

CHILDCARE SERVICES PROVIDED FOR MID-SIZE LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES
WILL IMPACT EMPLOYEE RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION BY 2007

Article

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“Employers who offer childcare attract more highly qualified applicants, greater loyalty and less absenteeism. Clearly, we all have a stake in increasing the supply of quality childcare for working families (Kohl, 2002).” U.S. Senator Herb Kohl is right. Childcare is a real concern for parents in our society. This is especially true where both parents in a family work due to the need or desire to bring in more income to sustain an acceptable standard of living. The childcare issue is also becoming an increasing concern for law enforcement agencies. With earlier retirements, more female employees in the profession, and increasing numbers of younger officers comes greater competition among law enforcement agencies. New law enforcement employees in the twenty-first century are generally less career-minded and more concerned with family and personal needs. This creates a recruitment and retention issue for law enforcement agencies. Add to that the concern for the safety and security of our children and it is obvious that something must be done to assist working law enforcement families with their childcare arrangements. This article analyzes the current situation with childcare and reviews some possible trends and events of the future.

As law enforcement agencies compete with each other over recruitment and retention of employees, the fulfillment of individual family and childcare needs is often overlooked. Twenty-first century employees, especially those with children, are in a constant struggle between meeting the needs of the employer and taking care of their own family. The complications and frustrations of finding adequate childcare for law enforcement employees is even more troubling when you factor in the nature of odd and/or rotating work hours, emergency

call back responsibilities, collateral assignments, court appearances, and the unpredictable nature of police work.

HISTORY

Childcare has been a concern of families throughout history. In much of the twentieth century, the traditional family consisted of one parent working, usually the father, and the other staying at home to care for the children. This began to change during the past thirty to forty years as both parents needed to work to sustain the family. In law enforcement, the number of working mothers in the profession has increased dramatically since the 1970s. This further complicates the childcare issue because of the stresses and strains of working odd and unpredictable hours. The issue of finding adequate 24-hour-a-day, seven-day-a-week childcare is becoming a serious concern in the law enforcement profession.

According to the 2000 U.S. Census (US Census Bureau, State and County Quick Facts, 2002), 39.7% of all California households have persons under the age of eighteen. Seven point three percent of all persons in California are under five years of age. This is a significant number of children, many who are in need of childcare services. As stated in the California Budget Project Report, *Lasting Returns: Strengthening California's Childcare and Development System* (May, 2001), "California's preschool-age population (0-4) has increased by an estimated 71 percent since 1970. The Department of Finance (DoF) projects an additional 12 percent increase—to 3.1 million children—by 2010." It also points out that "only a small portion of licensed childcare programs are available to parents who work outside the traditional work day." Law enforcement is anything but traditional in its work schedules. Finally, the report states "nearly two-thirds of California families with preschool-age children rely on non-parental childcare arrangements." These findings, in conjunction with more working mothers and an

increasing number of single parent officers, suggest that childcare services for law enforcement employees are in great need.

A review of the Society for Human Relations Management (SHRM) web site shows many articles and publications in support of childcare facilities and arrangements for employees. One publication titled *Achieving Work-Life Balance for Employees and their Employers* (Digh, 2002, April, p. 501) states “The Families and Work Institute’s Business Work-Life Study (BWLS) and National Study of the Changing Workforce (NSCW) found that employees with more supportive workplaces as well as better quality jobs are more likely than other workers to have:

- Higher levels of job satisfaction;
- More commitment to their companies’ success;
- Greater loyalty to their companies, and
- A stronger intention to remain with their companies.”

“Not surprisingly, the study also found that employees with more demanding jobs and less supportive workplaces experience:

- More stress;
- Poorer coping;
- Worse moods; and
- Less energy off the job-all of which jeopardize their personal and family well-being.

Additionally, they found that when employees personal and family well being is compromised by work, employees experience more negative spillover from home to work, which diminishes job performance.”

The Challenge: Law Enforcement and Childcare Concerns

The typical law enforcement employee joining the profession today views their time at the agency as a job instead of a career. Generally, these employees are more into themselves, and subsequently their family. This attitude is not bad, just different from those who have joined the profession in years past. As a result, employees will be looking to employers to provide more benefits that help them at home as well as at work. This includes quality childcare available at any time of the day or night. According to the publication of *An Overview of Early Education and Childcare in California* (2001, p. 1) good-quality childcare services are difficult to find. There is also a shortage of childcare teachers for after school programs. Add to this the fact government-funded childcare services are usually only designated for low-income families and the future of childcare for law enforcement employees is uncertain.

