



Tuesday, Jul 13, 2010 Global/Local Communities Neighborhoods Work & Economy Politics & Policy Arts & Lifestyle Opinion Special Sections

Who's watching the children? Unaffordable childcare in Minnesota



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BY MARY TURCK, TC DAILY PLANET
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In Minnesota, paying for quality childcare has gotten much more difficult since 2003. Unaffordable childcare and lack of government support means lost time for workers and employers, and increases in the achievement gap for lower-income children. According to the "Status of Women and Girls in Minnesota" report, "Minnesota accredited childcare costs exceed college tuition."

How are women and girls doing in Minnesota? That's the question for the 150+ page report issued by the Women's Foundation of Minnesota and the University of Minnesota Humphrey Institute's Center on Women and Public Policy. This is one of a series of articles beginning with data and questions from the Status of Women and Girls in Minnesota report.

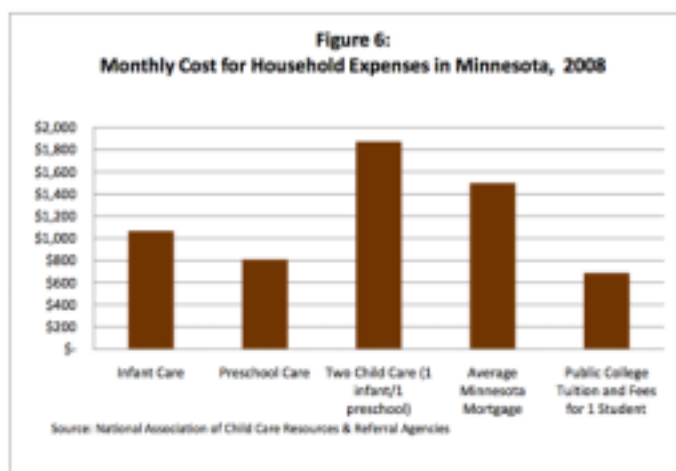
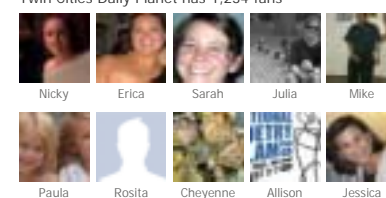
Researchers confirm the importance of high-quality early childhood education in closing the achievement gap.

Research shows that, on average, children from higher-income families or parents with more education perform better at the skills needed for school readiness than children from lower-income families or with less-educated parents. Remarkably, these differences disappeared among Minnesota children enrolled in high-quality, accredited child care centers. [The Lost Decade, Minnesota Budget Project](#)

Because about 75 percent of Minnesota mothers (and 94 percent of dads) work outside the home at least half-time, childcare is an issue for most parents. Accredited childcare is more expensive than "family and friends" childcare, but may also provide increased developmental and educational support. Either kind of childcare is expensive, with the average infant care costing more than \$1,000 per month and the average preschool care costing about \$800. The graph below (from the [Status of Women and Girls in Minnesota](#) report) compares childcare costs with average mortgage and college costs.

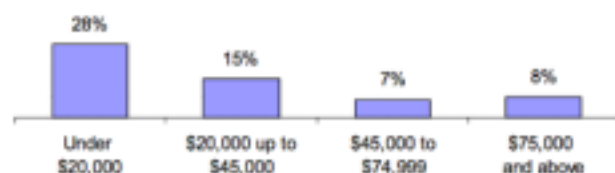


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Spending ten percent of family income on childcare is considered affordable. Low-income families in Minnesota spend a much higher proportion of their income for childcare. A 2004 Department of Human Services study found that the lowest-income families paid an average of 28 percent of their income for childcare.

Proportion of annual household income going for child care costs



DHS report, [Child Care Use in Minnesota, 2004](#)

Nearly half of all families with children under 12 rely on family, friends and neighbors for childcare. Another 32 percent use childcare centers and 10 percent use licensed family childcare.

High costs for childcare leave families struggling to patch together some sort of care, and taking whatever they can find. This is true for families at many income levels, but especially true for low-income families, whose children most need quality early educational support.

In 2004, more than one-third of Minnesota low-income parents said that childcare problems interfered with their ability to work. More than one-third of Minnesota parents at all income levels reported missing time from work in 2004 due to childcare problems. (That's in addition to any time missed due to children's illness.)

As recently as the 1990s, Minnesota did a good job in helping families to afford quality childcare. Aviva Breen, who was the director of the Minnesota Commission on the Status of Women from 1983-2001 recalls:

We worked a lot on the whole childcare funding thing. We had absolutely the best program. Our sliding fee childcare program was the best. It never was enough, but it was way better than anyone could have hoped for. Sometimes we actually got rid of the waiting lists! For various periods, we were able to serve everybody who was eligible.

It made a difference in everything. They had good childcare and could work at their jobs and not worry about what was happening to their kids. And then they moved off [welfare]. You don't need childcare for 20 years.

You are talking about families that need help with their children when they are working at low paying jobs.

Minnesota's commitment to assisting families with childcare and early childhood education faltered after 2002. In 2003 and again in 2005, the legislature tightened eligibility requirements and increased costs to parents. By 2005, 11,000 fewer children received childcare assistance. The [Minnesota Budget Project](#) reported:

State general fund spending for child care assistance dropped by 26 percent from FY 2000 to FY 2009. Increased federal funding made up for some of the lost dollars, but total federal and state child care spending in Minnesota in FY 2009 is still 16 percent below FY 2000 levels.

Today, childcare subsidies today fall far short of the need.

Unfortunately, only 19% of low-income Minnesota families received a subsidy, according to the 2004 survey. As of October 2009, 6,600 families were on waiting lists. Many more struggling families do not even qualify. Eligibility requirements set at 47 to 67% of the state median income leave many working-class families, who do not earn a livable wage, behind. "Status of Women and Girls in Minnesota" report.

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Unaffordable childcare

Submitted by Susan (not verified) on Mon, 2010-07-12 08:13.

Yes to this article...there is a double bind in needing to work to pay bills which takes you out of the household so you need childcare which is expensive so you need to work to pay for it - and often you can't make enough to pay for it and you can't afford to stay home.

A group of us eight years ago created a neighborhood based childcare cooperative in Powderhorn Park that still exists. When we created it it, it cost us \$75/month for childcare. The price has since gone up as they moved from providing the care in one of the

member's homes to renting a space. This kind of childcare doesn't work if every parent needs to work full time - but if the parents can have one day a week to give to the childcare project, then it works great.

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