



Island County Child Care Partnership Task Force

# 2021 SPECIAL REPORT

**The Island County Child Care Partnership Task Force** (Task Force), with grant funding from the Washington State Department of Commerce, came together in early 2021 to address the issue of child care in Island County. The Task Force, comprised of a diverse coalition of community members including parents, child care providers, early childhood education experts, and businesses, came together to both assess the current state of child care in Island County, and make recommendations to improve access to quality, affordable, and equitable child care across the county.



**Lewin Education & Consulting**  
**Kenesha Lewin**  
*Task Force Facilitator*



**Washington STEM**  
**Soleil Boyd PhD**  
*Early Learning Senior Program Officer*  
**Jenee Myers-Twitchell PhD**  
*Chief Impact Officer*



**Island County Public Health**  
**Nicole Marley**  
*Public Health Coordinator*  
*n.marley@islandcountywa.gov*  
**Theresa Sanders MPH,**  
*Assessment and*  
*Healthy Communities Director*  
*t.sanders@islandcountywa.gov*

A special thank you to the following Task Force members for their time, dedication, work, and commitment to envisioning a thriving child care system in Island County.

- Nikki Barone, Oak Harbor Boys and Girls Club*
- Wendy Beagle, Island County Human Services*
- Veronica Benalcazar, ECEAP - Skagit Valley College*
- Kristen Bowler-Marere, Opportunity Council*
- Rene Denman, Toddler Learning Center*
- Vicki Graham, Oak Harbor Chamber of Commerce*
- Jessie Gunn, Partners for Young Children/Whidbey Community Foundation/Parent*
- Grant Johnson, Island County Planning Department*
- Gail LaVassar, Readiness to Learn/ South Whidbey Community Center*
- Marion Mayhew, Community Resource Center of Stanwood Camano*
- Bobbi Mennella, Parent/City of Langley*
- Tabitha Sierra, WhidbeyHealth/Parent*
- Natalia Skaleski, Parent/Military Affiliated/WhidbeyHealth*
- Brian Tyhuis, Naval Air Station Whidbey Island*
- Heather White, Camano Island Child Care Provider/Parent*

To request a presentation or for additional information please email: [t.sanders@islandcountywa.gov](mailto:t.sanders@islandcountywa.gov)



**WEBSITE** [www.islandcountywa.gov/Health/AHC/Childcare/Pages/Home.aspx](http://www.islandcountywa.gov/Health/AHC/Childcare/Pages/Home.aspx)



**FACEBOOK** [www.facebook.com/Island-County-Child-Care-Partnership-107496887856704](https://www.facebook.com/Island-County-Child-Care-Partnership-107496887856704)



**TABLEAU DASHBOARD LINKS TO LOCAL SURVEY DATA**

**Parent Guardian Survey**

[tableau.strivetgether.org/#/site/GraduateTacoma/views/Island\\_County\\_Childcare\\_Survey/ParentGuardianSurvey](https://tableau.strivetgether.org/#/site/GraduateTacoma/views/Island_County_Childcare_Survey/ParentGuardianSurvey)

**Provider Survey**

[tableau.strivetgether.org/t/GraduateTacoma/views/Island\\_County\\_Childcare\\_Survey/ParentGuardianSurvey?%3AisGuestRedirectFromVizportal=y&%3Aembed=y](https://tableau.strivetgether.org/t/GraduateTacoma/views/Island_County_Childcare_Survey/ParentGuardianSurvey?%3AisGuestRedirectFromVizportal=y&%3Aembed=y)

# TASK FORCE VISION

Task Force members envision a resilient community that supports the well being of all families, children, and early childhood professionals in Island County. This will include accessible child care and early education opportunities for all families, as well as a livable wage and opportunities for growth for early childhood professionals. Achieving this vision will require a dedication to equity through cultural and racial awareness, which ensures everyone has equal access and a voice.



