

TO: Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors

FROM: Alliance for Girls, Young Women's Freedom Center, YWCA GGSV, Youth Alliance, Planned Parenthood, and Shine (formally known as "Teen Success Inc.")

SUBJECT: Increasing Access to Childcare and Economic Opportunities for Young Moms Ages 12-26 in Santa Clara County (SCC)

DATE: August 25, 2022

Executive Summary:

Early childhood education is a necessity for children and families to thrive. However, the cost of high-quality child care in the United States, and in SCC specifically, places a significant burden on parents without financial means¹. For low-income moms between the ages of 12-26 cost, eligibility restrictions, stigma, and a lack of transparency consistently limit access to existing high-quality child care. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the barriers these young parents face. In 2019, Alliance for Girls (AFG), Young Women's Freedom Center (YWFC), Planned Parenthood Mar Monte, YWCA, and others came together to advocate for county funding to support young moms, as per the recommendations that came out of AFG's [Together We Rise](#)² report. This advocacy resulted in funding from the Santa Clara County (SCC) Government for YWFC and AFG to initiate the When Young Moms Thrive, We All Do (WYMT) program. This program aimed to effect systems change in policy and culture for young parents in SCC, by engaging over 150 young mothers in youth participatory action research (YPAR) and uplift their experiences to proposed key recommendations. These key recommendations, if implemented, have the potential to create multi-generational change in SCC and lay the groundwork for all parents in the county to thrive.

This policy memo was authored by Viviana Arenas (lead author), AFG staff, YWFC staff, and YWFC fellows. The recommendations outlined in this policy memo is reflective of the YPAR research data collection and analysis led by Research Fellows at the YWFC based on the experiences and solutions that over 187 young moms and direct providers in SCC provided throughout this program.

Recommendations:

1. Expand child care subsidies eligibility to include parameters around age specifically for parents under the age of 18.
2. Increase funding for childcare assistance programs and infrastructure for young moms ages 12-26.
3. Universal Basic Income (UBI) for childcare related costs to go the the childcare of the mothers choice.
4. Mandate annual paid training on stigma-free service delivery for all childcare providers serving young parents between the ages of 12-26.
5. Provide young moms with increased employment and vocational opportunities.

Background:

In SCC, young moms and families face many barriers in accessing childcare programs and economic benefits. WYMT defines young parents as any parent age 12-26 with one or more children. One WYMT participant described the limitations she faced accessing child care resources:

“Childcare is probably the biggest struggle that I had since the beginning and now. We couldn't afford childcare. So I took the first year off with my first son. And when I got pregnant with my second [child], I was like, "I have to work. There's no way we're going to survive." And when you

¹ <https://home.treasury.gov/system/files/136/The-Economics-of-Childcare-Supply-09-14-final.pdf>

² <https://www.alliance4girls.org/wp-content/uploads/Together-We-Rise-Report.pdf>

seek assistance, I go with my husband's paycheck and they're like, "You make too much." Like, "How do I make too much? I can't even survive. My fridge is almost empty." ³

This young mom is not alone in her experience. Many young parents struggle to find accurate and clear information about eligibility restrictions and information about accessing subsidized child care, early learning, and other opportunities related to economic and social-emotional wellbeing. Even when young parents successfully overcome these barriers and receive benefits, the resources provided are often low quality and insubstantial proportionate to the need. This forces many families to supplement government-funded care and shoulder large financial and logistical burdens.

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the challenges facing young low-income parents in accessing childcare have only become more pronounced. Young families are facing even more severe struggles to maintain their employment. Nationally, one-half of working mothers and one-fourth of working fathers reported needing to reduce their hours at work. In SCC, this has resulted in little to no job security for many families and an increased demand for childcare. With child care options that are difficult to access, limited, and costly, young families in SCC today have an urgent need for solutions.

Recommendations:

1. Expand childcare subsidies eligibility to include parameters around age specifically parents under the age of 18.

Current federal and state age eligibility requirements do not allow most parents under 18 years of age to independently qualify for subsidized childcare. Instead, the parent of the minor is seen as the qualifying individual. However, the majority of mothers under the age of 18 who financially support themselves are unlikely to make above minimum wage. Given that the average wage in SCC is \$16.40 an hour⁴, these individuals would be considered low-income by county metrics and, as a result, would otherwise qualify for CalFresh (Food Stamps), Medi-Cal, and CalWorks (City of Santa Clara, Business Services)⁵.

