

impact brief

TWO

**Workplace
Partnerships
and
Interventions
Promote
Dialogue
on
Child Care**

Return on Workplace Investments through Child Care Initiatives:
A Labor Management Project¹

For a copy of the full study see:
“Working Parents for a Working New York Study” 2010

http://economicdevelopmentandchildcare.org/technical_assistance/work_life

THE Working Parents for a Working New York Study was designed to examine and assess the impact of the provision of child care subsidies and parental child care support workshops on a sample of New York City employees and employees of subcontracted agencies in the health care sector. The study focused on the variables of attendance, work performance, productivity, and retention of employees. Participants were randomly selected and assigned to either the subsidy or control group. A total of \$1.525 million was allocated during the 2007-2008 and 2008-2009 fiscal years by the New York City Council for this study; of this approximately 74% funded the subsidies and the workshops. A unique opportunity for labor/management cooperation was built into the framework of this multi-union and multi-employer project.

The WPWNY model of cooperation between labor, management and government allowed employees not only to secure affordable and reliable child care, but also opened the door to initiate discussions with employers to create more awareness and understanding of work-family issues for employers, and to promote a positive climate for work family dialogue.

The initiative's participants included income eligible District Council 37 members working for the Health and Hospitals Corporation, International Brotherhood of Teamsters Local 237 members working for the NYPD School Safety Division and 1199 SEIU members working for NYC Home Care Subcontractors. The Cornell School of Industrial Labor Relations directed the case study research. The Consortium for Worker Education administered the subsidy distribution and the Center for Children's Initiatives formerly known as Child Care Inc. provided workshops and informational/educational services. The Linking Economic Development and Child Care Project with funding from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation helped cover publication costs. The study asked questions regarding job performance, absenteeism and child care satisfaction before, during and after the study of both subsidy and control group participants.

Methodology

The study population was comprised of 169 participants across all unions, of those 92 respondents were in the subsidy group and 77 were in the control group. The overall population was almost exclusively female with an average age of 35 years. The mean salary ranged from an average low of approximately \$22,000 to an average high of approximately \$36,000. Weekly subsidies ranged from a minimum of \$20 per child to a maximum of \$332 and an annual minimum of \$1,040 per child to a maximum of \$17,264. Subsidies were capped at the market rate set for New York State and parental co-payments were adapted from a standard New York City subsidy formula that factored in household size and income.

Labor/Management Collaboration

The WPWNY initiative was initially conceived by the New York Union Child Care Coalition and is based on the Child Care Facilitated Enrollment Project currently underway in various locations throughout New York State. Like Working Parents for a Working New York, this project was developed to extend access to child care subsidies for low to moderate-income working families who historically have had extremely limited access to this type of assistance and to create a user-friendly and worker oriented enrollment process. The NYUCCC was formed in 1994 as a coalition of 10 unions committed to a child care, work and family agenda. The Coalition has since become a forum for unions to share problems and develop cooperative strategies and to address mutual concerns regarding work and family issues. Incorporating the element of Labor/Management partnership into the WPWNY model was a natural progression in the Coalition's strategy of increasing support for working parents. Labor/Management collaboration was an essential component of accomplishing the core objectives of WPWNY Initiative.

When the leadership of two prominent unions endorsed the Cornell-ILR study, it lent a credibility that encouraged their management counterparts to cooperate. "When our Union was approached about participating in the Working Parents for a Working New York Project, we signed on right away," said Lillian Roberts, Executive Director of AFSCME's 120,000-member District Council 37. "We had the right demographic of working parents to draw from, and the cooperation of one of our major employers, the Health and Hospitals Corporation. This project will benefit both the union member and the hospitals." "The Cornell study is the first of its kind and will provide essential documentation to influence public policy on work and family issues," added 1199SEIU United Health Care Workers East president George Gresham. "We are very excited that 1199 homecare workers are part of the City Council initiative to study the effect of providing child care benefits on worker retention and productivity."

