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Ocean County Child Care Plan 2000 Developed In Cooperation With

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OCEAN COUNTY CHILD CARE PLAN 2000

- I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
- II. OVERVIEW OF OCEAN COUNTY
- III. EXISTING CHILD CARE
- IV. PROJECTED CHILD CARE NEEDS
- V. FOCUS GROUP STUDY
- VI. DEVELOPING STRATEGIES

(The Child Care Committee, under the auspices of the Human Services Advisory Council, will oversee the progress toward meeting all the goals outlined in the plan. The committee will meet on a quarterly basis at the Ocean County Department of Human Services Building, 1027 Hooper Avenue, Toms River, NJ 08753, Building 2, 3rd Floor conference room.)

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Ocean County was established in 1850 as a result of lands divided from Monmouth County. The County is the second largest in terms of size and one of four New Jersey counties which borders the Atlantic Ocean. Toms River serves as the county seat and is centrally located within the county.

The population in Ocean County has grown substantially since the 1950's, in part due to the opening of the Garden State Parkway in 1954. The parkway permitted access to a large amount of undeveloped and inexpensive land within commuting distance to New York City and northern New Jersey. Ocean County's population increased from 37,675 in 1940 to 433,200 persons by 1990. By 2000, the County's population is expected to have increased another 15% to approximately 500,000 people.

The most densely settled municipalities in Ocean County are Point Pleasant, Seaside Heights, Ocean Gate, and Point Pleasant Beach that have densities of 5,149 to 3550 persons per square mile. The four townships with the highest population are: Dover, Brick, Lakewood, and Manchester. Combined, these towns account for half Ocean County's population.

Ocean County income levels are lower than the statewide average of \$40,927. In 1990, Ocean County's median income was \$33,110. Seaside Heights, Lakewood and South Toms River had greater than 10% of their population living below the poverty line. In addition, Beachwood, Lakehurst and Island Heights have greater than 10% of all persons over age 65 living below the poverty line.

Overall, Ocean County has experienced lower unemployment levels than the State average. The unemployment rate has declined from 6.7% in 1994 to 5.0% in 1998. However, nine communities in the county had a higher unemployment rate in 1990 than the State average of 3.9%.

Ocean County has 1,470 active WFNJ cases, with 1007 adults and 2819 children. Two parent families account for less than 9% of the total recipient families. WFNJ recipients are primarily located along the eastern portion of the County with concentrations in Lakewood (425 adults/1225 children), Dover (138 adults, 351 children), Brick (84 adults/197 children), Jackson (52 adults/145 children), and Seaside Heights (36 adults/ 97 children).

From the perspective of the parents, 2 separate focus groups of WFNJ participants were held to discuss issues they felt were important with the current childcare system. The first group expressed concerns over the increase in co-payment due to the centers rate per child. They felt that the number 1 concern was the lack of affordable care. The second group felt that the current system lacks weekend and evening care and agreed that this was the number one concern. This

Based on the 1990 census, approximately 81,000 children reside in Ocean County. Currently, there are 466 programs equipped to serve 14,829 children in need of care (18% of the total population). 138 licensed childcare centers exist with a licensed capacity of 8,353 and a physical capacity totaling 9,956.

In the year 2000, it has been estimated that 88,196 children will reside in Ocean County. Based on this figure, and the current percentage (18%) in need of care, Ocean County forecasts that 15,875 will need childcare services in the year 2000. This is an increase of 1,046 slots over present year figures which amounts to 14,829(1999).

Based on year 2000 and 2005 projections, Ocean County should be able to meet the childcare demand through existing centers currently in place. Presently, childcare centers across the County are at approximately 84% capacity. Actual capacities amount to 9,956, while current occupancy is 8,353. Based on these figures, Ocean County has approximately 1,603 empty slots to accommodate the years 2000 and 2005 childcare needs, that are forecasted to increase in the year 2000 by 1046 slots. Childcare needs for the year 2005 are expected to decrease by 722 slots from the 2000 estimate. Based on the State figures (figure 4-1, 4-2) it seems the 2005 Child Care figures are expected to decrease from the 2000 estimate. However, The County Superintendent of Schools Office has experienced a 3% - 5% average annual increase between the years 1995 and 2000 and the 2000- 2005 child projections are not yet available. The Committee will be outreaching the County Superintendent of Schools Office to obtain the figures as well as figures from the 2000 census in order to gather more accurate information for 2005 childcare projections.

Focus group studies were held to research childcare from the perspectives of the providers (1 group) and WFNJ participants(2 groups). Three separate sessions were held to discuss the problem areas and overall views of childcare services in Ocean County.

The childcare providers identified child behavior as the number 1 problem they were faced with. Concerns were expressed over the increasing number of children with extreme behavioral problems. The providers felt the attitude of the parents was the primary cause of the violent tendencies and acting out among the children.

From the perspective of the parents, 2 separate focus groups of WFNJ participants were held to discuss issues they felt were important with the current childcare system. The first group expressed concerns over the increase in co-payment due to the centers rate per child. They felt that the number 1 concern was the lack of affordable care. The second group felt that the current system lacks weekend and evening care and agreed that this was the number one concern. This group also felt that the transportation schedules in the County were not adequate to meet their needs.

Based upon an analysis of the issues identified in the focus group studies, as well as the relevant information presented in the Plan, the Child Care Planning Committee prioritized the County needs and made recommendations regarding strategies to address the County's child care needs. The Human Services Advisory Council's ChildCare Committee felt the lack of affordable childcare was the County's highest priority need. Other areas the committee addressed as priority needs were: transportation, childcare staff training, lack of weekend and after hours childcare services, no sufficient choice by location, and no ill child care.

