

**Greater Raritan One-Stop Childcare Brainstorm Session facilitated by
Fernandel Almonor, Greater Raritan One-Stop Operator**

Debrief

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Attendees:

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Brainstorm Minutes:

- I. Greater Raritan One-Stop Operator Introduction (Fernandel)

Objective: Facilitate a solutions-based discussion about childcare solutions for One-Stop customers in Somerset and Hunterdon counties resulting in a viable strategy.

- II. One-Stop Partners define their childcare challenges and how they affect outcomes.

Work First New Jersey (Aminah): Is a mandated program for clients receiving cash assistance (GA and TANF). Participants are mandated to be in the program until employed. They work closely with the Community Childcare Solutions in Somerset, providing referrals. If a client becomes noncompliant with the program, childcare stops. Biggest challenge is the limited childcare options in the Somerset area. Especially difficult for clients with special needs children. Clients without transportation are unable to take advantage of childcare resources. Limited public transportation in this county compounds the issue.

Employment Services (Poo Lin): ES is part of WIOA. Title III, focused on helping clients get back to work. Supports the unemployed, under employed and special populations. Retention challenges are affected by lack of childcare options; it's also compounded by lack of reliable transportation options.

Career Training Services (Monica): CTS relies on Community Childcare Solutions and Norwescap for childcare supportive services - they are the experts in this area and have the most up to date information.

CTS Childcare Challenges

1. Childcare is a significant expense for working parents, regardless of income.
2. The fewer resources a family has in terms of income for childcare or extended family support for "free" childcare assistance, the greater the challenge.
3. Childcare is out of reach for many folks working to re-engage with the workforce employed in entry level paying jobs, as the cost of daycare often is equivalent or exceeds their income.
4. Cost/benefits analysis done by many single parent low-income wage earners is to not re-enter the workforce until children are of school-age – turn to public assistance for financial support until then.
5. Cost/benefits analysis done by low and middle-income wage earners with two working parents is to have one parent, usually the woman, remain at home to provide childcare until children are of school age. This impacts lifetime earnings potential for the stay-at-home parent who must sacrifice a career or defer a career due to childcare costs. This leads to overall earning suppression compared to their counterparts who did not have to leave the workforce to care for children.
6. Childcare is not always located near housing, leading those without cars or near public transportation to have another barrier to childcare, even if it is affordable (finding transportation from home to childcare and then from childcare to work and get to work on time; do the reverse at the end of the day to pick up before childcare closes and/or charges additional fees for late pick up).

III. Group Discusses Challenges and Solutions

Mary Jane DiPaolo

Post COVID there's been an increase in federal block grant subsidies (additional \$300 per child and \$150 for part time child). A child receiving subsidies can enroll with 75% of providers.

Infant care ratio is 4 to 1.

State recently increased childcare grant subsidies, Thriving by Three and Quality Program.

Universal Pre-K, every year more school districts are picking up 3-year-olds and expanding program reach.

[Community Child Care Solutions](#) has a plethora of resources and services to support community childcare needs.

Childcare is in crisis. Staff shortage because of low pay. Many providers suffer from lack of staffing.

Aminah Reeves

WFNJ is on a month-to-month contract. Depending on the attendance of parents, childcare will be extended the next month. If a parent is noncompliant without good cause, then their contract is pulled. This can cause issues with childcare providers because payment/consistent attendance is uncertain. Giving open slots to working parents over WFNJ parents is sometimes preferable. This issue further limits childcare options for our customers.

Mary Jane DiPaolo

Aminah's point is compounded because in Somerset and Hunterdon you're also competing with corporate slots. Corporate slots usually pay in advance. It's tough competition.

Liz Bilder

As a center director, I noticed many companies didn't want to be bothered with subsidy children. Previously if the child didn't attend, they'd deduct the payment. Not sure if centers know post COVID the subsidies increased and now centers are paid if a child is absent.

Amanda Modale

Working with childcare facilities. High demand for staff but low compensation. Employers desperate to fill positions. Employers legally aren't permitted to ask if applicants have childcare or transportations. Despite legal protection against these inquiries, they're still factored into some evaluations.

