

VISIBLE VOICES:  
EXPERIENCES OF LOW INCOME SINGLE MOTHERS ACCESSING QUALITY CHILD  
CARE

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Visible Voices:

Experiences of Low Income Single Mothers Accessing Quality Child Care

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### Abstract

Single mothers are the main topic of welfare reform and this research study. It is important to understand the experiences of single mothers because they comprise a growing segment of the population and tend to manifest higher levels of financial hardship (Basta, 2008). This qualitative research study illustrates the experiences and stories of single mothers as they transition off welfare into work, return to welfare, and their ability to access quality child care using subsidies. It is to examine the experiences of low-income single mothers seeking to access quality child care using subsidy vouchers as an alternative payment. My study used a hybrid research model that integrated self-study and qualitative interview methodology. To this end, I interviewed three single mothers who are participating or have participated in a child care subsidy voucher program at the local level, kept a reflective journal about my own experience with subsidized child care both as a recipient and provider, and attended local policy and advocacy meetings where I learned about the implications of policy changes for subsidized care. Results from the qualitative data analysis revealed how experiences trying to access child care using subsidy created barriers for low-income single mothers, how the life experiences of single mothers while on these programs (Welfare, CalWORKs, Alternative Payment) led to and created additional roadblocks for them to continue receiving services. The use of inquiry and self-study helped me think about, understand, and develop my practice. My self study increased my understanding on what could limit my ability to support families in my family child care that use subsidy child care vouchers and how, as a provider, I could support them.

Keywords: single mothers, low-income, family child care, subsidy, quality, welfare

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## Visible Voices:

## Experiences of Low-Income Single Women Accessing Quality Child Care

All of my siblings left home at a young age. I am the youngest of four and was raised by my single mother. All my siblings had relocated to live with our father. When I did leave, I found myself soon living out of large heavy duty garbage bags and relocating weekly from house to house. I was homeless. Over the course of four years, I participated in state funded programs for food (food stamps) and cash assistance (general assistance). As I had no children at the time, I did not qualify for other welfare services such as child care assistance. The moment I became employed, I was immediately ineligible for cash assistance and my food stamps were greatly reduced. In 2000, gave birth to a baby girl. Within the first four months of her life I'd become a single mother. I wasn't surprised by the shift. I almost expected to be a single mother because of what I was exposed to as the norm in my community.

Things began looking promising with the increased income from my job. I was able to afford a one bedroom apartment that was suitable for my daughter and me. Yet, as my life quickly shifted to supporting a family of two, finding quality child care became an urgent need of mine. Because of my experiences with state funded programs, such as general assistance and food stamps, I soon learned of alternative payment programs such as Child Care Links, an organization that supports low income parents with subsidized vouchers that offset the high cost of child care (Child Care Links, 2013). During this challenging and vulnerable time in my life, California's state subsidized funding and Child Care Links were lifelines for me as I was able to enroll my daughter in quality child care, allowing me to maintain my employment, stabilize my family and to have peace of mind each day I had to leave my daughter and go to work.

Not so long ago I was a homeless single mother on welfare and a child care subsidy

recipient. My experiences with poverty have helped me to encourage and empathize with low- 7  
income single mothers. Had it not been for the safety-net of cash aid and child care alternative  
payment services, I would not have been able to support my family, maintain employment, and  
return to school. Today, low-income single mothers do not have the same support. The current  
fiscal crisis in the state of California has influenced abounding policy changes including severe  
cuts to child development services (Child Care Law Center, 2012). Specifically looking at cuts to  
child care subsidies, California recently (State Budget FY 2012-13) cut \$130 million dollars  
from our early care and childhood education programs, which resulted in eliminating 26,500  
child care slots (Parent Voices, 2010).

The State of California continues to be faced with large spending cuts that effect child care  
and other vital safety nets for children. On January 5, 2012, the Governor of California proposed  
to make additional cuts to child care that would have impacted single mothers and their children  
considerably. The following proposals were rejected:

- The January proposal included over \$500 million in proposed cuts impacting  
62,000 slots. Now it's down to \$130 million impacting only 26,500 slots. A proposal to  
lower income eligibility guidelines to 200% of Federal Poverty Level was rejected and  
15,700 parents can continue to seek economic security and keep their jobs.
- The proposal included reimbursement reductions to Title 5 child care centers and  
voucher based programs, which was rejected and will ensure that these programs can stay  
open, parents will not have to make up unaffordable co-payments. Finally, the proposal  
included shifting control of child care administration from the Department of Education  
to the Department of Social Services County Welfare Offices was rejected. This means  
thousands of families are protected whom would have lost care for fear of going to the



welfare office, and there wouldn't be a system of 58 different child care systems that 8  
parents would have to navigate when they move from county to county (Parent Voices,  
2010).

Although there's no additional proposed cuts to child care in the States budget (fiscal year 2013-  
2014), organizations such as Parent Voices, continue to fight to preserve and restore the millions  
of dollars that have been already cut from child care services since 2008 (Parent Voices, 2010).

Since becoming an active licensed child care provider in 2010, I have enrolled two  
families using subsidized child care vouchers through an alternative payment program.  
Alternative payment programs [AP], are funded with state and federal funds and offer an array of  
child care arrangements for parents, such as in-home care, family child care, and center-based  
care. The AP helps families arrange child care services and makes payment for those services  
directly to the child care provider selected by the family. The AP is intended to increase parental  
choice and accommodate the individual needs of the family (California Department of  
Education, 2013).

Families enrolled in my program have shared with me some of the difficult experiences  
they have encountered as they barely managed to meet eligibility requirements. I also realized  
how the possibility of additional cuts would make it difficult for providers, such as myself, to  
meet the demands to deliver quality child care, and equally harder for single mothers to access it  
with any additional budget cuts. Now that I am a participant in a local family child care  
association, I also witnessed firsthand how single mothers are often stereotyped. Some of the  
myths I have personally heard, either directed at me or within different discussions about child  
care about single mothers, depict them as young, unemployed, irresponsible, drug users whose  
families are 'broken.' I have witnessed how these stigmas have influenced some providers to no

longer accept child care vouchers, creating additional barriers for them to access high quality care for their children. Although this was the consensus of the small group of providers I was amongst, there are many family child care providers like myself who do not share the same assumptions about child care subsidy recipients. 9

Keeping in mind my personal story, the array of experiences single mothers encounter accessing subsidized child care, and the education that I have received at Mills College in Early Childhood Special Education, I chose to conduct for my Masters thesis a research study that documents the challenges and perseverance of low income single mothers as they try to access and maintain child care and the many strengths and resiliencies of these women who are not accurately represented in the stereotypes in society that describe them through deficit language.

My study uses a hybrid research model that integrates self-study, and qualitative interview methodology. The use of inquiry and self-study are methods for helping me think about, understand and develop my practice. As Kroll (2012) states, “Self-study supports teachers' continued inspiration and resilience to teach all children well in the face of very challenging circumstances.” (p. 153). Self-study of my own practice will help me to reflect upon how I currently support families in my family child care that use subsidy vouchers and how the barriers they face have an impact on my ability to continue enrolling these families.

Low-income single mothers face unique challenges due to the variability in availability and affordability of resources (child care) to help them get what they need (employment) (Lewis, 2000). My study is grounded in a framework that conceptualizes low income, current or prior welfare recipient single mothers right to access quality child care. It is my belief that quality child care is a right and an obligation of the general society, which should be available to all children. Because child care plays a pivotal role in supporting women's employability and

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education, particularly for single mothers, it forms an indispensable ingredient of family stability <sup>10</sup> (Polakow, 2007, p. 22). Particularly, for single mothers, child care is a critical component of economic security (Child Care Matters: Building Economic Security for Low-Income Women, 2010).

Interviewing single mothers allowed me to capture their personal stories. Allowing families to talk about their stories can strengthen relationships between parents and providers. As a provider, the families' stories will draw clarity for me on how and if I have the capability to support low-income families in today's society using state child care subsidies. This research study interests me as I want to strengthen my ability to serve as a resource and advocate for single mothers. I want to increase awareness about the importance of creating relationships with the families that child care providers serve through these stories. Highlighting the experiences of single mothers that depend so much on reliable quality child care in order to become self sufficient is a story that providers and educators in the field of early childhood should be mindful of before placing judgment. The specific research questions guiding my study include:

- What experiences do single mothers using state subsidized vouchers have when they try to access, enroll, and maintain their children in quality child care programs?
- As a licensed family child care provider, how have these experiences of single mothers, as well as changes in policy, impacted my ability to continuing enrolling child care subsidy recipients?

This literature review begins by describing the historical research about single mothers and poverty. This is followed by a discussion of the stereotypes concerning single mothers on welfare and how they have been portrayed in society. I explore a wide range of challenges that low income single women describe as barriers that lead to their inability to access and maintain quality child care. The latter part of the literature review investigates research on policy, the relationship between high quality child care and child outcomes, and the lack of high quality child care available to single mothers.

Few studies have taken the needed qualitative approach to understand the experiences of accessing high quality child care from the perspective of low-income single mothers, with few exceptions. Polakow (1993), through the stories of single mothers, questions the prevailing historical and cultural image in childhood and the myths of motherhood and family structure. Polakow (2007) documents how one mother's salary increase from \$8 per hour to \$10 per hour led her to be cut off from welfare cash benefits and Medicaid and unable to qualify for child care subsidy programs because she no longer met the income requirements (Polakow, 2007). Further, this mother was left to rely on informal and unstable child care (Polakow 2007). Polakow (2007) describes another single mother whose efforts to make a better life for her family led her to rummage through the garbage for cans and bottles on her lunch breaks so she could exchange them for cash (\$5-\$10) to purchase food for her children. This mother was left no choice but to make hasty last minute child care decisions and lived in constant fear of losing her job if she had to stay at home with a sick child (Polakow, 2007). Polakow's (2007) research provides an important view into the complexities of becoming "self sufficient" for low-income single mothers, especially those accepting federal subsidies.

Edin and Lein (1997) investigated the lived experiences of 379 urban low-income single 12 mothers in four urban cities across the United States to understand how they used accessible resources to meet the needs of their families (Katras et al., 2004). Seccombe (1999) interviewed 47 women in Florida to gather their perspectives on welfare reform (Katras et al., 2004). Monroe and Tiller (2001) described the work of welfare-reliant women and their experiences with participants in the labor force, the rural job market, their use of support networks, and the stigma of welfare (Katras et al., 2004). Again, Polakow (2007) shares many stories about single mothers and their determination to provide for their children, to fulfill their commitments as a student, to strive to keep their job, all while pursuing their dreams. She describes many stories that provide evidence that sometimes the gain of a job for a low-income single mother actually creates a tremendous number of unforeseen obstacles and setbacks.

### **Single Mothers and Welfare**

In this research study, single mothers are defined as women who have never been married, are divorced, or families headed by a female with no spouse present who is caring for at least one or more biological or adopted children under the age of eighteen, and who qualify as low income (i.e., less than 200 percent of the poverty threshold) (Mather, 2010). Single parenting has become a more common experience in the United States for millions of women (Olson & Banyard, 1993). The number of single- parent families with children under age eighteen rose from 3 million in 1970 to 10 million in 2000 (Fields & Casper, 2001). Today 24% of the seventy-five million children under the age of eighteen live in a single mother family and of the 18.1 million children in single-mother families, 9.2 million are under nine years of age (Mather, 2010).

Despite increasing prevalence and elevated risk status within the general population, single mothers in poverty comprise a significantly under researched group (Belle, 1990; Zelkowitz, 1987). Past efforts have also neglected the fundamental economic reality of these mothers lives-neither welfare nor low-wage work gives single mothers enough income to meet their families' expenses (Edin & Lein, 1997). The release of the 2007 official Census poverty data affirm that American families are still suffering from the Great Recession that, according to the National Bureau of Economic Research, officially began in December 2007 (The National Bureau of Economic Research, 2010). Many single mothers experience a high rate of financial stress because of poverty; they represent 40.7% of the individuals across the nation living in poverty (Redd et al., 2011). There are additional burdens of poverty that extend into the lives of single mothers including costs of working, transportation, housing, food, physical and mental health, education, employment outcome, and the overload of tasks associated with child rearing, such as child care (Olson & Banyard, 1993).

Maintaining steady employment or gaining additional training and education is unlikely to occur without good, reliable child care (Child Care Aware of America, 2012). During this time of economic disorder, when so many low-income single women are struggling to find and keep work to become self-sustaining in society, the lack of affordable, quality child care presents significant barriers (Child Care Aware of America, 2012). The availability and quality of early care and education programs is even more critical for low-income, single mothers, who lack financial resources to access the best care for their children (Child Care Aware of America, 2012).

In 1935, a small program within the Social Security Act called "welfare" was accessible. Welfare, at that time, was defined as "well-being", prosperity, good health, and good spirits.

Now, the meaning is depicted as “ill-being.” (Gordon, 1994). Today, welfare connotes slums, depressed single mothers and neglected children, even crime (Gordon, 1994). Overtime, the word “welfare” has been referred to as: Public Assistance, Underclass, Aid to Dependent Children [ADC], Aid to Families with Dependent Children [AFDC]. AFDC is most currently known now as Temporary Aid to Needy Families [TANF]. 14

Prior to the 1996 welfare reform, all children in poor families that met state eligibility criteria were entitled to assistance under the AFDC program. The threshold was so low in many states that it left only the poorest families eligible (Shields & Behrman, 2002). Because of underfunded programs, many eligible families were not served and the mothers that were eligible and receiving AFDC payments stayed home and cared for their children themselves (Shields & Behrman, 2002).

In an historic shift in the nation’s approach to welfare, the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act [PRWORA] (Public Law 104- 193) was signed into law by then-President Bill Clinton on August 22, 1996 (Reed & Karpilow, 2010). PRWORA established the TANF program, which replaced the existing welfare programs – [AFDC], Emergency Assistance [EA], and Job Opportunities and Basic Skills Training [JOBS]. PRWORA eliminated the open- ended entitlement of the prior welfare programs and created TANF as a block grant to states to provide *time-limited* cash assistance and establish work requirements for needy families. TANF became effective on July 1, 1997, and was reauthorized in February 2006 under the Deficit Reduction Act [DRA] of 2005.

The TANF goals established by PRWORA, known as the “four purposes of TANF,” are stated in Section 401(a) of the Social Security Act. In order to implement TANF, California adopted the California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids Act [CalWORKs] in 1997.

Implemented in 1998, CalWORKs provides eligible needy families with time-limited cash assistance grants and welfare-to-work services (Reed & Karpilow, 2010).

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**CalWORKs.** CalWORKs has established a three-stage system of child care for families as they move through the welfare-to-work process or the Cal-Learn program. Child care is funded through a combination of federal and state funds (Reed & Karpilow, 2010).

**Stage 1.** Designed to provide child care subsidies for the first 3 to 6 months, for children up to 10 years of age, that families are eligible to receive cash aid, typically while they are in training or a work activity program, volunteering, or beginning to work. However, families can remain eligible for up to 2 years after leaving aid under certain circumstances (Reed & Karpilow, 2010).

**Stage 2.** Available to families on CalWORKs, once the Welfare-to-Work plan has been signed and their work situation is stable, as determined by the county. Recipients have 24 months of child care after leaving cash aid or if their income exceeds 75 percent of the state median income. (Reed & Karpilow, 2010).

**Stage 3.** Funded as a set-aside in the larger child care subsidy program available to the working low-income families. Stage Three is available to eligible former CalWORKs families who have exhausted their two-year time limit in Stage One and/or Two. Families remain eligible as long as their income is at or below 75 percent of the state's median income and there is space and funding available. (Reed & Karpilow, 2010).

On October 28, 2010, The Child Care Law Center and five other public interest law organizations filed a lawsuit to save critical child care funding for working low-income California families, money that was cut out of the California budget by Governor Arnold



Schwarzenegger's last-minute, line-item veto. The petitioners, Parent Voices Oakland and four 16 California mothers who were told their child care assistance would end on November 1, 2010, sought a court order against the California Department of Education to halt the implementation of the Governor's veto, which would have left the working parents of more than 56,000 children without the critical assistance they need to keep their jobs (Child Care Law Center, 2010).

On October 29, 2010, Alameda County Superior Court Judge Wynne Carvill issued a Temporary Restraining Order, halting the termination of child care services for working low-income California families through November 4, 2010. Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger vetoed this critical child care funding from the state budget on October 8, 2010 (Child Care Law Center, 2010). On November 5, 2010 Alameda County Superior Court Judge Wynne Carvill issued an interim order following a hearing on November 4, 2010. The order required the state to continue Stage 3 child care and instructed the state to issue new notices that advise parents about their options and to use its "best efforts" to screen parents for alternative child care services. The judge also set a date of November 23, 2010 for a hearing at which he would decide the outcome of the case (Child Care Law Center, 2010). On November 17, 2010, Alameda County Superior Court Judge Wynne Carvill approved a settlement that preserved child care services for the families of more than 56,000 California children. The settlement extended the Stage 3 program through December 31, 2010 and required state-contracted child care agencies to inform families of their right to request a screening for any available child care alternatives (Child Care Law Center, 2010).

**Working towards Self-Sufficiency.** When the debate over welfare was renewed in the mid-1990s, some advocates for welfare families took the position that women receiving welfare should not be required to work, that work requirements were effectively forced labor, and that

women on welfare should be able to stay at home with their children during the critical early years. PRWORA was enforced after this position was rejected (Sylvester, 2001). 17

The reform forced single mothers into a swift transition from welfare to work. Mothers who were unable to sustain their families with their work wages would, after a lifetime of five years, have no government safety net to fall back on (Edin & Lein, 1997). Single mothers are most vulnerable to repeat welfare because they have the least work experience and education in order to become self-sufficient (Edin & Harris, 1996).

Emphasis on the eligibility requirements for welfare recipients required that they be employed after two years of receiving benefits and continue moving mothers into the work force. The focus was strengthened requiring women to work in order to receive subsidies. In 1996, the federal welfare reform law allocated more federal spending for child care subsidies to support individuals who were receiving or leaving welfare (Sylvester, 2001).

The changes to PRWORA can be viewed as being positive in that they created a system for single mothers to move off welfare and into more stable jobs, which in turn, generated more business for women to run child care centers and family child care homes (Fuller et al., 2004). However, attention must be paid to the early development and long-term advancement of children in welfare and working poor families. Mothers' employment gains are of little consequence to children's development unless such gains lead to improvements in children's daily environments at home, in child care, at school, or in the community (Fuller et al., 2004).

It's important to remember that single mothers are disproportionately unemployed, or working in low-wage jobs with few benefits, and children growing up in single-mother families remain among the most vulnerable children in the country (Mather, 2010). Ensuring that single mothers have access to education, job training skills to retain employment, quality child care,

and equal wages are some of the ways to ensure children's successful transitions to adulthood 18 (Mather, 2010). To ensure that welfare recipients are able to work, the 1996 federal welfare reform law included significantly more federal spending on child care subsidies for people who are receiving or leaving welfare (Sylvester, 2001). Still, single mothers who leave welfare for work often find themselves marginally employed and economically insecure (Hershey & Pavetti, 1997). These barriers in California's welfare system potentially impact the single mother who wants to transition off of welfare and into work but finds herself sitting home "doing nothing" because she lacks the tools needed to acquire a high wage job whose salary covers her basic needs including childcare.

Looking at past and recent research, it is important to factor in the hidden costs of employment and its effects on single mother households. For example, there are direct financial costs of working including the costs of child care in addition to transportation and related expenses that have not been adequately accounted for in current measures of poverty (Citro & Michael 1995; Fisher 1999; & Short, Shea, Johnson, & Garner, 1998). As important as employment retention is to the economy and for the single-mother who seeks job opportunities with health benefits, wage increase, and career advancement, maintaining a job is difficult when these mothers are frequently absent/tardy due to child care problems. Employers are more likely to terminate employees who are tardy, absent, or unproductive due to child care problems (Holzer, Stoll, & Wissoker, 2001).

Another study looked nationally at the representative group of four hundred-fifty women who had left welfare for a job, reported that the women worked, on average, just twenty hours per week and earned from \$203 to \$387 monthly and almost one-third of these women worked at two jobs simultaneously in an effort to earn enough to support their families (Hershey & Pavetti,

1997). By contrast, less than 50 percent of parents who complete work-first programs get jobs. 19 Average wages are only \$6.64 an hour, and a year later, half are unemployed and back on welfare. Higher education is thus a critical resource that enables low-income parents to become educated, employed and economically secure. LIFETIME (n.d.). According to the basic needs budget calculator for the State of California in the San Francisco county, a single parent with two children, needs to be making at least \$46.00 per hour in order to truly be self sufficient (calculations do not include debt) (National Center for Children in Poverty, 2012).

### **Stereotypical Assumptions**

Popular conceptions about welfare are for the most part demonstrably wrong, or, at the very minimum, not borne out by evidence from systematic studies (Coughlin, 1989). These underlying tensions create a set of conditions predisposed to the development of social constructs that help to sustain a variety of negative beliefs about welfare (Coughlin, 1989). By pushing for welfare reform in the 1990's, for example, President Clinton helped abolish stereotypical views of welfare recipients as ungrateful wastrels who are willing to spend their adult years living off the hard work of others to help them raise their children (Wolfe, 2010). Policy decisions that influence the lives of single mothers and their children are frequently based on stereotypes of single motherhood rather than on the lived experiences of single women and their families (Fraser, 1989; Polakow, 1993). The single women and children directly affected by these policies are routinely viewed as passive objects of intervention rather than active subjects involved in creating their own experiences and capable of self-definition. Researchers and policy-makers seldom ask single women for input into the decisions that directly affect their lives and well-being (Fraser, 1989; Polakow, 1993).

The current state of affairs for poor children in the United States supports the following view that: 20

The welfare mother is an example of many myths surrounding welfare. Despite the challenges single mothers face, many misconceptions persist in society about single-mother families, stereotyping them through deficit language. According to a new survey from the Pew Research Center (2011) many people still believe that single motherhood is bad for society. The survey describes Americans' negative attitudes about single mothers and captures the sharp divisions that exist in America related to beliefs about diverse family structures. Of the 2,691 people who took the survey, the results showed a large percentage (69%) of Americans disapproved of single parenting (Pew Research, 2011). This disapproval stems from the belief that children need both the mother and father to grow up happily. The American public also believes that children of single parents face more challenges than other children (Pew Research, 2011).

Basta's (2008) research suggests that the prevalent image of welfare recipients is that they are lazy and prefer to stay home with their children rather than working:

Since caring for children full-time is no longer viewed as an appropriate role for single mothers on welfare, especially black single mothers, this negative view of welfare recipients prompted the development of increasing work requirements eventually leading to the 1996 welfare reform law with its mandatory work requirements and time limits. (p. 22)

Heider (2004) stated, "The media's stereotyping of single mothers on welfare does not accurately portray single woman receiving cash aid benefits from the state" (p. 28). Although single mothers with young children have less education and work experience, resulting in lower

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wages (Mather, 2010), few balanced accounts of single mothers' stories, including their strengths<sup>21</sup> and the structural barriers they face are communicated through the media (Heider, 2004). While these children are vulnerable, the stereotypes place blame on single mothers when, in fact, the challenges these mothers face are more about the inequities of poverty in our country (Heider, 2004).

### **Accessing Quality Child Care**

When families are forced to get by on less than adequate income they are strained to face tough choices including selecting cheaper child care that may be unsafe or unstable. The child care setting a family can access varies by income level and the "average" child care is simply unaffordable for most low-income mothers who do not receive subsidy child care assistance (Womens's Economic Security Campaign, 2010). This is exemplified by "a single mother in Illinois living with two children and with an annual income of \$36,620 (or 200 percent of the poverty level), would need to spend about \$19,163 annually on child care, leaving just \$17,457 for such basic needs as housing, food, medical care and transportation" (Womens's Economic Security Campaign, 2010, p. 6). Not receiving subsidy for child care would leave this mother reliant on other forms of child care, which often consist of unstable and low quality options (Womens's Economic Security Campaign, 2010).

Poor single mothers experience a lack of rights when exploring child care options. As Polakow (2007) states, "failing to provide the same level of care to poor children that is meted out to their middle-and upper-income peers, is saying that poor children aren't as deserving of attentiveness, care, enrichment, and developmentally appropriate early education" (p. 161). Single mothers face many obstacles when trying to access quality child care including challenges related to lack of affordability, transportation to accessible child care and a lack of flexibility in

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child care schedules that often don't align with employment requirements (Womens's Economic Security Campaign, 2010).

Research suggests that high quality child care can make a positive difference in children's outcomes (Child Care Aware of America, 2012). A 2010 report released by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development [NICHD] found that quality child care has a long-lasting impact on a child's development, behavior and cognitive abilities (Womens's Economic Security Campaign, 2010). Additionally, a multi-year study of more than one hundred child care centers in North Carolina reported that children in higher-quality settings demonstrated significantly better cognitive and language skills and abilities than did children in lower-quality settings (Womens's Economic Security Campaign, 2010). Quality early childhood services have been correlated with increased readiness for school, improved academic achievement and school attendance, reduced grade-level retention, increased rates of high school graduation, greater attendance in college and higher employment earnings (Lally, Mangione, & Honig, 1988; Karoly & Bigelow, 2005; Ramey et al., 2000; Reynolds et al., 2007).

There has been a lack of oversight with the desired requirements essential to provide quality care in family child care homes including poor training requirements, insufficient education of providers, and ineffective inspections (National Association of Child care Resource and Referral Agencies; NACCRRA, 2012). Although children from poor households stand to benefit the most from high-quality care, they are less likely to be enrolled in high-quality programs than children from affluent families, partly due to uneven access to high-quality options in their neighborhoods (Fuller et al., 2004). Low-income families using paid child care services also use family day-care providers disproportionately more than child care centers. The former are characterized by "unregulated, unlicensed setting of unknown quality" (Cherlin,

1995). Licensed family day care could provide high quality care at affordable rates if providers 23 were trained and standards enforced. In fact, with appropriate training, family day care is an entrepreneurial opportunity that has the potential to develop into a high quality and affordable child care option (Frankel, 1994).

As Sylvester (2001) suggests, “Parents generally prefer child care services located close to their home with providers who live in their own communities, yet families living in poor neighborhoods often have few choices for child care and those that do exist are too often very low quality” (p. 8). Additional follow up and consideration to policy must be given to ensure quality is reached in all family child care settings in California and that they are accessible in low income communities. Some studies on child care preference suggest that parents prioritize practical features of care, such as cost and convenience, rather than characteristics that developmental psychologists would consider indicators of high quality. Such as, the type of materials used to stimulate emergent literacy, care giver level of education, activities to stimulate language, and caregiver interactions. (Hofferth, 1991; Kim & Fram, 2009; Kisker & Maynard, 1991).

Quality, compensation, and affordability has been the National Association for the Education of Young Children adopted position since 1987 and this still stands today. Only quality programs can equip young children with a healthy foundation that supports learning in the areas of intellectual, social, emotional, language and communication, and physical development (NAEYC, 1995). Poor quality programs have been associated with harmful effects for children, especially those who are disadvantaged and most vulnerable, leaving children even further behind when they enter school (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2002; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000; Gilliam & Zigler, 2000, 2004).



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It is difficult to meet the criteria without a plan to ensure that all families have affordable 24 access to good programs and greater reimbursement of actual costs associated with operating early childhood programs. Although currently stalled due to fiscal constraints, California has implemented a Quality Rating Improvement System [QRIS] that purposely links improvement in program quality with child outcomes, including readiness for schooling (California Early Learning Quality Improvement System Advisory Committee, 2010, p. 1). Despite increases in public and private funding over the past 20 years, most early care and education [ECE] revenue (about 57% of the total) still comes from the pockets of parents. Within this context, we must create accountability measures that effectively embrace and include the financial contribution and high level of provider choice our families make. Theoretically, parents with child care subsidy should purchase higher quality care than comparable families without one because subsidies decrease the income constraints, increasing purchase power (Ryan, Johnson, Rigby, Brooks-Gunn, 2010). We will never address the quality ECE needs of most American children, including most poor children, if we do not have such measures in place.

Local and regional QRIS programs are being developed throughout California using Race to the Top Early Learning funding (California Department of Education, 2013). Specifically, in Alameda County, has recognized the added value of including licensed family child care providers to participate in the piloted program: Race to the Top Early Learning grant. The program competitions focuses on improving early learning and development programs for young children by supporting states' efforts to: increase the number and percentage of low-income and disadvantaged children in each age group of infants, toddlers, and preschoolers who are enrolled in high-quality early learning programs (California Department of Education, 2013).

President Obama's plan for early education for all Americans proposes a series of new 25 investments that will establish a continuum of high-quality early learning for a child – beginning at birth and continuing to age five. By doing so, the President would invest critical resources where we know the return on our dollar is the highest, in our youngest children (Child Care Council, 2013). Building on the President's agenda to provide high quality education to our youngest children, California's Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge, has agreed to raise the bar on the quality of their early childhood education programs, establish higher standards across programs and provide critical links with health, nutrition, mental health, and family support for our neediest children (Child Care Council, 2013).

Enrolling low-income children into safe, affordable, quality child care settings enables families to work; in addition quality child care can positively affect children's development, supporting children in learning the social, emotional, intellectual and physical skills they need to develop in a healthy manner and ultimately to start school ready to succeed (Child Care Aware of America, 2012).

### **Child Care Subsidy System in California**

There are a variety of child care subsidy programs in California that require different levels of eligibility including center-based care, state preschool, and vouchers that are administered through alternative payment programs (BANANAS, 2013). These programs are run by a wide variety of institutions that serve parents receiving cash aid (i.e., welfare) or parents who no longer receive welfare but are still considered low income. There is a state-funded child care Resource and Referral [R&R] program in every county in California. These organizations provide free information on choosing child care, referrals to child care centers and family child

care homes, and information on how to pay for child care (Child Care Resource and Referral Network (n.d.). 26

In the last decade, helping defray child care costs has become a cornerstone of policies to help low-income parents work. Public funding for child care subsidies, which are usually provided as vouchers that parents use to purchase any of a range of child care options, has risen significantly (Adams, Snyder, & Sandfort, 2002). The California Department of Education [CDE] administers most of the child care funds in California. This funding pays for the child care of eligible families in licensed family child care home, centers or exempt child care situations (BANANAS, 2013). Subsidy child care programs are designed with the goal of supporting parents to enter the workforce, but not necessarily to focus on the quality of child care that parent's access (Child Care Aware of America, 2012). The monthly subsidy assistance for single mothers is not at a level that provides access to quality child care (Child Care Aware of America, 2012). For example, according to the Child Care Development Fund Program (2010), the average subsidy to be paid for an infant in a family child care home [FCC] is \$4,836 annually whereas the average annual cost is \$7,065 and most low-income single mothers cannot make up the difference between the monthly subsidy they receive and the cost of child care in their community (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2011). In examining these issues, it is important to recognize the realities facing state subsidy agencies. Although budget problems are worsening, administrative challenges continue, and caseloads are rising. According to Governor Brown's January, 2013 budget proposal, it will not impose significant cuts to subsidized child care programs beyond slight negative caseload adjustments but this does not mean that budget cuts are behind us (Child Care Planning Council, 2013).

**Summary.** While the system is based on parents being able to find quality child care providers, little is known about how providers experience the subsidy system and the effects of subsidy system policies and practices that shape the experiences of parent and provider relationships (Adams & Snyder, 2003). The research presented here examines single mothers' personal experiences accessing quality child care using subsidy vouchers, interactions with welfare and subsidy agencies, the ease of applying for, navigating and retaining subsidies, and the implications for child care providers willingness and ability to participate. 27

### Method

The current study is designed as a hybrid research model integrating self-study and uses a thematic method for analyzing qualitative semi-structured interviews. I aimed to capture “lived experiences” of single mothers’ stories to deepen my understanding about the interrelated barriers that are often difficult to overcome. By focusing on participants’ personal meanings, qualitative research “gives voice” to people who have historically been silenced or marginalized (Brantlinger, Jimenez, Klingner, Pugach, & Richardson, 2005, p. 199). Using a thematic method helped me to identifying, analyze and report patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organizes and described my data set in rich detail and interprets various aspects of the research topic (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

As a licensed family child care provider, the families’ stories brought clarity for me about their beginnings and their ability to support their family in today’s society with, and without, state child care subsidies. My self study describes my role as a licensed child care provider and how by working together with single mothers, that are struggling, can build relationships needed to better understand the underlying issues that single mothers face accessing quality child care programs using subsidy vouchers. In return, opening lines of communication allows parents and

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providers to understand each other. Through shared experiences within subsidy system programs 28 we can better understand the contributors that challenge the parent and provider. In turn, because of this understanding, together we can create solutions to the barriers that we face as a community.

This research study interested me as I want to strengthen my ability to serve as a resource and advocate for single mothers and family child care providers. As an educator, the experiences that were shared with me in conjunction with the self-study have helped me build and transform my pedagogical knowledge and transform my individual practices in early childhood education. By reflecting on my experiences with families that are utilizing their right to subsidy child care, I have taking important steps on my journey for equity and social justice for single mothers and their right to quality child care.

### **Participants and Setting**

I interviewed three single mothers, all using subsidized child care, that were receiving cash aid (welfare), were new welfare recipients, and/or have worked their way off cash aid but are still low-income eligible. Participants for my research varied in age. Some had a long history relationship with subsidized child care and some were new to the program and unfamiliar with how to navigate through the system. All participants were volunteers who agree to participate in the study. Each participant signed an informed consent form (see Appendix A). Volunteers were recruited through the professional contacts my professors had at Parent Voices, BANANAs Resource and Referral Agency, Child Care Links Alternative Payment Program, 4Cs, First 5, and the Alameda County Early Learning Challenge Advisory Committee.

### **Data Collection**

Participants completed one hour of semi-structured qualitative interviews. Interviews took

place in person at a time and place that was convenient for the interviewee and me, the interviewer. The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. Interview topics focused around families' stories and individual experiences accessing quality child care, defining quality in child care, their experiences on the welfare-to-work program, and their current use of, and experiences with subsidized child care (see Appendix B for interview schedule).

Reflective journals were the second component in the self-study that was motivated by my interests in documenting single mothers' experiences, how I currently support families using subsidy child care vouchers, and the accessibility gaps enrolling and retaining families using subsidy child care with the least restrictive impact to quality. I was in attendance amongst single mothers, child care providers, directors, teachers, students, college professors, specialists, and many other professionals at parent advocacy meetings, trainings/workshops, child care advisory meetings, and child care providers group meetings. These meetings were coordinated by organizations such as Parent Voices, Bananas, 4Cs, East Oakland Family Child Care Association, Alameda Family Child Care Association, Child Care Law, Alameda County Early Learning Challenge Advisory Committee, and the Jewish Family & Children Services of the East Bay.

Discussions about quality child care, subsidy child care, single mothers and providers experiences and interactions with subsidy child care programs, current campaigns such as the state budget's impact on subsidized child care, and coalition movements to protect subsidized child care were all documented. Journaling about the topics that arose within these discussions helped me stay up to date with the relevant events that impact single mothers and their use of subsidized child care. My journaling also contain discussions on topics about local efforts to increase quality in early learning including child care. I also actively participated on the Alameda

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County Child Care Planning Council, whose vision is comprised of four essential components 1) 30 Building a high-quality early learning system, 2) Connecting early learning with K-12, 3) Increasing access to quality programs, and 4) Providing comprehensive support for the development of the whole child.

My journal reflections were shared with my faculty advisor and critical friends group. The journaling allowed me to reflect on progress being made to improve quality programs for children, enhanced my learning about issues of accessibility as a provider and teacher, and to think about how parents and providers can partner with other each other to deliver quality services to child care subsidy vouchers recipients in a more efficient and equitable way.

### **Data Analysis**

My qualitative data analysis was continuing and simultaneously occurred in concurrence with the data collection process (Merriam, 2009). My data consisted of transcribed interviews, field notes, memos, and reflective journals. Data was examined for emerging themes and common patterns that was organized and grouped into categories using open inductive coding. Deductive coding was also used where codes were developed for analyses that were drawn from the conceptual framework and literature review informing the study. This coding process was the first step in a conceptual analysis of the data. Emergence of theory was employed through analytic memos and audit trails linkages were established as means to enhance credibility of my study. This included inventory of documentation of self-constructed codes, categories, and my ideas that influence the self study and how it affected me as a researcher.

### **Validity and Reliability**

As a researcher I am responsible for conducting my investigation in an ethical manner. The main topics driving my study, low-income single mothers, their attempts to access and

maintain quality child care, and their experiences they face while seeking child care using subsidy vouchers. Because of my brief personal experiences as a single mother on welfare, my personal understanding of homelessness, and using subsidy child care vouchers, I had preconceived ideas about the barriers for single mothers associated with accessing child care, navigating through the welfare system, and the challenges of remaining eligible for these programs. I understood that by looking at other single mothers' experiences through my own story I might be inclined to apply my personal beliefs. I managed my biases as they may not reflect current policy around subsidy child care and the welfare system through active integration of many strategies discussed in more detail below.

There were several limitations of the current study including the small sample size of three single mothers. Additionally, study participants may be unwilling to share their stories given the sensitive content of the interview questions. Also, working single mothers schedules can enable an in person interview. Further, the limited sample of participants does not represent mothers in all aspects of the process of accessing, enrolling and maintaining high quality child care. Finally, participation may be limited by the exhaustion of resources (i.e., money, transportation, and child care) typically experienced with this sample of women.

Internal validity was strengthened using multiple methods. First, I used triangulation of the data to examine whether the data collected accurately represented the phenomenon I studied. The information I gathered through interviews were checked against my journal reflections and what I read in documents relevant to my investigation. As Merriam (2009) states, "The reliability of documents and personal accounts can be assessed through various techniques of analysis and triangulation" (p. 222). Second, I used peer examination/peer review to solicit feedback from my research advisor, cooperating teacher, and critical friends to critique my interpretation of the data



and the emerging findings. I asked my peers and colleagues to suggest perspectives or ideas I had not considered and to extend my viewpoints. I also used respondent validation or member checks to ask the participants to confirm the accuracy (or inaccuracy) of interview transcriptions, observational field notes and journaling. Respondent validation assisted me in reducing the possibility of misinterpreting the meaning of what participants said and did and the perspectives they have about what is going on, an additional method for identifying my own biases and misunderstanding of what I hear or observe (Maxwell, 2005, p. 111). Peer examination feedback helped me reflect on descriptions, analyses, and interpretations of my study results.

Although this study is not designed to be generalizable, It strengthened the external validity of my study by providing rich descriptive details throughout the thesis methods and results sections in order for readers to determine, what, if any of the study's findings relate to their contexts. Several methods were used to strengthen the reliability of the study. For example, triangulation of data sources, reflection on my role as a researcher, and peer review was used to assess whether the findings I reported were accurately reflected in the data I collected. I also created a comprehensive audit trail documenting the research data collection and analysis process.

### **Findings**

In this paper I explored the experiences of low-income single mothers and their ability to access quality child care using subsidy vouchers. I identified four repeating themes that contribute to barriers for single mothers accessing child care: i) child care subsidy regulations, ii) navigating the welfare system, iii) defining quality in child care settings iv) stereotypical assumptions.

**Child Care Subsidy Regulations**

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Ms. L is a long-term recipient of Cal WORKs, a single mother of two, and full time student. She has been a recipient of subsidized child care since 2008 and serves as an active advocate within a rapidly growing grassroots organization that is fighting to make quality child care available for all low-income single mothers within the State of California. I first heard Ms. L speak on topics around cost of living and paperwork during a budget meeting (2/16/13), organized by Parent Voices. All of the women at the meeting were mothers, mostly single mothers, advocating for their right to child care, right to information they expressed they have not been getting, challenges paying family fees, challenges meeting timesheet deadlines, and following impractical rules.

The monthly child care family fee is the total monthly dollar amount the family is required to pay during the report month for subsidized child care services. This fee is based on the Child Development Family Fee Schedule in effect during the report month (California Department of Education, 2013). Parents at the meeting expressed their difficulty paying parent fees. When asked the question, “Have any parents ever been shown the parent fee schedule from their caseworker?” The majority of the room responded that they had not seen the schedule. While researching my topic the issues brought up in the meeting raised questions about the breakdown in communication between the local agencies and the people they serve. This has helped me in my understanding about the complexity of the system and ways to inform families using child care subsidy and family child care providers.

In attendance was also the Child Care Law Center. The Child Care Law Center explained the barriers that impact accessing child care for low-income working parents. Ms. L stated that she had noticed a trend since being an active member of Parent Voices, “I noticed the ones that

lose their benefits are Stage 3 and these are people that are working.” Anna Levine, Senior Staff 34

Attorney spoke with the group about our due process rights to keep subsidy child care. The questions asked by the parents confirmed my assumption that parents are not being informed of their rights as a subsidy recipient. After the meeting, I was able to connect with Ms. L.<sup>1</sup> We met at her home in San Francisco, CA where her two children were present, watching Dora the Explorer cartoon, and walking back and forth in their one bedroom apartment. The interview took place in her kitchen, as she prepared macaroni and cheese for her family. Ms. L shared her reasons for not transitioning out of Cal WORKs, “Jobs were like \$9.00 per hour without benefits.” By contrast, less than 50 percent of parents who complete work-first programs get jobs. Average wages are only \$6.64 an hour and a year later, half are unemployed and back on welfare. Higher education is thus a critical resource that enables low-income parents to become educated, employed and economically secure. (LIFETIME (n.d). The finding shows that even at a rate of \$9.00 per hour you can still find yourself trapped in the *cycle of welfare dependency*.

Ms. L also expressed her frustration with the lack of communication she had with her social worker, “They only tell me when my child care is going to be cut.” “No information was given to me about travel or study time.” It wasn’t until Ms. L joined forces with Parent Voices – San Francisco chapter that she learned of her rights and what she was entitled to. “Parent Voices gave me a lot of information about the child care system.” Ms. L’s knowledge increased around child care law and regulations because of her involvement with Parent Voices, “As an advocate I need to know what the regulations are, know how to talk to state officials, legislators and familiar with Cal WORKs stages. The more Ms. L learned the more she saw how regulations impacted her family. “Regulations make no sense...regulations around cutting food, naptime,

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<sup>1</sup> Thanks to Dr. Julie Nicholson for helping me make this connection.

and potty training...some places you can't even pick your child up early. There's a lack of communication ... most of them (child care providers) just justify it (regulations) by saying, "It's the law and we have to follow it." Ms. L's daughter had to know her ABCs, colors, numbers, and do homework in kindergarten. Ms. L goes on to say, "I think the requirements are too much. It is such a bureaucratic process, same ink pin must be used on timesheets, and you can't enter the same time in/out two days in a week. If you're in school you have to have your counselor at the school sign forms for extra hours of studying. Attendance records are a nightmare. There was always a problem and child care is not paid if you miss the deadline to turn in your paperwork."

The process of accessing and retaining subsidies can be quite challenging. Subsidy policies are implemented in a way that can make using subsidy easier or more difficult. Ms. L and other single mother advocates are working towards making the subsidy system more accessible to low income families, while addressing the issues within the current policy and practices.

### **Navigating California Welfare System**

During the period of my data collection from the three interviews, Child Care Planning Council (3/15/13) and Parent Voices (2/16/13) meetings, I quickly discovered the complexity of the child care subsidy system, welfare, and the barriers that single mothers voiced and have experienced navigating through the various stages to meet the program requirements (Cal WORKs) needed to qualify for child care subsidy. The interviews exposed the complex components of the welfare system that created more barriers than pathways to self-sufficiency. The women all shared with me essential barriers they faced and how the systems in place ultimately limit children and their families' ability to excel in the workforce. The mothers each shared balanced accounts of what they experienced while going through the stages of Cal

WORKs; each at a different stage. I began the interview by asking each of them to describe barriers, if any, they've experienced navigating the welfare system. It became immediately transparent in the interviews that there was a comparable alignment of confusion when answering the questions associated with navigating, which demonstrates a reoccurring pattern of inefficiency on the behalf of the social systems in place, whose strategy claims to remove the barriers for the welfare recipients.

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My interview with Ms. D (interviewed 1/21/13) was conducted at a coffee shop of her choice; 45 minutes from her home. The interview was planned around Ms. D access to transportation to the coffee shop and child care arrangements for her three children for the evening. Ms. D had been an on/off recipient of welfare since 2001. I have known Ms. D for over 20 years and I've always known her to be a caring and responsible mother figure to her own children and other peoples' children. We began the interview with Ms. D sharing her involvement with subsidized child care in counties such as, Alameda (2001-2006) and Contra Costa (2007-2013). Ms. D expressed her need to apply for welfare because of her commitment to continuing her education, she mentioned, "I was in school while I was pregnant." Ms. D has been in school with all three of her pregnancies and is determined to complete her degree in accounting. Ms. D's situation is similar to that of many single mothers who want to go back to school to gain the skill set they need in order to acquire a sufficient income and no longer be dependent on the state for financial support. She began the interview by reflecting on past memories of when she first applied for welfare. "In 2001 it was the best time to apply (for welfare) because doors were opening up for subsidized child care...it wasn't hard to find child care." Ms. L also shared a similar experience in our interview (2/23/13), "To get back my child care (2008) and all of the benefits what I was receiving from Cal WORKs was harder than the

first time (2001)."

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During 2001-2003, Ms. D received welfare benefits (child care). She was also involved in an abusive relationship with her son's father (first child) that made it difficult for her to fully participate in the program (make appointments, paperwork, job search). Ms. D goes on to share with me what lead up to the barriers she faced, "My son's father would physically abuse me." Ms. D's time limit (60 months) on the program (Cal WORKs) was nearing and she claimed, "I needed more time." Ms. D stated that she asked her caseworker if she could receive more time receiving benefits due to her situation (domestic abuse). Unbeknown to her, the request was never submitted.

There may be months in which exempt conditions are in place and the month is not counted towards the 60-month time limit. The exemptions are referred to as "clock stoppers. According to the Cal WORKs time limit exemption and extenders policy it states exempted individual include those who are: victims of domestic abuse who are unable to work or participate in WTW activities due to the abusive situation (Reed & Karpilow, 2010).

Ms. D found work in 2003 and as soon as her employment status was reported, Ms. D received a Notice of Action (NOA), from social services that her benefits would be stopping because her income exceeded the annual income guidelines by fifty dollars for a household of two. Ms. L experienced something similar back in 2008, "I made an extra \$5.00 (per hour) and services were cut off." Ms. L mentioned that she'd preferred to stay home, "I'd rather stay home and take their benefits and try to take care of my own and go to school or find another way to make it. I'm going to transition out of Cal WORKs but I really want a job that's going to pay me benefits and a decent salary".

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Ms. D had just begun working she wasn't making enough to support her and her son. Her 38 food stamps and child care subsidy was immediately cut off. Ms. D left her abusive relationship and relied on her ex-boyfriend and mother to care for her son while she worked. In the later part of 2009, Ms. D became pregnant again with her second child and reapplied for welfare after she became unemployed in 2008 and needed child care again. She was informed again via NOA but this time the notice stated that she owed close to \$4,000 because she exceeded her time on welfare "I was confused because I requested an extension." State law and regulations include specific exemptions to the 60-month time limit that effectively stop the clock (Reed & Karpilow, 2010).

Ms. D was convinced that an error had been made "They made a mistake and now they want me to pay this money. They never processed my exemption back in 2003 for an extension. They were supposed to start my time over on welfare. I won't be able to concentrate stressing over paying for child care." Ms. D continued to rely on informal child care with her ex-boyfriend while she tried to figure out how she was going to payback the money that social services claimed she owed, this child care arrangement resulted in her son going without food while in the care of her ex-boyfriends.

While Ms. D's financial burdens prevented her access to subsidies she continued to pursue her educational goals at Berkeley City College (2010); Ms. D came across a flyer for an organization called LIFETIME. LIFETIME is a nonprofit organization that was created by student mothers at the University of California Berkeley who completed college degrees while raising their families on welfare, and who are committed to helping others do the same. LIFETIME (n.d). Their goal is to help low-income parents enroll in, continue and successfully complete higher education and training. LIFETIME (n.d). Ms. D called LIFETIME and worked

closely with one of the peer advocates that helped her appeal the NOA claiming she owed back 39 payments, “They’re like lawyers and they advocate for you. They helped me understand my rights as a welfare recipient and helped me get the extension, which started the clock over.” Ms. D is still a Cal WORKs recipient still seeking full-time employment and working towards a degree in accounting, while her mother currently serves as her child care provider to her three children.

### **Quality Child Care Perspectives**

In theory, parents with a child care subsidy should purchase higher quality care than those without one because the subsidy increases purchasing power, which should increase affordable child care options (Johnson, Ryan, & Brooks-Gunn, 2012). In order this to be true parents must value child care quality, be able to identify higher quality settings, must be available in the community, and the value of the subsidy must be generous enough to support the purchase of higher quality care (Johnson, Ryan, & Brooks-Gunn, 2012).

Ms. T and I met during a time when she was seeking child care for her infant son. She located me while searching online for child care. Our initial meeting was at my family child care. Our second and third meeting was at her home. This allowed for her son and I to get orientated with each other. Ms. T enrolled in my child care September 2012. At the time of the interview for this research Ms. T was a new recipient to the subsidy program. This was also my first time participating in a child care subsidy program as a child care provider and I was excited to be able to help support Ms. T. When I enrolled in the child care subsidy program, I had not put much thought into the implications that my participation would cause to my child care practice and my ability to provide quality care for the new and existing children enrolled in my family child care. I approached Ms. T requesting her permission to be interviewed for my research. I was



appreciative that she agreed to sit down and talk with me about what her experiences have been 40  
prior to accessing child care.

Ms. T relocated from the East Coast to California in search of a better experience for her son. Ms. T had no one to turn to for support, “Having no family, no support community resources available I reached out to Alameda County Social Services for help.” Ms. T’s prior education helped expand her employment opportunities. Certainly, this is not always the case for women on subsidy who lack the education they need to access higher paying jobs. I assumed that single mothers such as myself shared similar experience as I did when I was a child care subsidy recipient (2001), had the support of family, and had job or was seeking one.

Ms. T is a hard worker working to provide a solid foundation for herself and her son, but given her shifting work schedule, that includes weekends and long working days, she must use a variety of care settings. National research indicates that when a mother works a variable schedule she is generally more likely to rely on informal care, which is typically provided by family or neighbor, and is less likely to have a regular schedule of care (Woman’s Economic Security Campaign, 2010). Today, the average child care is simply unaffordable for most low-income single mothers (Woman’s Economic Security Campaign, 2010). Without the support of welfare assistance, the only option would be to rely on substandard and unstable forms of child care, similar to Ms. D’s experience. Maintaining steady employment or gaining additional training and education is unlikely to occur without quality, reliable child care (Woman’s Economic Security Campaign, 2010).

It is important to note that in situations where children are involved quality shows up in many different ways. How I saw quality was something that the eye could see in things such as purchasing power, objects, and other frivolous things. My education and Mills College,

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experience working with families of all socio-economic backgrounds, and the time I invested in 41 this research has given new meaning to “Quality”. I was expecting my recipients to see quality as I have in the past but what I heard was much more. Ms. T viewed quality as, “One that matches her belief system, lifestyle, being connected to families and people who are genuinely interested in developing on-going relationships and community together.” Ms. D found that what was most important to her was locality and the atmosphere, “The area. That’s really important to me. I like to see a clean atmosphere, daily schedule, educational play, child proof, and organization.” What I found most captivating of all was what Ms. L said she valued and saw as quality, “I think it’s the quality time that I spend with my children. I want the provider to know my child and ways of being...is so important to me.”

Being able to support Ms. T schedule has been somewhat of a challenge and costly. I have had to hire an additional assistant to accommodate the demands of her working schedule, which creates additional expenses (child care insurance, child care assistant pay, weekend availability). Keeping in mind that I am only licensed as a small family child care, my income allows for one part-time assistant. Because of my commitment to maintaining quality, low ratios are important to me. Enrollment and other factors such as whether the family pays full tuition or not also determines my ability to hire more support, and limits how many families on subsidy I can enroll. What I can afford is heavily based on enrollment and that can change in a blink of an eye. However, Ms. T and I relationship over time has become stronger because of our involvement, commitment, and partnership in creating the best possible outcome for her son in today’s and future climate especially for young black boy. There are too many cases of our black boys who are disproportionately placed in special education programs (Blackwell, 2013). When really what they need is an environment they can be empowered and take ownership of their

success.

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Since the enrollment of Ms. T's son in my family child care I have only experienced one obstacle. On 3/29/13, during the period of this research, I contacted the subsidy program and her case worker mentioned that her benefits had stopped and she'll need to come into the office to recertify. The time it took for Ms. T to recertify and for my payment to resume was approximately 6 weeks. In the meantime, I was unable to fund a fieldtrip I had planned, had to cut back on my assistant hours, and delay my child care insurance renewal.

These mothers prioritize quality in child care settings in many different ways, all being equally important. I also have new lenses in how I view quality in child care settings. The problem I continue to have as a provider is where do I make up the loss when families on subsidy can not pay the out of pocket costs (co-payment) or if I have to wait for months to get paid through subsidy? I believe this will continue to be an on-going dilemma of mine and other family child care providers until reimbursement rates for providers are increased and Congress and the states design a system so all families, not just wealthy ones, can afford quality child care.

I believe that family child care provider and parents can work together to successfully achieve at addressing the need for quality improvement in California. For over 30 years, the Child Care Resource and Referral programs [CCR&R] in California have played a key role in parent education and the development of the early care and education [ECE] workforce in California. CCR&Rs are community-based, located statewide, and uniquely positioned to contribute to the success of the California Early Learning Advisory Council [ELAC] quality rating scale [QRS] pilot projects (California Child Care Resource and Referral, 2011).

A successful QRS informs and listen to parents, advocating for and with families. This is a particular expertise for CCR&Rs, which have long been committed to engaging parents and

providing relevant information and resources to all families regardless of income. The charge to 43 provide parent education complements the CCR&Rs role in professional development. The technical assistance, recruitment, training and retention activities offered by CCR&Rs to ECE practitioners at all levels are designed to build a high-quality child care workforce. The strength that CCR&Rs bring to the entire QRIS process is this combined experience with both families and ECE teachers and child care providers (California Child Care Resource and Referral, 2011).

### **Stereotypical Assumptions**

There continues to be popular conceptions about welfare, which for the most part are demonstrably wrong, or, at the very minimum, not borne out by evidence from systematic studies (Coughlin, 1989). Ms. T described an event that took place in the grocery store at the check out stand. She recalled using food stamps to pay for her groceries and she was going to pay using her food stamp card and credit card. A lady behind her offered to pay for her groceries before Ms. T was able to pull out her second form of payment using her credit card, “Are people looking at me as the pity or charity case out here?” “It can be hurtful how people see me.” “Your another statistic, raising another delinquent, contributing to society’s issues with children who grow up in these single mother households.”

Initially, I assumed that child care providers were the one’s that created the barriers for single mothers to access child care using subsidy vouchers. My assumption was that providers were unwilling to accept subsidy recipients because of what some providers have expressed in past family child care association meetings (10/23/12, 11/27/12, 1/16/13, 2/20/13) that I’ve attended, “There always late picking up child and I see them parked right across the street – talking on the phone. They’ll just sit there and wait until the last minute” “They won’t pay late fees.” “Excuses.” Providers in these meeting expressed their frustrations but never insinuated

that they were unwilling to continue participating in subsidy programs.

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What I found was that many of the stereotypical assumptions were initiated from experiences with various case workers and just society itself. My findings revealed factors that created barriers to locating quality child care fell within caseworker interactions. This finding also coincides with past research where parents discussed how many caseworkers they had to see, how they felt they were treated disrespectfully, whether their caseworkers were helpful, and whether they experienced barriers (Adams, Snyder, & Sandfort, 2002).

Ms. L recalled a time when she purchased a car and during that time she was in process of recertifying and her worker was asking her about all of her assets, "I had a very old car and she's was asking me how much is your car. I just gave her one number and she was like totally telling me that because I have so much assets I wouldn't be able to qualify. She made me feel like I was trying to take advantage of some of these services that were basically for like low income. I have to be homeless in order to receive some subsidy. How am I suppose to look? Or what am I suppose to say when I have the need? It made me feel like I was trying to take advantage instead of I was trying to provide for my children. She said to me, you seem very healthy, you could work and pay for your children. I use to work as a provider now I need a provider for me. So, I didn't experience that until I had a child. It made me feel diminished in many ways."

Ms. T also shared some of her personal views, feelings, and assumptions about the many appointments she had to keep in order to remain eligible for child care. She recalled times when she would wait for hours to be called and during that time share brief encounters with other welfare recipients, "Meeting people along the way in the system have this, take what we've given you kind of attitude and be thankful for it." Ms. T experienced being left in the dark about

resources that could have been beneficial for her and her son and how she believed to be profiled, “ They (case worker) kind of have a certain profile of what they expect to come through the door. I don’t fall into that profile and stereotype so don’t try and push me down that lane.” Ms. T discussed a situation when she began the process of seeking child care and how through interactions with case workers during her appointments she felt like she was being treated like another statistic, “If your low income that means your not educated, don’t have good work experience; they lump you into a large group of people that may be receiving services...you could be married and just got a divorce, they don’t know.” It almost means being your own case manager or social worker (to get the information you need). I knew what type of child care I was looking for. I didn’t take their list (child care provider references). If you don’t know how to advocate for yourself don’t expect a lot of things to function well for you.”

Caseworkers are critical in shaping the experience that families have with the subsidy system. They’re supposed to translate policy into practice, communicate details of policies to parents, help them with forms, and process paper work, and claims. In other cases, parents described being treated disrespectfully, having to wait for long periods of time, being misinformed, having paperwork lost, and so forth (Adams, Snyder, & Sandfort, 2002). While the effects of these problems may be related to issues such as level of resources, policies, and training, they are also affected by local agency leadership and likely to affect single mothers ability to use subsidies (Adams, Snyder, & Sandfort, 2002).

### **Self Study Discussion**

#### **Implications of subsidy programs on child care providers**

Understanding the funding and eligibility structures of subsidized child care and knowing how to navigate these systems is very complex and can be challenging for families to understand

which services they may qualify for (Karoly, Reardon & Cho, 2007). Eligibility for child care assistance is different depending on the type of child care single mothers use. Eligibility is generally determined by income and, in some cases, by receiving child protective services or by being at risk of abuse, neglect, or exploitation and for some programs, participants are required to demonstrate need (Karoly, Reardon & Cho, 2007). 46

To add to the barriers that single mothers already endure parents must begin to pay parent fees when they reach 40% of SMI, (\$1,950 for a family of 3). These fees are paid either to the child care agency or directly to the provider. California law does not state definitively who must collect the family fee. Many agencies take responsibility for collection of family fees from parents, but others deduct the family fee from the provider's payment and require the child care provider to collect the fee from the parent. This arrangement can lead to problems, creating tension between parents and providers, or leading the provider to forego fees because of the burden it places on low income families (Child Care Law Center, 2012).

Late payments are also problematic for providers who tend to be small business owners, often with no source of income other than child care. Child care providers do not have the right to challenge Department of Social Service [DSS], California Department of Education [CDE] or Alternative Payment Programs [APP] child care subsidy decisions that affect them such as late payment, termination of a subsidy, or an incorrect payment amount. When there is a dispute between the provider and the CWD/APP regarding payment, there is no formal mechanism for resolution available to the provider as a CWD/APP contractor (Child Care Law Center, 2013).

By participating in a subsidy program, I assume the risk of delayed payments based on the availability of funding from the State of California. When Ms. T's contract terminates she will no longer be income eligible because of her current salary from her job. Ms. T and I have

been working together to come up with a plan with the idea of continuing child care services in my home. The cost of quality child care isn't something that providers should have to compensate by lowering their rates. If parent fees were paid directly to the provider it would give providers who deliver "quality" services the ability to collect their full private-pay rate, or close to it. The subsidy rate reimbursement that providers are paid for child care is too low for providers to provide quality care. Rates affect staff salaries, materials, staff turnover, child-to-staff ratios, and professional development opportunities. 47

The competing interests of employers, single working parents, and very young children collide in decisions over work schedules, child care arrangements, children's sicknesses, and untraditional working hours (Friedman, 2001). My participation in the subsidy program has been helpful to recipients seeking child care but in return has implicated the way I run my business in the following ways because of funding: decrease in caregiver aid hours, delay in purchases and supplies, limits the number of subsidized children I can serve, and the quality.

Because I've had experience with only one child care subsidy program my interactions have not included difficulties reaching or working with a caseworker and/or meeting the eligibility requirements. Every provider experience is different and can vary. I'm hesitant to work with any other agencies for concern it may create additional barriers for me until I've thoroughly research their eligibility requirements.

### **Implications of subsidy programs on recipient**

Subsidized programs allow the parent the discretion to select the type of child care program. Although some of the families felt like these programs are "designed" to help, Ms. T stressed, "The policies in place are not based on real facts." "The cut off for these programs are



way too low that you're still setting up a single mom to struggle and have a hard time." "If you 48  
were to break down my expenses it would make a huge difference. There are various types of  
income such as disability insurance payments, pensions or annuities, even your car is counted  
toward your total household income, and can easily put you over the eligible monthly income for  
a family size of two.

Subsidy programs require participants to start paying a family fee based on the income  
and size of the family. These fees are determined using the California Department of Education  
Family Fee Schedule (Appendix E) and are not to exceed 10% of your income. Parent fees are  
set for the next 12 months, which creates yet another burden for a single mother. For example,  
parent fees remain the same for the duration of 12 months regardless of your inability to pay.  
Adding additional fees for single mothers to pay, who already are struggling, only adds to the  
barriers and challenges remaining eligible for services. Paying the parent fees late can result in  
services being terminated.

Navigating the various systems with subsidized child care can be a complicated  
experience, particularly for low and moderate-income families eligible for subsidized child care  
it negatively impacts whether or not you remain eligible for services. The paperwork and  
documentation seems to be the most problematic when starting the process of applying for social  
services. There's a consensus that navigating creates additional barriers for single mothers  
applying for the first time, existing recipients that are recertifying, and recipients who just need  
to report changes (marital status, where you live, job or school changes, birth of a child, etc.).  
The law states that if you receive a child care subsidy, you do not need to re-certify for one year.  
But if you are going to school, have a variable school schedule, work at different times, you have  
to re-certify much more often (Child Care Law Center, 2012).

The issue with attendance records and paper work was also raised at the Parent Voices 49 meeting I attended. I was at a table that consisted of another Mills College colleague, single mother, and Child Care Law Center senior staff attorney. There were six tables total that seated 4-5 advocates each in the room. We were asked to various questions related to travel and study time, child care administration and funding, parent fees, attendance records and paperwork, and child care law. Some of the questions we were asked to collaboratively discuss at are table were: Do you think it's necessary to sign in/out each day by providing two signatures? Is five days enough to report a change in status? Are there other ways to use technology to submit paperwork and changes? The discussions generated an assortment of solutions for advocates to address with politicians. These suggestions were collected and reflected in the policy/advocacy meeting handouts; electronic signatures, proposing reporting time be changed from 5 days to 30 days, ability to submit documents via scan/fax, electronic receipt, families who have limited access to technology could benefit by having a carbon copy for time sheets. Parent Voices has been invited to participate in stakeholders meetings, with the Legislature, and with the Child Development Division at the Department of Education in the process of identify efficiencies and streamlining options to improve the child care delivery system (A.Jabbaar, personal communication, 2/16/13).

Lack of availability and affordability to resources such as transportation, living expenses, health care, employment and child care create additional unique types of barriers that are interrelated and often difficult to overcome (Katrass, Zuiker, & Bauer, 2004). The numerous eligibility appointments alone can cause a burden to a single mother trying to remain working. During Ms. T enrollment in my child care she discussed some of her barriers trying to balance work and child care, "If you're a working parent your going to have to miss work...trying to squeeze in appointments...puts you in an uncompromising position with your job trying to make

all these appointments. I have to take time from my vacation...losing hours that I'm not getting 50 paid for and if you miss one document they'll (caseworker) tell you that you need to reschedule your appointment." A common concern for parents is having to be physically present for an appointment to handle various interactions required by the state (e.g., to apply or predetermine their eligibility) (Adams, Snyder, & Sandfort, 2002). Although face-to-face meeting can help caseworkers build a relationship with the parent and ensure they understand the program requirements, they can also present a burden when they occur frequently or unnecessarily (Adams, Synder, & Sandfort, 2002).

### **Stereotypical Assumptions from a Single Mother**

As a single mother I understand how difficult it is making sure you can provide the basic needs in order to sustain. Researching this topic I found it difficult trying to prioritize the Welfare and CalWORKs program into the least amount of themes as they're many layers to the programs that required multiple follow up interviews. As I re-read my research I had a hard time sympathizing with Ms. D's decision to continue having children when you're struggling to care for one. After discussing my biases with my critical friends they helped me to understand that sometimes the choice to have children doesn't depend on the ability or inability to support them financially. Americans believe a whole host of social ills can be traced to the lapse of judgment that a poor unmarried woman shows when she bears a child she can't afford (Edin & Kefalas, 2005).

My critical friends also helped me to look at other reasons that may be associated with culture, beliefs, and upbringing that influence the choices single mothers make when they continue to have children on welfare. Although not a question brought up in the interview, but one that warrants more research. In the time that I've known Ms. D, I have expressed my

discernment with her bearing more children. Ms. D is an admirable parent and my concern isn't 51  
reflective of her being a single mother but more so her ability to become self sufficient and not  
get caught up in the welfare cycle of dependency.

My initial assumption about single mothers was that they all had a bad experience with a  
caregiver. My assumption was based a meeting where I heard one provider's mention that she  
would never accept another child on subsidy. My initial theory was premature and not valid.  
That providers experience did not represent the other many family child care providers' feelings  
about subsidy child care. The more I listened to single mothers speak (via interviews and  
meetings) about there experiences accessing child care I learned that the barriers accessing child  
care had more to do with the interactions with case workers and how there are factors that affect  
every interaction. The single mothers I interviewed had goals and ambitions. They were  
continuing their education, seeking work where the pay was enough to successfully transition out  
of welfare. These mother's are not what society depict them as. They are defying stereotypes,  
building their careers and families.

### **Policy changes that impact child care providers and quality**

The proposed budget for fiscal year 2012-2013 in California included a \$184 million  
dollar cut to child care subsidies, a reduction that could significantly impact single mothers'  
ability to access and enroll their children in quality subsidized child care. The proposed budget  
would lower reimbursement rates that are paid to licensed providers through the voucher system,  
which could force many providers to go out of business or significantly reduce the number of  
children and families they can serve (California Child Care Resource & Referral Network, (n.d.).

As of Feb 20, 2013, \$10 million was given to the Stage 3 child care program to prevent  
any further terminations. The California Department of Education is working with child care

payment agencies to get the money out as quickly as possible. This funding will only protect 52 families who are being dis-enrolled between now and June 30th, 2013.

While the budget negotiations proceed, legislation is also being debated by the legislature. Some of the bills proposed that are relevant to subsidy child care, my study, and affect family child care providers include:

**AB 274** (Bonilla) would simplify documentation required by Alternative Payment programs and allow for some forms of electronic technology to increase efficiency (California Legislative Information, 2011).

**AB 290** (Alejo) would amend child care licensing laws to increase the required Health & Safety training for licensed providers to include childhood nutrition (California Legislative Information, 2013a).

**AB 641** (Rendon) would grant family child care providers the right to negotiate collectively with the state (California Legislative Information, 2013b).

**SB 528** (Yee) would give priority to minor parents and non-minor dependent parents who have not completed high school, to subsidized child care (California Legislative Information, 2013c).

**AB 364** (Calderon) would require all licensed child care facilities to be visited by Community Care Licensing [CCL] no less than once every two years. (Currently CCL is required to visit programs once every five years.) (California Legislative Information, 2013d).

CalWORKs has suffered five years of deep cuts totaling 4 billion and child care has been significantly cut since 2008 totaling 1 billion. The Governor 2013-2014 budget proposal shows no new proposed cuts in the 2013-2014 budget. However, it maintains cuts from previous years cutting child care and work assistance funding. (Children's Defense Fund-California, 2013). The cuts in recent years come after a decade of stagnant spending on CalWORKs that failed to keep

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up with inflation – the CalWORKs grant a family receives today only goes half as far as it did 20<sup>53</sup> years ago (Children’s Defense Fund-California, 2013).

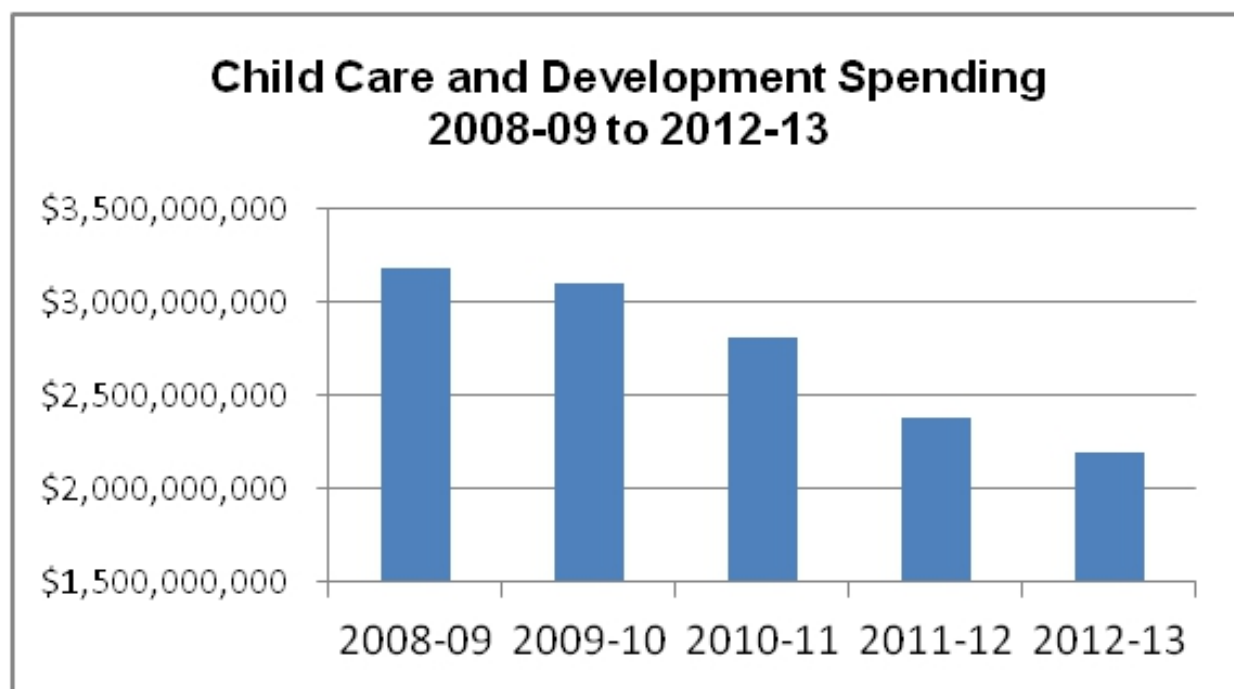


Figure 1

A vast body of research demonstrates that spending on child care and development reaps a high return on investment (Children’s Defense Fund-California, 2012). Child care programs also provide safe and affordable care that helps low-income single mothers find and retain jobs. Yet, these spending cuts have resulted in a reduction of about 110,000 child care and preschool slots – one-quarter of total slots – for Californian children since 2008 (Children’s Defense Fund-California, 2012).

### Conclusion

Many other major industrialized nations have taken a far different approach, with child care programs offering universal eligibility, in which fees and benefits are scaled according to

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income and which combine "some form of income maintenance with day-care centers and family<sup>54</sup> day-care programs" (Norgren, 1988). Australia, Belgium, and Italy, for example, have rejected the welfare model, which uses public funds only for the neediest children, and now provide nearly universal access to preschool opportunities. In France, preschool for children aged 3 to 6 is free to the families. "The French conceive of public support for preschool education, not as a reluctant handout to those whose parents cannot provide well for them, but rather as a 'welcoming' of all children into French society" (Lubeck, 1995). Such models recognize that only programs that benefit all families with children are free of the stigma attached to programs for the poor (Stoper, 1998). Such an approach also addresses the fact that a large number of the poor are children.

There is strong evidence that women's decisions about whether and how much to work depends upon the availability and cost of child care and that these factors are significant barriers to employment for low-income mothers (Bowen & Neenan, 1992; Brooks & Buckner, 1996; Cherlin, 1995; Hernandez, 1993; Kisker & Silverberg, 1991). Mothers working and supporting young children rely on child care. Therefore, their efforts to escape dependence on welfare require a public commitment to supporting their child care needs (Phillips, 1991).

My main findings accessing, enrolling, and maintaining quality child care using subsidy highlight the existence and nature of support systems to which single mothers had access to help their families. Also highlighted were the barriers these families faced as they tried to access and maintain these support systems, thus revealing the inadequacies in these systems within the child care subsidy regulations and navigating the welfare system. My findings also revealed an important aspect of quality child care may not be visible to the eye and for some exist within the relationship of the parent, provider, and child. There are differences between subsidy recipients

on the quality of child care chosen, family characteristics and values. I investigated ways in which subsidy recipients access child care that revealed many areas within the Department of Social Services that could be examined and reformed before drawing policy conclusions. The present study also investigated if and how changes in policy impacted family child care provider's ability to enroll families using child care subsidies. Unfortunately, cuts in the states budget to child care impacts, doesn't prevent, my ability to enroll more than three subsidized families and maintain the level of quality experiences in my small family child care.

The results of this study allowed me to hear and share real stories of single mothers and their journey that offered detailed analysis of their experiences in accessing and using child care resources in California. These stories have helped me to grow as a researcher and built the foundation that will allow me to share issues that single mothers seeking quality child care face and to include more family child care providers in this discussion.

Offering more educational opportunities and classes to educated more family child care providers are ways that child care spending can be used to improve quality of child care and increase safety for children. By permitting family child care providers the opportunity to access professional growth and education in Early Childhood Education (ECE) under the AB212 Bill will build a skilled and stable workforce, and provide high-quality child care and development services in at-risk communities. It will help to strengthen parent and provider relationships, build community within the learning environment, and provide services that best match the needs of families.

BANANAS, a non-profit child care referral and support agency recognizes the need and value of providing free informative publications and workshops to parents and providers around all things child care (e.g. choosing child care) (BANANAS, 2013). These publications and



workshops address important regulations and processes that impact quality and build on parent and provider relationships. The results of my study have implications for more education and outreach by single mothers, child care providers, community members, and other interested parties wanting to learn and teach about issues facing subsidy child care in California. 56

The concern is that many children are in settings that may not be safe or that may jeopardize their healthy development and parents need a safe, quality setting for their children while they work. It is essential that federal and state governments help families' access and afford quality child care so that children's safety and healthy development are not at stake (Child Care Aware, 2012).

Future policy must develop alternative means for recipients of subsidy child care and providers to gain knowledge and access to child care subsidies. As many of my findings revealed child care subsidies helped ease the burden of the cost of child care and helped them to seek and maintain employment (Adams, Snyder, & Sandfort, 2002). Some families revealed that without the help of subsidies, going back to school or gaining employment is out of reach. Some stated that without a substantial salary it wouldn't be worth working as much of their wages would go toward paying for child care.

The way subsidy programs are structured requires providers to accept the lower rate and make up the difference elsewhere, or not accept subsidized children (or limit the number of subsidized children we serve). Subsidy rates should be set and maximum reimbursement rates should be increased for child care providers who have made steps towards building upon quality improvement in their program, minimum quality requirements need to be set for providers in low-income neighborhoods, improving paperwork requirements, timeliness of payments, consistency of requirements across different subsidy agencies, and caseworker

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interactions/training can have a major impact on the quality of care that subsidized providers can 57 provide and families can access (Adams, Snyder, & Sandfort, 2002).

Minimizing the barriers of low-income single mothers access to quality care will take more than the experiences that were shared in this research. It also suggests that the California legislators examine their policies and practices that influence the barriers that I've discussed and design them to better support this population. Consequently, a more active interest is needed in designing social services to better support working families and their staff.

Locating substandard child care is easy. However, it threatens these mothers ability to stay employed or pursue education and training that would ultimately lead to better jobs (Women's Economic Security Campaign, 2010). My experience as a past recipient of subsidy child care, single mother, licensed child care provider, and educator in the early care field has inspired me to join forces with existing movements in my community that are working towards reducing the barriers that prevent low-income single mothers from using subsidies in high quality settings and changing policy.

California is one of nine states selected to receive a competitive federal Race to the Top- Early Learning Challenge [RTT-ELC] grant. Alameda County is one of 17 local Consortia to receive funding. The grant will be used to develop and implement a Quality Rating and Improvement System [QRIS] with the goal of having more low-income and high needs children in high quality child care programs (Alameda County Child Care Planning Council, 2012). This is not an easy task but one that I have committed my time and dedication to a QRIS that is working on increasing the number of low-income children access to quality child care in California.

“Interaction enables people to build communities, to commit themselves to each other,

and to knit the social fabric (Beem, 1999). These interactions have many influences on a child. I 58  
view the children, parents, and my peers who work with me as my social environment, a  
community, a network of social relationships that is maintained (Bott, 1957). Building  
relationships is an essential part of my philosophy as was shared and valued for Ms. T, “Children  
are meant to be raised in a community. Multiple people are apart of that process...creating a  
whole rounded child together. I’m slowly developing community with people who are genuinely  
interested in developing on-going relationships and community together – being committed to  
that process.”

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## Appendix A

## Research Participant Information and Consent Form

Single-Mothers Experiences Accessing Quality Child cares Using State Subsidized Vouchers  
Informed Consent

October 21, 2012

I, \_\_\_\_\_, state that I am over 18 years of age and that I voluntarily agree to participate in a research project conducted by Asiya Jabbaar, Graduate Student, School of Education at Mills College. I have been selected to participate in a research study interview that documents single mothers' personal experiences in trying to access and enroll in quality child care using subsidy vouchers. My participation will include sharing my personal experiences around this topic.

Individual privacy will be maintained to ensure confidentiality of all participants. Real names will not be used. Extensive measures will be taken to ensure the safety and security of the participants and guard against the dissemination of private information. Any hard copy paper data that consist of participant's personal information (names, emails, addresses, and phone numbers) will be locked away. Electronic copies will be stored in a password protected unshared file/folder computer for the duration of 10 years and then destroyed.

Participation in this research project is completely voluntary. I have the right to say no and I may change my mind at any time and withdraw without consequence. I may choose not to answer specific questions and I can stop participating at any time without penalty. I acknowledge that Asiya Jabbaar has explained the task to me fully; has informed me that I may withdraw from participation at any time without prejudice or penalty; has offered to answer any questions that I might have concerning the research procedure; has assured me that any information that I give will be used for research purposes only and will be kept confidential.

I also acknowledge that there are no direct benefits derived from, or rewards given for, my participation. I understand that if I have questions or concerns about my role and rights as a research participant, if I would like to obtain information or offer input, or would like to file complaint that resulted from this study, I may contact, anonymously, Asiya H. Jabbaar ([rbclearning@yahoo.com](mailto:rbclearning@yahoo.com); 510-520-6162) or Asiya's professor, Dr. Linda Kroll at ([lindak@mills.edu](mailto:lindak@mills.edu)).

My signature below means that I voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_



### Interview Questions

Below is a sample of the type of questions I will ask. These questions may be adapted or expanded.

#### **Experiences**

Accessing subsidized child care?

Transitioning on/off welfare

Are you currently receiving Cal WORKs? How long? Do you know what Stage you're in?

School: Are you aware of travel and study time as a student?

How did you receive your referrals?

Parent fees and out of pocket costs

Has it been difficult to pay parent fees?

Would a work study program have helped offset the costs for you?

#### Eligibility

Experience with the eligibility process?

#### Navigating

What is difficult to navigate through the child care subsidy program?

What information was given to you regarding your rights?

Was the fee schedule ever shown to you so that you could understand how your fees are calculated?

Attendance Records?

#### **Stereotypes**

Have you experienced any stereotypical assumptions about being low-income?

Single mother?

Receiving subsidy child care?

While seeking to access child care?

What has been your experience working with families using child care subsidies? – Providers

#### **Policy/Quality**

What type of care do you want for your child?

How would you define “quality” child care?

How would you define an effective provider?

Is community in a child care setting important to you?

Are you aware of the proposed budget cuts? If so, how do you imagine it would affect your family?

#### **Advocating**

Any current/past involvement with the following organizations?

- LIFETIME
- Child care Law
- Parent Voices

## Appendix C

### Overview of Research Project for Participants

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Re: A research study to support the goal of achieving accessible quality child care for single mothers using subsidy child care.

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

A student researcher, Asiya Jabbaar, at Mills College in Oakland is studying single mothers' experiences accessing and enrolling their children in quality child care. This research involves interviewing single mothers who are using subsidized child care including those that are either receiving cash aid (welfare), are new welfare recipients and/or have worked their way off cash aid but are still low-income eligible. Participants for the research will vary in age. Some will have had a long history (past or present) relationship with subsidized child care and some will be new to the program and unfamiliar with how to navigate through the system. All participants will be volunteers who agree to participate in the study.

If you choose to be a part of this study, participation will involve being interviewed. Interviews will take place in person at a place that is convenient for the interviewee and the interviewer. Any follow up interviews can be conducted over the phone. Initial interviews can last anywhere from 1-2 hours. Study participation will last until May 2013.

If you are interested in participating in this study or have questions, please contact Asiya Jabbaar at 510-520-6162 or email: [rbclearning@yahoo.com](mailto:rbclearning@yahoo.com). Participation is voluntary.

Sincerely, Asiya H Jabbaar  
Graduate Student Mills College 5000 MacArthur Blvd. Oakland, CA 94605

## CALWORKS WELFARE-TO-WORK (WTW) PROGRAM FLOW



## Appendix E

## State Full Day Full Year Family Fee Schedule

Family Fee Schedule												
Part-time Daily Fee	Full-time Daily Fee	Family Size 1 or 2	Family Size 3	Family Size 4	Family Size 5	Family Size 6	Family Size 7	Family Size 8	Family Size 9	Family Size 10	Family Size 11	Family Size 12
\$ 1.00	\$ 2.00	1,820	1,950	2,167	2,513	2,860	2,925	2,990	3,055	3,120	3,185	3,250
\$ 1.25	\$ 2.50	1,893	2,028	2,253	2,614	2,974	3,042	3,109	3,177	3,245	3,312	3,380
\$ 1.50	\$ 3.00	1,965	2,106	2,340	2,714	3,089	3,159	3,229	3,299	3,369	3,440	3,510
\$ 1.75	\$ 3.50	2,038	2,184	2,426	2,815	3,203	3,276	3,349	3,421	3,494	3,567	3,640
\$ 2.00	\$ 4.00	2,111	2,262	2,513	2,915	3,317	3,393	3,468	3,544	3,619	3,694	3,770
\$ 2.25	\$ 4.50	2,184	2,340	2,600	3,016	3,432	3,510	3,588	3,666	3,744	3,822	3,900
\$ 2.65	\$ 5.30	2,257	2,418	2,686	3,116	3,546	3,627	3,707	3,788	3,869	3,949	4,030
\$ 3.05	\$ 6.10	2,329	2,496	2,773	3,217	3,661	3,744	3,827	3,910	3,993	4,076	4,160
\$ 3.45	\$ 6.90	2,402	2,574	2,860	3,317	3,775	3,861	3,946	4,032	4,118	4,204	4,290
\$ 3.85	\$ 7.70	2,475	2,652	2,946	3,418	3,889	3,978	4,066	4,154	4,243	4,331	4,420
\$ 4.25	\$ 8.50	2,548	2,730	3,033	3,518	4,004	4,095	4,186	4,277	4,368	4,459	4,550
\$ 4.65	\$ 9.30	2,621	2,808	3,120	3,619	4,118	4,212	4,305	4,399	4,492	4,586	4,680
\$ 5.05	\$ 10.10	2,693	2,886	3,206	3,719	4,232	4,329	4,425	4,521	4,617	4,713	4,810
\$ 5.45	\$ 10.90	2,766	2,964	3,293	3,820	4,347	4,446	4,544	4,643	4,742	4,841	4,940
\$ 5.85	\$ 11.70	2,839	3,042	3,380	3,920	4,461	4,563	4,664	4,765	4,867	4,968	5,070
\$ 6.25	\$ 12.50	2,912	3,120	3,466	4,021	4,576	4,680	4,784	4,888	4,992	5,096	5,200
\$ 6.65	\$ 13.30	2,985	3,198	3,553	4,122	4,690	4,797	4,903	5,010	5,116	5,223	5,330
\$ 7.05	\$ 14.10	3,057	3,276	3,640	4,222	4,804	4,914	5,023	5,132	5,241	5,350	5,460
\$ 7.45	\$ 14.90	3,130	3,354	3,726	4,323	4,919	5,031	5,142	5,254	5,366	5,478	5,590
\$ 7.60	\$ 15.20	3,203	3,374	3,749	4,348	4,948	5,061	5,173	5,286	5,398	5,510	5,623
\$ 7.75	\$ 15.50	3,283	3,393	3,770	4,373	4,976	5,089	5,202	5,315	5,428	5,541	5,655
\$ 7.90	\$ 15.80		3,413	3,792	4,399	5,006	5,120	5,233	5,347	5,461	5,575	5,688
\$ 8.05	\$ 16.10		3,432	3,813	4,423	5,033	5,148	5,262	5,376	5,491	5,605	5,720
\$ 8.23	\$ 16.45		3,518	3,835	4,448	5,062	5,177	5,292	5,407	5,522	5,637	5,752
\$ 8.43	\$ 16.85			3,856	4,473	5,090	5,206	5,322	5,437	5,553	5,669	5,785
\$ 8.63	\$ 17.25			3,880	4,500	5,121	5,237	5,354	5,470	5,586	5,703	5,819
\$ 8.88	\$ 17.75			3,908	4,534	5,159	5,276	5,394	5,511	5,628	5,745	5,863
Monthly Income Ceilings		3,283	3,518	3,908	4,534	5,159	5,276	5,394	5,511	5,628	5,745	5,863

## Brief Chronology of Welfare Policy in the United States

<b>Prior to early 1900s</b>	Local communities provided most care for the poor through almshouses, orphanages, and charities.
<b>1911</b>	The first federal government welfare program, Aid to Dependent Children (ADC), was enacted at the state level and spread throughout the country. Popularly called “Mother’s Pensions,” the program originally served mostly white, widowed women, then considered to be the deserving poor. The goal of the program was to help mothers stay home and provide a nurturing environment for their children.
<b>1933</b>	For the first time, the federal government provided temporary welfare relief for unemployed parents and their dependents.
<b>1935</b>	As part of the New Deal, Title IV of the 1935 Social Security Act created a permanent, but optional, ADC program administered by the states in order to provide benefits for children.
<b>1950</b>	The federal government began to provide cash aid to caretaker parents or relatives of children in the ADC program.
<b>1960</b>	The name of the ADC program was changed to Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC).
<b>1962</b>	Federal legislation allowed states to obtain waivers from federal AFDC guidelines to develop innovative demonstration projects to promote the objectives of AFDC. This practice became more widely used in the 1990s.
<b>1967</b>	The first federal work requirement, the Work Incentive Program, was enacted. It was mandatory for males and voluntary for female recipients of AFDC.
<b>1960s-1970s</b>	Landmark judicial decisions resulted in the inclusion of many who had been excluded from the original ADC program (e.g., cohabiting or sexually active single mothers). In combination with the War on Poverty Program in the mid-1960s, these changes resulted in a significant increase in the number of families on AFDC.
<b>1980s</b>	States were permitted to impose work requirements through the Community Work Experience Program. The idea of welfare as an entitlement was questioned by some policymakers, and the concept of mutual obligation emerged.
<b>1988</b>	The federal Family Support Act codified state workfare options, including mandatory work for mothers with children over the age of 6, and required states to establish a Job Opportunities and Basic Skills Program (JOBS), named Greater Avenues for Independence (GAIN) in California. GAIN coupled training and work requirements with guaranteed child care. The JOBS program required a match from states to receive federal funding.
<b>1980s-1990s</b>	The federal government increasingly shifted program and financial responsibility to the states to reduce federal spending for open-ended programs.
<b>Early 1990s</b>	Many states obtained waivers allowing states to implement work training and other programs intended to change the behavior of welfare recipients, such as 1) “learnfare” programs that conditioned AFDC payments on the minors in a household attending school; 2) family caps that limited or reduced AFDC benefits for children conceived while the mother was on AFDC; and 3) “bridefare” programs that provided small monetary incentives for recipient mothers to marry the fathers of their children.
<b>1996</b>	Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) was passed, creating the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program. TANF allowed states the flexibility to start or continue programs that had previously required waivers, and capped federal welfare spending through fixed annual allocations in the form of block grants to states.
<b>2005</b>	The Deficit Reduction Act (DRA) reauthorized TANF through 2010. The Act and its final regulations reset the caseload reduction credit “base” year from 1995 to 2005; increased the number of clients that must meet federal work participation requirements; provided the federal government with broadened regulatory authority to define work activities under TANF; increased oversight for uniformity across states; developed rules on how states must document, track, and verify hours of participation; and restricted how state funds must be spent for states to qualify for federal TANF dollars.
<b>2009</b>	In response to the recession, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) of 2009 created a new, temporary TANF Emergency Contingency Fund (ECF), capped at \$5 billion and available only in FFY 2009 and FFY 2010. ARRA also temporarily modified the caseload reduction credit to hold states harmless for expected caseload increases due to high unemployment from FFY 2009 through FFY 2011. States must apply for TANF ECF, which can be used for increased expenditures in basic assistance, subsidized employment, and non-recurring short-term benefits. The purpose is to create jobs, provide benefits and services to low-income families, and stimulate the economy.
<b>2010</b>	TANF is due to be reauthorized.