

PROFESSIONAL FAMILY CHILD CARE ALLIANCE OF GEORGIA



MEETING THE NEED FOR FAMILY CHILD CARE IN METROPOLITAN ATLANTA: A BLUEPRINT FOR ACTION

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Approved. PFCCAG Board 9-18-21

Purpose. The purpose of this *Blueprint for Action* is to document the important role Family Child Care (FCC) plays meeting child care needs, explain why the number of homes is declining, describe barriers and challenges to reversing this decline, and propose a bold plan to increase the number of FCC homes in metropolitan Atlanta by 2024.

Hard Reality. In the last 10 years, the number Family Child Care (FCC) providers opening in Georgia has not kept pace with the number of FCC homes closing, let alone increasing. **In fact, the number FCCLH homes declined from 5265 in 2010 to only 1333 in 2020**¹. This contrasts with the dramatic and significant growth in FCC homes in the 70s through the 90s. The Professional Family Child Care Alliance of Georgia (PFCCAG) believes it is difficult and expensive to obtain a license and there is little or no coordinated sustained strategy to promote FCC as a career or assist applicants become licensed. The time to reverse the decline is now!

This *Blueprint* describes the community and corporate support process which led to so many FCC homes opening in the 70s thru 90s, identifies factors which led to a decline continuing to this day, presents a detailed description of the challenges and barriers making it difficult to open a FCC home, reviews what other communities have done to increase the number of homes, and describes a plan to start 130 FCC homes in metropolitan Atlanta by 2024.

Definition. In Georgia, Family Child Care (FCC) is generally defined as licensed care for pay of six or fewer children by one provider in a private home. Bright from the Start: Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL) licenses FCC homes. DECAL uses the term “Family Child Care Learning Home (FCCLH)” and defines this business as “a program that operates in a private residential home for less than 24 hours per day. It provides care for three children, but no more than six, under the age of 18 for pay”². In

this publication, the terms “Family Child Care Learning Home and Family Child Care and the acronyms “FCCLH” and “FCC” are used interchangeably

The decline of FCCLH homes is a **canary in the coal mine**, signifying a critical weakness in the child care availability, affordability, quality, and delivery systems in Georgia. The continued decline in FCC homes will result in:

- A lack of parental choice that fits a family’s culture, language, backgrounds, and values which is especially needed to support Atlanta’s increasingly diverse communities.
- An increase in child care deserts, especially for rural communities where FCC may be the only option.
- Hardships on families who need non-traditional care such as night and /or weekend care.
- A dramatic decrease in the availability of care for infants and toddlers.
- States not meeting federal requirements to permit parents to choose from a variety of child care categories ², and
- An increase in the number of children in unlicensed care which can avoid health and safety requirements placed on licensed care

A Beginning Step. In September 2020, PFCCAG received funding from United Way of Greater Atlanta (UWGA) / Joseph B Whitehead Foundation to take the first step toward reversing the decline of FCCLH homes in the 13 UWGA counties*. This step involved establishing the **Explore-FCC** Project to provide one-on-one coaching for up to 20 Individuals exploring FCC as a career. Simultaneous with that step, PFCCAG was asked to create a *Blueprint for Action* to reverse the decline by developing a plan that “is comprehensive, inclusive, welcoming, and supportive”.

Family Child Care in Metropolitan Atlanta. While the number of FCC homes in the United Way of Greater Atlanta (UWGA area did not decline from 2010 to 2020, it also did not keep pace with the increase in population as FCC homes increased slightly based on data provided by DECAL. However, the increase is not proportionate to the population change in Atlanta during the last 10 years. The Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC) kept track of 10 of the 13 UWGA counties (ARC does not count Butts, Coweta, Paulding). In the 10 counties, there are currently 4.7 million people, and growth from 2010 to 2020 added 585,000 new residents.³

Scarcity in Neighborhoods with “Very Low” or “Low” Child Well Being (CWB) Scores. United Way of Metropolitan Atlanta uses a “Child Well Being” scoring process as the way to put children on an equitable path to fulfilling their potential. Of the 12 zip codes scoring “Very Low,” there were only 30 FCCLH homes, including 3 with no

FCCLH homes. Yet these 12 zip codes included over 92,000 children and represented a percent of children in poverty between 40% to over 62%. Of the 37 zip codes scoring “Low,” there were only 261 FCCLH homes, including 7 with no FCCLH homes. Yet these 37 zip codes included over 290,000 children and a percent of children in poverty between 19% to over 69%.⁴

Barriers and Challenges. Barriers and challenges exist, which make it difficult and sometimes impossible to open an FCC home in metropolitan Atlanta. Given the issues involved, it is a welcome surprise when a new FCC home opens, especially when the provider masters the challenges with little or no help from the community.

Licensing Requirements. There are barriers inherent in the licensing process. PFCCAG estimates that 90% of the time and 95% of the money an applicant spends preparing to open is spent on reading/understanding requirements, securing required supplies and equipment, making minor/major home repairs, attending required trainings, acquiring the required credential-degree, developing policies, forms, and records, obtaining local government approvals, and, arranging the child care space--all of which are addressed in licensing requirements. And this is done in preparation for the all-important Initial Licensing Visit which ultimately decides whether an applicant can or cannot open.