AOA WFNJ Customer

Single mom with 4 children. Recently started a business. Childcare is very difficult to navigate. Also has a special needs child. There are limited resources available to support her childcare needs. Hoping to share her insights and learn

more about available resources. Where's the cost-effective reliable childcare in this area? So many challenges in finding the right care.

Patricia Berhan

Asked about after school programs to support some of AOA's childcare needs. Does the school have any support on-site?

AOA WFNJ Customer

The school programs don't open early enough to meet her childcare needs. Has to take her children to 3 different schools that are considerable distance apart. Aftercare is primarily a babysitting service lacking early development education. Would prefer something more educational and beneficial for the child. For parents without cars it's even more challenging.

Liz Bilder

COVID has shortened operation hours for many providers. Now it's hard to find a center open past 6pm.

I think it would be extremely helpful if families knew which providers have open spots in each particular age group. I am not sure if there is truly a lack of available spots or if parents simply don't know where they exist. It is time consuming to call or email providers. In many other industries, this information is very obtainable, for example, if you are booking a flight, you can see how many seats are left and where they are on the plane. Why can't families see which providers have space for their child(ren)? The technology is there, we should use it!

Other than that, I think family child care could be better utilized and encouraged to provide cost-effective child care. It allows parents to stay home with their own child, (effectively solving their own child care issue,) be an entrepreneur / business owner, earn a living wage and providing a much needed service to the community.

Monica Mulligan

There's a cost associated with Aftercare that creates a barrier for customers lacking the necessary financial resources. Even if a child is enrolled in a public school, there's a separate expense for Aftercare. It's less expensive than daycare but there's still a cost.

Mary Jane DiPaolo

Family childcare is an option, becoming a registered childcare provider. Can watch up to 5 children in their home. Can go to a childcare resource and referral agency in your prospective county to register.

Amanda Krause Discala

United Way started the United In Care program after the pandemic. They started small gathering essential data around the childcare issue. Next 3 years they're expanding into Somerset. They provide subsidies and tuition assistance supporting hub centers numerous ways. It's been a great pilot, looking to expand throughout NJ. [United Way In Care Program](#)

Fernandel Almonor

How do we address the transportation challenges that compound the childcare issue?

AOA WFNJ Customer

Hillsborough has a transportation program that supports transport to childcare centers. It can be a good model for Greater Raritan.

Paul Grzella

Mentioned the special needs grant the GRWDB recently submitted, still in review. It has a transportation component providing a bus dedicated to support WFNJ client childcare needs.

AOA WFNJ Customer

Asked if there will be aides on the bus.

Paul Grzella

He agreed to look into providing aides if the grant proposal is accepted. Having aides is a legal requirement.

Patricia Berhan

Is there an initiative to provide school vans for childcare transport?

Monica Mulligan

It's an issue of funding. Childcare facilities aren't going to pay for transportation.

Amanda Modale

Working with school districts desperate for drivers. There's a significant unmet demand.

Paul Grzella

Has a good friend working who's a bus driver making \$30 per hour. Middlesex County has a pilot program providing busing for \$3 per ride only serving New Brunswick.

Mary Jane DiPaolo

The \$3 a ride vans are rampant in New Brunswick. It works but the vehicles require more maintenance attention.

Karen Araujo

Many mothers want to stay at home, provide emotional support to their children. We should consider providing more work at home opportunities and promote home based/ family childcare training. Also suggested the [Au Pair Program](#).

Mike Frost

It's ultimately about what this society wants to value and what it doesn't. We as a society should make a strong commitment to the care of our children. This is about legislation, ballot box and funding. A big question is who should pay for these entitlements. It's a both ends solution, we should "do this" and support each other and also work with elected officials to reprioritize funding for childcare.

Mary Jane DiPaolo

Mentioned a legislation stating 7% of everyone's income should go to childcare.

Monica Mulligan

Emphasized it's important for people to vote in order to achieve significant change.

AOA WFNJ Customer

Important for politicians to focus on job creation. Important to utilize resources we already have. Use college students looking for credit. Use people looking for work, put them to work in childcare to meet staffing needs.

Jennifer Daly

We should consider that childcare providers aren't babysitters. They're early education professionals. Must consider how to maintain that necessary level of professionalism.

