



**San Francisco CARES Program:
Year 1 Qualitative Implementation Study
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**San Francisco Child Development Corps
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Abstract

This report on the implementation of San Francisco County's CARES program (SF CARES) provides guidance and lessons for policymakers, program administrators, child-care advocates and others who are planning similar initiatives to improve retention. To conduct the study, PACE (Policy Analysis for California Education) held a series of focus groups to collect responses from program planners, stipend recipients, and other members of the child-care community. Feedback was gathered on aspects of the entire planning and implementation process, such as the key players involved in the program's launch, decisions about who would be eligible for stipend awards, the agency that ran the program, and the appeals process. Despite an abbreviated timeline and limited staff, SF CARES successfully distributed over 400 stipends in the program's first year. But challenges also remain, including reaching a broader array of child-care providers and communicating the program goals to applicants and the general public alike.

K Caspary, M Giokas, H Veldhuis. San Francisco Child Development Corps: Year 1 Qualitative Implementation Study Report. PACE, February 2001

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San Francisco CARES Program Year 1 Qualitative Implementation Study Report

Findings from the Year 1 Qualitative Implementation Study of the San Francisco CARES program are based on feedback from eleven focus groups attended by program planners, staff, stipend recipients, and other members of the child-care community in San Francisco. This feedback was supplemented by follow-up interviews and background materials, such as program outreach materials and minutes for meetings. Please see the [appendix](#) for more information about methodology for the study. Quotations and sentiments are individual reactions to the programs, and may not reflect generally held views; however, PACE has made an effort to highlight perspectives that were expressed in more than one context.

When young children have close and stable relationships with their child-care providers, they are more likely to feel happy and secure while their parents are working, according to researchers who study child-care quality. Frequent turnover of providers, however, can leave children feeling anxious and withdrawn and can pull down the quality of the environment.

The authors of a 1999 report from the Center for the Child Care Workforce wrote, “Turnover is demoralizing. It can turn a child care teacher’s or director’s job into a question of day-to-day survival, rather than a way of working toward high-quality care for children and families.”

The 1993 “Cost, Quality and Outcomes” report, conducted by researchers at four universities, found an annual staff turnover rate of 37 percent. And a study conducted among 75 centers in northern California found that 76 percent of all of the staff members who worked in these centers in 1996 no longer worked there four years later.

While there may be a variety of reasons why child-care providers leave their jobs, low pay is certainly high on the list. In 1999, the average wage for a child-care worker, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, was \$7.42 per hour. Those who define themselves as preschool teachers made about \$9.50 per hour, but that’s still less than half of what kindergarten teachers earn.

As a result, efforts to retain teachers by boosting their income, as well as encourage additional training and professional development, particularly for entry-level teachers, are becoming an important strategy in the drive to improve the quality of child care.

In 1999, both Alameda and San Francisco counties launched child-care retention incentive programs. These initiatives are designed to reduce turnover and retain educated early care and education providers by providing monetary stipends to providers who meet certain tenure and education requirements. Because of the pioneering nature of the programs, the California Children and Families Commission funded Policy Analysis for California Education (PACE) to evaluate these two counties’ initiatives. The PACE evaluation consists of both an outcome component focusing on program effects measured in terms of retention and professional development, and a qualitative study that examines how the programs have been implemented.

This document, the San Francisco CARES (SF CARES) Program Year 1 Qualitative Study Report, is a synthesis of the findings from the Year 1 implementation study of the SF CARES Program. It is intended to summarize San Francisco's experience and to serve as a resource to policy-makers and program managers seeking to implement programs that address the problem of high turnover in the child-care workforce.

This report is divided into four sections: county context, program history and planning, program structure and implementation, and perceptions of program effect.

- I. [County context](#) provides an overview of the child-care field in the county, including demand and supply for child care, a portrait of the child-care workforce and a discussion of the early care and education training system. This section describes the problems in the child-care field at the time the initiative was being planned, as perceived by focus group participants.
- II. [Program history and planning](#) describes the advocacy process that led to the funding of the program. This section outlines the basic elements of the SF CARES program, and describes the process of program design. Include [lessons learned](#)
- III. [Program structure and implementation](#) describes the program's experiences and lessons learned implementing the various components of SF CARES, including home agency, staffing, recruitment and outreach, the application process, eligibility determination, stipend awards, appeals, and advisory group. Includes [lessons learned](#)
- IV. [Perceptions of program effects](#) summarizes the changes that focus group participants have observed in the field, including increased recognition, professional networks, training and professional development, retention, and quality of care. Includes [lessons learned](#)

History of the California CARES Initiative

Several child-care groups have advocated for higher wages over the past two decades, both in California and nationwide. In 1996, the California Department of Education contracted with the American Institutes for Research and the Center for the Child Care Workforce to complete a review of wages and benefits among child-care and preschool teachers and staff, revealing low pay for most, even among teaching staffs that displayed relatively strong education levels.

Aiming to coordinate a response to these new data on wages, in 1997, child-care leaders from around the state were pulled together by the San Francisco Early Childhood Professional Development Institute (PDI). This group of activists settled on a policy strategy that came to be known as CARES (Compensation and Retention Encourage Stability).^{*} Originally developed by the Center for the Childcare Workforce, CARES supplements annual salaries through wage supplements or stipends.

Subsequently, a number of counties designed programs based on this model, fusing wage supplements to well-organized professional development activities that encouraged teachers and staff to move up the state's child development credentialing ladder. The child-care community in Alameda County developed a strategy with rigorous continuing education requirements tied to significant wage supplements, while San Francisco's model provided similar stipend levels with fewer continuing requirements. But at its inception, the CARES model stemmed from earlier "living wage" and economic justice movements.

The first bill to support CARES retention incentives was introduced in 1998 by Dion Aroner, a state legislator from the Berkeley-Oakland area. While waiting for State funds, advocates in Alameda County and San Francisco convinced local political leaders to allocate funding for CARES incentives. In San Francisco, the city leaders designated one and a half million dollars from the county's general fund to establish the first retention-incentive initiative in the State. The Alameda County program secured funding soon thereafter, aided by new tobacco tax revenues flowing to California counties under state Proposition 10 that provided over \$700 million annually for early childhood programs beginning in 1999.

Over the next two years, the California Children and Families Commission (under Proposition 10) and Governor Gray Davis had agreed to fund efforts in over 42 California counties to experiment with wage incentives, variably coupled with continuing training requirements. The State Commission also is supporting evaluations of the original Alameda and San Francisco programs, and the new initiatives getting underway throughout California.

^{*} Burton, Alice; Jessica Mihaly; Jennifer Kagiwada; and Marcy Whitebook. *The CARES Initiative in California: Pursuing Public Policy to Build a Skilled and Stable Child Care Workforce, 1997-2000*. Center for the Child Care Workforce, 2000.

COUNTY CONTEXT

Child-Care Landscape

Measuring only 46 square miles, San Francisco has a total population of 776,733 people (U.S. Census 2000). Despite its small geographic size, in 1999 San Francisco was the tenth most populous California county. Also in 1999, San Francisco taxpayers reported the eighth highest median income in the state compared to other California counties, at \$33,623.¹ This prosperity was also reflected in the 1999 unemployment rate of 3%, the fifth lowest in the state.² San Francisco has the 27th highest rate of child poverty of the 58 counties in the state. Based on ratio of the number of licensed child-care slots for children ages 0-13 in the county, San Francisco ranks second out of the 58 California counties in the supply of licensed child care.³

San Francisco

Population and number children, U.S Census 2000		
Total Population		776,733
Number of Children, ages 0-5		31,633
Number of Children, ages 5-14		62,377
2000 child-care supply information ⁴		
Number of Child Care Centers		233
Number of Licensed Family Child Care Homes		735
Licensed Child Care Supply		21,536 slots
1998 child-care supply information ⁵		
Center slots per 100 children	□ Ages 0-5	26.9
	□ Ages 6-14	8.33
FCC slots per 100 children	□ Ages 0-5	10.72
	□ Ages 6-14	7.6

Child-Care Workforce

Focus group participants identified a number of problems in the child-care field at the time SF CARES was being developed, including:

- high staff turnover rates, particularly for more highly skilled and educated providers⁶

¹ Franchise Tax Board, http://www.ftb.ca.gov/press/01_17att.htm

² California Employment Development Department, <http://www.calmis.ca.gov/htmlfile/subject/lftable.htm>.

