

# Fact Sheet



## Child Care and Children with Special Needs: Challenges for Low Income Families

### Objectives

Low income families face unique challenges in balancing work and family responsibilities. However, as experience with welfare reform grows, there is anecdotal evidence that the conflict for low income parents of children with special needs is more extreme. Faced with the often difficult task of finding suitable, stable child care for their special needs child, many parents are nevertheless forced by economic necessity and the pressures of welfare reform to join the labor force. Families living in rural areas face additional problems that compound these challenges, such as: transportation issues, a shortage of specialists and fewer child care options. The Institute for Child and Family Policy has been funded by the Child Care Bureau at the federal Department of Health and Human Services to learn more about the experiences of this vulnerable sub population, with a particular emphasis on the rural perspective. We are in the second year of the project. In the first year we conducted focus groups and in-depth interviews with low-income parents of children with special needs. A report on the emerging themes from this exploratory phase of the project will be published in June. We used this information to design our approach for the next research phase which we are implementing now. While our primary focus is on access to child care, we are also looking at the related issues of welfare reform, the impact on work force participation of having a child with special needs, and the issue of coordination of early intervention services with the child care system.

### Scope of Work

- Gather information directly from parents and guardians in Maine to learn about the challenges low income families face in balancing work and the care of their special needs child.
- Gather information to gain the perspective of caseworkers, child care providers and others who provide services to these families in three Maine communities.
- Develop final reports of our findings, and carry out dissemination strategies for their use by policy makers in bringing about policy reforms that will ease the challenges of these families and children and enhance their well being.

### Data Collection Methods

- Parent focus groups and interviews in three communities in Maine.
- Field study involving a review of policies and interviews with case workers, service providers and others who serve this population in three Maine communities.
- Statewide surveys of a random sample of parents and child care providers.
- Analysis of existing national data sets.

### Timeline

- Preliminary report on findings from qualitative research in Year One by June, 2003
- Parent & child care provider surveys –by August, 2003
- Field Study by September, 2003
- Analysis of national data sets by December, 2003
- Additional, follow-up parent focus groups and interviews by February, 2004
- Analysis, final report and dissemination activities by September, 2004

### Project Grantee

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