



# Hearing from Parents About Their Child Care Needs

## Coos Health and Wellness

In February of 2020, nine individual listening sessions were conducted with parents living in Coos Bay, North Bend, Brookings, and Hauser, Oregon (Coos and Curry counties) to learn about their experiences with, and needs for, child care in their community. The interview sessions were co-designed, planned, and conducted by researchers at OSLC Developments Inc., Portland State University, and Coos Health and Wellness. Eight parents were interviewed in English by phone, one mother responded to the questions in written form due to hearing loss. One parent was a person of color who reported also speaking Spanish at home. All parents have children with long-term healthcare needs and are receiving services through CaCoon, part of Coos Health and Wellness in Coos Bay. CaCoon is a program for families who have children with special healthcare needs, ages birth through 20 years of age.

### Their Ideal Child Care

Safety and trustworthiness were important for all family's final decisions. Parents wanted to know that children's needs would be met. They also want to meet the providers and feel comfortable with the facility. To feel trust, parents highlighted the importance of finding providers who were experienced in working with children with special health care needs. These parents emphasized that providers must be well equipped for handling situations, which might arise, that are related to their children's disabilities; for some, providers who could help with children's basic self-care (toilet training and feeding) was important. Other factors that were important for families included having flexible schedules, being affordable, and getting their transportation needs met.

**"I have a child with Autism and trying to find child care for him is difficult because not a lot of people are certified to be able to work with disabled kids like him."**

**"I need somebody who is experienced with children like him to be able to watch him."**

**"I was looking for a clean safe environment, looking to make sure there was enough staff. What types of things they teach the kids. Do they have the patience for a child with Autism? If staff is trained properly to deal with kids with hyperactivity or disabilities."**



## Supporting Learning at Home

These families reported a variety of ways that providers communicated with them about their child's progress and gave the family information and support that could help the child's learning at home. Only one parent indicated that the child's provider had not communicated with them about ways the parent could support the child's development. Some parents reported their provider gave them worksheets and specific suggestions about what they can help their child with, such as helping their child recognize the first letter of their name, writing their name, and handwriting skills.

Three parents' providers sent home information about how to help prevent tantrums and keep their bodies calm (self-regulation); other parents reported their providers encouraged the family to do things like helping their young children with potty training, talking, eating different foods, getting dressed, counting, and naming.

One parent had her father care for her children because she did not trust anyone, stating: **"this town is full of people who do drugs, so I only trust family."**

Although the majority of these parents expressed a preference for center-based care, two parents mentioned that their ideal location would be in their home—one adding "that way I know I could always look at the cameras I have set up all over always recording". Inclusive settings where parents could bring other siblings was also important for these parents.

Most of these parents wanted to have care during the work week, with all but two describing a preference for full day, even extended-care hours (6:00am to 6:30pm). Some also mentioned the need for irregular or flexible care hours to accommodate varying work schedules. One parent mentioned her provider offers 24/7 care and that this is very helpful. A desire for evening hours to allow parents to have "date night" was also expressed, perhaps reflecting the need for parental respite for these families.

## Benefits of Early Learning Programs for Children

These parents described the importance of having early learning providers who could support their children's learning and help them be ready for kindergarten. Parents reported that most of their providers do social-skills activities such as teach them how to introduce themselves, participate in circle time, teach them to be safe, eat together, be patient, and share. One parent specifically mentioned that her child's preschool helps the kids talk through melt downs, teaches them what they can do to get through it, to use their words, and help manage their feelings. There was consensus among these parents that social interaction (e.g., how to get along with other kids and adults) was their main priority.

**"Sending him to preschool (HS) was the best decision we made for him. I wish I would have known about it beforehand. I feel like he would have progressed so much if he were in it the whole time."**

Other things they hoped children would learn included: basic early learning skills such as manners, respect, shapes, colors, numbers, letters, playing with others, and outdoor activities. Parents with children experiencing specific types of disability suggested that having providers who could help with speech and who had skills in helping children navigate their own emotional and behavioral challenges was important:

**"My son, he's nonverbal, he's difficult but he's also very defiant in wanting to listen so what I would want is just him learning the basics, getting through everyday life. We're still working on that. That's been the hardest part."**

## Compromising for Child Care

All of the parents but one said that they had chosen not to work at some point because they could not find child care that they trusted or could afford. Complications included transportation and changes in their work schedule that could not be worked out with the provider. Another reported that it was not feasible for the second parent to work due to the high cost of the Employment Related Day Care (ERDC) copayment. Having multiple children that needed care was also a factor in choosing not to work and to provide the child care themselves instead.

