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**A Case Study of
San Francisco County CARES:
Year 2 Qualitative Implementation Study (QIS)**

Policy Analysis for California Education
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Policy Analysis for
California Education

PACE

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Executive Summary

This report on the second year of the implementation of San Francisco County’s CARES program (SF CARES) as a child-care retention-incentive program describes perspectives and experiences of various stakeholders regarding several components of the program’s structure, implementation, and effects. These findings are drawn from focus group data; group interviews were conducted with program planners and funders, program staff, stipend recipients, and other members of the early care and education (ECE) community in San Francisco County. In addition to detailing perspectives on the implementation and effects of the program in Year 2, this report provides guidelines and lessons for policymakers, program planners, ECE advocates, and others who are planning similar initiatives to improve retention. This study is part of a larger evaluation of Child-Care Retention Incentive (CRI) programs in San Francisco and Alameda counties being conducted by PACE (Policy Analysis for California Education) at the University of California, Berkeley.

Stated program goals for SF CARES in Year 2 include improved compensation and retention of ECE staff in centers and family child-care homes, and increased public awareness of the importance of quality ECE. In comparison with Year 1, the second year of SF CARES saw over a threefold increase in the number of stipends awarded (over \$3.1 million across 1,326 recipients). Program staff stepped up outreach and recruitment efforts in order to reach this goal. Recipients were, by and large, satisfied with the application and stipend distribution processes, and with the quality and availability of program staff, but there were some disagreements surrounding the specificities of stipend awards for those who used languages other than English at work, and for those who were more educated (vs. those with greater experience).

In terms of program effects, recipients particularly appreciated the monetary and professional recognition conferred by the program, as well as opportunities for professional development, networking, and advocacy. However, focus group participants felt that the program could not function alone in addressing ECE staff retention/turnover—the stipend would not necessarily cause staff to stay in their jobs. They agreed that solutions for these staffing problems need to be implemented within a larger system of support and advocacy for the field, which includes raising public awareness of issues facing the ECE workforce, expanding local opportunities for professional development, and exerting pressure on policymakers for sustained funding to augment ECE staff salaries.

Introduction

Research on ECE in the U.S. indicates that consistent, sensitive care-giving is positively associated with young children's cognitive, social, and emotional development.ⁱ When young children have close and stable relationships with their caregivers, they are more likely to feel happy and secure while separated from their parents.ⁱⁱ Frequent turnover of teachers, thus, can leave children feeling anxious and withdrawn, can diminish the quality of the early care and education (ECE) environment, and can have negative consequences for children's early learning and development.^{iii, iv} Turnover further affects the ECE environment by affecting staff morale and job performance.^v

The first phase of a multi-site study, "Cost, Quality and Outcomes" (1995) found an annual staff turnover rate of 37%.^{vi} Recent findings include ranges in turnover from 20-42% annually.^{vii} Specific to northern California, a study conducted among 75 centers in the area found that 76% of all of the staff members who worked in these centers in 1996 were no longer there four years later.^{viii}

The relationship between low wages and high turnover is well documented in the ECE field.^{ix} In 2001, the average wage for a "child-care worker", according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, was \$8.16 per hour. Although those who defined themselves as preschool teachers fared better, earning around \$10 per hour on average, at the time, this wage was still less than half of what kindergarten teachers earned annually.^x

Due to these recognized linkages between wages and turnover, and between caregiver stability and children's development, retention and quality improvement efforts in ECE have increasingly focused on boosting staff income, and on encouraging additional training and professional development, particularly for entry-level teachers.

In 1999, both Alameda and San Francisco counties initiated child-care retention incentive programs. These initiatives were intended to reduce turnover and retain educated ECE staff by providing monetary stipends to individuals who met certain tenure and education requirements. First 5 California Children and Families Commission (First 5 California) funded Policy Analysis for California Education (PACE) to evaluate these two counties' initiatives. The PACE evaluation consisted of two components: (1) a quantitative program effects component that tracked outcomes such as retention and professional development, and (2) a qualitative study that examined how the programs have been implemented.

This document, the San Francisco CARES (SF CARES) Program Year 2 Qualitative Study Report, is a synthesis of the findings from the implementation study of the second year of the SF CARES Program. The purpose of this report is to summarize the experience of many people involved in SF CARES, and to pay special attention to changes in the program from its first year of implementation. It is also intended to serve as a resource to policy-makers and program managers seeking to implement programs that address the problem of high turnover among ECE professionals.

This report is divided into five sections: Methodology, County Context, Program History and Design, Program Structure and Implementation, and Perceptions of Program Effects.

I. **Methodology** offers a synopsis of data collection and analysis procedures, and also includes goals and purposes of the evaluation.

II. **County context** provides an overview of the ECE field in the county. This section outlines demand and supply for child care, provides a portrait of the ECE workforce, and includes a discussion of the ECE training system. In addition, this section describes local economic issues and how these conditions contributed to the shifting context in which SF CARES functioned and developed.

III. **Program history and design** describes some of the successes and challenges faced in Year 1 program implementation, as well as outlines the basic elements of the SF CARES program and the design of program components in Year 2. Also included here is feedback from focus group participants regarding their understanding of the purpose and goals of the program. This section contains demographic information on Year 2 recipients.

IV. **Program structure and implementation** portrays participants' experiences with the various components of SF CARES, including the home agency, staffing, recruitment and outreach, application process, eligibility determination, stipend awards, appeals, and advisory group.

V. **Perceptions of program effects** summarizes the changes that focus group participants have observed on an individual level—in their lives and among their colleagues—as well as more broadly in the local ECE field, including increased recognition, professional networks, training and professional development, retention, and changes in quality of care provided.

Methodology

Participants

The data for this qualitative evaluation were collected via focus groups conducted with various meetings of individuals who were involved in the planning and/or implementation of the San Francisco CARES program, or who were directly affected by the initiative. Ten focus groups were conducted in total, and included representatives of the following constituencies: program staff, Corps consultants, Advisory Work Group (AWG), community stakeholders, funding agents, family child-care providers, and among center-based providers, included returning recipients, new recipients (Level 1 and Level 2), and center directors.^{x1} Phone interviews were completed with first-year recipients who did not re-apply in Year 2. In addition, representatives from City College and other local organizations and institutions providing ECE training were surveyed via mail and telephone.

Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

Focus groups lasted 45 minutes to one-and-a-half hours in length and primarily took place at local community centers and organizations not affiliated with SF CARES.^{xii} The number of participants in each focus group varied widely, from three to twelve, with the average being five people. The recipient groups were the most widely attended, averaging about seven participants per group. Individuals were chosen for inclusion in the focus groups (except for the four recipient groups), on account of their roles and involvement in the SF CARES initiative. Stipend recipients participating in the groups were selected randomly from a list of recipients who had provided consent to participate in the evaluation. Individuals participating in most of the focus groups, except program staff, Advisory Work Group, and funding agents (which all took place during the work day) were reimbursed \$45 to cover transportation and child-care costs. All focus group participants signed consent forms that confirmed their acknowledgement of research procedures, such as confidentiality.

Focus group members were asked questions to elicit their perspectives and feedback on a variety of issues and topics related to the implementation of the SF CARES program. While specific questions were tailored to the distinct role and purview of each audience, general areas covered with the majority of groups were: roles, program goals and purposes, reactions to program components, and program effects and impact.

Focus group sessions were audio-taped and transcribed verbatim. Each transcript was analyzed qualitatively to identify relevant themes and topics using the *NVivo* computer program. Findings were then organized into individual reports, ranging in length from four to eight pages. These reports were utilized to elaborate salient issues across groups and pinpoint themes that emerged in a variety of contexts and settings. As much as possible, findings are meant to be descriptive, using ideas and thoughts gleaned directly from participants' statements, rather than from researchers' interpretations. Furthermore, while assertions made about the program often utilize quotes and thoughts from individuals, and therefore may not reflect generally-held views, they have largely been made from the gathering of evidence from a variety of sources, including focus group transcripts, program materials and resources, and meeting notes.

Purpose of Study

While the Qualitative Implementation Substudy (QIS) was in part undertaken as one component of a comprehensive two-year evaluation of the CARES program in California, the study also aimed to provide useful information to parties interested in related issues nation-wide. The purpose of this report is to provide a portrait of San Francisco's experience primarily in Year 2 of the CARES program from a variety of perspectives, while at the same time serving as a resource to policy-makers and practitioners in other locales seeking to implement similar programs. This document is offered as a window into the distinct experience of the ECE community in San Francisco and thus should not be perceived as a blueprint for initiating such programs in another context. Rather, the conclusions and assertions contained herein are intended as a sort of guidebook, or informational tool, to assist others as they undertake the process of designing and implementing a program addressing the problem of staff turnover in their particular

setting. To this end, we have highlighted strategies and aspects of the program found to be especially effective or successful, as well as noted particular challenges faced and lessons learned along the way.

