



**Early Childhood Support  
& Parent Education**

**START *SMALL*  
*THINK BIG***

# Why this report matters to all of us

Island County Community Health Advisory Board  
Coupeville, WA 98239

The health of Island County is of concern to us all, and the Island County Community Health Advisory Board (CHAB) has just completed a lengthy two year process of examining and prioritizing health issues for our community. This special report is one result of that process, which included both science and a wide range of inputs from our partners in the community, including a comprehensive telephone survey of residents in all regions of Whidbey and Camano Island.

CHAB spent the first year studying health data pertaining to Island County. Such data included a household survey many in the community participated in: the Island County Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance Survey (BFRSS). Data was also analyzed from a number of national, state, and local sources. The members of CHAB then prioritized health issues that needed attention and community action. Issues were prioritized on the basis of their size, their seriousness, and whether there are potential community-based interventions available to lessen the problem.

The research identified 44 different health issues that were potentially significant for Island County. Through a variety of evaluation exercises CHAB then selected 15 issues that needed more exploration. Those 15 have been grouped into four different topic areas: Early Intervention/Parent Support, Health Prevention/Screening; Chronic Disease/Physical Activity; and Mental Health. This special report specifically focuses on Early Childhood/Parent Support.

By publishing a special report on each topic we hope to raise community awareness about the health issue in Island County and encourage community partners to join together and take action to address the issue. Our community has a long history of working together to develop plans and strategies that make Whidbey and Camano Islands great places to live, and together we can have a positive impact on the health of people in Island County.

We invite you to join in building a better future for Island County. Our next task is to develop action plans to address priority issues, determine goals and evaluation plans that measure progress in addressing the issue(s), and create a healthy Island County culture.

The future is ours to create.

Sincerely,



Robin Hertlein, Chairperson  
Island County Community Health Advisory Board

P.S. You can find more information about CHAB on our website at [www.pioneernet.net/chab](http://www.pioneernet.net/chab)

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## Who Are We?

CHAB is the Island County Community Health Advisory Board. We are made up of 21 adult and 8 student community members from all regions of Island County. Our task is to identify community health care needs, formulate recommendations to the Board of Health, and assist in developing community action to address priority issues.

In order to do this we have recently completed an exhaustive study of the health needs and issues of Island County citizens, using information from the 2000 BRFSS (Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance Survey), numerous other local, state, and national studies, and information from practitioners in Island County.

Out of a list of 44 Health Issues that arose from the study, CHAB has identified four key areas of concern regarding the health of our community. This special report addresses the issue of Early Childhood Support and Parent Education.

## What Have We Found?

There is a lack of programs and/or resources available to new parents and/or parents in families that are “at risk” or “overburdened” throughout Island County.

## Why Is This A Problem?

The number of children (and percent of all children) referred to Child Protective Services for possible maltreatment has increased in Island County. Studies have shown that 75% of all child abuse and neglect is perpetrated by the parents.



*There is a lack of programs and/or resources available to new parents and/or parents in families that are “overburdened” throughout Island County.*

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## What We Know

The first three years of life is of critical importance to brain development and emotional health. Early stimulation and healthy bonding build the foundation for learning and emotional development.

Supporting the families of these young children will not only benefit their lifelong learning and mental health, but ultimately, the health of our own communities. Children (and parents) who are supported during the early years do better in school and are less likely to be involved in illegal activities later on. Studies have also shown that 1:1 adult/youth mentoring works!



*Early stimulation and healthy bonding build the foundation for learning and emotional development.*

## What We See

### (Start Small)

- ↑ cases of child abuse and neglect
- ↑ cases of developmental delays (Island County cases are greater than the state average)
- ↑ child care costs (Island County is highest in “child care burden” costs)
- ↑ single parents, grandparents parenting and children in foster care
- ↑ number of children born to parents who abuse drugs and alcohol
- ↑ mental illness in young children
- ↑ services for very young children and families

### (Think Big)

- ↑ need for juvenile detention centers
- ↑ in percentage of jail population with behavior issues/mental instability/learning deficits
- ↑ need for mental health services/policing in schools
- ↑ children needing special services in schools

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# Where Can A Family Get Help Now?

(A partial list...)

## ***Special Needs***

Toddler Learning Center  
CSHCN Program  
Parent To Parent  
Family Support  
Dad's Group

## ***Income Based***

Early Head Start  
Women Infants Children  
Nutrition Services  
Maternity Support  
Services

## ***At Risk***

New Parent Support Team  
Child Protective Services  
Harbor Haven  
In A Pinch Crisis Nursery  
Alternative Response System

## ***Available To All***

Father / Infant Groups  
Parent Preschool Co-ops  
Healthy Family/ Healthy Baby  
Toddler Groups @ Library  
Family Resource Centers

## ***Business/Community***

Movin' & Groovin'  
Kid's Gym  
Children's Center  
Child Abuse Prevention Foundation  
Civic Organizations  
Churches

## What We Hope For

We hope for a nurturing community who respects and cares about young children and supports parents of young children.

***Natural community supports*** – neighborhood play groups, mentors, MOPS, civic organizations.

***Schools*** – preparation for parenting, support for children's various needs.

***Government Level*** – funding for programs, community centers, recreation, health screens.

## Start Small

***Kids corner in newspaper*** announcing resources and activities for young children and their families.

***Support for community connections*** – playgroups, welcoming neighborhoods, mentors

## Think Big

***Required curriculum*** for all high schoolers regarding health care and pregnancy prevention, child development, shaken baby syndrome, effects of drugs and alcohol abuse, preferably hands on.

