

employer toolkit

Implementing work/life programs

Resource & referral and other family support services

Resource and referral services: working solutions

Kimberly is a working mom. Her two-year-old son, Ethan has been watched by his grandmother since he was six months old. For health reasons, his grandmother could no longer handle the responsibility of caring for the little boy and Ethan was without a caregiver. Kimberly was at her wit's end, desperately trying to find care as quickly as possible for her son.

Explaining her dilemma to co-workers, Kimberly quickly found out about LOCATE: Child Care, a statewide, computerized resource and referral service available through her employer. Kimberly contacted LOCATE: Child Care, spoke with a counselor specially trained to help parents in finding appropriate child care, and soon had the names of four providers who met her criteria, and had vacancies for Ethan. Kimberly called these caregivers, arranged for interviews, checked references, and found one of these providers was perfect to take care of her son.

Child care resource and referral

When a parent calls, a counselor will discuss the parent's child care concerns and preferences. The counselor will conduct a database search, matching the needs of the parent and child with the services available. The parent will be given the names, locations, telephone numbers, and additional information about child care providers or programs which are identified on the basis of the needs the parent presents. The parent can also be sent profiles of each referral and a packet with materials offering guidance on what to look for in a child care arrangement and other child development issues.

Whether it's changing diapers, getting out of the house and to work on time, caring for sick children, or worrying about what children are doing after school or during vacation, balancing work and other family responsibilities can often make parenthood more a chore than a joy.

More workers than ever before are juggling the responsibilities of work and family. More than 65 percent of workers are either single parents or members of dual income families with young children. With trouble at home, professional responsibilities frequently suffer.

Though the responsibility for selecting and employing a child care provider rests with each parent, child care resource and referral services help with information and resources and will work with the parent until he or she is able to identify a suitable child care arrangement for the family and child.

Community line LOCATE services are available in all parts of the state:

Allegany	800-924-9188
Anne Arundel	410-269-4465 or 4464
Baltimore City	410-539-2209
Baltimore County	410-288-5600
Calvert	888-648-4919
Caroline	410-822-5400
Carroll	410-751-2953 or 877-230-7422
Cecil	410-297-6592 or 888-297-1885
Charles	888-648-4919
Dorchester	410-822-5400
Frederick	301-695-4508
Garrett	800-924-9188
Harford	410-297-6592 or 888-297-1885
Howard	410-313-1930
Kent	410-822-5400
Montgomery	301-279-1773
Prince George's	301-772-8400
Queen Anne's	410-822-5400
Somerset	410-334-6101 or 887-310-8805
St. Mary's	301-373-6105
Talbot	410-822-5400
Washington	301-733-6914
Wicomico	410-334-6101 or 887-310-8805
Worcester	887-310-8805

Less stressed working parents mean more productive working parents. Resource and referral (R&R) programs, such as LOCATE: Child Care, can serve as a clearinghouse for all types of dependent care options, matching families with caregivers who meet legal requirements for health, safety, program, and staff qualifications. Such resource and referral services not only include child care, but also can help families look at options for elder care. Employers can select between general community line services or more specialized corporate subscriptions that can be tailored to the needs and hours of their workers.

Elder care referral services

Resource and referral services for employees can be a very accessible, low cost way for employers to begin to address the varied elder care needs of workers, in addition to other work/life situations.

Elder care resource and referral works in the same way. The caller speaks with a counselor to identify needs. Options are discussed and suitable situations are determined for the caller. As with the child care R&R, the counselor will work with the caller until they are able to identify a suitable elder care arrangement for the family.

Other referral services

Additionally, many resource and referral agencies have databases on a variety of community services and resources beyond child and elder care. Maryland Committee for Children has developed the LOCATE: Community Resources Database, which has information on over 4,000 human services programs in the state for family use. This database is available to employers on a contractual basis.

