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Survey Results: Child Care Struggles Flow Over into the Workplace

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If you have a young one in daycare while you're at work, you know the struggles that come along with it. Not only is it expensive, but sometimes, it could mean you'll have to miss work, and maybe even not get paid. In this economy, that doubles the stress.



The results of a survey just released by Charlottesville-based group Smart Beginnings says that struggle also impacts employees when they're on the job.

On the Net: Smart Beginnings

Thirteen employers in Charlottesville and Albemarle County made the survey available to their employees. More than 50 percent of 700 employees who voluntarily took a survey on child care concerns said they've missed work for an issue at some point.

Survey results go further to show that the number one concern about child care for working parents is the cost. Day care averages \$140 a week, per child, and just under 50 percent of parents say they drop their children at daycare while they're at work.

"We asked for additional comments, you didn't have to. We had over 51 additional comments. Statements that when childcare is unreliable they have to leave work because they don't know what's going on. And it's also even more significant now that there's a lot of downsizing going on. There's even less employees taking care of businesses so employee productivity is even more important right now," explained Smart Beginnings Director Miriam Rushfinn.

Smart Beginnings says it's starting to provide options on how to help with affordable child care including references in on-site newsletters.

Reported by Liz Nagy



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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 26, 2009

Child Care Needs Impact Employees' Work

CHARLOTTESVILLE, VA -- Smart Beginnings, a local public/private school readiness initiative, has released the results of a survey on child care options from over 700 employees at more than a dozen local employers. Survey results indicate that child care issues have a big impact on absenteeism and productivity in the workplace. The survey asked working parents about the costs and availability of child care and their perspective on balancing the care of young children and a job.

Peggy Echols, Vice President of Operations at State Farm Insurance, and a member of the Smart Beginnings initiative, was the first employer to survey staff. "State Farm has always looked at the education of our children as a workforce issue," Echols said. "And, we know education starts with quality child care. When we surveyed our employees we confirmed that we need to do more to assure access to affordable quality care, not only to secure our future work force, but to provide peace of mind for the moms, dads, and grandparents that currently work for us."

The lack of child care options has an impact on employers, with 62% of employees noting that child care problems have an impact on their work schedules. Over half (52%) of those responding have missed work to handle a child care issue.

Cost was stated as the number one problem in finding child care. The respondents cited 1) cost, 2) lack of openings and 3) (tied) limited hours and low quality of care as their primary concerns. Only 14% reported encountering no problems in finding child care.

Fifty percent of respondents reported that finding child care was very or somewhat difficult. Nearly half (46%) of employees utilize child care centers, while 29% use a family member and 20% utilize home day care providers.

Tim Hulbert, President of the Charlottesville Regional Chamber of Commerce, notes that this is an important business issue. "Child care and early childhood education are critical, central workforce issues, and to have the workforce that we need today and tomorrow demands that we address them now. The Smart Beginnings initiative gives this community a head start on meeting this challenge head on."

Many employees responded with additional comments, including:

"The cost (of child care) is just too much and I can't afford it and because of that, I feel my child won't get the early education she deserves to get her ready for school!"

"Many jobs now require time outside the 9-5pm job; providers are hard to find."

"I was dismayed ...that there was not a greater focus on quality early childhood education. There are only a handful of nationally accredited centers."

"It's very difficult finding available, affordable child care. Our first child care option had very frequent turnover; our second childcare option was very high quality but extremely expensive."

These survey findings on local child care needs and the impact on the workforce will be included in Smart Beginnings' upcoming report on the state of local school readiness, to be released later this spring.

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