
Friends, Family and Neighbor Providers- Invisible Backbone of Support for Parents

The California Child Care Resource and Referral Network recently released the 2015 California Child Care Portfolio, which reports the availability and affordability of child care in California¹. While 63% of children ages 0-12 have all parents in the labor force, there are only enough licensed child care slots, including centers and family child care homes, to provide care for 25% of California's children. Even if a family obtains one of these coveted slots, the cost of one preschool-aged child in a center can take up half of a minimum wage earner's income. Not only is this unaffordable, the amount of flexibility offered is often unfeasible. Many low-wage jobs don't follow a standard Monday through Friday 9AM-5PM schedule, and only 2% of licensed child care centers and 39% of family child care homes offer non-traditional hours (evening, weekend, or overnight care).

When piecing together the parts to create a cohesive child care plan for their children, working families need to find flexibility in one of three places: scheduling in the workplace, help with child care responsibilities at home, or in their child care arrangement. Flexibility in the workplace (modifications to the time, location and/or manner in which an employee works) is rare, and even rarer for those in low-income jobs. Many low-income positions are often on-call and without a predictable schedule. When there isn't family available to help with flexibility at home, families must seek flexibility with their child care provider. This is why license-exempt care (also referred to as informal care, family friend and neighbor care, kith and kind care, and relative care) is the most common type of nonparental child care.²

In California, a caregiver is considered exempt from licensing if they are a relative of the children in care, or if they are caring for the children of only one family besides their own children³. While license-exempt care is used across all socioeconomic groups, families with lower-incomes are more likely to rely on it. Since their jobs are less likely to follow reliable schedules and offer flexibility. For parents with limited options at work or at home, access to informal child care is what enables them to seek a path towards economic self-sufficiency.

License-exempt providers vary in their experience with caring for children, their relationship to the family, and whether they are paid. While grandparents are the most common type of license-exempt provider⁴, some are nannies or babysitters and consider this their profession, and some are friends

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1. "2015 California Child Care Portfolio." *California Child Care Resource and Referral Network*. November 2015. <https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/rnnetwork/pages/204/attachments/original/1447951101/California_11-18-15_FINAL.pdf?1447951101>
 2. "Informal Caregivers Research Project: Characteristics, networks, and needs of informal caregivers and parents in California." *Mathematica Policy Research*. April 2015.
 3. California Health and Safety Code § 159.66(a), California Education Code § 8358(a).
 4. "Who's Minding the Kids? Child Care Arrangements: Spring 2011." *U.S. Census Bureau*. April 2013. <<https://www.census.gov/prod/2013pubs/p70-135.pdf>>

helping out a family in need. Along with affordability and flexibility, many parents prefer license-exempt providers because they know and trust them, and their culture and language often match that of the family's.

Trustline, California's comprehensive background check, offers parents a measure of security about their license-exempt provider. It's available to all license-exempt providers and is required of those receiving child care subsidies, except grandparents, aunts and uncles. Regardless of the provider's background and experience, according to the Informal Caregiver's Research Project, the majority of license-exempt providers have a desire to increase the quality of care they provide and are seeking resources such as learning materials, information on child development and health and safety, and developmentally appropriate activities for the children in their care. Additionally, many license-exempt providers feel isolated, are lacking support networks, and would like to be connected with other providers.⁵

Although license-exempt child care workers fill an important role in working families' lives, they often receive less funding and support than licensed child care centers and licensed family child care homes. Despite the fact that license-exempt care is less formal, there is a reason so many parents choose to use it, as it fills a need licensed care often doesn't. In addition to providing more flexibility and being more culturally and linguistically familiar, families often choose exempt care due to the unaffordability of licensed care. About half of children with working parents are in license-exempt care⁶ and the majority are infants and toddlers⁷, so it's essential that children and families be met where they are and support is provided both to license-exempt providers, as well as parents seeking child care.

Child Care Resource and Referral agencies (R&Rs), funded by the California Department of Education and available in every county, are situated in a prime position to meet both of these needs. Two of the primary goals of R&Rs are to support parents in finding child care that best fits their needs, and to support child care providers in all settings offer high-quality care. Trained child care specialists work with parents to create a child care plan that best fits their family's needs. And, free services such as resource libraries, playgroups, and trainings are offered to support exempt providers from diverse backgrounds. R&Rs also help build the supply of licensed child care and promote quality by recruiting and training child care providers at each R&R agency in the Child Care Initiative Project (CCIP).

It's clear that license-exempt care plays a vital role for many working families, and that exempt providers want more resources and support to help them provide the best care they can. In order to close the achievement gap, resources must go where the children are, regardless of setting, so that all children enter kindergarten prepared. It is crucial that license-exempt providers are offered the support they need so that the children in their care are afforded the same opportunities as those in more formal care settings.

The role of R&R programs is to provide information and resources to both providers and parents, and assist in ensuring that all types of providers feel supported and connected, with the ultimate goal that all children are receiving high-quality care.

5. "Informal Caregivers Research Project: Characteristics, networks, and needs of informal caregivers and parents in California." *Mathematica Policy Research*. April 2015.

6. "Understanding the Needs of FFN Childcare in L.A. County." *First 5 LA*. May 2012.

7. "Informal Caregivers Research Project: Characteristics, networks, and needs of informal caregivers and parents in California." *Mathematica Policy Research*. April 2015.