



“Our Biggest Hurdle”: The Challenge of Child Care for Workers in the Building, Construction and Manufacturing Trades

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Executive Summary

Funded by a Washington State Department of Commerce Child Care Partnership Grant, the Machinists Institute, in partnership with Washington State Labor Council, The Imagine Institute and SEIU 925, conducted a study that included two surveys—one of workers in the building, construction, and manufacturing trades, and one of child care providers—in order to better understand the scope and dimensions of workers’ challenges related to child care. Results of this study are intended to guide the work of the Washington State Apprenticeship Council Child Care in the Trades Subcommittee, which brings together stakeholders from the trades that include workers, employers, policy makers as well as workforce leaders, childcare workforce agencies and advocates. The study found that:

- The high cost is seen by this workforce as the biggest issue surrounding child care — more of a challenge than availability, flexibility, convenience, or language barriers.
- There is a misalignment between when building, construction, and manufacturing workers need care, and when care providers are available. Most building, construction, and manufacturing workers need care outside of regular daytime hours, and relatively few providers are currently able to accommodate that need.
- Parents in the building, construction, and manufacturing trades rely largely on informal care arrangements (such as spouses, family and friends) rather than using paid licensed child care centers or home-based providers.
- Building, construction, and manufacturing trades workers prefer potential solutions that involve state or federal policy changes and employer-supported solutions, although other possible solutions also received substantial support.

Given the pressing and complex child care needs of many building, construction, and manufacturing workers, and the equally complex child care landscape in Washington, it is unlikely that any single solution will be sufficient. Results of this study indicated the need for advancement on a number of fronts and the following recommendations are offered:

- Legislative advocacy is needed to advance a number of key priorities, including changes to child care tax credits, expanded eligibility for child care subsidies, adjustment of licensing requirements, and clarifying/refining a policy that limits care hours.
- Solutions to increase recognition of and support for informal child care providers (spouses, grandparents, etc.) should be explored.
- While there appears to be widespread recognition of the challenges of child care among building, construction, and manufacturing trades workers, there are also indications of hostility to the needs of parents or guardians which come in the form of workplace norms and culture, employer expectations/requirements, and individual resentment. An information and awareness campaign may promote the importance to all workers of making it possible for parents or guardians to work without having to worry about their children’s safety, while at the same time publicizing care possibilities and promoting support for potential legislative solutions as noted above.
- Ways to feasibly enact employer-funded solutions to support the child care needs of workers should be explored.

Introduction



Child care, or the lack of availability of it, puts the lie to the notion that America cares about children of the working class. It's especially hard for persons of color, historically underserved.
(Journey aviation worker, male)

Over time, abundant anecdotal evidence has gradually accrued to suggest that the challenge of finding reliable, affordable child care is a significant one for workers in the building, construction, and manufacturing trades (hereafter referred to as “trades workers” for the sake of brevity). There are indications that the problem is affecting people’s career trajectories, job satisfaction, home lives, overall wellbeing, and willingness to enter or remain in the trades. This study is intended to contribute empirical evidence to the trades’ growing understanding of the scope and dimensions of the child care challenges faced by trades workers.

This study approached the question of child care in the trades in two ways. First, a survey of trades workers in Washington was conducted in April 2021 to collect data about the needs and experiences of that population. Second, a survey of the state’s child care providers was conducted at the same time to better understand providers’ capacities, availability, and limitations. By looking closely at these two data sets which were gathered at the same point in time, we can more effectively describe the challenges faced by both trades workers and care providers, and explore possible opportunities for narrowing those gaps in ways that suit the needs of both sets of workers.

Limitations of this study

There are a number of limitations to the study. The most important to acknowledge is also the most basic: due to a lack of data about how many total people work in the trades in Washington State, and their various demographic attributes, we cannot make any claims about the representativeness of our survey sample for that population, nor the generalizability of our findings. In particular, some of our findings may be skewed by people’s tendency to self-select; people who are interested in and aware of child care issues may have been more likely to participate in our survey of trades workers. Nonetheless, the insights contributed by our survey participants, and contained in this report, will likely be useful to inform discussions of various stakeholder groups (state policy makers, union leaders, employers, and care providers) as they tackle this pressing issue.

Another limitation to note is that child care is a complex domain: care can be provided by licensed facilities (centers and family homes) and license-exempt child care providers (nannies, family members, etc.). Both licensed child care facilities and license-exempt child care providers can participate in government subsidy programs (state, municipal, etc.), which means that some license-exempt providers, while not licensed, are lightly regulated (as is the case with Family, Friend, and Neighbor providers). Some license-exempt care is paid and some is not. There is also unlicensed care which generally refers to “grey market” care that is operating contrary to Washington State Administrative Code and, if reported, may be forced to become licensed or close. To add even more complexity to the child care landscape, there are also child care facilities (many embedded in public schools) that serve older, school-aged children. Some of these facilities are licensed and some are license-exempt, and some participate in subsidy programs while others do not. Caregivers providing care outside the licensed and subsidized systems are, largely, the ones caring for the children of people in the trades, but they were not the primary respondents to the survey. Therefore, the needs and perspectives of many key caregivers for the children of trades workers are not represented in this study.

Overview of this report

This report proceeds as follows: First, brief overviews of the challenges faced by trades workers who need child care, and those faced by child care providers, are described. Second, key findings from both surveys are presented and discussed, along with preliminary recommendations for ways to begin addressing the needs of both populations. Third, more in-depth results from the survey of trades workers are offered, followed by more in-depth results from the survey of child care providers. Finally, the report closes with a brief conclusion.

Overview of the Problem

Child care is one of the most important issues facing U.S. workers today.¹ The COVID-19 pandemic only exacerbated a problem that has existed for years: the lack of high-quality, affordable child care for the children of working parents. The issue is a particularly challenging one for trades workers, who work long hours, frequently work overtime and/or outside of regular working hours, and who may routinely travel to different sites. And while trades workers earn what is usually considered a comfortable wage, the cost of child care is often prohibitively expensive. In Washington, the statewide median for toddler care was reported to be roughly \$1,200 per month² (pre-pandemic) but in many cases the cost can be much higher.

To further complicate the child care challenge, many trades workers have unique scheduling needs. Unlike most office workers, manufacturing and trades people have schedules that may change frequently and abruptly, may need to begin work at 5 am or earlier, and often work nights and/or weekends. Further, they may endure periods of seasonal unemployment during which they can not afford child care, but fear losing their child’s place in care and not having access to care when the busy season picks up again.



¹ Haspel, 2021

² Child Care Aware of Washington, 2020



At the same time, trades and manufacturing unions and employers are working to create inclusive and welcoming environments for women, who may be particularly affected by the child care challenges faced by trades workers. The ranks of construction workers have seen a steady increase in women over the past two decades³, but they remain strongly underrepresented at about 10% of the construction workforce.⁴ Broadening women's participation in the trades can help address labor shortages and create opportunities for women to enter stable and well-paying occupations. However, a systematic approach to addressing child care needs, the burden of which often falls on women's shoulders, will be a necessary part of creating a viable path for women to develop careers in the trades.

For people in Washington state, the challenge of child care availability is particularly acute. Approximately 63% of Washington residents live in a "child-care desert" meaning there is low or no availability for child care; the state is facing the 6th most severe child care shortage in the country.⁵

A number of factors may be contributing to the shortage: a low prevailing wage, expanded regulations and education requirements, a complex subsidy system, the 2007-2009 economic recession, escalating housing and land costs, and working family wage stagnation. The COVID-19 pandemic has only exacerbated the shortage. Many licensed facilities

remain closed nationally and it is unclear whether they will reopen.⁶ Closed facilities means fewer child care slots and fewer choices available for working families.

The causes of the child care shortage are beyond the scope of this study. However, a recent report from the Washington State Department of Commerce noted that "many child care providers are unable to charge parents the tuition rates it would require to cover all of the costs associated with quality care, as parents cannot afford to pay for the full value of the services. With insufficient revenue, providers are unable to pay competitive wages and provide employment benefits to staff. This results in high employee turnover, disincentives for workers to pursue professional development to advance in the field, and overall instability in the child care system."⁷ Moreover, despite the high cost of and high demand for care, child care workers are not well-paid — they are in the third percentile of occupational wages in the state.⁸

³ Institute for Women's Policy Research, 2019

⁴ The National Association of Women in Construction, n.d.

⁵ Center for American Progress, 2020

⁶ Child Care Aware of American, 2020

⁷ Brown, 2021, p. 7

⁸ Brown, 2021

The lack of a clear solution to the child care challenge continues to plague registered apprenticeship pathways and those they represent. A primary impetus for the formation of the child care task force were the numerous stories from apprenticeship programs about losing good apprentices because of the child care issues they faced. Two individuals spearheaded the creation of a Child Care in the Trades Task Force: Kairie Pierce, Washington State Labor Council, AFL-CIO and Shana Peschek, Machinists Institute. The Child Care Task Force originated with apprenticeship coordinators and quickly expanded to include union leaders within the construction and manufacturing trades. It has been meeting quarterly in coordination with the Washington State Apprenticeship Council, and initiated its work by identifying the barriers, exploring solutions, and finding ways to center the voices of apprentices and journey workers. The original task force has since been elevated to a subcommittee of the Washington State Apprenticeship Council.