County Context

A Changing Landscape

A Shifting Economic Context

Measuring only 46 square miles, San Francisco has a total population of 776,733 people (U.S. Census 2000). Despite its small geographic size, in 1999, San Francisco was the tenth most populous California County. While the Bay Area was the site of an economic boom in the late 1990's, fueled by the "dot-com" phenomenon and burgeoning success in the technology sector, in 2001 this economic bubble burst, and San Francisco was mired in recession. Whereas in December of 2000 the county's unemployment rate was 2.5%, this figure had risen to 6.1% by December 2001, and was 6.9% in May of 2002.^{xiii} However, while unemployment was on the rise, costs for basic necessities such as housing, utilities, transportation, and food in the Bay Area increased by nearly \$8,000 from 1999 to 2001.^{xiv} In 2002, the average median price of a house in San Francisco was \$571,000.^{xv} A state-wide study released in 2001 by the California Budget Project projected the annual amount needed to sustain a family of four in the Bay Area at \$61,600.^{xvi} This figure requires that an individual and their spouse both work full-time and earn at least \$14.81 per hour. While the federal poverty level for 2001 was set at \$17,650 for a family of four, critics have charged that the federal formula is outmoded because it does not account for the needs of the present-day family, such as child-care.

Although the downturn of the high-tech sector did not directly affect jobs in the ECE industry, the repercussions of the city's economic woes were evidenced throughout the job market. Moreover, shifts in employment patterns impact the demand for services such as ECE. For example, in 2001 two-thirds of California mothers were working, making obtaining quality ECE "the biggest money burden on California families second only to rent," according to a study on child welfare as reported in the San Francisco Chronicle.^{xvii} However, at the same time, layoffs may serve to attenuate some families' need for child care, as one parent may no longer be employed. In other situations, demand for ECE may have actually increased in the wake of the area's economic slump, as parents who previously stayed at home must enter the workforce in order to compensate for cuts in spouses' or partners' pay. Finally, to the extent that family income was affected by spouses'/partners' unemployment, this factor may have had effects on ECE staff's willingness to stay in low-paying jobs. Thus, changes in the economy can resonate in myriad ways within a variety of work sectors, having a significant bearing on parents' decisions about child care, and, to a less extent, on ECE workers' decisions to stay in their jobs.

Children and ECE

San Francisco has the 27th highest rate of child poverty of the 58 counties in the state. While this rate is not the worst by state standards, overall, children in California are more

likely to be poor than children nationwide.^{xviii} Furthermore, in the Bay Area, although many counties boast low child poverty rates, there exist large, and mounting, inequities between the area’s richest and poorest children.^{xix}

Based on the ratio of the number of licensed child-care slots for children ages 0-13 in the county, at the time of this study San Francisco ranked second out of the 58 California counties in the supply of licensed child care.^{xx} While on the surface the city would appear to merit high marks for their provision of ECE, as a report by the California Child Care Resource & Referral Network clearly documented, in 2000, the amount of children requiring care still outstripped the availability of licensed care, meeting only 41% of families’ needs for child care.^{xxi} Furthermore, a study by PACE indicated that, in poor neighborhoods, subsidized care provided a higher quality of care than non-subsidized centers in working class communities.^{xxii} However, the study revealed that only 49% of parents in low-income neighborhoods utilized these services, partly because of lack of knowledge about the availability of financial aid, but also on account of long waiting lists and limited space at subsidized centers. Table 1 below documents ECE supply information for San Francisco County.

Table 1. San Francisco County ECE supply information.

San Francisco	
Population and number of children, U.S Census 2000	
Total Population	776,733
Number of Children, ages 0-5	31,633
2000 child-care supply information^{xxiii}	
Number of Child Care Centers	233
Number of Licensed Family Child-Care Homes	735
Licensed Child Care Supply	21,536 slots
1998 child-care supply information^{xxiv}	
Center slots per 100 children aged 0-5	26.9
FCC slots per 100 children aged 0-5	10.72

Child-Care Workforce

Wages and Benefits

Pertinent surveys of the San Francisco County ECE workforce in 2001^{xxv} provide data on the wages and benefits of this population. According to these data:

- Average wages for teachers at centers in the city ranged from \$9 to \$15 an hour; family child-care providers reported annual household incomes ranging from \$30,000 to \$50,000, and 40% of the latter sample did not meet self-sufficiency standards for San Francisco County.

- Among center-based staff, 32% were estimated to lack health care coverage and about half of all centers surveyed reported contributions to retirement/pension plans for some (not all) employees.

In light of the findings regarding the rising cost of living in San Francisco, the current wages for ECE employees miss the mark in fulfilling basic needs. According to these figures, ECE teachers in the highest income bracket would have just adequate income to support themselves alone; for those who serve as their families' sole providers, these wages would place them well below the standards set forth by the California Budget Project. Furthermore, the limited benefits offered in the field mean that often a portion of employees' already-low salaries must be used to cover health insurance or retirement; in the worst-case scenario, staff members go without these necessary "benefits" altogether.

Education, Career Preparation, Tenure and Longevity

Workforce surveys^{xxvi} indicate that 43% of teachers in San Francisco child-care centers have a Bachelor's degree or higher, on average, while the corresponding percentage for family child-care providers is around 20%. 19% of center-based teachers had less than 24 ECE or child development college units; 56% of all family child-care providers had completed less than 12 college units of ECE or child development (or had none).

Annual turnover rates were around 16% across all center-based staff (all levels of teachers, directors, and other staff), 18% across all teaching staff, and only 2% across directors. Family child-care providers reported working in the field for an average of 8.7 years, with only 10% reporting having worked as a provider for a year or less.

Other Early Care and Education Initiatives

It is important to view SF CARES in the context of other ECE initiatives that either existed or were in the process of being developed in San Francisco during Year 2 of this evaluation. Some programs funded improvement or expansion of physical infrastructure and facilities at family child-care homes and ECE centers. Other programs were intended to support staff directly, such as the California Early Childhood Mentor Program and a proposed health benefits pilot project. Finally, some programs focused on the children in ECE settings, such as the Mental Health Consultation Initiative that provided mental health services to them.

WAGES +

In late 2000, San Francisco funded WAGES +, another program that directly targeted the city's ECE workforce. Both programs aimed to increase retention through enhanced compensation. SF CARES presented a once-a-year stipend to eligible staff members, while WAGES + actually augmented their wages based on minimal wage floor criteria at each staffing level. The two programs also differed in terms of which staff received an increase. While the SF CARES funding matrix matched the WAGES+ matrix, the latter funded all levels of teachers except program directors, who were not eligible. Another important difference was that *individuals* applied for and received stipends through SF CARES, whereas *centers* were responsible for requesting augmentations from the WAGES + Program.

State Matching Funds Program

In March 2001, First 5 California awarded matching funds to 14 local commissions implementing child-care retention-incentive (CRI) programs, including San Francisco county. This matching funds program was expanded to include 28 additional counties (a total of 42) in fiscal year 2001-2002. These county-led CRI initiatives were intended to directly assist staff in the short-run. And in the long term, the programs are expected to provide a variety of lessons about the effects and costs of alternative policy approaches to the training and retention of qualified ECE staff.

Early Care and Education Training System

As during Year 1 of the evaluation, in Year 2, two public institutions offered child development courses in San Francisco: City College of San Francisco (City College) and San Francisco State University (SFSU). Various community-based organizations around the city also provided trainings for ECE professionals, including Wu Yee Children's Services and the Children's Council of San Francisco, the two Resource & Referral Agencies in the county.

Times and Locations of Classes

A number of recipients commented that classes offered at City College were hard to fit into their schedule; this problem was particularly acute for family child-care providers who often do not have additional staff to relieve them during work hours. Some recipients cited instances of classes being full, presumably due to increased demand.

Linguistic and Cultural Accessibility

While classes were offered in a number of languages, including Spanish and Cantonese, recipients complained that there was still a need for more classes taught in languages other than English.

Program History and Design

History of the California CARES Initiative

Several early care and education (ECE) groups have advocated for higher wages over the past two decades, both in California and nationwide. In 1996, the California Department of Education contracted with the American Institutes for Research and the Center for the Child Care Workforce to conduct a statewide study of a review of wages and benefits among ECE staff, revealing low pay for most, even among teaching staffs that displayed relatively high education levels.

Aiming to coordinate a response to these new data on wages, in 1997, ECE leaders from around the state were pulled together by the San Francisco Early Childhood Professional Development Institute (PDI). This group of activists settled on a policy strategy that came to be known as CARES (Compensation and Retention Encourage Stability).^{*} Originally developed by the Center for the Childcare Workforce, CARES aims to reward and support both attained as well as continuing education and professional development among ECE staff by providing periodic financial reward in the form of stipends. The CARES model was an outgrowth of both the movements for "living wage" and economic justice, as well as that for professional development within early care and education. Financial reward of past and continuing professional development—as a mechanism to promote staff retention—was the cornerstone of the model.

Subsequently, a number of counties designed programs based on this model, using wage supplements to well-organized professional development activities that encouraged ECE staff to move up the state's Child Development Permit matrix. The ECE community in Alameda County developed a strategy with rigorous continuing education requirements tied to significant wage supplements, while San Francisco's model provided similar stipend levels with fewer continuing eligibility requirements.

