Salary Surveys:

How to Conduct One in Your Community

Prepared by
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Child Care Employee Project

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The Child Care Employee Project (CCEP) advocates for improved wages, status, and working conditions of child care providers. Our goal is to ensure high quality child care available to all families regardless of economic status. The CCEP is a non-profit agency that provides resources, training, and consultation to the child care community. For more information, please call (415) 653-9889 or write CCEP, P.O. Box 5603, Berkeley, CA 94705.

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Introduction

Child care, we know, is an essential service, helping millions of working parents — especially women — to gain economic self-sufficiency. For children, quality preschool education is an important part of intellectual and social growth, and the key to quality is the consistent presence of a loving, skilled, well-trained child care worker. Yet for the million or more people who work in child care in the U.S. — mostly women — the rewards are low pay, few benefits, poor working conditions, and constant turnover.

Over 70% of child care workers earn wages below the poverty level. In 1986, the average salary for a preschool teacher in the U.S. was $9,464 a year — well below even poorly-paid workers such as cashiers, bank tellers, bartenders, and receptionists. For a family day care provider, the average salary was an appalling $4,732 (CCEP News, 1987). Fewer than half of all child care workers receive medical or vacation benefits. Many report that they routinely work overtime hours for no pay at all. Turnover may be as high as 42% a year, a rate far exceeding the national average of 10% in other human services (NAEYC, 1986). Few people can sustain themselves for long in such an unrewarding field — but the number of children who need child care continues to soar. The result is a crisis-level shortage of child care workers nationwide (Whitebook, 1986).

In recent years, child care workers have begun to speak out about this situation and to seek remedies. One of the first barriers we have faced in our organizing and education efforts has been the lack of reliable, consistent data. When we say that job turnover is excessive, we are asked, "How excessive?" When we demand better benefits, we are asked, "What benefits do you get now?" When we call for higher salaries, we are asked, "Higher than what?" The ambiguous national data available from the U.S. Bureau of the Census and the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics have been of limited help (Phillips and Whitebook, 1986).

The first step in most communities, therefore, has been to gather local information about existing salaries, benefits, and working conditions. Child care groups throughout the country have found useful data for their efforts to upgrade the field, but they have also found that such a survey is no small undertaking.

This booklet for child care advocates is the product of many people's experience over the past ten years. The Child Care Employee Project began collecting local child care workforce data in the San Francisco Bay Area in 1977. Since then we have conducted surveys and assisted survey groups in dozens of other communities. Included here are CCEP's widely-tested survey form, as well as information which we hope will demystify the task of conducting such a research project.

Why Conduct A Survey?

A salary survey of child care workers will probably reveal few surprises to those who conduct it. We all know from our own experience about problems with wages, benefits, and working conditions. But many other people do not know. A salary survey is a valid and effective way to make others see what we have experienced.

Survey results can open up discussion on wages and other issues, and can serve as a clear rationale for a raise. Tennessee Head Start officials, for example, were so embarrassed by the results of a survey of their employees that they raised salaries 6.7% — a small but welcome beginning. In September 1986, the Massachusetts Head Start Directors Association obtained state funding to cover 15% to 30% salary increases for staff, after demonstrating that low wages were undermining quality and fueling an intolerable turnover rate. With clear, well-presented data, the discussion can shift from *whether* wages and benefits should be improved to *when* and *how much.*

Salary and benefit information is crucial in planning child care program budgets, whether a program is starting up, expanding, or simply calculating next year's expenses. Child care centers and resource and referral agencies are frequently asked about appropriate salary and benefit packages. Although most current pay levels are unacceptably low, survey data can be a helpful basis for estimating what staff *should* be paid.

Survey data can be used to enlist support from parents, political leaders, and the general public. Public policy-makers, and parents who use child care, often lack a clear notion of the economics of a child care program. Salary and benefit data can give politicians and public agencies dramatic, startling evidence of the results of budget cuts and low funding. Parents can better understand the need for modest fee increases or fundraisers. The news that parking-lot attendants earn more than trained child care workers gives new meaning

to the campaign for "comparable worth."

