

Working Paper

***Meeting the Family Care Needs of the  
Health Care Workforce:  
Reflections on the 1199 Child Care Fund***

**Carol Joyner, Executive Director,  
1199/Employer Child Care Fund**

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Working Paper edited by: Susan C. Cass

For information regarding the MIT Workplace Center or for additional copies of this Working Paper (#WPC0007), please email [workplacecenter@mit.edu](mailto:workplacecenter@mit.edu), call (617) 253-7996 or visit our website: [web.mit.edu/workplacecenter](http://web.mit.edu/workplacecenter).

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## **Introduction**

One of the working premises of the MIT Workplace Center is that we are going to solve and address work-family concerns only when society works to identify the broadest spectrum of stakeholders with an interest in solving the issues that face working families. This premise leads us to want to connect with those stakeholders who *are* addressing the needs of working families, like the labor and management partnership that founded the 1199/Employer Child Care Fund. “Labor-Management Partnerships for Working Families,” the MIT Workplace Center’s fall 2002 Seminar Series, focused on partnerships that are starting to push the envelope of traditional labor-management partnerships. That is just what Carol Joyner’s organization does.

Carol Joyner is executive director of the 1199/Employer Child Care Fund. She is its founding director and has guided the Fund through its ten years of growth, from serving 250 children to serving 7,000 children a year. Prior to her work at the Child Care Fund, Joyner was assistant director of the 1199 Training and Upgrading Fund where she planned and implemented a number of programs for adult learners and children. Joyner has a master’s degree in psychology from City College of New York and taught elementary school in the public school system for six years.

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## **A Brief History of the 1199 in New York**

Representing approximately 250,000 members and growing every day, the 1199 SEIU is New York's Health and Human Service Employees Union. The union extends from Montauk, Long Island to Buffalo, New York and is expanding westward in New York State. The union started in the early 1930s when a small group of pharmacists wanted to organize. In the 1960s, 1199 began organizing health care workers, primarily in hospitals, and in the 1970s moved on to home care workers, giving them a stronger voice and higher wages as well. 1199 also includes an entity that is not health care related—the legal aid workers in New York City—organized approximately 20 years ago.

## **1199 and Work-Family—The 1199/Employer Child Care Fund**

1199's membership is huge and diverse, ranging from maintenance workers and clerical workers in hospitals to physician's assistants. The salary range and lifestyle differences are enormous between these groups, but one thing the members all have in common, as all of us do, is they all are part of a family and have loved ones and therefore have to balance work and family.

Beginning in 1989, work-family issues became a topic of discussion and great interest at delegates' and organizing meetings alongside more traditional workplace issues. 1199 members were concerned that while they worked, their children were in environments that did not nurture, protect, and value them. At that time, with hospitals downsizing and forced overtime in the hospitals, workplace issues coupled with fewer or no supports in the community (for instance, after-school programs were being cut) led the members to bring their concerns to the union. One would think that a church or religious institution would be the organization people would turn to with such problems, but that was not the case. The workers brought these problems to the union, and the union began to pay attention.

By the end of 1989, the union had completed a contract survey as it does every year before negotiations. A question on the survey asked, "Would you fight for a childcare benefit in this union?" The response? Eighty percent of those who responded to the survey said they thought the union should fight for a childcare benefit. At that time, about 40 percent of the membership were parents. Union officials believed that some union members would complain about childcare benefits because it would be a benefit just for a specific population within the union. Benefits are generally for the entire membership—everyone gets the same thing. A registered nurse, for example, may receive additional benefits due to the budget process, but for the most part the standard contract language is the same for the entire membership. The survey convinced the union to fight for childcare benefits.

In the beginning, 16 forward-thinking healthcare institutions signed on to this pioneering initiative—leading to the establishment of the first comprehensive Taft-Hartley Childcare Fund in the nation. Each employer agreed to pay three-tenths of a percent of their gross yearly payroll into a childcare fund—amounting to approximately two million

dollars each year. Currently, there is approximately \$16 million a year in the Fund. In the past, employers contributed between three and five percent and there was no regularity to the bargaining. Since April 1, 2003, all employers contribute five percent.

