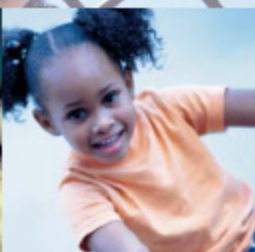


A photograph of several children climbing on a wooden playground structure against a clear blue sky. The children are in various positions, some reaching up, others holding onto the beams.

# In Our Own Backyards:

*Local and State Strategies to  
Improve the Quality of  
Family Child Care*



Institute for Women's Policy Research

## Low-Income Communities

All Our Kin  
New Haven, Connecticut

Seventy-eight percent of infants and toddlers in New Haven, Connecticut are cared for in family child care homes and informal arrangements (Mayor's Task Force on Universal Early Care and Education 2001). The frequency of home-based care in the community is likely related to the city's 20 percent poverty rate (U.S. Census Bureau 2000) and the fact that informal and family child care arrangements tend to be less costly. Concern about the quality of care in these environments led All Our Kin, a nonprofit organization that provides training and networking opportunities for providers, to place a particular emphasis on helping unregulated providers meet licensing standards. All Our Kin has had success working with unregulated providers and reaching providers across economic conditions, including many low-income communities.

## Training Program

In 1999, All Our Kin established a training program designed to provide welfare participants with job opportunities in the child care field. Each year, six Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) participants interested in entering the child care field enroll in an intensive nine-month program to obtain a Child Development Associate's (CDA) degree. Program participants attend with their children and spend half the day in a participatory and interactive classroom setting. During the second half of the day, students care for their own children and those of other participants at an on-site lab school. Instructors model teaching techniques and apply lessons from the classroom. Following graduation, students either seek employment in a child care center or establish a licensed child care facility. At the program's onset, most students chose employment at center-based facilities, but more recently, about half of the students have opened family child care homes.

## The Family Child Care Network

All Our Kin established a family child care network<sup>10</sup> in 2002 to meet the needs of the broader family child care community, which includes providers from inner-city New Haven as well as the surrounding suburbs. Members must have at least one year of experience in family child care or an equivalent degree or training hours, and agree to work toward national accreditation with the National Association for Family Child Care (NAFCC). Family child care providers who do not meet these standards can become associate members while they work toward full membership. All Our Kin provides educational consultants who work with members towards the NAFCC credential. Members are also eligible for a number of free services, including evening and weekend child development classes, group meetings, technical assistance, and educational incentives and scholarships. The All Our Kin Family Child Care Network addresses many of the same issues and programs as other family child care networks around the country. Providers have the opportunity to meet with other family child care providers through monthly support groups and with regular home visits from an educational consultant. In addition, family child care providers meet other professionals and have access to training and higher education.

All Our Kin is notable because it addresses persistent barriers to improving family child care quality specifically for providers caring for low-income children, in addition to other providers. The network includes family child care providers from a wide range of backgrounds, from providers operating in New Haven's inner cities to the surrounding suburbs. All Our Kin began as a service for low-income families and has since branched out to include all providers. Now approximately three-fourths of providers in the network are caring primarily for low-income children. All Our Kin's success in developing an inclusive family child care network was due in part to their well-established reputation in the community through the training program. Staff at All Our Kin have developed several strategies for working effectively with child care providers from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds, including:

- ▶ **INVOLVING COMMUNITY MEMBERS FROM THE BEGINNING.** Before the Family Child Care Network was established, All Our Kin invited family child care providers to participate in focus groups. They presented different models for family child care networks and asked providers what would be most useful in the community.
- ▶ **BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS.** All Our Kin invests significant time in building relationships with providers. Staff members visit providers in the home for casual conversation, giving the provider a chance to voice concerns. Staff members get to know the provider, which helps them encourage her to reach her full potential. Meetings and workshops incorporate

<sup>10</sup> The family child care network is funded by the Community Foundation for Greater New Haven, Empower New Haven, the New Haven School Readiness Council, the United Way of Greater New Haven, and the Liman Fund at Yale Law School.

socialization time to allow providers to meet each other. In essence, the Family Child Care Network is designed to build trusting relationships that will motivate family child care providers to stay involved in the network and encourage other providers in the community to join.

