

# SOLUTIONS FOR INFANT CARE AVAILABILITY COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

August 15, 2018 at 6:00 pm  
Florida Department of Health in Pinellas  
8751 Ulmerton Road, Largo, FL

**Committee Members in Attendance:** Nancy McGreevy, Child Care Apprenticeship Coordinator & Distance Learning Instructor, PTC; Sonia Meier, Early Childhood Education Services Director, R' Club Child Care; Amber Britner, Home Child Care provider; Maria Piatt, Home Child Care provider; Karen Gardner, Director, Skycrest Christian Preschool; Twana Monroe, Center Owner/Director; Cynthia Sumter Home Child Care provider; Cheryl Miller, Senior Program Consultant, Juvenile Welfare Board (JWB); Colleen Flynn, PCLB Attorney; Maria Villarreal, Licensing Specialist, CCLP; Michelle Leland, Licensing Specialist, CCLP

**Public Comment Volunteer:** Chris Grybauskas, Licensing Specialist, CCLP

**Official Note Taker:** Lisa Zacharia, Administrative Secretary, CCLP

**Committee Members Absent:** Ray Hensley, Maternal & Child Health, DOH

## Call to Order

The second Solutions for Infant Care Availability Committee meeting was called to order at 6:10 pm.

Nancy McGreevy opened the meeting by welcoming everyone and thanking them for taking time out of their busy day. She stated that we will probably have two more meetings and that we want to be respectful to people that are speaking and to use appropriate language. There is a process to this and we must trust the process by being authentic and have integrity and respect. Nancy McGreevy asked everyone to take a minute to review the minutes from our last meeting and to let her know if there will be changes, edits or modifications before we go on. Cheryl Miller asked for an edit on the second page, second paragraph, where it says, "why is there still a need?" asking for it to be changed to "where is there still a need?" Nancy McGreevy asked if there were any other changes requested and there were none. Nancy McGreevy asked for a motion to approve the minutes from the June 25<sup>th</sup> meeting with the one change and they were approved.

Nancy McGreevy stated that the committee was formed to serve families in Pinellas and described the survey results. She explained that we explored reasons why many family child care homes closed and why there are not enough slots available. We talked about incentives, regulations (new and old), the need for an exit door to the playground, and asked providers why they don't take infants. We had a small response to the survey which was open for six weeks but people were honest in their responses. They said sometimes it has to do with issues such as dealing with toileting, lack of knowledge, safety issues, growth and development, and the skill set they need. Nancy McGreevy asked the committee to look at the bar graphs in the homes handout. On the second page, it says 17 responded. Then Nancy McGreevy asked the Committee to look at the typed version of homes results. Most responded that they do offer infant care. The challenges were the different age ranges, keeping babies safe, and not having enough hands to take care of infants. They also mentioned their need for parental involvement and availability of parents to provide information about their children. Nancy McGreevy said families are important because they help with marketing by telling other parents about providers. There are always issues with parents, but we do our best to help the children thrive. "Ratio did not come up as much as I thought," stated Nancy McGreevy. Some home providers said that they did not have slots but she was not sure if it was because of ratio or because of the age of the infants. Finding qualified staff is not as much a problem in homes as in centers. Some providers said they had no obstacles but 17 out of 294 responses is a very small snapshot, only 6%. Nancy McGreevy said she would love to have every home provider come to a forum. Some people responded they would like a stipend or a grant, some people said a sub list would be helpful and PCLB has that. Some suggested incentives included funding for toys, equipment, and playground equipment. Regarding centers, most do not offer infant care. Nancy McGreevy explained that she had a center and did not want the liability of having children that were 12 months or less but that she did accept children with special needs. She added that there are centers with classroom space and you can have groups of six but you need help. Infants are a "feeder program" to get toddlers. Many centers don't have extra classroom space and there is also liability in transporting children. In regular classrooms, in order to take infants, they would have to put in bathrooms and playgrounds. Nancy McGreevy stated she visits many centers per month and directors always need

qualified staff. Quality centers always have a waiting list and often they are waiting for a baby to be born so they are holding that slot. It comes down to money more than ratio. Obstacles are cost, staff, supplies and centers need classroom space, money for equipment, subsidies for staff salaries, and referrals to stay full.

Discussion ensued about what to do with staff when classes are not full, licensing always comes into play, and ELC reimburses more for accredited child care. Maria Piatt said that she receives ELC funds and has become a large family child care home. She can have 12 children total with an employee.

