

# An evaluation of child care deserts Across five western new york counties

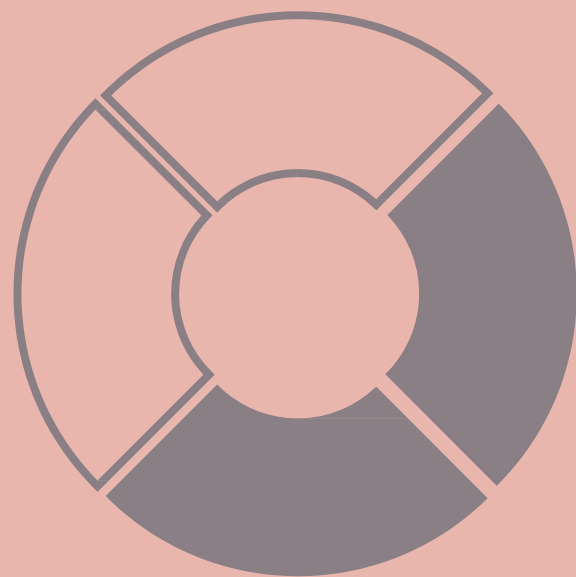


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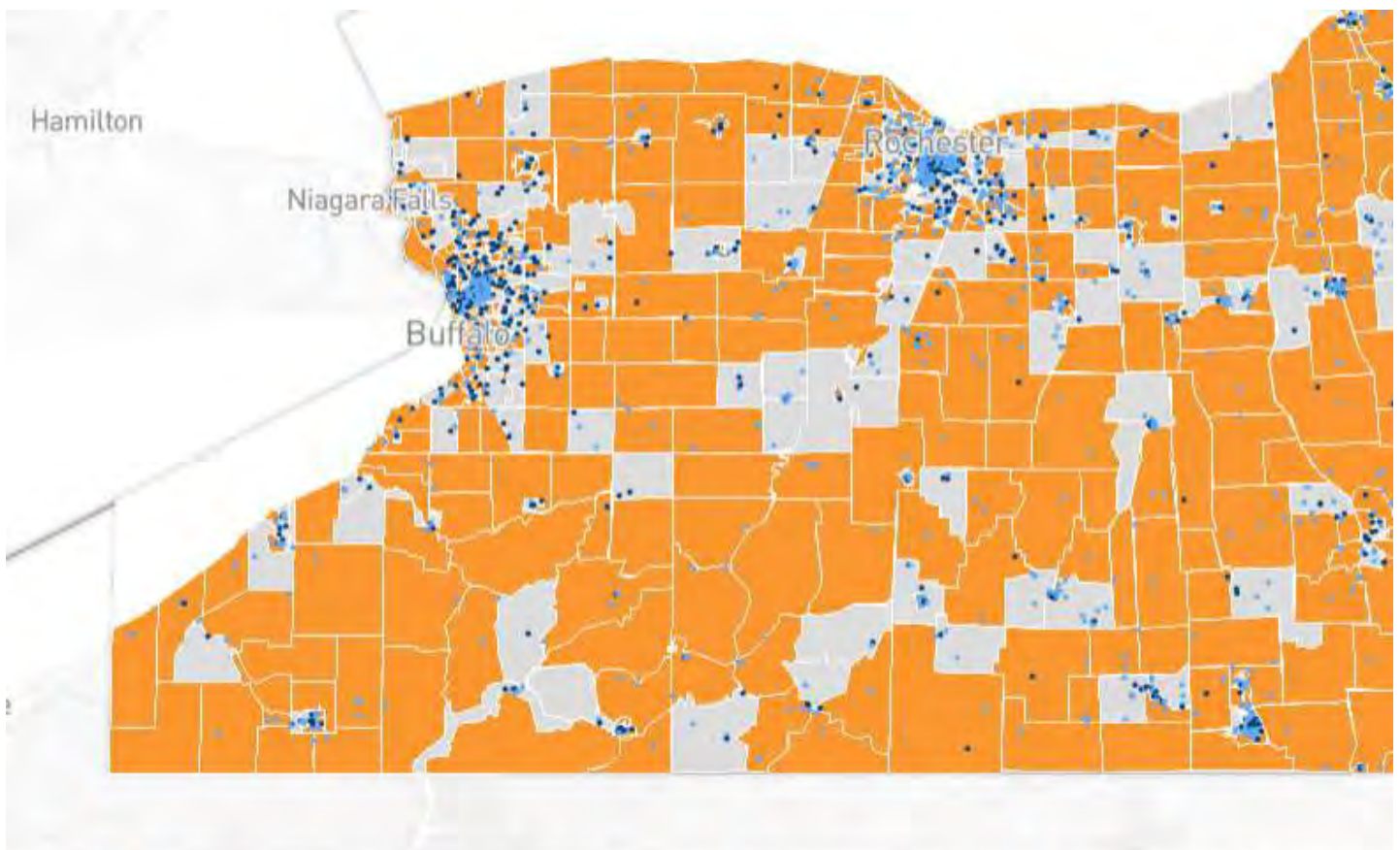
# Contents