The first bill to support CARES retention incentives was introduced in 1998 by Dion Aroner, a state legislator from the Berkeley-Oakland area. While waiting for State funds, advocates in Alameda County and San Francisco convinced local political leaders to allocate funding for CARES incentives. In San Francisco, the city leaders designated one and a half million dollars from the county's general fund to establish the first child-care retention-incentive (CRI) initiative in the State. The Alameda County program secured funding soon thereafter, aided by new tobacco tax revenues flowing to California counties under state Proposition 10 that provided over \$700 million annually for early childhood programs beginning in 1999.

Over the next two years, First 5 California (under Proposition 10) had agreed to fund efforts in over 42 California counties to experiment with retention incentives, variably coupled with continuing training requirements. After prolonged campaigning by Assemblywoman Aroner and ECE advocates, Governor Gray Davis eventually signed AB212 effective January 2001 earmarking funds for CRI programs in state-subsidized centers. First 5 California also is supporting evaluations of the original Alameda and San Francisco programs, and the new CRI initiatives underway throughout California.

^{*} Burton, Alice; Jessica Mihaly; Jennifer Kagiwada; and Marcy Whitebook. *The CARES Initiative in California: Pursuing Public Policy to Build a Skilled and Stable Child Care Workforce, 1997-2000*. Center for the Child Care Workforce, 2000.

Year 1 of the SF CARES Program: Successes and Challenges

The first year of the SF CARES program generated some significant accomplishments even though the program had a limited staff and a short 6-month timeline within which to implement the initiative. The successes of the program were largely related to the tasks of building local capacity and establishing a structure to address issues facing the local ECE field, such as retention and compensation. In the initial planning and organizing stages of the program, child-care advocates, planners, and policymakers came together to develop common goals for the field. Through these discussions, they were able to draft an agenda for improving retention that involved input from a variety of stakeholders. In this way, with SF CARES, issues relevant to ECE professionals attained heightened visibility, particularly within the local policy arena.

Unfortunately, the funds available for the program in Year 1 were not sufficient to address the local needs in the field. Despite being unable to fund all eligible applicants, program staff were able to utilize a prioritization system to award stipends totaling \$822,500 to 436 ECE professionals. While many eligible, yet unfunded, applicants were disappointed, the large response from the field in terms of applications to SF CARES provided some evidence for the demand for such a program. The great number of application for stipends also served as the impetus for many to advocate for increased funds. In the wake of the veto of the state CARES initiative, program planners waged a targeted campaign to raise public awareness and garner additional monies for SF CARES.

The objective of these advocacy efforts was realized in the second year of the program, when First 5 California approved matching funds for CARES. This resulted in an increase of over 1.5 million dollars to San Francisco's program (a total Year 2 budget of almost 3 million dollars from various sources), allowing them to award stipends to 1,116 individuals in Year 2, almost three times more than in the initial year, thus fueling the growing enthusiasm about the program within the field.

Year 2

Funding and Advocacy

As detailed above, the state monies allocated in Year 2 enabled SF CARES to increase considerably the number, and amount, of stipends awarded to eligible applicants. A total of \$1,900,625 was disbursed to stipend recipients in the program's second year.

Funding streams continued to be available through First 5 San Francisco, First 5 California, and the Department of Children, Youth, and their Families (DCYF). The program was administered by Wu Yee Children's Services, with the DCYF acting as the lead fiscal agency.

In Year 2, SF CARES staff continued to participate in activities and efforts aimed at raising awareness of issues relevant to ECE professionals, with the particular intent of exerting pressure on state and local agencies for continued and increased program funding. In the second year the program devoted one forum—a meeting for recipients and part of the continued eligibility requirements—to the issue of advocacy, where they urged attendees to contact state and local officials to voice their concern regarding issues such as program funding and monies for ECE. In addition, program staff maintained close ties with local organizations that were involved in advocacy issues, such as family child-care

associations, parent groups, and non-profit organizations whose primary purposes were advocating around ECE and workforce-related issues. SF CARES staff members often attended meetings of these groups, so as to stay abreast of relevant issues and legislation, as well as, in the words of one SF CARES staff member, “play into their advocacy efforts.” Through these organizational connections, stipend recipients sometimes received mailings and post-cards about upcoming initiatives, meetings, and rallies, which fostered their awareness of, and often promoted their participation in, advocacy activities.

Goals for Program

Stated goals for the SF CARES program are to:

- 1) Promote the compensation and retention of committed and qualified teachers and providers to ensure quality services to children and families.
- 2) Stimulate public awareness of the importance of quality ECE programs.

In the evaluation of the SF CARES program in the first year, focus group participants identified a number of problems in the ECE field that they hoped SF CARES would address. Among these problems were high staff turnover rates, difficulty recruiting quality staff, and low salaries.^{xxvii} They also pointed to the high cost of living in San Francisco as compounding difficulties in retaining staff.

In Year 2, participants of focus groups echoed these sentiments, and articulated a variety of aspirations for the program, informed by their distinct role vis-à-vis the ECE field. For example, ECE staff members were mainly concerned with two potential goals of the program: first, the financial impact of the stipends, and second, how SF CARES would help them gain recognition as individuals and as ECE professionals. While the primary motivation driving most to apply was the money offered through the stipends, recipients also saw the stipends as important to “maintain the dignity of the work.” One particular family child-care provider expressed that applying to SF CARES “let people know that there were people out there [that] ... should be honored in this way.”

Stipend recipients’ initial reactions, however, were tempered with skepticism. At the same time that they were “shocked that there was going to be money given to people in child care,” many felt it was “too good to be true.” One focus group participant elaborated: “Some of the people that I have talked to couldn’t believe it, they were like, ‘Oh, nobody is going to give me money.’” Another posited that participants’ disbelief regarding the program stemmed from the low status accorded ECE professionals in the larger society: “...they just don’t feel valued.” This feeling was endorsed by another participant: “I didn’t think anyone really cared!”

Center directors, on the other hand, were more interested in the ways in which the program would ameliorate staffing problems, reduce turnover, and increase the quality of care provided at their particular sites. They detailed the initial context within which SF CARES emerged as being characterized by persistent staffing problems. One director in particular described the situation at his center as a “revolving door,” with staff leaving because of low pay, while another expressed frustration that her site was often a “training

ground” for the school districts and programs that paid more than private centers. As one director stated: “The time [for SF CARES] had come, and it has always been a need.” In summing up the sentiment of the group of center directors regarding their goals for SF CARES, one said, “We were really hopeful that the program would help in terms of retention.” Along with retention issues, center directors also mentioned professional and personal effects of stipends on participating staff.

Participants also referred to the economic downturn as a backdrop to Year 2 of SF CARES, in that job retention may have been more valued given that there were fewer job opportunities within ECE and in other fields. This situation may have affected ECE staff directly (in terms of their ability to find jobs elsewhere) or through decreased household income due to the unemployment or underemployment of spouses/partners.

Relevant themes for funding agents and administrators involved similar issues related to retention and quality, but these issues were discussed in relation to the larger field of ECE. Funders saw SF CARES as one element of a larger ECE agenda, rather than as a stand-alone program. They discussed the program as a strategy, “one piece,” that functioned within a larger system of programs and initiatives aimed at addressing relevant educational issues. On a state level, funders described how CRI programs furthered goals and issues elaborated within the “Master Plan,” such as school readiness. On the local level, funders explained how SF CARES fit into other compensation strategies:

It cannot stand by its own ... we don’t see SF CARES as being successful by itself. We do see SF CARES as being a big impetus for teachers’ stay[ing] in the classroom, but that isn’t the only thing that needs support.

Similarly, when center directors and other program administrators discussed the impact of SF CARES on retention, they acknowledged the significance of other initiatives, particularly WAGES+, in bringing about positive changes at their sites and in the field. As one director expressed: “I think that the changes that we [have] see[n] are not just a result of CARES ... I can’t say that one has done more than the other, I think it is the combination of the two that has boosted morale.”

Program funders and planners viewed the issue of retention as integrally linked to improving the quality of care, through recognizing and strengthening the workforce. As expressed by one focus group participant: “the whole premise is based on the precept that stability in a child’s life is good, and you therefore don’t want turnover in the child’s caregivers ... If having a better-educated and better-paid staff leads to better retention, then that is a win-win situation.” Nevertheless, despite their belief in the importance of enriching educational opportunities for ECE staff, the “bottom line” for funders, and foremost indicator of success for the program, was retention: “If we are causing people to go back to school, to get their credential, to get better education, and they become kindergarten teachers, then I wouldn’t call the initiative a complete success.” While such a fear—of preschool teachers leaving in large numbers for the school districts—has not been documented empirically in the research, the statement reflects a genuine concern of program planners and funders.

Program Design

Eligibility

In order to be eligible for the program, individuals had to meet the following general requirements: 1) employment at a licensed center or family child-care in San Francisco, 2) employment at the same center or family child-care for at least a year, and 3) providing care to at least 3 children (in addition to the applicant’s own children). Place and duration of employment was demonstrated through the submission of an employment verification form, completed by the applicant’s supervisor. The SF CARES stipend levels were based on the California Child Development Permit Matrix and coordinated with the WAGES + Matrix, which were verified through the evaluation of official transcripts from educational institutions or having Child Development Permits and/or Teaching Credentials. The levels and unit requirements are listed in Table 2 below.