In 1991, 1199 successfully negotiated a contract with a block of institutions called the League of Voluntary Hospitals resulting in the addition of 50 new institutions into the Child Care Fund. In 1992 contract negotiations, approximately 60 additional employers agreed to contribute to the Child Care Fund, effective 1994. Currently more than 380 employers contribute to the Fund, which provides benefits for approximately 8,000 children each year.

*Much of the success of the Child Care Fund can be attributed to the work of the labor-management committee members.*

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### **The Labor-Management Board of Trustees**

Originally, there were seven representatives on the union side and seven on the management side of the board set up to govern the Fund. Now there are 13 on each side. In 1994, when the League of Voluntary Hospitals came into the Fund, we went through an active process of determining how we are going to operate and the Trustees made a formal decision to operate more collaboratively. There are no caucuses on this board. There is a sincere attempt at conversations that are not driven by the union or management agenda. Board members thought that the childcare interests of working people would be better served with this type of collaboration. And so far, most Trustees would agree that this approach benefits the Fund as well as the families.

### **Local Labor-Management Committees**

Much of the success of the Child Care Fund can be attributed to the work of the labor-management committee members. When the Fund began, it needed an identity, and we felt strongly that local committees of rank and file members were the key to real parent participation. The parents of the children in these programs needed to have a say in the types of programs that would be offered and how the collective bargaining money would be spent. In the beginning, there was a big struggle. This was new territory—usually with benefit plans, trustees determine the complete schedule of benefits and recipients simply participate. But oftentimes with childcare and education services, parents do have a voice and the Child Care Fund was structured so the members—the parents—would participate in the same way.

At each contributing institution, therefore, a local committee helps administer the Fund to participants. The Board of Trustees adopted a plan of benefits from which local committees select. To give the members a voice, we designed the local committees to have budget control over what their employer contributes. The committee could decide if they wanted money to go to camps, holiday programs, voucher reimbursements, after-school programs, or to developing a childcare center. People began to dream, and it was a very exciting time. There were some committees where management was interested, too,

and worked with 1199 members to develop these programs and to budget for their childcare benefits.

From the start, committee members have been involved in resource development. They keep their ears to the ground in their communities to find the area's best camps and

### **Finances**

Years ago when new institutions began contributing, it took time for them to figure out the full process. Some union members could not believe the Fund existed! We used to wonder why some particular hospital had such low turn-out during registration. In focus groups people said they thought their money would be taken out of their paychecks. They could not conceive that the employers would contribute for childcare benefits. This lag in start-up resulted in a Fund balance that over the years accumulated in several local accounts. Even though we sent out literature, and the registration material was very clear, these members could not believe that this was a benefit that they would actually receive without payroll deduction. The commingled structure will allow the surplus to be spent where it's needed most.

programs. Members also provide counseling to other 1199ers, taking them through the complicated process of registering for childcare benefits. They also assist one another during crises and give tips for managing work and family.

We currently have about 600 committee members, and this year we are changing the structure of the committees. Last year when the union negotiated a contract, they decided to commingle all of the funds. In the past, we were able to have strong committees because we had 380 separate budgets, which were based on the institution that provided the funds. It was to a very equitable system, but one that had a lot of buy-in on a local level. People felt that it was their money and they should control it. That worked when there were a small number of institutions, but the Fund's growth has forced a new operating process. We will experiment with commingling this year and have the challenge of maintaining the committee participation absent financial control.

### **Whom to Serve**

Originally we tried to figure out how to offer the broadest array of services and benefits to 1199 members. After some struggle, the Trustees agreed that we should serve children from birth to 17 years of age. This was not an easy decision and tension arose because several Trustees thought the cutoff should be 13 years of age, as it is generally for tax purposes. There was also disagreement regarding the needs of teenagers and whether or not the Fund should provide benefits to "young adults." Other Trustees argued that all children require care while parents are working and the type of care should be age appropriate. But the union felt strongly about focusing on teenagers since a lot of our members have teenage children. Originally, most people thought we would set up a childcare center in every hospital and they imagined people wearing nursing uniforms, walking around and rocking babies all day. But our survey results suggested that members needed a comprehensive range of care.

