EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PURPOSE

To determine the perceptions of community child care leaders regarding technical assistance provided under contract with the Administration for Children and Families (ACF), Child Care Bureau.

BACKGROUND

The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 repealed a number of child care programs and created a single, integrated Child Care and Development Block Grant for low-income families. Program goals are to ensure accessibility and affordability of quality child care for working families by promoting parental choice, encouraging States to provide consumer education to parents, and helping States implement health, safety, licensing, and registration standards. The program is currently funded for a total of $20.9 billion for Fiscal Years 1996-2002.

The ACF contracts with outside entities to provide technical assistance funded through this Grant. This technical assistance includes the coordination and support of regional and national conferences, national workgroups, leadership forums, audio conference calls, and creation of the National Child Care Information Center. In 1997, ACF further expanded its technical assistance capabilities by creating the Child Care Technical Assistance Network.

While ACF provides technical assistance only to States, Territories, and Tribes, child care at the community level is ultimately affected. To determine perceptions at this level, we surveyed 100 community child care leaders regarding their sense of the technical assistance provided and the extent to which it meets their needs. We asked them about the format and content of technical assistance, and to identify critical issues facing the child care community.

FINDINGS

Overall, community child care leaders are satisfied with the technical assistance

Over 90 of the 100 participants surveyed are satisfied that the technical assistance they received addressed their concerns and was provided when they needed it. They also view the technical assistance events as valuable opportunities to network, collaborate, and learn what other States are doing. Their suggestions for improving technical assistance include updating invitation mailing lists and providing invitees with more advance notice of upcoming events.

They prefer regional meetings and conferences

Seventy-five participants express a preference for regional meetings and conferences because they are more narrowly focused and provide local or regional information which is often the key to improving the quality of child care. Other technical assistance formats they find beneficial are the Internet, large national conferences, mailings, targeted technical assistance, audio conference calls, focus group events, and national workgroup meetings and forums.

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The National Child Care Information Center is a valuable technical assistance tool

Almost two-thirds (63) of the participants are familiar with the National Child Care Information Center and 59 are aware of the **Child Care Bulletin** published by the Center. They report that information provided by the Center is helpful and promptly provided upon request. Nearly one-fourth (24) have also accessed the Center's homepage on the World Wide Web and find it beneficial.

Participants identify subsidy payments, infant/toddler care, school-age child care, welfare reform, Head Start/child care collaboration, and inclusion of children with disabilities as the most critical issues facing child care

Forty-four participants identify subsidy payment rates and/or sliding fee scales as a critical child care issue. It is followed by infant/toddler care, school-age care, welfare reform, Head Start/child care collaboration, and inclusion of children with disabilities as other critical issues.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

Clearly, community child care leaders think highly of the technical assistance they are receiving. However, based on our analysis of their responses, we identified a few areas where improvements could make this program better. We therefore suggest that ACF work with technical assistance contractors and regional office staff to

> -- *Improve advance notice and information about upcoming events.*
>
> -- *Focus technical assistance on issues community child care leaders consider critical.*
>
> -- *Continue to support the National Child Care Information Center, but enhance the technical assistance provided through its website.*

AGENCY COMMENTS

The ACF concurs with our suggested opportunities for improvement and describes recent changes in their technical assistance initiatives. Their comments are included in Appendix A.

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