

**DAYTIME CHILDCARE SURVEY
PARK SLOPE & NEIGHBORING COMMUNITIES
SUMMARY OF FINDINGS * SEPTEMBER 2009**

INTRODUCTION

The Park Slope and Vicinity Child Care Survey was developed by the Park Slope Child Care Working Group, an ad hoc committee formed in the wake of discussions on the Park Slope Parents Listserv about the state of child care in this region. The discussion was prompted by several child-care center closings that took place in 2008 and 2009 (including Roots & Wings, Brooklyn Children's Academy Preschool, and the Berkeley Carroll Child Care Center which has reopened as a parent-run cooperative). It revealed a great deal of concern about the capacity of existing child care centers in this area to meet local needs and about their affordability. Some parents commented that the child-care application process had been arduous, with parents applying to four or five centers, uncertain of finding an acceptable placement.

The working group decided to develop a survey to assess the following:

- whether the child-care space shortage is real or merely a perception;
- to seek feedback on the affordability and quality of existing child care options;
- to explore parental preferences in terms of group daycare versus care in the home;
- and to explore the impact of child care availability on individual families' work decisions and finances.

The survey was distributed online to parents via the Park Slope Parents and other local listservs during May 2009. The 377 self-selected families who filled out the survey represent 486 children not yet enrolled in kindergarten. Of the 486 children reported in the survey, roughly half were being cared for at home (230) and half cared for at a child-care facility (252). Of the 230 children being cared for at home, approximately two-thirds were cared for by paid caregivers (149), and one-third had unpaid care (81), presumably by a parent or other relative.

KEY FINDINGS

Among the survey's findings were the following:

- **MANY FAMILIES CARING FOR OLDER PRESCHOOLERS AT HOME WOULD PREFER GROUP CHILD CARE**
Among the 221 children being cared for at home whose families provided a reason for this choice, 109 were ages 0-1, and 112 were ages 2-4.
 - Out of the 112 children ages 2-4 being cared for at home, the families of only 52% (59 children) said that home-based care was their preference. However, home-based care was the preference for considerably more families of younger children: Out of the 109 children ages 0-1, the families of 74% (81 children) cited this arrangement as their preference.

- Families who would have preferred an out-of-home option cited a variety of reasons for having their children cared for at home, predominately the high cost of group care, an inability to find a facility for children under age 2, or an inability to be accepted to a day care center. The specific percentages for each answer are not given here because many of these respondents (17%) checked “other” and then described their situations, which most often indicated a combination of cost and other factors among their reasons.
- Some of the reasons that parents gave for having their children at home when they would have preferred group child care were: Having twins, which made group child care less economical than nanny care; inflexibility of available childcare centers (for example having to pay for summers even if the parent doesn’t work during the summer); having the perception that it was too hard to get into a local child care center; and having feared for the quality of available child care despite the ability to pay.

One parent wrote: “I work from home part time and my husband works full time. We have searched high and low for a good daycare in our vicinity that I can use for part time weekly daycare or drop in..... I ended up resorting to an in home nanny situation though this is much more expensive and I wonder how other moms esp. low income can afford this.”

- **HIGH COST LEADS TO WIDESPREAD DISSATISFACTION WITH GROUP CHILD CARE**

Of the 237 families who answered a question about satisfaction with their children’s group daycare/preschool or other group care facility (roughly divided between those in full- and part-time preschool), only about three in ten (30% or 72) said that they were very satisfied and wouldn’t change anything about their childcare facility.

Among the 237 respondents to this question, 38% (89) identified the cost as a “severe strain” on their family’s finances. Another 29% (74) respondents to this question marked that they would like to see improvements in the quality of their daycare center, namely with materials, curriculum and/or educational philosophy. 14% of respondents (36) cited the location of the facility as not convenient. Several respondents wrote in the comments that they, or families they knew, had ended up finding daycare options in Manhattan (near a workplace) despite their desire to have found it closer to home. 14% (36) said that they would like to see more ethnic/cultural diversity in their facility. Another 14% (35) respondents indicated that they needed more days per week and/or hours per day than they were able to secure.

Notably: Having a second child in daycare further reduces the level of satisfaction. For example, of the 25 out of 377 respondent families who said that they have two children in paid group child care, only 20% reported satisfaction with their child care situation, and 44% reported that child care is an extreme strain on family finances. One parent commented: “The cost of daycare is so high in this area that we are putting off having another child until our oldest is in kindergarten (there is simply no way we could afford to have 2 kids in daycare at the same time, nor are we in a position for one parent to stay home).”

- **TYPICAL GROUP CHILD CARE COST IS \$9,000-\$18,000 PER YEAR**
The cost of childcare facilities varied considerably by neighborhood, with the largest number of people (46%, or 97) paying \$9,000 to \$18,000 per year. This was also the most frequently cited range in Park Slope and Windsor Terrace. In the Brooklyn Heights and Prospect Heights neighborhoods, more respondents paid from \$19,000 to more than \$24,000 (56%; 44%, respectively). In Ditmas Park, the largest number of respondents (7 or 44%) reported paying \$4,000 to \$8,000. This survey did not ask families' income, so it is impossible to assess the cost of childcare as a percentage of individual families' income.

