

Our Neighbors in Need

As Arizonans struggle through the worst recession in our state's history, the legislature is grappling with a budget deficit of nearly \$4 billion. "An Arizona that Cares" will spotlight our neighbors most in need of vital services, that are in jeopardy of deeper budget cuts, through an upcoming series presented by Valley of the Sun United Way. Beginning with child care, these discussions will highlight local programs and people that work every day to preserve a bright future for thousands living in our state.

Child Care: A State of Emergency

All Arizonans are feeling the pain of our state's economic crisis. Many of us have witnessed the lives of our co-workers, neighbors, family members and friends changed by the instability of employment, housing and personal income. These financial stressors often push individuals to the brink of crisis causing thousands among us to make the impossible choices between life's essentials.

- Shelter- eliminating rent or mortgage payment
- Child care- which provides shelter, education and nutrition while parents are away
- Medication- to prevent more serious and costly medical care
- Groceries- to supply basic hygiene items, clothing and food on the table

Low-income families are facing tough challenges. These families earn less than \$29,000 per year and are required to pay a portion of their child care costs. Until this year, federal and state investments in child care have allowed eligible families to receive this subsidy.

- Currently in Arizona, child care assistance provides subsidies for more than 45,000 children from low-income families, enabling their parents to retain employment.
- The cuts to FY09 Budget put 3,200 children on a child care waiting list – eliminating employment opportunities for many parents, and worse, leaving many children unattended in unsafe environments.
- Deeper cuts in FY10 could result in 20,000 children losing subsidies, forcing more parents to make hard decisions about going to work or leaving children alone.

Legislators are currently weighing the significant decline in revenues against the increasing needs for necessary services like child care. However, they must understand how cuts to quality child care could affect families, local businesses, education and the future leaders of our state.

Affect on Families

Quality child care provides a safe learning environment for thousands of Arizona children and positively influences their development for years. In addition, child care allows parents to retain employment, provide the necessities for their family, and eliminate stress that can lead to child abuse.

Local Businesses Struggle

Child care is also a crucial industry for our state. With more than 6,000 child care businesses in Arizona, thousands of local employees could lose their jobs from proposed cuts. As an industry, child care businesses generate \$1.7 billion in revenue for the state. Quality child care options also affect the general work force as it enables employers to attract and retain good employees, reduces absenteeism and encourages productivity.

Additionally, we must recognize that quality child care not only determines the future for working parents, it sets the course for the success of many of our state's youngest children...children that will grow and lead all of us someday.