



**Policy Statement  
Revised April 2002 by  
Oregon Council on  
Developmental Disabilities**

## **Child Care**

### **Summary of the Issue:**

Affordable, accessible, quality childcare is difficult to find for most families. The challenges are even greater when a child requires a higher level of care due to disabilities. The consequences of the lack of affordable, accessible, quality care are well documented. These include parents unable to work or pursue education, families unable to take part in routine activities, and children being isolated from their peers.

### **Council Position:**

The Oregon Council on Developmental Disabilities believes that children with or without disabilities should grow up in family settings. It is important to assist families who have children with special needs to maintain their children in the home. Access to affordable, available quality care for children and youth with disabilities when it is needed, is a critical component to maintaining a healthy family life.

The Oregon Developmental Disabilities Council supports efforts in the public and private sector designed to overcome the barriers to child care so that:

- Families can find and afford quality child care
- Families have the childcare supports to participate in the community both personally and professionally.
- Children with special needs (support needs?) have the opportunity to participate in inclusive childcare where they can enjoy and contribute to relationships with normally developing children and vice versa.

Solutions and strategies for assuring accessible, available, affordable quality child care for children with special needs are described in detail in the 1998 plan developed by the Council in collaboration with the Child Care Division and other key stakeholders. In order to achieve these goals, the Oregon Developmental Disabilities Council supports the findings and full implementation of “ A Strategic Plan to Improve Access to Child Care for Oregon Children with Special Needs and their Families.”

### **Background:**

Childcare is a basic need for many Oregon families. Yet finding appropriate childcare is often difficult, regardless of a family’s income or where they live. Many families whose children require a higher level of care are simply unable to find a qualified provider, even when financial supports are available to pay higher fees.

The greatest childcare challenges are faced by those families whose children have disabilities or identified disorders and who require special accommodations or supports in child care. There is no ready source of data on the numbers of these children. This is primarily due to the following: 1) many children have significant special needs but can be cared for in typical child care settings with little or no added supports; 2) many children present major challenges in child care – particularly emotional or behavior concerns–yet have not been diagnosed or identified for services; 3) youth with disabilities older than 12 may still require care and supervision, yet are not included in current child care data tracking 4) there is no meaningful data that effectively identifies the number of families that have serious difficulty finding appropriate child care and /or children who experience multiple child care placements.

The Child Care Division and the Oregon Council on Developmental Disabilities collaborated to develop a plan to address issues of child care for Oregon children with special needs. The stakeholder discussions and planning that occurred in 1997 and 1998 resulted in the development of “ A Strategic Plan to Improve Access to Child Care for Oregon Children with Special Needs and their Families.” The plan is a blue print to guide public and private partners in developing a coordinated, comprehensive and statewide approach to addressing barriers to care for children with higher needs.

The plan calls for a pilot project to assist lower income families of children with special needs who required child care. In 1998, the Child Care Division provided funds to the Council to implement the Inclusive Child Care Pilot Project. The project offers a subsidy to eligible families to meet higher child care costs related to a child's need for added accommodations or supports. Initially, the project served 25 children in 5 counties. Project funding was increased in 2001 to serve approximately 50 children statewide.

A recent assessment of progress on the strategic plan, and findings from the three year operation of the Inclusive Child Care Project, identified the following key issues on the current status of child care for Oregon children with special needs.

- Families have few options and limited choices in seeking child care for children with higher level needs. In many cases, choices are limited by perception of higher needs when in fact a child requires minimal accommodation.
- Child care resources for youth over eleven years of age are especially difficult to find.
- There is a serious lack of qualified providers to care for children and youth with higher level needs.
- Finding an appropriate provider for a child with higher needs is often extremely difficult. Families have little support within the child care and referral system in finding providers with special skills and/or experience.
- Families have increased access to respite care and personal care providers. As a result, families turn to these individuals when no other regular" child care placement can be found. This places a financial burden on families since rates for respite care and personal care are typically much higher than child care rates.
- There is not sufficient training and support to providers who are willing to care for children with special needs. Training to increase comfort level and basic skills in caring for children with disabilities is limited and not available on a statewide basis. Consequently, providers who want to care for children with special needs can not find training and consultation when it is most needed.
- There are perceptions among many child care providers that care of children with special needs involves higher costs or undue burdens.

- There are not enough opportunities for training to help providers improve the quality of care offered to children with special needs.
- In part because of the issues identified above, a disproportionate number of children with special needs are not regulated care (register family child care or certified centers). This often means they are not in settings with other children.
- Families in rural areas face additional challenges due to distance, fewer provider options, and transportation.
- Relative to 1997, there are more resources to help families meet child care costs that are higher due to a child's disabilities. In 2000 the Department of Human Resources child care subsidy program implemented a "high needs" system to provide individualized rates up to 300% of regular rates. However, high need subsidy programs are limited in the following ways:
  1. Most families are not eligible for subsidies. The DHS program only serves families under 185% of poverty level. The Inclusive Child Care Project serves families up to 85% of median income, but is limited to approximately 50 to 60 families.
  2. There has been little outreach for the DHS high needs program. Consequently, many parents, providers and caseworkers do not request or use the higher rate.
  3. The state's regular child care reimbursement rates are inadequate, further limiting the pool of providers who will accept state-subsidized children.
  4. Subsidies typically end when a young person turns 18. It is extremely difficult to find financial resources to continue payment for higher cost care after an 18<sup>th</sup> birthday.

**Possible Future Activity:**

- Monitor and support the implementation of the "Strategic Plan to Improve Access to Child Care for Oregon Children with Special Needs and Their Families."
- Support ongoing attention at the state level to child care for children with special needs through the Inclusive Child Care Committee of the Childhood Care and Education Coordinating Council.

- Monitor policy development, education and training activities, funding and legislation that relate to children to assure inclusion of children and youth with special needs.
- Increase public awareness of needs and resources for childcare for children with special needs.