



SD CHILDREN & NATURE

## San Diego County Early Childhood Community Asset Inventory

*By Patti Shields, Consultant to the  
San Diego Children and Nature Collaborative  
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### Project Summary

A community asset inventory was generated to describe opportunities in the early childhood sector to increase outdoor and nature activities as part of child care services. Through interviews with professionals in the area of early childhood and an internet search, baseline information was gathered on organizations which offer childcare or support to the Early Childhood Education (ECE) community. Programs are categorized as professional development/support organizations, education and training entities, non-profit centers, campus-based centers, large for-profit childcare corporations, federally-funded programs, special needs programs, and support. Opportunities for collaborations between SDCaN and some of these organizations and/or programs include presentations at professional association meetings and newsletters, mentoring staff at early childhood centers, and adding children and nature lectures to college and continuing education programs.

### Table of Contents

Project Summary .....	1
Project Methods.....	2
Overview of Support Services for Early Childhood Professionals in San Diego.....	2
Professional Organizations.....	2
Education and Training.....	2
Overview of Childcare Programs in San Diego County .....	2
Federally-funded Programs .....	2
Child Care Centers .....	3
Campus-based Programs.....	3
Programs for Children with Special Needs.....	3
Opportunities for Collaboration with Early Childhood Organizations and Professionals .....	4
Professional Organizations.....	4
Child Care Centers .....	4
Campus-based Programs.....	5
Programs for Children with Special Needs.....	5
References Cited.....	5

## **Project Methods**

The experience of working in the field of early childhood education in San Diego County for over 25 years by consultant Patti Shields, provided the basis of this report. The information built on her knowledge of local organizations, an extensive internet search, and telephone, email, and in-person interviews.

The *Community Action Guide: Building the Children & Nature Movement from the Ground Up* (Children and Nature Network 2008) was used to guide this project. The community asset map approach is taken from the report, *Community Culture and the Environment: A Guide to Understanding a Sense of Place* (U.S. Environmental Protection Agency 2002). Baseline data on children in childcare and other out-of-home-care in San Diego County was gathered from sources such as the YMCA Childcare Resource Service and organizational web pages. This information was compiled into an Excel spreadsheet.

## **Overview of Support Services for Early Childhood Professionals in San Diego**

### **Professional Organizations**

Support for early childhood professionals includes a number of different organizations that provide staff development, training, and resources. The San Diego Association for the Education of Young Children, San Diego Family Childcare Association, the Reggio Roundtable, and YMCA Childcare Resource Service are the most well-known and widely utilized. All offer trainings and/or conferences throughout the year. More detail on each of these organizations is provided in the Excel spreadsheet.

### **Education and Training**

San Diego County has a comprehensive community college system comprised of 15 community colleges offering two-year degrees in Child Development. In addition, there are several four-year universities with child development programs. Students can earn an AA in Child Development from the community college or a bachelor's degree from a university. San Diego State University now offers a Master's degree in Human Development as well. UCSD and USD do not offer a child development major at this time. Some college campuses have child development student organizations or clubs which host workshops and seminars, and provide a variety of resources to students. The Regional Occupation Program offers child development classes to high school students throughout the county. Students do not receive college units for these classes.

## **Overview of Childcare Programs in San Diego County**

The early childhood community in San Diego County is comprised of a wide variety of out-of-home-care choices: campus-based programs, small and large for-profit centers, faith-based programs, Head Start Centers, military child care, Preschool for All, State Preschool, non-profit centers, family childcare centers, and unlicensed child care homes.

As of June 30, 2010, there were 852 licenses for preschools, 185 infant care licenses, and 3,675 family childcare licenses in San Diego County (San Diego YMCA 2010). This represents 49,695 children. The potential is reaching large numbers of teachers, children, and families through connecting with the programs which have periodic contact with these centers such as the YMCA Childcare Resource Service, which compiles this data. According to U.S. Census Bureau estimates for 2008, the County of San Diego has 225,080 children under five years of age.

### **Federally-funded Programs**

Head Start Centers are the main source of federally-funded childcare in San Diego County. East County is served by Episcopal Community Services (ECS). North County Head Start is administered by Multi-Agency Alliance for Children (MAAC) Project and includes Head Start, Early Head Start, and State Preschools. A total enrollment of 1200 children is served in MAAC Project's Early Head Start and Head Start Centers. Early Head Start's 27 programs provide services to 340 children.