Employer endorsement was enthusiastic and focused on the dual benefits of meeting worker and employer's needs in seeking to improve client care. Bill Pernisek, President, CABS Home Attendant Service, a subcontracted homecare agency said, "We have ...found that the underlying cause for workers' inability to meet increasing client needs is their own inability to obtain competent, reliable child care." Mr. Pernisek looked to the study to shed light on the relationship "between reliable child care services and their corresponding impact on improved performance, work quality, job retention and cost reduction."

Particularly noteworthy was the collaboration between the Cornell principal investigators with the input of union representatives and the participating human resources representatives to create a standardized employer inventory of variables to determine what common data sets would be available for a study comparison and constitute the baseline of employer data. At the job site level, this collaboration

took many forms, including partnering with department supervisors to secure rooms for onsite recruitment and to approve “union leave time” requests so that the research participants were able to complete the base line and follow up surveys on work time.

In addition to creating a forum for Labor/Management partnership, the WPWNY initiative also included the creation of an advisory board. The advisory board convened periodically to provide feedback and expertise on issues related to the workplace partnership, study design, implementation and on public policy implications. It was comprised of representatives from the New York Union Child Care Coalition, the employers and unions participating in the study, staff from the New York City Council and the Administration for Children’s Services and two not-for-profit organizations, one who functioned as the fiscal agent for the study the other with expertise in child care.

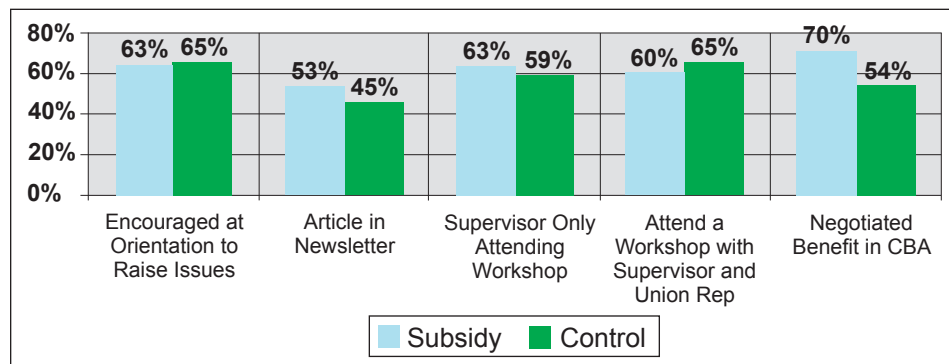
Correlation of Supervisory Dialogue on Child Care to Employee Retention

Research has documented that employee turnover is a significant way in which unstable child care negatively impacts the bottom line of employers.ⁱⁱ Despite initial intentions, the WPWNY study was not able to focus on “employee turnover” and retention as a variable in the study population given the limited time period of the study and the unexpected funding cut midway in the second year. However, employee self-reports from the WPWNY study provided preliminary findings that could be amplified by additional study. Seventy-two (72%) of all research participants indicated they would stay at their job if a child care subsidy was offered. Overwhelmingly, study participants indicated that a child care subsidy would motivate them to remain at their job in the face of less than satisfactory working conditions.ⁱⁱⁱ Eighty-five percent (85%) indicated a motivation to stay if they didn’t like their boss; seventy-five percent (75%) indicated a motivation to stay if their work commute was longer, sixty-two percent (62%) would stay even if there were fewer promotional opportunities. Additionally, eighty-five percent (85%) indicated that they would prefer a child care subsidy instead of a raise.

Research shows that attention to issues such as unreliable child care^{iv} or training employees to engage in discussions with their supervisors at the department level can assist in effective problem solving relating to work/family issues and have a positive impact on employee retention.^v In the baseline survey, the WPWNY participants were asked to rate their work climate as measured by the willingness of their supervisor(s) to discuss work/family challenges. Over 50% of participants, including both the subsidy and control groups, felt their supervisors were not willing to listen to conversations about family responsibilities. The partici-

pants were then asked to rank workplace interventions that would be beneficial in promoting supervisory dialogue and the overall work environment. Labor/management cooperation through the collective bargaining agreement was ranked the highest rated intervention needed to foster supervisory dialogue by 70% of WPWNY participants receiving a subsidy. Since the collective bargaining signifies agreed upon workplace protections and procedures, this framework provides workers and supervisors with an agreed upon context to discuss challenging workplace issues.