Major Findings and Recommendations

“One of the biggest challenges is the industry-wide assumption that workers are men and that fathers aren’t primary caregivers for their child(ren) so it’s their partner’s responsibility/challenge. Women who have children, especially single mothers, are faced with more pushback in this industry than other sectors. And men, whether single or partnered, who work to be involved in their children’s lives are also facing pushback. (Apprentice carpenter, female)

Chart 1: Percent of All Trades Workers Reporting That Issues Related to Child Care are a “Substantial Problem” or “Somewhat of a Problem” for People in the Trade

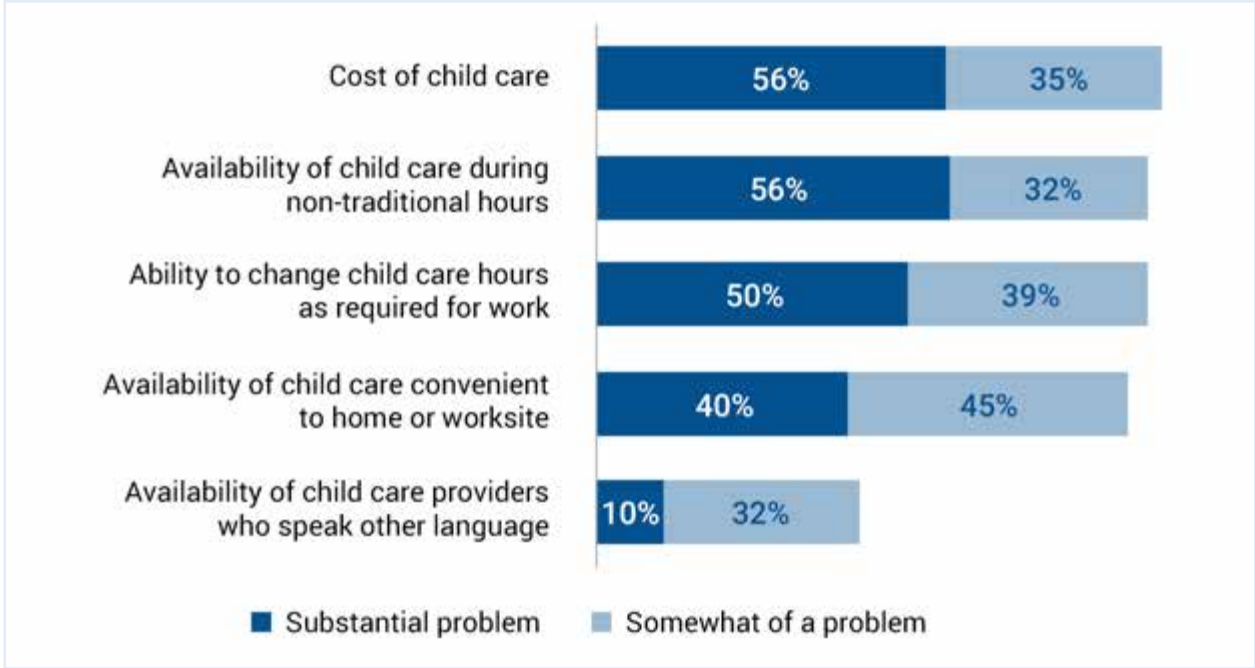
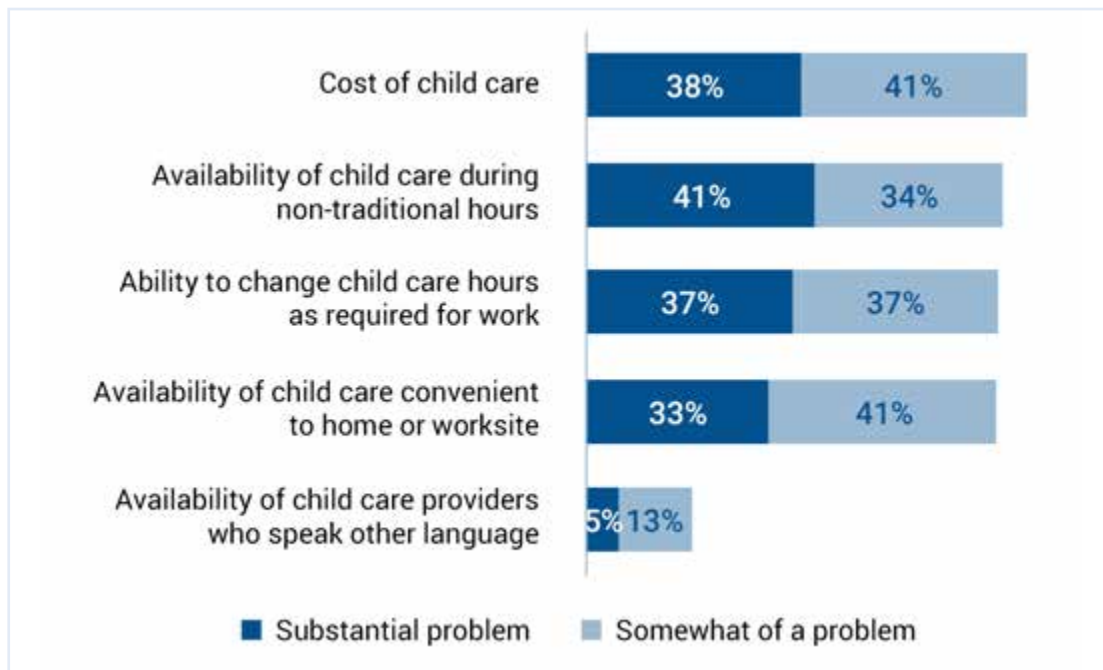


Chart 2: Percent of Trades Workers with Children Reporting That Issues Related to Child Care are or have been a “Substantial Problem” or “Somewhat of a Problem” for Their Family



Major Finding 1. Formal child care is prohibitively expensive, even for workers earning well above minimum wage.

The high cost of child care is seen by trades workers as the biggest issue surrounding child care for people in the trades overall—more of a challenge than availability, flexibility, convenience, or language barriers (see Chart 1, above). Cost is also the barrier most likely to be selected by trades workers who are parents as being a problem they have faced within their own family (see Chart 2, above). Trades workers’ relatively high earnings disqualify them from public assistance, but the cost of child care, especially for multiple children, is still a tremendous barrier. This issue is explored further in the section titled **Insights from the Trades**.

This study did not specifically take up the question of cost, in part because the issue is so complex and well-covered in both national and state literature. The drivers of this cost are multifaceted, but they include the high cost of housing and other essential overhead expenses, maintenance of high-quality environments, staff wages, and other expenses.⁹ These costs can be variable depending on geography (costs in Seattle may be higher than those in Pasco, for example) but it is generally understood that, across the board, the cost of formal child care is remarkably high. For example, in one cost modelling study of child care in Washington, DC, it was found that, in most cases, “a provider’s estimated cost of delivering early care and education services exceeded the revenue generally available to provide care.”¹⁰

⁹ Brown, 2020

¹⁰ District of Columbia Office of the State Superintendent of Education, 2018, p. 5



Major Finding 2: There is a misalignment between when trades workers need care, and when care providers are available.

One of the key contributions of this study is the adding of empirical heft to what has long been understood anecdotally: that trades workers' options for child care may be even more limited than the general population, primarily due to the long work hours and non-traditional work hours required from many trades workers.

Trades workers frequently work non-standard hours, usually either early mornings or in the evening. Overnight work is not common but does happen, and most workers report that they either sometimes or frequently work weekends. In fact, 94% of survey respondents reported that they at least sometimes work weekends and/or outside of a regular day shift schedule. In addition to the actual hours that they work, many survey respondents noted that the need to travel long distances to their worksites, and the frequent issues with traffic along the way, add to their hours and push their need for child care even further outside of traditional work hours. At the same time, a majority of respondent licensed Family Child Care providers (52%) and Child Care Centers (75%) indicated they do not currently accommodate children needing care outside the hours of 6am-6pm, Monday through Friday. However, a slim majority of subsidized Family, Friend, and Neighbor (FFN) providers (55%) do offer care outside the hours of 6am-6pm, Monday through Friday, and a majority of FCCP (65%) and FFN providers (58%) did indicate that they could provide care during non-standard hours if there were additional demand or staffing to meet that demand (see Appendix I: Long Form Answers to Provider Survey).