Low-income mothers under the age of 18 who do not live/reside in the home of their own parents, which included over half of the 158 young moms surveyed, are at a particular disadvantage. In order to expand childcare access to low-income parents under 18, SCC should develop and implement special eligibility guidelines for parents under 18, regardless of whether the under 18 parent is living with their own parents, such as an eligibility exemption for parents 17 and under.

The establishment of special eligibility guidelines to include those under 18 should consider:

- Expanding guidelines to reflect those used by WIC⁶ and choices for children⁷, which have more flexible eligibility and broader timeframes for renewal.
 - Ensuring that the language used in the guidelines is stigma-free, culturally-responsive, and easily understood across multiple audiences, ages, and identity groups

³ [YPAR Report/findings](#)

⁴ <https://www.santaclaraca.gov/business-development/business-services/minimum-wage-ordinance#:~:text=As%20of%20January%201%2C%202022%2C%20the%20Federal%20minimum%20wage%20is,wage%20is%20%2416.40%20per%20hour>

⁵ For a non-exempt family of 2 they would need to make less than \$1,242 a month to be eligible for \$696 in the CalWORKS program that can also connect them to child care assistance.

⁶ [http://bridgetobenefits.org/Women_Infants_and_Children_WIC#:~:text=question%20%234\).-Do%20I%20need%20to%20renew%20my%20WIC%20eligibility%3F.receive%20additional%20vouchers%20for%20food.](http://bridgetobenefits.org/Women_Infants_and_Children_WIC#:~:text=question%20%234).-Do%20I%20need%20to%20renew%20my%20WIC%20eligibility%3F.receive%20additional%20vouchers%20for%20food.)

⁷ <https://www.cfcsc.org/parents/> and <https://www.cfcsc.org/our-programs/>

- Providing alternate avenues for parents under 18 to use their own financial information for eligibility. Such as:
 - Developing a countywide waiver that will allow parents who are under the age of 18 to qualify as financially independent, without having to obtain permission from their own parents.
- Advocate to expand age requirements to include young parents under 18 for state and federal-funded social services.

2. Increase funding for childcare assistance programs and childcare infrastructure for young moms ages 12-26.

The YWFC Fellows found that young mothers in SCC argue that the system is broken: those who attempt to sign up for childcare-focused social services designed to support mothers face numerous waiting lists and long application processes⁸. Many subsidized child care programs require direct referrals through the county to expedite the process without being placed on a waitlist, which perpetuates inequalities. One service provider in SCC explained that young moms without these referrals can wait up to a year or more to receive a childcare spot. Even after getting off of a waiting list, young moms face additional barriers including a limited choice of providers and limited provider availability. Mothers who make it past these initial barriers also report that childcare facilities are not well maintained, making the physical space unsafe for childcare⁹. Many young parents in SCC report low confidence in the options available to them and feel uneasy about the safety of their children.

To address these concerns, the county should:

- Push for an increase in federal funding for subsidized programs such as Head Start, Go Kids, Kidango, and Choices for Children. This would allow more families to be eligible for assistance.
 - Adapt the [Vulnerability Index - Service Prioritization Decision Assistance Tool \(VI-SPDAT\)](#) as a primary assessment (already used by SCC for homeless populations) to determine eligibility for child care referrals with a supplementary form with up to five questions focused on childcare.
 - Reserve 800¹⁰ subsidized spots through Choices for Children and Go kids for young parents between the ages of 12-26, regionally prioritizing East San Jose and South Santa Clara County, where a higher percentage of low-income young parents of color reside.
 - Establish a standardized and transparent selection process to help ensure equitable access for childcare services for young parents across subsidized child care spots across for county agencies.
 - County agencies to utilize when interacting with childcare providers.
 - Invest in adequately funding county-provided childcare infrastructure to maintain facilities, make necessary repairs, and address unsafe conditions for children.
- 3. Research, develop, and implement a Universal Basic Income pilot program that will allow young moms, aged 12 - 26, to access the childcare of their choice.**

⁸ [Ypar report/findings](#)

⁹ [The Dept. of the Treasury](#)

¹⁰ The estimated number of expectant and parenting female youth up to age 21 in the county, by a Medical Service Study Area is 1,571 for 2020. 800 accounts for a little over half of this estimated number and would include spots for those ages 21-26, which are not accounted for in this study.