## Needs Assessment Findings

- **4,299 (62%) of children under the age of six have all parents in the workforce**, and it is unknown where or how they are all being cared for while parents work.
- Of these 4,299 children, **2,340 (63%) would likely use child care if it were to be available** but do not have access to a child care spot now.
- Of these 4,299 children, approximately **1,460 (34%) are infants and toddlers**, and there are currently a total of 124 child care spaces for this age group available in Island County.
- In Island County, of children who meet the criteria specifically for ECEAP/Head Start/Early Head Start, there are **1,642 (88% of eligible children) who do not yet have an ECEAP or Head Start spot** available to them. There are 288 infants and toddlers currently who qualify, none of whom are served by Early Head Start in Island County.
- In order to meet the child care needs in Island County, approximately **460 additional educators** would need to be hired. This does not include administrative and support staff.
- Parent/Guardian survey findings indicate that **most (61%) families would pay for child care if it were available and met their needs**, and that there are currently disparities in access to preferred child care types across race and income.
- Child Care Provider survey findings show that providers face **challenges related to turn over and finding qualified staff**, and that half of providers are currently at capacity and have waitlists.
- Listening Session findings revealed that **families are strained** when it comes to balancing child care needs with their financial wellbeing, and that **child care providers want to elevate the child care profession** through improved compensation, recognition, and policy changes.
- Some data are not yet available concerning the child care needs of military families. Additional research and data sharing with NASWI will support a plan that includes their specific child care needs and resources.

**I**sland County is home to 6,667 young children and their families and is experiencing a severe child care shortage. The self-sufficiency wage for a family of four in the county is \$72,000. The typical cost of care in Island County is \$19,000. The vast majority of families, if they had two working adults, would need to have **both adults making over \$36,000** (for a total over \$72,000 per year) **in order to begin to afford the total cost of average care in the county.** Child care options are needed to ensure children have access to developmentally supportive settings while their parents work. Island County is home to vital manufacturing, medical and

social service industries alongside a considerable presence of U.S. Naval personnel at Naval Air Station Whidbey Island (NASWI). Child care that meets the needs of local families will ensure that the region retains and strengthens its economic vitality and equitable support for its diverse population.

In Island County, 2,076 (31% percent) of children under six are living in poverty. Children in poverty are defined as those in households at or below 200 percent of the federal poverty line, which is \$53,000 a year for a family of four.

There are 4,849 children under six

(73% of all children) in Island County who have all parents in the workforce. Island County licensed child care availability only meets the needs of approximately 11 percent (550 children) of children under six whose parents are in the workforce and need care. In Island County, of children who meet the criteria specifically for ECEAP/Head Start/Early Head Start, there is a gap of 1,642 (88% of eligible children) who are unable to access those programs (eligibility for these programs includes either a household income of 110% of the federal poverty line or children with disabilities or those facing homelessness).

# HOUSEHOLD AVERAGE INCOME & AFFORDABILITY OF CHILD CARE

*“The options for child care are limited. We are very lucky to have the military child care center but any other options are incredibly expensive. In order to have child care at the CDC, we both have to be working in order to keep our position, but I am trying to transition to a Work from Home position and I am afraid of making any career changes that would jeopardize our position because we can’t afford care anywhere else.”*

– Active Duty Military Parent

Child care costs place a tremendous burden on families, impacting income in three areas: work time commitment, productivity levels, and long-term career. The median income of a family in Island County is \$68,604. The typical cost of child care is \$13,000. The average Island County family pays 19 percent of their income for one child in child care. However, the Washington State Department of Commerce states child care should cost no more than 7 percent of a family’s income.

## Average % of Income Spend on Child Care by Race/Ethnicity

	Median Income	Average % of Income Spent on Child Care	If Child Care Cost was 7% of Average Income
	Island County	Island County	Island County
All	\$68,604	19%	\$4,802
Hispanic/Latinx	\$57,379	23%	\$4,017
Two or more races	\$67,400	19%	\$4,718
White	\$68,909	19%	\$4,824
Other	\$66,458	20%	\$4,652

## Child Care Access

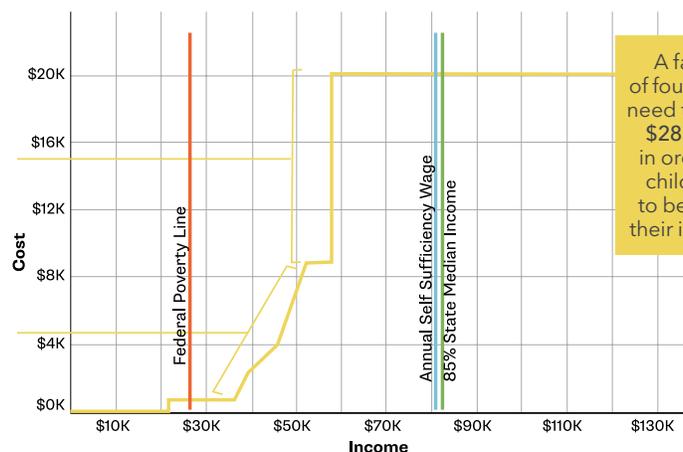
As mentioned above, Island County licensed child care availability only meets the needs of approximately 11 percent (550 children) of children under six whose parents are in the workforce and need care.