"[I] cannot find staff to work any hours now, so non standard hours are out of the question"

- FCC Provider, Spokane County

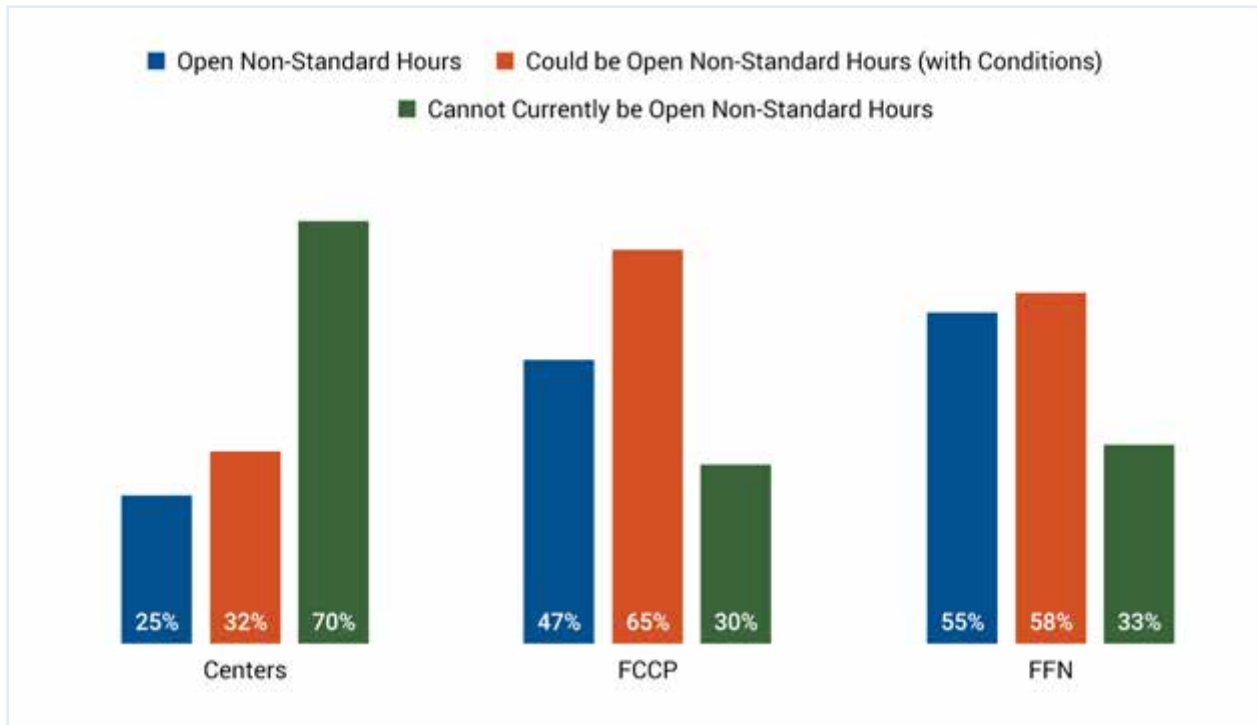
Licensed child care options exist on a spectrum of formality. Child care centers, the most similar to formal school environments, require defined classroom spaces, set program schedules,¹¹ and have the largest adult-to-child ratios of all child care options.¹² On the other end of the spectrum, FFN providers generally provide in-home child care and are exempt from licensing.¹³ We noted a clear inverse correlation between the formality of the child care environment and the flexibility of care hours provided, with child care centers offering the lowest rate of non-standard hour care and FFN providers the greatest rate. See Chart 3, below.

¹¹ Washington State Legislature, 2019a, 2019b

¹² Child Care Resources, 2021

¹³ Washington State Legislature, 2018

Chart 3. Availability of Care during Non-Standard Hours, Child Care Provider Survey Respondents



“We do not have the staff to support extended hours. We are struggling to keep our Center staffed during our regular hours.”
 - Child Care Center Owner, Kitsap County

Inconsistent hours reported by trades workers pose a challenge for child care providers, as state-mandated staffing ratios and capacity limits do not offer flexibility to care for children as needed. One possible solution to this problem is for child care slots to be prepaid in advance, and held for drop in care as needed. All surveyed child care providers were asked if they would be willing to hold a prepaid slot open for drop-in care as needed. The majority of child care centers (77%) and FFN providers (64%) indicated that they would be willing to offer this solution to parents.¹⁴



“I would be willing [to offer non-standard hour care] if the schedule needs were consistent and at an additional charge outside of standard operating hours” - FCC Provider, King County

¹⁴ Very few FCC respondents answered this question.

Our survey of trades workers indicated that this issue has a substantial impact on people’s decisions to enter or stay in the trades. Two-thirds of survey respondents (and three-quarters of female survey respondents) reported that they know of people who have not entered or continued with a career in the trades because of child care issues.

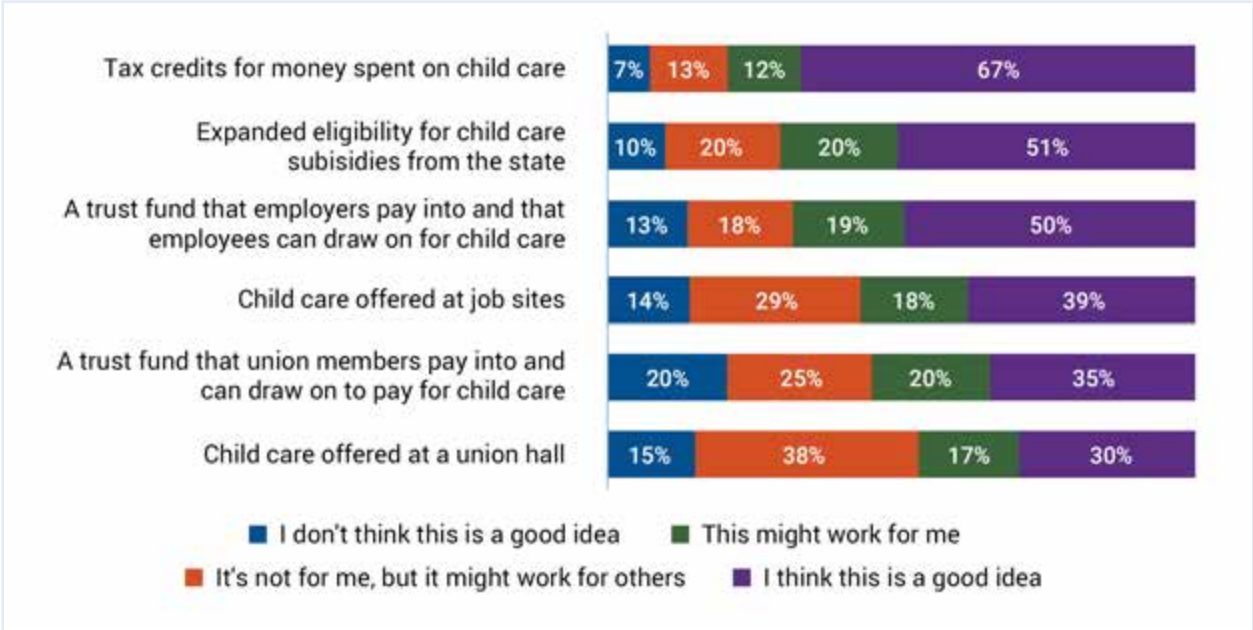
Major Finding 3: Parents and guardians in the trades rely largely on informal care arrangements (such as spouses, family and friends) rather than using paid care centers or home-based providers.

Our survey of trades workers asked parents of children aged 12 and under how their children are cared for during work hours. Respondents could check more than one option. We found that over half (58%) of the parents of children aged 12 and under rely exclusively on informal child care arrangements and do not use paid child care centers or paid home-based providers. Only 16% of respondents rely exclusively on formal paid care. Comments from workers indicated that this is common for many trades workers, largely because of scheduling and cost barriers. This is also aligned with literature indicating that in many parts of Washington, licensed child care facilities are not available.

Major Finding 4: Trades workers prefer potential solutions that involve state or federal policy changes, and employer-supported solutions.

Trades workers who completed the survey were offered a menu of potential solutions to the disconnect between child care need and availability. As Chart 4 shows, workers had a strong interest in policy-based solutions that occur at the state or federal level, and were also interested in an employer-paid trust fund that employees can draw on for child care. Other suggested solutions also garnered support from many workers - no one solution met with more than 20% of respondents saying it was not a good idea.

Chart 4: Trades Workers’ Reactions to Child Care Solutions Currently Being Explored



Recommendations

Based on our findings from the literature, conversations with key stakeholders, and responses to the two surveys (described in greater detail below), we suggest that the Child Care Task Force focus its work in the following areas:

Legislative advocacy. Survey respondents working in the trades show a clear preference for solutions that are provided by the state or federal government — specifically, tax credits to offset the cost of child care, and expanded eligibility for child care subsidies from the state.

Other areas that are potential targets for legislative advocacy include:

- **Licensing requirements.** Ensuring children’s safety when in the care of others is an appropriate area of concern for licensing of child care providers. However, the web of regulations around licensing, sometimes enhanced by additional requirements at the local level, impact both cost and availability of child care providers.¹⁵
- **Investigating cost drivers of child care, to link to subsidies.** The State of Washington has already been investigating the cost of child care; a 2020 report from the Child Care Collaborative Task Force included recommendations about more deeply understanding the cost of child care, determining sustainable business models for providers, and assessing funding options to support living wages for child care workers.¹⁶ Our findings support the need for these recommendations to be taken up.
- **Limitations on hours of care permitted each day.** Our conversations with stakeholders indicated that many trades workers believe that child care providers are required to file reports of suspected neglect for any children who need more than 10 hours of care in a day. However, according to WAC 110-300-0455, “An early learning provider may keep a child in care up to a maximum of ten hours each day. If needed, the maximum time may be extended based upon the parent or guardian’s work, an agreed upon alternate schedule, or travel to and from the early learning program.” While children can be in care longer than 10 hours per day, this is still perceived as a barrier to enrolling children in formal care, and lack of clarity about this policy may be distressing to families and providers alike. We recommend exploring ways to educate trades workers on the types of care available and dispelling common misconceptions that may be preventing them from seeking available types of care.



