5C's) and the Chemung County Executive, formed a partnership to involve local businesses in child care. They met with local business leaders and conducted a survey to assess the level of business need and support for child care. The survey determined that employers were preoccupied by health care and had little attention left to devote to child care needs. However, they uncovered a need for short-term child care for county residents as they looked for work and took job training classes. The result has been the creation of a drop-in child care center that will open in 2007 as part of Chemung's Academic Career Development Center. The drop-in center, which will be run by Chemung's community action agency, will serve the entire Chemung community and the county will fund the center's first year of operation.

Child care is also an integral part of Chemung’s \$15 million 5-year school readiness initiative. The initiative began over concern that 40% of Chemung’s students were entering kindergarten under-prepared. The lack of preparation in early childhood, in turn, has contributed to Chemung’s 25% high school dropout rate. As a result Chemung has had difficulty producing and attracting the kind of workers that could fuel economic growth. Chemung’s County Executive grew more concerned after holding conversations with businesses that wished to move to the area but were discouraged by the lack of skilled workers.

The school readiness initiative has benefited from the leadership of The Community Foundation of the Elmira Corning Area, the Elmira City School District superintendent, a long time proponent of early education, and local business leaders committed to a more literate community. The initiative began with a million dollar grant for school readiness from the Community Foundation.

**Finding Partners**

Child care and economic development professionals may be unaware of a number of community organizations that may be interested in collaborating on improving child care infrastructure. According to a 2006 Cornell University survey of economic developers in New York State, many are uncertain whether groups like the United Way, local foundations, local governments, and chambers of commerce are interested in child care. All of these organizations, however, are essential parts of collaborations profiled in this brief. When building a coalition, it is useful keep an open mind and approach non-traditional partners.



The planning and implementation of the program was conducted by the 5C’s, Head Start, Elmira’s school district, and Comprehensive Interdisciplinary Development Services. Together they were able to secure matching funds for the program from the county.

The readiness initiative has several components, one of which is improving the supply and quality of child care in the county. The 5C’s is also hiring additional full-time trainers for local child care providers and will soon start monitoring and assessing provider quality. It also will work to educate parents on the importance of quality child care and publish the results of its quality assessments so that parents can compare providers.

*Rochester:  
Investing in Early Education*

Rochester has a long history of community collaborations for child care. Its Early Childhood Development Initiative (ECDI), founded in 1990, has helped the city develop one of the best early education programs in the nation. The ECDI is run by a committee of local leaders, primarily from government and non-profit groups dedicated to making quality child care available in Rochester.

The ECDI provides a forum for member organizations to plan community-wide initiatives, often forming sub-committees to focus on individual projects. These projects have included universal pre-kindergarten in Rochester, accreditation programs for local child care providers, differential reimbursement for accredited providers, and RECAP, an assessment of Rochester’s progress in early education which showed that its quality initiatives have helped Rochester’s children to meet and exceed developmental expectations for social, cognitive, and motor skills (RECAP, 2005).

Another organization responsible for Rochester’s success is Rochester’s Child, a fundraising initiative within the Rochester Area Community Foundation. Thanks to donations from regular private donors and businesses it has raised \$50,000 to \$90,000 a year and has built up a \$2.3 million endowment. Its grants have gone towards the construction of new centers and quality improvement projects and helped fund accreditation efforts for existing centers. Nancy Kaplan, director of Rochester’s Child, attributes much of the organization’s success to the fact that

they have provable results. Thanks to studies like RECAP, donors know that their dollars have been well spent.

*Erie County:*

*Public/Private Partnership*

The Child Care Resource Network (CCRN), Erie County's child care resource and referral agency, is engaged in an exciting collaboration with local business and labor leaders, community members, child care professionals and others. The collaboration, began when two centers in downtown Buffalo closed. At the same time, plans were being made for a new medical corridor to house the Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus, plans that did not include child care. The president of the nurse's union demanded that child care be included in future development plans. Initially, the union demands were rebuffed. A consortium of interested parties got together, met with legislators to outline the child care problem and ultimately began work on an economic impact study of the downtown area surrounding the Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus. The study seeks to make a case for child care based on a research-based supply and demand survey of businesses and providers of early care and education in the target area. The Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus planning coordinators agreed to support the consortium's efforts.