The Child Care Committee recommended strategies that address each one of the priority areas listed above:

- CHILD CARE COST: Increase the availability of New Jersey Cares for Kids vouchers. This would increase the clients funds for child care, as well as broaden the choices of child care centers.
- TRANSPORTATION: a. Encourage day care centers to develop transportation programs. b. Encourage the coordination among schools, day care centers and the County Transportation Committee for development of Transportation programs.
- TRAINED STAFF: Develop training programs focusing on the areas of concern to the Child Care staff. Specifically, behavior and special needs.
- AFTER HOURS CARE: a. Extension of existing hours from centers in the early morning and evening to accommodate client work schedules. b. Develop non-traditional hours for shift work, specifically for infant care.
- CENTER LOCATIONS: The child care centers that are already serving clients may be interested in developing satellite sites in areas identified as having a high child care need.
- LACK OF ILL CHILD CARE: Encourage centers to develop ill child care provisions, thus identifying the criteria in which a child may still receive care.

The Human Services Advisory Council's Child Care Committee will continue to monitor and direct the focus of these recommendations, as well as the future needs of Child Care in Ocean County.

II. OVERVIEW OF OCEAN COUNTY:

A. GENERAL DESCRIPTION -

Ocean County is located in the Atlantic Coastal Plain in central New Jersey. The County is the second largest in the State in terms of size and one of four New Jersey counties, which border the Atlantic Ocean. Toms River, in Dover Township, serves as the County Seat and is centrally located within Ocean County. The County is in close proximity to two of the Nation's largest metropolitan centers, New York City approximately 60 miles to the north and Philadelphia roughly 50 miles to the west. In addition, Atlantic City is located approximately 50 miles to the south of the County Seat. These metropolitan areas are easily accessible to Ocean County via several major highways, as shown on the Regional Location Map.

Although Ocean County has been settled since colonial times, its presence as a separate political entity is of relatively recent origin. The County was created from lands divided from Monmouth County in 1850. For much of its early history, the County was a rural, agricultural and fishing center. During the latter part of the 1800's and through the 1900's, the resort industry of the New Jersey Shore was developed, and the commercial activities associated with seasonal resorts quickly became the County's economic mainstay.

In early 1950's, there began a nationwide trend towards suburbanization as people moved outward from the older urban centers into previously sparsely populated or rural areas. The opening of the Garden State Parkway in 1954 permitted access to a large amount of undeveloped and inexpensive land within commuting distance of the labor markets of New York and northern New

Jersey. The County also became a desired location for people who wanted to retire away from the more industrial areas to the north. A primarily rural County with a population of 37, 675 in 1940, the County's population increased to 433, 200 persons by 1990. As evidence by each of the decennial Censuses during this fifty-year period, Ocean County was the fastest growing county in the State. Almost all of this growth was due to in-migration, rather than the natural increase of the population.

Development in Ocean County has traditionally occurred along the coastal beaches and in the corridor formed by the Garden State Parkway and US Route 9. Major interchanges along the Garden State Parkway have encouraged development along east-west corridors, such as County Routes 526 and 528; State Highway 37 and State Highway 72. Interstate 195 is a relatively new highway, which is playing an increasing role in the development of the northern portion of the County. The Interstate provides direct access to the major employment areas of Trenton, the State Capitol, to the west and Monmouth County to the Northeast.

With the growing year round population, Ocean County's economic base has become increasingly diverse, with a variety of industries now supplementing traditional tourist related businesses. The growth in employment opportunities within Ocean County is now becoming as notable as the population's growth was in the recent past. Over the last ten years, Ocean County has had one of the fastest increases in new jobs in the State. The Health Care Industry has been by far the fastest growing employment sector and is now the top employer in the County. Employment projections released by the NJ Department of Labor show that Ocean County will continue to be at the forefront of New Jersey employment well into the next decade.

B COUNTY DESCRIPTION –

1. Population –

With a 1990 population of 433,203, an increase of 25% from 1980, Ocean County continues to grow at a fast pace. By 2000, the County's population is expected to increase an additional 15% to approximately 500,000 people. Ocean County encompasses several densely populated areas, the most densely settled municipalities being Point Pleasant, Seaside Heights, Ocean Gate, and Point Pleasant Beach with densities of 5,149 to 3,550 persons per square mile. The 4 townships with the highest populations are Dover, Brick, Lakewood, and Manchester, which combined make up over ½ of the County's population. With this, Dover Township and Lakewood Township have been identified as the key focus of this Child Care Plan. The County's population remains concentrated in the northeastern portion of the County despite the population growth of the past 10 years.

The County continues to be a popular retirement location. According to the 1990 Census, approximately 23% of the County's population are over the age of 65, while statewide, 13% of the total population is over 65 years of age.

2. Income

Overall, income levels in Ocean County are lower than the Statewide average for New Jersey. While the statewide median household income reported in the 1990 Census was

\$40,927, the Ocean County median was \$33,110. Three communities had greater than 10% of their populations living below the poverty line in 1990. These communities are Seaside Heights Borough, Lakewood Township, and South Toms River Borough. In addition, there are 5 municipalities that have greater than 10% of all persons over the age of 65 living below the poverty line as of 1990: Beachwood Borough, Lakehurst Borough, Island Heights, Borough, Eagleswood Township, and Plumstead Township.

3. Employment.

Health Care services, recreation, education and County Government dominate employment in Ocean County. The 3 largest Industries in Ocean County Ranked by Greatest Average Employment are: Health Services (18,000), Eating & Drinking Places (9,000) and Food Stores (7,000). The Leading Employers in Ocean County are: St. Barnabas Health Care System (4,721), 6 Flags Theme Parks, Inc. (4000 – seasonal), Naval Air Warfare Center (3,000), and the Medical Center of Ocean County (2,195). There are approximately 31,000 Ocean County residents employed in Administrative Support positions, with 25,000 in Sales, and 20,000 in Service related positions.

