

*impact brief*

**THREE**

**Child  
Care  
Workshops  
Provide  
Benefits to  
Employees  
and  
Employers**

Return on Workplace Investments through Child Care Initiatives:  
A Labor Management Project<sup>1</sup>

For a copy of the full study see:

**“Working Parents for a Working New York Study” 2010**

[http://economicdevelopmentandchildcare.org/technical\\_assistance/work\\_life](http://economicdevelopmentandchildcare.org/technical_assistance/work_life)

**T**HE Working Parents for a Working New York Study was designed to examine and assess the impact of the provision of child care subsidies and parental child care support workshops on a sample of city employees and employees of subcontracted agencies in the health care sector. The study focused on the variables of attendance, work performance, productivity, and retention of employees. A total of \$1.525 million was allocated during the 2007-2008 and 2008-2009 fiscal years by the New York City Council for this study; of this approximately 74% funded the subsidies and the workshops.

*A unique component of the WPWNY study is that common parental challenges were not only identified but tackled directly through the provision of information and workshops.*

The initiative's participants included income eligible District Council 37 members working for the Health and Hospitals Corporation, International Brotherhood of Teamsters Local 237 members working for the NYPD School Safety Division and 1199 SEIU members working for NYC Home Care Subcontractors. The Cornell School of Industrial Labor Relations directed the case study research. The Consortium for Worker Education administered the subsidy distribution and the Center for Children's Initiatives formerly known as Child Care Inc. provided workshops and informational/educational services. The Linking Economic Development and Child Care Project, with funding from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, helped cover publication costs. The study asked questions regarding job performance, absenteeism and child care satisfaction before, during and after the study of both subsidy and control group participants. Participant's employer evaluations were collected for third party impartial assessment. Surveys and evaluations were collected and the data was compiled and examined by the Survey Research Institute and Cornell University School of Industrial and Labor Relations.

## **Methodology**

The study population was comprised of 169 participants across all unions, of those 92 respondents were in the subsidy group and 77 were in the control group. The overall population was almost exclusively female with an average age of 35 years. The mean salary ranged from an average low of approximately \$22,000 to an average high of approximately \$36,000. Weekly child care subsidies ranged from a minimum of \$20

per child to a maximum of \$332 and an annual minimum of \$1,040 per child to a maximum of \$17,264. Subsidies were capped at the market rate set for New York State and parental co-payments were adapted from a standard New York City subsidy formula that factored in household size and income.

The 92 subsidy group participants were required to participate in informal work/family workshops conducted by the Center for Children's Initiatives (CCI), either in person or via the telephone. These workshop/trainings covered a variety of topics and also addressed the employee/employer relationship as it relates to child care, including how to be proactive with a supervisor. For these participants, specific questions were included in the follow up questionnaire to measure the variables addressed in the work/family support workshops.

## **Impact of Child Care Workshops**

Sixty percent of WPWNY participants receiving the subsidy who participated in an informational workshop or telephone consultation on work/family problem solving strategies changed their approaches or behavior as a result. Parents reported that the workshops and phone calls educated and helped them change their actions in areas ranging from selection of quality child care to problem solving with their providers and supervisors. Research supports that attention to issues such as unreliable child care<sup>ii</sup> or training employees to engage in discussions with their supervisors can assist in effective problem solving relating to work/family issues.

In addition to the self-reported, positive impact of work/family support workshops demonstrated in the WPWNY initiative, such workshops present a model that can be replicated for supervisory staff so that supervisors themselves can participate in training and gain awareness of child care issues. This type of training can create the potential for the development of a greater shared context and a common ground for dialogue on work/family issues. This is significant as conflicts related to child care and work/family balance clearly can have a major impact on the workplace.

## **Workshops are a Low-Cost Strategy for Employers**

Workshops like these are a valuable way to address work/family conflict for employees. It was estimated that the cost of operating these workshops was approximately \$25 per participant. Participants' self reports indicate that their attendance at child care workshops provided valuable information in catego-

ries known to impact work performance. For example, over 75% of WPWNY parents saw how pro-active approaches in planning for child care school vacations and holidays could prevent unnecessary missed days at work. They also gained an understanding about the correlation between various types of child care and how these child care arrangements can have an impact on their work performance as employees. Reliable child care promotes a peace of mind that enables parents to be more focused and productive on the job.