A survey can raise the consciousness of child care workers themselves. Those who spend their entire work day with children, isolated from other adults in the field, may not realize how many people share their problems of low pay and poor working conditions. One common feature of "burn-out" is the sense that no solutions exist or that they are unreachable. By participating in a salary survey, staff can gain a sense of shared problems and can begin to talk about solutions. The data can help them develop reasonable requests for improvement from their center's board or owner. A survey conducted every year or two is an effective way to measure change — for the better, we hope!

Of course, there are limits and pitfalls. Survey results are sometimes used to justify low pay and no change at all. Given your results, some employers may argue that their salaries are sufficient because they pay the "going rate." Data must be accompanied by explanations of how child care work as a whole, like other female-dominated professions, is undervalued in our society and does not provide a living wage. Survey data alone, after all, only tell what is, not what should be.

A survey won't guarantee higher salaries. Survey results may generate interest, dismay, or shock, but they won't automatically lead to improvement. The survey could simply leave you burned out and buried in numbers which have little meaning to the community. Be prepared to commit the time and energy not only to complete the survey but to publicize its results effectively and create a plan of action.

Finding Help

Most useful child care salary and benefit surveys have been conducted by child care employees themselves. But surveys require time, money, and specialized skills which are often hard to come by. (A good rule of thumb is to estimate how much time you need to do a survey, then double it!) Here are some ideas to help you find outside resources:

- Apply for a grant from a group that shares your concerns, such as NAEYC or its local affiliate in your area, business and professional women's groups, social-service-oriented foundations, etc.
- Ask your local child care resource and referral agency whether it can contribute staff or telephone time, postage, lists of programs to contact, and/or publicity.
- Discuss the project with university or college departments in child development, education, city planning, or social work. They might be interested in supporting the survey as part of a research project, student internship, or work-study program. They may also be willing to donate student time, consultation about research methods, and/or computer access.
- Form a coalition of child care advocates (center staff, resource and referral staff, NAEYC members, early childhood instructors, etc.) to conduct the survey as a joint community project. In this way you'll have more volunteers to help with the survey, and a broader number of people invested in collecting accurate, useful results.
- Find out whether community and government agencies (such as resource and referral agencies or social service departments) already collect some of the information you need, or might be willing to incorporate your questions into their routine record-keeping. In Minnesota, state officials have added salary questions to their annual statewide enrollment survey of licensed child care centers.

References:

Child Care Employee News (1987). Vol. 6, Nos. 1, 2, 3.

National Association for the Education of Young Children (1986). *In Whose Hands: A Demographic Fact Sheet.* Washington, D.C.: NAEYC.

Phillips, D. and M. Whitebook (1986). "Who Are the Child Care Workers? The Search for Answers." *Young Children,* 41, May 1986, pp. 14–20.

Whitebook, M. (1986). "The Teacher Shortage: Professional Precipice." *Young Children,* 41, March 1986, pp. 10–11.

Who Will Be Surveyed?

The question of who will be surveyed actually involves two questions. First, what is the survey *population* — which group of people will the research findings represent? (For example: all Head Start programs in a particular city; all publicly-funded centers in a particular county; all child care workers statewide.)

Second, if it is impractical to contact every person in the survey population, how will you create a representative *sample* of this group? In sampling, a fraction of the population is contacted — for example, one fourth of the Head Start programs, or one tenth of the publicly-funded centers — and the results are interpreted as representative of the whole. Surveying the entire population, especially if it is large, is not just time-consuming; it may be completely unnecessary. If a sample group is large enough and is selected with care, your survey results will represent the wider population with whom you are concerned. In fact, a survey of a well-selected sample may be even more accurate than one of the entire population.

The most crucial factors in getting data which accurately represent the community are (1) choosing a random sample and (2) getting a high response rate.

