



CHANGING THE FACE OF  
CHILD CARE & EARLY LEARNING IN

# NEWAYGO COUNTY



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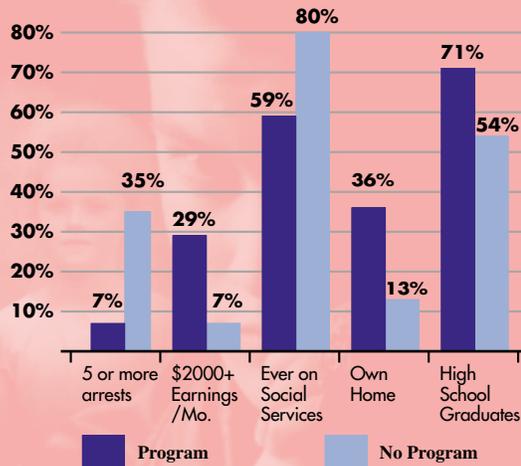
Rural Newaygo County’s 900 square miles include rolling forests and meandering rivers, and outlying communities that recently had the dubious distinction of offering the second-lowest number of licensed child-care providers of any county in the state. Today, Newaygo County boasts 87 new child-care sites offering “slots” to serve 719 children.



# QUALITY CHILD CARE CUTS CRIME

## High/Scope Perry Preschool Project—MAJOR FINDINGS AT AGE 27

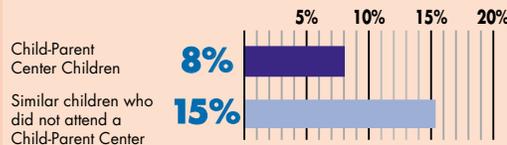
A 22-year study of the High/Scope Perry Preschool program showed that leaving at-risk children out of this program multiplied by five times the risk they would become chronic lawbreakers as adults. This study examined the lives of 123 African-Americans born in poverty and at high risk of failing in school. At ages 3 and 4, these children were randomly divided into a quality preschool program group and a no-program group.



## Quality Care = Fewer Arrests

More than 57 percent of Michigan mothers with children under the age of six are in the labor force. The good news is that quality child care can cut crime and violence.

### A Violent Arrest by Age 18



New research tracked over 900 children who had been enrolled in government-funded Child-Parent Centers while 3- and 4-year-olds. Compared with children left out of the program, the latter had 70 percent more violent arrests in their teens.

## Quality Care Costs Less in the Long Run

Failure to invest in quality child care now squanders billions in public funds to care for troubled youth and criminals.

### Educational Child Care Saves Money



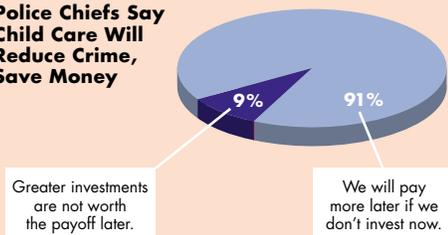
Even after accounting for inflation, the public saved over \$700 for every \$100 invested in a preschool and home visitation program.

## Police Chiefs Support Quality Care

Nine out of 10 police chiefs say that America could greatly reduce crime by expanding educational child-care programs and after-school programs. They agreed that we'll pay more later if we don't invest now.

Despite such evidence, Head Start is so underfunded that it serves only about two of 10 eligible children aged 0 to 5.

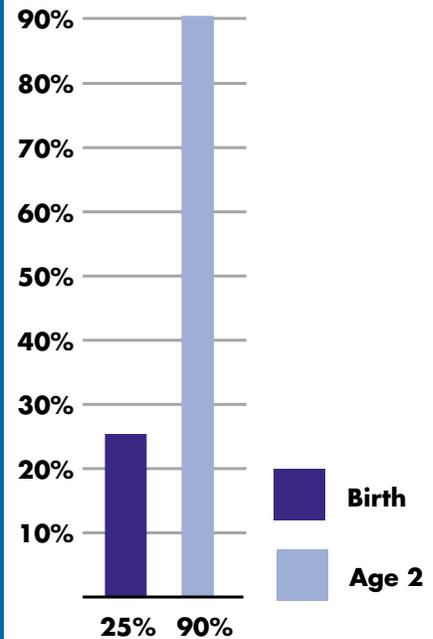
### Police Chiefs Say Child Care Will Reduce Crime, Save Money