The 5 Occupations that are projected to have the highest employment demand by the year 2005 are: Professional, Paraprofessional & Technical Occupations (37,650), Marketing & Sales Occupations (24,350), Administrative Support & Clerical Occupations (25,200), and Service Occupations (37,550).

4. Unemployment

Despite adding approximately 11,550 new adult workers to the workforce in the past 5 years, the unemployment rate has been declining from 6.7 % in 1994 to 5.0 % in 1998. While Ocean County experienced lower unemployment rates than the state, 9 communities in the County had a higher unemployment rate than the statewide rate of 3.9% in 1990: Beachwood, Harvey Cedars, Jackson Township, Lakewood Township, Little Egg Harbor, Ocean Gate, South Toms River, Seaside Heights, and Tuckerton.

5. Commuting Patterns in Ocean County –

Of the 178,966 total workers in Ocean County, 66,809 commute outside of the County, with 105,739 commuting within the County. Most commuting residents travel to Monmouth and Middlesex Counties. Of the County residents who are employed, 92.7% drive, 2.3% walk, 2.0% use public transportation, .3% bicycle, .6% report other means, and 2.1% work at home.

6. WFNJ Profile –

There are 1,470 total active cases, with 1,007 adults and 2,819 children in Ocean County. Two parent families account for less than 9% of the total recipient families. This indicates that there is a high demand for childcare arrangements that must be met for mothers seeking employment.

WFNJ recipients are generally located along the eastern portion of the County, with concentrations in Lakewood (425 adults/1225 children), Dover (138 adults/351 children), Brick (84 adults/197 children), Jackson (52 adults/145 children) and Seaside Heights (36 adults/97 children).

C. CROSS COUNTY ISSUES

One major cross county issue is lack of transportation. According to Ocean County's Community Transportation Plan of 1998, Ocean County has limitations in transportation especially among WFNJ participants due to the many small gaps in transportation services. Individual participants have specific needs, which are best addressed with a menu of transportation options. Some of these options can be addressed with the current transportation system, and some may be rectified with future enhancements to the County's system.

However it is estimated that a large number of trips will need to be met to accommodate childcare arrangements. The Plan indicated that an assumed 30% of participants would need child care transportation:

- 65% did not need (or already have) child care transportation;
- 25% needed transportation for child care;

It was also determined that because family day care and licensed child care centers are concentrated in Brick, Lakewood, and Dover Townships, the likelihood of using transit services to reach child care destinations was reduced to account for the complexity of making child care and work trips by transit. The 1998 projected weekly trips for Ocean County for WFNJ clients was estimated:

- 7,221 child care trips
- 2,196 CWEP
- 2,530 work trips (employed case open)
- 13,790 work trips (employed case closed)
- 868 job search trips

III. EXISTING CHILD CARE-

The Ocean County office of the Children's Home Society (CHS) of New Jersey has been designated the Unified Child Care Agency under New Jersey's Department of Human Services Family Development Program. CHS is a private, not-for-profit agency that promotes the welfare of children, adolescents and parents throughout New Jersey and adjacent areas of Pennsylvania. The mission of the agency is to provide at-risk children and their families a range of services that empower them to achieve their fullest potential. CHS is child centered, family focused, community based and outcome oriented.

The CHS Lakewood office was established in 1988 as the lead Child Care Agency for the county through the New Jersey Department of Human Services, Family Development Program, and its welfare reform program "REACH". The staff worked closely with the Ocean County Board of Social Services in providing clients with referrals to child care and provider payments. The program has

since changed names several times. The goal for self-sufficiency has not. The agency was contracted to take the lead on several key issues:

- To develop registered family care homes.
- To provide welfare recipients (in the REACH program) an orientation to the "world of childcare" including education, technical assistance and referrals
- To provide the community with childcare referrals of licensed centers and registered family childcare providers through the maintenance of a statewide computerized database.
- To provide parents and child care providers with resources and technical assistance.

In 1992, the Division of Family Development contracted with our agency to administer the New Jersey Cares for Kids Certificate Program (NJCK). This child care subsidy program provided the county with additional funding for working and eligible low income families. The extreme need for this program in Ocean County was soon evident as a priority-based, slow moving waiting list developed. The NJCK program also paid childcare subsidies for DYFS families and foster parents. In 1997, the NJ DHS, Division of Family Development developed a Unified Child Care Agency (UCCA) in each county to not only provide all of the above services, but to assume responsibility for provider payments through the statewide welfare computer program, enhance the standard of childcare throughout the individual counties and to address the professional development of childcare providers. The Children's Home Society was awarded the contract for Ocean County through our Lakewood Office and thus widened or scope of responsibilities in the county. Currently, CHS Lakewood employs a staff of 26, and provides the following services:
Child Care Resource and Referral

The early childhood specialist:

- Maintains a statewide computer database (through DFD) which contains up-to-date information on all regulated childcare in Ocean County.
- Maintains an extensive brochure inventory for both childcare providers and public use
- Attends public outreach and community events
- Conducts parent/provider satisfaction surveys
- Provides referrals to regulated child care programs in the county
- Assists parents in assessing their child care needs
- Describes available child care options

- Provides counseling to parents on the importance of quality early childhood programs
- Offers on-going technical assistance to childcare programs.

The Agency:

- Conducts enrollment surveys to assist potential and existing programs
- Provides training to the community in childcare related topics, continued education units and CDA clock hours are awarded to all attendees.
- Maintains an extensive resource library containing videos, cassettes and books which are available to child care providers
- Publishes a quarterly newsletter for all childcare providers, center based staff, and a variety of other interested agencies throughout Ocean County.

Professional Development

CHS of Lakewood addresses the professional development needs of the early care and education community by providing bi-weekly child care workshops and hosting conferences and seminars. Fees for service permit these programs to usually be self supporting.