Aminah Reeves

Somerset is one of the richest counties in NJ. Tax funds need to be better allocated. We should consider partnering with state university early education programs. Van service paid through county and parents, collective contributions to fund the service. It'd pay for driver, vehicle maintenance and aide. Many unemployed, this could provide a viable opportunity for them too. This initiative would need vision and commitment. It's time for action, put the good ideas forth.

Morris County has a collective plan, one school bus transports children from 7 schools this could be a great model for Somerset.

A mass exodus of those leaving the educational system. There's an opportunity to recruit more child providers.

Aminah Reeves

Suggested engaging with RBCC Child Care Department.

Mary Jane DiPaolo

Mentioned they currently have a partnership in place with RBCC.

Patricia Berhan

Has been doing financial coaching, it's an extension of childcare issues. Explained and promoted [Lifelong Learning Accounts Program](#). She's a point of contact for the program. Program can provide necessary funds to support childcare and transportation needs. Currently accepting referrals.

Monica Mulligan

CTS has referred Somerset customers to the Lifelong Learning Accounts Program.

Patricia Berhan

Acknowledged Somerset referrals.

Monica Mulligan

Human Services Counsel (Somerset and Hunterdon) should receive our findings as part of the next steps.

Mike Frost

It has to be a both ends solution plan. Regardless of mandate, this is an important issue that needs to be addressed at multiple levels.

Fernandel Almonor

Next steps, a multifaceted plan will be devised based on the brainstorm. It will be shared with partners and others in childcare resource management spaces.

Jeanne Cassano

Offered to research and provide Universal Childcare information.

Brainstorm Summary/ Findings

Challenges Identified

1. Childcare staffing shortages due to low compensation.
2. Some parents want to stay home with infants/toddlers but need to maintain adequate income to survive.
3. Stay at home parents losing key earning potential years.
4. One-Stop customers competing and losing to corporate childcare slots.
5. Too many residents unaware of helpful childcare supportive services and subsidies.
6. Lack of quality/reliable childcare options for low-income residences.
7. Childcare seems to be a government low priority. Not enough funding to adequately support community needs.
8. Lack of adequate public transportation compounds the issue.
9. System feelings of hopelessness around the childcare crisis.

Childcare Resource Shared

[Thrive by Three Grant](#)

[Universal Preschool](#)

[Child Care Assistance Program](#)

[New Jersey Cares for Kids Subsidy](#)

[United Way In Care Program](#)

[Grow NJ Kids](#)

[Lifelong Learning Account](#)

71 Childcare facilities in local Area (see attachment)

Federal Block Grant

[Au Pair Program](#)
[Lifelong Learning Accounts Program](#)

Proposed Goals

The collective agreed that a multifaceted strategy is required to adequately address our childcare crisis.

Suggested Goals:

1. Help One-Stop customers desiring to be stay-at-home parents to get certified to start home-based childcare businesses. Implement an extensive registered home childcare provider drive.
2. Discover and promote stay at home employment opportunities.
3. Implement a transportation component with aides that provides year-round subsidized transportation to and from childcare facilities.
4. Consolidate/simplify communication of all applicable childcare subsidies. Ensure the resources are consistently shared with customers.
5. Outreach and partner with local childcare providers to ensure slots are consistently available to One-Stop customers.
6. Effectively share enrollment information for local home based and established childcare providers.
7. Communicate childcare brainstorm findings with local government officials and counsels.
8. Work with United Way to expand United In Care into Somerset and Hunterdon.
9. Partner with state university early education programs to help meet staffing needs for local childcare providers.
10. Effectively promote and refer customers to [Lifelong Learning Accounts Program](#).
11. Follow up on GRWDB grant proposal to support childcare transport van.

One-Stop Priority List:

1. Consolidate/simplify communication of all applicable childcare subsidies and supportive services. Ensure the resources are consistently shared with customers.
2. Follow up on GRWDB grant proposal to support childcare transport van.
3. Effectively promote and refer customers to [Lifelong Learning Accounts Program](#).
4. Work with United Way to expand United In Care into Somerset and Hunterdon.