

Focus Group Protocol – Special Needs and Child Care

- ◆ Introductions, Ice Breaker
- ◆ Thanks for coming
- ◆ My name is.....
- ◆ The Muskie School of Public Service and ... are arranging these meetings. We're doing these discussions in Maine and Connecticut because we want to hear directly from parents about their experiences with finding child care for children with special needs or chronic illnesses. We also want to hear about your experiences getting special services for your child and how all of these issues have affected your employment.
- ◆ Confidentiality..... only interested in finding out about your experiences so that we can try and improve child care services for children with special needs or chronic illnesses.
- ◆ The Muskie School of Public Service at the University of Southern Maine will be writing the report. Offer to send copy
- ◆ Tape recording
- ◆ ... will be taking notes, ... will be observing.
- ❖ Researchers from the University of Southern Maine.
- ❖ May be contacting for interviews

We'll start by talking about child care and then talk about work and your family. Today, when I ask questions about your child, I will be referring to your child with special needs or with a chronic illness.

Describe all the different programs or care arrangements a special needs child in this age group could be in:

- Preschools at the local public school or elsewhere. These could be:
 - Special preschools only for children with special needs
 - Preschools that serve disabled and non-disabled children together (e.g. School Readiness programs)
 - Head Start, Early Head Start
- Friend, relative or neighbor taking care of the child either in the child's home or in theirs
- Day care centers
- Family Day Care Homes
- Elementary schools (Kindergarten or First Grade for this population)

- After school programs (either to cover the hours after elementary school or after a part-day preschool program)

- 1.) Who here has their child with special needs in one of these types of programs?
- 2.) What are the reasons you placed your child in one of these programs?

Listen for:

*Their parents work or go to school
Their parents need respite from caring for their special needs child
Their child's special needs require the help the program offers.
Their child is school age
Some combination of these reasons*

- 3.) How long did it take to find a program for your child?
- 4.) How many programs did you contact?
- 5.) Did any programs turn you down because of your child's special needs?
- 6.) How many times have you had to change your child's program and why?
- 7.) Is the program you've chosen for your child meeting your *child's* needs?

Listen for:

*Provider experience, support
Medication
Health and safety
Special services
Child's progress*

- 8.) Is the program you've chosen for your child meeting *your* needs?

Listen for:

*Flexibility
Respite
Cost
Transportation
Work disruptions
Reliability
Hours to match work hours*

- 9.) For those of you who don't have your child in any program, have you tried in the past to find a program? How have those experiences affected you? Your child?

10.) Does your child see a medical specialist or receive special services such as OT, speech therapy or a medical specialist?

- ◆ Where does your child receive these services?
- ◆ How does the schedule or location of these services affect your child, your schedule or your ability to work?
- ◆ If these services are provided somewhere other than at your child's program, does your child's therapists or medical specialist ever talk to the person who cares for your child?

11.) In what ways does having a child with special needs affect your ability to work?

Listen for:

Inability to work despite wanting to
Reduced hours
Nontraditional hours
Split shifts
One spouse working two jobs
Trouble with employers
TANF work requirements

Now let's spend some time talking about the effect of having a child with special needs on your family.

12.) How has having a child with special needs changed your life? The life of your family?

Listen for:

lessons it has taught them
joys
strengthening of family relationships
family stress
Stress from outsiders not understanding
financial difficulties
Child Protection Services
Lack of time for child, siblings

13.) If there was a single thing you could change to make it easier to care for your child with special needs, what would it be?