From the beginning, the CCRN and its partners have understood the importance of bringing in new partners, particularly from the business community. The consortium teamed up with Buffalo's Federal Reserve Bank, whose economists stressed to local business leaders the enormous returns communities can gain from investments in child care. It invited powerful stakeholders to be on the advisory committee for the project. As downtown Buffalo undergoes numerous revitalization projects, the consortium has made sure that private developers and Buffalo's economic development agency are involved as well.

The study is based on the methodology outlined by Cornell's Linking Economic Development and Child Care Project (Ribeiro et al, 2004). By limiting the study to a small area and promising reliable, objective data, CCRN has marshaled the support of many different community groups. As the survey is completed and plans for child care development begin, CCRN hopes this support will provide the impetus to bring high quality child care to downtown Buffalo.

## Lessons Learned

### *Balance Stakeholder Needs*

The organizational structure of a child care collaboration can make a difference in whether or not it succeeds. While coalition members may share similar immediate goals, their long-term goals and strategies towards reaching these goals may differ. Bringing in nontraditional partners is important, but successful coalitions must balance the needs of various stakeholders.



One of the greatest strengths of Chemung County's school readiness initiative is its unique organizational structure. The initiative is a community-wide project, involving local schools, hospitals, non-profits, the child care council, civic leaders and more. Community members, including business leaders and parents, participate in an advisory role as part of a community council, and Columbia University's Teachers College provides oversight and evaluates the group's proposals. Experts from various government agencies and civic organizations lead the workgroups responsible for implementation. A coordinator from the local community foundation mediates the concerns of varying interest groups. The project's organization creates a forum in which everybody's voices are heard. This brings valuable ideas to the initiative, and ensures that each participant has a strong interest in seeing the project succeed.

Rochester's Early Childhood Development Initiative balances stakeholder interests by providing a forum for members to decide on projects and funding priorities, rather than funding projects directly. While projects benefit from the input of all initiative members, the funding of a project is entirely voluntary.

The organizational structure of a coalition may vary depending on the nature of the collaboration,

but the most successful ones are able to give all stakeholders a voice and ensure that no single stakeholder holds a disproportionate level of influence on policy. This is of greatest importance when working with businesses, whose political power is critical but whose expertise in child care is limited.

### *Involve Employers*

Traditionally, a popular model for employer-supported child care has been the on-site center model, in which employers subsidize the construction and operation of a day care center for their employees' children. However, centers are risky investments, costly to maintain, and often cannot subsist on parent fees alone. Most importantly, they benefit from economies of scale that do not exist in many New York communities. While this model can be effective for large employers with 500 or more employees, smaller businesses have fewer options (Work and Family Connection).

This is why it is important to include businesses in community coalitions. Many businesses want their employees to have access to child care, but have not been able to figure out a way to provide it on their own. Improved access to quality child care is especially important to employers that hire working parents. Hospitals, hotels, and banks are examples of organizations that have been particularly receptive to collaborating on child care.

Ultimately, a good relationship with business depends on the dedication of individuals. Years ago, Rochester's large businesses were active participants in local child care initiatives, but as profits plummeted, their interest waned. For many years, however, Rochester had an active local business leader who encouraged his peers to remain involved in child care despite the downturn. Keeping business interest alive requires forming connections with individuals with the clout and leadership skills to keep child care on the business agenda. A single dedicated business leader can galvanize the entire business community.

The value of including employers in a coalition goes beyond the financial contributions they can make to a project. Including employers can help make child care more politically viable in an environment where funding cuts are a constant threat. For example, in a year in which New York State reduced child care subsidy funds to upstate

New York, only Chemung and Tompkins County – two counties with strong business advocates for child care – received funding increases.

### *Start With Data*

Framing child care as economic development can open the door to new partnerships for child care. One excellent way of achieving this is through economic impact studies. Policymakers and business leaders are more easily persuaded to join a childcare initiative if they can refer to data that quantitatively assesses the importance of child care. The methodology guides created by the Cornell Linking Economic Development and Child Care Project have supported local and state governments across the country in assessing the size and linkage effects of their child care sector, and have suggested ways in which they can use their findings to promote change.

To date, Tompkins, Monroe, Ontario, and Chemung County as well as Long Island and New York City have joined New York State in conducting economic impact studies. But gathering data is only the beginning. These counties are taking the next step – turning this research into action through community collaboration.

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