## Infant Brain Growth: USE IT OR LOSE IT



Experience shapes brain tissue in the womb and early years. Completion of the brain is dependent on stimulation from the environment, and the kind of stimulation determines personality and capacity to learn. Neural paths not used by age 2 will die. Neural paths used will live. In Michigan, at least 20 percent of child care is actually detrimental to child development, and only 5 percent can be described as quality care.



Nine out of 10 agreed: "If America does not make greater investments in after-school and educational child-care programs to help children and youth now, we will pay far more later in crime, welfare, and other costs."



## FEELING LIKE A PROFESSIONAL

Child care was something Teresa Alexander intended to leave almost since the day she was so disappointed in her baby-sitter that she decided to take care of her children herself. She was certain she would leave child care when her children started school. That was five years ago and she's still doing it, a total of 12 years so far. One major reason is Joining Forces.

"It helped me tremendously," she readily admits. "With Joining Forces, I didn't feel like just a baby-sitter any more. I was running a business. I felt like a professional. I think Joining Forces gave me all that."

Teresa's group home is in White Cloud. A former member of the board for the Newaygo County Child Care Providers Association, she's very definite about the benefits that Joining Forces brought her. "It started with the quality standards. I saw these and knew this was exactly what I wanted when my kids were being taken care of."

She says that being a board member added to her sense of professionalism. In general, being part of the providers association made a tremendous difference in her life. "Because of the lending library I was able to get things for the kids I could never have afforded. And you could rotate things, always getting something new for them to work with."

"I also learned so much in the training. About kids with Attention Deficit Disorder, about brain development. Things I never even heard about before, even in college. It really helped us all stay up-to-date."

What's truly impressive about the Newaygo County Joining Forces child-care and early education effort is the level of professionalism in its provider network. "Before we came on board, there was a very loosely knit provider group that would meet occasionally," says Leslie Hindes, Newaygo County Joining Forces consultant. "Joining Forces helped them organize, achieve 501(c)(3) nonprofit status, and become a very active, professional organization. We've had as many as 95 percent of the providers in our community participating in this association, sharing information regularly through newsletters, monthly meetings, the Internet, and even putting on an annual child-care networking conference."



The association also made it possible to continue and expand a toy and learning resources lending library initiated by Joining Forces. It's grown so large that the lending library has moved four times to find enough space. The library gives providers learning tools to match learning goals. The Newaygo County Child Care Providers Association has taken over much of the responsibility for the library. It's staffed by provider volunteers, who track and care for the library's inventory of 5,000 items, including materials related to an innovative Newaygo County curriculum that was developed by Newaygo County teachers. "The curriculum meets national standards and includes activities and outcomes from pre-K through 12th grade."



"We have a booklet for providers that guides them through activities related to the curriculum," explains Denise Gasper, Joining Forces coordinator. "The lending library also has toys and other materials to help providers do the activities with their children to evaluate their learning readiness."

Quality child-care standards have created an energy of their own, and parents now often check to see if a child-care provider's licensing is current. "Joining Forces has really raised the level of professionalism to the point where it's part of our system, our culture," says Gasper.



It's all happened very much the way the Joining Forces team planned several years ago. "We're very much on target with all our goals for helping low-income families," says Hindes. She believes that's been possible because Newaygo County already had the relationships in place to get behind Joining Forces. She attributes that to "the MAC," the Newaygo County Multi-Agency Consortium. "The MAC just doesn't believe in barriers to change. Everybody is working toward the goal of helping the family and helping the child," says Hindes. "No one argues that something isn't in their job description. The MAC is not funded. Nobody gets paid. It's an unofficial and informal gathering of people who like to get things done."