Sampling

Random sampling means that each child care program has an equally good chance of being selected: for instance, each of 5,000 programs is assigned a number, and 750 numbers are drawn to create a 15% sample. This sample will reflect, in all probability, the same distribution of salary and benefit data which you would find in the larger population. But if the sample will include different program types (such as non-profit and proprietary, or half-day nursery schools and full-day centers), it should be *stratified* proportionally to include some of each type. (Within each type, centers should be selected randomly.) In selecting a sample, it's best to enlist the help of someone who has a background in research and statistics, or to consult a basic research methods textbook.[1]

How large a sample is large enough? There is no simple answer to this question, but a sample should be as large as you can handle effectively. If the population is small, or if there is much variation among segments of it, a larger sample is necessary. And keep in mind that not everyone who receives the survey will complete it and send it back, even with extensive follow-up. Ultimately, it's better to have a small sample with a high rate of return than a large sample with a low rate.

Be mindful of possible sampling biases or errors. If you want to survey all child care centers in your community, for instance, but only send the questionnaire to members of a

1. Babbie, Earl R. *The Practice of Social Research.* Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1975.

   Dillman, Don A. *Mail and Telephone Surveys: The Total Design Method.* New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1978.

   Gay, L.R. *Educational Research: Competencies for Analysis and Application.* Columbus, OH: Charles E. Merrill Publishing Co. Second edition, 1981.

local preschool association, you may only reach the programs which have better access to resources. Or if the survey includes a disproportionate number of public school system early childhood staff, whose earnings are close to those of elementary school teachers, the survey results may show inaccurately high pay levels. If a sampling bias is unavoidable, you should make this clear in your final report so that the public can evaluate your results accordingly.

Ensuring Response

Getting a high rate of response to a survey takes careful preparation. Many programs may fail to return a mail survey, and a 25% to 50% return may be typical. Yet with planning and plenty of follow-up contact, return rates as high as 80% or 90% are possible.

It's best, of course, if "non-responses" are spread among all the centers in your sample rather than among particular types. If, however, you find that a significant number of a certain kind of center (e.g., part-time or private proprietary) did not return the questionnaire, this may affect your data and you should make this clear in your report.

Probably the most important factor in getting a good response is the quality of the survey questionnaire itself. The Child Care Employee Project developed the enclosed questionnaire after much testing and consultation, in an effort to be concise, simple, clear, and relevant. But there are several things *you* can do to maximize the response:

Publicize the survey in advance. Use local newsletters, conferences, and meetings to let people know they will be receiving the questionnaire. With advance notice, people may be more willing to set aside the time to participate.

Keep your mailing list up-to-date. Your local licensing department or child care resource and referral agency can probably help here. Having surveys returned, forwarded, or lost could waste considerable time and postage.

Design an interesting cover letter. *(See sample.)* Be brief — keep it to a single page — but warm and friendly. Explain your objectives and the ways in which you expect the results to be useful, and let people know their participation is important. State your deadline — allowing yourself leeway, of course, for late responses to trickle in. Provide a phone number which people can call if questions arise.

Mail the surveys first-class, unless you have a very tight

budget; bulk mail receives a low priority and is very slow. If you can afford it, include a self-addressed, stamped envelope for respondents to return the survey. For surveys of large groups, business reply mail is an effective way to pay postage only for those who do return their survey form. Your local post office can explain this service to you.

Assure confidentiality. People are more likely to respond honestly to survey questions if they know there is no personal

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SAMPLE COVER LETTER

Date

Dear child care provider:

We know you are busy and do not need an added task in your demanding schedule, but we do need your help! We are conducting a wage and benefit survey to obtain a comprehensive, up-to-date picture of child care workers in X county. This information is constantly requested by child care administrators, potential providers, legislators and the media--but no survey has been done in this area since 1977!

You have been selected at random for our survey. Please be assured your program's name will not be used; all information you provide will be kept confidential and anonymous. We ask you not to place your program's name or address on the survey form itself or on the return envelope.

As soon as the data is compiled we will be sure to send you a copy of our report. If you have any questions, please contact the survey coordinators, _____ _____, at 999-999-1111. Please return the questionnaire in the enclosed, stamped envelope no later than February 2.

Thank you in advance for your support!

Sincerely,

risk. Who'd want to offer embarrassing information about low wages or poor benefits if it would open their program to public criticism?

