



## THE SUPPLY AND DEMAND OF CHILD CARE

Prepared by The Early Years Institute

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### Demand for Child Care

How many parents on Long Island need child care because someone needs to be with their children while they are at work or school? Based on estimates from the 2007 American Community Survey Public Use Microsample, there are **118,098 households** on Long Island with children under the age of 6 who are not enrolled in an elementary school and where no one over the age of 16 is an available caretaker. There are **133,185 children** living in these households.

### Supply of Child Care

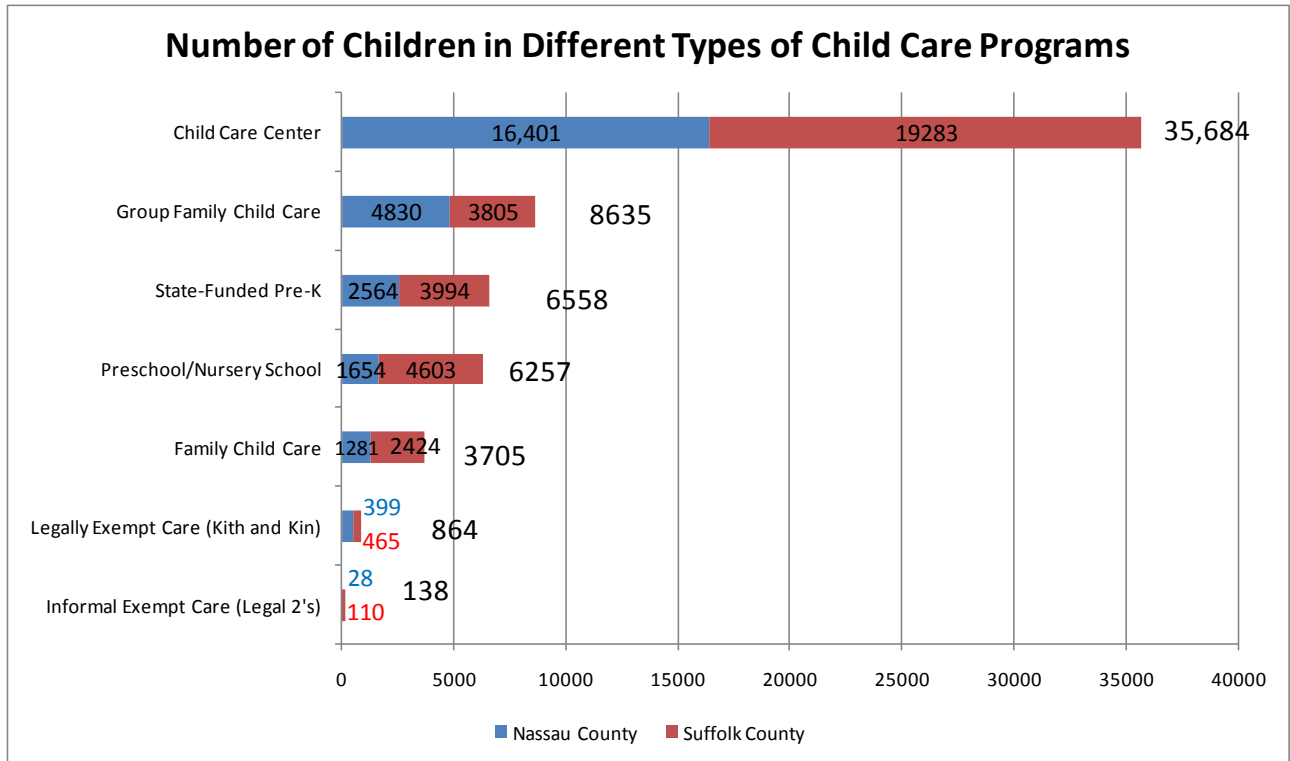
The supply of care is a more elusive number. There are many forms of child care, which readers may recognize as preschool, day care, early childhood program, family child care, nursery school, nannies, au pairs, 4410 special education preschools, Head Start, pre-kindergarten, playschool, parent co-op, or Montessori school. Some of these are federally-funded programs, others are state-funded by the Departments of Education or Health, and some are created by the marketplace and paid for exclusively by parents. These various forms of child care have different funding streams and regulations to follow – some have none; they serve different populations for different hours in a range of buildings; and they use a variety of child development philosophies. Quality is uneven in all settings. Data are limited for all types of care as well.

Based on lists of child care programs maintained by the Child Care Councils of Nassau and Suffolk, and from data gathered from a study of Pre-K by The Early Years Institute, an estimated 61,841 children can be served in regulated child care programs on Long Island. (*See Glossary.*) Based on the demand for care stated above, the supply of **regulated child care programs can serve only 46% of children under the age of 6** on Long Island.

Many parents cannot use these regulated providers because they are unable to afford the fees they charge. Some parents who need financial assistance are ineligible for government subsidies. Others work full-time and cannot be served by the 21% of regulated care that is available for less than three hours per day (e.g. nursery schools and pre-K programs). The Child Care Councils also report that parents will have a hard time finding infant care on Long Island as well as care during evenings, weekends or on a rotating basis.

National data indicate that 10% of parents work evenings and a third work on weekends, while 44% of welfare clients work non-traditional hours where there is a paucity of care.<sup>1</sup>

So where are the other 54% of preschool children on Long Island who are not in the regulated market of child care? Most are with family members and neighbors (kith and kin) who live nearby. Some are with nannies and au pairs who come to the child’s home. Grandparents provide a significant amount of this care. For many parents, these arrangements are more trusted, more flexible and less expensive. Yet, with no oversight, many early childhood experts are concerned that these children are not spending time in rich learning environments.