The early childhood specialist:

- Schedules training, conferences and workshops and notifies providers of upcoming events
- Maintains a database of provider's receiving CEUs
- Assists providers with the requirements for the Child Development Associate Credential (CDA), the Child Care Professional Credential, NAFCCP Accreditation and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) Accreditation
- Maintains a library of training videos, cassettes and resources to assist with NJ DYFS Bureau of Licensing training requirements

CHS subcontracts with Preferred Children's Services of Lakewood to address the Quality Child Care Component of the DHS DFD Family and Children Early Education Services (FACES) contract.

The early childhood specialist:

- Assists centers in Lakewood in achieving NAEYC Accreditation
- Teaches early childhood courses to childcare providers pursuing the CDA

Pre-K Partners Planning Grant

CHS is required to bring together essential early childhood players in the identified Early Childhood Program Aid (ECPA) districts in the county. Slow progress has been made in fostering a collaboration between early childhood educators and the public school districts.

Quality Infant/Toddler Initiative – Health Consultation in Child Care

As part of a statewide initiative, this program is designed to promote healthy, safe and developmentally appropriate early care and education for infants and toddlers in all child care settings. A registered nurse is employed by CHS Lakewood as the health consultant coordinator.

The Health Consultant Coordinator:

- Is creating a state and county wide system for health consultation according to the State plan.
- Provides health consultation services to licensed centers and family child care providers
- Is developing a network of health consultants to provide technical assistance, training and information to infant and toddler providers in the county

Beginning Careers

The Early Childhood specialist:

- Provides the identified welfare reform recipients with a program that will result in either the participant receiving family child care certification or the skills and certification necessary for employment in a child care setting.
- Develops training plans and curriculum specifically designed to meet the requirements of the program including selection and training of program mentors.
- Develops and utilizes evaluation plans and tools for mentors and participants
- Teaches early childhood training classes

Voucher Programs

CHS, Lakewood, administers the Work First NJ (WFNJ) and the New Jersey Cares for kids (NJCK) child care subsidy voucher programs. The agency

- Determines client eligibility for NJ and verifies continued income eligibility for TCC (post welfare) clients
- Obtains information from clients about their child care needs
- Conducts vacancy checks for WFNJ clients
- Identifies providers who accept the voucher rate
- Counsels clients on choosing quality care
- Provides child care referrals to licensed and registered providers

- Conducts home inspections to authorize payments when a parent chooses self arrangement care
- Processes payments to providers
- Provides technical assistance to clients and providers on payment issues
- Provides outreach, education, resources and support to approved home providers caring for infants and toddlers

Registered Family Child Care

The agency:

- Recruits family child care providers
- Provides a six hour pre-service training and on-going workshops
- Conducts home inspections and program observations
- Ensures the completion of all necessary paperwork and issues Certificates of Registration
- Conducts unscheduled monitoring visits to a minimum of 20% of the registered providers on a random basis
- Monitors compliance with regulations and provides technical support for improving program quality.
- Investigates complaints which deal with regulatory issues
- Works with parents and providers to resolve complaints about business practices, quality issues and parent/provider relationships

There are 466 total child care programs in Ocean County currently serving 14,829 children.

A. CHILD CARE CENTERS

There are 138 Licensed Childcare Centers in the County (Figure 3-1) with a Licensed Capacity totaling 8,353 and a Physical Capacity at 9,956. The County currently has 329 Social Service Block Grant slots, with the County's Head Start program currently having 11 federally funded slots. Of the 138 centers, 20 are located in Lakewood with a Licensed Capacity of 1,155 and a Physical Capacity of 1,227. There are 33 centers in Dover Township with a Licensed Capacity of 2,522 and a Physical Capacity of 2,839. Of the 138 Licensed Childcare Centers, 87 are at full capacity. (Figure 3-2) It has been identified that facility repairs, staffing and personal choice have been the barriers to increased enrollment.

Sixty three (63) centers in the County offer full day care, with 42 offering ½ day or full day care. 8 centers offer ½ day only, and 23 offer before/after school care. Only 76.1% offer full day care. In

Lakewood, 11 centers offer full day care, and in Dover 13 offer full day care. (Figure 3-4) Of the 138 centers in the County, 21 offer transportation services (15.2%), 4 are located in Lakewood, with 5 located in Dover. (Figure 3-5) Transportation has been a concern in Ocean County regarding accessibility to employment, services, etc. Though some progress has been made through extended route services and the WorkPass program, transportation to childcare is still a concern.

B. REGISTERED FAMILY DAY CARE PROGRAMS

Ocean County has 171 homes falling under the classification of Registered Family Day Care Programs taking in 3 children per home. 24 homes are located in Lakewood with 3 children per home, and 40 homes are located in Dover with 3 children per home.

C. APPROVED HOMES

Ocean County has 157 homes approved for childcare with room for 773 children. 36 approved homes with room for 166 children are located in Lakewood, while 36 approved homes with room for 110 children are located in Dover. There are 96 homes serving infants, 26 in Lakewood and 13 in Dover. There are 92 homes serving preschoolers, 17 located in Lakewood, and 13 in Dover. Lastly, there are 19 homes serving school aged children, 7 located in Lakewood and 4 in Dover.

D. INFANT/TODDLER CARE

Ocean County has a Licensed Capacity for 304 infants/toddlers at 37 available sites, 8 in Lakewood and 9 in Dover. Actual infant/toddler enrollment is 55 which is only 18.1% of capacity.

E. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION PROGRAMS

There are 5190 children enrolled in Department of Education Programs: 28 in ½ day preschool, (0 in Lakewood or Dover); 0 children in Full Day preschool; 4388 children in ½ day Kindergarten, (212 in Lakewood and 1124 in Dover); and 774 children in Full Day Kindergarten, (181 in Lakewood and 71 in Dover).

F. SPECIALIZED CARE

Ocean County has 34 centers offering specialized care. However, there is no night care or extended hours available. In Lakewood, ill childcare is available at 1 sight. In Dover, drop in services and ill childcare are available at 2 sights.