First of all, assure confidentiality in your cover letter. Ask respondents *not* to write their name and address on the survey form or on the return envelope. (It will help to place your organization's name and address on the return envelope, so that centers don't place their own there by mistake.) Instead, *before* mailing out the questionnaires, write or print an ID number on each one, and keep a list of programs and their ID numbers in a secure place.

Code numbers can also help you classify a stratified sample into sub-groups such as full-time, half-day, urban, rural, public, private. For instance, programs which receive public subsidy can be coded as PS 1, PS 2, etc.; private proprietary programs can be coded as PP 1, PP 2, etc.

Be appreciative. It takes time and energy to fill out a survey. Let people know concretely that you appreciate their efforts — for instance, by putting them on a mailing list to continue

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SAMPLE REMINDER POSTCARD

Date

Dear child care provider:

Last week we sent your program a questionnaire about staff salaries and benefits, as part of our statewide survey of child care workers.

If you have already completed and returned it we sincerely thank you. If not, please take the time to do so today. Your response will help guarantee the accuracy of our data, which will be crucial in planning next year's state child care budget.

If you did not receive the questionnaire or it has been misplaced, please call us today at 999-999-1111, and we will mail you another right away. Thanks again for your participation!

Sincerely,

receiving information. Promise to send everyone who responds a copy of the results — and do so promptly when your report is ready.

Be persistent and patient. Many people will inevitably need reminders. Researchers have found it useful to send out a follow-up postcard to everyone in the sample after one week, both to thank those who have already responded and to encourage those who have forgotten the survey or let it sink under their more recent mail. *(See sample postcard.)*

After about three weeks, or as the deadline approaches, call or write centers you haven't heard from to ask whether they have mailed back their questionnaires, and provide a replacement questionnaire form if you can. *(See sample follow-up letter.)* If a program hasn't responded after two or three reminders, however, it's probably time to call it quits.

SAMPLE FOLLOW-UP LETTER

Date

Dear child care provider:

Three weeks ago we sent your program a questionnaire about salaries and benefits, as part of our statewide survey of child care workers.

We are writing again today because in order to obtain accurate and useful information it is very important to hear from as many programs as possible. The survey results are expected to have a major effect in planning next year's state child care budget.

In the event that your questionnaire has been misplaced, we are enclosing another.

We truly appreciate your taking time from your busy day to participate in this survey. Thank you!

Sincerely,

P.S. A number of people have asked when the survey results will be ready. We plan to have them out by (give a reasonable estimate here).

The Questionnaire

The enclosed questionnaire has been tested by the Child Care Employee Project for the past few years, and many people have given us feedback in order to improve it. We encourage you to use it "as is," so that groups throughout the country will be collecting information in the same way and can compare their findings more easily. While this questionnaire doesn't ask every question we could think of, it *does* cover the key issues around child care salaries and benefits. We have found, too, that the more questions you ask, the less likely it becomes that people will want to take the time to answer them all!

The questionnaire is designed to be filled out by center administrators regarding the entire teaching staff in their programs. We have excluded non-teaching staff such as cooks, office workers, bus drivers, and janitors — not because these people aren't important, but because we wanted to keep the questionnaire simple.

This is not a survey of individual child care workers. Such a survey can be very difficult and cumbersome because of the need to identify, contact, and follow up on so many different people. If you do want to conduct such a survey, however, contact the Child Care Employee Project for assistance.

Staff are categorized in the questionnaire as teachers, assistant teachers, teacher/directors, and directors. We have aimed for the simplest, most common categories, but we realize that these may differ from the terms which your state's licensing department uses. Change the categories if necessary, but if the differences are minor (such as "aide" instead of "assistant"), programs should be able to answer the questions without much difficulty.

For the sake of uniformity, we have also asked programs to indicate hourly wages. Programs which calculate wages as an annual salary will have to divide that figure by the number of weeks worked per year, and then by the number of hours

worked per week.

The questionnaire does not ask programs to categorize themselves by program type: for instance, public or private, subsidized or not. If you are using a stratified sample of different types of programs, you will need to pre-code the forms yourself in order to categorize the results.