“There is a shortage of staff. DCYF has changed who can be lead teachers, director, and all the staff . . . they are killing the business. We need quality teachers who love children. Being book smart is not important. Loving kids is a must” - Child Care Center Owner

If members of the Child Care Task Force become familiar with the details of the current regulations, form close connections with state legislators, and offer suggestions for constructive changes, this could help create a regulatory climate that is welcoming and supportive to child care providers.

¹⁵ Thomas & Gorry, 2015

¹⁶ Brown, 2020



Finally, the national conversation is shifting toward a recognition that child care is a vital part of the nation's infrastructure, playing a key role in facilitating parents' ability to fully participate in the workforce. It will be important to stay abreast of changes that come from federal legislation and be in a position to recognize and advocate for ways in which policy changes can benefit trades workers as well as child care providers.

Increased recognition of informal child care providers, and support for families who use that option.

The survey of trades people, described in more detail below, indicated that many of them rely on informal networks of care rather than established child care facilities. This can be a cost-effective solution and can offer flexibility as well—and in some areas of the state, it is the only care available. This type of care may be chosen by families because it is often culturally responsive, more affordable, a good match for children with disabilities or other health and behavioral needs, embedded in family or community, and offered in a family's preferred language. Sometimes families choose this type of care because it is the only care available to them. Many trades workers (and other parents across the state) rely on trusted family and friends — spouses, grandparents, aunts and uncles, etc. — to care for children. These caregivers are generally outside of regulatory oversight and typically ineligible for financial support from state subsidies. In some parts of the state, like Seattle, income eligibility for the City's subsidy program has been expanded to reflect the impact of child care costs on middle income households.

Several trades people suggested that spouses of trades workers who are already caring for their own children could care for other workers' children as well. Others asked for help connecting with families who are willing to provide this care. There may be a role for the Task Force to develop and publicize these networks of care, along with ensuring that any expanded access to subsidies applies to these informal care networks as well. The Task Force could also advocate the funding of slots within programs like Imagine U.¹⁷ These slots could be dedicated to those who commit to serving families in the trades in key regions.

Tell the story to workers in the trades. The survey results demonstrate a clear recognition that access to child care in the trades is problematic. However, it is important to note that survey respondents may have been self-selecting. Eighty-five percent of survey respondents have children, and 57% have children who are 12 and under. Their perceptions may not be representative of all trades workers.

Our study also surfaced some indications of a lack of support for providing child care solutions from some trades workers. A very small but vocal number (18 of 1433 respondents) believe that parents alone should be responsible for a child's care, and were opposed to any child care support from the government, union, or employers. Others were opposed to some types of support but not all, often saying that they do not want union members to have to pay into a fund that supports others' choices. Finally, over 40% of those who do not have children but who intend to in the future indicated that they believe that their spouse will definitely or probably care for their children — a plan that may not be financially feasible or attractive to their spouse.

¹⁷ See <https://imaginewa.org/imagine-u-mentor-program/>

An information campaign can promote the importance to all workers of making it possible for parents to work without having to worry about their children’s safety. At the same time, this campaign can publicize child care possibilities and describe potential legislative solutions as noted above, and perhaps combat misinformation. Telling this story can help move the needle toward all trades workers being advocates for an expanded menu of child care options and solutions, and may also create a more positive working climate for workers with children.



We need MORE SUPPORT for everyone who works. The benefits go beyond anything monetary. Jobs created, happy kids, less stressed adults. (Apprentice electrician, female)

Areas for further investigation

Employer-supported solutions. Survey respondents’ enthusiasm for employer-supported child care solutions (specifically an employer-supported trust fund) was nearly as high as policy-related solutions. In partnership with employers and other stakeholders, the task force may undertake an exploration of the opportunities and constraints that currently exist around this idea.

Workers’ sources of information. Our survey did not investigate how people in the trades learn about child care options. However, 26% of survey respondents reported that they had never heard that there could be subsidies available to them, and several entered comments indicating that they needed help finding care providers who suit their needs. The task force, along with Imagine U, SEIU 925, and Carina (SEIU’s child care registry partner) may be well-positioned to collaborate with key partners to explore ways of connecting workers with care options. The need for this was underscored by one tentative finding from our survey of trades workers that English-language care providers may be difficult for some people to find, while our survey of providers indicated that 78% spoke English. This rate increases to 98% when limited only to child care center respondents. While not conclusive, this contradiction might point to a lack of awareness that may be partly ameliorated by improved systems of communication about available child care options.

Insights from the Trades

The summary and recommendations described in the sections above are supported in part by a survey designed to capture the voices and insights of people currently working in the trades, concerning how access to child care has affected them and their colleagues. This survey was developed following a literature review and conversations with stakeholders, which helped identify the most common issues and potential solutions concerning child care in the trades.



The survey was administered electronically during April 2021, with links in English, Spanish, Russian, Thai, and Vietnamese. Union leaders and apprenticeship coordinators promoted the survey among trades workers and, when possible, provided time during class or work hours to complete the survey. The survey questions are listed in Appendix II.

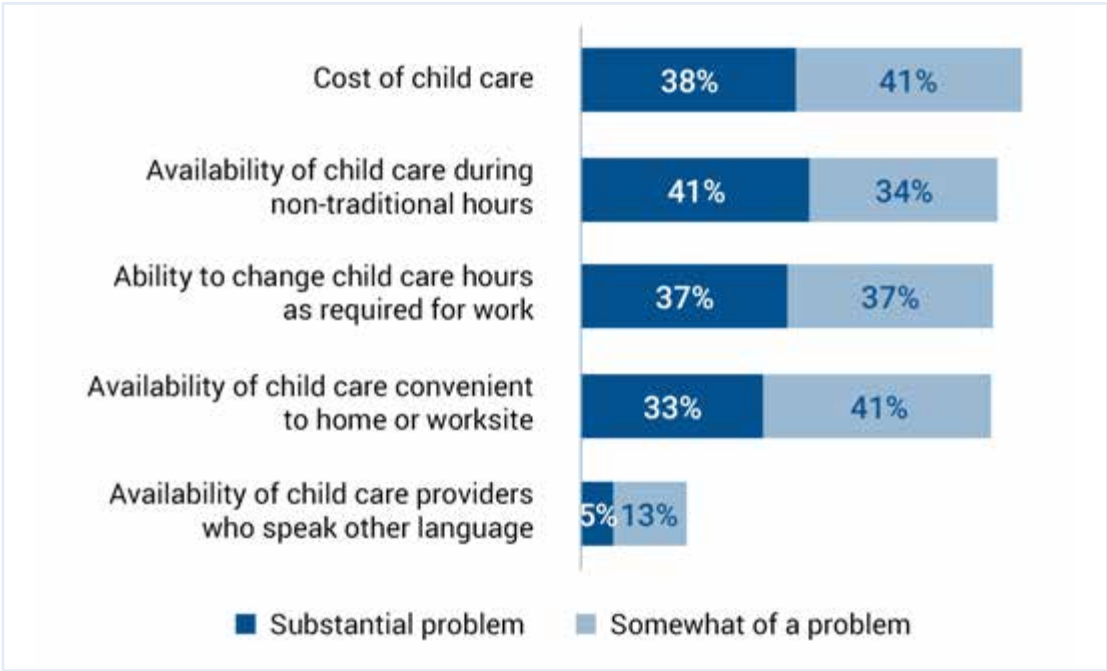
A total of 1,433 trades workers completed the survey:

- Carpenters and machinists are the trades most heavily represented among respondents, together accounting for over 55% of respondents.
- Most respondents (61%) are journey workers. Another 33% are apprentices and the remainder are pre-apprentices.
- 80% of survey respondents live in Snohomish, King, and Pierce counties
- Over 70% of survey respondents are men
- 85% of survey respondents are parents
- 57% of survey respondents are parents of children ages 12 and under

Key findings

The need among parents for support with child care was palpable. Between 70 and 80 percent of parents of children indicated that cost, scheduling, flexibility, and location of child care are or have been either substantial problems, or somewhat of a problem for their families (see Chart 2, first shown on page 7 and reproduced here).

