



HUMAN SERVICES POLICY CENTER

Daniel J. Evans School of Public Affairs ♦ University of Washington

Forging a Brighter Future for Children and Families

Summer 2003

Providing Support and Training for Family, Friend, and Neighbor Caregivers*

In Washington State, most of the 295,000 family, friends, and neighbors (FFNs) who care for children do not have access to a variety of supports that would enable them to deliver the highest quality care to children. More than two-thirds of the FFN caregivers we surveyed said they would like some kind of support or training. This fact sheet is addressed to professionals in Washington and elsewhere, trying to design programs to serve the needs of FFN caregivers.

Finding the FFN Caregivers in Your Community

Before you can design a program to help FFN caregivers in your community, you need to find out who they are. Grandparents, other relatives, and friends and neighbors (including nannies and babysitters) are all FFN caregivers. Unless they are receiving public subsidies, however, it is often difficult to identify them. The following methods have proven effective, both in initial identification of FFN caregivers and in spreading the word about meetings and programs. Caregiver situations change frequently, so outreach will be an ongoing effort. Make sure you factor costs for finding FFN caregivers into your budget.

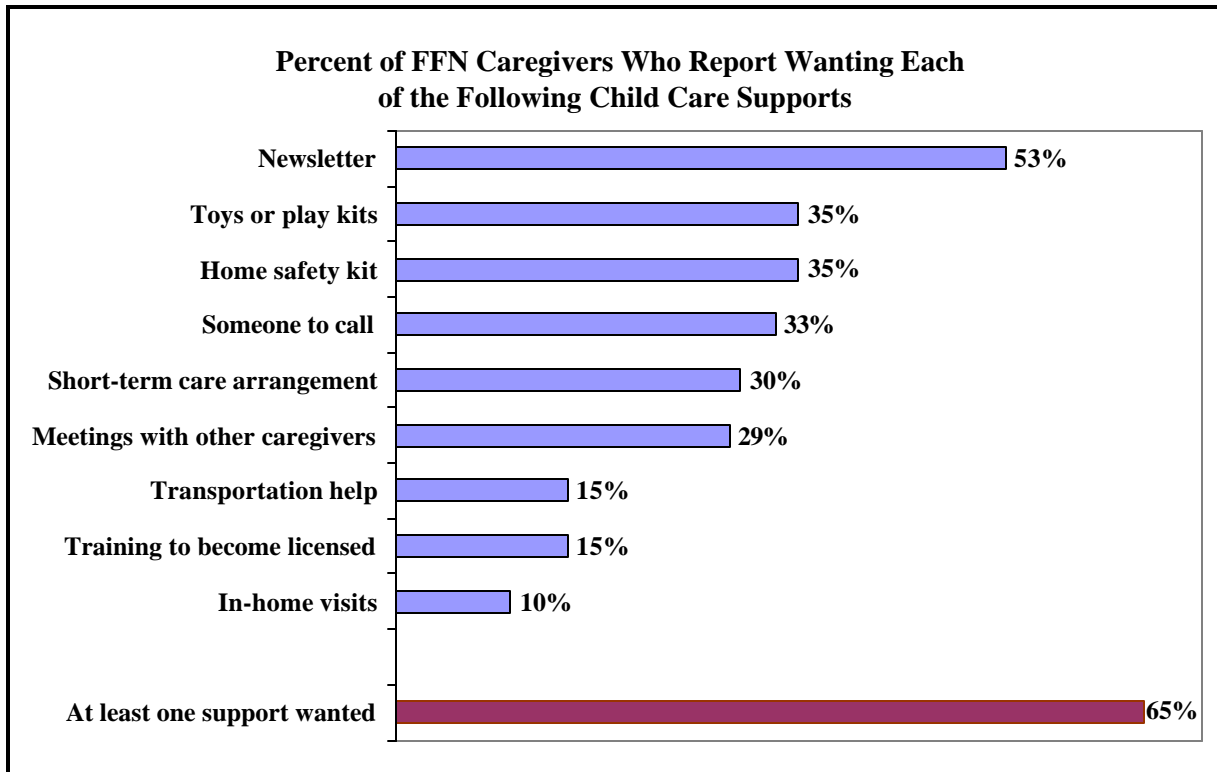
- ❖ FFN caregivers often trust established organizations that provide services to the community, so consider partnering with a Family Resource Center or other community agency or organization (WIC center, Head Start program, volunteer fire department, adult education program, housing authority, etc.) that complements your strengths and enhances your ability to connect with FFN caregivers. Build a list of contacts through each partner organization.
- ❖ When trying to reach immigrant and other culturally and linguistically diverse groups, work through organizations that are known and trusted by members of those communities.
- ❖ *Talk to the people who use your agency or services.* Ask parents who they use for child care. Collect contact information.

- ❖ Broaden your exposure to non-parental caregivers: Partner with part-day programs to talk about your program to the caregivers who pick up the kids.
- ❖ Work with appropriate state departments to get the word out to caregivers who receive public subsidies.
- ❖ *Personalize your contacts.* Make sure that FFN caregivers and personnel from other organizations know who you are and what you do. Try to follow up immediately after an initial contact or request for information.