³ The California Child Care Portfolio 2001. California Child Care Resource and Referral Network.

⁴ *ibid*

⁵ Child Care Indicators 1998, Part II. PACE and the California Child Care Resource and Referral Network

⁶ For this report, child-care provider is defined broadly to include teachers, directors and aides at child-care centers in addition to family child-care providers.

- few incentives for continued training in the wage and salary structure of child-care professionals
- difficulty recruiting staff for centers
- low education levels of new recruits to the field
- long periods with no salary increases for staff
- high cost of living in San Francisco

Wages and Benefits: The August 2000 *Profile of the San Francisco Child Care Center Workforce*⁷ provides information about education levels, wages and benefits for staff at approximately half of the child-care centers in San Francisco. According to this study,

- Average low and high wages for teachers at child-care centers in the city (excluding San Francisco Unified School District teachers) ranged from \$10 to \$14 an hour.
- Fifteen percent of teachers did not have any employer-sponsored health coverage, and fewer than half received a paid pension plan from their employer.

Recruitment: Recruiting new staff had become difficult. One planner noted that, “as the economic boom went up here, rent went up, costs went up, and salaries elsewhere went up” and recruiting child-care providers became very difficult.

Turnover and Retention: Many members of the child-care community, from directors to administrators and advocates, mentioned concerns about provider turnover. They were concerned about movement within the field as providers moved from center to center, seeking better salaries and positions, as well as attrition from the field entirely. According to the *Profile of the San Francisco Child Care Workforce*, annual teacher turnover at centers in San Francisco was 25 percent. One stakeholder noted that, “we were experiencing a lot of people leaving the field entirely, realizing there was no hope that they were really going to be able to afford to live in San Francisco and teach.”

Quality: Focus group participants agreed that teacher turnover was having a negative impact on children in child-care centers. One stakeholder explained that with the staffing shortage, “It’s a nightmare to run a child-care center and keep up the quality.” Another added, “When children are exposed to a revolving-door staff situation they are not able to form necessary attachments.”

Capacity: In addition to the detrimental effect on the quality of care, focus group participants thought that high turnover stymied efforts to build child-care capacity, which participants saw as critical in anticipation of increased demand for child care in the wake of welfare reform. As one planner saw it, “there was a political movement to build capacity—but you can’t build capacity without people.”

Training and Education Levels of Providers: Instructors from local colleges and universities thought that child-care providers varied dramatically with respect to their level of education and formal training. Of the teachers in the 2000 *Profile of the San Francisco Child Care Center*

⁷ Center for the Child-Care Workforce. *A Profile of the San Francisco Child Care Center Workforce*. August 2000.

Workforce, 35 percent had completed a BA or higher, and 94 percent had completed at least twelve units of child development.

Focus group participants noted that from the perspective of child-care providers, there were few incentives for continued training. High turnover meant that directors were reluctant to invest resources in transient staff. One stakeholder noted, “Why start in on staff training when they’re not going to be here in twelve weeks?” In addition, the wage scale in the field was not calibrated to education level; one director described how, “I had to explain that the system is not logical...that more education is not always tied to better salaries.” This meant that there was no monetary incentive for continued education and professional development. As one planner noted, “Why bother [taking classes] when there is not going to be any payoff?”

Other Child-Care Initiatives

There were many other child-care initiatives in San Francisco either existing or being developed at the time. Several programs supported the field’s physical infrastructure, providing money to help family child-care homes and child-care centers improve their facilities and expand. A few programs were aimed directly at supporting child-care providers, such as the California Early Childhood Mentor Program and a proposed health benefits pilot project for child-care workers. In addition, the Mental Health Consultation Initiative provided mental health services to young children in child-care settings. One stakeholder thought that this support was a crucial complement to improved compensation. On the policy and planning front, the Starting Points Initiative, an early childhood planning initiative housed in the San Francisco Department of Children, Youth and Their Families (DCYF), provided a city-wide forum to discuss child policy and program needs in the city and to start building consensus on priorities for child services, including child care. Funded by the Carnegie Foundation, the Starting Points advisory group included representation from the public and private sector.

WAGES +: Subsequently, the city has funded WAGES +, another program that directly targets the city’s child-care workforce. While both programs aim to increase retention through improved compensation, SF CARES offers a once-a-year stipend to child-care providers, while WAGES + augments their wages. The two programs also differ in terms of which providers received more of an increase. Providers with higher levels of education received the largest stipends through SF CARES. In contrast, entry-level providers with low wages (and less education) received more money through a WAGES + wage augmentation. Another important difference is that *individuals* apply for and received stipends through SF CARES, whereas *centers* apply to the WAGES + Program.

Early Care and Education Training System

Two public institutions offer child development courses in San Francisco: City College of San Francisco (City College) and San Francisco State University (SFSU). In addition, a number of community-based organizations around the city offer trainings for child-care providers, including Wu Yee Children’s Services and the Children’s Council of San Francisco, the two Resource & Referral Agencies in the county.

Times and Locations of Classes: Representatives from both SFSU and City College thought that their programs offer a wide range of unit-bearing classes. Instructors described City College as more flexible with its class schedule and locations than SFSU. “I teach in the evening in Chinatown and on Saturday mornings, because the students want it,” commented a City College instructor. And a representative of SFSU thought that her school has not been very responsive to working students’ scheduling concerns, as most of their undergraduate classes are taught on weekdays and during the day, so that many students have a hard time finding the classes they need at convenient times.

Although many stipend recipients believe in the value of continuing education, many found it hard to schedule class time. “It’s good to refresh, to get new ideas, especially since it’s been 10 or 15 years since I took my first courses out at state, and things have changed,” commented one provider, “[However], my time is just used up, all the time. There is a lot of work in this business, especially if you’re involved in administration, too.” Several family child-care providers reported having trouble finding the time to take courses because they can only enroll in evening or Saturday classes. Some participants felt that general education classes are particularly problematic, because they are held during business hours, and space is sometimes limited. Some center-based providers described similar challenges. For example, they found it difficult to take courses because they had their own children to care for, and didn’t have enough free time. “I work six days and on Sunday I go to church,” explained one participant.

Linguistic and Cultural Accessibility: Representatives from both City College and SFSU reported serving an ethnically diverse group of students, with many bilingual students. They mentioned that students with limited English proficiency required more support and attention. Teachers have tried to accommodate the needs of students with limited English proficiency by using various teaching methods, such as putting students in small groups, and giving them extra time to complete assignments. In some cases, materials are offered in students’ native languages. Students frequently request study guides, video guides and other support materials in their native languages. Many students are also referred to English as a Second Language classes, which may help them perform better, but also prolong their studies, since these courses don’t count as general education units toward the permit or a degree.

Role of CARES

Planners were concerned that most of these initiatives were designed to increase capacity without addressing recruitment and retention. One planner felt that “people were talking over and around the basic issue.” In the midst of these other child-care programs and initiatives, SF CARES was specifically targeted for retention of the workforce.

PROGRAM HISTORY AND PLANNING

Advocacy and Funding

Faced with the challenge of maintaining program quality and stability in an environment of high staff turnover, center directors along with living-wage and child-care advocates in San Francisco began meeting to discuss ways to improve child-care provider compensation and decrease staff turnover in the city. Under the auspices of the Asian Child Care Coalition, the group met at Wu Yee Children's Services, one of the two Resource & Referral Agencies in San Francisco, and eventually evolved into the San Francisco Child Care Providers Association. The group discussed CARES (Compensation and Retention Encourage Stability), a program model developed by the Center for the Child Care Workforce (see History of the California CARES initiative, page 3) that provides annual stipends to providers based on their level of education. In 1999, hopes that state matching funds would be available for a CARES initiative were disappointed when the Governor vetoed the funds for the state CARES bill. With support from Coleman Advocates for Children and Youth, a San Francisco children's advocacy group, the Providers Association launched a successful city-wide campaign to secure city funds for the program.

Description of Funding Process

Stakeholders and planners discussed a number of factors that contributed to the successful funding of the program:

- strong relationships between the child-care community and the San Francisco Board of Supervisors that fostered support from community and political leaders
- affirmation of the support of these community and political leaders from advocacy groups
- consensus in the child-care community around how the problem of turnover needed to be addressed
- support from the San Francisco Department of Children, Youth and Their Families (DCYF) in articulating policies and shaping a "fundable" program

When funding for the state initiative was vetoed, the Providers Association waged a campaign to raise both public awareness and funding for the child-care workforce. Advocates worked to mobilize local support and resources in the hopes that eventually the state would provide matching funds for a provider retention initiative. Planners identified two components of this campaign: an external lobbying effort aimed at raising general public support for child care and an internal component that involved developing individual political ties.

For the external campaign, Wu Yee organized parents and center directors to come to meetings. Coleman Advocates coordinated a postcard campaign to the mayor and members of the Board of Supervisors from parents and teachers. The postcards campaign, which was part of "Speak up for Kids Day," urged the politicians to consider an SF CARES funding package. According to one participant, approximately 5,000 postcards were sent. Planners also attended public meetings of the San Francisco Board of Supervisors to argue their case.

For the internal advocacy effort, Providers Association members cultivated and leveraged personal connections. One association member was politically connected to Mabel Teng, a member of the San Francisco Board of Supervisors, who had previously backed a two million dollar child-care initiative. Members of the Providers' Association steering committee met with the mayor himself, and with members of the mayor's staff, including finance officers. Guided in part by staff at Coleman Advocates, planners forged relationships with city government administrators.

Climate for Funding: At the time, planners thought there was little public awareness of the need to address retention in the child-care field, and of the underlying conditions that affected retention; however, within the field retention was emerging as a priority. Several groups were meeting to address child-care issues in San Francisco, such as a CalWORKs planning group and the Child Care Organizing Roundtable convened by Coleman Advocates. One stakeholder noted that public awareness of the need for child-care capacity grew after welfare reform, as lack of child-care became more visible as a barrier to work. The effort to meet reduced TANF caseload goals without sacrificing the well-being of children helped garner public support for the initiative. In addition, the Starting Points Initiative provided a forum to articulate priorities and build consensus for children's services and program "If [Wu Yee's director] had been out there on his own, Coleman would've thought that was a dumb idea, or the public sector would've said, 'Well, that's not the best solution.' [Starting Points] allowed people to come to an agreement about what a local solution would look like."

Key Players: Stakeholders mentioned support from a number of key figures. One stakeholder characterized local leadership as committed to looking for innovative solutions, and saw buy-in from the mayor as important to the successful funding of the program. Advocacy groups commended the mayor for his efforts on behalf of child care throughout the year. In addition, child care was being promoted from the Department of Human Services, whose director helped instill the importance of child care to the Mayor. One community stakeholder pointed out that the initiative was particularly attractive because it was new. She recalled talk about how "if San Francisco would do this, we would be on the cutting edge and be a trend-setter. And that, politically, sounded good."

Strategies for Continued Funding: Stakeholders also credited the program planners with mobilizing support for continued and increased funding through the program design, by prioritizing applicants rather than funding all eligible applicants. While this led to a number of disappointed applicants who did not receive stipends in Year 1, one stakeholder thought that SF CARES had done a good job transforming this disappointment into advocacy for more funding. For Year 2, SF CARES is receiving city funds, in addition to funding from both the County and State Children and Families Commissions, more than tripling the total funds available for the program. Stakeholders thought the program had been successful in securing additional funding by demonstrating the unmet need in Year 1.

Program Planning

Planning Process: After the San Francisco Board of Supervisors allocated \$1.15 million in July 1999 to fund SF CARES, DCYF, the city department charged with administering the funds for

the program, convened a formal SF CARES planning group. This group, which included several active members of the Providers Association, modified the program model developed by the association. They changed the eligibility requirements and established the formula used to determine priority in awarding stipends in order to make the program easier to implement and more attractive to funders.

Emergence of Goals: The efforts of this DCYF planning group culminated in the release of the Request for Proposals (RFP), outlining the goals and program design of the SF CARES Program. These goals related to increasing and improving:

- compensation for child-care providers that allows them to support their families;
- retention of a trained workforce;
- numbers of trained providers in order meet an anticipated increase in demand for child care due to welfare reform;
- collaboration among the city's training institutions.

According to the RFP, the initiative was “intended to enhance the quality of child care services and the retention of a trained workforce to provide child-care services to the children of San Francisco.”

In addition, many focus group participants emphasized that SF CARES was a first step in addressing the problems related to low compensation in the child-care field, such as lack of training, high turnover, and low status and low professional recognition. Planners mentioned improved quality as a long-term goal. But more immediately, they hoped the program would raise awareness about the importance of early care and education, and make visible the problems of low compensation and high turnover in the field. They also hoped the initiative would engage and unite the child-care community around a common goal. Planners, stakeholders, and program staff discussed improved provider retention as a central goal for the program, as well as increased professional development. Planners and stakeholders also saw the program as a way to improve the wage structure in the field by providing a financial incentive for training.

Program Design

Eligibility: In developing the RFP, the planning group specified the eligibility requirements for different stipend levels, devised a method for prioritizing applicants, and outlined the continuing eligibility requirements for the program. To be eligible for a stipend through the SF CARES program in Year 1, providers were required to:

- be currently employed as a child-care provider in San Francisco, caring for at least three children;
- have been employed at the same licensed facility for one year;
- have at least six early childhood education (ECE) units.

As with the state CARES model, eligibility for particular stipend amounts was based on education level, with stipend levels based on California's Child Development Permit Matrix, the state's early education credential required for employment at some publicly-funded centers. The planning group modified the state CARES model for San Francisco. For example, the group reduced the minimum number of early childhood education units required to be eligible for a stipend from twelve to six, to be more inclusive of family child-care providers and of providers

starting out in the field. School aged providers were eligible to receive a stipend from the SF CARES program in Year 1, as the programs was funded by the City of San Francisco and was not limited to services for children ages zero through five as a condition of funding.⁸

SF CARES Program: Year 1 Stipend Levels

SF CARES Stipends Aligned with Child Development Permit		
Level	Requirements: Child Development Permit Level	Stipend Amount
1	Associate or Assistant Teacher (6 ECE units)	\$500
2A	Teacher (24 ECE units and 16 GE units)	\$1,500
2B	Master Teacher, Site Supervisor, or Program Director (no BA)	\$2,500
2C	Master Teacher, Site Supervisor, or Program Director (with BA)	\$5,000
Additional Stipends		
Language	Fluent in language other than English; use it on the job	\$500
Graduate	Possess master's or graduate degree	\$500

Prioritization: Because of the high cost of living in San Francisco, planners discussed definitions of a livable wage, and determined wage tiers for each level of the Child Development Permit Matrix. Realizing that there was not enough money to fund all eligible applicants, planners decided to target the lowest wage-earners. Applicants with wages in the lower tier for their education level were designated priority 1, and applicants with higher wages were designated priority 2. One planner explained, “we decided that we are rewarding retention, but that the wage issue is key and people who are making more should have second priority.”