## Percent of Annual Income Spent on Child Care

2 Adults, 1 Preschooler, and 1 Infant

In Island County, a single dollar (\$1.00) more of monthly income, from \$57,624 to \$57,625 increases the cost of child care 125%.

For every \$1,000 of increased income per year, \$500 will go to child care.



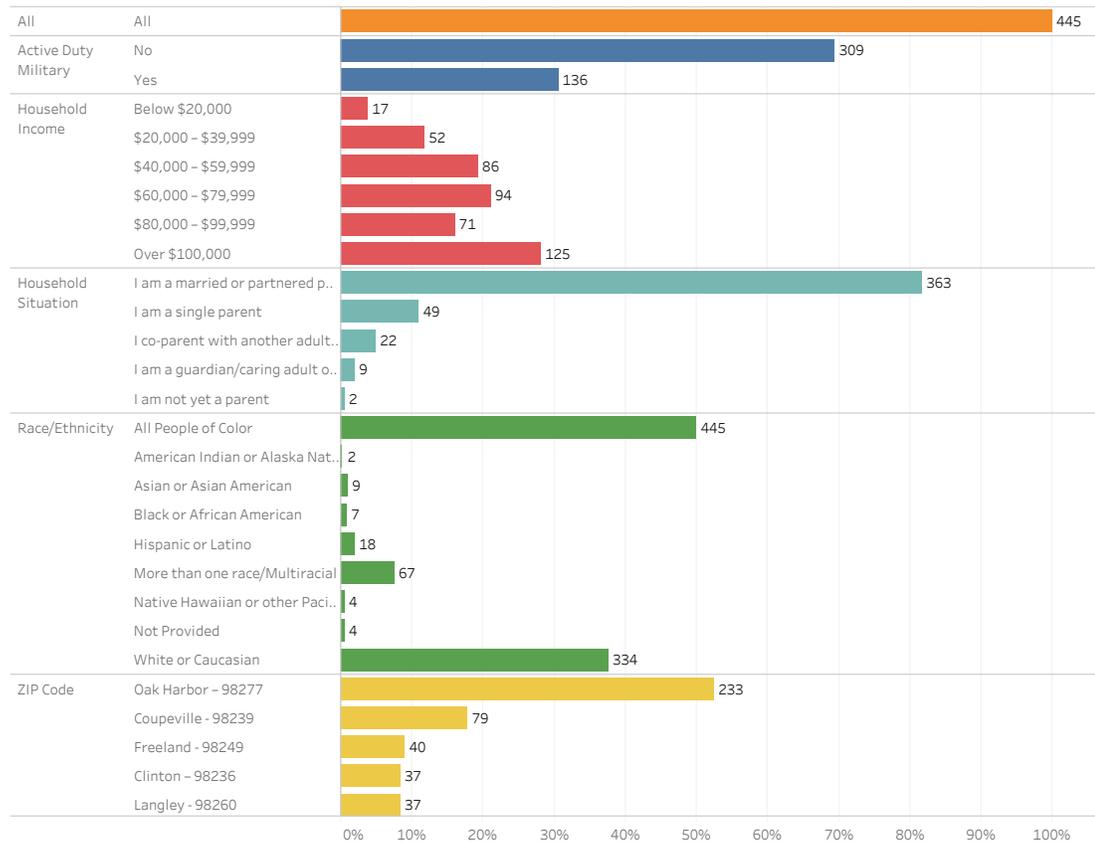


# ISLAND COUNTY COMMUNITY CHILD CARE SURVEYS

## Parent/Guardian Survey

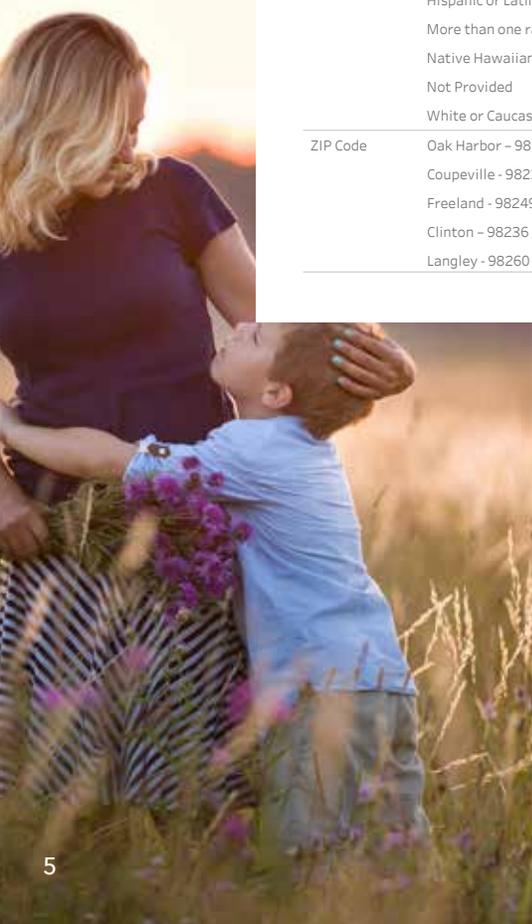
In the spring of 2021, 445 parents and guardians in Island County completed the Island County Community Child Care Survey. All findings are available on the Parent/Guardian Survey tab at this [Tableau website](#). Of the respondents, 31% were Active Duty Military and 25% were people of color.

### Parent/Guardian Survey Respondent Demographics



Results from the survey highlight several major themes, including that a strong majority (61%) of families would use licensed child care if it were to be available, and that for almost all families their top priorities in the care of their child are cost (100%), quality (95%), and location (95%).

While major themes related to parents' and guardians' preferences, priorities and interest in using paid child care, disparities emerged in terms of income and race when it came to being able to access preferred care types. For example, no (0%) Latinx parents and only 37% of Multiracial parents reported using their preferred child care