## **Non-Traditional Hours and Childcare**

Ten years ago we conducted a survey and asked people who worked non-traditional hours what kind of childcare they wanted. Responses were minimal on this question. In fact, results from both the survey and follow-up focus groups indicated that parents do not want to take their children out at night, they want them home. Vouchers meet some of that need. A babysitter can come to the home of a late shift worker or single parent and stay while the children are sleeping. While we have the capacity to provide 24-hour care at our new learning center, it now operates from 6:45 a.m. – 6:00 p.m., spanning several shifts. In Texas, the number of 24-hour centers is growing and the UAW has a 24-hour center in Flint, Michigan. It would be interesting to study these centers in the coming years. (See #WPC0008)

## **Programs and Accomplishments**

- **Voucher System**

One of the Fund's first programs was a voucher system. Parents get reimbursed for childcare tuition up to \$75 per week based on a sliding fee scale that considers their salary and the number of children in their care. This is structured very much like a typical social service voucher or reimbursement system.

- **Childcare Centers**

Nine years ago, we started our first childcare center, the 1199 Future of America Learning Center. We recently expanded that center and have developed another center in the Bronx. The new center has 10,000 square feet of space and is a collaboration between the Child Care Fund, the 1199 Training Fund, and the City University of New York. Over the years, the Fund has also sought the development of a center in Brooklyn, which has the largest concentration of 1199 children.

- **Subsidized Slots in Centers**

Some hospitals have existing childcare centers, but the tuition is at the market rate and cost prohibitive for 1199 parents. The average 1199er or parent cannot afford \$12,000 yearly tuition. Doctors and nurses are the primary users of the on-site centers. When we can, we purchase slots from those centers and subsidize them for 1199 members, reducing tuition by 50 percent or more. The subsidized tuition is still a lot compared to people's salaries, but the subsidies make it more feasible than paying the full tuition.

- **Summer Day Camp Programs**

Parents with school age children have several gaps in childcare throughout the year. The summer and school breaks, for example, present a challenge to parents who must work and can not take the time off to be with their children. The Fund's first program was the summer day camp program.

We contract primarily with 135 camps located in the five boroughs of New York City, Long Island, and Westchester. 1199 parents select the camp that they want and then pay the Fund a small co-payment. We added a summer day camp voucher program that

reimburses summer camp costs for people who do not live in the five boroughs of New York City. These people can use the voucher and select whatever camp they want in accordance with a reimbursement schedule. In addition, we have gone into surrounding communities and developed contracts with other community-based programs. Some of these camps are 90 percent 1199 children. It is good for the camp because they have guaranteed funding. It is very good for us because those are the communities where the members live. The camps are often in the churches or the synagogues that the members attend, and it makes sense to keep those programs funded and the community relationships consistent.

- **Cultural Arts Program**

We started a cultural arts program about six years ago and initially contracted with six or seven cultural arts institutions around New York. Members wanted support to help them pay for arts activities. In response, we developed a cultural arts stipend program, similar to the voucher program.

Getting the cultural arts program approved was a big struggle. Some Trustees did not consider it childcare. They felt the program would not enable employees to work more. They saw it as time for employees' children to dance and sing. We argued that children are no longer dancing and singing in school because of the drastic cuts in schools' arts budgets. What helped us was a provision of the 1199 contract requiring people to work every other weekend. We said, while the union members are working every other weekend what are their children doing? They are home, watching TV or dancing and singing alone. These children need to be engaged.

We thought we would develop relationships with several arts programs and museums, but it proved to be very, very difficult. The groups that we were able to develop relationships with—seven organizations—had to redesign Saturday programs to accommodate a group of children from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. We tacked on the cultural arts stipend program because we thought it might be easier for people to get reimbursement for a dance or music class the child is engaged in on the weekend. It is a very interesting project, and parents do appreciate it. We have about 450 children using the cultural arts program at any given time.

- **Workforce 2000**

When the Fund decided to start a youth program we were clear that it had to be sustainable year round and be able to reach young people in a variety of ways. We were not sure however, what young people wanted out of such a program. One summer we polled a group of 300 teenagers about what they wanted and needed and where they planned to be in four years. We asked what was interesting to them about school and what careers interested them. We found huge gaps between what kids thought they were going to be or wanted to be and what they were interested in at the moment. For example, kids were saying, "I definitely want to go to medical school" yet they were failing math or failing science. There was a total mismatch between where kids wanted to be and where they currently were.



