

HISTORY OF THE WASHINGTON STATE FAMILY CHILD CARE ASSOCIATION

1975-2008

By Linda Brehmer

It is important to recognize and acknowledge that this association is an all volunteer organization of family child care providers dedicated to families and children. Many family child care provider members of this association commit long hours of volunteer time to maintaining this vital organization. You will see in this amazing history of our association, the dedication and commitment of time and energy as volunteers, exactly what providers have done for their profession. The evolvment and accomplishments of our profession are recognized here in this history.

The first family child care home licensing law in the United States was enacted in Pennsylvania in 1885. It prohibited anyone from offering care to more than 2 children under three without a license issued by a mayor, justice of the peace, or magistrate. Utah and Nebraska began licensing family child care homes as a separate category in 1943 and California began in 1946. In the early 1900's nearly all states began social agencies to supervise the care of children in foster care and family homes and ultimately created a licensing system for children cared for in private homes.

There has always been an awareness and concern for child welfare and protection in the State of Washington, which prompted statutory regulations in 1937. The regulations were revised in 1967 and have become the foundation of the regulatory process ever since. By 1967 there were 1467 licensed family child care homes. As of 2006 we have 6200.

In 1970, an extraordinary session of the Washington State Legislature enacted a bill to establish the Department of Social and Health Services beginning on July 1, 1970 under title 74.15 Revised Codes of Washington.

The need for family child care providers to have support as a group prompted the first family child care association to be formed in Los Angeles County California in 1958. Our Washington State Family Child Care Association was founded in 1975.

The Washington State Family Child Care Association was originally created with the help of the Department of Health and Social Services who suggested that it would benefit providers to form an association. The association worked closely with DSHS. Membership was created through the efforts of DSHS who informed providers that the association existed. The association's newsletters were sent to all DSHS regional offices who passed the information on to new family child care providers.

The first meeting was held on May 17, 1975 to formally create the statewide Washington State Family Child Care Association. 35 providers were present. They elected their first officers, President Alto Strebe from Bellingham, Vice President Elsie Gregorich from Yakima, Secretary Karin Cagg from Olympia, and Treasurer Pam Johnson from Vancouver. The first order of business was to create annual dues. Annual dues of \$3.00 a year was voted on and passed. The board developed goals, purposes, committees, by-laws, standing rules, and worked on offering medical and liability insurances.

The WSFCCA began with only a few members from various counties all over the state. Chapters of the association are formed by volunteer providers networking together to create the chapters. Over the years most have stabilized into permanent chapters. Some chapters struggle with maintaining chapters especially in the rural areas. Throughout our history chapters play a key role within the association as they mentor providers and end the isolation that comes from

working in the home. Chapters offer members many trainings such as business tax workshops, CPR/HIV trainings, stress management ideas, and numerous educational opportunities for increasing quality in their child care programs.

The WSFCCA became incorporated as a non profit educational, charitable corporation on Oct. 12, 1976, stating their original purpose "to educate, protect and give status to the family child care PARENT through existing educational facilities, publications, meetings, and by cooperating with other organizations concerned with the development and good care of children." Original goals were also set to "work legislatively, support providers, advocate for quality child care, educate community, coordinate and create chapters, create newsletters, and set up medical and liability insurance for providers". In time, the association realized that their purpose was not to "educate, protect and give status to parents" but to the providers themselves. This does show the original intent of our association to be all about the care and protection of children by helping to educate parents with our expertise and experience.

Today the purpose of the WSFCCA is "to educate, protect and give status to family child care PROVIDERS through publications, meetings, trainings and networking". The goal of the association is to enhance and improve the quality of care provided to the children of Washington State.

In 1979 a basic child care act was proposed in the legislature with the Bureau of Children's services; they recommended instead that the DSHS department work with the child care community (i.e. associations) to examine regulations before any pilot programs were made.

In July 1979 DSHS created a Task Force with representatives in the child care community and family child care providers from this association. Together they worked on understanding the present system of licensing, looked at alternative models, defined goals and identified a system for regulating family child care, ultimately making recommendations to the advisory committee. Association members worked for 6 months on this Task Force only to have their opinions, expertise and concerns be completely ignored by the department of licensing. The WSFCCA board collectively wrote a letter of protest to the advisory committee and legislators.