A review of the literature and history of childcare suggests that law enforcement can do much more to prepare for the needs of its employees. Law enforcement, just like society as a whole, has more working parents and few qualified childcare centers for its workers. As the demand for law enforcement professionals increases and early retirements take effect, leaders of police agencies will need to become more proactive and creative in enticing quality candidates to their agencies. A look into the future for trends and events in the childcare field is a logical step in the right direction.

METHODOLOGY

Trends and Events

In order to forecast the probable future of law enforcement childcare, it is necessary to brainstorm possible trends and events that could impact it. A trend is defined as a series of incidents or events taking place that seem to indicate a direction in which a particular issue may

be heading. It is based upon the past, present, and future and can be qualitative or quantitative. An event is defined as a single occurrence with a specific date and time. Examples of some more likely trends with childcare are the availability of qualified providers, the cost of childcare, and the number of extended (after hour) childcare facilities. Examples of some of the possible events that could effect childcare are a terrorist attack on a government childcare facility, loss of political support of tax dollars for childcare, or a law enforcement agency announces agency sponsored childcare for its employees in recruitment announcements.

Once trends and events are identified, a cross impact analysis is necessary to compare the impact of events on the trends. This analysis involves making a determination that if the event occurred, what would be the impact on the trend.

The process of brainstorming trends and events, and comparing their possible effects on each other, allows law enforcement leaders to adequately plan for the future. This planning not only avoids possible pitfalls, but also helps to improve their employee's job performance and morale while providing a better service to the community.

Strategic Planning

Strategic planning, as defined by Tom Esensten of Organizational Effectiveness Consulting, is "a structured approach, sometimes rational and other times not, of bringing anticipations of the future to bear on today's decisions" (2002). The strategic planning process involves defining the future of an issue and its impact on the organization. A thorough strategic planning process includes: An external analysis; an internal analysis; identification of strengths, weaknesses, threats, and opportunities; stakeholder identification; and direction setting. It concludes with an implementation plan and some type of follow up or periodic evaluation.

The internal analysis is one of the most important strategic planning tools. It means looking inside the culture and operations of the organization to determine the current status of the situation. In order to fully understand the needs and commitment of law enforcement employees with the childcare issue, it is necessary to look into their thoughts and feelings. The Modesto Police Department was selected to survey for a snapshot view of childcare needs within a medium-size law enforcement agency.

The Modesto Police Department is a medium-size municipal law enforcement agency located in the Central Valley of California. At the time of this survey in the spring of 2002 the department had 355 total full time personnel. Of this total, 251 were full time sworn personnel and 104 were full time civilian personnel. According to a City of Modesto Police Department Equal Employment Opportunity Plan (2001), 26.9% of all full time police employees are female.

To accomplish the survey, a form was developed listing ten questions related to employee family make-up and their childcare arrangements. The first four questions were related to the employee's opinion if childcare facilities would have an effect on recruitment and retention, and if facilities were available, would the employee consider using them. The remaining six questions addressed the individual employee's family situation regarding if they had children, were they planning to have children, the ages of their children, pay for childcare, and marital status. The surveys were anonymous and employees were given a few minutes in roll call or unit briefings to complete the one page survey form. One hundred eighty two out of the 355 total surveys passed out to all of the department's full time employees were returned by the deadline. This was a 51% return rate. Total numbers and percentages were taken from the forms as part of the internal analysis. There were slight differences in the totals as not all employees answered every question on the form. Therefore, the total number of respondents for specific questions

ranged from 180 to 182 of the 355 total surveys that were sent out. The questions and resulting answers are identified below with total numbers and percentages. The percentages were rounded off to the next highest or lowest number above or below .5 percent.