According to a survey conducted by the Ocean County Human Services Advisory Council in 1997, 31 centers stated they provided specialized services. 3 centers in Lakewood responded stating that they had handicapped services, speech therapy, and services for learning disabilities. 11 centers in Dover responded stating they provided services for speech therapy as well as mental and occupational health services.

IV. PROJECTED CHILD CARE NEED

The County currently has approximately 81,000 children ages 0-14. At present approximately 18% of this population is enrolled in childcare programs. If the County continues to provide child care arrangements to approximately 18% of the estimated projected population for 2000 and 2005, the

County's available child care slots will not need expansion. When the 2000 census figures and the County Superintendent of Schools figures are complete, the committee will be better able to forecast the childcare needs for 2005.

A. YEAR 2000 PROJECTIONS

1. ALL CHILDREN

Ocean County is estimated to have 88,196 children possibly needing childcare arrangements in the year 2000. It is estimated that 10,031 will be enrolled in day care, 3,024 in nursery/pre-school, 3128 in school based programs, 298 in school, 3,226 cared for by mothers, 3,023 caring for themselves and 25,643 unknown. Lakewood Township will have 11,532 children needing childcare and Dover Township will have 16,484 children needing arrangements of the total estimated County total.

2. INFANT/TODDLER CARE

It is estimated that there will be 16,295 infant/toddlers less than 24 months of age that will need childcare. Approximately 3,715 will be enrolled in day care, 1,304 in nursery school, 24 in school based programs and 151 cared for in school with 839 cared for by mothers. It is projected that of the 16,295 infant/toddler children needing services County wide, Lakewood Township will have 2,686. 612 will be enrolled in day care, 215 in nursery school, 4 in school based programs, 25 in school and 138 cared for by mothers. Dover Township will have 2,576 infant/toddlers with 587 enrolled in daycare, 206 in nursery/preschool, 4 in school-based programs, 24 in school, and 133 cared for by mothers.

3. PRE-SCHOOL AGE CHILD CARE

The County is expected to have 15,911 pre-schoolers ages 3-5 that will need childcare arrangements. 3,628 will be enrolled in day care, 1273 in nursery/preschool, 24 in school based programs, 147 in school, with 819 cared for by mothers. Lakewood is estimated to have 2,207 of the 15,911 pre-schoolers needing child care arrangements. 503 will be enrolled in day care, 177 in nursery/pre-school, 3 in school based programs, 20 in school and 114 cared for by mothers. Dover will have 2,864 pre-schoolers needing care. 653 will be enrolled in day care, 229 in nursery school/pre-school, 4 in school based programs, 26 in school and 147 cared for by mothers.

4. SCHOOL AGE CHILD CARE

Ocean County will have 55,990 school aged children, 6-13 years old, needing child care arrangements. 2,687 will be enrolled in day care, 448 in nursery/pre-school, 3079 in school based programs, and 1568 cared for by mothers. Lakewood will have 6,640 of the expected County total. 319 will be enrolled in day care, 53 in nursery/pre-school, 365 in school based programs, and 186 cared for by mothers. Dover will have 11,044 of the expected County total of school aged children needing child care arrangements. 530 will

be enrolled in day care, 88 in nursery/pre-school, 607 in school based programs, and 309 cared for by mothers.

B. YEAR 2005 PROJECTIONS

1. ALL CHILDREN

It is estimated that there will be 84,180 children in Ocean County that will need child care arrangements. Approximately 9,586 will be enrolled in day care, 2,891 in nursery/pre-school, 2,982 in school based programs, 285 in school, 3,081 cared for by mothers, 2,882 caring for themselves and 24,445 unknown. It has been forecasted that Lakewood Township will need arrangements for approximately 11,009 children and Dover Township expects about 15,731 to need childcare arrangements.

2. INFANT/TODDLER CARE

Ocean County will have 15,587 infants/toddlers under 24 months of age that will need child care arrangements. 3,554 will be enrolled in day care, 1,247 in nursery/pre-school, 23 in school based programs, 144 in school and 803 cared for by mothers. Lakewood Township will have 2,569 infants/toddlers needing arrangements for childcare. 586 will be enrolled in day care, 205 in nursery/pre-school, 4 in school based programs, 24 in school, and 132 cared for by mothers. Dover Township will have 2,464 infant/toddlers needing childcare. 562 will be enrolled in day care, 197 in nursery/pre-school, 4 in school based programs, and 23 in school with 127 cared for by mothers.

3. PRE-SCHOOL AGE CHILD CARE

It is estimated that the County will see 15,219 pre-schoolers needing child care arrangements. 3,470 will be enrolled in day care, 1,218 in nursery/pre-school, 23 in school based programs, 141 in school and 784 cared for by mothers. Lakewood will have 2,111 pre-schoolers needing arrangements. 481 will be enrolled in day care, 169 in nursery/pre-school, 3 in school based programs, 20 in school, and 109 cared for by mothers. Dover Township will see 2,740 pre-schoolers needing child care arrangements. 625 will be enrolled in day care, 219 in nursery/pre-school, 4 in school based programs, 25 in school with 141 cared for by mothers.

4. SCHOOL AGE CHILD CARE

The County is estimated as having 53,374 school aged children that will need child care arrangements in 2005. 2,562 will be enrolled in day care, 427 in nursery/pre-school, 2,936 in school based programs, 1,494 cared for by mothers, 2,882 caring for oneself with 24,445 unknown. Lakewood will have 6,330 school aged children needing arrangements. 304 will be enrolled in day care, 51 in nursery/preschool, 348 in school based programs, 177 cared for by mothers, 342 caring for self with 2,899 unknown. Dover Township will face 10,528 school-based children needing arrangements. 505 will be enrolled in day care,

84 in nursery/preschool, 579 in school based programs, 295 cared for by mothers, 569 caring for self, with 4,822 unknown.