type, compared to 59% of White parents. Across income ranges there are also marked differences. For families making less than \$80,000/year, on average, fewer than half of them report being able to access their preferred care type, compared with 65% of families making between \$80,000 - 99,999/year and 59% of families making \$100,000+/year.

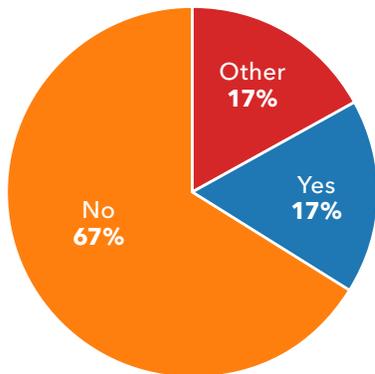


*“I work in education, so I’m definitely not working for the money – higher-ed does not pay that well. It’s getting ridiculous that we’re having to choose between upward mobility and family...well we can’t even choose upward mobility really, because we don’t have that option. We’re just stuck in this cycle of, essentially, poverty.”*

– Island County Parent

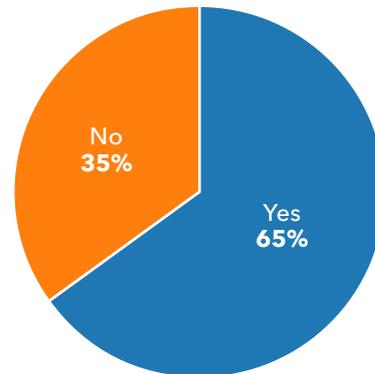
**Parent/Guardian Use of Preferred Care for \$20,000 - \$39,000 Income Range**

Are you currently using your preferred child care?



**Parent/Guardian Use of Preferred Care for \$80,000 - \$99,000 Income Range**

Are you currently using your preferred child care?



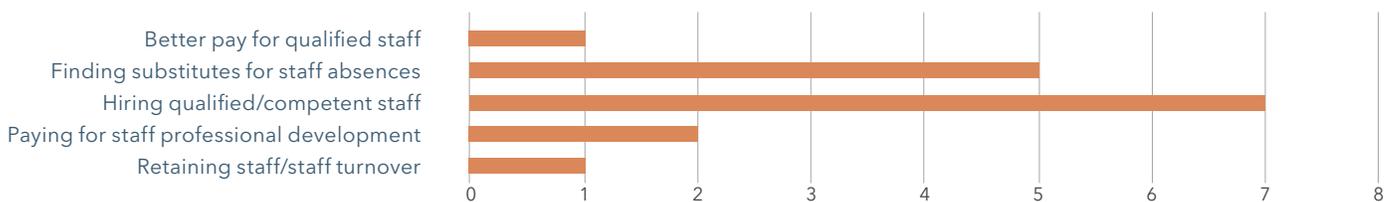
**Child Care Provider Survey**

In the spring of 2021, 20 child care providers in Island County completed the Island County Community Child Care Survey. All findings are available on the Provider Survey tab [at this Tableau website](#). Respondents represented a range of characteristics, including diversity in care type provided, location, and ages served.