The Joining Forces team went to school boards and made a pitch that child care was an early childhood intervention program that supports children to be better prepared to start school. The result was that while many school districts

didn't see child care as their mission, they were willing to provide linking facilities and child care within their school districts. "We now have before- and after-school care in every one of our five school districts."

A critical part of Joining Forces' success has been the support MAC people receive from their administrators. "The executive directors of the Family Independence Agency, of community mental health, of the health department, the school superintendents, and all our local agencies have given their front-line people the go-ahead to participate in meetings and serve on collaborative committees," says Gasper.

## SHORT-CHANGING MICHIGAN'S INFANTS

Newaygo County can point to many successes in developing a network of providers and raising public awareness of quality child care. But it readily admits to one important failure. It was forced to close its own infant/toddler room.

"We couldn't make it," admits Denise Gasper, with a mixture of anger and disappointment. "We wanted to walk the talk, but we couldn't keep it in the black so we had to close it. It was one of only two infant/toddler centers in Newaygo County. That's pitiful."

With the state requirement of four infants or toddlers to one licensed caregiver at all times, it was impossible to make ends meet. Even with no overhead. "It was a terrible thing to have to do," says Gasper, "yet we know it's happening all across the state, and the country. We expect people to work, but we're not helping them take care of their babies. Providers just can't make it on the current compensation level, and low-income parents can't afford what it costs."

Joining Forces has also developed a system for linking parents with providers. "We have a locally based, countywide resource and referral office that can match parents with providers in their area. Parents are given a printout that includes all the information they need about a provider to make an informed decision," adds Gasper. "Our Web site includes an e-mail link so we can contact parents to learn about their child-care needs and find a solution for them."

The success of the referral service results in part from the cooperative relationship that's developed between Joining Forces and the Child Care Coordinating Council (4C) office in Grand Rapids. "The involvement of 4C has really helped us achieve our objectives," says Gasper. "Newaygo County is distant from that office, and the amount of funding available for us is small, but we've worked together with 4C to create an effective program of provider support."



"The result has been a great partnership with 4C," says Gasper. "4C coordinates the larger training, education, and conference activities, and such programs as equipment grants."

The Fremont Area Community Foundation has also been very supportive of training and education for providers, and promoting child-care issues. "With funds from the Foundation, we've been able to stretch the 4C funds to broaden our referral services throughout the county, and to develop a mentoring program for our providers," says Gasper. "And, we have Jesi."





“Jesi” is Jessica Wimmer, a Joining Forces consultant who works closely with providers. “I try to visit four or five providers a month, in addition to attending association meetings and meetings of their board,” says Wimmer. She works in an advisory capacity, a very visible support person for providers. Wimmer also advocates for child care and the providers at meetings around the county, and represents their interests at the 4C office in Kent County.

The Joining Forces team is very confident that the emphasis on child care will remain important in Newaygo County. In part, this confidence stems from the systems and agreements amongst the various agencies, as the person doing the work is often funded from more than one source and the focus is on success for children. But it’s also the supportive atmosphere that’s second nature in Newaygo County—that willingness to make things work.



## LIGHTBULBS AND BLEEDING HEARTS

The owner/director of Newaygo’s “Small Impressions,” Chris Taylor has seen child care from many perspectives. She first worked in a center in the area that had 40 children, then at another with 140. She later became director of a center and began working on her Child Development Associate from Muskegon Community College. After she finished, she excitedly opened Small Impressions in February of 2000. Sometimes, it’s been a struggle.

“When we first started, enrollment fluctuated up and down. Lots of times we just didn’t have enough kids, but Joining Forces changed that a lot, by building community awareness about the importance of quality child care, and by helping refer parents to providers.”

She says awareness of quality care is at an all-time high, and parents are starting to ask questions they never asked before. “When I started out, they wanted to know three things—Do you have an opening? How much do you charge? And what do I have to sign to start them?” she remembers. “Now they are really starting to worry about what type of training your staff has. What type of ratios you run. Joining Forces has made them aware of what they need to ask.”