You may either reproduce this questionnaire yourself or order the forms in bulk from the Child Care Employee Project for a nominal fee. Our only "requirement" is that you let us know when you are doing a survey, and let us know the results!

Analyzing The Results

Before you collected the data, presumably, you decided whether you would be tabulating and analyzing it with a computer or by hand. The decision may already have been made for you, based on your access to a computer and to people with computer skills — but these are becoming more available all the time, especially in college and university research programs and at large social service agencies. A computer can save a tremendous amount of time in tabulating frequencies, and in cross-tabulating data for different subgroups in your sample. But if you will need to tabulate the data by hand, don't give up. As long as someone in your group can calculate percentages and averages you can make your data meaningful to others.

Computer Analysis

If you are using a computer, your first task will be to code the surveys to prepare them for data entry. The enclosed Child Care Employee Project questionnaire has been "edge-coded" for data entry; that is, the number code for each response can be entered in the small boxes in the right-hand column. Some computer programs don't require edge-coding, however, and will instead prompt the operator with the question itself. If you will be using such a program, you may want to remove the edge-codes from the questionnaire before reproducing it.

We strongly urge you to consult someone with computer expertise for assistance in deciding how you will prepare your survey for data entry. You may contact the Child Care Employee Project for a copy of our codebook for use with this survey.

Some "clean-up" of the data will no doubt be necessary before it can be entered into a computer, regardless of which system you use. When respondents fail to answer a question, for instance, you will need to assign a code number for "missing" or "blank" — "9" is often used. (If a question receives

a low response rate, however, your data may not be reliable for that particular question; if so, make this clear when you report your findings.) If a person gives contradictory answers to two questions, this will require a judgment call: you can either change the answers to "missing," or leave the answers contradictory. When coding the answers to questions which ask for a range, you will have to choose whether to code the low point, the midpoint, or the high point of the range. Be sure to decide on how to handle all the unusual cases before entering the data, so that you will treat all cases consistently.

To code the answers to the open-ended questions, develop a manageable list of headings — perhaps eight to twelve — under which all the responses will fall. Try coding about 20 of the answers to see if there are any ambiguities, or answers which don't fit your categories, and then revise your coding system if necessary. Create an "other" category if there are a few miscellaneous answers which don't fit with any of the others.

Once the data is computer-ready, you will need a program which will direct the computer to calculate the answers you want. Since software technology is constantly changing, you should check with someone in your community who is up-to-date on the best package for your needs.

Hand Tabulation

To tabulate the data by hand, enter it on a large tally sheet with all the different questions listed across the top, and the ID number of each respondent listed down the side. Then compile summary sheets on which you record all your findings about each specific question.

Statistics

Once you have tallied the information, you will have to decide which statistics you will use in order to make your findings clear to others. Here are several types:

- **frequency:** the number of identical responses to a given question. Raw frequencies, however, don't make much sense by themselves. For example, 75 programs may report that they offer health benefits, but it will make a big differ-

ence to know whether the total sample was 80 programs or 800.

- **percentage:** the number of identical responses to a question, divided by the total number of respondents. For example, if 75 out of 300 programs offer health benefits, the percentage would be 25%. Percentages are easy to understand, and allow for comparisons between groups of different size.
- **average:** the sum of all responses to a given question, divided by the total number of respondents. This will let you know what wage most people receive, for example, but the figure can be thrown off easily if there are a couple of very high or very low scores. In such a case you may want to calculate the **median** instead: the midpoint in the distribution, above and below which 50% of the scores will fall.
- **range:** the distance between the highest and lowest scores in response to a given question. You may say, for example, that "teacher assistants in private programs earn anywhere from $3.35 to $5.80 an hour." Information reported this way provides a good overview of the situation.

Beyond these methods of reporting data, you may also want to find out whether any differences you observed among sub-groups in your sample are "significant" or due to chance. Does a comparison of turnover rates at private and public programs, for example, reflect real differences between programs, or is the variation just a coincidence? Such calculations, however, will require more sophisticated statistical methods.

Although we have been focusing on numerical reporting of data, remember that descriptive or qualitative information is also important. If people wrote comments on your survey, or gave interesting answers to the open-ended questions, these can add a human element to your report that is often lost in page after page of numbers.

