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Serving  
Blount, Jefferson  
Shelby and Walker Counties



An overview of child care in Blount, Jefferson, Shelby and Walker Counties



# 2011 Status of Child Care Report



Serving Blount, Jefferson  
Shelby and Walker Counties



## STATUS OF CHILD CARE REPORT SPRING 2011

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## What it takes to be successful...

Engineers know it. Construction workers know it. Financial advisors know it. And kids need it.

What they all know and what skyscrapers, retirement accounts and children need is a solid foundation that is built with investments that start early. The solid foundation needed for success is built when young children are provided with quality, early learning experiences. Investments in programs that promote quality early learning yield the greatest return for children, families and society.

Research shows that the first five years of life are the prime time for human development, learning and growth. During this critical period, investments of money, time and energy yield the biggest "bang per buck."

- 85 percent of a child's brain is developed before age three
- Early years represent the greatest window to make a positive difference for a child
- Investments in quality early childhood learning experiences and programs that support parents yield returns of \$7 to \$17 per dollar invested

Children are often touted as our greatest natural resource. However, as a society we start investing seriously in our children too late. This may be why we currently see only fair or diminishing returns from these investments. Prevention through early intervention pays handsomely.

To be successful, children need caring adults to invest early and often to provide a solid foundation for life success. These adults include parents, teachers, relatives, neighbors and fellow citizens. When children and their parents have nurturing support and stability early in life, children stand to make the most gains over their lifetime and become more productive members of society.

Consider that close to 60 percent of women in the workforce have children under age five. Combine this with the high number of single-parent families and it quickly becomes apparent that children and families today need our help. Children need safe, stimulating learning environments and skilled and compassionate people to care for them during one of the most vulnerable times in their life.

Anyone who has ever climbed the ladder of success will tell you it is a much easier climb if you get the first few steps right. Helping children up the ladder means they can reach goals such as high school graduation, a healthier lifestyle and a higher earning potential. Read on to discover what's at stake and how to help children succeed.



# Who is Caring for Our Children?

Over 67,500 children under the age of five live in Blount, Jefferson, Shelby and Walker Counties. (VOICES for Alabama's Children. 2010 *Alabama Kids Count Data Book*). Based on the number of working women with children under five, approximately 40,000 of these children are in some type of child care program. Who is caring for these children?

The 2008 *Child Care Workforce Study*, published by Alabama Partnership for Children, with assistance from the Alabama Technology Network – Auburn University, reports that, “The quality of the child care staff is the most important indicator of a high quality early learning program. Research has found that the teachers’ level of formal education and specialized training in early childhood education is directly related to positive outcomes for children’s social, language and cognitive development.”

In Alabama, legally operating child care centers can be licensed or exempt from licensure. The licensing authority is the Alabama State Department of Human Resources (DHR). Providers exempt from licensure include centers operated by the following: religious or faith based organizations, state agencies, local governments, military facilities and programs that operate less than 4 hours per day.



Minimum requirements for teachers working in a child care center		
Requirements	Licensed Center	License-exempt Center*
Age	19 years of age	None
Education	High School or GED Diploma	None
Pre-service Training	12 Hours	None
Professional Development	2 Hours in each of the 6 DHR mandatory categories of study	None

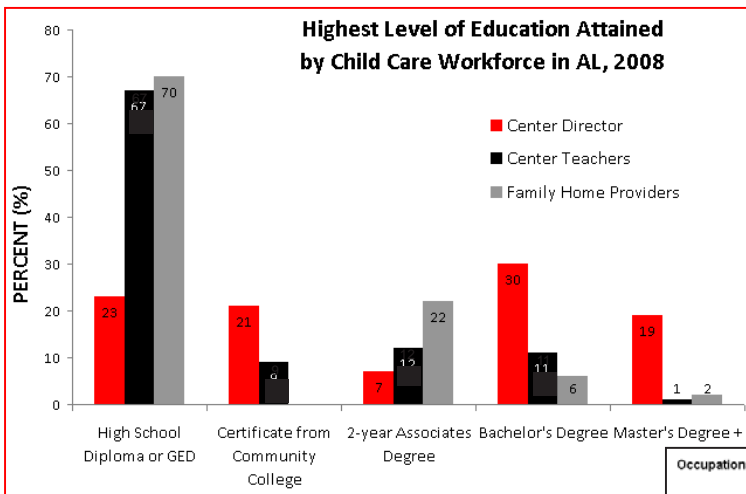
*\*Many child care centers have their own requirements which may exceed licensing standards. Parents and guardians must be sure to ask what criteria are in place at their child care program.*