In Year 1 there was not enough money to fund all the eligible priority 1 applicants,⁹ so SF CARES used a formula to prioritize eligible applicants within this category. Because they thought it was important to reward consistency and longevity, planners included tenure in the job, in the field, and working in San Francisco into this formula for determining which priority 1 applicants would receive stipends from the limited funds available.

Continued Eligibility Requirements: To promote professional development and quality of care in the field, the program established continuing eligibility requirements that returning stipends recipients had to complete to be eligible for a stipend in Year 2. In addition to the twelve-month tenure requirements, level 1 recipients were required to earn three course units, which can generally be earned through one semester-long course; level 2 recipients were required to complete 21 professional growth hours, a requirement which could be fulfilled by taking unit-bearing courses or by attending workshops, trainings or conferences.

SF CARES: Year 1 Continued Eligibility Requirements

Level 1	3 units
Level 2	21 professional growth hours

⁸ Most of the subsequent child-care retention-incentive programs in the state have been funded with state and local Prop. 10 money which is earmarked for programs that serve children ages zero through five.

⁹ By extension, there was not enough money to fund any of the eligible priority 2 applicants who earned above the wage tier for their level.

Key Design Decisions: Planners had to make some compromises around the professional growth hours required for continued eligibility. While unit-bearing coursework is easiest to document, planners wanted to acknowledge other experiences such as workshops, conferences and classes as legitimate avenues of professional development. Planners thought the state's network of professional growth advisors for child-care providers was inadequate. These individuals pre-approve professional growth hours required for Child Development Permit renewal; however, planners did not think there were enough professional growth advisors in the county to meet the program's needs. Instead, the group decided that to be eligible for Year 2, level 2 SF CARES recipients would be required to list their professional growth hours but would not need to get these hours approved by a professional growth advisor. This decision was seen as necessary: "once we moved into implementation...we were very conscious of the fact that we didn't have the capacity to do what we wanted to do, which was to document those professional growth hours."

Community input: Program planners considered the planning process overall to be "respectful and inclusive." Planners thought they made an effort to get input from many groups within the child-care community, including not just state-funded centers, but also for-profit centers and family child-care providers, and educators at City College and SFSU. Planners noted that the open, revolving attendance at the Providers Association meetings lengthened the planning process, and led to many revisions.

Since the planning process relied on channels of communication already established by organized groups in the community, one planner thought that these groups had the strongest voice in the planning process. For example, input from teaches and teachers' aides was minimal, since "teachers in the child-care field are not organized." One instructor thought that the planning process would have benefited from more input from providers at private, non-profit centers, who "could have served as a bridge to merge the non-profit and the public sector, since the ultimate goal in California is that all teachers have some kind of a permit and move up on the ladder professionally."

Diversity of Views: Some planners thought that discussions of a livable wage were misguided, because SF CARES would never be funded if it came across as a wage initiative, arguing instead that it had to be focused on retention and recognition of the child-care workforce. While there were differing views on the elements of program design, planners and stakeholders thought that people put aside these differences to get the program up and running. Stakeholders recalled disagreement about how broad the program design should be. One stakeholder noted, "I didn't agree with everything [but]...rather than slow things down, it was more important to get [the program] out."

Evaluation and Indicators of Effectiveness

During the planning phase, planners briefly discussed means to evaluate outcomes for SF CARES. However, the perceived urgency and need to get the program in place quickly made evaluation efforts less of a priority. Planners did not discuss specific outcomes for the child, for the classroom, or target rates of turnover and retention. Planners were concerned that if the program seemed not to work according to some specific criteria, the whole approach might be

abandoned. They thought that it hardly needed to be proven that the low wages for child-care providers are not in the best interests of children, or the profession. Still, they set aside some money for evaluation and SF CARES agreed to participate in the PACE evaluation funded by the California Children and Families Commission.

Lessons Learned

Advocates and planners in San Francisco:

- ✓ Brought together multiple organizations and individuals to support the CARES model.
- ✓ Identified and connected with key political actors who could help move their agenda forward.
- ✓ Defined and articulated program goals in ways that resonate with these key actors.
- ✓ Viewed SF CARES as a first step towards improving compensation and retention for child-care providers, and stressed that more work was needed.
- ✓ Cited visibility and recognition for the early care and education profession as important goals for the program, in addition to increased retention, professional development and quality of care.

PROGRAM STRUCTURE AND IMPLEMENTATION

Wu Yee had a six-month timeline to implement the program: develop outreach materials, draft the application form, review the applications and supporting documentation to determine eligibility, develop a data system, and award the stipends. DCYF released the RFP on November 1, 1999; Wu Yee was awarded the contract to administer the SF CARES program beginning in January 2000, with the stipulation that funds for the program be expended and the stipends disbursed by June 30, 2000. SF CARES was fully implemented within this Year 1 timeline; Wu Yee reviewed applications from 1,223 child-care providers, and obligated funds for the program before the end of the fiscal year, June 30, 2000.

Home Agency

Focus group participants recommended that the administering agency for a retention incentive program have a number of characteristics, including,

- history of working with different groups in the county and a capacity for multi-lingual communication;
- record of efficiency (i.e., the ability to get checks out in a timely manner) and sound fiscal administration;
- roots in the local child care community;
- awareness of the challenges facing the child-care community; and an evident passion and commitment to the issues.

Planners noted that the home agency should also provide sufficient staffing and infrastructure to support the program—not simply the timely dissemination of checks, which is critical, but also the fostering of a network of supports for child-care providers that engenders a new culture among participants. One planner noted that, “Only then is the program sustainable.” Wu Yee assisted not only with the stipends but also conducted advocacy work, and provided resources and links to services that teachers need to be eligible for SF CARES. The agency has natural links to the Asian community, but has also been working to reach out to other communities as well, something it was able to achieve through the SF CARES program.

Planners and staff noted that either a county agency or a community-based organization could implement the program. According to one staff member, “It doesn’t matter as long as you have a good program.” Another staff member added that a community-based organization might be more connected to the child-care community. “An advantage of running [the program] through a community organization is that there is a stronger tie with what the real needs of the community are.” Program staff thought that the decision regarding how to run the program should be made locally, depending on the resources and characteristics of the community.

Some focus group participants were concerned about the appearance of a conflict of interest in having an agency that runs child-care centers, such as Wu Yee Children’s Services, administer a compensation program for child-care center staff. Indeed, early on as the program transitioned from planning to implementation and Wu Yee was awarded the contract to administer the SF CARES Program, one planner thought that some providers perceived Wu Yee as “building its own empire.” However, advisory group members were confident of the integrity of the Wu Yee

staff and did not think that there had been any improprieties. They thought that the comprehensive outreach conducted through the broader child-care community in San Francisco, as well as the use of outside program consultants, had helped mitigate the possibility of favoritism.

For Year 2, SF CARES became a distinct department within Wu Yee with its own dedicated staff. In addition, external reviewers examined SF CARES applications from Wu Yee employees; in Year 1, the advisory work group was charged with reviewing Wu Yee applications.

Program Staffing

Because of the short timeline and limited Year 1 funds, Wu Yee did not hire a staff dedicated to the SF CARES program. Instead, the program was run by existing Wu Yee staff under the auspices of the Family Center. The first SF CARES coordinator was hired in early February, and Wu Yee staff members from other projects were pulled in to help implement SF CARES in Year 1. In addition, volunteers, including advisory group members and the corps consultants helping with outreach, played an important role in Year 1 program implementation. Wu Yee had the advantage of having natural links to the child-care field and could recruit people to help with the SF CARES implementation; however, planners thought the program was implemented with the help of many volunteers who should have been paid. In the long-term, planners did not see this reliance on unpaid staff as sustainable, noting that, “passion is not sufficient to sustain a long-term movement.”