<sup>1</sup> Ancillary Services to Support Welfare to Work: Specialized Child Care, Mathematica Policy Research, Inc., U.S Department of Health and Human Services, January 2001.

## The Importance of Quality

Most federal and state policies for child care have been created to reduce welfare rolls and help parents find and maintain employment. Over the past decade, in response to new brain research and the demonstrated return on investment from three longitudinal studies of children in high quality preschools, policymakers are not only focused on “slots” for child care, but also on the quality of those slots. The pre-k movement is an effort in 38 states to increase school readiness and close the achievement gap by investing in quality early education. At the same time, there are numerous high-quality early childhood programs in the community that cover the full day, but often, these programs are unaffordable or not suitable for their child’s needs.

According to the National Academy of Sciences, young children benefit from care that offers them ample verbal and cognitive stimulation, sensitive and responsive care giving and generous amounts of attention and support.<sup>2</sup> Throughout the 1990s, a seminal group of studies highlighted those features of an early care and education program where children fare better emotionally, socially, and cognitively. Such arrangements include:

- A sufficient number of adults for each child, i.e. high staff-to-child ratios;

- Smaller group sizes;

- Higher levels of staff education and specialized training;

- Low staff turnover and administrative stability; and

- High levels of staff compensation.<sup>3</sup>

The Cost, Quality and Outcomes Study found that only a small minority of programs actually offer all of these ingredients to quality. They concluded that 12% to 14% of children are in child care arrangements that promote their growth and learning while 12% - 21% are in child care arrangements that are unsafe and harmful to their development. For infants and toddlers, the proportion in unsafe settings is estimated to range from 35% to 40%. The study also examined the long-term effects of variations in child care quality by following children through the second grade and discovered that:

- Children in higher quality centers perform better cognitively and socially in child care, through transition to school and through second grade than children in lower-quality centers;

- At-risk children are affected more by the quality of the child care experience than children from middle and upper-income families;

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<sup>2</sup> National Research Council and Institute of Medicine. *From neurons to neighborhoods: The science of early childhood development*. J.P. Shonkoff and D.A. Phillips, eds. Washington D.C.: National Academy Press, 2000.

<sup>3</sup> Cost, Quality & Child Outcomes Study Team. *Cost, quality and child outcomes in child care center, Executive Summary*. Denver, CO: Economics Department, University of Colorado at Denver, 1995 and Kontos, S., Howes, C., Shinn, M., and Galinsky, E. *Quality in Family Child Care Relative Care*. New York: Teachers College Press, 1994.

Children who attend higher quality child care centers perform better on measures of both cognitive skills (e.g. math and language abilities) and social skills (e.g. interactions with peers, problem behaviors) in child care and through the transition into school;

The quality of child care classroom practices is related to children's cognitive development, while the closeness of the child care teacher-child relationship influences children's social development through the early school years.

This analysis is not able to provide information about the quality of early care and education programs on Long Island. This will be possible in 2011 when New York State implements a Quality Rating and Improvement System that gives 1-5 stars to each program based on an independent, professional assessment of its quality. Consumers will see the ratings of each program and an indication of the program's strengths and weaknesses, enabling them to select more appropriate care for their children.

## GLOSSARY OF CHILD CARE PROGRAMS

**Child Care Centers** provide group care for children away from their homes for three or more hours per day. Centers may care for children from 6 weeks old through 12 years old and must maintain strict staff/child ratios, group size limits and adhere to staff academic qualifications. Day Care Centers are licensed by NYS Office of Family and Children's Service (NYSOCFS).

**Family Day Care Programs** care for children in the provider's home. If a provider cares for three or more children (other than her own) the provider must be registered by the NYSOCFS. A provider may care for up to six children and two additional school age children

**Group Family Day Care Programs** also care for children in a provider's home. The maximum number of children allowed in this modality is doubled (12) because an assistant is required. These two caregivers may care for up to 12 children and two additional school age children. Group family child care providers are licensed by NYSOCFS.

**Head Start Centers** are federally-funded and when offered for a full day, are regulated by the State under the same provisions as child care centers. They provide a range of social services and care is offered free of charge

**In-home care** is when a provider comes to the family's home to provide services, such as a nanny, au pair, or babysitter. When provided on a regular basis, this caregiver is considered an employee and employment and tax laws apply. There is no oversight of nannies, au pairs or babysitters.

**Informal Exempt** providers are those who typically care for their own children as well as two other children, hence their other label, "Legal 2's" and are not subject to any regulation or oversight.

**Legally-Exempt Providers**, also known as "informal providers" or "kith and kin" care, are primarily friends, relatives or neighbors. This is the most highly used form of care, and the majority of these providers need not be regulated by OCFS. There are low income families who receive child care subsidies from the Department of Social Services (DSS) who are not required to use regulated programs. These families identify the "legally-exempt" caregiver, and the caregiver must enroll with their respective Child Care Councils in order for the families to receive subsidies to help them cover the costs. This care can take place in either the provider's home or the child's home.

**Nursery Schools and Preschools** care for children for less than three hours per day. Many of these programs operate on a school calendar and often offer both a part-day and part-week option to families. These programs are not required to be regulated. However, many programs voluntarily register with the State Department of Education. Schools with extended day programs (three hours or more) are legally considered child care centers and must be licensed by DSS.

**Pre-K Programs** are offered through school districts to four-year olds, and some three-year olds. Some districts partner with child care centers, Head Start programs, nursery schools and other social service agencies to run the Pre-K program for some or all children in the district. The program provides a part-day service (2.5 hours) and operates on a school calendar. These programs receive funds from the New York State Department of Education, and often from the local school district, and are free to all children enrolled.