Learning What FFN Caregivers Want

In our recent FFN study, input from caregivers, focus group participants, and professionals and policymakers in the child-care field generated the following high-priority “wish list”:

- ❖ *Information via newsletters, booklets, and tip sheets.*
- ❖ *Equipment and resources, including home safety kits, activity boxes, and toy/play kits.*
- ❖ *Someone to call for information and/or help.*
- ❖ *Short-term help and respite care.*
- ❖ *Meetings, including opportunities to get together with other caregivers and, for those who are interested, workshops and training sessions.*
- ❖ *Opportunities to get help with specific children (resource line and home visits).*



You will want to customize your program to meet the specific needs of caregivers in your community. While general support programs will meet the needs of many FFN caregivers, some have specialized needs. For example, one in six FFN caregivers in Washington State cares for a child with physical, emotional, behavioral, or developmental difficulties. Our survey found that these caregivers are more likely to want support than those who do not face these challenges. Other caregivers who may need individualized supports include those in communities of recent immigrants and communities where few residents speak English.

Conduct your own (formal or informal) interviews, surveys, and/or focus groups to decide what kinds of programs and materials will best serve the FFN caregivers in your community. To gather this information in a relaxed setting you might want to host an informal event – an open house or recognition day for those who care for others’ children. Invite the media to cover the event, and offer awards, certificates, and prizes to those who participate.

In-House Planning for Your First FFN Program

- ❖ *Start small.* Set realistic goals for participation, focusing on a few services or sites, and initiate a limited number of partnerships.

- ❖ Try to integrate your FFN program(s) into existing programs.
- ❖ Make sure everyone in your organization is on board and clearly committed to working with FFN caregivers. This may involve reframing negative perceptions and attitudes about FFN care. Also, make sure everyone understands that many FFN caregivers do not aspire to become licensed child care providers.
- ❖ Working with your partners, develop a plan in which you articulate your common goals and priorities and specify the roles that each of you will play. Include plans that will support your continuing collaboration (regular meetings, ways of keeping everyone in the loop).
- ❖ Document your work by collecting data on the characteristics of caregivers, the nature of child care arrangements, and – as it evolves – participation in your program(s).
- ❖ Plan to evaluate (and fine-tune) your program on a regular basis.

Ideas for Program Structure

Rather than formal training sessions, FFN caregivers prefer having opportunities to share information and learn from each other. As adult learners, they like to be able to draw on their own experiences and apply their new knowledge immediately. Whenever possible, use interactive, experiential strategies to keep them engaged.

Ideas for Program Content

In general, FFN caregivers want relevant information that helps them meet the daily challenges of their work. FFN caregivers want to learn more about how to support children in their care. Health, safety, and nutrition are popular topics. Some FFN caregivers want to learn about steps they can take toward becoming licensed. Other activities in which FFN caregivers have expressed interest include visits to licensed caregivers and opportunities to participate in mentoring partnerships.

Nuts and Bolts

For any meeting or event that you sponsor, make sure you provide child care, good food, and, if necessary, translation services. Schedule meetings at an accessible location. If location cannot be easily reach on foot, offer van pick-ups or bus vouchers.

Getting the Word Out

After deciding how you want to start serving FFN caregivers in your community, you'll need to let people know what you're doing. If appropriate, schedule an open meeting (caregivers prefer the term "meeting" to "support group" or "get-together") at which you can explain your program and solicit feedback.

- ❖ When you have scheduled a meeting – or are starting a new program – call everyone on your caregiver list. Maintaining personal contact is important!
- ❖ Place ads in local newspapers (especially weeklies). Run public service announcements – in appropriate languages, using correct vocabulary and idioms – on local radio stations.
- ❖ Post notices and distribute leaflets in community gathering places such as schools, libraries, churches, laundromats, bus stops, copy centers, supermarkets, senior centers, playgrounds, and recreation centers.
- ❖ Contact local, churches, synagogues, temples, and mosques. Place announcements in the bulletins of these faith-based organizations.
- ❖ Offer incentives for participation. If attendance is required, child care on site is a must! Other possible incentives include food, transportation, recognition awards, door prizes, money, books, videotapes, health and safety equipment, toys, car-seat inspections, and CPR or emergency-preparedness training.
- ❖ Encourage attendees to bring a friend.

*We took a multi-faceted approach to learning about the informal child care arrangements known as "family, friend, and neighbor" (FFN) care. Our approach included: (1) a survey of almost 300 individuals who care for other people's children on a regular basis but do not work in child care centers; (2) a focus group with FFN caregivers; (3) interviews with early care and education policy makers and professionals; (4) a survey of almost 1,200 households with children age 0-12; and (5) a forum of child care experts, caregivers, agency staff, advocates, parents, and others engaged in developing policy for early care and education. This fact sheet also incorporates information provided by Toni Porter, Director of the Institute for a Child Care Continuum, Bank Street College of Education (see *Lessons Learned: Strategies for Working with Kith & Kin Caregivers* by Toni Porter and Rena Rice, Bank Street College of Education, March 2000).

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