A Neighborhood House Association (NHA) directly oversees central San Diego Head Start Centers. In addition, NHA provides the funds and oversight for East County's Alpha Kappa Alpha Head Start Centers and the South Bay Head Starts through ECS. NHA also has partner programs such as the Chicano Federation. The total number of children served by NHA Head Start Centers is 1,821. In total, there are 5,758 children who receive Head Start services through NHA's delegate and partner agencies.

### **Child Care Centers**

Several for-profit corporations provide childcare and preschool programs in San Diego County. Knowledge Learning Corporation (KinderCare) has 15 centers in the San Diego area. KinderCare teachers are required to attend quarterly as well as bi-annual trainings. Bright Horizons Family Solutions, Inc. owns and operates five centers in San Diego County. Discovery Isle operates three centers in San Diego, serving children from six weeks to five years.

There are 3,675 licensed family childcare homes in San Diego County. Of these, 2,674 are licensed for eight children, and 1,001 have large (up to 14 children) licenses. Some of these family childcare homes are part of larger organizations such as the military or Head Start.

Many churches have on-site childcare and preschool programs. A support group for directors of these centers, the Church Related Early Education Fellowship, holds regular meetings.

State Preschools offer half-day preschool programs to low income children. State Preschools are administered locally through the San Diego County Office of Education. *Preschool For All* (PFA), funded through First Five San Diego under a five-year demonstration project that began in 2006. PFA centers can be found throughout the county.

Another significant provider of childcare in the county is the military. At Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton, there are six childcare centers and 93 family childcare homes. In addition, Marine Corps Base Miramar and the Navy in San Diego County also have child development centers and family childcare providers. Information on these centers can be found at <https://qol2.navyaims.net/CYPWEB/>. Further research is needed to make connections with this large section of providers of childcare.

### **Campus-based Programs**

San Diego County is home to 12 campus-based child development centers. These centers serve as lab school sites for students of child development, psychology, nursing, and more. These child development centers typically serve a combination of children, students, faculty, staff, and community. Cal State San Marcos has an on-site child development center that is operated by a for-profit corporation. These programs are listed in an Excel spreadsheet (not included in this report).

San Diego Community College District Continuing Education has offered parent/child participation classes for over forty years, free of charge. Classes for parents and their infants through age five are taught throughout the city of San Diego. In a typical semester, dozens of classes are available. Grossmont College Adult Education in East County and Sweetwater School District in South Bay offer similar classes. There is a small fee for the parent participation classes through these other districts.

### **Programs for Children with Special Needs**

The Special Needs Unit of the YMCA Childcare Resource Service (CRS) coordinates respite care for children diagnosed with special needs for Regional Center as well as the Military Exceptional Family Member Program. This unit of CRS also assists parents with "enhanced referrals" for childcare when their child's special needs require additional training of the staff. San Diego Regional Center provides a number of services to children with special needs and their families, including assessment, resources, and development of an Individualized Family Service Plan. Most notably for the purpose of this report, Regional Center "... may be able to support and assist families when additional staff or other special accommodations are required in a child care setting, in order to deal with the exceptional needs of the child." ([www.sdrc.org/c\\_serv\\_child.php](http://www.sdrc.org/c_serv_child.php)). Head Start Centers typically employ a disability coordinator to oversee the coordination of services for any child with special needs. This may include assisting with accommodations to the curriculum and/or the environment.

Special Education Early Childhood programs are offered through the San Diego Unified School District. All districts have some type of special needs programs for children under the age of five. Recent funding changes have greatly impacted services for children under the age of three, provided by California Early Start. The Hope Infant Family Support Program is offered through the San Diego County Office of Education. Respite care for military families was recently cut significantly, effective July 1, 2010.

## **Opportunities for Collaboration with Early Childhood Organizations and Professionals**

Many possibilities exist for collaboration centered around direct connections with teaching staff, administrators, parents, and children. The aforementioned requirement of over 100 hours of professional growth for childcare permit holders would provide target audiences of a large number of early childhood professionals, teachers, and administrators alike. The requirement of over 100 hours of professional development for childcare permit holders constitute a large number of potential course attendees among early childhood professionals, teachers, and administrators.

### **Professional Organizations**

YMCA Childcare Resource Service publishes a quarterly electronic newsletter, the *Communique*. This is emailed to 16,000 childcare providers, potentially reaching many more as most programs post the *Communique* for the whole staff to review as well as copying articles for parents. In addition, their website includes the C.A.T.S. Calendar, where information on trainings, conferences, and other events for childcare providers, children and families can be posted. The C.A.T.S. Calendar can be updated by CRS staff at any time and is always available on their website, [www.ymcacrs.org](http://www.ymcacrs.org).

