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SOCIAL POLICY RESEARCH ASSOCIATES

Report on the Second Round of the Quality Child Care Initiative (QCCI)

Final Report

Chapter 8. Conclusion

This file contains Chapter 8 of the full report. The complete text of the report and an *Executive Summary* are posted on the web site of Action Alliance for Children at www.4children.org/QCCI.htm.

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VIII. CONCLUSION

ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE SECOND ROUND OF QCCI

The San Francisco Bay Area funders that came together in 1997 to form the Quality Child Care Initiative were responding to the challenges posed by the then newly-passed welfare reform legislation, which called for putting large numbers of low-income mothers to work over a relatively short period of time. Although welfare reform was the immediate catalyst for developing a shared program of grantmaking focused on quality child care, the QCCI funders found that they had a more lasting set of common interests. The funders that contributed to QCCI pooled grantmaking—although they were a diverse group in many ways—found that they shared a broad vision of the importance of early childhood education and agreed on the need to increase the visibility of and priority given to early childhood education funding and services by elected officials and the general public.

Thus began a formal funders' collaborative that lasted six years, developed a useful model of how a regional funders' collaborative could operate, and had a positive, substantive impact on both the philanthropic community and the early childhood education practitioner field in the Bay Area. For the participating funders, QCCI demonstrated that a funders' collaborative could raise the level of awareness and understanding of an issue such as child care and help frame public discussion and debate on that issue, using a multi-pronged strategy of supporting media literacy, advocacy projects, resource and technical assistance organizations, and training and service projects implemented by experienced practitioners. For the community of child-care practitioners and parents, QCCI provided funding to test promising approaches within a supportive but critical learning community that was interested in identifying and disseminating best practices.

Although the QCCI pooled fund was expected to be a one-time activity when it was initiated in 1997, the participating funders felt that their work together was not yet complete at the end of the first round in

QCCI demonstrated that a funders' collaborative could help frame public debate on a critical policy issue such as child care.

2000. They decided to continue to work together in a second round of collaborative grantmaking. During its second cycle of grantmaking, QCCI refined its strategic approach to emphasize the importance of achieving a stable child care workforce. It also reduced the number of individual grants made and increased its use of regional resource organizations with recognized expertise as intermediaries between the QCCI funders and the community of direct practitioners that actually provide early childhood education services. During its second round of grantmaking, QCCI also became more comfortable with including support for advocacy and education of public officials—e.g. through grants supporting local compensation and retention initiatives and Parent Voices—as an integrated component of its grantmaking strategy. This component was essential to QCCI’s other goals of achieving a stable child care workforce, expanding child care facilities, and ensuring access to quality child care.

As the end of the second round of QCCI pooled grantmaking approached, there was a need for transition planning to bring the formal pooled grantmaking to a close in a responsible way and to think about the future of Early Childhood Funders as an informal funders group. It was time for QCCI to examine and celebrate how far it had come. It was also time for the ongoing ECF to examine its heritage of the QCCI experience and decide how to transform that experience into a vision for its future.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Over the summer and fall of 2002, a new ECF Leadership Team came together, with participation from ten foundations, to guide the Early Childhood Funders group into the future. As mentioned previously, the retiring QCCI Leadership Team agreed to be responsible for overseeing the Round 2 QCCI grantees until their grant-funded activities were completed.

At the October 2002 ECF meeting, the new ECF Leadership Team presented a proposed mission statement for the group that emphasized the informal nature of the ECF collaborative: “The Early Childhood Funders (ECF) are an informal association of Bay Area foundations, public funders, and private donors. The ECF seek to enhance grantmaking effectiveness in the early childhood field by providing an opportunity to

share information, engage in dialogue, and participate in joint activities to improve the lives of young children and their families.”

Although several of the planned activities for the reconstituted ECF are similar to the previous activities of that informal group (including holding three meetings a year for public and private funders, bringing in speakers, and providing up-to-date information and materials on early childhood and related issues), the new ECF is also interested in promoting policy and program agenda that builds in large part on the strategic goals developed by the QCCI funders as part of their pooled grantmaking. It is not yet clear what form these new ECF activities will take. Possibilities being considered include: convening the early childhood community, policy makers, and other groups to discuss regional child care challenges and solutions; developing joint funding opportunities in which interested funders could participate; and exploring whether ECF itself could play a direct public policy role as a voice for regional funders on regional and state-level child care issues.

Whatever collaborative activities emerge from ECF in the future, the participating funders have been educated and enriched by their experiences as part of the two rounds of pooled funding carried out by the Quality Child Care Initiative. The philanthropic community in the Bay Area and elsewhere can be inspired by reviewing the substantial accomplishments and lessons learned from the QCCI experiment in funder collaboration.

The federal, state and local budget difficulties experienced toward the end of QCCI’s second round, however, have reminded private not-for-profit funders that they are able to expand the opportunities for quality child care only at the margins. As the public commitment to investing in quality child care begins to falter in the face of budget shortfalls, priorities for the philanthropy community and child care stakeholders continue to include: (1) education efforts to highlight the importance of quality child care as a public policy concern; (2) advocacy efforts to preserve and expand the public commitment to child care funding; and (3) efforts to find new funding partners within the business sector.

Though it is not yet clear what form and specific goals the reconstituted ECF group will pursue, it will undoubtedly build upon QCCI’s strategic goals and rich experience.

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