Making The Best Use of Your Findings

The most important part of conducting a survey is how you publicize your results. Having all the data in the world is useless unless it reaches people. Unfortunately, many groups and individuals who conduct surveys run out of steam at this point in the process. In making your plans, be sure that you allow time and energy for getting the word out.

Begin with a short, simple, attractive article which summarizes your findings clearly. Send it to local newspapers (don't overlook small, free neighborhood papers) and newsletters of early childhood, women's, and parenting groups (especially local NAEYC affiliates and child care resource and referral agencies). Turn the article into a one- or two-page fact sheet which can be distributed at meetings and other events. Although it may be difficult to condense all your findings into one or two pages, most people will not read much more than that. A brief summary is essential for wide distribution, but let readers know that more detailed information is available upon request.

A survey report should include the following:

- a **description** of your sample, and of how you collected and analyzed the information.
- a **summary** of key findings. Include the most dramatic facts and those which you think will be of most interest to your audience. Use tables or charts to illustrate important patterns. *(See sample on next page.)*
- some **interpretation** of the findings: What do they mean? Is any of the data new or surprising? How do the findings compare with those in previous surveys, in other communities, or in comparable professions? Where are they in relation to the poverty level, or your local or statewide median income? Comparisons with wages in other jobs — especially unskilled jobs such as in fast food chains — have an immediate impact.

SAMPLE CHART

Profession	Median Annual Income 1984	Average Annual Income 1984
Child care worker	$ 9,204	
Receptionist		$13,780
Cashier	$ 8,840	
Recreation worker		$15,000
Bartender	$10,600	
Bank teller		$10,800
Wholesale/retail buyer	$19,500	
Flight attendant		$13,000
Real estate agent	$19,000	
Librarian		$18,791
Registered nurse	$21,000	
Dietician/nutritionist		$18,980
Urban planner	$29,600	
Medical records technician		$13,200
Architect	$28,600	
Meteorologist		$16,107
Computer systems analyst	$34,632	
Bank manager		$28,600
Accountant	$19,500	
Social worker, B.S.W. M.S.W.		$15,700 $20,100

(Source: Occupational Outlook Handbook, 1986.)

Your public library can help you find information about average wages and standards in other jobs in your community, and will probably have national reference books such as the annual *Occupational Outlook Handbook*. Information from the *Consumer Price Index* may also be helpful. In West Los Angeles, for example, CCEP was able to point out that while teachers' wages rose 18% and aides' wages rose 14% between 1980 and 1983, the cost of living had risen 19%. Thus, what appeared to be an increase in earnings was actually a decrease in purchasing power.

- a summary with conclusions and recommendations. This is your chance to suggest improvements in the field. After conducting a survey, for example, one referral agency decided to list in its job bank only jobs which offered at least the average wage in the community. Try formulating a policy: What would you recommend to someone setting up a new child care center or to a program trying to revise its salary schedule?

But don't stop with one article or fact sheet. Try making the release of your survey results part of an event which will grab wider attention: a press gathering, a lobbying day at the state legislature, a child care worker day, a conference, a fair, or a party. In the Minneapolis area, the Child Care Workers Alliance promoted a Child Care Worker Day, by placing an ad in *Parent Magazine*, with a circulation over 30,000. *(See next page.)*

Your Audience

Different audiences will have different interests and points of view — child care workers, parents, legislators and public policy makers, community groups, the media. In order to attract the widest possible attention, be prepared to follow up your brief fact sheet by adapting your arguments and emphases according to differences in outlook.

Child care workers: Call an area-wide meeting of teachers and directors to discuss the survey results and shared problems, and to brainstorm solutions. At a series of meetings following a survey in southern California, for instance, child care staff shared personnel policies and developed a group

insurance plan. Call your local college Early Childhood Education department, too, and ask if you can discuss your findings with the faculty. Suggest making a presentation to classes about these issues.

Make your statistics work for you, not against you. Be prepared to ward off negative consequences; some people may use your figures to justify paying low wages. Make it very clear that you are not recommending the going rate as an adequate salary.