Staffing Challenges: Program staff and advisory group members reported that the minimal staffing diminished the amount of outreach conducted around the program’s broader goals of quality and retention, as well as the program’s continued eligibility requirements. Lack of dedicated staff also limited the agency’s ability to respond to questions from applicants, a concern also voiced by some stipend recipients. Delays in hiring staff may have been compounded by the low salaries budgeted for the positions. One advisory group member noted, “if you offer enough money, you will get people.” Wu Yee was able to recruit staff for the program after the Year 1 stipends were distributed, when increased funding for the program appeared more certain.

Stakeholders discussed the importance of having a professional staff to administer the program, calling it, “naiveté, to think you could administer a program like this and not have staff to support it.” In fact, reflecting on Wu Yee’s implementation of SF CARES in Year 1, she thought that its weakness was in keeping the administration too trim. In Year 2, program staff and corps consultants are tracking the questions asked by applicants and the time spent to answer them. By marking questions that come up many times, staff can now identify areas that need to be more clear in the future and make time estimates that can be used for future staff allocation.

Background and qualifications: Program staff discussed the background and qualifications they saw as important for coordinating the program, including:

- experience with program development and implementation
- familiarity with the California Child Development Permit Matrix and local college transcripts

- commitment to working long and non-traditional hours, such as evenings and weekends, because “child-care teachers can’t make it [to meetings] during the day.”

Staff recommended that the program determine early on how and in what language to provide technical assistance, and how to handle translation. One staff member described the demands of the position as being “a little different than being a regular program director,” benefiting from experience with both public policy research and advocacy.

Advisory Group

To capture the interests and perspectives of child-care providers city-wide, DCYF convened an SF CARES Advisory Work Group that met on a regular basis to insure broad public accountability. Program staff described the responsibilities of the Advisory Group: setting policies, reviewing and approving stipend eligibility and awards, and having the final say in the appeals process. Advisory group members thought that the different perspectives represented in the advisory group helped to anticipate problems: “Many minds see potential pitfalls more than one or two people that are trying to work it out.” They thought that the decisions they made were final and were consistently implemented.

Composition: The Advisory Work Group was designed to include representatives from a range of constituencies, including public schools, labor organizations, foundations, and institutions of higher education. Neighborhood and ethnic representation were taken into account in determining the composition of the advisory group, as well as the type of child-care setting (family child care, school district, center-based etc.). In Year 1, the advisory group was primarily comprised of center directors. For Year 2, however, an effort has been made to include “line staff” and teachers as well. Although work group members considered their group to be fairly representative of the larger community, a few thought the group should have been more diverse in terms of ethnicity, language, program type, and should have included more school-age providers.

Role: While it was not difficult to recruit work group members, not all members were able to make the time commitment needed for consistent attendance. The workload was quite intense at the beginning, with meetings every two weeks. In addition, one work group member suggested that, because the program was understaffed, the advisory group was asked to take on inappropriate responsibilities: “we weren’t advising, we were micromanaging.” With the program more fully staffed for Year 2, work group members were able to step back to what they defined as a more appropriate level of involvement, focusing on program policy rather than implementation.

Outreach and Recruitment

Many recipients and stakeholders had positive reactions to outreach for the program, noting that the program had received many more applicants than it could fund and that most people in the field were aware of SF CARES. Focus group participants noted that the peer outreach strategy—where program consultants drawn from the child-care community received small stipends for providing technical assistance to applicants—was particularly effective.

These corps consultants described their experiences providing technical assistance to applicants. They reported that the time commitment was not too great, approximately one hour a week, consisting mostly of short phone conversations. Some consultants, particularly those listed first in the SF CARES application packet, received more calls than others. One consultant suggested having a call-routing system for technical assistance, with one central number that would route calls to consultants in an equitable manner: Consultants received \$500 and a plaque for their services, and were recognized at an appreciation luncheon organized by Wu Yee. They reported appreciating the recognition, as well as the personal satisfaction they received from their role in the program.

Short staffing limited the agency's ability to respond to questions from applicants. For example, although corps consultants agreed that Wu Yee staff worked hard to set up the program, they were not always available to respond to inquiries. Thus, in many cases, applicants and consultants who called Wu Yee to obtain clarifications were greeted by an answering machine and sometimes never received a call back. A few focus group participants were concerned that there were instances of directors not passing information about the SF CARES program on to their staff; yet the program could not easily contact teachers and other providers except through their place of employment, since it is difficult to obtain home addresses for child-care providers, "unless they've become CARES recipients or they're enrolled in a class."

Participants in a number of focus groups noted that some communities were not fully reached, such as family-child care providers. Although approximately 18 percent of the licensed child-care slots in San Francisco are in family child-care homes,¹⁰ family child-care providers represented approximately eight percent of program applicants. One advisory group member explained, "one [community] we didn't reach very well was family child care, but steps were taken immediately to remedy that." Recipients and corps consultants were more satisfied with the level of service offered by Wu Yee in Year 2. One corps consultant thought that the reason she did not get as many phone calls this year is because people were calling directly to the agency's office and getting someone to talk to right away.

Program staff and advisory group members reported that the minimal staffing diminished the amount of outreach the program was able to conduct around the program's broader goals of quality and retention, because program staff only had time to focus on getting checks out on time in Year 1. As a result, many applicants perceived the SF CARES program as an entitlement and expected to receive stipends if they met certain criteria. This led to problems. "We should have made it more clear from outset that there wasn't enough money," remarked one staff person. Advisory group members and planners were concerned that many unsuccessful applicants did not understand why they had not received a stipend. In Year 2, many unsuccessful Year 1 applicants who had been eligible for a stipend but who did not receive one due to limited funding did not reapply to the program. Planners hoped that there would be enough staff to devote time to emphasize other goals in Year 2, such as program outreach and professional development for the childcare workforce. In Year 2, Wu Yee hired more staff to be responsible solely for SF CARES; they explained to applicants through the orientations and one-on-one TA sessions that the program is not an entitlement, and not everyone will receive a stipend.

¹⁰ California Child Care Resource and Referral Network. *California Child Care Portfolio 1999*.

Application and Eligibility Determination

Most recipients reported that the application process was fairly clear. Nonetheless, some recipients reported that obtaining official transcripts and verification of work experience was cumbersome, particularly for foreign transcripts that required formal evaluation. Advisory group members were concerned that in a few cases center directors did not certify employment for their employees' applications, rendering them ineligible. Reviewing the application and documentation materials to determine eligibility was also time-consuming for staff, in part because San Francisco was the first county to implement a CARES program so that there was no precedent on which to base staffing requirements for the effort. Despite the burden involved with assembling the documentation requirements, focus group participants thought that official transcripts were needed to ensure the integrity of the eligibility determination process.

Program staff described how the program had to decide whether or not applicants should be notified that their application had been received. Initially staff members tried to call back applicants with incomplete applications, but this proved unsustainable. "The staff was calling people back, but then as the hundreds [of applications] came rushing, that was like the tidal wave came over the door, they absolutely couldn't do that."

The system for determining precedence within the group of priority 1 eligible applicants proved particularly time-consuming. One advisory group member described the experience. "Nobody wanted to destroy the spirit and the intent of what had been before, but ...there was this very complicated formula the first year that became overly complicated in its implementation." For Year 2, SF CARES abandoned this formula and used only the wage tiers to determine priority for stipends; in the end, there was enough money to fund priority 1 and 2 eligible applicants.

Eligibility Requirements

Recipients were torn between the value of education, which determined stipend level, and years of experience, which factored into the priority equation to determine recipient status in Year 1, but did not determine stipend level. While some providers thought that education is important, others did not think it was fair that a teacher with 15 year of experience could receive the same amount as—or even less than—someone with only five years of experience.