V. FOCUS GROUP STUDY

Focus group studies were held to research the problem areas regarding childcare from the perspectives of child care providers as well as WFNJ participants receiving childcare services. To gather information on this topic, focus group participants were invited to interactively discuss their child care situations (providers and clients groups were held at separate times), the problem areas in the County and the overall view of child care in the County. The following provides an overview of each focus group:

A. PROVIDER FOCUS GROUP

A focus group was held to determine the priority concerns and needs for the providers of child care in Ocean County. The following 8 providers were represented:

1. Day Care Centers;

- St. Francis Community Center, Long Beach Island
- Unity Day Care, Lakewood Township
- Hilltop Nursery School, Dover Township
- Kangaroo Kourt, Manahawkin

2. SSBG Centers;

- Preferred Children's Services, Across County
- Jane Adams Day Care, Dover Township

3. Federally Funded Centers;

- O.C.E.A.N. Inc Head Start, Dover Township

4. School Aged Children;

- YMCA Y-Kids, Across County

Providers identified the *behavior of the children they serve as the number 1 problem area*. The group discussed that an increasing number of children that are participating within the provider's childcare programs have extreme behavioral problems. Specifically, providers discussed problems with children acting out, either show disruptive and/or violent tendencies. Providers then tied in the attitudes of parents as a contributing factor. The group expressed concern regarding attitudes of the parents when they are asked to address their child's problem behavior. The group discussed the different strategies they implement for addressing parents regarding unacceptable/disruptive behavior. Overall, the group still concluded that the parent negative attitude often leads to the escalation of the child's poor behavior. The increase in problem behavior has caused disruptions

among every day activities with other children, staff, etc. Some providers are concerned that these children need to seek specialized services to address the problem.

The group then identified *lack of affordable childcare as the 2nd problem area*. The group recognizes that the cost of childcare for clients has been increasing. Because the cost of childcare has increased, the State's formula for determining subsidized payments for WFNJ childcare is no longer covering the cost of childcare as it once had. Because of the affordability issue, the group identified that although extended child care services are provided to post employment WFNJ clients, those seeking to use the extended service will still see an increase in co-pay per child. The group also believes that the increase in cost leads to a *lack of childcare, which was identified as the 3rd problem area*. The group determined that if resources are not available there is no feasible way to expand, upgrade or develop child care centers, therefore, a lack of child care could be an issue to address.

The group *identified ill childcare as the 4th problem area*. A discussion resulted in the ideology that centers cannot implement facilities, nurse/trained staff, isolated space and supplies for ill childcare due to lack of funding. This ultimately led to the identification of the *lack of trained staff as the 5th problem area*. As quality childcare becomes an increasing demand, centers cannot compensate staff for the training/education required meeting the needs of future childcare requirements. The group also identified the children that are receiving care are becoming more and more specialized in the care that they require, leaving an increasing demand for trained staff in all child care facilities.

Lastly, the group identified *regulations as the 6th problem area*. Providers feel that some regulations and requirements are hard to meet without the proper funding. Some providers expressed that regulations can sometimes prevent them from upgrading their services.

B. CLIENT FOCUS GROUP #1

A focus group was held to determine the concerns among WFNJ clients who currently have children in child care arrangements. The group was comprised of 4 clients:

- 1 male with 3 children under the age of 4, (1 infant) all in center based child care.
- 1 male with 1 child 2 years of age in center based care.
- 1 female with 1 child 2 years of age in center based care.
- 1 female with 3 boys in school, 2 in high school, none enrolled in child care.

The group identified *lack of affordable childcare as the number 1 problem area*. The concern was that in order to achieve quality childcare, the centers rate per child was very expensive ultimately leading to increases in the clients copay of services per child. Clients expressed concern that even after they receive their post employment extended services for childcare, that the cost per child would still be high for the wages that they will be making. The *2nd problem area identified was the lack of ill childcare*. There are no current services available to this group which would aid in the event that their child becomes sick. Currently, clients must stay home with an ill child and will miss work, job search, or any other employability activities. *The 3rd problem area identified was the lack of sufficient choice of childcare by location*. The group maintained that due to the location of their residence, job training, and transportation availability, they were very limited in their choices of childcare. One participant expressed concern that due to the transportation schedule her

subsidized housing offered, she was only given 10 minutes to become familiar with her child care facility and sign her child up for services. This led to a discussion that there is *not enough childcare available, 4th problem area, in general to meet everyone's needs.*

Trained staff was identified at the 5th problem area. Clients are concerned with the quality of childcare regarding staff training and experience. In order for clients to feel secure with their childcare arrangements, they express the desire to have trained staff working with their children. *The 6th and last problem area identified was the lack of transportation* the clients had to aid with their childcare situation.

C. FOCUS GROUP #2

A second client focus group was held to further research identified problem areas in childcare from a WFNJ participant perspective. The group was comprised of 4 women:

1. 1 female with 2 children 5 years of age and 1 ½ years old receiving child care through her mother whom is an Approved Home for child care in Ocean County.
2. 1 female with 3 children; 11 years old, 20 months old, and 4 months old, all receiving child care at the same center based facility.
3. 1 female with a 3-year-old child receiving center based care.
4. 1 female with 1 child 1 year old receiving care from a family member.

The focus group identified the *lack of weekend and evening care as the 1st problem area within Ocean County.* They expressed the concern regarding work, and transportation schedules when dealing with centers or homes that are only open Monday through Friday, with limited hours. The *2nd problem area identified was the lack of transportation to aid with childcare.* This concern, again, is County wide in every aspect. The group focused on the *lack of sufficient choice of childcare by location as the 3rd priority need* which also stems from the lack of transportation available, especially for one client who resides in the southern region of the County.

