



For the past 4 years, Associated Day Care Services and the Early Education Quality Improvement Project (EQUIP) Advisory team have used the Boston Inventory to collect data on the quantity and quality of child care in Boston, Massachusetts. The Boston EQUIP is a data usage and community mobilization project funded by the AT&T Foundation in cooperation with the Families and Work Institute. Its goal is to improve quality for the estimated 25,000 children served by the city's early childhood programs. There also are EQUIP sites in West Virginia, Oregon, and Kansas City.

The components of the Boston Inventory measure supply and demand, program quality, parents' conceptions of quality, and facility assessments. A biennial provider survey captures data on program quality such as staff salaries, turnover, parent activities, computer usage, and program priorities.

Boston's EQUIP maps the distribution of child care slots and creates a visual representation of the supply and demand of care. Other maps present variables to examine added factors, such as family income, the number of single parents, and children by age groups. When the maps are overlaid, they reveal gaps in the child care services.

Using the inventory measures, the community has set benchmarks for improving services in the areas of accreditation, training, compensation, parent empowerment, and facilities. In 1996, more than 35 groups used the inventory data to plan, advocate, and bring funds into the city. These examples demonstrate the wide use of the data by the child care community:

- Boston has received more than \$2 million from the Massachusetts Department of Education's Community Partnership Grant. Inventory data are used to identify and allocate dollars to specific neighborhood clusters.
- The United Way is leading efforts for the passage of a bond bill by the state legislature to increase revenue for facility improvement. The data revealed that more than 20 percent of child care centers had to close down for more than 3 days a year due to facility problems.
- The data are used to bring private funds into the city. In 1996, The New England Inc. provided \$50,000 to give low income children an opportunity to work with computers. Inventory data were used in the grant application to demonstrate the difference between Boston Public School's kindergarten programs and child care centers in computer usage in classrooms.

The Boston Inventory is a valuable, yet relatively inexpensive community building tool. Total costs have been less than \$250,000 over a 4 year period. As the project funding by AT&T draws to an end, groups such as the Boston Enhanced Enterprise Community, the Carnegie Corporation, the United Way of Massachusetts Bay, and local coalitions have purchased enough community audits and other data services to sustain the project for the next year.

In addition to gathering data and using mapping software to analyze it, the project is working to educate the public as a community of data users. One aspect of their efforts has been to train parents and providers to facilitate workshops in child care settings to discuss the quality of child care with parents. The parent facilitators help others ask questions, voice concerns, and develop strategies to address them.

This year, EQUIP will release mini-enhancement grants to leverage community change efforts. Local groups will be able to use inventory data to design projects to enhance child care.

To learn more, contact Jason Sachs, Research and Policy Director, Associated Day Care Services, at: (617) 695-0700.

Child Care Initiatives Across the Country



Hawaii: County Legislative Measures Assist Families Seeking Child Care

The Maui County Council's Child Care Subcommittee was formed in 1996 to provide recommendations for increasing the availability of affordable child care in the community. The subcommittee was comprised of council members, child care providers and advocates, and union and management representatives. They held monthly public meetings, one of which was televised by the local public access channel. Testimony was received from child care providers, parents, business leaders, and community activists, many of whom stated that the lack of affordable child care was Maui County's most pressing social and economic problem. The subcommittee researched issues by contacting child care organizations and government agencies, primarily via the Internet.

The subcommittee initiated a public education campaign. The goal was to inform the community of the mutual benefits, including improved morale and lower absenteeism, that employer-assisted child care can provide to both employees and businesses. The subcommittee members also pledged to assist in the planning of a large organization's 24-hour, onsite child care center. In addition, the subcommittee urged the reinstatement of full county funding for training programs for family child care providers, funding which had previously been cut by 50 percent.

The subcommittee's work revealed that many working families are caught in a gap. They are ineligible for existing state subsidies because their income is too high, yet their income is not high enough to enable them to send their children to a licensed provider. A new county subsidy program, aimed at meeting the needs of these families, was urged. A bill was proposed to create a property tax exemption for licensed child care providers as a means of lowering their costs. The subcommittee also recommended a zoning bill that would increase the number of children that could be cared for on any single residential lot from six to twelve, provided that the family child care setting remained in compliance with state licensing standards. All of the subcommittee's legislative recommendations were adopted or given initial approval by the full Maui County Council before the end of the Council term on January 2, 1997.

Massachusetts: Working Together to Support Inclusive Communities