Child care staff will respond differently to the data depending on whether they earn less than, the same as, or more than the average salary. Each of these groups will need assistance in interpreting the data. The case is simplest for those who earn less than average pay; the facts will be a clear rationale for a raise. For those whose earnings are average, it will be necessary to articulate what's wrong with the status quo. Information about turnover is critical, as well as the number of child care workers who find it necessary to hold second jobs, or to receive food stamps or other forms of assistance, in order to stay in the field. Those who earn more than the average may find it very awkward to complain or to ask for improvements. Here it's helpful to draw comparisons with other jobs which require similar education and training, especially fields which are dominated by men rather than women.

When discussing results with people in the field, it's always important to keep in mind how these facts affect people personally. If the results are not accompanied by a plan to upgrade wages, they may contribute to a feeling of hopelessness and even lower morale — or the conclusion that it's foolish to remain working in child care!

Be sure to share your results with the Child Care Employee Project, NAEYC, and other national and statewide child care groups. Check their newsletters and journals, too, such as CCEP's Child Care Employee News, to stay informed about how child care workers are doing in other parts of the country.

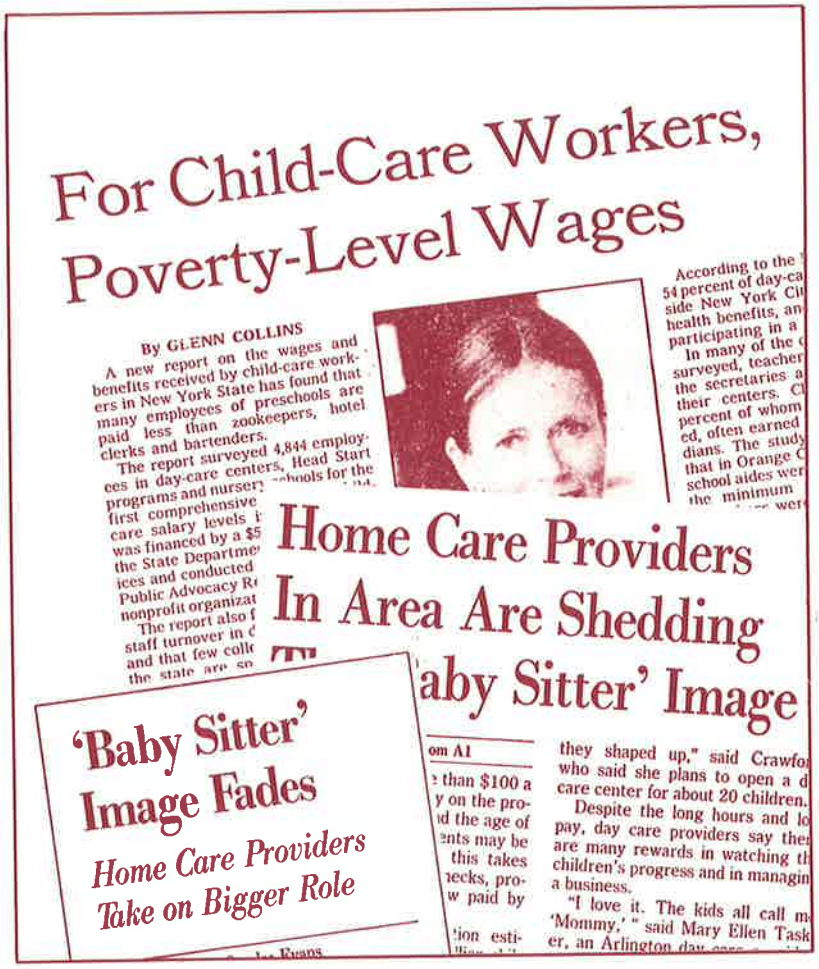
Parents: Parents are potentially strong allies in a campaign for better salaries and working conditions, but unless they are approached sensitively they may feel like adversaries. Changes which cost money, after all, may mean an increase

in their fees, and child care is already expensive. Still, many parents do not know how poorly paid their children's caregivers are — they may assume that high fees mean decent wages — and survey information may produce an outpouring of shock and support.