Legally operating family day care homes and group day care homes must have a license if they are providing care for one or more unrelated children; with or without compensation; away from the child’s home; for more than 4 hours in a 24-hour period. The licensing authority is DHR. Family providers must meet the following requirements:

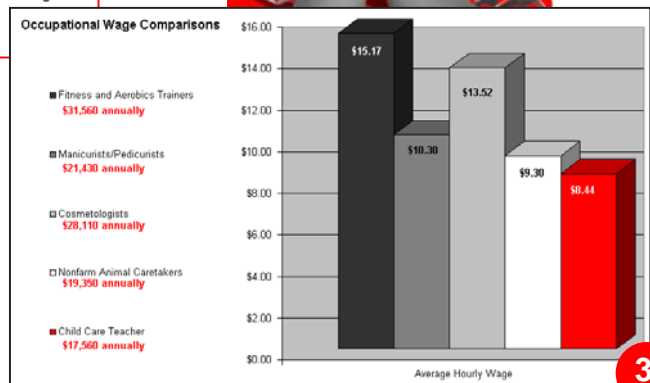
- 19 years old,
- high school diploma or GED,
- current CPR/First Aid training and
- at least 24 hours of clock training

Thereafter, the provider shall complete at least 20 clock hours of training related to child care annually.

## Child Care Workforce Data



2008 *Child Care Workforce Study*, Alabama Partnership for Children, with assistance from the Alabama Technology Network – Auburn University



2009 Alabama Occupational Employment Survey

# What is Quality Child Care?

Proper nutrition and health, a safe and nurturing home environment and access to high quality child care in the earliest years of life are integral to helping today's children prepare for school and lifetime success.

## Six Indicators of Quality Child Care

1. **Teacher to Child Ratio**  
How many children are attended by each caregiver? The fewer the number of children per teacher the better attention your child will receive.
2. **Group Size**  
How many children are in a group or classroom? Smaller groups tend to be calmer and safer environments.
3. **Caregiver Education and Turnover**  
What is the teacher's training and education? Young children do better when they have a knowledgeable, consistent teacher for at least a year.
4. **Health and Safety**  
Is the environment clean and organized? Are there appropriate discipline and medicine policies? Are teachers certified in CPR and First Aid?
5. **Family Involvement**  
Are parents welcome to participate and share ideas with the program? Involved parents build a strong partnership with their child's caregiver.
6. **Accreditation**  
Nationally accredited programs are measured by standards of quality that have been established by national organizations and are usually higher than state minimum standards.

