



APRIL
Newsletter



ACCESS, AFFORDABILITY AND QUALITY IN EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION

Investing in the youngest among us builds the foundation for future learning, behavior and health. Why? Because 90% of a child's brain develops by age 5! It's imperative that we focus on policies and programs that promote access, affordability and quality for the 47,000 young children in Southwest Washington.

Access

Current licensed child care availability only meets the needs of about half of children under 6 whose parents are in the workforce and need care. That's 12,400 children in Southwest Washington whose parents have to scramble. This lack of access will have dramatic impacts on employers as we rebuild the economy post-COVID.

The biggest gap is for infant care, where there's a 78% shortfall in licensed child care. For toddlers it's 66% and for preschoolers it's 28%.

Affordability

Families with two young children who make the regional median income spend up to a third of their income on child care. The Washington State Department of Commerce states that child care should cost no more than 7% of a family's income.

For families of color in Southwest Washington, it's even more of a strain — 43% of income goes to child care, based on a median income of \$61,325 a year, compared to 32% paid by white families whose median income is \$81,351.

Quality

Quality care provides safe, loving and stimulating environments for young children. Many early learning programs in Southwest Washington have achieved a quality rating. But it comes with a price, and many families with infants and toddlers may not be able to afford, or even find, quality care.

Researchers have found that children who receive quality child care enter school with better math, language and social skills.

ECEAP (Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program), Head Start, and Early Head Start offer quality programs for children of low-income families. Programs are either part-day or full school day (7 hours), leaving families to piece together care. With only 2,097 slots in Southwest Washington, only 62% of infants and toddlers who qualify have a spot available to

them. During the pandemic, 90% of ECEAP programs moved to a distance model online or in socially distanced settings.

Help Me Grow Washington is a statewide and regional network of communities working together to create a resource grid of community services and supports. It connects young children and their families to these services, linking them to caring people highly trained in child development. These people listen to families' needs and direct them to appropriate services. Last year, 569 families in the region were connected to Help Me Grow.

Learn more by visiting selfwa.org and clicking the Support Child Care button.

For more details, click the link below to review the *State of the Children: Early Learning & Care*, published in Southwest Washington by SELF, SWEL (SW Washington Early Learning Regional Coalition), Washington STEM and Washington Communities for Children.

READ THE REPORT

Stay healthy and safe

Debbie Ham
Executive Director

SELFies for SELF

SELF provides essential child care services, and that means that all our staff are eligible for the COVID vaccine. We are proud to be part of the solution. **Have any photos of yourself getting vaccinated?**

Email Debbie Ham at debbie.ham@selfwa.org

Picture Perfect

They say that a picture is worth a thousand words, and we agree! We would love to share your photos on our social media channels. Here are the details. Send us a photo of you and your little one participating in your favorite activities and tell us what you are doing and why it means so much to you. Now more than ever these little moments mean so much, help us highlight them with a shout out on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. Email photos and descriptions to Debbie Ham at debbie.ham@selfwa.org.

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