In response to the survey mentioned above, we developed Workforce 2000 in cooperation with New York University (NYU). The children go to NYU on Saturdays and they work with counselors and college students to begin honing their skills and thinking more deeply about what it is they want to do. With the counselors, the students look at their transcripts, their pattern of study, their interest level and develop a plan for their future. Students also work on developing their skills. If one wants to be a doctor, then they work on math skills.

Workforce 2000 is a response to the new standards that states have imposed on children. Across the country, new education standards have affected kids. Our hope for this program is to develop a safety net so teenagers not only learn how to assess their own skills, but they also get support to meet the standards that the New York City Department of Education and many other county systems are requiring of them. Setting higher standards is acceptable to most people, but the school systems have failed to create the needed academic support to help students meet the standards.

The counselors at NYU develop a relationship with each of these students' high school guidance counselors to help ensure continuity in the classroom and that the guidance counselors talk to the children. The average guidance counselor in a New York City public school has about 300 cases, so their time with students is extremely limited. The counselors at NYU are asking the guidance counselors in the high schools to pay particular attention to this group of children. This does not solve all of New York City's public education problems, but it does address some of the issues these 300 or so individuals face. Over the last four years, all of the students in the senior class of the Workforce 2000 program have graduated high school and entered college (with the occasional exception of someone entering the military). We keep track of the students, and they also do well in college.

## **Child Care Fund Spin Offs**

About four years ago, the Child Care Fund became the sole member of the Child Care Corporation, whose purpose is to oversee childcare centers and childcare center development. Under the Corporation, we have established two childcare centers, a Public Education Project and new grant-funded program to extend childcare benefits to low income parents.

In addition, we have been trying to address a concern that members have about sick care and what happens when their child is sick and they must return to work. The union contract has a sick leave provision, but it only allows members to use two sick days for a family member who is sick. We are in the process of working with Montefiore Hospital in the Bronx to develop an on-site sick care program with space in the hospital's pediatrics department. 1199 members would be able to use that space for up to four days if their child is sick.

Another interesting project is the Union Child Care Coalition, which is not under the auspices of the Fund or Corporation. It is a coalition of the New York State AFL-CIO, and the Fund participates. The coalition of 20 labor unions in and around New York

City, which started about six or seven years ago, frames the union position on work and family issues. The Union Child Care Coalition works on behalf of all children in the State of New York. The Coalition primarily started out doing what unions do best—lobbying—and we realized that when the unions went up to Albany to lobby for more childcare dollars in the state budget, the legislators definitely paid attention. As a result, the budget for childcare increased significantly for over three years. Union children receive free summer camp programs, the facilitated enrollment program assists middle income workers with their childcare expense, and the Coalition has joined the New York State Paid Family Leave Committee. Since September 11 and the budget crises effecting most states, the Union Child Care Coalition has been instrumental in working with the statewide coalition of childcare advocates to move that agenda along.

### **Culture Change as a Result of the Child Care Fund**

There is a small nursing home up the block from our first childcare center. The 1199 members at that nursing home brought me over to the space they had found and said, “let’s build a center together.” The Child Care Fund had a huge impact on that nursing home. The management person is one of the board members and is very committed to the local committee structure. He was one of the lead opponents of the commingled financial structure that might weaken the local committee, and spoke more strongly about the committees than anyone on the board. The parents in the nursing home were very committed to the center whether they had children in the center or not. They met with other parents regarding center-based issues, raised money for it by having fish fries at lunchtime, and purchased holiday gifts for all of the children.

While I don’t know what impact the childcare center had on the work of these parents on a day-to-day basis, I do know that the childcare discussion made the other problems a little bit easier to deal with, because they found a common ground and used that common ground as a successful starting point for other conversations.