Table 2. San Francisco CARES Year 2 Stipend Levels.

SF CARES Program: Summary of Year 2 Stipend Levels^{xxviii}

SF CARES Stipends Aligned with Child Development Permit		
<i>Level</i>	<i>Requirements: Child Development Permit Level</i>	<i>Stipend Amount</i>
1A	Assistant Teacher (6 ECE units)	\$500
1B	Associate Teacher (12 ECE units)	\$750
1C	24 ECE units, no equivalent permit	\$1000
2A	Teacher (24 ECE units and 16 GE units)	\$1,500
2B	Master Teacher (no B.A.)	\$2,500
2C	Site Supervisor (no B.A.)	\$3,000
2D	Program Director, Master teacher w/ B.A., and Site Supervisor w/ B.A.	\$4,500
Additional Stipends		
Language	Fluent in language other than English; use it on the job with children, parents, or staff	\$500
Graduate	Possess Master’s or graduate degree related to ECE or child development	\$500

Continued Eligibility Requirements

In order to continue to receive a stipend beyond the initial year, applicants had to fulfill the following requirements:

SF CARES: Year 2 Continued Eligibility Requirements

Level 1	3 units of ECE, Child Development, or General Education
Level 2	21 professional growth hours or 3 units of ECE, Child Development, or General Education

These units and hours could be satisfied in a number of ways, including enrolling in classes at City College or at SFSU or attending trainings at community organizations. In addition, both Level 1 and Level 2 recipients were required to participate in at least one forum organized by SF CARES.

Key Design Decisions

While the principal structure of the program remained nearly the same in Year 2, there were some amendments made to the program. Most of these changes involved modifications in eligibility requirements or stipend levels. The program added stipend levels so as “more fairly match what people are doing” in their jobs, as well as provide more incentive for ECE professionals to advance on the matrix. Another important change in Year 2 involved the abandoning of the prioritization system used in the initial year, often described as “tedious” or “confusing,” a move that greatly facilitated the process of determining eligibility levels. The Year 2 system involved prioritizing applicants based on hourly wage; this simplified formula was made possible through increased funding in the second year.

Program staff also undertook a concerted effort in Year 2 to address the needs of family child-care providers, largely on account of the few applications received from this group the first year. They convened a sub-committee of the advisory group, comprised of representatives from the family child-care community, to identify barriers posed by the program and determine how best to restructure the program to meet the needs of family child-care providers. This resulted in the offering of a separate application in Year 2, designed specifically for family child-care providers. Another change involved an alternative award level designed expressly for family child-care providers, ranging from \$80 to \$400, and awarded to those who possessed one to five ECE or child development units. This stipend recognized the lower levels of education characteristic of this group of ECE staff and the challenges they often faced in completing educational requirements.

Community Input

In an effort to improve the program and make it more “user-friendly,” SF CARES staff elicited, and incorporated, feedback regarding the first year from a variety of constituencies. Such input was provided through formalized and structured means, such as the Advisory Work Group (AWG), as well as through comments and responses offered in more informal settings and conversations with staff.

The AWG was assembled so as to be, in the words of one staff member, “representative of the field as a whole.” Staff thus planned the group so that it included individuals from a variety of communities within the ECE field, among them family child-care providers, community college personnel, center directors, and ECE teachers. In Year 2, staff mainly relied on the AWG to advise them on policy-related issues, commenting that, although AWG decisions were non-binding, their recommendations played a large role in shaping SF CARES policy. Staff utilized the feedback from group members, as informed by their distinct perspective within the field, to amend features of the design and implementation of the program.

Other contributions that informed Year 2 planning were provided by Corps consultants, who, due to their role in conducting outreach, and as purveyors of technical assistance to

program applicants, were privy to a wealth of feedback and opinions related to various program elements, most notably the application process. Consultants also commented that SF CARES staff sometimes explicitly sought their reactions, as evidenced when they asked them to pilot the application to assess whether it was ‘user-friendly’. Results from the focus groups conducted as part of the Year 1 evaluation also furnished program staff with information helpful in enhancing program services in Year 2. Culled from the experiences of multiple communities in the ECE field, this feedback assisted them in improving program elements so as to better meet the variety of needs posed by participants.

Evaluation and Indicators of Effectiveness

This QIS report represents one piece of the larger evaluation of the progress and effects of the SF CARES program. In addition to the focus groups aimed at obtaining qualitative information about program implementation, PACE is collecting quantitative data on a number of variables to assess the impact of the program on retention and further training of ECE staff.^{xxix} Further, SF CARES is conducting an internal evaluation, using data gathered from applications and maintained and analyzed using the Packard database.^{xxx}

In the focus groups, the majority of the feedback regarding SF CARES’ evaluation efforts was provided by individuals who were involved in the program in administrative or supervisory roles, such as funders and members of the Advisory Work Group. Representatives from these groups discussed issues related to the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data.

As they articulated their goals for the program, representatives from state and local funding agencies stated that they were looking for specific outcomes, or “real numbers,” to demonstrate success for SF CARES. Similarly, AWG members thought it was important to gather evidence that could attest to the program’s impact. Both groups hoped that program evaluation efforts would provide them with quantitative data to document program progress in a number of areas; however, funders were more interested in retention-related issues, while AWG members discussed professional development trends as well. Specific data mentioned included: numbers retained in the field, program penetration rates (meaning the percentage of caregivers within the field who apply to the program), and matriculation rates in ECE classes offered at City College and SFSU. Funders stated that “hard” evidence would assist them as they garnered support to sustain funding for the program. AWG members conceived of such data more programmatically, as a means of suggesting areas where the program needs to improve and elaborating directions for the future.

In addition to gathering quantitative data, some focus group participants expressed an interest in the collection of qualitative information from program participants. In particular, AWG members thought it would be useful to interview ECE staff “who don’t choose to stay,” so as to find out “what would make them stay in the field.” A number of focus group participants emphasized the importance of gathering caregivers’ stories to determine “why they left and where they went,” whether it was to the elementary or secondary educational system or “to drive a garbage truck.”

Funders also emphasized the importance of framing evaluation findings towards specific audiences; for example, policymakers, who often “don’t have a lot of experience and

depth in child development ... [and thus] are just going to look at the headline” may, funders opined, require more background to educate them regarding the relevance and complexity of the issues facing the ECE field.

Table 3 below details key demographic information on SF CARES stipend recipients in the second year.

Table 3. San Francisco County CRI (SF CARES) Recipients in Year 2: Demographic, Employment, & Stipend Information.^{xxxi, xxxii}

	<i>Total (n=1,116)</i>
Education	
Up to High School/GED	6%
Some College	25%
AA (2 year College)	13%
BA/BS (4 year College)	15%
BA +Some Graduate School	11%
Race/Ethnicity	
African American/Black	15%
American Indian or Alaskan Native	1%
Asian/Pacific Islander	41%
Latino (collapse)	13%
White	13%
Multi-Ethnic	2%
Other	1%
Number of years in field	
1 - 2 years	3%
3 - 8 years	41%
9 - 15 years	25%
16+ years	30%
Annual Salary	
Below \$10,000	3%
\$10,000 - 19,999	30%
\$20,000 - \$29,999	38%
\$30,000 - \$39,999	21%
\$40,000 - \$49,999	5%
\$50,000 +	3%
Percent speaking a language other than English at work^{xxxiii}	74%
Stipend Awards	
Total number of stipends awarded	1,116
Total stipend amount distributed	\$1,901,625
Average amount distributed	\$1,703.96

Program Structure and Implementation

This section presents focus group participants' perspectives on the structure and implementation of the SF CARES program in its second year. Included are opinions and experiences of a variety of constituencies and stakeholders described in the methodology section of this implementation study.

Home Agency

When discussing their relationship with the home agency, Wu Yee Children's Services, program staff described themselves as "somewhat independent" from the agency, in that, although administered by Wu Yee, it was housed in a separate building and was intended to serve a larger, city-wide population. In the words of one staff member, while they "function as a part of the agency... there was a real effort for [SF CARES] ... to be seen as a program for the entire county and not just Chinatown," the community where Wu Yee is located and with which it is identified. Staff believed that this autonomy was particularly important, and made them "a better program," imparting them with credibility and helping them avoid allegations of "conflicts of interest." Moreover, to further convey a sense of sovereignty and non-partisanship, the program devised a conflict-of-interest agreement, which mandated that any applications or appeals associated with the home agency were subject to an external reviewer; this policy also included Advisory Work Group members and consultants working for the agency.

Program Staffing

Due to increased funding in Year 2, SF CARES was more fully staffed than in the first year, and thus more adequately equipped to administer and implement the program. During the second year, the program had a total of seven full-time staff members, each contributing their distinct skills to the range of tasks and responsibilities posed by such a program. There were also a number of languages represented on staff, including Spanish, Tagalog, Mandarin, and Cantonese. In addition, SF CARES contracted with corps consultants, who were paid a stipend to conduct outreach for the program and provide technical assistance to applicants during the application process. Furthermore, their extant strong links with the ECE community provided them with a host of supporters who acted as unpaid volunteers, performing such duties as outreach and advocacy.

