



Health, Housing and  
Human Services Council

**Childcare for Children  
With Special Needs**

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# CHILDCARE FOR CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS ACTION TEAM REPORT

## Background

The HHHS Needs Assessment notes more options need to be provided for special needs children. During 2003-2004 Bainbridge Island School District reported serving 535 children with Individual Education Plans and 35 children who attend Functional Skills Classrooms. In Bremerton, Holly Ridge serves three Bainbridge Island children.

**Special needs** were defined as conditions that impede a child's independence or functions and require assistance from a caregiver. Conditions may include developmental delays or disabilities, behavioral challenges, communication delays or disabilities, mental health concerns, physical or medical conditions.

**Childcare** was considered any situation in which someone other than the primary caregiver cares for the child, and included childcare centers, family childcare, respite care, after-school programs, summer programs or home care.

The Action Team focused on care for children and youth with special needs, ages 0 to 21, who require year-round daily care. Recognizing permanent extended childcare is a necessity for working parents to continue their employment, the Team then focused on the availability of such care.

## Key Findings

- Many cognitive and physical disabilities pose little or no impediment to a child's ability to function in a childcare setting. Certain behavioral, medical challenges or disabilities can impede a child's ability to function in childcare.**

Thirteen of the 14 childcare providers surveyed stated that they provide care for children with a wide range of disabilities. The capacity of providers to provide increased levels of care is a balance that takes into consideration the child's independence level, facility requirements, additional staffing required, safety issues, and funding resources.
- Due to the lack of childcare for children with special needs, many families modify their employment, with one parent dedicated to the care of the child.**

Families often have arranged a patchwork of activities to provide care, combining in-home care, unpaid relatives and friends, preschool and recreational programs. This approach covers only part of the day, relies on the parents or primary caregivers for transportation from one site to the next and requires the child adjust to frequent changes. While many families in modifying employment and establishing such arrangements have developed routines and lifestyles which are very rewarding, other families suffer severe financial, physical and emotional stresses. One-parent families are susceptible to poverty as they may have less of a support network and fewer options as dictated by the needs of the child.
- Due to developmental delays, many children and youth with special needs require supervised care to the age of 21.**

Teenagers with special needs often require the same level of supervision, assistance and care that they required when they were younger, and consequently, their families' need for childcare frequently extends at least until they reach 21.
- The need for childcare extends beyond Monday through Friday office hours.**

Care is required during traditional and non-traditional hours, weekends and evenings in a multitude of settings.

## **Key Findings, *continued***

- **Challenges to families or primary caregivers include:** limited and decreasing childcare options; lack of a county facility capable of providing specialized care; lack of structured options for 13 to 21 year olds; some families perception that care is not available or welcoming; cost of care is not affordable, especially when 1:1 care is required; inconsistent knowledge of resources and support and no single point of contact; limited options for childcare close to work or home; and transportation to or between providers.
- **Challenges to childcare providers relate to:** limited information about resources and no single point of contact; lack of coordinated means of sharing information among a child's support network; inadequate and inconsistent information and disclosures about children's special needs; reluctance to care for certain children; difficulty assuring the safety of a child; needed training; lack of employees; lack of facilities and equipment; and lack of funds for needed staff.

## **ACTION TEAM RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Increase parent awareness of and access to existing caregivers, sources of funding, family advocates and resources to assist in their child's placement**

- Explore options of disseminating information and placement assistance through a single point of contact.
- Provide advocates to help parents find providers and establish services eligibility.
- Educate the community about public services.
- Market service providers' programs.
- Coordinate with Helpline House for information and referral.
- Coordinate information regarding local resources and childcare via Bainbridge Island School District (BISD) communication to parents.
- Coordinate information on BISD, Parent and Child Center and other websites and publications.

### **Increase provider capacity via information, support, and development strategies**

- Build on existing provider's willingness to provide services.
- Identify local and county resources and information for referrals, training, and other supports.
- Explore options to disseminate information and resources through a single point of contact.
- Identify providers who are experienced and equipped to care for specific specialty areas.
- Determine the type of support and resources providers need for the future.

### **Create and expand a continuum of options for working parents during traditional and non-traditional childcare hours**

- Examine models in other communities.
- Develop a pool of home care providers.
- Explore weekend, evening and night options by existing and new providers.
- Develop "companion care" options for teens after school.
- Expand summer, weekend, and after-school opportunities in collaboration with youth agencies.
- Explore more options for Extended School year.
- Create opportunities for children with behavioral challenge.
- Explore options with Kitsap Transit regarding dedicated Access vans for transportation to and between providers.

### **Address financial considerations for families and service providers**

- Explore funding opportunities through Kitsap County Childcare Resource and Referral.
- Explore establishing fund to assist providers offering childcare for children with special needs.
- Increase the number of island providers that accept Department of Social and Health Services subsidy.
- Develop funding for expanded staff hours to provide higher ratios as needed (1:1 care).
- Develop funding for facility remodeling for safety and accessibility.
- Obtain information regarding legal restrictions on use or receipt of grants to "for-profit" providers.