



# The Economic Downturn

## The View from America's Child Care Centers

The challenges brought by national economic decline include families' struggles to afford the basics of housing, rising food costs, and high-quality, affordable early care and education programs. Parents are less able to afford their usual child care options, and are pulling their children out of these good programs. As unemployment increases and salaries, hours and wages go down at all kinds of jobs, the child care industry is directly impacted.

The challenge is perhaps best explained through the stories of ECEC members across the country:

*We used to have several parents who would drop off their child for school readiness programs. Now with the economy the way it is I have been told it is a "luxury" and they need to cut back.*

*-Center Director in Roseville, CA*

*More parents are removing their children from care due to financial reasons. Not only does this affect the families, but also center owners and employees who depend on our jobs to care for our own families. I think too many people overlook the fact that without childcare many, many people across the U.S. would be unemployed.*

*-Child Care Worker, Gainesville, FL*

*We have a parent who is getting her hours cut to three days a week so she takes her daughter to work with her so that she can use the money she pays for child care to buy groceries. Some families are taking their children to other family members because they can't afford child care. In some instances we have heard that a parent has kept an older sibling home from school to care for a younger sibling.*

*-Center Director in Las Vegas, NV*

*We are seeing more and more families lose their child care assistance and have nowhere to turn for help. We have had to downsize and consolidate 2 of our centers. Hopefully it will turn around soon. I would hate to have to lay off people.*

*-Center Director, Milton, MA*

*I have a family who has three children, the youngest is a toddler, and the oldest just started Kindergarten. All three children have been with us since infancy. Mom had been receiving Third Party Assistance for many years, but she no longer receives the assistance so will be unable to pay for her three children to continue attending full time at our center. She has enlisted the help of her mother, who is elderly, to watch at least the youngest and possibly the oldest and has decided he will probably continue to keep the middle child, a PreK student here with us full time. She truly values preschool education but going from paying \$200 per week to almost \$700 per week is simply not in her budget at this time.*

*-Center Director in Virginia Beach, VA*

*Our infant room was fully booked until August 2009. A month ago, all but one parent on the list informed us that they will be taking their infants to a neighbor or grandparent. We were left holding an empty bag! We request parents to give us two weeks notice when disenrolling their child, but that doesn't work when parents lose their jobs without a two weeks notice. Centers and parents need help. Parents need subsidy especially if they've lost a job. Child care centers make that first and critical impact in a child's life.*

*-Center Director, Pasadena, MD*

*Due to the loss of jobs in our area, enrollment has declined and we have had to cut our teachers hours. Many are no longer eligible for health insurance because they do not work enough hours to qualify. This also affects their own children who also lose the health insurance.*

*-Center Director in San Bernadino, CA*

*We've had several long-term families withdraw children due to a parent's loss of job in the computer industry. It is shattering to the family to go from upper middle class to barely making ends. Often they worry how they will transition back into the workforce without quality child care.*

*-Center Director in Dallas, TX*

*Our enrollment has dropped drastically. We had a waiting list for most of our classrooms, but currently we have classrooms that all need enrollment. Parents are being laid off from work, some are having their wages cut, and others simply are trying to save money any way they can by having friends and family care for their children. As a small business owner I hope that we can stay open.*

*-Center Director, Broomfield, CO*

*In December, we lost eight children to parental job loss in a single week. As a result we are having to cut staff hours.*

*-Center Director, Suwanee, GA*

*I had one family at my center with a sixth grader, a second grader and a two year old. When mom lost vouchers she was forced to withdrawal her two older children and have her 11 year old watch her seven year old before and after school. I lost three families in the last month due to the cost of gas, food and their mortgage. In the last month the county has put a freeze on vouchers. Due to this subsidy freeze we are unable to enroll any more voucher children and our enrollment has continued to decline. My teachers are now all working 25-30 hours per week versus the 40 hours per week they used to work.*

*-Center Director in Frederick, MD*

*The other issue we really need to consider is the child care industry's declining enrollment causing us to cut back on our staff's hours. We can't afford to pay people when there are few kids in the centers. I heard over and over about staff losing their insurance or their own state assistance due to their declining hours, about their struggle to support their families as well. The child care industry is a significant employer - primarily of single mothers and minority women who likely can't survive fluctuations in their hours.*

*-ECEC Board Member*

*When the parents get laid off we end up having to write off their tuition because they can't pay the balance. They are also looking for child care options that are less expensive and lower quality, because they have no choice. We have been cutting staff hours because our enrollment has dropped 30%, our staff are struggling to pay their bills and are losing their insurance.*

*-Center Director in Grand Rapids, MI*

*We had a parent who works for a mortgage company come to pick her baby up last week in tears. She shared with us that her company told everyone that day was their last day of work due to the economic crisis. She told us she can't afford child care while job hunting and is worried that when she finds a new job she won't be able to find care for her baby.*

*-Center Director in Dallas, TX*

*I am a director at a child care program where I offer care for children from 6 weeks-12 years of age. I have lost 8 children within the last week because their parents have lost their jobs. Do the children of these parents deserve to have their lives jolted too because the parents lost their jobs? Please don't take away the one and only stable thing in most of the children's lives that I can and do provide for them.*

*-Center Director, Canal Winchester, OH*

*We have parents who have to leave because they simply cannot afford our rates. They are doing so with tears in their eyes. It breaks my heart and the rest of my staff as well. I am unable to lower my rates because I have bills to pay and employees that I need to make sure that I can keep. Do we really want to take away the small businesses in our country?*

*-Child Care Director, Frankfort, KY*

*For the past eighteen months, we have seen a downturn in enrollment. Parents started losing their jobs and their homes, and started taking their children out of child care. Some parents are even allowing children as young as 7 years old walk home or to neighbor's home, where there is no one at home. Our children are being put in dangerous situations all because there is no funding for child care. We need jobs for parents and we need funding for child care as parents cannot work without child care.*

*-Center Director, Fort Lauderdale, FL*