The San Diego Association Education for Young Children (SDAEYC) is an affiliate of NAEYC, the national organization whose goals include a dedication "... to improving the well-being of all young children, with particular focus on the quality of educational and developmental services for all children from birth through age 8. NAEYC is committed to becoming an increasingly high performing and inclusive organization." (<http://www.naeyc.org/content/about-naeyc>). SDAEYC publishes a bi-monthly newsletter, *Windows for Children*, which is mailed to 531 addresses. Because many of these addresses are for childcare centers, this newsletter potentially reaches many times the number of readers than the actual mailing. There is great interest on the part of SDAEYC for workshops at their conference on topics related to children and nature. This organization would also like SDCaN to have informational tables at all of their conferences. SDCaN member Patti Shields will give a presentation on SDCaN at the September, 2010 Board meeting.

A workshop, "Nature is the Classroom," was presented by SDCaN members Patti Shields and Myrian Solis Coronel at the April, 2010 San Diego Family Childcare Association annual conference. The response to this workshop was very positive and demonstrates the benefits of presentations and informational tables at future conferences.

### **Child Care Centers**

With several large corporations providing childcare in the county, they are a potential audience for fee-based staff development workshops. KinderCare teachers are required to attend at least six professional growth workshops per year and this could be an opportunity for SDCaN to partner with programs that may be able to financially support such trainings. Since the policy of required professional growth is becoming standard in early childhood (105 hours of professional development over a five-year period are required to renew a Child Development Permit through the Commission on Teacher Credentialing), there should be many opportunities to share information on children's learning and nature.

Verna Sundquist, Behavioral Specialist for YMCA Childcare Resource Service Healthline, suggested the following ways SDCaN could partner with their early childhood education programs, and these could be applied to most of the opportunities outlined:

- List natural places parents and providers could visit near homes and schools.
- Provide articles on how being in nature helps children with social and emotional issues.
- Provide ideas for how centers can provide exciting programs on site or connect their children and families to such programs in the community.
- Provide information on how being outdoors helps with children's health and physical well being.
- Provide information and/or experts on what providers can do to make play yards more natural.

### **Campus-based Programs**

Carissa Olivi, adjunct faculty at San Diego Mesa College, shared her ideas for collaborations with SDCaN: workshops for parents at the center about special outdoor places to go in Sand Diego; information on why this is important; what to do once they get there; supporting schools in creating natural habitats in the playground; and hands-on interaction in transforming the outdoor space. Professor Olivia also suggested a cadre of people to evaluate playscapes and give ideas on how to transform the spaces for young children. In the Child Development classes, guest speakers could provide literature and information on places to go, what to do, and why. Experts in leading hikes for children could lead field trips with staff and children to nearby nature sites, and in so doing, teach this valuable skill to staff. SDCaN could develop a video and packet to be sent to all ECE programs that would provide information on the above topics and more recent research. Schools could participate in the SDCaN organization and thus be connected with other schools who are also subscribers; by doing this, they then can be connected to support each other in their efforts get children outdoors.

As suggested by faculty members at local colleges, SDCaN could provide curriculum materials and research that could be incorporated into the course content. This could include the value of nature experiences, early nature-based activities, questions for adult students in child development related to the value of nature, and lists of local places to take children to explore nature. Olivi asked for guest speakers in child development classes to provide literature and information on places to go, what to do, and why it is important. Further interviews with four-year university faculty are needed.

### **Programs for Children with Special Needs**

Children's behavioral and developmental issues are part of both the daily challenges and learning opportunities for the early childhood professional. With funding changes, teachers are increasingly left to deal with these issues with less and less outside support. The understanding of how beneficial nature can be to the adult or child with mental health or behavioral issues is significant in considering the possible collaborations of SDCaN with this population and the agencies which provide services to them.

Julie Childs, Education and Disability Coordinator for NHA Head Start, made the following suggestions: provide training in the natural environment, not just for education of the teachers but also for those that don't necessarily work directly with children (i.e. administrators) to convince them of need for nature, and suggested that "children and nature" is not just the latest trend. Articles can be provided for educators to have information to use in conversations. Ms. Childs feels it would be helpful to have on-site mentors, such as master gardeners, working through their process of understanding and helping on an on-going basis, rather than a one time workshop.

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