●	WNY Child Care Conditions .....	3
●	Project Description .....	4
●	Project Findings .....	5-10
○	Participant Descriptions .....	5
○	Experiences Finding Child Care .....	6
○	Definitions of High-Quality Care .....	7
○	Barriers to Providing High-Quality Care.....	8-10
●	Key Findings & Potential Solutions.....	11-12
●	Acknowledgments.....	13
●	References .....	14



# Child Care Deserts

Recently, New York State was identified as having the second highest amount of child care shortages nationwide, where 64% of the state demonstrated a severe lack of regulated child care options. This shortage is often referred to as ‘child care deserts,’ which is defined as having more than 50 children under age 5 in a census tract that contains either no child care providers or so few options there are more than three times as many children as there are licensed child care slots. Deserts exist across urban, suburban, and rural communities – significantly impacting the majority of working families throughout Western New York.



Child care desert    Not a child care desert    Child care center    Family child care provider

Image Source: Center for American Progress. (2018). *America's Child Care Deserts in 2018*. Retrieved From: <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/early-childhood/reports/2018/12/06/461643/americas-child-care-deserts-2018/>

# Child Care Needs of Western New York

Nearly three-quarters of Western New York families with children under age 6 have all parents in the workforce, and the region is reported to have an average of only one available child care slot for every five children under age 12. This demonstrates the regularity with which child care is a barrier for working families. One factor contributing to this Western New York crisis is the lack of sustainable programming. In Erie County alone there was a net loss of over 50 child care programs between 2012 and 2017. After closely observing this regional trend, Child Care Resource Network (CCRN) posits that not only does Western New York need an increase in available child care slots, it also needs new programs that are well-equipped to become reliable, long-term child care solutions for working families. Additionally, to avoid a net loss of programs more supports need to be put in place to make sure that existing programs continue to grow and serve the Western New York community.

In the last year, nearly 1000 Buffalo working families have solicited CCRN for assistance with securing child care, and approximately one-quarter of all clients participated in followup surveys. As a result of our services, 61% found care, and 95% of those clients placed their children in licensed/registered child care programs. Those who offered details surrounding their difficulty with finding care most frequently cited two reasons: high cost of care and the lack of available child care slots. Although for over 30 years CCRN has regularly trained providers, helped new programs open, and shut down illegal programs, additional data is necessary in order to learn how best to: cultivate sustainable programs that parents can rely on, continue professionalizing the early childhood field to ensure high-quality care is routinely provided, and facilitate information to all working families about child care options that best fit their employment needs.

**“We desperately need more options. I am on 8 wait-lists”**

**-WNY Parent**

# Project Overview

Child Care Resource Network (CCRN) partnered with three other child care resource and referral agencies to conduct a brief regional study of current child care conditions. The partner agencies include: Allegany County Community Opportunities and Rural Development (ACCORD), Inc., Community Child Care Clearinghouse of Niagara, and Chautauqua Opportunities, Inc. This collaborative effort primarily targeted the Western New York counties of Allegany, Cattaraugus, Chautauqua, Erie, and Niagara. Each agency was provided with the following materials in early October 2019: links for online surveys, focus group directions and scripts, advertising materials, gift card incentives for focus group participants, and one \$2000 stipend for services rendered. Focus groups and surveys were designed specifically for two different types of participants – parents and child care providers – so each resource collected two different data sets. Audio recordings of focus groups were submitted to CCRN by mid-November 2019, which were transcribed word-for-word. Online surveys were closed on November 22nd, 2019 at 5pm. CCRN finished reviewing all study findings by early December 2019.