A consistent challenge for providers in terms of staffing is hiring qualified/competent staff. Of the eight providers that hire staff, seven indicated this as a staffing problem they currently experience, followed by finding substitutes and paying for professional staff development.

**Child Care Staffing Problems**

Please indicate which of the staffing problems you currently experience in your business (check all that apply)



*“To retain staff, we need to make the jobs better. Offering employment packages and benefits like other jobs – medical, retirement – so that people will think it’s worth it.”*

– Island County Child Care Provider



# SUGGESTED POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS



## Recommendation 1 **FACILITIES**

The physical environment in which children are cared for and learn, both inside and outside, are important factors in high quality early education. Finding suitable, affordable premises within Island County in which to house quality child care is a significant hurdle for local child care providers and educators. Regulations relating to the purchase of land on which to build new premises and to change the use of existing buildings is also a significant barrier.

The Task Force recommends that Island County review its code relating to child care and early childhood education premises. In addition, policymakers should look for creative and affordable ways to leverage existing structures and encourage the development of new child care facilities, including outdoor spaces. Potential action items include:

- Bring the **Northwest Center for Child Care Retention and Expansion/Opportunity Council (C-RECC NW)** to Island County and create a local position to support this work. This work would specifically focus on the feasibility of co-locating child care in new public school buildings and workforce housing.
- Assess and modify **local code** to facilitate greater ease in permitting child care operations. Prioritize this work on the Island County Planning Department's work plan for 2022. Island County Public Health and Island County Human Services staff would ideally also participate in this process.
- Investigate the possibility of **county/city owned property** being leased (or purchased with grant/private funds outside of market competition) **at low cost** to build or house child care facilities.
- Earmark incoming monies** from the American Rescue Plan Act toward exploration of new child care facilities and/or expansion of existing facilities and/or a fund to support local child care providers with operating expenses, including transportation expenses (buses/vans) to utilize public green spaces.
- Create an **Island County Assistance Bulletin** for local child care providers, planners, realtors, and developers to use to reduce confusion and create efficiency in planning and expanding child care.  
See example: [Snohomishcountywa.gov/DocumentCenter/View/8065/11---Daycare-Operations-PDF?bidId=](https://www.snohomishcountywa.gov/DocumentCenter/View/8065/11---Daycare-Operations-PDF?bidId=)
- Find **local partners that will provide green space** for newly licensed outdoor preschools in the county.

## Recommendation 2 TRAINING AND EDUCATION



To be successful, child care facilities need a qualified, stable workforce that feels the community values their work and profession. This stable workforce relies on both education and training. Ongoing training for both directors and staff is vital for creating quality child care and retaining child care providers. In addition, leadership, management, and vision are leading factors of successful quality child care and early education operations. Training is currently both expensive and time consuming for local providers.

The Task Force recommends a combination of local, regional, and state support to prioritize education, training, and compensation for child care directors and staff. Potential action items include:

- Create an **Island County Child Care Provider network** with quarterly meetings to provide support to the child care workforce and facilitate access to training. Prioritize access to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) and anti-bias, anti-racist (ABAR) training, particularly for providers without access to, and requirements for, regular training.
- Support and locally promote the **Shared Services HUB** being launched by the Department of Children, Youth, and Families starting August 1, 2021.
- Advocate for **additional state funding** to support training for child care providers and staff, including leadership and management training.
- Advocate for **minimum education requirements for all levels of providers**, centering equity. Providers should be offered various routes (both pre- and post-hire) and funding mechanisms to meet requirements.

## Recommendation 3 FUNDING



In contrast to the K-12 education system in Island County, child care programs and providers do not receive a dedicated amount of state and local funding support. Adequate funding for more high-quality child care programs in Island County is needed. This lack of stable funding, and the sustainability it brings, is a barrier to attracting needed child care providers to Island County.