Young mothers in Santa Clara County experienced challenges acquiring and covering the costs of a trusted child care provider. The When Young Moms Thrive Initiative is one of few pilot programs that offered young mothers hired as Fellows \$250 in monthly payments for childcare-related costs for the duration of their fellowship (10 months). Throughout this time, YWFC heard positive mention from the Research Fellows - recipients of the monthly payments - of this income that allowed them to use the funds for food and costs for childcare providers of their choice. When talking about the end of the Fellowship and the importance of the monthly payment, one Research Fellow shared how the universal basic income has impacted their ability to work and attend school:

“As of right now I'm not sure, my childcare is approximately \$2,200 a month and my subsidy is only responsible for \$1,900 of that \$2,200 bill. Also if I do not find another job my childcare may be at risk since they give me full-time childcare due to the fact that I work part-time and go to school part-time.”

- *WYMT Research Fellow*

The WYMT pilot showcases the importance of financial stability related to childcare costs while holding a space for young moms to explain how budgetary restrictions create the conditions for their hardships and ability to thrive. Models of universal basic income have been implemented recently in the County, for example, Santa Clara County has implemented a model of unrestricted income supporting young adults transitioning out of foster care with \$1,000 in monthly payments (County of Santa Clara). These models have demonstrated individual success stories from recipients who were able to utilize the stipends to cover the costs of their housing which in turn allowed individuals to focus their attention on other financial or professional goals (ibid¹¹). The State has developed The State has allowed minors to be in control of their identified how to deliver services resources and services minors through However, opportunities for economic incentives that would allow for young mothers to cover the high costs of childcare as mentioned by Community Experts and Research Fellows do not exist to reduce and address these financial barriers for young mothers to feel confident in their choice of care.

Adopting a more expansive government-funded guaranteed income for young mothers to cover the costs of childcare of their choice, the County should:

- Research and Identify a structure for this UBI program while considering the limitations on resources, capacity, and funds for the project.
- Provide an unrestricted universal child care UBI payment for 100 young mothers, ages 12-26, residing in Santa Clara County with monthly payments of \$1,728 - \$2,200 based on annual childcare costs for infants and or toddlers (Population Reference Bureau¹²).
- Push for State or Federal ask, (SCC pilot this) and commitment to support this UBI program
 - This unrestricted income will cover the costs of chosen trusted child care providers, food and formula, diapers, educational materials, transportation, and associated costs that the provider of care needs for a happy and healthy child.

¹¹<https://news.sccgov.org/news-release/county-santa-clara-extends-basic-income-program-young-adults-transitioning-out-foster>

¹²<https://www.kidsdata.org/topic/1849/child-care-cost/table#fmt=2358&loc=2,127,347,1763,331,348,336,171,321,345,357,332,324,369,358,362,360,337,327,364,356,217,353,328,354,323,352,320,339,334,365,343,330,367,344,355,366,368,265,349,361,4,273,59,370,326,333,322,341,338,350,342,329,325,359,351,363,340,335&tf=108&ch=984,985,222,223&sortColumnId=0&sortType=asc>

- Serve as a pilot county for a State or Federally funded UBI program, the issued payments should reflect the cost of childcare in the County that will implement and distribute the UBI income to the program participants.

4. Mandate annual paid training on stigma-free service delivery for all childcare providers serving young parents between the ages of 12-26.

The YWFC Fellows reported that young parents in Santa Clara county encounter stigmatizing and shameful messaging and service delivery. As one individual described:

“The thing that I don't like about these services is that people judge. They shouldn't judge us based on how we look because they just put us in a box. When they see a young mom and they assume everything about our lives when it's inaccurate. And that's why it's hard to look for resources because they don't feel comfortable letting them handle everything that has to do with their families.”

While childcare providers play a critical role in the lives of children's development, providers often discriminate against young moms. There is currently no formalized process for childcare providers to understand how implicit bias and stigma impact service delivery for childcare. In addition, there are currently few opportunities for young parents to have their voices and experiences centered in adapting services to be responsive to their experiences and needs.