Some recipients were also concerned about colleagues who were not eligible for a stipend because they had changed centers in the last year and did not meet the program's twelve-month job tenure requirement. At the same time, some participants could see good cause for requiring at least one year at the same facility, and thought the application clearly conveyed this requirement: "The idea may be to encourage the people to stay longer at each center, not just to stay six months and then move and move and move." Another participant pointed out that there was not enough money to fund everyone, and so the requirements needed to exclude providers who leave their jobs. Participants also recognized that consistency of provider is very important for children: "The infant becomes very attached to the primary caregiver, but if the teacher keeps changing, that's not good for the children or the family."

The Role of Provider Training in Child-Care Quality: Elements of Caregiver Training Raise Child Outcomes

In designing an initiative aimed at increasing quality by targeting early care and education professionals, the key question becomes: what measurable characteristics of caregivers are related quality? Research suggests that a number of caregiver traits, including high levels of provider education, are associated with social, cognitive, and language development for children.

Researchers have found positive effects of high-quality center care through random-assignment experiments involving highly trained teachers who display very low turnover rates. More stable and better-educated center staff are more attentive and sensitive to young children in their classrooms and engage in more age-appropriate activities.

But how much education does it take to achieve the level of quality associated with improved outcomes for children? While research indicates that higher levels of providers training are associated with better quality care, there is evidence that good-quality care may be related to a bachelor's degree. One study of center-based providers found that although some specialized training in caring for children was associated with increased quality of care, providers with bachelor's degrees were linked to classrooms that were rated as good or better. Another study of licensed family child-care providers found that levels of education below a B.A. were not associated providers with higher-quality settings.

Based on this empirical evidence, in a guide for Children and Family Commissions Carollee Howes and Jan Brown of the University of California Los Angeles Department of Education suggest that short-term (and relatively inexpensive) efforts to increase specialized provider training may be less effective than efforts to require higher levels of formal education and to improve compensation with the goal of retaining providers with college degrees.*

*Howes, C and J Brown, *Improving Child Care Quality: A Guide for Proposition 10 Commissions*, in N. Halfon, E Shulman, M Shannon and M Hochstein eds., *Building Community Systems for Young Children*, UCLA Center for Healthier Children, Families and Communities, 2000.

Language Stipend: Focus group participants were very supportive of the language stipend, and thought that providers who use their language skills with children and families should be rewarded. For example, one center director noted that, "In my center 90% of the children speak Chinese. So it's very important for them to learn from their mother tongue." Several level 2 recipients agreed that the exact amount of money given for this special skill was not important, but that language diversity should be honored. As one recipient explained, "I think speaking a second language doesn't automatically mean you give quality child care, but it makes it more likely—especially in this city [that] is full of people who speak different languages." She believed quality is improved when providers are able to communicate with parents who do not speak English. One program consultant suggested awarding the \$500 language stipend to child-care providers who use a second language at work, regardless of their other qualifications, because they contribute to the child-care field in a very important way.

Other focus group participants questioned the fairness of the language stipend. One level 2 recipient thought that the language stipend was not fair for African-American providers who were not as likely to speak a language other than English as providers from other ethnic minorities. Another level 2 recipient, who grew up speaking Spanish, thought that providers who went to school to learn a foreign language should be rewarded, but thought it was unfair that

she had received one just because she had grown up in a home speaking a language other than English.

Family child-care providers generally considered exposure to other cultures important and valuable; however, one suggested eliminating the language stipend to allow the program to fund more eligible applicants. Another provider, who works with non-English speaking students at her center but has no formal training in Spanish, believed she is as deserving of a language stipend as someone who is fluent. Another provider, who served as a program consultant, was concerned that for family child-care providers it was very hard to verify eligibility: “For us, the residential care operators, I think it was more difficult to get qualified during the first year, because we run our own businesses.” She added that Wu Yee did accept confirmation from children’s parents, but many family providers were not aware of that option and did not exercise it. To address this problem in Year 2, SF CARES created a separate application form for family child-care providers.

Graduate Degree Stipend: Most providers agreed that the \$500 graduate degree stipend was a good way to reward and encourage education. “Education is pretty important, so somebody who really likes the field and has gone as high as college or university...should be rewarded,” noted one recipient. Some thought that the awards should be reserved only for those providers who had earned a graduate degree in a field directly relevant to child care. Others thought the graduate stipend would be fair if there was a comparable degree for years of experience: “I don’t think CARES should stop awarding the \$500 for graduate degrees,” she noted “but there should be something comparable for experience in the field.”

A few recipients thought that the reward for a graduate degree demonstrated that the program was designed for centers and particularly center directors rather than teachers or family child-care providers. One provider asserted that, “those who designed and advocated for the program, at least originally, were mostly directors and their viewpoint was that the whole child care field would fall apart if we didn’t have directors and directors have to have degrees.” Recipients were concerned that the graduate degree favored veterans in the field “What happens when these people retire? We still have to bring new people into the field.”

Stipend Award and Distribution

In total, SF CARES awarded 436 Year 1 stipends totaling \$822,500. While the number of stipends awarded was divided almost equally between level 1 and Level 2 recipients, Level 2 recipients received a much greater proportion of the program funds.

SF CARES Year 1 Stipends Awarded

Stipend Type	Number Awarded	Total Dollar Amount
Total	436	\$822,500
Level 1	212	\$167,750
Level 2	224	\$654,750
Language	251	\$125,000
Graduate	27	\$13,500

Stipend Levels: Several focus group participants were concerned about the gap between level 1 stipends (\$500 for a minimum of six early childhood education—ECE—units) and level 2 stipends (\$1,500-\$5,000 with a minimum of 24 ECE units and 16 GE units – see [matrix](#) on page 11). Others thought that directors, who spent less time directly with children and already had higher salaries, should not receive such high stipends. SF CARES modified the eligibility requirements and stipend levels for Year 2, adding two intermediary tiers between level 1 and level 2A for providers with twelve and twenty-four ECE units. In addition, in Year 2 SF CARES awarded different stipend amounts to master teachers, site supervisors, and program directors, though providers with a bachelor’s degree who qualify for any of these three levels of the Child Development Permit were eligible for the highest stipend of \$4,500.

Planners were concerned that requirements for family child-care and center-based providers were not sufficiently differentiated in Year 1. Family child-care providers echoed this concern, with one noting, “we need to have our own [child development permit] matrix.” For Year 2, SF CARES added five different small stipends for family child care providers with between one and five ECE units.

Program staff explained that they deliberately sent all the checks out at the same time, over a two-week period in order to minimize inquiries and complaints. Level 1 recipients reported that their checks arrived when they expected them to. A few level 2 recipients reported waiting longer than they anticipated. One described how she was anxious to receive her check. “I called everybody on that list. And I called City Hall where the program came from and I said ‘I have to go to school in two weeks and I spent my money that I’d normally go to school ... you guys said [the check] was coming and I don’t have it yet and school starts in a week...’ And then two days later it came.”

Appeals Process

The advisory group helped design the appeals process for the program. They thought this process had to be defensible and consistent. Decisions were overturned only if the program had made a clerical or mathematical error in determining eligibility, not for subjective cases. One participant explained her philosophy that, “either we do it for everybody, or you don’t do it at all, because...otherwise you just create another set of complaints.” Members stressed the importance of providing very clear information to applicants, and were concerned that some applicants didn’t understand the eligibility determination and appeals process. One participant noted that some applicants “really believed that something went awry, that they had all the paperwork in and something went wrong.”