**"I would try to work when their dad got home from like after 5 and I would be gone until 10 and when my hours changed, to go in a 2 or noon. I pretty much had to stop working because the child care and babysitters were going to be more than I was making out of my check, like more than I would even bring home."**

**"It's so hard to get in anywhere because there are so many low-income families, that the child care here is packed up. I want to go back to work but I also don't want to go back to work just to pay somebody to babysit and not have money left over to pay my bills."**

**"I don't remember what they quoted me because of our income it was basically all of our paycheck."**

About one half the parents said they felt they had to make compromises in what they were looking for, and ultimately either chose to care for children at home or ended up placing children in settings that were not ideal. The lack of affordable options in experienced, licensed-care settings was seen as a barrier to finding the kind of high-quality, trusting environment these families wanted.

**"A lot of them [providers] were not on the bus route, a lot of them cost way too much. It was weird it was like every person I would call would be least one of these problems, at least. It's like which one do I compromise? Which one do I choose to compromise, choose for a daycare provider? That was a nightmare."**

Several parents described negative experiences in care (one of which has since been closed):

**"He came home with fingerprint bruises on his arm. They didn't understand his different needs."**

**"We literally could not find reliable child care. We had our child care provider calling in sick and wanting more money. It became this really odd situation with money. It was like well, you need to pay me this much more. It was dirty, it's a very dirty subject here because the scandals, I hate to put it that way but it's true."**



## Challenges Finding Child Care

With the exception of one parent who reported extensive family support, all of these parents mentioned having varying degrees of difficulty finding child care. Two parents said that they literally could not find any care for their children experiencing disabilities. Challenges were related primarily to cost and a general lack of care options, as parents described many providers as not certified, trained, or willing to provide care to children experiencing disabilities. Parents talked about the lack of registered or certified providers in the area, and the experience of being put on long waitlists.

**"There's a lot of places that don't accept children with complications, I feel like when I call somewhere and get information on child care or daycare they get intimidated when I say I have a child with Down's Syndrome but my kid's a typical child."**

**"One of the child care facilities around here got shut down for abuse and neglect of the children. When you find out that this person is a new daycare opening up and they worked at that facility, it's like do we really you trust you? It was a scary time for us moms looking for it."**

**"It was hard, you know being a mom you always want the best for your child, kids with special needs are way more difficult to handle. My biggest things were that the classrooms were too big she wouldn't get that individual attention she needed. Either it was too expensive or it didn't have enough staff members to keep an eye on all the kids at once."**

## Information and Decision Making About Child Care

When looking for child care, most of the parents reported that they got information about child care providers from word of mouth from family, online reviews, and information gained from in-person observations. Other parents got the information about the provider through community agencies such as DHS, WIC, OHF, Coos Health & Wellness, and Coos County Mental Health. A few mentioned receiving information from their doctor's office, their ESD Family Coordinators, and from other parents with children with disabilities. Many of these parents relied on the internet and social media for recommendations and information:

**"Googling the reviews from the other parents was a really big help as well. When a parent goes through that [negative] experience of daycare, they're not going to want to send other kids there so for me listening to another parent voice was a milestone of that."**

**"Friends I have in the workplace, people who know other families with special needs children. I have a Facebook page that I'm on, The Autism Society of Coos County. They can really help out as far as finding child care in the area, I guess you can say word of mouth."**

Many parents, however, had difficulty finding and keeping consistent care with qualified or experienced providers even when they had information or connections to potential providers.

**"It was helpful that the 211 number, WorkSource Oregon gave us information on people in the area but they were people who weren't accepting Special Needs. It would be helpful if they could update their registry of providers' references and also the provider's cost information."**

**"CPS, DHS, or WIC would be a really good resource for child care. They should be able to have a list of people that are on their payroll. We have no resources here we don't have a link. That would really help people."**

## Experiences Being Asked to Leave Care

Only one parent reported having had this experience, expressing that she had to find another provider due to the provider not having enough disability training. The remaining participants did not share this experience, although many of them remarked that this was likely because they chose not to enroll their child with providers who were not trained to work with their children experiencing disabilities.

## Experiences of Discrimination or Bias

In response to the question about whether they felt their provider created opportunities to highlight their family background and traditions, these predominantly White parents either said it was not something that was ever done or thought of—nor was it relevant to their family or that their provider recognized their child's birthday, Christmas, or Thanksgiving holidays as examples of family culture. One exception to this was a parent whose caregiver was the child's grandfather, who: "respects what I want for my kids. We are Indian and African American, and Mexican. When he is cooking, making tacos, he teaches my son about this."

Two families felt that they had been treated in a way that was disrespectful of themselves or their family culture. One of these families was a Spanish-speaking mother from a Latinx background; the other described feeling disrespected when her child's teacher contacted CPS instead of asking her about a concern she had for the child.

**"When he went to the last preschool he will never go to again, they only focused on White/Caucasian. Like the posters are only White people. A lot of the things in the classroom are focused on White, in the books: White kids."**

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