Employee Survey

Demographics:

According to responses, current ages of employee's children were:

0-5: 57 (40%)

6-12: 55 (39%)

13-15: 30 (21%)

Childcare services/current cost to employees were as follows:

\$0-\$100: 30 (35%)

\$101-\$200: 10 (12%)

\$201-\$300: 10 (12%)

\$301-\$400: 14 (16%)

\$401 and up: 21 (25%)

The primary methods of current childcare were:

Spouse: 40 (31%)

Relatives: 34 (27%)

Childcare facility: 27 (21%)

Private home care: 27 (21%)

Responders to the survey were:

Single with full custody: 9 (6%)

Single with shared custody: 6 (4%)

Single with no children: 24 (15%)

Married with blended family: 17 (11%)

Married with children: 87 (56%)

Married with no children: 13 (8%)

182 responses (51% of 355 total full time police employees)

1. Do you see a need for an employer sponsored childcare center for Modesto Police employees?

Yes – 131 (72%) No – 50 (28%)

2. If the Department had a childcare center - open 24/7 - would you use it?

Yes – 90 (50%) No – 91 (50%)

3. If the Department provided a childcare center for its employees (fully or partially funded) do you feel this would have an affect on your decision to apply for employment (if you were not already employed) at this Department?

Yes– 120 (67%) No – 60 (33%)

4. If the Department provided a childcare center for its employees, would it have any impact on a decision you might have to seek employment elsewhere or otherwise leave this Department?

Yes – 63 (35%) No – 117 (65%)

5. Do you have children who would need childcare services?

Yes – 75 (41%) No – 107 (59%)

6. Do you plan on having children in the next five years who would need childcare services?

Yes – 40 (32%) No – 142 (78%)

An analysis of the survey indicates that 72% of the respondents felt there is a need for employer sponsored childcare in the police department, however there was a 50% split as to

whether they would use it. Two-thirds (67%) of the respondents said having a childcare facility for employees would have an impact on their decision to apply for employment at the agency, however only one-third (33%) said it would affect their decision to remain there. Only 41% of respondents said they currently had children who need childcare services now and 22% said they planned on having children that would need these services in the next five years. A total of 79% of the respondents had children between the ages of 0 to 12, which are the most likely ages of children in need of childcare. Regarding employee costs for childcare, 35% reported they pay \$100.00 or less a month. Only 25% of the respondents reported paying more than \$400.00 per month for childcare. Twenty one percent of the respondents indicated that they currently use a formal childcare facility. Another 21% reported they use a private home for childcare, which could also be a licensed childcare operation. The remaining 58% reported that their spouse or relatives cared for their children while they were at work. A total of 10% of the respondents were single and had full or shared custody of their children. Fifteen percent were single with no children. Fifty six percent of the respondents were married with children, while only 8% were married without children.

The survey results show that 24-hour-a-day, seven-day-a-week childcare is absolutely needed in medium-size law enforcement agencies.

THE PLANNING PROCESS

Strategies

In order to plan for childcare facilities for law enforcement agencies it is critical to determine strategies for implementation and then finalizing the set direction. Setting a direction starts with identifying alternative strategies before settling on a final path to take. After analyzing all of the alternative strategies, the law enforcement leader must set the direction.

Leaders set the direction by doing research, brainstorming ideas, receiving input and formulating a plan in writing.

The strategy that seems to make the most sense, and has the greatest likelihood of success, is the one of a shared partnership between the employee and the employer. Staffing, licensing, funding, and other requirements would be formulated after a thorough needs assessment. Square footage and employee/employer costs would be determined by the extent of participation and identified need. Since most law enforcement agencies do not have room at their existing police facilities, an easily accessible location, preferably within walking distance of the department, would be necessary. Expansion or relocation would be dependent upon increases in need or expansion for use by other law enforcement or government agencies after a cost-benefit analysis is conducted.

Implementation Plan

The implementation plan begins with bringing together a cross section of the department to ensure there is representation from every unit and rank of the organization. Other stakeholders, such as employee association representatives, childcare professionals, and licensing experts should also be involved early on in the process. After introducing the idea and explaining the vision, a needs assessment would be conducted. This would include an analysis of the needs of the employees, estimates of numbers of children and employees that would be interested in participating, and an evaluation of available childcare in the community. A focus group or nominal group technique exercise should be conducted to identify possible future trends and events that could impact childcare facilities for law enforcement agency employees. After the initial needs assessment, a more thorough environmental assessment, followed by an internal assessment, would need to be conducted to ensure a thorough analysis has been conducted. A

direction is then recommended by the committee to begin designing the implementation plan. The implementation plan involves identifying and designing the tasks, structure, people, and processes necessary to achieve the desired result. A periodic evaluation of the plan will be necessary to see if there are any design or organizational culture changes necessary. This can be monitored through an analysis of the culture, in conjunction with looking at outputs and outcomes. The implementation plan cannot start, however, without a smooth transition management plan.

Organizational Assessment

Any change within an organization causes anxiety among its employees. To facilitate change, it is important to first understand the culture of the organization. Today's police organizations are going through significant change. In general, today's law enforcement professional cares more about family and their time off than living totally for the profession. Therefore, much more time and effort is needed to explain what the change is all about and involve employees from throughout the organization in the process.

Financial Considerations

Many parents already pay monthly childcare fees with private childcare in the community. The opportunity of sharing those costs with the employer or employee organizations makes the personal financial concerns less stressful and possibly less costly than private childcare centers. Additionally, California and the federal government have funding available to all 58 counties through its childcare development planning councils, although most of that money is geared to low-income families.

KEY FINDINGS

There are a few key findings, if not surprises, that came out of the research and work involved in this project. The current state of childcare is worse than one might think. There are not enough private childcare facilities and very few have after hours, 24-hour-a-day, seven-day-a-week operations. Few, if any, have facilities or special arrangements to care for mildly ill children. Childcare staff is generally underpaid and retention in that field is difficult as employees frequently leave for higher paying jobs.

Government funding for childcare is mostly limited to low-income families or those on welfare to work programs. Middle-income families, where most of law enforcement employees fall, have little or no financial assistance. A 25% federal tax credit and funding of \$150,000 per year for employers to assist employees with childcare facilities was only implemented in 2001 and it is not well known by employers or their employees.

An internal assessment of a medium-size California municipal law enforcement agency revealed interesting survey results. Almost three-quarters of the respondents saw a need for an employer sponsored childcare center. Half of them said they would use it. Two-thirds said it would affect their decision to go to work at that agency, if they were not yet employed there, however only a little over one-third said it would affect any decision to leave the agency. Almost two-thirds either have children that need such services now or plan on having children in the next five years that would need the services. Based upon the number of respondents who returned surveys, it appears that there is a strong need for childcare services for law enforcement employees and it would have a significant impact on recruitment for that agency.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Conduct a needs assessment of all sworn and civilian employees of the agency.
- Determine the exact number of employees who would participate in a childcare facility partnership with the employing law enforcement agency.
- Identify other stakeholders, such as employee associations, government officials, and subject matter experts in the local community to solicit their ideas and involvement.
- Brainstorm and research potential local, state, and federal funding sources.
- Research childcare licensing and staffing requirements.
- Investigate potential zoning and spacing requirements.
- Look for existing facilities within a few blocks of the law enforcement agency.
- Prepare an implementation and evaluation plan.

IMPLICATIONS

Law enforcement leaders have a golden opportunity to improve employee morale and performance of existing employees. With early retirements and a younger and more demanding workforce, agencies can become more competitive and attractive to law enforcement applicants. Employees will be less stressed and more willing to do the job, especially during disasters or times of crisis, if families know their children are nearby and well cared for. Employees who perceive employers as caring about their families will be more committed to the organization and less likely to leave for another agency or profession. Progressive law enforcement leaders will begin the process of implementing 24-hour-a-day, 7-day-a-week childcare facilities for its employees.

Providing around the clock childcare services exclusively for law enforcement employees is absolutely possible. Although most law enforcement agencies do not have space in their

current facilities for such an operation, the ideal situation may be to find a facility within a block or two of the police station. Employees would take less time off from work to care for their children and could visit them on breaks. For those employees who have to stay after work for reports or a late call, or get summoned to court or called out for an emergency or collateral duty response, the 24-hour-a-day, seven-day-a-week operation near the work place is ideal. No longer will employees worry about picking up their children before the private childcare facility closes. No longer will the employee have to pay a premium for after hours care. If the employer/employee childcare facility can provide care for mildly ill children, the employee will no longer have to call in sick or take personal time to care for them at home. Employers will see more satisfied and productive employees, who will provide a better service to the community. Childcare services for mid-size law enforcement agencies will have a positive impact on employee recruitment and retention in the future.

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