We hear from the local committee members that parents greatly appreciate the Fund, and they see it as an integral part of their work. They need these benefits to work. Members can not get the benefit every year because there is not enough money for all of the children that need to be served. Benefits are distributed by seniority and benefit history, so there is type of rotation system. At times, members have even coordinated with one another, to help make sure families with the greatest needs are served. They have said things such as, “I know you need it more than me—I’ll decide not to register this year and give others a chance to be considered.”

Throughout the union membership, I have never witnessed the competitiveness in terms of receiving the benefits that one hears about in corporations. Parents could take the position of, “I know how to register and it benefits me to have fewer people in this hospital register because of how the benefits get distributed. So, I’m not going to help others to register.” But they do not take that position at all. They want as many people as possible to register for this benefit because it is such a great thing and they know others need it. It has created a community mindedness amongst our members.

## **Future Projects and Directions**

- **Paid Family Medical Leave**

The Union Child Care Coalition and a group of other workers in New York State have drafted a bill that will be heard on the floor of the legislature in the near future.

- **Shortage of Childcare Providers**

The shortage of childcare providers is a huge problem—not just for our childcare centers, but also for summer camps, retreats, Workforce 2000, and all our seasonal staffing. We are considering developing some sort of youth education system so that people can get informal training aside from the early childhood specialized training that the state requires. This training would be geared toward developing a cadre of trained staff.

To fill positions in our centers, we are competing with the department of education for teachers. Last year the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) negotiated a generous contract for its teachers, and we were afraid we would lose all of our licensed staff at the center to the public school system. Surprisingly, we did not lose any of our teachers this year, though I am waiting for the axe to drop. We increased vacations because the Department of Education gives 10 weeks. We are generous with allowing our staff to attend just about any conference they want to attend. We do whatever we can to increase professional development and keep them engaged because we know it is very hard to find good teachers, especially those with the State license.

Our tuition costs before subsidy at the learning center are \$12,500 and 75 percent goes toward salaries. If you do not pay the salary, you are not going to keep the teachers. The problem that every center in this nation is experiencing is that most parents can not afford to finance the full expense of running a center and centers that care about quality can not afford to balance the expenses on the backs of its workers. The piece that is missing is money from the government. The United States is the only industrialized nation that does not have a comprehensive or universal childcare system that provides for the early education of its citizenry. At the Fund, we have money from the employer through collective bargaining and payment from the parent, but there is nothing from the government. The only way to combat the shortage of childcare workers is to pay them more and treat them like professionals.

There has been little done in terms of lobbying for childcare funding, although a few years ago, the Union Coalition was instrumental in securing a subsidy for childcare workers across New York State. It amounted to \$700 per worker. It is a step in the right direction in terms of getting the government to recognize that childcare workers need additional compensation if we are ever going to address the high turnover rates and retention and recruitment problems that have a negative impact on the childcare delivery system in America.

## **How Other Unions Can Follow the 1199/Employer Child Care Example**

Local 2 of H.E.R.E in the San Francisco Bay area negotiated childcare language for members into their contract. It is modeled after the Child Care Fund and has grown steadily in the last five years. They have also been able to provide some benefits that the Fund is now considering, so we really do benefit from each other's existence. The UAW has been very active in work-family matters over the years, particularly in Michigan and they have done something that we have not been able to do. (See #WPC0008). They have not only provided a variety of services for workers, they have also been able to develop sensitization training for managers on the needs of working parents.

### **Mission of the 1199 Employer Child Care Corporation (CCC)**

The CCC is a non-profit corporation committed to providing a high standard of early education and quality childcare to the children of working parents both from 1199 Employers and from the broader community. Our caring program is built around safe, nurturing, and responsive environments. At the Corporation, we value people and work hard to bring out the best in our dedicated staff, the parents we serve, and the children under our care.

Negotiating a childcare fund or other work and family benefits is not out of the realm of possibility for other unions, but there has to be a very strong voice inside of the union for it to happen. The Labor Project for Working Families has amazing resources that chronicle all of the collective bargaining childcare language negotiated nationwide. Unions need the information and strong leadership that can put family benefits high on the agenda. It needs to be an expectation during bargaining. Despite the fact that most union leadership remains male dominated, having women on the executive boards or in leadership seems to help. On boards that have women or men who actually get the point of addressing work-family issues, we have seen the outcomes and they are always positive: good for working families and good for organizing.