- ▶ **INCLUSION.** All family child care providers are welcome to join the Family Child Care Network regardless of their ability to meet quality standards. The two levels of membership allow all family child care providers to work toward quality improvement, training, and networking with other providers. All Our Kin designs a unique quality improvement program for each network member. Staff are patient in working with providers and understand that it may take a substantial amount of time before a provider is ready to fulfill NAFCC requirements for accreditation.
- ▶ **ENCOURAGING PROVIDERS TO STRIVE FOR EXCELLENCE.** All Our Kin operates on the principle that all children need a quality care environment for healthy development. Staff members are very knowledgeable in child development and many have Master's degrees in the field. All network members must be committed to meeting NAFCC standards. High standards, however, do not preclude providers at all levels from participating in the network.

### The Family Child Care Toolbox Kit Licensing Project

In collaboration with a local school readiness board, All Our Kin distributes boxes to unregulated child care providers to guide them through the licensing process. The set of four boxes contains materials and guidelines for setting up a family child care business, from licensure to preparing the home for children (see Table 4). All Our Kin has a staff member responsible for identifying unregulated providers, distributing boxes, and assisting providers with the licensing process. Currently, 91 providers participate in the licensing program and 18 have already achieved licensure. While many community programs have difficulty identifying unregulated providers, All Our Kin has developed several program components that allow them to effectively serve these providers:

- ▶ **FINDING THE RIGHT STAFF PERSON.** Jessica Sager, Executive Director of All Our Kin, attributes much of the project's success to the calm and gentle manner of the staff person who recruits unregulated providers. She is able to quickly develop trust with participants and reassure them that their participation will not result in any legal repercussions. All Our Kin does not ask if participants are already caring for children illegally as not to make anyone uncomfortable or guarded.
- ▶ **ATTENDING COMMUNITY EVENTS.** All Our Kin regularly attends community events that draw large crowds. The boxes are on display for providers to examine; they contain a wide array of useful resources and serve as an incentive for participation.
- ▶ **INCLUSION.** Since all providers are welcome at Family Child Care Network events, many unregulated family child care providers are recruited for the Toolkit Box Licensing project when they participate in another event. Providers who hear about All Our Kin through flyers or friends and relatives come to events and want to become involved when they see the resources and social support available to members.

**TABLE 4:****All Our Kin Family Child Care Tool Kit**

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <p>Box 1:</p> <p><b>Getting Started . . .<br/>the Application Process</b></p>          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ License application</li> <li>✓ State regulations</li> <li>✓ Community resources</li> <li>✓ Fingerprinting materials</li> <li>✓ Loan information</li> <li>✓ Sample parent handbook</li> <li>✓ Professional development information</li> </ul>   |
| <p>Box 2:</p> <p><b>Second Step . . .<br/>Completing the Training Requirements</b></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ First aid/CPR training class information and posters</li> <li>✓ First aid kit</li> <li>✓ Calendar</li> <li>✓ Totebag</li> <li>✓ Subscription to NAEYC's Young Children Journal</li> </ul>  |
| <p>Box 3:</p> <p><b>Setting up the Environment</b></p>                                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Smoke detector</li> <li>✓ Fire extinguisher</li> <li>✓ Safety latches</li> <li>✓ Outlet plugs</li> <li>✓ Hand soap and gloves</li> <li>✓ Water thermometer</li> <li>✓ Lead paint information</li> <li>✓ Family child care home sign</li> </ul> |
| <p>Box 4:</p> <p><b>Preparing for the Children . . .<br/>Curriculum Tools</b></p>      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Literacy information</li> <li>✓ Children's picture books</li> <li>✓ Curriculum articles</li> <li>✓ Teaching materials</li> <li>✓ Playdough recipe</li> <li>✓ Resource Center information</li> </ul>  |

Source: All Our Kin (unpublished program materials)

## Culturally Diverse Populations

### Good Beginnings Never End Long Beach, California

As mentioned previously, the Good Beginnings Never End (GBNE) initiative visits family child care providers in their home to guide them in improving the quality of the home environment for optimal child development (See Chapter 3). While many programs offer home visits as a mechanism for improving quality, GBNE has been especially effective in working with immigrant and non-English speaking family child care providers in isolated communities. Home visits require a great deal of trust