This marked a wake up call for the WSFCCA that we needed to advocate for providers rights, become aware of what is happening legislatively on our behalf, and that we needed to be at the table giving input on matters that directly affect our businesses. The WSFCCA boards have followed the lead of the original board members and have continued to participate and advocate in its members best interests. As a voluntary association, each new executive board voted in has brought their own individual style, talent and skills to the association.

By September of 1979, the first WSFCCA conference was held in Bellingham, and has become a biennial event ever since. A different chapter hosts each conference and creates a team from their chapter to pull everything together. Chapters make the conference themes reflect their individual style and uniqueness to the area chosen. Guest speakers and trainings are chosen each year to reflect the needs of providers and to enhance quality family child care.

In May of 1980, as a result of our outreach to other associations, Seattle was selected as the site for the 3rd Annual Western Regional Conference of Family Child Care Providers. Outreach has always been a goal of the association, through increased membership we were able to acquire, in December 1980, a list of all licensed providers from DSHS and send out a sample newsletter once a year to all licensed providers in the State of Washington. The newsletter became a means to increase membership.

Legislators created a parents' "Bill of Rights" in June of 1984 (RCW 74.15 CR 85B) enabling

parents and providers to access the Public Disclosure Office and view provider's files. A telephone line was created for parents to receive an interpretation of the WACs as well. The association felt that providers also needed a "Bill of Rights" and worked on this idea in committee but it was never able to go before the legislature. This is an example of the difficulties that providers face as an all volunteer organization who work during the day and therefore are unavailable to advocate in the legislature.

Nevertheless, with that said, in October of 1989 - association providers were asked for the first time by DSHS to give input regarding WACS to DSHS Secretary Dick Thompson, prior to them being written. This was a major recognition of how the association had become a respected professional organization representing family child care providers at the table.

Our relationship with DSHS and legislators was not always one of working for common goals. In March of 1990 WSFCCA providers protested to their legislators regarding licensed exempt providers. Providers who cared for children from one family did not require a license and they still do not. WSFCCA licensed providers felt all children deserve minimum health and safety standards. The WSFCCA also felt that deregulating family child care was lowering the level of professionalism of family child care providers. In time, licensed exempt providers became family, friends and neighbors who care for children. The issue of no regulations for this group of providers continued to be fought by the WSFCCA.

WSFCCA providers also worked diligently in March of 1992 on the issue of zoning regulations. Providers felt that city and county zoning regulations needed to be in line with DSHS licensing regulations. Providers believed there should be no additional restrictions placed on a child care home by local government. The President of the WSFCCA helped negotiate a document called the "Floor Resolution" in the House Legislation acknowledging that this zoning problem is a statewide issue and that cities and counties statewide needed to work together along side DSHS to solve the issue. Family child care providers continued working together with legislators bringing this to each legislative session from 1992 until finally, in March of 2003, after 11 long years House Bill 1170 (The Zoning Bill) was passed in the Senate.

When the association was first formed it was very important to members that we develop health and liability insurance for our membership. Providers had access to these benefits but finding insurance that specifically catered to our needs proved difficult. Finally, in September of 1992, the WSFCCA selected Tom Taylor Insurance Brokers, Inc. as our new liability insurance company. This package was affordable and designed specifically for family child care providers. Affordable health insurance continues to be an issue. We do offer a quality Group Health Insurance package but it has its problems of affordability.

In January of 1998 the WSFCCA board of Directors applied for funding to support a project to have family child care providers become trainers in the new mandatory child care training system. The association felt that it was imperative that family child care trainers deliver trainings which reflect their first hand knowledge and experience, versus a child care specialist who has never set foot in a family child care setting.

In March of 1999, 48 Family Child Care Providers in our Cowlitz Chapter sent a letter to Legislators and DSHS outlining documentation of concerns regarding licensed exempt child care providers not having criminal background checks. They also outlined concerns about licensed providers' untimely delayed subsidy payments, lost paperwork, and non payment of overtime compensation. Due to their efforts of bringing this to the attention of the legislators a meeting was called regarding this on April 19, 1999 and a State Subsidy Committee investigation was done. It was discovered that out of 10,000 unlicensed providers:

2000 Had SS#s that were convicted felons

- 220 Were a completed match
- 18 Were child crimes
- 13 Were registered sex offenders

Through the joint efforts of the WSFCCA and Cowlitz Chapter bringing this to the attention of the committee, by the end of 1999 all licensed exempt child care providers receiving State subsidy were required by law to have a criminal background check done just as licensed providers are required. This is a prime example of the commitment family child care providers have to the health and safety of children.