The *4th priority need identified was the overall lack of childcare.* The reasons given were regarding lack of child care due to location, transportation, cost, as well as hours of operation. This led into the determination of *the 5th priority need being the lack of ill childcare available.* As the previous focus group identified, if a child is sick it will interfere with the clients WFNJ responsibilities. One client expressed concern over the condition of her son, who has asthma. Her inability to locate child care that can service her son led to the families decision to allow the grandmother to become an approved child care provider. *The 6th area identified as a problem area is the affordability of childcare.* Focus group participants express concern regarding the rising costs of childcare per child at quality service facilities. This group was specifically concerned about the cost for services once they received employment and were no longer eligible for WFNJ. At this time, the explanation of extended services was given to allow the clients to understand their options once they are employed. The group still identified cost as an issue, due to the co-pay per child.

VI. DEVELOPING STRATEGIES

Based upon an analysis of the issues identified in the focus group studies, as well as the relevant information presented in the Plan, the Child Care Planning Committee prioritized the County needs and made recommendations regarding strategies to address those needs.

LACK OF AFFORDABLE CHILD CARE ASSESSMENT

The focus groups identified that affordability was a County wide issue for all childcare needs including: infant/toddler, pre-school and before/after school care. The State's subsidy payment/vouchers are not adequate to cover the real cost of childcare fees associated at most private centers, therefore if a client chooses to use the center, the client is responsible to pay the difference between the State's allowable subsidy and the real cost of the center's fees. As WFNJ clients enter into employment, in addition to the assessed co-pay based on their income, the client is also responsible to pay the additional cost difference of the center's fees. Since most WFNJ clients enter employment at entry level wages, it becomes harder and harder to meet the cost of childcare and remain employed.

The childcare committee also discussed employer subsidized childcare as one possible solution to make childcare more affordable. The committee discussed past attempts to establish employer subsidized childcare, however, they have failed since employers would rather purchase slots than invest in their own centers. Additionally, attempts in the past have demonstrated that staff don't use employer based centers, resulting in the center opening its doors to the public to pay for its operational expenses.

RECOMMENDATION

To address the affordability of childcare the Human Services Advisory Council (HSAC) has been identified as the responsible entity to advocate changes in State legislation that currently hinder affordability. The HSAC will outreach to legislators to focus upon changes that need to be made regarding the State's low reimbursable rate for childcare provisions that currently increase the co-pay that parents must pay alone. This especially effects the working poor with multiple children. Outreach will also address the issue of New Jersey Cares for Kids (NJCK) and it's inflexibility regarding childcare arrangements. Recommendations will be made to allow NJCK to become more flexible regarding needs for the working poor such as drop-in care, or wrap around care. Providing that NJCK becomes a better tool to address the needs of the working poor, the recommendation has been made that those vouchers become more available to parents seeking childcare arrangements.

This fall, the childcare committee will host a legislative breakfast to advise legislators from the three (3) area districts about the high cost of child care in Ocean County. The focus of the breakfast will be to advise that the New Jersey Cares for Kids (NJCK) vouchers are not covering the actual cost of childcare. Additionally, many NJCK recipients are returning to or beginning unemployment since the cost of the copay and additional fees required above the voucher payment outpaces their paychecks.

Existing Childcare advisory groups will also be utilized to influence the Division of Family Development to increase voucher payments for WFNJ and post TANF childcare. Ocean County will also advocate through the Advocacy for Policy Development, Childcare Advisory Council and The Association of Childcare in NJ to increase the TANF childcare subsidy to reflect the true cost of childcare in the community.

TRANSPORTATION AND LACK OF SUFFICIENT CHOICE BY LOCATION ASSESSMENT

The committee identified the County's 2nd highest need to be the lack of transportation throughout the entire county. Though the County has been making developments in the transportation system, the concern lies within the transportation specifically for pre-school aged children. School aged children have no real transportation issue regarding child care because at this age they have after school care available to them where they attend school. It is the children who are not old enough to attend school that are the hardest to find child care arrangements when calculating transportation. When looking at the County map of where most available childcare is located, it is a concern that most child care centers are clustered in the northeastern region of the County. When looking back at the identified issues of transportation for clients, the location of services may cause many problems, leaving the sufficient choices of child care by location the County's 5th problem area to be addressed.

Recently Ocean County submitted an additional plan that would establish a route in the Brick area. The Brink Link, a new bus service, will provide transportation along Route 88/70 and terminate at Airport Road for the municipalities of Point Pleasant Beach, Point Pleasant Borough and Brick. The Department of Transportation has also coordinated with the UEZ transportation program for allowing Brick Link passengers to use the service in order to reach their final destination within the Park.

As of October 1, 2000, the Route 37 corridor will become operational and service the municipalities of Seaside Park, Seaside Heights, Lavallette and Toms River. (Figure 2-16) The route will begin at the RT70 circle and turn around in Lavallette before returning to the circle. The Route will occasionally head north on Hooper Avenue to stop at the Ocean County Mall. At this point passengers have the ability to switch lines and transfer to a NJ Transit line in order to reach the proposed Brick Link. Upon passage of the proposed Brick Link, people should be able to work in the Lakewood Industrial Park or along Route 88/70 and connect back to Seaside/Lavallette or Toms River.

The Committee has identified a high concentration of employers along the Brick Link, especially in the Lakewood Industrial Park. (Figure 2-3) The Committee has identified 9 licensed center based childcare facilities along the Route 37 corridor, however the committee has not yet identified childcare centers along the Brink Link. The committee will identify the centers upon approval of the Brick Link Plan.

RECOMMENDATION

The HSAC, Welfare to Work (WTW)/Transportation Committee as well as Schools within the County will oversee the development of collaboration and collaborative plans to address the recommended strategies regarding transportation:

- Encourage the coordination among schools, day care centers and the County Transportation Committee for development of transportation programs.
- Encourage providers to locate near major transportation routes.
- Encourage employers to provide on-site childcare for employees

- Encourage agencies to develop non-traditional transportation plans such as St. Francis Community Center Claire Fund that donates vehicles that have been restored by the Ocean County Vocational School to WFNJ clients.

