



Childcare COVID Response – Parent Child Centers compilation of answers to the following questions:

- What have been the Barriers and Opportunities during this time?
- What observations/information about do you have about the impact on children and families?
- What would be helpful going forward?

We did a quick survey within the Parent Child Network when we were asked to testify and given the questions above. Below is a compilation of the answers we were able to collect from the PCCs with childcare centers.

Impact on Children and Families:

We have seen a real mix of impacts on children and families, and of course, we will not be sure of the real impacts right away, as some of the stresses could impact both children and families for years to come. When we think about “adverse childhood experiences” we must acknowledge that for some families, the COVID pandemic has resulted in some of the experiences on that list becoming the reality for some of the children we serve. Here is a list of things that several PCCs have identified:

- Scheduling has been a challenge for many families, especially when centers had to close or children had to be quarantined in accordance with the state guidelines, or when centers had reduced hours.
- Inconsistency in the schedule has created challenges with children’s behaviors and program scheduling.
- Parents are missing the close contact with staff – this makes it more difficult to offer advice, check in, make a caring connection with the parents.
- One real impact is fewer adults outside the families are able to connect with and check on children. This reduction in contact may mean less progress for children with special needs or worse, a child in trouble not being identified.
- Consistency with families has been a challenge. Many of the families we serve were already dealing with the impacts of trauma, which makes it difficult to have trusting relationships in the best of times. For some families, this has meant stepping away from our programs.
- Many of the families we serve have been food insecure during the pandemic.
- When any member of a child’s family shows symptoms, it can be very stressful for the entire family to get the needed tests.
- When parents have reduced work hours or have lost jobs, sometimes they no longer need/can afford childcare, so those children have been absent from the programs. This absence can result in some of the effects listed above, as well as increased stress and hardship for the families.
- Families are generally frustrated and trying to cope, but often the frustration is directed at our staff or toward their children.
- Some families simply can’t afford childcare anymore, even if they could previously.
- Both children and parents really need socialization opportunities.

What would help?

- It’s no surprise that additional funding for the childcare sector would be helpful. We need higher pay for staff and teachers (comparable to k12 teachers) and more financial support for programs and families to ensure sustainability and affordability. Also, more \$\$ for licensing avenues and education for teachers, including tuition forgiveness.
 - Widen eligibility criteria so subsidies are available to more families.
 - Pay subsidies based on enrollment, not attendance.

- Support closed CCFAP teacher training and in-service days to support teachers' needs for training and maintaining staff wellness.
- Secure additional slots so that as the state's economy recovers, we have the slots we need as parents return to the workforce.
- Less administrative burden would help. We are dealing with many requirements for documentation.
- More support with workforce development and recruitment.
 - Mentorship opportunities for staff/teachers.
 - Healthcare benefits for staff.
 - Help with recruiting and retaining both permanent staff and substitutes.
- Attendance and closed days requirements loosened for grant compliance, because we have forced closures and unforeseen absences due to COVID.
- Mental health services or self-care opportunities for staff in ECE programs.
- Continued (and potentially increased) support around COVID-related questions regarding guidance, response to issues, information for families and staff, etc.
- Recognize our critical role and the great job we are doing.
- Rapid rollout of vaccine for our staff.
- Universal healthcare for all.
- Broadband access for all. Also, equipment and tech support.

Barriers:

- Workforce issues.
 - Not enough people applying/not enough qualified candidates.
 - Not enough substitutes, and centers are relying heavily on them to stay open, as staff are needing to take time off for various reasons (largely related to COVID).
 - Existing staff working overtime.
 - Pay is neither competitive nor sufficient.
 - Some centers have had to close classrooms or reduce available slots.
 - Staff are feeling overwhelmed, overworked and stressed.
 - Difficult to keep team feeling among staff during this time.
 - We have been needing to support staff in new ways and provide more accommodations and small perks.
- Revenue streams are dependent on children attending childcare, and volume is important. COVID-19 guidelines and other issues mentioned above have reduced attendance, and thus, revenue.
 - Also, we have lost other revenue, such as private donations.
- Can't serve all the families who want childcare and also meet the guidelines.
- Administrators have more requirements for following guidelines and additional paperwork.
- Very difficult to provide 1:1 outreach services that families need, especially as it gets colder.
- All things IT are a challenge – access, equipment, platforms, cost, connectivity, skills, etc.
- Challenging for staff to make the decisions about participants regarding following COVID protocols.
- Our staff are people who thrive on human connection and who create those connections professionally and are feeling challenged on many levels during this time.
- For centers that have not been able to hire a full-time cleaning person, the staff have had additional cleaning responsibilities.

Opportunities:

- Our work with families is deep and broad and multi-generational, and we have been able to address many basic needs, as well as build protective factors throughout the pandemic.
- 8-hour days do seem better for both children and staff (as opposed to longer days)
- Full time cleaning person has helped to keep centers COVID-free and also relieve staff of regular cleaning duties.
- New partnerships have been formed to deal with challenges and provide services to families.
- Creative staffing has helped with some of the challenges (hiring floaters, eg).
- The CRF\$ has allowed us to make investments to address COVID-specific needs that will also have long-term impacts for our centers and our families (eg, new kitchen equipment, vehicles, outdoor playspaces). We have also been able to upgrade some of our IT equipment and systems.
- Work from home has forced us to create more efficient ways of working, and online meetings have allowed more people to participate in some cases.
 - We have also expanded our parent virtual and online outreach and have been communicating with families more via online Facebook groups, zoom circles and parent/teacher conferences.
 - We have also done direct delivery of supplies and activities to families at home.
- We have been using outdoor spaces in new ways.
- We have used new fundraising tools and strategies.
- When we were totally shut down, our staff used the time to take advantage of online training resources.

We want to hold onto this opportunity to embrace what has worked during this time and move toward greater equity and build on what we have learned during this challenge. We want to ensure that the open conversations between the State and our Parent Child Center Network will remain a regular feature going forward. As the State of Vermont thinks about recovery plans and implementation, we want to be at the table to ensure that the families that we serve are considered and centered in the planning.

Prior to the COVID-pandemic, the Parent Child Centers and other childcare providers were already operating on shoestring budgets, constantly being asked to do more with less. This situation was not sustainable then, and it is not now, and it will not be going forward. We must acknowledge that childcare is an essential service – essential to children, to families, to employers, to communities – and we must act accordingly as we design our State’s future.



Parent Child Center Network Co-Chairs:

Amy Johnson: Amy.Johnson@ncssinc.org / 269-873-1207 & Donna Bailey: Donnadbailey@addisoncountypcc.org / 802-349-9721