Reproduction of Chart 2: Percent of Trades Workers with Children Reporting That Issues Related to Child Care are or have been a “Substantial Problem” or “Somewhat of a Problem” for Their Family



In addition, there were many comments in the survey that spoke to the desperation that parents in the trades are experiencing. A small selection are reproduced here and throughout the report:

“ *Having ‘on-site’ child care at work places, or jointly managed funds by the union would also be welcomed as we have felt abandoned and forgotten by our state, simply swept under the rug as lower class trash while we are trying to further and better ourselves as working, tax paying, red blooded Americans who have a dream to achieve.* (Apprentice millworker, male)

“ *Please make it happen... Make a child care union-based option available to us.* (Apprentice operating engineer, female)

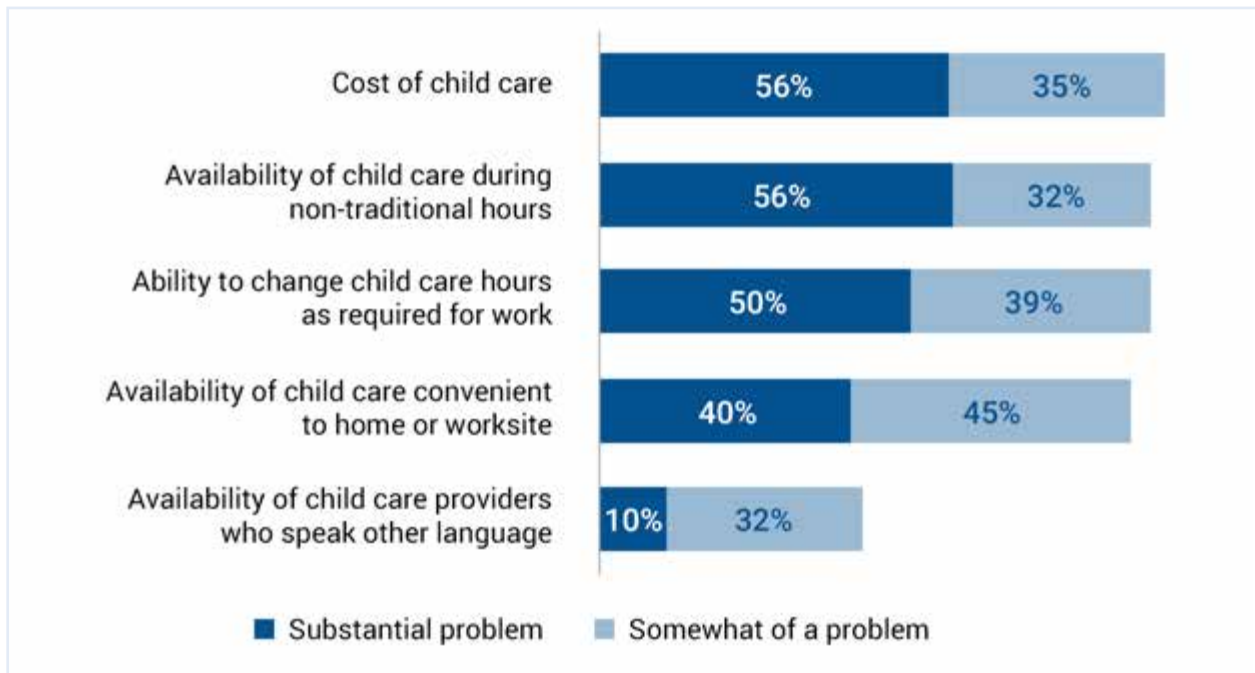
“ *Child care is our biggest hurdle when it comes to success in the union.* (Apprentice carpenter, female)

“ *I was laid off [on . . .] and sat unemployed until [. . .]. I had work from the day I was laid off and numerous job offers in those 6 months but, due to child care not available/reliable and most of all affordable I was unable to accept.* (Apprentice carpenter, male)

It is not only current parents of young children, however, for whom child care is an important issue. Recognition of the need for affordable, reliable, and accessible care cut across all sectors of respondents, including those without children. Chart 1, first shown on page 6 of the report and reproduced here, shows that respondents overall perceived child care issues as a problem for people in the trades. These percentages of overall respondents are even higher than the percentages for parents alone, indicating a possible sense of solidarity among workers: many of those without young children recognize child care as a challenge for people in the trades.



Reproduction of Chart 1, first shown on Page 6: Percent of Trades Workers Reporting That Issues Related to Child Care are a “Substantial Problem” or “Somewhat of a Problem” for People in the Trades



The widespread recognition of the problem around child care is particularly interesting given the demographics of the survey respondents, with around 70% of them being male. Some commented that in their own families, their spouse stayed home and so these issues did not impact them directly, but they acknowledge the impact on their colleagues – and on future generations of trades workers.



It's good this is being talked about. I know my boy's going to be a Union man someday. (Journey carpenter, male)

The survey demonstrated that the **lack of affordable, accessible child care is having an impact on people's choice to enter or remain in the trades, and on their decisions to have children.** Because the survey was only offered to people currently working or preparing to work in the trades, we cannot document attrition that has already happened, or the precursory loss of people choosing not to pursue a career in the trades at all. However, two-thirds of survey respondents (and three-quarters of female survey respondents) reported that they know of people who have not pursued a career in the trades because of child care issues. Moreover, over half of respondents know of people working in the trades who have chosen not to have children because of child care issues.



Survey respondents expanded on the challenges of combining a career in the trades with raising children in their comments:

“ ***It's hard to have a family in this line of work.***
(Journey machinist, male)

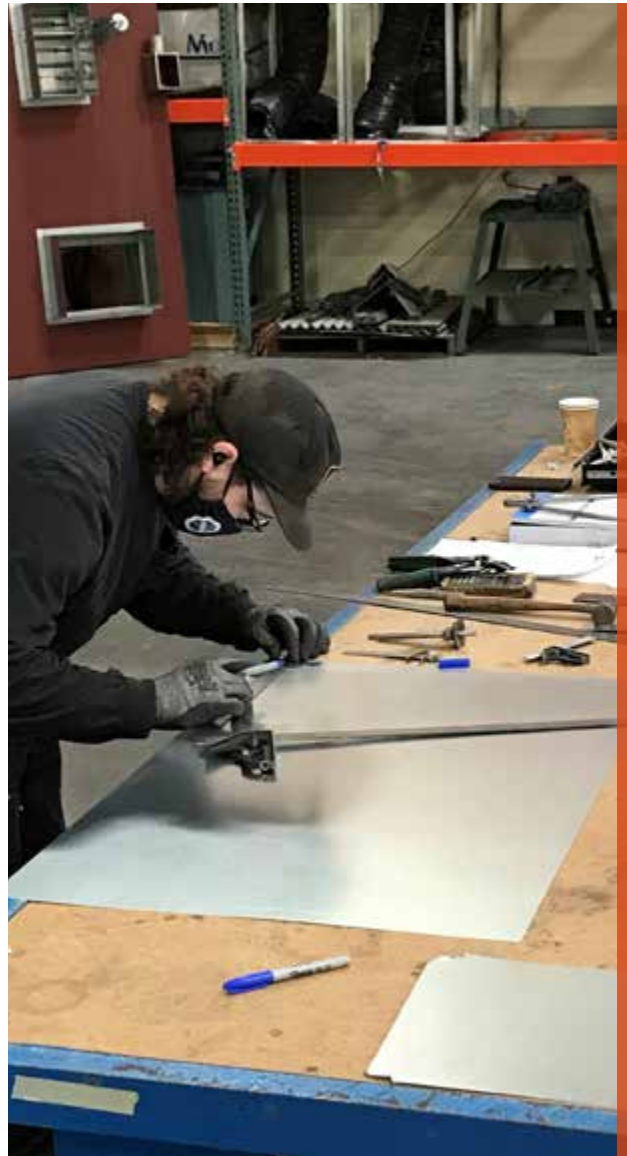
“ ***Single parents cannot work in the trades and be successful parents. The brunt of child care falls on spouses or family.*** (Journey laborer, male)

Women in the trades offered specific comments around how they have navigated, or considered the implications of, having families while working in the trades:

“ ***As a woman in the trades I was nervous to have my child and how it will affect my job. Most businesses don't offer maternity leave and concerns about child care are huge. Also, now that I have a newborn I am worried about how I will pump because I breastfeed and there are no options on the jobsite.***
(Apprentice operating engineer, female)

“ ***I have held off having kids so I could work on my career. Child care has always been a fear for me in this industry and I have been afraid that I would have to quit working once I decide to have kids.***
(Journey sheet metal worker, female)

“ ***I feel that getting pregnant would ruin my career. I feel the demands of my career would also make me an absent parent. It would add stress to a high-stress career field.*** (Female apprentice, trade not given)



Despite the widespread perception that child care is an important issue for people in the trades, it is also important to recognize a less prominent but still present strain of resistance to the idea of assistance with child care from either the government, the union, or employers. There were only a handful of people who were specific and consistent with their comments about this, saying things along the lines of “If you can’t afford kids, don’t have them.” Others were open to some kinds of support but resistant to other kinds, such as opposing any union-wide salary deductions that would pay for child care for those who need it, or opposing any government support for child care.

Related to this attitude is the assumption, which was evident in comments sprinkled throughout the survey, that the best way to handle child care issues is for children to be raised in traditional two-parent households with one parent staying home. There appears to be a lack of recognition among some trades workers of the many challenges that this scenario poses for families. As noted above, promotion of child care solutions as benefitting all trades workers may help address these issues.