Colleen Flynn introduced Lindsay Carson with ELC and Lindsay Carson said she is happy to answer questions. Lindsay Carson stated ELC has a percentage of school readiness funded children. There is also gold seal designation funding in addition to school readiness. Nancy McGreevy asked if ELC has any other enhancements. Lindsay Carson replied, yes, we are in the process of recruiting. We have a professional development coach onsite for people getting their CDA and candidates eligible for CDA. We have coaches that work with providers. It's a long and big commitment and we have participation of PTC to have a step before getting an Associates degree and we're in the process of finalizing our criteria. We don't want to look at shortage, we're looking at grants for providers coupled with stipends to help expand in order to serve infants. The stipend is \$10,000 for centers and \$5,000 for homes but it would only be for a handful; six centers and five homes. We recognize the need and are looking at equipment and cribs. Lindsay Carson said she would not authorize confining devices because they are not developmentally appropriate. Nancy McGreevy asked if this is a new program and Lindsay Carson replied that it's not new and they did it a few years ago. Demand has increased and people post on Facebook that they can't find infant care and they are also looking at rates. ELC is not able to reimburse full rates but they are exploring ways to fix it, but money is not the only answer. Nancy McGreevy asked about Lindsay Carson's timeline and Lindsay Carson replied that the grants would be happening this fall. Nancy McGreevy asked if they would be posted on the ELC web site and Lindsay Carson replied, "certainly."

Nancy McGreevy asked for comments from the Committee. Karen Gardner commented "too bad we didn't get more responses to the survey." Nancy McGreevy then stated "I don't think the answer is another survey." Twana Monroe said that she learned that qualified staff is at the top of her list. We need to find teachers with a heart for infants and added that she has a long waiting list but there is not enough qualified staff. Twana also said "we have different values in my community and there are only a few select people I would entrust. I consider that before I hire. I always ask about people's upbringing and what makes them love babies." She tries to pay infant teachers well and calls them professionals. She added that a ratio of 3:1 is very costly and mentioned new regs that they have to adhere to. It makes you take a look at if you want infants. Finally, Twana commented "I love it because I see their progression, but not everybody does."

Sonia Meier commented that if you pay more you will get more qualified staff but you have to rob Peter to pay Paul and it doesn't solve the problem. We should offer better salaries and give more training, then people will stay. "Teachers stay in their lane; they are qualified but they don't have the tools."

Nancy McGreevy agreed with Twana Monroe in that the rules always change, and now you have a baby laying on his back with nothing over him. A topic for training for centers would be about safe sleep. There are so many unknowns caring for infants, observations and assessments. There's always social interaction with infants. Learning and development came up, infant-toddler, classroom management, and challenging behaviors were topics people wanted for trainings. Solutions are more training and more qualified staff.

Amber Britner says she feels a home environment is more comfortable for infants, and that's harder in a center. Any home will be filled right way. "I've worked in centers and homes," Amber Britner said, "and parents have a bigger commitment level. It seems more natural for infant care. Everybody seems comfortable accepting infants. Is it easier to get centers with infant care or do we start more home school environments?" Nancy McGreevy said "you made two good points. In homes, the provider has raised children. In centers, the staff are 18-19 years old and they don't know how to do it." Twana Monroe stated that infant/toddler centers are more conducive because infants are with infants. Karen Gardner said that family homes accept infants but not many centers do and that people ask her when she is going to open up an infant room. Sonia Meier asked if there are homes that don't accept infants. Maria Villarreal answered that the majority do but one provider just told her that she doesn't want infants. There used to be 1,200 family child care homes. A lot of providers have retired and a lot are old school and can't deal with the regulations. Maria Villarreal said that Homes Supervisor, Julie Oliver, always tries to obtain the reason providers close their homes. Twana Monroe asked Maria Villarreal if the criteria is the same, of accepting infants at two months. Maria Villarreal replied that people can take infants at birth and that in the past, we used to have a lot of teen parent

programs but now there is only one left. Michelle Leland commented that centers are good for older children but centers are taking infants due to declining number of homes. If we had more home providers, we would have more slots. Chris Grybauskas (Public Comment Volunteer) stated that home numbers are increasing and that she just opened four new homes. Three of them are going before the Board.

Sonia Meier said that the media has shed light on this, the lack of affordable care out there. Young moms have a natural desire to take care of children, how can we make it so that there is a greater awareness? Amber Britner said she has been doing a lot of brainstorming and that her plan is to grow her home. She has been thinking about franchising rather than starting a preschool. Amber Britner asked if she can keep a large home and have that as a "feeder" for a center. I have been looking at need in the county. It's all about profit and about kids because it's hard work and you have to love them. It seems we need more homes and centers to get the training they need. There has to be a way to get young women excited about running their own business and they don't have to leave their own kids. Twana Monroe said younger women see the benefit of being partnered working with more seasoned women. They learn by partnerships and apprenticeships would help.