***Resource Centers*** – Resource coordinator, playgroups, respite care, screening, on-site classes for parents (ESL, GED, parenting education, playground).



***We hope for a nurturing community who respects and cares about young children and supports parents of young children.***

***Volunteer! – Your time and caring can make a difference!***

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## What Should Be Done?

WCPCAN, the Washington Council on the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect, has released a report showing that parent education and parent support programs have proven to be effective in the protection of children from abuse and neglect.

According to the national Prevent Child Abuse America, parent support groups:

- help to reduce isolation and build self-esteem
- reassure parents that the challenges they face are shared by other families, and can be successfully handled
- work best when leadership is shared so parents both receive and provide help
- can prevent child abuse and neglect

Island County needs to increase the number of parenting education and support options available for new parents and to parents in families that are “at risk” or “overburdened” in Island County.

## How Can We Do It?

- Develop more choices in parent education and parent support groups
- Publicize their availability for parents
- Provide childcare and scholarships
- Financially support organizations that provide parent education and parent support groups
- Get involved in 1:1 mentoring programs via a school district, Big Brothers/Sisters program, youth center, or agencies supporting adult/child mentoring



*Island County needs to increase the number of parenting education and support options available to new parents and to parents in families that are “at risk” throughout Island County.*

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# Child Care as a Community Concern

Every day, millions of our young children leave home to spend part or most of their day in some type of child care setting. Children participate in child care in a variety of settings, such as child care centers, family child care homes, or in-home care, at various hours of the day.

Due to economic and social forces that have transformed work and gender roles in our society, traditional methods of care are breaking down, creating challenges for families, children, and the economy. We need to reframe the issue, encouraging broader social responsibility for caring for our community's children.

There are two important arguments for taking a more active community role:

- *The quality of care affects children's development and readiness to learn.*
- *Child care provides the social infrastructure that enables parents to work.*

Young children need stable care providers and high quality early learning opportunities. The best way to achieve this is to make high quality care available and affordable.

According to the families responding to the Island County Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System Survey (BRFSS), conducted in 2000:

- Almost half (45%) reported having few, one or no choices for childcare
- 16.2% of children are being cared for by relatives (compared to .9% in Washington State)

*In just 20 years, the percentage of children enrolled in child care has soared from 30 percent (1970) to 70 percent (1993).*

*By the year 2000, 75 percent of families with children less than 5 years of age were employed and in need of child care.*



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- 6% report that their provider is doing a poor/very poor job responding to their child’s emotional needs (compared to 1.7% in Washington State)
  - Safety of the childcare setting was rated as poor/very poor by 6% of the respondents (compared to 1.7% in Washington State)
  - Cleanliness of the childcare setting was rated as poor/very poor by 6.8% of families (compared to .9% in Washington State)

## Current Situation

Caring for children has traditionally been viewed as parents’ private, individual responsibility. The cost and quality of child care, preschool and other early learning programs is limited by the amount parents can afford to pay.

This system is no longer adequate to meet the needs of children and families. Relying solely on private sectors, the system of paid care is grossly underfunded. This results in low wages being paid to child care providers. Low wages cause high turnover rates, undermine the quality of care, and increase hiring and training costs.

- The average salary for child care providers in Island County is \$8.00/hr.
- The turnover rate for providers in child care centers is 31% (versus 6.6% per year for public school teachers)

At the same time, many middle class and low-income families can hardly afford even the current rates.

- The average annual cost for full-time child care in Island County is \$5,504, and is the sixth highest in the state.



*Young children need stable care providers and high quality early learning opportunities.*

*The best way to achieve this is to make high quality care available and affordable.*

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- The annual child care burden (% of a single parent's after tax income) in Island County is 27.8% and is the highest in the state. (State average = 19.1%.)

An almost entirely private system of funding for care has had severe economic consequences for both families and businesses.

- Employees with inadequate child care are more likely to be late for work, absent, or distracted on the job.
- High rates of turnover, absenteeism, and low productivity cost employers money.

*We need a new ethic of care as a community responsibility.*



## A New Ethic of Care

Investing in child care produces bottom-line benefits and will also help ensure that more children enter school ready to learn so they can achieve the education and skills they will need for the jobs of the future.

Early learning, kindergarten through high school, and higher education are all lifetime investments in future citizens. ***Higher education receives both public and private investments, but the bulk of the cost of child care (early learning) is borne by families.***

We need a new ethic of care as a community responsibility. The public sector can take an active role by supporting a more comprehensive care system and the private sector can help by facilitating child care options and by restructuring paid work so that parents can balance the needs of their families and jobs.

# Acknowledgments

## Island County Community Health Advisory Board (CHAB), Early Childhood Health Action Team:

- ◆ Robin Hertlein
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- ◆ Mike Shelton, Commissioner
- ◆ William Byrd, Commissioner
- ◆ Mac McDowell, Commissioner
- ◆ Barbara Saugen, Whidbey General Hospital Commissioner
- ◆ Patty Cohen, Mayor of Oak Harbor
- ◆ Captain Susan Herrold, NC, USN, Commanding Officer, Naval Hospital Oak Harbor

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