## Project Aims

Overall, the main goal of this study was to assess the needs and barriers related to current child care conditions in Western New York.

To perform this assessment, Child Care Resource Network worked with three resource and referral agencies to:

- Collect quantitative data and demographic information from child care providers and parents across Western New York
- Collect qualitative data on: providers' experiences with facilitating care; parents' experiences with finding child care; and the relationship dynamics between parents and providers
- Research approaches to the needs and barriers suggested by this study
- Assess potential solutions to employ in the Western New York region

# Survey Demographics

## Parents

There were 156 respondents to the parent survey from across six different counties and 66 different zip codes. Roughly half of parents surveyed were from Erie County, Allegany and Chautauqua accounted for 40% of respondent. Less than 10% were from Cattaraugus, Niagara and Steuben Counties.

Respondents self reported gender, race, employment status and household income. An overwhelming majority of respondents reported as female, only 4% reported as male and 1% reported as other. Over half of the parent respondents identified as White, 18% as Black, African, and/or African American, 7% as Hispanic and/or Latino and 2% identified as Other. 85% of respondents indicated they were employed either full or part time, 11% were unemployed, and less than 1% indicated they were students. A diverse range of household incomes were

reported with no income bracket making up an overwhelming majority. 35% of respondents self reported income below the federal poverty line for a family of four, which is in line with the 35% that indicated they were receiving some sort of assistance from social services. 65% of parents self reported that they made above the federal poverty level for a family of four and were not receiving assistance from social services.

## Providers

There were 262 child care provider respondents to the survey from across six different counties and 66 different zip codes. Over half of the child care providers who responded were from Chautauqua and Allegany Counties, 40% were from Erie County and less than 10% were from Cattaraugus, Niagara and Steuben Counties.

Similarly to the parent survey 95% of respondents to the child care provider survey self reported as female, 4% self reported as male with 1% preferring not to answer. 83% of child care providers responding self reported as White, 10% reported as Black, African, and/or African American, 8% reported as Hispanic and/or Latino and 2% reported as Other.

The results of this survey indicate an aging child care provider population with almost half (46%) reporting that they are 50 years old or older. Income levels of child care providers are similar to the parents they serve 35% reported a household income of less than the federal poverty line for a family of four.



# *The Struggle to* **Find Child Care**



Over one-third (35%) of respondents began searching for child care either before their child was born or when their child was a newborn (0-6 weeks). However, nearly 30% waited until their child was 1-2-years-old before finding care. This potentially reflects the issue many parents have with being forced to leave the workforce for a year or more due to current child care desert conditions.

Depending on what type of child care parents are looking for can change the length of time it takes to find care. Nearly

one-quarter (22%) of parents surveyed have been unable to find care. According to survey results, some parents (27%) were able to find care for their child in two weeks or less, but the same number of parents (27%) spent one to two months searching for appropriate care for their child, while another 18% of parents spent two to four weeks searching for care.

Over two-thirds of providers indicated that they do not have any open slots for infants. Nearly 40% of providers have no open slots for toddlers, and over half of providers do

not have any open school-age slots. If they do have open slots, most providers indicated they had no more than 1 or 2 open slots for any given age group. Many parents indicated a need for evening or weekend care hours, but less than 30% of providers indicated they offered evening or weekend care hours.

Over 40% of parents found care by word of mouth, 19% searched on their own using the internet or other resources, 17% used a child care resource and referral agency, and 10% found care through their employers.



## Definitions of High-Quality Care

**B**oth parents and providers most often times identified the following three factors as features of high-quality care: qualified providers; organized, safe, and clean environments; and educational & developmentally-appropriate programming. Over half of providers indicated that provider credentials & developmentally appropriate curriculum were essential to providing high-quality care. According to parents the four things they considered the most when choosing child care were child happiness (78%), cost (60%), proximity to home or work (44%), and provider credentials (39%).