Staffing Challenges

While the staff situation was much improved in Year 2, the second year was not without some difficulties. Although there were significantly more staff members, the increased amount of stipend money available meant a greater workload as staff attempted to spread the word about the program, provide technical support and assistance during the application process, and handle the huge number of applications received. Thus, staff often did "a little bit of everything," offering their areas of expertise where needed. In the words of one staff member: "because we are so small, we are doing everything that everyone else is doing ... I am kind of dipping into wherever I am needed." A positive aspect of this understaffing was that staff members were knowledgeable about many components of the program rather than just one. Nevertheless, staff admitted that there were insufficient personnel to perform the multitude of tasks associated with implementing the program in Year 2.

Background and Qualifications

According to program staff, the skills required for planning and implementing the SF CARES program are varied and numerous, encompassing discrete skills and knowledge bases, as well as some general personality traits. Many skills mentioned were related to specific staff positions and tasks, such as possessing data analysis skills for positions involved with the database and being “detail-oriented” for positions involving application review. Other skills posited as useful were budgeting skills and knowing how to evaluate transcripts.

In addition to these discrete skills, program staff emphasized more general qualifications they viewed as important for individuals involved in the coordination of such a program. These included:

- Strong interpersonal skills, including the ability to work with diverse groups, the latter being particularly important in a city such as San Francisco
- Familiarity with both the local, as well as larger, child development field
- Background in child development
- Commitment to the goals and purpose of CARES; as one staff member expressed, it is important for prospective employees to be “passionate about our issues”

In the eyes of program staff, it was extremely important that they be viewed as a “user-friendly” program, as a helpful and useful resource for applicants and recipients. Repeatedly, staff mentioned that they strived to approach their work with a “customer-service attitude,” and that such a tactic was essential if they were to be seen as “serving the public.” In the words of one staff member: “If the program is not ... being user-friendly, then people aren’t going to come. I think it’s really important ... [to be] ... very patient, [and have] that customer-service attitude.”

Impressions from the Field

Responses from the variety of individuals involved with and affected by SF CARES attests to the realization of their “customer-service” goals. Corps consultants described staff as “personable and friendly.” They felt that staff valued and incorporated their feedback: “they take a lot of time to ask for a lot of feedback, and they really use that feedback ... if you say something then they are going to listen.” Similarly, stakeholders described staff as “very embracing, very outreaching ... very down to earth ... understanding, sympathetic, and patient.” In particular, one focus group participant mentioned the SF CARES director’s accessibility as largely responsible for creating a positive climate around the program: “because they have such an active, advocating director of the SF CARES program, [who] is out in the community, out in the public, [who] is easily accessible ... there have been many opportunities to communicate with SF CARES staff.” Recipients also commended staff on their receptiveness; many detailed instances of visiting the office to receive individualized help and assistance.

However, at the same time that they praised SF CARES’ staff members for their responsiveness, these groups acknowledged the need for more program staff. Consultants

mentioned that sometimes applicants complained about being unable to contact program staff, particularly around application deadlines; recipients themselves admitted that while program staff usually responded to their phone queries, sometimes it was difficult to reach them.

Advisory Work Group

To elicit the perspectives of ECE staff city-wide, DCYF convened the Advisory Work Group (AWG) in the first year of the program, and continued to seek their feedback in Year 2. The group met monthly, primarily to discuss policy-related issues.

Recruitment and Composition

Individuals were recruited to participate in the AWG in a number of ways. While most members were directly contacted by the City-Wide Child-Care Coordinator of DCYF, one focus group participant shared that she “kind of pushed” herself into the group because her organization was not represented.

Group members thought that the AWG was more representative of the ECE field as a whole in Year 2 compared to Year 1, with “good strong representation” from the “policy side of the field,” as well as from ECE practitioners, particularly center directors and teachers. However, AWG members identified family child-care providers and individuals from privately-owned centers as still lacking adequate representation in the second year.

Role

Many group members conceived of their role as providing SF CARES staff with the perspective of a particular recipient group—whether it be school-based teachers, family child-care providers, or center staff—to share “what they feel was working for them or not working for them [and] ...how changes [made in the program] affected how people perceived the program in the two years it has been implemented.”

Members indicated their desire to ensure that the issues and interests associated with their constituency were represented. For example, one member expressed that as a center director, she was “motivated to help” her staff; another said that for her “it was really important that teachers’ voices would be heard.”

While decisions made by the AWG were non-binding, the group played a significant role in shaping SF CARES policy. Staff utilized the feedback from group members, as informed by their distinct perspective within the field, to amend features of the design and implementation of the program. As one advisory group member expressed: “whatever we discussed and saw that needed to be improved was improved. And, we can see that in the application and the people [who] have now been targeted.”

Outreach and Recruitment

The response among focus group participants representing a variety of constituencies—from recipients to funders—to outreach efforts in Year 2 was generally very positive. Program staff contrasted the outreach in the second year of the program, which they described as “very extensive,” to the more limited outreach conducted in Year 1, when there were fewer staff members. They detailed a variety of outreach strategies utilized in Year 2 for “getting the word out,” including making presentations at meetings

and conducting outreach over the phone. Recipients learned about the program from a variety of sources, such as print media, mailings, colleagues at their center, child-care associations and networks, and City College.

Program outreach was particularly intensified in the second year, in part on account of the problems incurred in Year 1. More specifically, on account of the dearth of funding that meant many eligible applicants were not awarded stipends in the first year, staff launched an aggressive campaign in Year 2, to inform the local ECE community that there was a significant increase in stipends available and encourage disgruntled ECE staff to re-apply. The staff even continued efforts past the application deadline, because—in stark contrast to Year 1—the program had more money to give out than eligible applicants. This strategy, which included making calls to former recipients, had the desired results, spurring many more eligible individuals to apply. Furthermore, the program’s persistence impressed many in the field, as evidenced in the positive remarks of recipients and center directors. One center director said, “I don’t know too many organizations or efforts that encourage people a second time.”

The use of the Corps Consultants was unanimously lauded as an effective approach to outreach. Participating stakeholders thought having the consultants as resources for applicants was particularly useful because it provided them with “a list of accessible people,” many of whom spoke languages other than English. Applicants themselves commented on the convenience of having a list of numbers to call for information and assistance.

Consultants, stakeholders, recipients, and center directors were among the groups that commended program staff on the scope of their outreach efforts, describing how they made “a conscious effort” to target communities and centers where information was not being disseminated. A specific group that received emphasis for outreach in Year 2 was family child-care providers, especially those who were not active members of existing associations and networks. Despite the sizeable expansion in outreach strategies that program staff employed in Year 2, they nevertheless acknowledged that there were still some groups that were not reached. Particularly problematic was the situation at some centers where the directors were unfamiliar with SF CARES and thus did not make information available to teachers at the site, or, in some cases, provided misinformation regarding eligibility requirements. In order to avoid these types of scenarios, where center-based teachers are “at the mercy of director,” some focus group participants suggested sending materials straight to individual ECE teachers and targeting centers more directly, by making personal visits and presentations.

Many recipients learned about the program, not through a formal presentation or mailing, but via “word of mouth” from peers and colleagues. This successful outreach strategy was less a deliberate tactic than an outgrowth of the increasing awareness of and support for SF CARES within the local ECE community, although having individuals active in the field serve as consultants contributed to the dissemination of information among the ranks of ECE staff. Recipients also repeatedly mentioned the role that existing networks played in raising awareness of SF CARES in a variety of communities, particularly among family child-care providers.

Application Process

The general consensus was that the Year 2 application was much easier to understand and complete than in the first year. Center directors described it as “provider-friendly” and the majority of recipients stated that they had few problems applying, and that it was a “more reasonable” and less “complicated” process in Year 2. An exception was non-returning recipients (those who received a stipend in Year 1 but did not re-apply in Year 2); some in this group thought the application process was “a lot of work” and “not very clear.” One of the more cumbersome areas for new applicants involved obtaining documentation, such as transcripts and employment verification. However, many returning recipients noted that they were appreciative of program staff’s record-keeping efforts, detailing how the fact that “they really kept good files” of Year 1 documentation facilitated the application process for them. The Year 2 application was offered in 3 languages: English, Spanish, and Chinese.

For those who had difficulty filling out the application, there were multiple opportunities provided to assist them. The program offered three application workshops in Year 2, which guided attendees through the application packet; Corps consultants were available to answer individualized and recipient-specific questions. Some recipients also described stopping by the Wu Yee Office and described how program staff helped them fill out the application. One recipient summarized many others’ sentiments: “My experience was that there were so many staff workers everywhere for you to ask questions and get your questions answered. It was so convenient.” Center directors also praised outreach consultants and program staff for their responsiveness in answering applicants’ questions.

Informal support groups organized by applicants also played a significant role in facilitating the application process. A number of focus group participants detailed such a phenomenon occurring in centers and at scheduled meetings, as well as at family child-care providers’ homes, where people would pool their resources and help each other complete the application. A center director described “a group application process” occurring at his site, and detailed how center staff would help and support each other. In this way, directors were available to provide assistance to staff, verifying documents and reviewing applications.

