



**Child Care Worker Training:
An Interim Report of Programs and Needs
in Allen County**

December 2003

Executive Summary

In 2002, the Foellinger Foundation Board of Directors established an Ad Hoc Committee to study the local strengths and needs in child care worker training and to review national research on effective training approaches and model programs. The Child Care Worker Training Committee was formed in January 2003, to study the topic and to prepare a report of findings. Literature searches, program reviews, individual interviews, and some focus groups were conducted by the Committee through June 2003. The report of findings was presented to the Board in November 2003.

There are significant research findings as to the effectiveness of infant brain stimulation and early childhood education. Scientists have found that the infant brain grows exponentially. Even small amounts of learning at early ages promote significant development in later years from childhood through adulthood. Learning is explosive from birth to age six, but many children do not receive effective “early care and education” during this critical period. “Early child educators” can play a vital role in providing appropriate developmental experiences for the children.

It is important for the early child educator to have a working comprehension of children’s developmental stages, learning styles, teaching activities and techniques, behavior management, communication skills, safety practices, government regulations, parent engagement practices, cultural diversity, and training for children with special needs. It is also important that the early child educator be a caring and nurturing person and be emotionally mature. (More than 95 percent of early child educators are female.)

Some of the practical early care and education knowledge is passed from one generation to another or from peer to peer in an informal, experiential manner. Over time, formal college degrees in early childhood education have been developed and recognized. Additionally, the Child Development Associate (CDA) certification is recognized on a national basis.

Because so much of infant and toddler education occurs as the children play and interact within their environment, our society has undervalued the early child educator in terms of economic status and professional respect. A significant amount of early care and education in any community is provided by family or friends of the family and is unidentified by trainers, professional networks, and governmental authorities. Because of economic undervaluing, early child educators often receive minimal wages, creating significant employment turnover and a lack of continuity for the children in their charge. Those dedicated educators who stay and work in the

field may face compensation practices that cause their own families to experience poverty and a lack of employment benefits. Any examination of training or prescription for improvement must consider the depressed economic status of the field of early care and education. Any sustained improvements in this field will require increased professional recognition and respect as well as a corresponding increase in financial compensation.

Potential long-term solutions to these economic issues could involve governmental standards and funding for early care and education, as provided for elementary and secondary education throughout the country. Strong and successful models for governmental responsibility and financial support exist in other countries such as France, Italy and Sweden.

Also, there are strong models for training of early child educators provided through college degrees in early childhood education, the Child Development Associate certification, other certification programs of national associations, the federal Head Start program, Web sites, libraries, and state-provided training. These models are locally supported by Ivy Tech State College, Paths to QUALITY program of the Child Care and Early Education Partnership, and the Early Childhood Alliance.

Local early care and education providers recognize the value of the local training programs but acknowledge limited participation in them. They desire greater access to these programs. There is enthusiastic and unanimous support for the T.E.A.C.H. (Teacher Education And Compensation Helps) Early Childhood® INDIANA project. The T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® INDIANA project is administered by the Indiana Association for the Education of Young Children and is licensed by the Child Care Services Association in North Carolina, where the national model was developed. It is designed as a partnership model, which requires the sharing of expenses between the T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® INDIANA project, the sponsoring child care program and the scholarship recipient. Its goals are to improve the quality of early childhood education and to promote professional development of the early childhood workforce by increasing educational levels and compensation and decreasing staff turnover.

T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® INDIANA enables early child educators to continue their education by providing scholarship support to help with the cost of college tuition, books and travel. Some scholarship models provide paid release time for classes and study. (Also, a sponsoring program may subsidize child care for a participant.) Each scholarship recipient must complete a certain amount of education, in the form of college coursework, during a prescribed contract period, and will receive increased compensation in the form of a bonus or pay raise after completing the coursework requirement and contract period. Also, recipients make a commitment

to remain in the sponsoring child care program or the early care and education field for six months to one year beyond the contract period.

T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® INDIANA has various eligibility requirements, and currently the educator must work full-time (30 hours per week minimum) to be eligible for a scholarship. This requirement excludes a large number of early child educators, and committee members recommended that the minimum hours be reduced or eliminated. The Committee also expressed deep concern about potential T.E.A.C.H. budget cuts and stressed the need for local and statewide advocacy to protect the program. During the course of this study, the state's financial challenges have escalated committee members' concern. They would like to see a long-term plan of action developed and implemented to maintain and expand funding for T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® INDIANA.

Potential long-term strategies to strengthen the profession include a concerted and planned effort to unify advocacy groups and to promote community leadership, corporate support, legislative advances, and funding for high quality early care and education. Early child educators must teach and mobilize parents to serve as advocates for their profession and for legislative support of professional training.

Short-term training strategies include expanding the number of CDA certification classes and adding classes for graduates of the CDA program who need quarterly training that provides continuing education units. Ideally, sources of funds for stipends for after-hours education could be identified. Also, there is strong interest in creating centralized recruiting and new employee orientation for early child educators and in developing a substitute teacher pool for multiple centers to draw upon.

Efforts to improve training for early child educators must address both long- and short-term needs in the field of early care and education. On a short-term basis, early care and education providers need financial assistance to ensure appropriate staffing for their programs and to subsidize poorly paid workers who attend training after work hours. Over the long term there is the need for broad-based advocacy to improve the professional and economic stature of those individuals who provide early care and education to our youngest citizens at their most critical time of learning. Government and business leaders must recognize not only the intellectual benefits of early education for children but also the significant benefits to society at large from cost-effective investments in high quality early care and education.