The Task Force recommends that both local and state policymakers address the issue of appropriate funding streams for child care programs and providers. Potential action items include:

- Dedicated funding** to support a local liaison team to work with the Northwest Center for Child Care Retention and Expansion (C-RECC NW) in Island County per Recommendation 1.
- Consider a county **levy for Early Learning Investments** (e.g., the Best Start for Kids levy in King County).
- Advocate at the state level for **consistent funding** for early childhood education commensurate with K-12 education.
- Advocate for a **living wage** and access to appropriate state-level **benefits** for child care providers. Wages and benefits should mirror K-12 standards.
- Create financial **incentives** for programs and providers who create opportunities for and complete additional educational requirements per Recommendation 2.

*“I am a single mom doing a couple of jobs just to meet my child care needs. I am always thinking about what’s available, is this going to work, or do I need to figure something else out?”*  
– Island County Parent



## Recommendation 4 **ACCESS**

It is clear from current data that high quality child care is not available to all families and that the current COVID-19 pandemic has only decreased access to quality child care in Island County. Island County families lack equitable access across all geographic areas. Families particularly lack access to infant care and care for children whose parents/guardians work non-standard work hours.

The Task Force recommends that both local and state policymakers prioritize access to high quality child care for all families. Potential action items include:

- Increase the number of ECEAP and Head Start programs in Island County.
- Outreach to the local business community to explore employer-based child care incentives and extended parental leave policies.
- Earmark incoming monies from the American Rescue Plan Act to create a fund to cover child care costs for families from historically marginalized communities or those unable to access quality child care.
- Continue to advocate at the state level for increased child care subsidies for families and increased reimbursement rates for child care providers.
- Provide local education and outreach to increase the use of the Working Connections Child Care subsidy program.



## Recommendation 5 **QUALITY**

High quality child care has a profound positive effect on children's lifelong learning, the community, and society. High quality child care and early education is a factor in reducing poverty and achieving equity. It is cost effective in the long term as it promotes health and wellbeing for both children and their parents/guardians. In addition, Island County parents/guardians rated quality as their top priority when choosing child care.

The Task Force recommends that all providers, both centers and home care, should be required to take part in a quality assurance program, with equity and anti-racist principles centered in the implementation of this requirement. Potential action items include:

- Assign additional funding to Early Achievers, and other quality assurance providers, to ensure that adequate support is provided for a consistent standard of quality child care throughout Island County.
- Encourage and support home care providers to also participate in a quality assurance program.
- Link home care providers with a designated child care center to help meet the need for training and support.

*“Paying minimum wage for child care, it’s not right. I hate that I can’t offer more to anybody. And it’s just a hard incentive, trying to find adults that want to work part-time at minimum wage and watch children that are, across the board, five to 12, and on various age levels with different temperaments. It is very, very difficult.”*

– Island County  
Child Care Provider

## Recommendation 6 **ADDITIONAL LOCAL ADVOCACY**



The Washington State Child Care Collaborative Task Force issued a full set of recommendations in 2019 that outlines state level changes that are needed to support quality, affordable, and equitable child care. The Task Force supports the recommendations in this report and encourages local policymakers to support and advocate for these recommendations. There is also advocacy work that is needed locally.

The Task Force recommends local advocacy efforts that focus on the following:

- Integrating local child care programs within the public school system, including physical placement on school campuses. Advocacy should especially focus on new schools being built in Oak Harbor.
- Outreach and collaboration with local workforce housing and affordable housing efforts to ensure the inclusion of the child care workforce in these discussions.
- Engagement (including education and outreach) with the business community on the negative effects of inadequate child care for Island County’s workforce/working families. Business engagement efforts should focus on:
  - How businesses can help subsidize the cost of child care for their employees (including tax incentives)
  - How businesses can get involved with child care provider business needs (including skills such as budgeting, planning, finance, and feasibility studies)



*“Where is the money to support the new child care businesses that will need to open up as a result of our population growth? Someone has to be thinking about that, and someone has to be advocating for us providers who have to tell people all the time, “My wait list is too long and I have no spots available.”*

*There needs to be incentives for providers so they will to come into our community”*

– Island County Child Care Provider



### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This important work was made possible by the Island County Child Care Partnership Task Force, the Island County Community Health Advisory Board, the Island County Board of Health, Lewin Education and Consulting, and Washington STEM. We also wish to thank the community members who participated in the community survey, listening sessions, and story recording.

To request a presentation or for additional information please email:  
[t.sanders@islandcountywa.gov](mailto:t.sanders@islandcountywa.gov)