Parents are especially receptive to arguments about staff turnover and the quality of care: if the most qualified teachers are unable to stay in the field, it's the children who suffer. Share with parents the latest research findings that the consistency and training of staff are the key to quality child care (Howes, 1986). Hold parent meetings at centers; if the staff are uncomfortable about raising these issues, an outside speaker may help. If parents resist a fee increase, talk about fundraising activities, creating a sliding scale to make fees more equitable, and joining in a letter-writing and lobbying campaign for better public funding. Share copies of NAEYC's pamphlet, "Where Your Child Care Dollars Go," and CCEP's brochure, "What Every Parent Should Know About Child Care Providers."

Legislators and Policy Makers: Arguments focused on the economics of child care will make the most sense to this audience. If you are asking for more public funding, point out the ways in which child care saves money: fewer families dependent on welfare, a decreased need for remedial services during children's school years. Comparisons with the poverty level, local median income, and salaries in other fields — both unskilled and with comparable skills — will be especially effective. Keep your presentation eye-catching and short, using charts whenever possible; these people are already besieged daily with too much to read.

Legislative lobbying for improved salaries has begun to "pay off" in the past few years. Advocates in Massachusetts obtained a $5 million increase in the 1986 state child care budget earmarked for upgrading child care worker wages in state-funded centers; the same year, Connecticut workers won a $3.7 million increase. In the spring of 1987, Minnesota passed legislation to reward state-funded centers which pay higher salaries: centers which pay 110% of their county's average salary can now receive up to 125% of the standard reimbursement rate.



For Child-Care Workers, Poverty-Level Wages

By GLENN COLLINS

A new report on the wages and benefits received by child-care workers in New York State has found that many employees of preschools are paid less than zookeepers, hotel clerks and bartenders.

The report surveyed 4,844 employees in day-care centers, Head Start programs and nursery schools for the first comprehensive

care salary levels

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Public Advocacy R

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The report also f

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According to the

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Home Care Providers In Area Are Shedding

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'Baby Sitter' Image Fades

Home Care Providers Take on Bigger Role

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they shaped up," said Crawfo

who said she plans to open a d

care center for about 20 children.

Despite the long hours and lo

pay, day care providers say the

are many rewards in watching th

children's progress and in managin

a business.

"I love it. The kids all call m

'Mommy,' " said Mary Ellen Task

er, an Arlington day

Recent headlines in the New York Times and the Washington Post reflect changing awareness of child care worker's plight.

Community Groups: Share your data with other groups interested in children's and women's issues, such as NOW, the Junior League, the YWCA and YMCA, churches, unions, and major employers. The YWCA, for instance, has made raising child care salaries one of its national priorities. Unions and employers need to be educated about the true costs of child care if they are considering a program for members or employees.

All these groups may also have access to resources which

are not traditionally available to child care programs. Raising their awareness may gain you powerful new allies.

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The Media: Be thorough in contacting local newspapers, both large and small, as well as radio and television stations. In each one, locate those writers or producers who routinely cover "human interest" stories, labor issues, women, children, and families. You may have a hard time catching their interest, but be persistent; making your survey results part of a larger event or series of actions will help. Reporters may be especially receptive if they are parents and child care consumers themselves. When you send out copies of your news release, include the names and phone numbers of people who can be called for personal interviews. For more suggestions, see NAEYC's booklet, "Making News: An Affiliate Guide to Working with the News Media," and CCEP's booklet, "Managing the Media Maze."

Salary surveys are one of the best tools to inform the public about the conditions child care workers face. The facts generated can help explain why there is a shortage of high-quality child care for the growing number of children in need. By demonstrating how workers subsidize the child care delivery system through their low wages, and how these wages make it difficult for programs to recruit and retain a qualified staff, salary surveys can be used to build public support for a better child care system. We hope this guide has been useful to you, and that you will share your experiences and survey results with the Child Care Employee Project. Write or call us at P.O. Box 5603, Berkeley, CA 94705; (415) 653-9889.

Part of a brochure produced by a Portland group to raise community awareness about child care workers.