DECAL is legally charged with safeguarding the health, safety, and developmental well-being of children in licensed care. Given the level of evidence-based research about these issues and tragic consequences when requirements are ignored or overlooked, licensing standards must be detailed and the licensing process thorough. And while DECAL offers several mechanisms to help applicants through the licensing process, the process can be confusing, and applicants benefit when a coach is available to explain requirements and offer suggestions for how to comply.

Local Government Approval Maze. Requirements for local government approval of an FCC home (zoning, business permit, fire inspection) are included in DECAL requirements but are established, and administered separately by the 159 counties and 535 cities in GA. These jurisdictions can and often do layer their own set of regulations and requirements on top of those established by DECAL. At least 2 cities prohibit FCC outright, several others prohibit FCC in Multifamily Residential Districts (where apartment complexes and attached houses are located), and others place conditions for approval that contradict or exceed DECAL licensing requirements. This means dreams are denied and dreams derailed by a confusing, inconsistent, and often costly set of local laws and procedures. PFCCAG and other partners work to help applicants through the local requirement maze. This support work is critical to needs to expand.

Other Challenges. *Blueprint for Action* describes other local barriers, including landlord and homeowner association resistance, the difficulty and cost involved in making minor or major repairs to comply with licensing, and the substantial cost of start-up in general. The *Blueprint* shines a particular spotlight on equity issues concerning

racial, cultural, and language diversity of existing providers, and equity issues to be addressed when ensuring FCC is available to underserved populations and neighborhoods and recognizes the previous initiatives by CDF-Action in central DeKalb and Gwinnett to serve refugee and Spanish speaking providers.

Lessons Learned from Other Communities. Even with the many barriers and challenges identified, the *Blueprint* documents how other communities and programs turn the corner and increase the number of FCC homes. Starting first with a discussion of start-up cost issues, the *Blueprint* describes how projects offer help with start-up costs. This information is followed by detailed descriptions of 4 programs (General program characteristics, common services offered, unique characteristics or accomplishments, and organizational sponsorship and funding). The 4 programs are: California Child Care Resource and Referral Network (CCCR&RN) Child Care Initiative Project (CCIP), US Army Child, Youth, and School Services (CYSS) Family Child Care System, All Our Kin (AOK) Family Child Care Network, and Montgomery County MD, Department of Health and Human Services Early Childhood Services (DHHS-ECS) Growing Family Child Care Opportunities. Finally, **Explore-FCC's** first year's accomplishments are described as well as the potential to partner with the parallel work of Quality Care for Children's recently established Staffed Family Child Care Network (SFCCN).

Explore-FCC 2020-2024. The final chapter of *Blueprint for Action* addresses head-on the question of how metropolitan Atlanta can meet the need for FCC homes. The *Blueprint* proposes three goals to be achieved by 2024. They are

Goal One: *Increase the number of Family Child Care Learning Homes (FCCLH) by 130 homes in Atlanta in target neighborhoods and metro-wide by 2024.*

Goal Two: *Strengthen and expand the coaching and technical assistance services offered by the **Explore-FCC** project aimed at a continuum from welcoming individuals interested in becoming licensed FCCLH providers to supporting them becoming sustainable businesses, operating at a high level of quality, and part of an ongoing community support process.*

Goal Three: *Strengthen PFCCAG's capacity to administer and evaluate the **Explore-FCC** Project.*

Strategy and Objectives. The chapter presents a strategy consisting of 19 objectives and a series of comments explaining how each objective will be addressed. Objectives address meeting the timetable for achievement, targeting specific CWB neighborhoods, providing substantial help with start-up costs, refining the coaching and technical assistance process, developing innovative ways to help applicants obtain training including a credential-degree, expanding partnerships with key professional and community organizations, defining a post-opening strategy, continuing to research start-up models in other communities, strengthening PFCCAG's management and board capacities and conducting a thorough evaluation of the project.

Cost. PFCCAG developed a working budget for the three year Explore-FCC project of from \$1.1 to \$1.2 M. This includes \$436K in direct financial assistance to the 130 providers receiving a license. The assistance consists of Health and Safety Start-Up Kits, partial reimbursement of supply and equipment costs, assistance with minor repair and renovation costs, and other direct support.

Staffing for the project includes 3 full time positions, Project Director, FCC Coach, Administrative Assistant, and significant part time support from the PFCCAG Executive Director, Senior Coach, and Accountant. Consultant help is included for interpreter/translation and evaluation. The budget is available upon request. Address inquiries to info@pfccag.org.

*UWGA 13 Counties are Butts, Cherokee, Clayton, Cobb, Coweta, DeKalb, Douglas, Fayette, Fulton, Gwinnett, Henry, Paulding, and Rockdale.

FOOTNOTES

¹ DECAL Open Records Requests 5-28-19 & 3-11-21

² DECAL *Rules and Regulations Family Child Care Learning Homes Chapter 290-2-3* October 1, 2019290-2-3-.03 Definitions (k).

³ Adapted from: Donna Fowler, *Family Child Care Involvement In Prekindergarten Expansion: Legislative Report*, The Family Child Care Alliance of Maryland, September 2020

⁴ Atlanta Regional Commission website, *Atlanta Region Population Estimates*, accessed 5-20-21.

⁵ United Way of Greater Atlanta website, *Child Well Being Map*, accessed 3-4-21.