Eligibility Requirements and Stipend Levels

In the second year of the program, eligibility levels continued to follow the Child Development Permit Matrix, although, as mentioned previously, additional levels were added to SF CARES to provide further incentives for advancement. For the most part, recipients thought that the guidelines around the eligibility levels and stipend awards were reasonable and fair. However, some admitted to uncertainty regarding specific aspects of the requirements. For example, among family child-care providers, a few expressed their astonishment that spring semester classes did not count towards bumping them up a level; a first-time recipient was troubled that non-credit-bearing coursework and training was not honored by the SF CARES program. Others divulged that they were a little confused when colleagues with the same characteristics received a larger award, attributing the discrepancy to inconsistencies in the evaluation process. A few returning recipients thought the matrix itself was confusing and others mentioned that the categories and job titles provided by the matrix were somewhat constraining.

SF CARES staff members demonstrated their awareness of and sensitivity to some of the confusion surrounding the matrix and eligibility requirements. One staff member explained that although they attempted to clarify the issue of eligibility for applicants, because eligibility and stipend amounts were tied to the Permit system, “forever there are going to be people who don’t understand how they get the money and how much they get because they don’t understand the permit system.” Thus, one of program staff’s ongoing goals was to help applicants and participants “understand the system.”

A continuing point of contention centered on the importance and value of education versus experience. Focus group participants debated the merits of possessing educational degrees against having experience in the field, and disagreed regarding which contributed more significantly to the quality of care provided. While some thought it was important to retain educated professionals, such as individuals with M.A.’s or doctorates, because “they know how to deal with children better than just common sense,” others thought it was unfair that those with more education received larger stipends, because they viewed years working in ECE as an important factor contributing their work with children. Still others could see “both points of view” and thought it was important to have both education and experience in order to “be really well-rounded.”

Language Stipend

As in the first year, SF CARES continued to offer additional stipends to applicants who could speak a language other than English fluently enough to communicate with children and their parents at work. While most everyone involved with the initiative endorsed the rationale behind awarding stipends to these bilingual individuals, throughout the field there existed differences of opinion regarding the particularities of these awards. For example, a number of ECE staff were concerned, and confused, about SF CARES’ definition of “bilingual.” Some recipients thought that the rules should be broadened, so as to encompass individuals who could communicate with children, but not with parents; others thought the requirements should be more clearly defined. A few particularly vocal recipients thought that stipends were discriminatory and an “unreachable goal” for those who did not know a second language.

The emergence of controversies surrounding the language stipend was not limited to SF CARES’ applicants and recipients. The Advisory Work Group—which included program administrators, community stakeholders, and community college instructors along with center directors, family child-care providers, and center-based teachers—also grappled with issues related to the language stipend. The entirety of some monthly meetings was taken up by lengthy discussions of how to make determinations about “who is bilingual and who is not.” In the end, AWG members were not able to reach consensus in their definitions of bilingualism and attributed part of the disagreement around this issue to bilingual education’s controversial status in the larger society. As articulated by one AWG member: “we didn’t waste much time trying to figure out how to decide something that ... in this society at large it has been impossible to decide.”

Nevertheless, focus group participants were overwhelmingly supportive of the awarding of stipends for individuals speaking a language other than English, emphasizing that in a city as diverse as San Francisco, bilingualism should be encouraged and rewarded.

Graduate Degree Stipend

The awarding of graduate degree stipends also continued in the second year. While the majority of recipients agreed with the underlying principles governing the stipend, some differences in opinion existed, largely stemming from the aforementioned debate around education versus experience. Family child-care providers added that the graduate stipends favored those working in centers, as few individuals in family child-care homes possessed such degrees. However, for the most part, recipients thought it was beneficial to make attempts to retain educated caregivers in the field; some also suggested that a similar stipend could be added to reward experience.

Stipend Award and Distribution

Although program staff reported delays of up to three months for payment in Year 2, these were not as widespread as in Year 1. Staff obviously made thorough attempts to prepare recipients for this situation, as there were few complaints from recipients regarding the late receipt of stipends. In fact, most everyone said they received their stipends in a timely manner, and, if there was a delay in payment, they were informed in advance by SF CARES staff members who were “really apologetic” regarding the delay. Most of the problems in disbursing the stipends stemmed from a lack of alignment between program deadlines and the agency’s fiscal system. To ensure timelier stipend payments in Year 3, the program has made a number of adjustments: in addition to meeting with fiscal staff “to work out a better system,” staff has moved up their application due dates so as not to conflict with other fiscal paperwork.

Recipients used their stipends towards a variety of ends. Some, particularly family child-care providers, mentioned reinvesting their awards in their day-care homes, buying needed supplies or equipment. Others used their money to cover personal expenses, such as bills, while others applied it towards treating themselves to luxuries, such as a few recipients who used their stipends to take vacations.

One of the few criticisms of the stipends involved the issue of taxes, which were not deducted from the award. This caused problems for some recipients at tax time, when they needed to pay more taxes than usual. Although SF CARES had informed recipients of this fact, some thought that staff should further emphasize the tax issue, so as to prepare them for the shock in April. Others suggested that taxes be taken out beforehand, although, for legal reasons, this was not an option since recipients are not CRI employees.

Appeals

If applicants thought there was a mistake or oversight made in the identification of their eligibility or in the classification of their levels, they could submit a formal appeal to program staff and have their applications reevaluated. In Year 2 little feedback was offered about the appeals process, likely because, with increased funding, more applicants received stipends, and thus were more satisfied with the program overall. Program staff approximated the number of individuals who appealed decisions in Years 1 and 2 at around 10%. While in Year 1, the Advisory Work Group (AWG) was responsible for reviewing appeals, program staff conducted appeals in the second year, with one member of the AWG reviewing decisions to ensure fairness. In addition, under

the program's conflict-of-interest policy, appeals submitted by employees of the home agency, Corps consultants, and others with close relationships to SF CARES, were reviewed by independent, non-partisan reviewers.

Program staff identified three primary reasons that individuals appealed a decision: 1) applicants disagreed with a policy, 2) applicants did not submit their documentation by the deadline date, or 3) staff made a mistake in reviewing the application. In the first case, staff did not change their decision, as the policy was unalterable. However, in the second scenario, staff could reverse a decision, as long as the applicant could provide the requisite paperwork. Clearly, when staff made an error in evaluating an application, they would repeal their initial decision and award the stipend.

Those individuals who took advantage of this recourse were offered considerable support in the process. Staff described the appeals process as providing them with the opportunity to further actualize their goal of being a "user-friendly" resource for applicants and recipients. Staff members helped individuals who were appealing for a larger stipend amount to fill out applications, often supplying them with the appropriate wording. A few recipients opined that the appeals process was geared towards individuals more comfortable approaching staff and challenging a decision, and thus may not have been utilized by those less confident or uncomfortable confronting issues in such a direct manner.

Continuing Eligibility Requirements

As mentioned previously, in order to maintain eligibility for the program, recipients were responsible for fulfilling a number of requirements. Most recipients thought the requirements were fair and reasonable and were not difficult to meet. A few recipients praised the latitude of the requirements, or, more specifically, that a wide range of classes and activities could be used towards the professional development requirement. One ECE staff person in particular shared her thoughts: "I like the flexibility; that it can be according to our interest. It can be the kind of thing we learn best from ... and can also dovetail with the professional growth."

However, some recipients expressed their frustration at being obligated to attend meetings and forums, and thought that their eligibility should not be contingent on participation in such events. They complained that the continuing eligibility requirements placed additional demands on their already busy schedules. Others thought that there was not enough notification about the requirements and suggested that guidelines be made more clear and provided in a more timely manner.

Yet, overall, recipients agreed that building professional development into the program was a good idea and contributed to their development as ECE professionals.

Lessons Learned

The feedback provided by focus group participants provided valuable insights into what worked in various program areas, as well as offered useful information about procedures that were less successful. Following are some suggestions gleaned from the experiences of implementing the CARES program in San Francisco during Year 2 that may be helpful to others interested in implementing a similar program.

Planning and on-going implementation

- Administer the child-care retention incentive program independently from organizations affiliated with a particular community or constituency in order to avoid allegations of “conflict of interest”; in cases where the program is run by such an agency, make efforts to maintain the autonomy of the program.
- Elicit input from as many constituencies as possible during the planning process. Continue to seek feedback and incorporate perspectives from a variety of groups during the implementation of the program, through formalized strategies such as establishing an advisory group, as well as in more informal ways.
- Hire staff members who have a background in child development, are familiar with both the local and broader ECE landscape, and are committed to the goals and purposes of the program. When possible, try to hire staff members who are representative of the language and cultural groups that make up the local workforce.