Another problem Chris encountered early on still remains: slow pay or no pay.

“There have been months where you just don’t get paid,” she says, shaking her head.



Chris and Ed Taylor

“You try to give parents a break when they can’t pay. You wait, hoping they will come up with the money. Child-care providers have what my husband refers to as bleeding hearts. They would rather care for the child and know they are getting the quality care than worry about the payment.”

While things have improved, Chris admits there are still frequent “bleeding-heart situations” where finances are a problem. Summers bring low enrollment, but at other times Chris and her husband, Ed, spend 17- and 18-hour days as they try to meet the varied schedules of parents. Also parents themselves, with a new baby and a toddler, Ed and Chris can’t help but be sympathetic to parental problems as well as the needs of the kids.

For Chris, the single strongest motivation that gets her through the tough times is knowing that her work with the Newaygo County Child Care Providers Association and the work at her center is focused on quality care for every child she and the other Newaygo County providers can reach.

“The reward is knowing that every day the children with me are receiving the best care I can possibly give them,” she says. “Most of all, though, I just love teaching these kids, to see their little lightbulbs come on. You can see it in their faces when they finally understand something.”

## JOINING FORCES

The Joining Forces initiative was launched in 1994 to change the face of child care and early learning in nine Michigan communities. The initiative brought together parents, providers, and other partners. Together with three private foundations in Michigan—Frey, Skillman, and W.K. Kellogg—these communities “joined forces,” working to increase the accessibility and affordability of quality care for low-income children.

Joining Forces sites have served as bridges between parents and providers, and between providers and state welfare agencies. Based in both urban and rural areas, the sites have taken on remarkably similar challenges. They have increased support for providers and parents, increased awareness of the importance of quality care, and leveraged additional local support. Further, this diverse group—child-care councils, school districts, community foundations, and a university—successfully created models with great potential to help other Michigan communities seeking child-care solutions.

## JOINING FORCES RESOURCE AND REFERRAL SIGNIFICANT PARTNERS

Dawn’s Christian Child Care Center  
District #10 Health Department  
Fremont Area Community Foundation  
Fremont Public Schools  
Grant Public Schools  
Hesperia Public Schools  
Insightful Concepts Inc.  
Kent Regional Community Coordinated Child Care (4C)  
Michigan Department of Consumer and Industry Services  
Michigan’s Children  
Newaygo County Career Tech Center  
Newaygo County Child Care Providers Association  
Newaygo County Community Services  
Newaygo County Day Care (Head Start)  
Newaygo County Family Independence Agency  
Newaygo County Intermediate School District  
Newaygo County Parents As Teachers  
Newaygo Public Schools  
Newaygo County Community Mental Health  
Newaygo County Multi-Agency Consortium  
Project Find/Early On  
The Ark Christian Preschool and Child Care Center  
Transitional Health Care Services  
W.K. Kellogg Foundation  
White Cloud Public Schools

## COST OF QUALITY CHILD CARE OUT OF REACH FOR MANY

- Child care for a 4-year-old in a child-care center averages \$4,000 to \$6,000 per year. Some centers charge \$10,000 or more per year. These are per-child costs.

The average cost of child care for a 4-year-old in an urban area center is more than the average annual cost of public college tuition in all but one state. In some cities, child care costs twice as much as college tuition.

- In Detroit, the average cost of center care for a 4-year-old is \$4,830. For a 12-month-old, \$6,268. In Baltimore, Maryland, the same costs are \$8,121 and \$12,978.

- The average salary of a child-care worker is less than \$15,000 per year.
- Currently, state and federal funds are so insufficient that only one out of 10 children from low-income families who are eligible receives child-care assistance.
- Many low-income families have little choice but to place their children in lower cost, often lower quality, care. As a result, too many children are cared for in unstimulating or even unsafe settings, depriving them of the full opportunity to learn, grow, and thrive.

Source: Children’s Defense Fund, 2000.  
[www.childrendefense.org](http://www.childrendefense.org).

### Joining Forces Resource and Referral

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