Workshop Topics Subsidy Participants Ranked by Importance	
Important factors for selecting child care	78%
Information about finding better quality child care	76%
Creating backup plans for holidays/vacations	75%
Parental challenges to selecting care	75%
Licensed/informal care distinction	75%
Creating partnership with child care provider	74%
Planning for the unexpected	73%
Information about more convenient child care	70%
Problem solving with child care provider	68%
Job impacts of unreliable child care	62%
Problem solving for licensed/informal care situations	52%
Working with supervisor on child care issues	50%

Research has documented that the variables identified above are common parental challenges. For example, an employer who conducted a child care survey documented that over 50% of their employees indicated that “finding back up child care “was a significant challenge faced” by their workers.<sup>iii</sup> Research shows that attention to issues such as unreliable child care<sup>iv</sup> or training employees to engage in discussions with their supervisors at the departmental level can assist in exploring more flexible work arrangements and help address work/family issues.<sup>v</sup>

Unreliable child care is one reason parent-employees are tardy, absent, or leave before the work day is over. Although this study did not measure costs, nationally, this is estimated to cost employers \$3 billion annually.<sup>vi</sup> Employee turnover is another significant way in which unstable child care negatively impacts employers’ bottom line, as it has been calculated that employee turnover due to child care related issues

costs the equivalent of one and a half times the annual salary of an exempt employee, and three quarters of the annual hourly wage of a non-exempt employee.<sup>vii</sup> Research demonstrates that employers who adopt family responsive policies are better able to retain valued workers.<sup>viii</sup>

Despite initial intentions, the WPWNY study was not able to focus on employee turnover and retention as due to the short seventeen month time period of the study and an unexpected funding cut midway in the second year. However, employee self-reports from the study provided preliminary findings that could be amplified by additional study. Seventy-two (72%) of all research participants in the subsidy and control groups indicated they would stay at their job if a child care subsidy were offered. Overwhelmingly, all study participants indicated that a child care subsidy would motivate them to remain at their job in the face of less than satisfactory working conditions.

Child Care Subsidies and Workshops Foster Increased Retention	
% of Subsidy Participants	If a child care subsidy & workshop were offered...
85%	would stay at their current job if they didn't like their boss
75%	would stay at their current job if their work commute was longer
62%	would stay at their current job if there were fewer promotional opportunities.
85%	would prefer a child care subsidy instead of a raise

The WPWNY initiative demonstrated that child care subsidies and work/family support workshops can contribute to a more productive workforce and help resolve work-family conflict. Work/family strategy workshops, with a particular focus on child care offer the opportunity for a low-cost, high-impact intervention with significant benefits and return-on-investment for both employees and employers.

## Policy implications

- If a subsidy is unavailable, employer sponsored child care workshops can at least provide employees with access to information and strategies to make the best decisions regarding challenges to work–life balance.
- An additional study would be needed to isolate the impact of the work/family support workshops and to study their impact on employee job satisfaction and retention.
- Supervisors and employees alike should attend child care workshops to enhance their collective knowledge base and develop workplace problem solving strategies.

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**Copies of this study can be found @**

[http://economicdevelopmentandchildcare.org/technical\\_assistance/work\\_life](http://economicdevelopmentandchildcare.org/technical_assistance/work_life)

## Notes

i This is the third impact brief in a series highlighting themes that emerged from a 17 month study, entitled Working Parents for a Working New York. Other briefs include Impact Brief #1: Affordable and Secure Child Care Contributes to a More Productive Workforce & Helps Resolve Work-Family Conflict and Impact Brief #2: Workplace Partnerships and Interventions Promote Dialogue on Child Care.

ii Fleron, L.J., Breen, L., Dimitrov, D., Grogan, R. (2006). Buffalo Child Care Means Business Cornell University-ILR; Child Care Resource Network; UB Law School; Success by 6; United Way.

iii Shellenback, K. (2009). Cornell University Child Care & Child Care Grant Survey: Impact on the Cornell Community. Cornell University, Division of Human Resources. Linking Economic Development and Child Care Project, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY. Retrieved from <http://economicdevelopmentandchildcare.org/documents/publications/154.pdf>

iv Shellenback, K. (2009).

v Berg, P., & Ernest-Kossek, E. (2009). Work-Family Flexibility in Unionized Organizations: Results from a National Study, Presentation, Michigan State University - School of Labor and Industrial Relations.

vi Shellenback, K. (2009).

vii Shellenback, K. (2009).

viii Grover, S., & Crooker, K. (1995). Who Appreciates Family Friendly Responsive Human Resource Policies: The Impact of Family Friendly Policies on the Organizational Attachment of Parents and Non-parents. *Personnel Psychology* 48.2, p. 271-288.