Lindsay Carson said she forgot to mention Workforce Development. It was cancelled because they created substitutes and providers needed job training instead of substitutes. Lindsay Carson said she would welcome additional discussion. Colleen Flynn said that an operator has to be 21 years old and can have a substitute that's 18.

Maria Piatt stated she worked in a center for nine years and now has her own home and that parents like it when you have center experience. Cynthia Sumter said she has a large home but ratio is the hard part. Having an infant of 2 months means it takes 18 months until you can take another infant, but if you take an older child, it takes less time. You can only have 4 under 24 months. Maria Piatt said if you have an employee, you can take more kids but by age 3, people want to use a center. Cynthia Sumter said they can only have 4 children under 2 but can have 6 if they have an employee. Chris Grybauskas (Public Comment Volunteer) said it's 12 total or 8 under 24 months or 8 babies with an employee. Sonia Meier added that it's a blended age group at a home but a center can't blend. Cynthia said you can have a home and a center and Chris Grybauskas (Public Comment Volunteer) clarified that you can't work part time in both, but you can have a home and center if you have a center director.

Nancy McGreevy asked the Committee for any other possible solutions or if anyone wanted to add anything. Amber Britner stated that we had talked about having blended ages for the first and last hour of the day and asked if there were any further thoughts on that, just to help with staffing. Maria Villarreal stated that you are not to blend at all. Colleen Flynn said that it's in the state regs and we can look into it from a legal standpoint. Sonia Meier said they blend infants and toddlers in the morning and have 2's, 3's and 4's all in one room. Twana said she doesn't fret over staff costs over a half an hour.

Nancy McGreevy asked for any further comments. Chris Grybauskas (Public Comment Volunteer) said we have Lynn Gibson and Ann Brooks that would like to make comments before the Committee.

Ann Brooks introduced herself at the podium and said that the family provider survey didn't work so she did hers by hand. She then talked about how we should have training on how to work with different age groups and there are activities you can do in a high chair while other kids do them at the table. She added the definition of infant so everyone in the community knows you will only be taking the child at 12 months. She said she would like to know how many homes open and close within 2 years so we know where we have to do our educating and said that in this county, you have to be 21 to be a provider but in the meantime, there are people that are 18 with no experience in the working world that could work with children.

Lynn Gibson stood at the podium and said she is a large home provider and has been doing this for 35 years and that she is the association past president and legislative liaison. Lynn Gibson stated that the survey was supposed to have been anonymous and that people had problems getting into the survey. She added that ELC pays homes less than centers and that her husband has cancer so she has now changed to taking care of children age 2 and up. She feels that ratios in homes and centers don't match because in the rest of the state the ratio is 4:1 and in Pinellas it's 3:1. She also said that some people only want to take infants so they don't have to deal with temper tantrums or deal with having to lift heavier children.

Colleen Flynn asked Lindsay Carson if she wants to add anything. Lindsay Carson stated that rates are based on market rates and that market rate is lower for homes. It's less expensive for parents of infants to go into a home and there are more children in a center. Through Child Care Resource and Referral, more people are being referred to

centers for infant care so we are seeing a shift. Lindsay Carson said both her children went to child care homes and some people want that. We have focus groups with families on how to better support them. We are still finalizing plans and will share that information. Nancy McGreevy asked how often market rates are reviewed and Lindsay Carson replied that it's every two years. The last market rate increase was last year and it's been brought within 75% of market rate. Lynn Gibson added that centers have signs and homes don't. People ask for centers because they don't know to go to homes. She also suggested advertising in doctor's offices.

Sonia Meier said she looked up the definition of infant and it's up to 24 months. Colleen Flynn replied that we're bound by the state and that last fall regulations were changed by the state. A lot of changes are going on at the state level; we didn't change them.

Nancy McGreevy asked if there was any further discussion. She said that at the next meeting we will discuss how we proceed to a solution. Quality staff, more training, more providers, and more family child care homes. ELC has training. She stated that she would like to have a meeting in September before Licensing meets and it was decided to have the next meeting on September 12 at 6:00 pm. Nancy McGreevy said she will send a timely reminder.

The meeting adjourned at 7:35 pm.

Respectfully submitted,



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Lisa Zacharia