To address these problems, SCC should:

- Mandate paid training for childcare providers to be led by young parents and administered by the County Office of Education and First 5 Santa Clara County.
- Allocate an initial amount of \$50,000, through the County Board of Supervisors, to develop a standard training for facilitators to use and an annual recurring \$30,000 in the county budget for at least 5 consultants to provide culturally-responsive training.
 - Consultants hired to lead this should be former or current young moms with lived experience in navigating the stigma and barriers faced by young parents. This hiring process can be done through a county vendor or an RFP process.

5. Provide young moms with increased employment and vocational opportunities.

When young parents have access to upward financial mobility, their children and broader family also benefit¹³, showing the multi-generational benefits of these programs that can break the cycle of poverty and support their children to thrive. While there are currently programs in the county that provide workforce development support, many are not attuned to the needs of young parents or visibly promoted to young parents. This initiative itself is an employment opportunity that attunes to the needs of young parents, by providing competitive benefits such as, but not limited to; childcare stipends, paid time off, sick days, travel reimbursement, and healing and restoration workshops. Another example of an affirming employment opportunity model in SCC is the YWCA Golden Gate Silicon Valleys' childcare department's 6 month paid training program for young parents, which includes full-time work, subsidized childcare, and medical insurance as benefits.¹⁴ Programs like this that meet the needs of young moms should be considered and uplifted toward providing effective employment pathways for young moms.

¹³ [The Dept. of the Treasury](#)

¹⁴ Upon completion of the training, participants are offered employment with the YWCA or are supported in finding employment with other agencies within the nonprofit sector. Participants are offered an immediate raise upon employment and Early Childhood Education teacher credentials from Cal State Stanislaus.

In speaking with over a 150 young parents in SCC the YWFC fellows found that the participants expressed employment loss, job insecurity, appointment challenges, mental health issues, and that federal and social service assistance were even more difficult to receive as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

To support access to economic and educational opportunities SCC should consider:

- Provide incentives for nonprofits currently providing economic and educational opportunities to deliver subsidized childcare
- Partner with non-profits in SSC to incorporate job opportunities and vocational trainings in their job center and website to increase visibility of existing workforce and employment opportunities to young moms. These job opportunities should include:
 - At least three options for systems-impacted youth including formerly incarcerated youth and those on probation.
 - Options that have competitive benefits such as: childcare stipend, medical, dental, vision, holiday pay, paid time off, paid sick days, 401k or another form of savings.
- Develop a countywide workforce program, modeled off WYMT Initiative and the YWCA paid training program, that is attuned to the needs of system-impacted young moms.
 - We identified 16 existing programs for systems-impacted girls through the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP). Of those 16, only 2 attune specifically to young mothers and those are only identified as “promising” based on OJJDP, but neither program attends to the specific needs expressed by young mothers related to employment here.¹⁵
 - This should include competitive benefits such as: childcare stipend, medical, dental, vision, holiday pay, paid time off, paid sick days, 401k or another form of savings.

Conclusion:

Santa Clara County must implement solutions toward ameliorating the barriers young parents face in accessing childcare and mitigating the severe financial circumstances that young families experience. The COVID-19 pandemic has laid bare the gaps in the current systems providing childcare and increased the urgency to provide additional supports to low-income young moms. The memo outlines realistic recommendations that can be implemented by SCC. Organizations like [Amplify Girls](#) and [Abundant Birthing Project](#) have had success and positive results in doing similar work. Children are the future, and as their leaders, we need to support them in accessing futures where they have the opportunity to thrive. Implementing the four recommendations outlined above, which were informed and designed by those who directly experience the limitations of current policies and programs, would positively impact all families in the county and have a positive multi-generational impact.

¹⁵ Home visiting program: community-based program for adolescents and their mothers; trained home visitors deliver a separate curriculum (parenting program that includes parenting practices, promote school continuation, promote maternal well-being; includes mentoring and case management; adolescent mothers 12-18, enrolled when they were in third trimester.

Taking charge: 6-week program - CBT brief intervention to help adolescent girls stay in school; help coping across ‘four life domains - education, personal relationships, parenting, and employment/career’

Group discussion; problem-solving / goals oriented; challenges (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention).