

Child care should be but isn't a 'no-brainer'

GORDAN THIBEDEAU • JULY 27, 2009

I have always thought of child care as a "no-brainer" - you have small children, you need to go to work, so you put them in day care.

Pretty straight forward, I thought.

Recently, I visited with several people associated with child care, which gave me a new perspective.

First, there is the issue of cost. If you are a poor working family or a single parent making minimum wage, it's likely you are not able to afford child care.

Even if you are considered financially stable, you may not be able to afford it.

Let's do the math; at \$20 an hour, you make \$41,600 annually before deductions. After deductions, let's estimate that you bring home \$37,000. Child care at a child-care facility for two toddlers will cost, on average, \$21,000 leaving a total of \$16,000 to cover food, housing, medical, transportation, etc. That's if you make \$20 an hour; if you earn \$15 or less, making ends meet is a serious problem.

The second issue is child-care availability. In Larimer County, there are not enough quality child-care slots for the number of children needing them. Over the past several years, we have lost a number of nonprofit child-care providers, which compounds the problem, especially for low-income families trying to make it.

The third issue is the quality of the child care. We know, without question, that the quality of early child care makes a huge difference in a child's ability to succeed when they start school. If children are healthy and prepared intellectually and socially, their chances of success throughout their school years are dramatically increased.

Child care is one of the biggest barriers for parents working to get out of poverty and become self-sufficient.

It seems to me that access to quality, affordable child care is an absolute necessity and should be a "no-brainer."

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