Employers and resource and referral: partnerships that work

Employers who understand the challenges of work and home are able to provide solutions to employees through resource and referral, and by this, strengthen their employee support system. As part of its comprehensive work and family program, Baltimore Gas and Electric (BGE) offers an array of flexible benefits, flexible scheduling, and resource and referral services, including free referral services for finding quality child care and quality care for an aging relative. BGE has a diverse workforce in many locations throughout the state, making a resource and referral service an excellent resource for the company. Similarly, Marriott's Workforce Effectiveness Department has supported Marriott associates nationwide through resource and referral services in order to help employees meet the dual responsibilities of work and home.

This solution is not just for large, multi-site companies. Johns Hopkins' Applied Physical Laboratory (APL), with its relatively small workforce looks to resource and referral services to find solutions to its employees' needs.

Benefits of resource and referral

- Low start up and maintenance costs
- Works for any size organization
- Can be used as recruitment tool
- Recognized as a retention tool
- Reduces absenteeism costs associated with employees' search for appropriate dependent care services
- Minimal liability to organization
- Maximizes the use of existing community resources and the organization's recognition in the community.

Considerations for resource and referral

- Employers must consider ongoing promotion of the service to workforce
- In some areas, supply of dependent care options may be limited

In Maryland, a unique public-private partnership called the Maryland Child Care Resource Network, provides resource and referral services to all areas of the state. Regional resource and referral centers can address the unique needs of each community. At the same time, these regional centers are part of a statewide R&R system, so that organizations operating in multiple sites throughout the states receive consistent and comprehensive services.

Family support services

A good starting point for an employer to begin a work/life strategy is to offer employees information on parenting and dependent care issues. By sponsoring such initiatives and providing materials, an employer sends a clear message that the organization is supportive of their efforts to balance the demands of work with the challenges of today's families. Such informational programs may include:

1 Information services & materials

There are a variety of ways to share relevant information with employees that can benefit their family situations. Posting or distributing materials and brochures on work/life issues helps employees with issues they are facing. Including information on parenting, child care, and elder care options in an organization's employee newsletter can not only help families, but will also send the message that the organization is concerned and interested. Sponsoring an information day or informational fair, where community programs can display and discuss the services available for employees, and where employees can find the resources they need, are other ways to show organizational concern.

2 Family resource library

Parents frequently aren't aware of the information that can help with their particular family situations. As a convenience to its workforce, an organization may want to set up a resource library, consisting of a bookshelf in a corner or an entire resource library with books, audio and video tapes. Providing a computer with Internet access, and an updated listing of suggested sites for family issues is another low cost way to give employees access to the information they need.

3 Workplace seminars

Companies can arrange for specific work/life seminars at the workplace. Workshops are typically delivered by the Child Care Resource Centers, but can also be conducted by a local two or four year college, private trainer, consultant, or local community service. A simple needs assessment can determine the interest in this type of activity and the topics of interest to your employees. Topics currently offered through the Maryland Child Care Resource Network include: Preparing for Pregnancy and Parenting; Choosing Child Care; Communicating With Your Child; Dealing with Awkward Ages; Help with Homework Hassles; and many more. Topics can also cover areas such as drug/substance abuse, career options, overviews of the organization's employee programs and benefits, and so on.

4 Support Groups

An employer can respond to employee issues by facilitating informal gatherings of employees (at lunch or before or after work) to discuss common issues such as parenting concerns or the concerns associated with caring for an elder relative or a terminally ill family member. By providing space, support, and publicity, the company shows that it is concerned with issues beyond the worksite.

Many organizations find the family support service route is an easy and clear way to assist employees in issues that they face outside of the worksite. Companies that have set up services such as employee lunchtime seminars include the Johns Hopkins' University Applied Physics Laboratory, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Central Maryland, Marriott, and Baltimore Gas and Electric (BGE).

Benefits of family support services

- Address a broad range of family needs
- Provide employees with resources to solve their own family problems
- High public relations value
- Can build employee morale
- Can be started quickly
- Low start up and ongoing administrative costs

Considerations for family support services

- Employer needs to constantly promote the service
- Best initiated in conjunction with task force and /or needs assessment
- Does not address availability or affordability of dependent care

Resource and referral services and other family support services are initial steps that organizations can take to address the complicated problems that employees and their families face in today's society. These options are low in cost, involve minimal liability, and are responsive to a number of family situations.