The appeals process developed for the SF CARES program was carried out at two levels: appeals went first to Wu Yee and then to the SF CARES Advisory Work Group. Wu Yee ended up receiving approximately 200 written appeals as well as a flood of calls. Wu Yee staff overturned approximately ten appeals, and the additional stipends were paid from a reserve fund that had been set aside to deal with appeals. Although a number of appeals, around 40, went to the second level, to the advisory group, none were overturned.

Program staff and advisory group members agreed that the appeals process could be improved. Part of the problem was that appealing was made too easy; applicants who were denied a stipend could simply check a box on their notification letter to appeal the decision. As a result, staff thought that many applicants who were notified that they were not going to receive a stipend automatically checked the box to appeal.

The advisory group discussed the role of program staff and the advisory group in ensuring that applicants understand the application and appeals process. One participant wondered how much the program should provide beyond written information and basic technical assistance: “How many times do you have to say it, how many ways do you have to say it, how much do you have to hold people’s hands and get them through it so they really understand?” The group had purposely required a written appeal from applicants in order to avoid being deluged with complaints, but this also meant that many applicants who did not receive a stipend did not appeal. Participants discussed the idea of having a hotline that ineligible applicants could call for clarification on why their stipend application was turned down.

Continued Eligibility Requirements

Recipients in the focus groups were generally confused about whether they needed course work or professional development hours to remain eligible for a stipend in Year 2, and if the requirements differed by stipend level. For example, many family child-care providers believed they needed to earn credits enough credits to be eligible for a higher stipend level in order to qualify for a stipend again. One provider worried that she could not possibly take all the required units over a one-year period to be eligible for the next level of funding. “I would have to go to school three days a week to qualify for the next level, so how can I stay plugged in?” she asked. Other level 1 recipients understood that they only needed to take one class during the year in order to remain eligible at the same level of funding.

Program staff did not think that the program had done enough to publicize the program’s continuing eligibility requirements, which were outlined in a letter to recipients but not reinforced with follow-up mailings. Because of confusion about the continued eligibility requirements, SF CARES dropped the requirement that Year 1 recipients attend one SF CARES forum to be eligible for a stipend in Year 2. In addition, the program waived the unit and professional growth requirement for returning applicants if they had initially exceeded the minimum number of units for their Year 1 stipend level by three or more units.

Lessons Learned

Focus group had a number of observations and recommendation regarding the implementation of program components:

Home Agency

- ✓ The decision to contract with a community agency or keep a program in the county should be made locally, depending on the resources and characteristics of the community.

- ✓ If the program is contracted out to an agency that employs child-care providers, a system for having employee applications reviewed by independent eligibility assessors can help avoid the appearance of a conflict of interest.

Staffing

- ✓ It is time-consuming to review applicants' supporting documentation and verification materials. Plan ahead for staffing this process and budget for consultants, such as college instructors, who are familiar with college transcripts and the child development field.
- ✓ The workload for implementing a CARES-type program comes in waves. Flexible work hours, the ability to pull staff in from other projects, and funds to contract with consultants can help even the workload involved with determining eligibility.
- ✓ Without a core program staff, the applications process can become fragmented and confusing for applicants seeking answers to their questions. It is difficult to be responsive to applicants without a staff designated for the program.
- ✓ Reliance on volunteers for program implementation without adequate support from program staff is not sustainable.

Outreach

- ✓ To communicate the goals of the program beyond compensation, define and articulate these goals early on to allow for the conveyance of a clear and consistent message.
- ✓ Family child-care providers tend to be isolated, and may require targeted outreach strategies.

Application Process

- ✓ Determining the level of application verification poses a trade-off between program accessibility and integrity; documentation and verification requirements will pose a barrier to potential applicants, but will also reduce the number of erroneous awards.
- ✓ Evaluation of foreign transcripts, a formal process in which an independent company is paid to determine the unit and degree equivalencies for coursework, as opposed to translation, is expensive and cumbersome for applicants. Even if there is money available to reimburse applicants, applicants will need assistance navigating this process.

Eligibility

- ✓ Language stipends are often viewed as fostering children's development by honoring the diversity of languages spoken; however, they can also be controversial and bring up tensions around ethnicity and language.

- ✓ Graduate degree stipends are seen as a way of rewarding education, but are also resented by some providers who view them as valuing education over experience
- ✓ Continuing eligibility requirements need to be clearly outlined and reiterated throughout the year for recipients to understand and fulfill them.

Stipend Awards

- ✓ Complicated formulas for determining eligibility and priority for available funds may reflect the goals of the program, but are difficult and time-consuming to implement.
- ✓ By prioritizing applicants rather than funding all of those eligible, the program may have discouraged providers from applying in future years. It may be necessary to plan specific outreach to pull these providers into the system again.
- ✓ Recipients are very anxious to receive their checks once the awards have been announced (and even before). Minimizing the amount of time between the award notices and the distribution of the checks may help minimize call volume.

Advisory Group

- ✓ Structure the roles and responsibilities of the advisory group with care. Some potential members will not be able to commit more than two hours a week, and requiring more may discourage participation.
- ✓ It takes planning and effort to focus an advisory on broad policy decisions rather than the details of program management.

PERCEPTIONS OF PROGRAM EFFECTS

Recognition

Many recipients described the importance of SF CARES, not only in terms of the financial benefit but also in regard to the personal and professional recognition the program provided. One family child-care provider described it as “an honor” to be a recipient of an SF CARES stipend. Others commented on how important child care is to society, how undervalued it has been, and therefore how grateful they were to finally receive attention for the work they do. One family child-care provider commented, “the money was important, but what superceded it was the recognition.” Another recipient recounted how the program had helped to temper some of her discouragement about her low wages: “I think I will work [in child care] my whole life...But I look at my friends, and they make so much, and I [get] so upset. But last year, when I got the stipend, I thought: ‘Somebody cares about us.’” Another stated, “We now feel we are more respected by the government.”

One level 2 recipients reiterated the importance of SF CARES in changing the way people view child care. She noted that as providers complete training in psychology and child development the public’s perception of early care and education as a professional vocation would increase. They discussed how they valued the effect CARES had on the opinions of their family, friends, and the general public. As one participant stated, “CARES...helped the public to realize, to recognize that the job we are doing is [not] baby-sitting. By encouraging classes and training, recipients thought the program allowed them to be recognized as pre-school teachers rather than baby-sitters.

Professional Networks and Linkages

Participants in the family child-care focus group thought that SF CARES developed cohesiveness and support within the child-care community, as providers assisted one another in filling out program forms and encouraged one another to take more classes. Several family child-care providers noted that SF CARES helped them build social networks with other providers. Stakeholders also mentioned these linkages as an important effect of the program: “Especially the family child-care [providers], who are so isolated, now we really got them all networked up. They said, ‘Three years ago nobody paid attention to us. And now, everybody’s paying attention to us.’” As a result, family child-care providers were seeing value in developing professional associations and networks.

At centers, a few providers reported that the stipends caused some tensions, with providers who applied but did not receive a stipend feeling jealous and discouraged. One recipient noted that, “If somebody gets money and somebody doesn’t, the people who don’t get paid are upset.” On the other hand, one director reported that although teachers who did not receive a stipend were disappointed, there were no bitter feelings between recipients and non-recipients at her center. The stipends were openly discussed among staff, and everyone knew who had received one or not. One level 2 recipient described how, “my co-workers were jealous...I think [the stipends] caused a little bit of jealous[y], but I’ve been working with them for so long that at the end it was OK.”

