Colorado State University Cooperative Extension programs are helping Coloradans

- increase their knowledge about the social, educational and physical needs of children;
- recognize the importance of early child development on the long-term growth and
development of youth;
- improve childcare quality through research-based education and best practices for
provider training, parent involvement and community support.

The Costs...

- According to the Census Bureau, there are 36.7 million children in the U.S. between the ages of 5 and 14, of which 24 million are likely to need care because they live in family structures where parents are working, going to school, or seeking employment; 75% of children under age 5, or 14.4 million infant and preschool children are in some form of childcare arrangement.
- Lack of reliable childcare causes workers to lose time, be less productive and affects job performance. Research has shown that among employed parents, up to 57% of women and 33% of men with children under the age of 6 had lost time from work due to a failure in their childcare arrangements. Increased absenteeism, tardiness and turnover rates adversely affect productivity, work quality and ultimately business competitiveness, and cost American businesses $3 billion annually.
- The Children’s Defense Fund found that professional, quality childcare is hard to find in a marketplace where childcare providers do not earn as much as bus drivers ($20,150) or garbage collectors ($18,100). Poor-quality care has been shown to cause serious impacts on children’s development including delays in cognitive and language development.

Working With Parents and Providers to Strengthen Colorado Childcare Programs

Dramatic changes are occurring in the way families work and live, the environments in which youth learn and develop, methods of parenting and the financial security of families and communities. Decades ago, most children had seven hours a day to interact with parents and friends – they walked to school, ate lunch at home, and had the afternoon to learn and play. In today’s society, with changing family structures and more demands placed on working parents, time with children is greatly diminished. Children are whisked away to childcare centers or before-school programs as early as 6 a.m., to after-school programs at the end of the school day, then returned home at 6 p.m. to eat, watch TV or do homework and go to bed. At best, they might have two hours per day to interact with parents, siblings and their community. At worst, some children are left on their own or in unsafe conditions. Educating, nurturing, guiding and caring for our nation’s children is increasingly becoming the responsibility of a broad array of childcare providers in an equally broad array of settings. Over the course of their developmental years, most children will spend more time in childcare than they will in formal education. Every day in America 14 million infants and preschoolers are left in childcare arrangements, 24 million school-age youth are in need of programs, and an estimated 5 million are without any adult supervision. Colorado State University Cooperative Extension is improving the quality of Colorado childcare programs by training childcare providers, disseminating developmentally appropriate curriculum, and working with communities and other agencies to establish and expand childcare programs and make childcare safe and reliable for families.
Participation in high-quality early childhood care and education programs can have positive effects on children’s cognitive, language, and social development, particularly among children at risk. A national study found that children in quality childcare programs had better language, mathematics and social skills and better relationships with teachers than those in lower-quality classrooms; quality care also had a greater impact on at-risk children’s school readiness and self-perception.  

(University of Colorado-Denver, Economics Department, 1995)

Research has shown that investments in quality preschool programs save $7 for every $1 spent, by increasing the likelihood that children would be literate, employed, and enrolled in post-secondary education, and making them less likely to be school dropouts, dependent on welfare, or arrested for criminal activity or delinquency.  
The 7:1 cost-benefit ratio also reflects savings in the criminal justice system, reduced welfare costs and higher taxes paid from better paying jobs.  

(High-Scope Educational Research Foundation, 1992; Rand Corporation, 2001)

The Payoff...

- A decade worth of research on the developing human brain has made the issue of quality preschool and “who is watching our children” an important public issue. Research confirms a strong and consistent link between the training received by childcare providers and the quality of care they provide. Last year Cooperative Extension improved the knowledge and skills of nearly 4,000 Colorado childcare providers.

- The Childcare Referral Network operated by Cooperative Extension in the Tri-River Area last year answered 771 technical assistance calls from child-care providers, provided information to more than 280 individuals interested in entering the childcare business, made educational contacts with 2,948 providers, and conducted 20 site visits to childcare facilities as part of their outreach effort; 72% of those surveyed said they found training opportunities through Extension resources.

- In Routt County, a partnership with the local Consolidated Childcare Pilot, has increased capacity of childcare providers to deliver quality programming through monthly meetings where they receive training and work to create a collaborative service delivery system.

- In Gunnison County, Extension hosted the annual Western Colorado Early Childhood Conference, a local collaboration committed to assisting preschool and K-3 teachers, and home and center childcare providers to improve early childhood education. The 219 statewide participants received continuing education credits and increased knowledge by 20-60% about child literacy, brain development, nutrition, health, behavior, curriculum development and best business practices.

- In Pueblo County, a series of workshops using the “Better Kid Care” curricula was provided to 156 childcare providers who needed certification hours to maintain licensed homes and centers; 90% reported increased knowledge about nurturing and caring for kids.

- Foster parents and grandparents are target audiences for Extension parenting and childcare education efforts such as “Grandparents Raising Grandchildren,” which provide support and bilingual assistance to seniors who find themselves raising their children’s children due to abuse, neglect, parent incarceration, substance abuse, death, financial hardship, or mental health issues. In Weld County, a collaboration between the Colorado Department of Human Services’ Alcohol & Drug Abuse Division, the Area Agency on Aging, Catholic Charities, Extension’s Partners in Parenting Program and the local Extension office provided technical assistance and train-the-trainer sessions for the “Kinship Care” program. In subsequent sessions for grandparents, participants expressed appreciation for the support, increased knowledge of resources, and improved confidence in their abilities to nurture and care for themselves and their grandchildren.