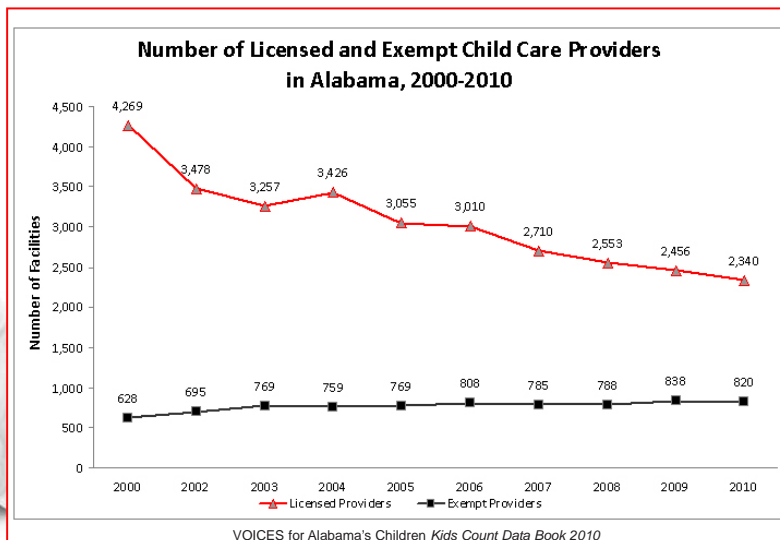


## Accreditation and Licensing Information

### Accredited Child Care in Central Alabama

Child care providers may attain accreditation beyond state licensure in an effort to reach and maintain standards of excellence in child care. Only 29 child care programs are accredited in Blount, Jefferson, Shelby and Walker County.

- 7 child care centers in Jefferson County**
- 1 Family Day Care Home in Jefferson County**
- 3 child care centers in Shelby County**
- 18 Head Start programs in Jefferson County**

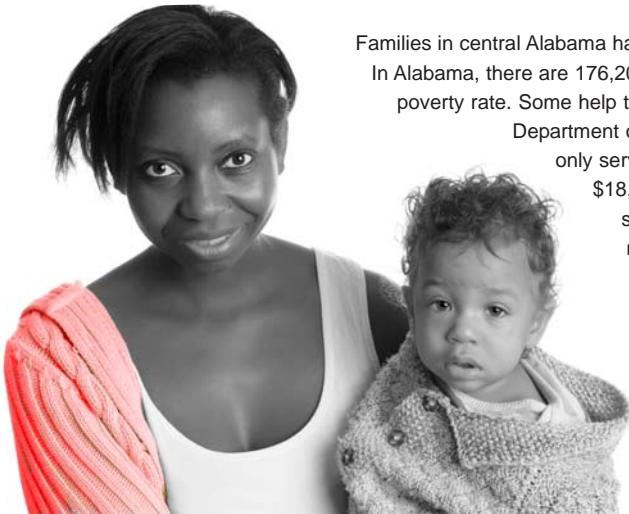


## Child Care Affordability

What do a home mortgage or rent payment, college tuition and child care costs have in common? In a family budget, they are about the same amount.

Housing and child care costs tend to be the two largest expenses of a household budget. In some cases child care expenses top housing costs. The annual tuition for an in-state college and yearly child care expenses are also about the same; yet, there are not any Pell Grants for child care nor is there a 529 Plan or other similar means to save for child care expenses.

Child care is expensive and why shouldn't it be? After all, we're talking about caring for one of our most precious resources – our children. Economists tell us that a family should allocate about 10 percent of their household income for child care expenses, but when the median family income in central Alabama is only \$40,547 one can quickly calculate that child care costs are absorbing much more of the family's income.



Families in central Alabama have many child care options, but most of those options are not affordable. In Alabama, there are 176,200 – or 20 percent -- of families with children living at or under the poverty rate. Some help to support these families is available from agencies such as the Alabama Department of Human Resources child care subsidy program. However, this program only serves families earning less than 130 percent of the Federal Poverty Line or \$18,937 for a family of two. Some very low income families can qualify for services such as Head Start or Early Head Start. There is a greater number of families who are in an income bracket that does not qualify them for these programs yet they must spend 25 to 30 percent or more of their annual household income for child care.

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## Child Care Costs Information

### Child Care Costs

The average cost of infant care in a licensed child care center is \$6,155 annually. The average annual tuition and fees paid for four-year state college in Alabama is \$7,374 (College Board 2010-2011).

The average cost of infant care is higher than the cost for other age groups.

Child care centers typically charge more than Family Day Care Homes and Day Care Group Homes.

*When families can comfortably afford the cost of quality child care they:*

**Have more viable child care options**

**Make better choices with their income**

**Take care of other necessities (e.g. housing, food and clothing)**

**May be able to advance their career through additional training or education**

### Child Care Costs in Central Alabama

COUNTY	2007*	2010*	Percentage Increase
Blount	\$4,706	\$5,720	22%
Jefferson	\$6,204	\$6,461	4%
Shelby	\$8,114	\$8,673	7%
Walker	\$4,463	\$4,680	5%

\*Childcare Resources data on infant child care in a licensed child care center

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## What to do now?

An ancient African fable demonstrates that applying “upstream solutions” is not a new idea. Be that as it may, going upstream continues to give us the best perspective on what needs to be done to intervene before problems occur.

The fable goes something like this... A local villager goes to the river one day to find a baby floating downstream. She quickly springs into action and pulls the baby out of the river. But just as she reaches the shore, she notices another baby heading downstream followed by even more babies. Alarmed, she calls for help to rescue the babies.

Another villager decides to travel upstream to see what is causing the babies to end up in the river. This villager discovers a group of adults – busy with laundry, cooking and other tasks – failing to notice the babies who are playing dangerously close to a waterfall. While it is certainly necessary to save the babies downstream, it is not until the source of the crisis is discovered that we can stop it from happening in the first place.



Professor James Heckman, noted economist and Nobel Prize Winner, has this to say about addressing some of society's biggest problems including education and poverty:

**“Today's challenges are real – record rates of high school dropouts, a lack of college graduates, increasing rates of obesity and chronic diseases, rising crime and a growing underclass. ... It's time to invest in upstream solutions for future generations while we continue to address today's problems.”**

Professor Heckman's work demonstrates that “prevention through early childhood development is more life and cost-effective than remediation.”

*Professor Heckman's solution is a basic equation:*

**Invest + Develop + Sustain = Gain**

Basically investing in quality early learning for children, developing their potential and sustaining their education will yield gains at the individual level and societal level in terms of a better educated workforce, higher individual earnings and safer, vibrant communities for us all.

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## Taking Action

So what can YOU do ?

1. Educate yourself on child care issues: visit [ccr-bhm.org](http://ccr-bhm.org) regularly
2. Support legislation that improves child care such as mandatory background checks for all child care staff and minimum licensing standards for all child care settings
3. Develop family-friendly work policies such as flexible work schedules or scholarship funds for child care costs
4. Donate books or learning games and toys to a child care center
5. Host a shower to collect books, diapers, wipes, etc. to donate to a child care program
6. Call or have your business contact Childcare Resources for more information about how you can help low-income working families pay for child care.
7. Donate to Childcare Resources

**Every year in Alabama over 60,000 children are born. These children need your help. We need your help. In the end we will all gain by supporting quality, affordable child care for all who need it: children, families, employers and our community.**



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The **mission** of Childcare Resources is to make quality care and education of young children happen by providing information, education and assistance to families, providers of child care, and the community.



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## Childcare Resources' Focus

Childcare Resources is central Alabama's child care resource and referral agency. Childcare Resources exists to support the child care needs of families, businesses and the community. The Status of Child Care Report is provided every three to five years as a basis to evaluate child care trends, indicate what has changed and encourage community involvement.

Childcare Resources was formed from a community driven task force led by United Way of Central Alabama in 1984. The primary work of this task force was to assess child care demands and available services in the region. It was clear that at that time that the management of child care and services in central Alabama was poor at best. For that reason Childcare Resources was born to address the needs of working families, report to the community and develop programs and services to address those needs. Childcare Resources continues to develop its programs and services, evaluate child care issues, report the status of child care and partner with others in the community to ensure quality and affordable child care is available.



Every day, Childcare Resources has the single-focused purpose to impact the quality and availability of child care in central Alabama. For over a quarter of a century, Childcare Resources has met the varied needs of a growing number of working families with young children. Services include helping families select child care, quality training and technical assistance for child care providers which includes our free Early Learning Resource Library and mobile Early Learning Resource Library van, the international Parents as Teachers parent education program and assistance to low-income working families seeking quality child care options for their young children.

Please contact us to discuss how we can partner with you to ensure all children and their families have access to quality, affordable child care. Together we can invest in our future.

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