One advisory group member thought that some of the power of the program had been diffused because there was not enough money for everyone. “It’s not a guarantee for everyone who qualifies... There’s a lot of uncertainty, so maybe that’s why [recipients] are not as interested and engaged in it as they could’ve been.” Another described a logistical barrier to organizing child-care providers through the SF CARES Program. Because of confidentiality issues, Wu Yee does not release the contact information for recipients or the sign-up lists from related events. She thought that advocates would like to have this information. “So that’s been a problem,” she noted, adding, “you just have to get more creative.” Nonetheless, one group member thought that providers taking college courses were becoming better advocates for themselves; however, she did not think that most staff in child-care centers had been engaged by the program. “I really don’t see a change in behavior,” she explained. “There are advocates and there are a lot of transitional folks. I see a lot of isolation, a lot of folks who don’t know what happens in other programs.”

Training and Professional Development

Recipients discussed how the SF CARES provided an incentive for continued training and professional development. Level I recipients reported taking classes at Wu Yee and City College recognizing that with more units they would qualify for a higher stipend in future years. One center director described several staff members who were only three units away from getting \$4,000. “They’re going to be ready next year,” she predicted. Another recipient described how she served as a model to her coworkers to take classes, as they “saw that I did receive money, and they saw that there was a good reason—a reason that not only benefits the children but benefited them—to go take class[es], get some professional growth.”

Representatives from City College and SFSU discussed whether there had been any changes in the number of child-care providers taking classes. In City College, the largest training site for child development in San Francisco, instructors mentioned that enrollment in the child development department had gone down in the previous two years, which they attributed to, “the economy and the fact that people are moving out of San Francisco.” City College has added sections targeting family child-care providers, although enrollment in these family child-care sections decreased from the 1999-2000 to the 2000-20001 academic years.

City College of San Francisco: Child Development Courses and Enrollment

	number of courses offered	enrollment	number of FCC sections	enrollment in FCC sections
Summer 1999-Spring 2000	181	4928	30	535
Summer 2000-Spring 2001	192	4485	24	417

SFSU, on the other hand, saw an increase in enrollment in child development courses, despite the fact that overall enrollment at the university has been declining. Demand for early childhood education increased both at the bachelor’s and the master’s level, and the infant-toddler program became very popular. SFSU served more minority students and more transfer students from City College, and had started an interdisciplinary major, Child and Adolescent Development, which

has grown in popularity and added new courses. Instructors did not attribute these changes to SF CARES.

One instructor had mixed impressions of the effect of SF CARES on course enrollment. As she commented, “I think there is a shift in both directions and it’s anecdotal. I just hear about students who would have signed up for a fall class had they not been denied a stipend. And then there are other students who are zealously working toward [a certain level], and students who are really annoyed that the class they are currently taking doesn’t add to their level.”

Retention

One center director thought that SF CARES was serving to stabilize turnover, “maintaining some continuity for children in the classroom,” at least during the year. She added, “I think there’s still some summer shuffle.” She added that the program had made a difference in her own decision to stay in the field. “I was just as tired as anybody else. It was really hard being with the staff, experiencing what they were experiencing...it made all the difference in the world to me, just in terms of my hope that I have something to offer the center.”

Many recipients expressed their intention to stay in the child-care profession because of their love for children and their commitment to children, and their families. A number of older family child-care providers thought that they would stay in the child-care field for life. However, one provider noted, “It depends on how much the rent in San Francisco goes up.” Two young level 2 recipients agreed that they would only remain in the field as long as they continued to find increasing financial rewards and professional advancement.

Quality of Care

Most focus group participants agreed that it was too soon to see the impact of SF CARES on quality; however, recipients discussed their hopes for the program. Several recipients noted that the recognition and stipends from the SF CARES program made them feel better about themselves and their work, and encouraged them to take classes. They thought that these positive feelings and increased training would inevitably be transmitted to the children. One family child-care provider stated that, “the stability of having a single provider over a long period of time is conveyed to the child. Who we are, we pass on to the children.”

The group discussed the difficulty of measuring changes in program quality as the result of a program targeted at individual providers. For example, one center director described how difficult it is to integrate new practices in the classroom. “It’s one thing to learn it, [and] it’s another thing to get used to doing things in that new way. [Providers] need someone modeling it and seeing it happen on a regular basis.” Because individuals apply and are awarded stipends through the SF CARES program, there may not be a critical mass of recipients at a given site. Participants felt that this had important implications for program effect. For example, one participant thought, “If you’ve got all your teachers going back to school then ... it’s a much more professional setting.” Focus group participants hoped that SF CARES would start to reach more providers: “Unless you have some threshold of density of participants, it’s hard to measure anything around quality, stipend, and related factors.”

One participant thought that the compensation initiatives combined with other child-care programs were providing the support and resources needed to allow the child-care community to focus on quality. Previously, because turnover was such a problem, providers were very resistant to quality assessments, arguing “No way, you can’t come in and assess us, we can’t use these tools to self-assess. We can’t focus on accreditation when we’re just doing all we can to keep it together here.” With more resources available, providers were more open to defining and setting quality standards. Now, “[providers] are willing to accept [assessments] because they know if they’ve got a facilities problem, we’ll come in with the facilities resources to help them. Or if they’ve got a training problem, we’ll help them with substitutes so that they can go to school. Or if they need the training and they can’t pay for it, that there [are] scholarships for them.” Participants felt it was important to have support programs available to allow providers to improve quality. “You’ve got to have all those pieces, because you can’t expect people with nothing to fix their own problems. It just doesn’t make sense.”

Lessons Learned

- ✓ CARES stipends have significance to providers beyond financial gain.
- ✓ Child-care providers seek professional recognition and respect in addition to improved compensation.
- ✓ Family child-care providers found the program particularly effective in terms of fostering professional networks.
- ✓ In order to be able to share contact information for applicants or recipients with training or advocacy agencies for outreach purposes, include consent on the program application.
- ✓ Stipends can cause jealousy and resentment between non-recipients and recipients, particularly when there is not enough money to fund all eligible applicants.

Next Steps

The first year of implementation of SF CARES laid the foundation for expansion and improvement. For Year 2, the SF CARES has a budget of 3.8 million, and a staff of five who have already acted to continue the successes and address many of the concerns that emerged during Year 1.

Appendix: Methodology for the Qualitative Implementation Study of the SF CARES Program

Sources

The final report of the qualitative study draws on three sources of information: focus groups, interviews, and background materials.

Focus Groups: Between December 2000 and April 2001, PACE conducted eleven focus groups with people who have been involved in the SF CARES program. PACE conducted two separate focus groups with community stakeholders in San Francisco, and three focus groups with stipend recipients: level 1 recipients, level 2 recipients, and family child-care providers.

Year 1 Focus Groups

Planners	Key players involved with developing the program design and identifying program funding
Community Stakeholders	Representatives from local Resource and Referral agencies (R&Rs), school districts and other local government and child-care agencies
Outreach Participants	Individuals who were not on the program's payroll who assisted with recruitment and provided support to applicants
Program Staff	Staff responsible for implementing the program
Program Participants	Stipend recipients, grouped by level and/or licensing type (center, FCC, exempt)
Advisory Group	Members of the program's advisory group
Center Directors	Directors of local centers (subsidized, non-profit, and for-profit, all sizes) who have staff participating in the program and can discuss both the application process and the effect of the program at the center level
Educators/Trainers	Instructors and administrators at local community colleges, training coordinators at local R&Rs, and representatives from other professional development institutions who can discuss training needs and their perceptions of program effect

Interviews: PACE conducted follow-up interviews to gather information not covered in the focus groups, and/or to capture perspectives of individuals who could not attend the focus groups.

Background materials: PACE also relied on program materials, such as the application, outreach materials and meeting minutes that provide valuable background about the program. PACE is working to obtain enrollment numbers from City College of San Francisco and San Francisco State University.

Confidentiality

PACE assures confidentiality to all study participants and gained written informed consent from all focus group and interview participants.

Generalizability

Statements of focus group participants may reflect an individual, rather than a more widely-held, perspective. PACE has made an effort to highlight those perspectives that came up more than once, voiced by more than one participant and in more than one focus group.