

BUILDING AND IMPROVING CHILD CARE SYSTEMS
THROUGH
COMMUNITY-BASED CHILD CARE RESOURCE AND REFERRAL

GUIDANCE FOR POLICY MAKERS AND COMMUNITY LEADERS

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF CHILD CARE RESOURCE AND REFERRAL AGENCIES

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MAKING CHILD CARE WORK FOR FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES THE VISION AND MISSION OF CHILD CARE RESOURCE AND REFERRAL

For the past twenty-five years, child care resource and referral (CCR&R) agencies nationwide have provided the child care infrastructure for communities. The National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies and leadership in local CCR&R agencies and state networks have defined the mission of child care resource and referral as follows:

To offer services and programs that make child care work for families and communities.

Specific services for families, child care providers and the community are the CORE of each CCR&R. In addition, CCR&R agencies have created and added new programs to meet specific needs of families in their communities following the direction and vision of local leaders and planners. This paper provides background information and operating principles for states and communities seeking to establish and infrastructure for their child care system.

The CORE services are complementary. When each service is carried out in concert with the other services, they build and improve the child care system. Therefore services provided by CCR&R agencies must include at least the following four CORE activities:

1. **Supporting families in their most important roles of nurturing their children and balancing the demands of family and work.** Each day in communities across the nation, CCR&R parent counselors plug into the "heartbeat" of parents' child care needs, listening to parents' concerns and priorities and helping them to find child care. Supporting parental choice is the essence of the CCR&R referral service philosophy. "Public" CCR&R agencies must serve families of all incomes, in all stages of their careers and child rearing, those leaving the welfare rolls, as well as those with the most evolved skills and career demands, etc. CCR&Rs also provide services to families regardless of the type of child care used – centers, preschools, family child care homes, relatives, etc.
2. **Data collection,** compiling, analyzing and sharing information with parents, child care providers and communities. This data can be critical to public planning and new program development. Policy-makers, corporate and philanthropic sectors, researchers and others rely on CCR&R information for policy efforts and initiatives to expand and improve child care. It is anticipated that CCR&R data will be standardized nationally in the near future and that local programs providing CCR&R services will cooperate in this effort. CCR&R databases must include current and complete information on child care providers -- schedules, ages cared for, fees and much more data to effectively help parents who are seeking care.
3. **Supporting individuals and programs that care for children.** CCR&R develops programs that expand and strengthen the child care delivery system making it more responsive to family needs. CCR&R addresses the diverse challenges facing parents, such as:

- **Availability** of care - by documenting service gaps, recruiting child care providers, assisting the start-up of new businesses and programs, and helping others to expand services;
 - **Quality** - by offering enhancement activities including education workshops, courses, toy and resource libraries, technical assistance, linkages to accreditation, support groups; and
 - **Affordability** - by leveraging additional resources to help parents pay for quality care, conducting market rate surveys, presenting data on the true cost of care and promoting increased compensation for child care providers.
4. **Building connections in communities and states.** CCR&R agencies actually create community partnerships to encourage efforts that improve the shape and services of child care. They bring their expertise about child care to these partnerships. CCR&R programs participate in community planning where they provide data and analysis on child care and parent concerns. They also work with local and state coalitions to improve services and resource allocation, and connect their efforts to those of higher education and training institutions involved in the professional development of child care providers.

Assisting **employers**, CCR&R contracts with employers for special referral and counseling services to the employees. They provide consultations on child care planning to the employers, and develop new forms of care – such as back-up care – to meet workforce needs. They encourage employer-funded subsidy programs and employer sponsored parenting seminars.

Local **media** find CCR&R programs to be a ready source of information, contacts, and parent and provider perspectives for the preparation of news stories.

CCR&R is the key source of data for **decision makers** and a critical point of information exchange on child care strategies at the state and local level. CCR&R's data from its daily contact with parents and child care providers in local communities is the only comprehensive child care information available to policy makers and planners. CCR&Rs have been effective in promoting and implementing the concept that child care requires the involvement of all stakeholders in the community to enhance the child care system.

CCR&R is a national model for improving the availability, quality and affordability of child care for all children in communities. The National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies supports state and local efforts to create CCR&R systems which utilize the criteria from this paper.