TRAINED STAFF

ASSESSMENT

The Committee recognized the increase in demand for quality day care. The need for trained staff throughout the County will be necessary due to the increasing number of children having special needs. The issue of staff becoming better equipped to serve children with behavioral problems also leads to the issue of staff training. Focus group discussions regarding quality care, as well as the child behavior were analyzed closely to determine this need as the County's 3rd highest priority. Children's Home Society, Ocean County's Unified ChildCare Agency, has an existing contract with the State Department of Human Services to provide 60 hours per year of Childcare training to the community. The training sessions are held approximately 5 hours per month and carry fees that range between \$5-\$10 depending on the class. CHS disseminates a quarterly newsletter to advise the centers of the training class dates. Additionally, CHS is collaborating with the Education Information and Resource Center (ERC) who assists locating experienced trainers. CHS' four quarter 2000 child care training schedule:

Directors Forum, Inclusion Awareness Fee \$5.00

Tuesday, October 3rd 12-2

Observing and Recording Behavior Fee \$10.00

Saturday, October 21st 9:30-3:30

Project Learning Tree Fee \$7.00

Saturday, October 28th 8:30-3:30

Peaceable Classroom Fee \$5.00

Wednesday, November 1st 7-9

Child Abuse Identification Fee \$ 7.00

Monday, November 13th 9:30-12

RECOMMENDATION

The committee has recommended forming collaborative efforts with the provider community in order to identify training programs that will enable childcare staff to handle the special needs of the population they serve. Cross-training will benefit the provider community by encouraging collaboration, understanding and information sharing. Once the staff is properly trained, providers may also opt to make training sessions available to parents regarding community service, parenting and key childcare issues.

The Human Services Advisory Council will contact the centers with a letter advising that it has been identified in the Ocean County Child Care Plan that special staff training is needed. The letter will advise to contact Children's Home Society (CHS), the Unified Child Care Agency, to obtain information on future training sessions and also to advise CHS of the centers specific training needs. CHS has also agreed to provide information back to the Child Care Committee relating to child care issues. Through this collaborative effort, child care needs, training needs and center needs will flow creating an efficient way to ensure that Ocean County Child Care Centers remain at the forefront of serving our child care population.

NOT ENOUGH CHILD CARE

ASSESSMENT

The Committee addressed the lack of weekend/evening care as a key factor in the overall lack of childcare throughout the entire County. Many focus group participants expressed a need for childcare services to be available during after hours. The expressed issue of lack of available hours for care preventing the client from acquiring employment or participating in employability development are reasons that the lack of child care are assessed as the 4th problem area for the County. Although members of the Committee do recognize that efforts made to accommodate expanded hours for parents have not been successful in the past, it must be addressed as a concern expressed by the Focus Groups.

Attempts in the past to offer extended hours and weekend hours have failed. Saint Francis Community Center, located on Long Beach Island, attempted to accommodate after hours and weekend care but later ended the program due to only 1 or 2 children enrolling. Additionally, participants were not comfortable using after hours care at any County location since their child's sleep was disrupted when being transported home. The participants preferred having someone provide care in their own home.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Two possible ways to address this issue are:

- Extension of existing hours from centers in the early morning and evening to accommodate client work schedules.
- Encourage centers to develop non-traditional hours for shift work, specifically for infant care.
- Encourage summer programs to develop diversified activities to keep school aged children engaged in programs

The committee recommends that the NJ Cares for Kids (NJCK) program become more flexible for the needs of the working poor. By making programs such as drop in care and wrap around care more flexible, the working poor would have a greater chance of gaining and retaining employment. The committee also felt that NJCK could become more flexible with the combination of hours for care. By mixing the hours for full and part time, the client would have greater flexibility accommodating their work schedule.

The Ocean County Child Care Committee will advocate these changes through existing child advocacy groups such as: Advocacy for Policy Development, Association of Child Care in New Jersey, and the Child Care Advisory Council.

NO ILL CHILD CARE

ASSESSMENT

The focus group discussions regarding clients employment and how it is effected if their child is ill, is a valid concern. The concern of providers on the other hand, lacking the facilities or the staff to provide ill services is also a great problem area. Therefore, the overall lack of available ill childcare

shall be addressed as the County's 6th priority need. Knowing that this is a very costly and difficult area to address, the Committee first assessed the existing ill care services. Unfortunately, it is not at all feasible to tap into those institutions to aid with the lack of overall ill childcare due to lack of transportation, as well as their limited space available.

RECOMMENDATION

Although identified as a need throughout Ocean County, it doesn't appear that this is an area the committee can improve. The committee discussed establishing centralized ill care locations across the county, however parents expressed they are not willing to utilize an unknown center. Further, parents in general expressed that they do not want to leave their child at a center when he/she is sick. Additionally, Centers and Family Day Care providers have advised that a child is sent home if a fever exists or if they are contagious. Two area hospitals, Kimball Medical Center and Community Medical Center, accept mildly ill children, but certain conditions must exist in order for the child to be accepted into the center that limits its scope to caring for non-contagious/ non-fever children.

The committee is concerned with the number of clients losing jobs due to leaving work to care for a sick child. The committee has recommended that clients develop back-up plans for when their child is sick. Since the clients are unwilling to use unknown centers or even leave a sick child with day care, back-up plans must be developed and utilized.

This Fall, the child care committee will distribute a letter to all centers stressing the need for participants to develop back-up plans as well as having a clear understanding that their child will be sent home if certain conditions exist. The centers will also be asked to advise the clients that most employers will not be flexible about taking off time to care for their child and that arrangements need to be made far in advance.