Family child care providers are also committed to supporting each other. An association member from Seattle decided to publish a newsletter solely for family child care providers, calling it "Kidnections". It was a short lived publication (May 2000 - Sept. 2002) but it reflected one providers insight and courage to write about the real issues providers had. She wrote about providers not having a voice, being over regulated, and unfairly treated. Kidnections message influenced other association provider leaders to decide to speak out and reach out to each other.

Further illustrating the commitment that even retired provider members of the WSFCCA have to children and providers is the birth of APRE (Advocates for Provider Rights and Education) in January of 2002. APRE was a group of concerned providers united to help one another with licensing issues of concern. Two of the advocates began working with providers in administrative law hearings and successfully helped them with positive resolutions. APRE has now become specialists in provider rights, partners with the WSFCCA/EWFCCA/VOCAL/SEIU, gained respect of the lawyers they have helped in hearings, and administrative law judges who appreciate their expertise and professionalism.

The internet has had a huge impact on family child care providers. As more providers have been able to afford computers they find themselves sharing information and ending the isolation that this profession brings by working in our homes. The association has become more connected to chapters and other agencies via email and is able to get the message out to them very quickly. Our ability to respond to legislative issues in a timely manner has increased enormously because of internet access.

Educating providers has always been a goal of the WSFCCA. In June of 2002, the WSFCCA became an approved training organization for STARS approving 30 trainings statewide the first year. Along with Eastern Washington Family Child Care Association, we collaborated on provider issues developing trainings in Walla Walla, Colville, Spokane, Bellingham, Everett, and Tacoma. Almost all of our chapters have also gone on to become training organizations as well and provide quality STARS trainings to their area membership. This has created great access for providers to have affordable trainings.

A concern the WSFCCA has always struggled with was that legislators, agencies and the general public did not understand what family child care truly was and what providers actually did for children. So the first ever Family Child Care Survey was created in November of 2002 and sent out to all licensed family child care providers in the state. The purpose of the survey was to gather pertinent information that reflected the truth about family child care and what it looked like. The information in the survey was used at meetings to help other agencies better understand what challenges providers face.

It also became clear from the survey that providers had similar issues all across the State and that by organizing this survey it reflected the need to organize providers. So on January 14, 2003 the WSFCCA invited Service Employees International Union President, Kim Cook, to attend our January Board meeting to discuss strategies around unionizing family child care.

The WSFCCA understands that communicating, networking, and building partnerships are paramount in reaching all providers. We created our own website and began translating our newsletter and brochure into Spanish. We now have 3 Hispanic chapters in our association to date. The Hispanic provider community is eager to join providers in becoming more professional and has shown appreciation of the WSFCCA efforts to help all providers reach their goals.

Then in December of 2003, a new draft of WACS came out over the Christmas holidays with a 2 week comment period and WSFCCA membership protested loudly and got it extended. Providers commented on the web site in thousands of pages of protest comments. Hearings were also scheduled and providers attended all over the state in numbers the Division of Child Care and Early Learning had never before seen. Providers were indeed organizing together in protest because these became business regulations instead of minimum licensing requirements. DCCCEL was over-regulating providers to the point that PROVIDERS were closing their doors in large numbers rather than jump through further unreasonable hoops to stay opened. It was no longer about the health and safety of children, which the WSFCCA totally supported, it was about telling providers how to run their private businesses. Most importantly, of all these regulations were once again still open to different interpretations from one licenser to another. The reason they were rewritten in the first place was to make them clear and understandable.

On January 23, 2004 a partnership agreement was signed between the WSFCCA and Eastern Washington Family Child Care Association called VOCAL. (Voices for Childcare Advocates and Leaders) Both Associations agreed to collaborate and unite licensed family child care providers. Presidents of the associations jointly attended meetings, together wrote letters to the Governor, legislators, and the Division of Child Care and Early Learning. Together in collaboration the associations also signed a 2 year partnership agreement on January 24, 2004 to begin building a coalition with the SEIU. There were issues to work out between the associations and the SEIU, yet the majority of chapters voted for the partnership. Many providers remained cautious that the SEIU would be beneficial to family child care providers because we were private business owners.

The collaborative efforts went on to work collectively to request that DSHS translate the WACs into Spanish for the 1,974 Hispanic providers in this state. DSHS granted the request, but in fact it is the law that they are required to translate regulations for the providers that they license. We also worked together side by side on mutual goals and honoring each others roles for family child care providers. We understood what we each brought to the table for the benefit of our memberships. Providers united together in all three organizations and responded by attending and testifying at hearings all across the state. They protested to the governor and got an extra WAC hearing for the Hispanic providers. Providers made massive calls to the legislative hot line causing to be shut down and no more calls taken.

By October 2004, the draft became the revised WACS and was sent out to all licensed providers in the state. Provider's comments and hearing testimony were mostly ignored by DCCCEL. Due to association provider partnerships voicing their concerns and the thousands of comments, some minor concessions were made to the regulations. The assistants' age went back to 14, you may have a wading pool, you may sleep if you do 24 hour care and the meaning of "premises" was clarified. These minor gains did not stop providers once again uniting to send in 148 appeals of the WACS, which were never before seen by DSHS/DCCCEL.

The voices of child care advocates got bigger in January of 2005 when the VOCAL (Voices for Child Care Advocates and Leaders) partnership between the east and west associations joined together to form a collaboration with Centers and APRE (Advocates for Providers Rights and Education) to appeal the WACS. They agreed to work together side by side on provider issues to become more effective. Centers have been severely affected by the new regulations and APRE

had witnessed providers being shut down because of the impossibility of complying with many of the regulations.

The WSFCCA had become a leader in collaborating as a team. Association members joined with non members all over the state in becoming associate members of the SEIU (Service Employees International Union). 2005 was the year thousands of providers had signed cards as associate members of the union. SEIU organized meetings all across the state with Subsidy Directors to look into the subsidy overpayment issues and the serious breakdown of the subsidy system that was making many mistakes and creating hardships for providers. Association members supported this effort and attended these meetings.

The WSFCCA was very interested when Legislator Ruth Kagi proposed a bill on Early Learning at the first legislative session of 2005. The WSFCCA felt it was vital that provider input be included in any council established by the Governor regarding this bill. By watching its evolvment very closely and attending all meetings on this issue the WSFCCA felt their input would be heard.

Further joint meetings were attended in March 2005. Forty-seven providers, most of them association members, went to Olympia to meet with legislators and the Governor. They shared their stories in a work session about subsidy problems, the over regulating of providers, no availability to affordable health insurance, and the need for providers to gain collective bargaining rights. Providers also had the opportunity to meet with the Governor who told them she is committed to making changes in early learning and recognized the important role of providers. It was a great day for providers. Providers felt they had made an impact and the face of family child care providers was being seen and heard.

On July 25, 2005 the Governor chaired a meeting of the newly formed Washington Learns Steering Committee. Seventeen slots were available on the advisory council and one family child care provider from Spokane was appointed to this council representing family child care and a small business. WSFCCA President and a provider from LaConner were invited to be on the quality rating and tiered reimbursement workgroup to help make recommendations to the advisory council. Once again the face of family child care was represented and recognized.

November 19, 2005 will go down in our history as the month that family child care providers had their first ever election in the history of this state for providers to have a union. Providers voted overwhelmingly to have the SEIU as our union of choice. The next step was to pass legislation for the right to have collective bargaining rights. WSFCCA provider members who are also union members worked on this goal in January 2006. By March 2, 2006 the Washington State Senate voted 40-8 for the Access to Quality Family Child Care Act. This now gives family child care providers the right to have collective bargaining rights with the state.

All across the United States family child care providers are being organized to have family child care unions. The WSFCCA supports all providers in any state forming a union of their choice. This association is unique because our association has been the only one who has formed collaboration with our union to work together side by side on mutual goals.

SEIU Family Child Care Providers negotiated their first contract terms with the State of Washington in 2007.

WSFCCA board, its volunteer committee members, and membership continue to work with the Department of Early Learning on many issues that directly pertain to family child care providers.

We are part of the team of providers who are working together along side SEIU providers on the Negotiated Rule Making Team creating the new regulations with the Department of Early

Learning.

We are very proud of our 33 years of history to date and look forward to what unfolds in the future.