Workplace Interventions employees ranked as facilitating supervisory dialogue



Since seventy-five percent (75%) of all WPWNY participants indicated that they had arrived late or left work due to child care related issues, a discussion with a supervisor on flexible scheduling could be productive. Additional research suggests that cooperation between labor and management is a key factor in flexible scheduling in unionized workplaces where workers had access to innovative problem solving strategies through their supervisors given the following conditions: (a) a mutual commitment to the employers needs (b) workers and supervisors are engaged in honest, open and ongoing communication with each other and (c) individuals are respected and trusted and (d) workers and supervisors are encouraged to jointly explore ways to meet workplace needs and to respect the important and critical dimensions of peoples lives outside the workplace.^{vi} The WPWNY study identifies that low cost strategies can go along way to open up communications.

The “added value” of the WPWNY labor/management partnership was in the identification of areas of common ground and cooperation that are essential to a greater return on investment whether that be in dollars and cents or in enhanced human capital performance. According to a 1998, Women’s Bureau, US DOL monograph, “through collaborations, some of the most promising child care innovations have taken place. Employers have found they can offer workers better services at a lower cost by pooling ideas and resources than they ever could have alone. Large businesses, small businesses, unions, community groups, non-profit organizations, and governments and their workers can all benefit from such arrangements.”^{vii}

Policy implications

- This model can be replicated in union and non-union settings, utilizing a variety of workplace forums. These can include committees on work/family; diversity and joint labor/management initiatives.
- Skills building for supervisors along with employees is crucial. Training of supervisors on issues via a new series of work/family support workshops is needed to explore the full potential of the WPWNY model.
- Employer commitment to family friendly polices can be

communicated in a variety of ways. Using existing vehicles such as the company newsletter or website to indicate the employer's willingness to engage in dialogue is another forum not explored in the WPWNY study that can open the door for strategic problem solving.

- Participating in a broad coalition with other stakeholders such as unions, community coalitions and government entities can maximize an employer's ability to offer resources to their employees.

Contact the authors below for more information about the Impact Series or the Working Parents for a Working New York Study:

General Info: Jocelyn Mazurkiewicz @ 212-558-2276

Case Study/Research Info: K.C. Wagner @ 212-340-2826

Copies of this study can be found @

http://economicdevelopmentandchildcare.org/technical_assistance/work_life

Notes

i This is the second impact brief in a series highlighting themes that emerged from a 17 month study, entitled Working Parents for a Working New York. Other briefs include Impact Brief #1: Affordable and Secure Child Care Contributes to a More Productive Workforce & Helps Resolve Work-Family Conflict and Impact Brief #3: Child Care Workshops Provide Great Benefit to Employees and Employers.

ii Fleron, L.J., Breen, L., Dimitrov, D. & Grogan, R. (2006). Buffalo Child Care Means Business. Cornell University-ILR; Child Care Resource Network; UB Law School; Success by 6; United Way.

iii The subsidy was paid directly to the provider, and there was no tax impact for the employee. The subsidy was also of significantly higher value to the employee than the usual collectively bargained across the board raise.

iv Fleron, L.J., Breen, L., Dimitrov, D. & Grogan, R. (2006).

v Berg P. & Kossek, E.E. (2009). Work-Family Flexibility in Unionized Organizations: Results from a National Study. Presentation at Empire State College. Michigan State – School of Industrial and Labor Relations.

vi Berg P. & Kossek, E.E. (2009).

vii Employer Child Care Resources: A Guide to Developing Effective Child Care Programs and Policies. (1998). Washington, D.C. : US Department of Labor, Women's Bureau.