I do know lots of people who have lost their wives and children to divorce, because of the trades. Wives do not appreciate being left to maintain the household on evenings and weekends so their husbands can stay at work longer and more. (Apprentice carpenter, male)

Detailed findings

As chart 1 (shown on page 6 and page 16 above) shows, the survey demonstrated that the two major issues for trades workers accessing child care are (1) the cost of child care, and (2) the non-standard hours that many of them work. These were closely followed by the need for flexibility in child care hours, and availability of child care that is close to either home or the workplace. A smaller, but still substantial, number of respondents said that finding a child care provider who speaks other languages is important (we did not ask this question in more detail; this could be to accommodate people who are not native English speakers and need a child care provider who speaks their language, or it could be to expose children to languages other than their own).

Cost

Many survey respondents indicated that the cost of child care is a substantial issue for workers in the trades, even while many earn what appears to be a comfortable salary. Two-thirds of survey respondents (including 45% of apprentices and 82% of journey workers) reported that they earn in excess of \$53,000 per year, which is twice the federal poverty level for a family of four.

Trades workers’ income levels generally disqualify them from public support such as state subsidies, but many still find it challenging to afford child care. Only 3% of survey respondents who have children aged 12 and under reported that they are receiving subsidies or other assistance from the state in paying for child care. Nine percent of respondents reported that they applied for subsidies and were denied, and four percent reported that they used to receive subsidies but no longer qualify. Twenty-six percent of respondents were not aware of the

availability of subsidies and the remainder reported either that they did not need assistance or did not think they would qualify.

Issues around cost came up frequently in the comments that survey respondents offered. More than 300 survey respondents offered at least one substantive comment; of the respondents who offered comments, 86 of them (26% of all commenters) mentioned the high cost of child care in their comments.



It almost costs more to go to work than what we make for working.

(Apprentice operating engineer, female)



It's a huge barrier preventing people within our trade from taking care of ourselves medically and keeping up with bills, when the cost of daycare is so high.

(Apprentice cement mason, female)



The cost of child care can put people so far into debt that it makes finding a job that pays more than child care costs almost impossible for most families.

(Journey machinist, male)

Scheduling

Scheduling - both the availability of child care during non-traditional hours as well as flexibility to change child care hours with short notice - followed closely behind cost among survey respondents as a problem for workers in the trades.

Trades workers frequently work non-standard hours, usually either early mornings or in the evening. Overnight work is not common but does happen, and most workers report that they either sometimes or frequently work weekends. In fact, 94% of survey respondents reported that they at least sometimes work weekends and/or outside of a regular day shift schedule. In addition to the actual hours that they work, many survey respondents noted that the need to travel long distances to their worksites, and the frequent issues with traffic along the way, add to their hours and push their need for child care even further outside of traditional work hours.

Table 1, below, shows the percent of survey respondents working non-standard hours by which hours they work. This table also breaks down responses by career stage and by trade.

Table 1: Percent of Trades Workers Working Non-Standard Hours

	All workers	Apprentices	Journey Workers	Carpenters	Machinists
Before 6 a.m.	42%	33%	47%	34%	49%
After 6 p.m.	22%	16%	24%	7%	29%
Overnight	9%	8%	10%	5%	10%
Weekends (either sometimes or frequently)	90%	87%	91%	83%	93%

Trades workers also work varying hours, and need child care that can adjust to the hours when they are on the job. About two-thirds of survey respondents reported that they frequently work overtime, and of those, more than half say they often get same-day notice of overtime hours. They require child care that will allow them to extend the hours their child is in care with minimal notice.

Workplace schedules and flexibility were another frequent source of comments in the survey, with 78 respondents (24% of those who offered comments) noting the challenge of finding available child care that fits their schedules, and 23 (7%) commenting on the need for flexibility in the workplace around hours and schedules.



“ *If companies want their workers to work Saturdays and Sundays, on a last minute basis, they should offer a clean trailer and at least one care provider to watch our kids onsite for the day. We don't all have people who can support us at the drop of a hat like that.*
(Apprentice carpenter, male)

“ *I would really like more sustainable options for reliable child care so I could go back to work. Early mornings and late nights. In this area, money isn't much of an object.*
(Journey carpenter, female)

“ *Nothing was mentioned about employers holding grudges to people who don't work overtime. This is a bigger issue than you think and no one talks about this. Frustrating!*
(Journey ironworker, male)

Convenience

Location of a child care facility close to work or home was also an important issue for trades workers. About 35% of survey respondents sometimes or often work in different locations, so child care locations cannot always be near a job site. However, long commute times – potentially increased substantially when workers are in different locations – make child care sites located near the home problematic as well. School-age children also need to be in child care locations that are accessible from their school.



I would need to drop off my kids at 4:00am and would not be able to pick them up until 4:30pm due to my commute. I could take them to somewhere in Seattle but my jobsite changes so often and I couldn't change that often for the kids and also it would be SUPER hard to find care for the short term. (Journey sheet metal worker, female)

Language

While the availability of child care providers who speak another language was less likely to be viewed as substantially or somewhat problematic for people in the trades, it was still an issue that was noted by about 40% of survey respondents. Nearly 20% of survey respondents with children (of any age) reported that this is or has been an issue for their family.

We asked those survey respondents who indicated this was an issue for their family which languages they would like child care providers to speak. Several language options were provided in a checkbox question, with an opportunity to write in other languages. Of 189 survey respondents who indicated that language barriers were an issue, 51 (27%) wrote in “English” as the language they would like child care providers to speak (this was not offered as a choice in the survey item, because we simply didn't realize that a lack of providers who speak English was an issue). Because this prompt was only offered to those who had earlier indicated a difficulty with finding child care providers who spoke their language, we can conclude that at least in some parts of Washington, finding child care providers who speak English is a challenge.

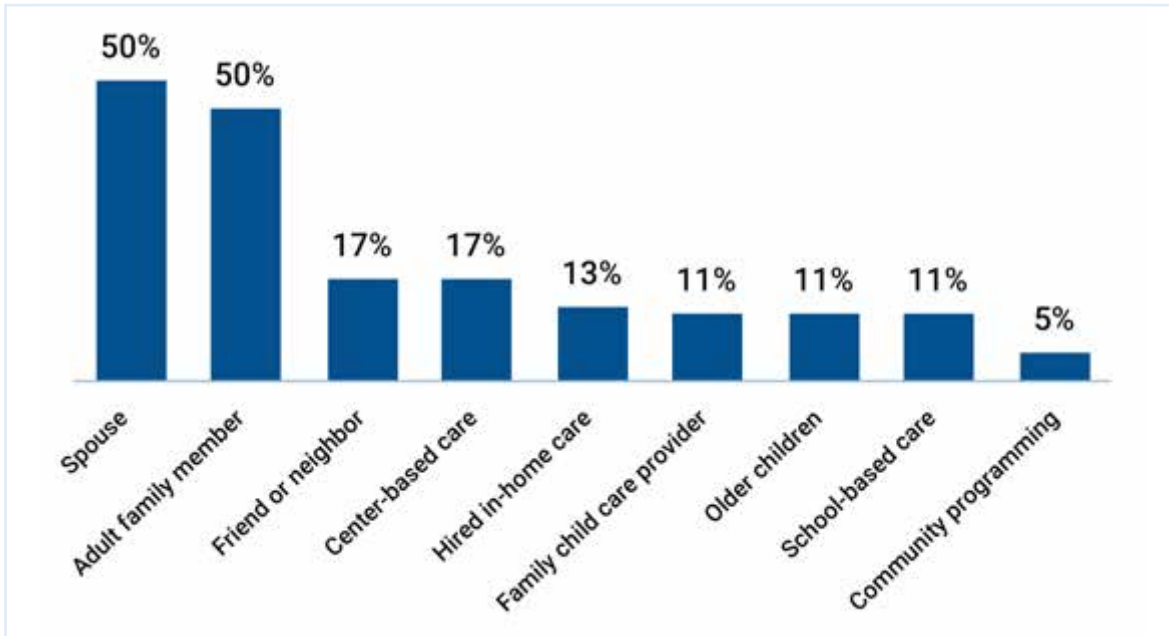
Other languages that trades workers seek in child care providers include Spanish (46 respondents), Vietnamese (33 respondents), and Somali (16 respondents). There were many additional languages noted by fewer than 10 respondents.

How workers are accessing care

We asked trades workers who have children aged 12 and under what child care options they use during work hours, with the option to select all that apply. Chart 5 shows the percent of respondents selecting each option:



Chart 5: Child care options used by trades workers with children age 12 and under



Many workers selected more than one option, providing us with a sense of the combinations of care that families put together. Our analysis of these combinations showed that 58% of survey respondents with young children rely exclusively on informal care, such as a spouse, family members, or friends to care for their children. Only 16% of survey respondents with young children rely exclusively on formal care arrangements with licensed child care centers and family child care.

COVID-19

Our survey was conducted just over a year into the COVID-19 pandemic, at a point where vaccines were only beginning to be widely available and many restrictions that impacted child care accessibility and availability were still in place. Our survey asked respondents how the pandemic had affected their ability to access child care. Nearly 70% of respondents with children aged 12 and under reported that the pandemic had impacted their access to child care. While families relying on paid child care were most heavily affected, we found that the pandemic strained even families relying on informal networks of care. (It is important to note that the closing or restriction of formal child care providers may be why many of these families are now relying on informal networks of care; we only asked about current child care arrangements and did not ask whether these had changed because of the pandemic).