- **FAMILIES EXPERIENCE STRESS OVER CHILD-CARE PROCESS**
Families were asked to rate the level of stress that they experienced during the child-care application and acceptance process. Only 12% (39) said that it was “not stressful at all.” The largest group of respondents (47% or 148) described the process as “somewhat stressful.” 29% (92) said it was “stressful.” 10% (34) said it was “extremely stressful.”

Notably: Of the 227 eldest children in daycare in the past year, 11 percent of families had forfeited a deposit on a child-care center. 51% had applied to one to two centers, while 32% had applied to three to five centers, and 5% applied to more than six centers.

- **CHILD-CARE NEEDS IMPACT PARENTAL WORK STATUS**
A total of 7% of respondents (23) said that either they or their partners were *not working* the desired number of hours at a job as a result of daytime childcare needs. Many respondents noted in comments that they or their partner had left a job because they had no other option for daytime childcare, and others said that their daytime childcare costs were equivalent to one entire parent salary.

- **NEED FOR ACCESS TO PUBLIC PRE-K.**
This survey did not comprehensively assess families' efforts to gain acceptance to public pre-K. However, it is worth noting that the 17 children who were not accepted to a public pre-k despite having applied were ALL enrolled in a paid preschool program, indicating the strong need for available preschool for children in this age range.

Notably: 8% of those who applied to their zoned public pre-K were not accepted, while 13% did not apply to their zoned school.

- **FAMILIES ARE FRUSTRATED WITH CHILD CARE OPTIONS: COMMENTS**
Beyond the raw statistics, parents submitted hundreds of comments expressing frustration at the high-cost, lack of flexibility, or difficulty “getting into” area preschools. Some of those comments follow:
 - We moved to Park Slope last summer. We had visited, done interviews and observed play sessions at preschools...applied to five and did not get into any!
 - I have been working part-time since the birth of our first child—who is now nearly 6—because the cost of childcare would have been equal, approximately, to the increase in salary I would have made by working full-time.

- I had to send my infant (and later on my toddler) across the country for months at a time to be cared for by family when I was ill because we could not afford nor find any available child care for our infant - we are middle class - but my husband's job required him to live in this place for several years where we could not afford a reasonable standard of living.
- The cost of ANY daycare, preschool, childcare, not just those that people consider “desirable,” is too much for us.
- I bring my daughter to a daycare in Manhattan because we could not find suitable care anywhere in our neighborhood when I returned to work.
- When our son was recommended for placement in a special ed class in an early intervention center, there were no seats available at EI centers in the immediate neighborhood....
- It is very expensive—we pay \$1600/month for daycare for our older child (\$19,200 for the year) and have a nanny for our infant at \$14/hour (about \$30,000 for the year)—with overtime for the nanny.... we are spending over \$50,000/year on child care.
- The waiting lists are stressful. Having your child in an environment that is not educationally challenging when you know that's what he needs is stressful. Then finding a place that charges you late penalties for arriving a few minutes after 6pm when I get off of work in lower Manhattan at 5:30 pm is stressful.
- The fact that we are entirely priced out of every viable place to put our child is a big stress for us.
- My job didn't pay me enough to pay for childcare and have anything left over, so I'm staying home most of the time.

ADDITIONAL SURVEY RESULTS

TYPES OF DAYCARE OR PRESCHOOL FACILITIES REPORTED

- 48% (116) of respondents’ children in a daycare/preschool were in a facility with two or more classrooms
- 14% (35) were in a daycare/preschool facility with no more than one classroom
- 9% (19) children were in parent-run cooperative preschools (i.e., parents required to contribute services)
- 9% were in family day care (i.e., paid daycare service provided in caregiver’s home)
- 9% (21) were in public pre-kindergarten
- 7% (16) were in independent school with elementary grades
- 3% (7) marked “other”
- 0% were in babysitting cooperatives

NEIGHBORHOODS REPRESENTED

- 48 % from Park Slope (181)
- 19% from Windsor Terrace/ Kensington/Sunset Park (72)
- 11% from Prospect Heights/Fort Greene/Clinton Hill (43)

- 9% from Brooklyn Heights and other areas northwest of Park Slope (Gowanus, Carroll Gardens, Boerum Hill, Cobble Hill, Red Hook, and Dumbo) (34)
- 9% from Ditmas Park/Flatbush/Midwood (33)
- 4% from other neighborhoods (14)

AGES OF CHILDREN IN THE SURVEY

The ages of all the children reported on the survey were as follows:

- 30% children under 2 (43)
- 28% 2-year-old children (135)
- 20% 3-year-old children (96)
- 18% 4-year-old children (86)
- 4% 5-year-old children (21)

AGES OF CHILDREN BROKEN DOWN BY ELDEST AND YOUNGEST

The ages of the 377 eldest children reported in the survey were as follows:

- 23% children under 2 (85)
- 26% 2-year-old children (96)
- 21% 3-year-old children (91)
- 22% 4-year-old children (84)
- 6% 5-year-old children (21)

109 respondents (28.9%) indicated that they had a second child under 6. The ages of the younger siblings were reported as follows:

- 56% children under 2 (58)
- 38% 2-year-old children (39)
- 5% 3-year-old children (5)
- 2% 4-year-old children (2)
- 0% 5-year-old children (0)

To contact the Child Care Working Group, please send email to: Childcareworkinggroup@gmail.com, dominiquebravo@nyc.rr.com, or bkancelbaum@verizon.net.