Outreach, recruitment, and technical support

- Utilize a variety of outreach strategies and media for “getting the word out,” (such as newspapers, mailings, television ads, meeting presentations, and posters and flyers) in order to reach as many communities and constituencies as possible.
- Employ individuals currently working in the ECE field as consultants for the program, to provide technical assistance to applicants during the application process; this group can offer valuable insights regarding elements of the application.
- Make use of existing networks and organizations to disseminate information about the CRI program. In San Francisco, this was a particularly useful tactic for reaching family child-care providers, who, although generally more isolated than center-based staff, often participated in provider networks.
- Do not assume that center-based staff will receive adequate information through center directors; in some situations, directors might need to be specifically informed about the program’s purpose, goals, and requirements. Some suggestions offered in this regard are conducting informational presentations for center directors and targeting ECE staff directly.

Eligibility, stipends, and appeals

- Present requirements in a clear and readable format; offer a variety of opportunities and outlets for potential applicants to receive clarification.
- Keep documentation, such as transcripts, from former applicants on-file.
- Note that language stipends often are viewed as fostering children’s development by honoring the diversity of languages spoken; however, they also can be controversial and raise tensions around ethnicity and language.
- Understand that graduate degree stipends are seen as a way of rewarding education, but also are resented by some applicants who view them as valuing education over experience.

- Outline continuing eligibility requirements clearly and reiterate them throughout the year for recipients to understand and fulfill them.
- Include a procedure for applicants to contest decisions made regarding eligibility and stipend levels.
- Inform recipients repeatedly that stipends will be taxed.

Perceptions of Program Effects

During the focus groups, participants offered their input on specific elements of the program, and also reflected upon the significance of SF CARES in their lives and the local ECE setting. Thus, as they registered their reactions to and opinions on particular aspects of the program's implementation, they also speculated on the progress they thought the program had made towards addressing larger issues in the field. Their comments reflect the contributions they thought the program had made in a number of areas, from the recognition of recipients and fostering of professional linkages to the improvement of quality of care and promotion of advocacy. While this feedback has been organized and presented below in separate areas, these program effects are interrelated. For example, efforts to encourage networking among ECE staff can also assist in achieving goals related to advocacy; similarly, increasing access to professional development can foster relationships and build solidarity among ECE professionals, while improving the quality of care offered to children. Furthermore, it is important to emphasize that these are individuals' *impressions* of the impact of the program, rather than statements of causality. They are offered as multiple perspectives on the role of the SF CARES program in this community of ECE professionals.

Recognition

Although the financial reward offered through the stipend was a significant factor motivating many recipients to apply, focus group participants articulated numerous other benefits that they gained from their involvement in the program. Many recipients thought that the SF CARES program had an effect monetarily and influenced their self-concept, both personal and professional. The recognition conferred by the stipend made many recipients feel supported and valued. Such an impact is especially important, considering the work of ECE professionals is often undervalued, or in the words of a few participants, where they are viewed as "babysitters." A number of recipients discussed how their status as a stipend recipient instilled in them pride and confidence, making them "feel more supported as ... teacher[s]." Another recipient shared her feelings about the stipend: "And [it was] well deserved. I mean we never get bonuses, we never receive any kind of pat on the back, so it was great."

A few recipients also referred to the acknowledgment they received from parents due to their participation in the program. As one recounted: "[we] told parents about it and they were really glad ...it makes me feel like more of a professional."

Center directors noticed similar effects of the program on participants. One commented that, since the inception of SF CARES, there was “more joy” in the workplace, and that “people are pleased that [others] not only care about them, but ... value their work.”

Professional Networks and Linkages

Another consequence of SF CARES involved the relationships recipients built with other professionals in the field due to their participation in the program. Numerous recipients shared how their attendance at activities related to SF CARES, as well as their enrollment in classes to meet continuing eligibility requirements, provided them with the opportunity to network with others in the field. These professional linkages helped alleviate some of the isolation mentioned by some ECE staff. One focus group participant described this phenomenon more specifically: “I never knew that there were as many groups as there are. You get into ... your little clique that you work with, but getting involved in this has made me see that there are other ways to get people involved.”

This sense, that SF CARES helped foster relationships among recipients, was expressed by SF CARES program staff, Advisory Work Group members, and center directors as well. Some also thought that the program promoted feelings of unity and group identity among recipients because “now they seem like they are part of a system.” The forums sponsored by SF CARES were cited as “corps building.”

Training and Professional Development

Although SF CARES did not directly provide coursework to recipients, the professional growth hours and coursework required to maintain continued eligibility offered multiple opportunities for participants to expand their knowledge of child development and related issues. Recipients commented that the program requirements helped them and their colleagues adhere to a professional development plan. They detailed a range of classes that they were attending, from ECE classes and workshops to courses aimed at completing their General Education units. While program staff acknowledged that many participants were attending professional growth activities “because they need[ed] to do it for [SF] CARES,” they sensed that an outgrowth of their fulfilling requirements was that participants “are really getting something out of it.”

The response among recipients regarding the effects of the forums organized by program staff was mixed. Many recipients provided critical feedback about the forums and expressed their opinions that they were not particularly useful. Participants cited scheduling and time constraints as one reason for their dislike of them; in some cases, as with the advocacy forum, they thought that the information provided was repetitive. Others thought the forums could be better organized. However, some recipients acknowledged that these types of activities “brought teachers together,” and thus contributed to networking and advocacy efforts. Others detailed instances where they utilized information gained from a forum in their work with children, as in the case of the forum devoted to children’s music.

Among all the recipients, there was the perception that enrollment in ECE and child development classes at the local city college had increased since the initiation of the SF CARES program. One focus group participant observed that “classes were never filled

before,” while another detailed the following scenario: “Some people are competing for classes and can’t even get in.” The fact that classes are filled, and in some cases closed, is, in the words of one participant, “a first.” As illustrated in the Table 4, while the number of courses offered decreased from 2001 to 2002, enrollment increased by over 10%. Furthermore, training opportunities available at community organizations nearly doubled over this time period.

Table 4. Training and Professional Development in San Francisco

	<i>Number of courses offered at City College (enrollment)</i>	<i>Number of courses offered at community-based organizations (enrollment)</i>
Summer 1999-Spring 2000	181 (4,928)	n/a
Summer 2000-Spring 2001	192 (4,485)	19 (466)
Summer 2001-Spring 2002	179 (5,081)	35 (816)

Retention

Nearly all of the recipients expressed their desire to remain in the ECE field for the next few years; a number also avowed their life-long commitment to the profession, as exemplified by one who stated that she would “do it for the rest of [her] ... life.” Many shared aspirations of eventually opening their own family child-care homes or centers.

Despite the strong commitment expressed by many to remain in the field, a few recipients stated that they would probably leave their jobs soon, mostly because of the high costs of rent in San Francisco. For these individuals, the stipend offered through the program was unlikely to provide sufficient incentive to retain them in the field. As one ECE staff-person expressed, “a thousand dollars is just a thousand dollars ... it doesn’t make me want to be a provider for the rest of my life, and I love kids.” Others reiterated this sentiment that the stipend was not substantial enough to compensate for the low wages pervasive in the field. One member of a funding agency specifically addressed this issue: “I remain skeptical if [a \$500 stipend is] going to make a difference whether somebody stays in the field or not—that doesn’t help them put food on their families’ table.”

However, center directors attested to the impact that they perceived that SF CARES has had on retention at their site. They mostly attributed this to the “tangible validation” provided through the stipends. One director referenced the combined effect of SF CARES with other retention incentive programs, such as Wages +, lauding both as influencing staffing patterns at her site.

Thus, there may be a variety of factors beyond the SF CARES’ stipend that have contributed to the retention of ECE professionals in the field. While the stipend has certainly played a significant role in making recipients feel more valued and respected, it is likely not the decisive or single determining factor responsible for preventing individuals from leaving the workforce.

Quality of Care

Many recipients claimed a positive change in the quality of caregiving at their centers over the last few years, and attributed this improvement to SF CARES. Senior teaching staff indicated that junior staff-people were more knowledgeable about child development due to the increased training that was required for stipend eligibility: “my assistant actually understands what I am doing now.” Others similarly declared that the program had played a role in improving the quality of their caregiving by providing support for them to continue their education. Center directors thought that the SF CARES’ program benefited the quality of care at their centers through increased staff training, noticing that, in the past few years, staff members were “more open to learning.” They described staff at their centers as “more competent to work with children.”

The Importance of Advocacy

While the primary goal of the SF CARES program was to retain ECE teachers, program planners and staff believed it also was important to build an advocacy agenda into the program. Thus, although the stipends were aimed at providing financial incentives to ECE staff, other activities, such as forums and meetings, sought to foster advocacy skills among recipients and others in the local ECE arena.

This goal of building an advocacy movement was realized in many sectors of the industry. Community stakeholders participating in a focus group thought that an impact of SF CARES also included strengthening the community, by “building solidarity” among ECE professionals. Many recipients commented that such activities served to “[bring] teachers together.”

Participants representing many groups, from planners to recipients, emphasized the ability of the program to promote advocacy skills among those working in the field—providers, teachers, and directors—as well as to develop an awareness of relevant issues, such as quality of care and ECE staff wages, within the larger policy-making arena. For example, one teacher stated that she thought SF CARES had enabled the field “to come together, and advocate for one cause,” while another said that she felt “really vocalized,” due to increased awareness in the media about the program, praising the fact that many people “were really getting out there” to advocate for ECE issues in a public way. Examples of such direct action included sending letters to the governor (an activity organized as part of a SF CARES-sponsored forum) and attending rallies. Other focus group participants articulated that they viewed the stipend as a way to raise awareness about issues such as low wages among ECE professionals, or in the words of one recipient, as a “type of announcement to let the community know that we are here.”

The Future of SF CARES

As the statements and perceptions of the many individuals presented here attest, there was an overall impression that SF CARES had a large impact on the local ECE arena in a number of significant ways. Throughout the focus groups, individuals representing a variety of constituencies referred to the multiple positive effects of the program, in the lives of individual caregivers and specific centers, as well as in the field as a whole. While many of those polled for their opinions were quick to point out implementation

flaws or areas where the program could be improved upon, the general consensus regarding the initiative was overwhelmingly positive.

The Issue of Sustainability

Looming over these glowing accounts of the program's benefits was a less hopeful sense of the possibilities for continued funding and sustainability. Many expressed their aspiration that the program would remain in existence, yet were realistic in their long-term prognosis for SF CARES, acknowledging that since "it runs from year to year," funding is uncertain.

A number of times directors referred to the belief among staff that funds would "dry up" or only be offered for a few years. One focus group participant stated that "there is still a feeling ... pervasive throughout the center that it is too good to go on much longer." This particular director acknowledged that the funds would need to "come from somewhere else" as First 5 monies begin to dwindle.

Future Visions

Funders addressed the issue of sustainability and emphasized that SF CARES should be viewed as "one piece" functioning within a larger system of programs and initiatives aimed at addressing the retention of professionals in the ECE field. Funders highlighted increasing the coordination of compensation and retention programs at a local level. In this way initiatives would become "intertwined" and the processes "streamlined," allowing sharing of information across programs and the lowering of administrative costs. Although supportive of the program, one funder expressed the hope that in the future the need for the program would become obsolete because "we would be paying people enough." This individual described the initiative as a "band-aid" approach, rather than as a permanent solution to the problem of retention and low-wages in the ECE field.

One focus group member elaborated her future vision for SF CARES as being "like a union" for ECE staff. In her opinion, the continued sustainability of the program lies in obtaining credibility among funders and policymakers, as well as within the ECE field: "It just needs to be around long enough to gain recognition and trust. Time will prove it to be stable and worth fighting for. People would fight for [SF] CARES." A center director stressed the importance of increasing advocacy efforts among recipients and parents in achieving continued maintenance of the program. In her words, "It is up to them to get out there and fight for it."

Conclusions: Findings and Implications

To conclude, this section outlines the primary findings from this study of various stakeholders' perspectives on the implementation of SF CARES in Year 2. In particular, it points to the role of this program in the ECE community and implications for promoting retention and professional recognition.

The demand for stipends evidenced by the large number of applications in Year 1 of SF CARES served to increase efforts to secure increased funding in Year 2. However, applications initially did not match the level of increased funding in Year 2, causing

program staff to undertake expanded outreach and recruitment strategies to ensure comprehensive stipend distribution. Following feedback from Year 1, these efforts were particularly targeted towards family child-care providers, who were underrepresented among stipend recipients in the first year of the program.

Year 2 stipend recipients were, overall, satisfied with the application and stipend disbursement processes, and with the level of support received from program staff. There were some controversies around eligibility requirements and stipend levels, especially around awards based on (multiple) language skills and education vs. experience.

While participants articulated a variety of perspectives on and experiences with the SF CARES program in Year 2, a strong theme emerging from all of the focus groups was that ECE professionals are underpaid and undervalued, and that programs such as SF CARES may play a role in alleviating this lack of monetary and professional recognition. However, it was also apparent from focus group feedback that although SF CARES supplied needed support and acknowledgement to ECE professionals, it could not be relied upon as the sole, or sustained, solution to the more pervasive problem of low wages in the field. While all recipients expressed their appreciation of the program, few stated that the stipend was the factor keeping them in the field.

The program's support for continued professional development, and the recognition and sense of unity conferred through participation, combined with the extra money from the stipend award may have served to enhance recipients' satisfaction as professionals. Yet, many of the recipients' statements suggested that they were deeply committed to remaining in the field of ECE; some expressed that they would never leave. It is difficult to determine how heavily the stipend figured into the career decisions of such dedicated individuals. Furthermore, in assessing the effect of the stipends on turnover, disentangling the components of the program to identify one factor that may solve the retention problem may not be possible. As this study revealed, the SF CARES program signified different things to different people, and had multiple, and interrelated, effects on the lives of individual recipients and within the local ECE community.

Findings from this study of SF CARES illustrated the belief of participants that it needs to be implemented within a larger system of support and advocacy for the field, which includes raising public awareness of issues facing the ECE workforce, expanding local opportunities for professional development, and exerting pressure on policymakers for funding to augment ECE staff salaries permanently.

The need for quality early care and education, and the demand for well-trained ECE staff do not seem likely to wane soon. Recent federal changes in welfare legislation mandating longer work hours for income-support recipients and the continued participation of parents generally in the workforce will make the ECE staffing problem more acute in the years to come. Regardless of shifts in the economy that serve to affect employment patterns in myriad ways, nationwide, families will persist in their need for a range of child-care arrangements, the provision of which will depend largely on the field's ability to secure and retain staff. While the CARES model is by no means the *only* way to

address the problems facing the field, such as retention and quality, it certainly is one method, particularly when leveraged with other types of retention and training programs and initiatives.

Appendix: Descriptions of focus group participants

Year 2 Focus Group Participants

Funders/Planners	Key players involved with developing the program design and identifying program funding such as officers of the California First 5 Children and Families Commission, the San Francisco County First 5 Commission, and pertinent officers from DCYF.
Community Stakeholders	Representatives from local Resource and Referral agencies (R&Rs), school districts and other local government and child-care agencies
Program Staff	SF CARES staff responsible for implementing the program
Program Participants	Stipend recipients, grouped by licensing type (center, FCC, exempt), and among center-based, by returning recipients and Level 1 & Level 2 new recipients
Advisory Work Group	Members of the program’s advisory group
Center Directors	Directors of local centers (subsidized, non-profit, and for-profit, all sizes) who have staff participating in the program and can discuss both the application process and the effect of the program at the center level
Corps Consultants	Individuals contracted by the program to conduct outreach in various ECE communities, to help with the application process, and to advise both program staff and stipend recipients regarding professional development efforts

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- ^{ix} Whitebook, M., Howes, C., & Phillips, D. (1998). *Worthy Work, Unlivable Wages; The National Child Care Staffing Study*. Washington, DC: Center for the Child Care Workforce.
- ^x U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics (2002). 2001 National Occupational Employment and Wage Estimates. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Labor.
- ^{xi} See Appendix for descriptions of focus group participants.
- ^{xii} Exceptions were program staff, which occurred at the SF CARES program office and funding agents, which was conducted via conference call.
- ^{xiii} California Employment Development Department (2002), Labor Force and Unemployment Data. State of California: Employment Development Department. Available: <http://www.calmis.ca.gov/htmlfile/subject/lftable.htm>.
- ^{xiv} California Budget Project (2001). *Making Ends Meet: How Much Does It Cost to Raise a Family in California?* Available: <http://www.cbp.org/2001/r0109mem.htm>
- ^{xv} *Cost of Bay Area homes still rising*, San Francisco Chronicle, June 25, 2002.
- ^{xvi} California Budget Project. (2001).
- ^{xvii} *Study cites divide for rich, poor kids: Big inequities seen in Bay Area*, San Francisco Chronicle, November 28, 2001.
- ^{xviii} The national average of child poverty is 16.5%; California's is 19.5%. Source: Children Now (2001). *California Report Card 2001*. Oakland, CA. Available: <http://www.childrennow.org/california/rc-2001/reportcard-2001.htm>
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- ^{xx} California Child Care Resource and Referral Network (2001). *The 2001 California Child Care Portfolio*. Available: <http://www.rnnetwork.org/calchildcare/onramp/article.php?ID=624>
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- ^{xxiv} Child Care Indicators 1998, Part II. PACE and the California Child Care Resource and Referral Network
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- ^{xxvi} Ibid
- ^{xxvii} See Year 1 report. (San Francisco CARES Program: Year 1 Qualitative Implementation Study February 2002. PACE Web Series 02-W02. http://pace.berkeley.edu/sf_cs.pdf)
- ^{xxviii} In addition to meeting the prerequisites for units, there are additional requirements associated with each level; this chart is thus a summary of unit requirements.
- ^{xxix} See http://pace.berkeley.edu/pace_bay_area.html for a description about, and publications on, this evaluation.
- ^{xxx} See <http://www.calcares.net> for information on this database.
- ^{xxxi} For comparisons with county workforce demographic data, see Year 1 Progress Report of the evaluation of CRI programs <http://pace.berkeley.edu/Pol.Br.03-2_Press.pdf>. Also, break down by type of care not available for San Francisco. Of the total 1,116 stipend recipients, 996 were center-based staff and 120 were family child-care providers.
- ^{xxxii} Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding and missing data for some indicators.
- ^{xxxiii} Percentage may be over-represented since applicants were allowed to check more than one language on the form.

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