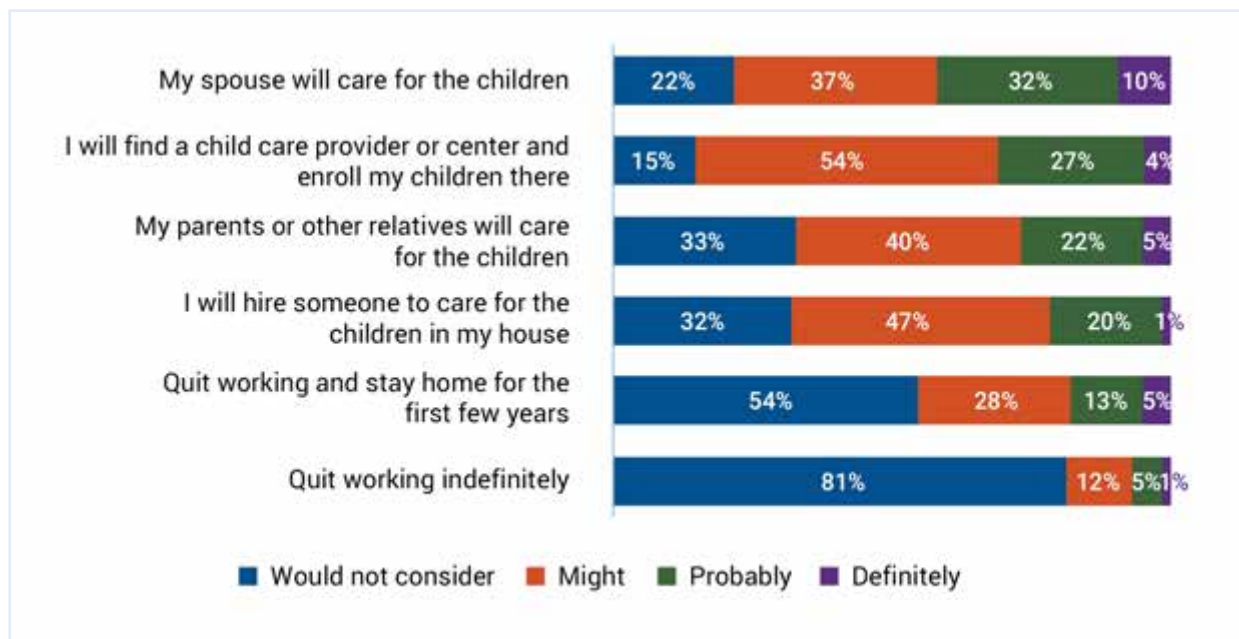
Appendix III shows a breakdown of the impact of COVID on families with different types of care arrangements for their children.

Trades Workers Without Children

As noted above, 85% of our survey respondents have children of any age (including adult children). Of the 15% who are not currently parents or guardians, about one-third reported that they definitely plan to have children, and another 18% reported that they are likely to have children.

Those respondents who reported that they will definitely or probably have children, or who were not sure whether they wanted children, were asked whether they had considered different types of care arrangements for when they had children. Chart 6 shows a breakdown of their responses:

Chart 6: Percent of Trades Workers Who Do Not Yet Have Children, But Who May Have Them Someday, Who Have Considered Each Type of Care



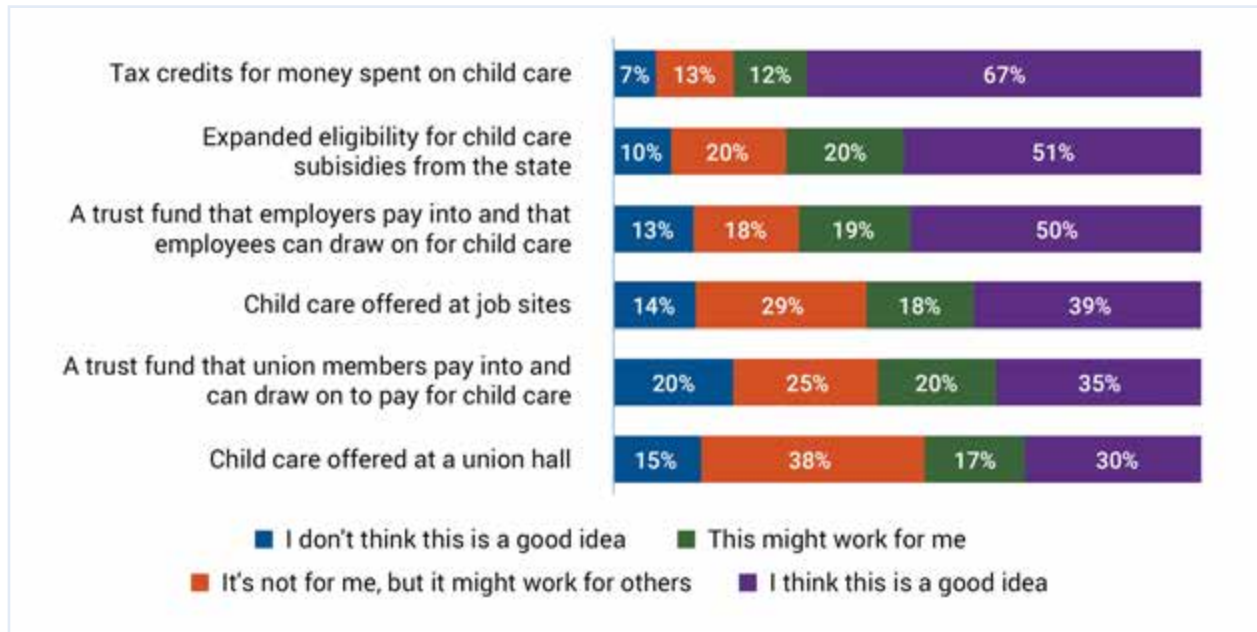
As Chart 6 shows, few of the trades workers who hope to have children some day plan to quit work, even for a few years, to stay home with their children. Over 40% report that their spouse will “probably” or “definitely” stay home with their children. However, nearly 90% of respondents are at least open to (selecting “might,” “probably,” or “definitely” as responses) paid care for their children, either in the form of center-based care, family child care providers, or other forms of paid care.

We asked those who do not want children, or who are not sure, whether their careers are the reason why they do not want children. Only 6% reported that their careers are the sole reason they made this decision, with another 14% reporting that their careers have had a strong impact on this decision. Over 60% said that their careers and their decision to not have children are totally separate.

Proposed solutions

Based on the literature and on conversations with key stakeholders, we developed a menu of potential solutions to the child care issues facing workers in the trades, and asked survey respondents (all respondents, regardless of whether they had children) to comment on them. The results are displayed in Chart 4, on page 10 of this report and reproduced below.

Reproduction of Chart 4 (previously displayed on page 10): Trades Workers' Reactions to Child Care Solutions Currently Being Explored



As Chart 4 shows, trades workers are most responsive to child care solutions offered through the state and federal governments, such as tax credits and child care subsidies, and solutions offered by employers. However, there was substantial support for each of the solutions that we suggested.



We also allowed workers to offer their own suggestions for solutions, and 123 workers offered comments. Some of the types of responses we saw included:

- **Reduced costs.** 21 respondents wanted to see reduced child care costs or financial assistance coming from an unspecified source. Five respondents wanted additional government support for child care, four wanted employer support, and three wanted union support.
- **More hours available.** Thirteen respondents wanted more hours available for child care, and another six wanted more flexibility from employers around overtime notice, and/or the ability to move work hours. However, one respondent noted a potential issue with flexibility:
 - Also a conundrum is having flexible construction shift hours while maintaining integrity of union contracts. Historically shifts have been aligned for start/stop/break times to prevent abuse of worker communication and rights. I wonder if there might be some way to address all that with current technologies?
- **Child care at job sites.** Ten respondents wanted child care at or near job sites. Five wanted child care sites run by unions; two wanted sites run by employers. One requested child care at apprentice sites.

Fifteen respondents had specific suggestions for other ways in which to provide child care. Their comments are organized below, by category:

- **Informal care networks - formalizing, subsidizing, making people aware of their availability**
 - Maybe a way to connect with trades workers who have spouses that stay at home? They might be able to help with child care during the weird hours. If it wasn't for family and friends I would be lost.
 - Network of tradesmen family members willing to 'babysit' other tradesmen's kids, in home
 - Organized in-home care amongst union members with compensation from money collected from members
 - A program to compensate friends of family or extended family, for providing child care
 - Grandparents who forfeit work hours to care for grandchildren should receive tax credits. This keeps the younger workforce on the job during their learning years and it also incentivizes grandparents who invest in their extended family via providing child care.
 - Helping members find home daycare centers might be something the unions could help members with.
- **Expanding availability**
 - Worker funded co-ops. Quality child care at cost.
 - Funding before and after school programs at elementary schools
 - Train unemployed people on welfare to run state funded daycare centers. Then others who can't afford daycare can drop off children and go to work. This could employ 1000's of adults currently on welfare.

- I think more child care options would be available if child care workers were paid more. How to entice child care for early/late hours and transitions for children to/from school?
- **Payment models**
 - Offer those with kids a child care stipend and a way to save similar to an HSA account that they can use towards monthly child care costs.
 - Subsidies for child care providers who are open for extended hours.
- **Accessing information**
 - Union-worker related child care facilities that operate on early and late hours. Specific areas. Maybe open a website where people who want to open daycares that meet our criteria, can market their daycare and allow workers to have these options. Or create a site with pre-existing daycares with our hours and list them on that site.
 - Outcall child care hotline.
- **Resources**
 - Care That Works is a model that might help in this area. Carethatworks.org

Summary of Insights from Trades Workers

The responses to the survey of trades people clearly show that there is a strong need for child care, particularly during early morning hours, and at a cost that does not wipe out a large chunk of trades workers' earnings. Trades workers are open to a variety of suggested solutions, and also offered some additional thoughts about how to address this issue.



I think it's very cool and family-welcoming that the union is planning on assisting with child care for its members because I don't see any non-union companies who would go out of their way to make life outside of work less stressful. I love the union! (Apprentice carpenter, male)

Insights from Providers

In addition to the survey of trades workers, an additional survey of child care providers was conducted to determine the current availability of child care providers in three different categories (child care centers, licensed family home child care providers, and Family, Friend, and Neighbor providers). This survey was intended to complement the survey of the trades workers, so that recommendations could address economic stability of both populations, and in order to help empirically validate the experiences reported by many trades workers.

The online survey was conducted in April of 2021, and had a total of 1,301 responses (roughly 23% of all child care providers in the state of Washington). Licensed family child care providers were the best represented, and licensed child care centers were the least. See table 2 for details.

Table 2. Response Rates

	Respondents	Total in State ¹⁸	Response Rate
Licensed Child Care Centers	129	1,692	7.6%
Licensed Family Home Child Care Providers	947	2,639	35.8%
Family, Friend, and Neighbor Providers	225	1,275	17.6%

Geographic Breakdown: Respondents from 30 WA and 2 OR Counties

Respondents came from 30 counties in Washington and 2 in Oregon. The top 10 counties represented for each type of provider are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Top 10 Geographic Counties/Areas Represented In Each Survey

Licensed Family Home Child Care Providers (FCCP)	Family, Friend, and Neighbor Providers (FFN)	Licensed Child Care Centers (CC)
King - 205	Pierce - 39	King - 21
Yakima - 64	King - 27	Snohomish - 10
Pierce - 58	Yakima - 16	Clark - 8
Snohomish - 46	Spokane - 7	Pierce - 8
Grant - 35	Benton - 6	Spokane - 6
Franklin - 27	Clark - 5	Thurston - 5
Chelan - 23	Snohomish - 5	Franklin - 4
Clark - 22	Clallam - 2	Grays Harbor - 3
Thurston - 20	Douglas - 2	Kitsap - 3
Skagit - 15	Grant - 2	Yakima - 3

¹⁸ Totals are based on current union (SEIU 925) data.

Key Findings

A key finding of the survey results of tradespeople was a need for child care during non-standard hours, particularly early morning hours. **Though an overall minority of child care providers surveyed indicated that they were able to provide non-standard hour care, of those that did, a majority were able to provide care before 6am.** Additionally, a majority of respondents who did provide non-standard hour care also indicated that their rates for providing this care were no different than rates for providing standard hour care.

Many respondents also noted that they are unable to provide standard hour care. The reasons included inflexible licensing requirements, insurance restrictions, the need for additional subsidies and supplies, and others (see Appendix I for all reasons individually). However, **the most common impediment listed by all providers was a lack of available staff and the resources to pay for their additional hours or overtime.**

Of the minority of FCCP and Centers providers who were either currently offering non-standard-hour care or willing to offer non-standard-hour care, FCCP providers were the majority. A slim majority (55%) of FFN providers currently offer non-standard hour care.

Non-standard hours for child care centers: 10% of child care centers indicated they would be able to accommodate non-standard hours of child care needed. However, this would be Monday-Friday and not overnight or on weekends. There is some chance that some centers could open earlier and stay open later Monday-Friday if there were enough children to pay the cost of staffing required by law.

- 68% only offer care in traditional hours of 6:00 am -6:00 pm Monday-Friday
- 13% offer care before 6 M-F and 12% offer care after 6:00 Monday-Friday
- Less than 1% offer care on weekends or overnight
- Possible availability of Non-Standard Hour Child Care (before 6 and after 6)
 - 58% could not be open during non-standard hours
 - 20% could be open before 6:00 am and after 6:00 pm
 - Less than 1% could be open on weekends or overnight

Non-standard hours for Family Child Care Providers: 48% of licensed family child care providers currently offer non-standard hour care. 65% of providers not currently offering non-standard hour care indicated that they could provide care outside of the outside the hours of 6am-6pm, Monday through Friday if there were demand from families and/or additional staffing available to them. Of 48% of respondent FCCP providers offering non-standard hour care:

- 74% offer care before 6am Monday-Friday
- 55% offer child care on weekends
- 46% offer child care after 6am Monday-Friday
- 38% offer child care overnight



Non-standard hours for Family, Friend, and Neighbor Child Care Providers: 55% offer care during a combination of non-standard hours before 6:00 am, after 6:00 pm or on weekends or overnight. Of the 55% that offer non-standard hour care:

- 73% offer child care on weekends
- 53% offer care before 6am Monday-Friday
- 45% offer child care after 6am Monday-Friday
- 42% offer child care overnight

Rates for Non-Standard Hour Care: Of those respondent child care providers who offer non-standard hour care, a majority indicated that they do not charge higher rates to provide this care.

- Center Non-Standard Hour Rates
 - 70% of center respondents who provide non-standard hour care indicated that their rates for non-standard hour care were the same as those for standard hour care
 - 30% of center respondents who provide non-standard hour care indicated that their rates for non-standard hour care were higher than rates for standard hour care
- FCCP Non-Standard Hour Rates
 - 54% of FCCP respondents who provide non-standard hour care indicated that their rates for non-standard hour care were the same as those for standard hour care
 - 44% of FCCP respondents who provide non-standard hour care indicated that their rates for non-standard hour care were higher than rates for standard hour care
- FFN Non-Standard Hour Rates
 - 82% of FFN respondents who provide non-standard hour care indicated that their rates for non-standard hour care were the same as those for standard hour care
 - 17% of FFN respondents who provide non-standard hour care indicated that their rates for non-standard hour care were higher than rates for standard hour care

Drop-In Care: FCCP, FFN, and centers respondents were asked if they would be willing to hold as needed drop-in slots available if the slots were paid for in advance. A majority of all providers who answered the question indicated they would be willing to hold as needed drop-in slots available

- Centers: 77%
- FCCP: 86%
- FFN: 64%

Languages Available: All types of child care providers can accommodate a variety of language needs.

Ages and needs of children in care: Both child care centers and family home providers care for a spectrum of ages and needs.

Summary of Insights from Child Care Providers

Responses from child care providers speak to the challenges and opportunities that may exist with the existing child care workforce in Washington. While offering non-standard hour care is a problem for many, there is a significant number of providers who are able to accommodate this need, most frequently among the less-formal types of care. In addition, drop-in care is an option that many would be willing to explore. Financial resources would have to be provided to make offering care at different times possible. Child care providers, staff, and directors must be able to make a living wage in order to address the needs of child care in Washington.



Conclusion

This study represents a step forward in understanding, acknowledging, and addressing the complex and interdependent needs of parents in the trades and child care workers. It has provided some key empirical evidence to support what trades workers have been saying for a long time — that the demands of their jobs and the realities of child care can feel like being wedged between a rock and a hard place. In addition, it helped illustrate a similar conundrum for child care providers — the web of regulations and restrictions, coupled with the high cost of housing, staffing, and providing high-quality care, that make it difficult or impossible to provide the kind of flexibility that many parents in the trades need.

While difficult, this problem may not be intractable. It is generally accepted that the rigors of trade work — long hours, lengthy commutes, weekend and overnight shifts, overtime — are not likely to change in the foreseeable future. However, there are steps being taken to help address some of the challenges faced by families and child care providers in Washington. For example, some parts of the state are already expanding income eligibility to help working families meet the high cost of care, and programs such as the state's Working Connections Child Care and Seasonal Child Care programs already exist to serve as potential models. The Imagine Institute, working with state policymakers and SEIU 925, has the potential capacity to expand child care by thousands of slots per year, and finding new streams of funding will help realize that potential. In June 2021, the Child Care Task Force hosted an employer roundtable to discuss preliminary results of this study, and to initiate serious conversation with a variety of employers about the severity of the child care challenge and ways to help ameliorate it.

The Child Care Task Force is committed to exploring solutions for the immediate and long-term needs of trades people, and to working hand-in-hand with child care partners to ensure that those solutions complement the needs of providers. Both sets of workers are vital to our state's economic and social health, and both deserve recognition, celebration, support, and respect. This study has equipped the Task Force with new ways to advance its activities toward improved conditions for the people who care for our children, who construct our homes, offices, roads, and bridges, who build the machines that our lives depend on, and who keep it all running smoothly.

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