WABASH COLLEGE
Wabash Democracy & Public Discourse Initiative

April 2016

Report on the Community Conversations on Childcare in Montgomery County, January 2016

This report was authored by
- Adam Burtner, Alex Wimber, Michael Lumpkin, and Deonte Simpson, *Wabash College Democracy Fellows*
- Sara A. Mehltretter Drury, Ph.D., *Wabash College*

This report is available at http://blog.wabash.edu/wabashdpd/category/reports/

We thank the following organizations for their support of the Community Conversations on Childcare

WABASH COLLEGE
Wabash Democracy & Public Discourse Initiative

WABASH COLLEGE
Center for Innovation, Business & Entrepreneurship

Children's Bureau, Inc.
Community Partners for Child Safety

Public Health
Prevent. Promote. Protect.

Child Abuse Prevention Council
Cherishing Children
Affirming Families

BOYS & GIRLS CLUB
OF MONTGOMERY COUNTY

The Wabash Democracy and Public Discourse (WDPD) Initiative hosted two community conversations on the state of childcare in Montgomery County on January 28 and 30, 2016. The deliberation focused on the **question "How can we work together to improve childcare in Montgomery County?"** The January 28 event was held from 4pm-6pm at the Hays Center within the Chase Building in Crawfordsville, IN and the January 30 event was held from 2pm-4pm in the Montgomery County Boys and Girls Club in Crawfordsville, IN.

The community conversations on childcare were a collaborative effort, with co-sponsorships from The Child Abuse Prevention Council and Community Partners in Child Safety, host sites courtesy of the Center for Business, Innovation, and Entrepreneurship at Wabash College and the Boys & Girls Club of Montgomery County, and childcare provided by the Boys & Girls Club and supported by the Montgomery County Public Health Department at the second event.

In addition to the partnerships above, this conversation was also supported by many community organizations and members being willing to participate in the research phase. The Women's Legacy Fund held an educational panel meeting about childcare on August 31, 2015. At that event, many community members expressed their frustrations that this issue had been ongoing for many years, and that in order to move forward, more people had to come together and think in new ways—a task which WDPD could facilitate through public deliberations about childcare.

To prepare for the community conversation events, researchers from WDPD conducted a series of focus groups to learn about different aspects of the childcare issue in Montgomery County. The sessions included parents, childcare providers, representatives from childcare state agencies, the local HR and business community, as well as citizens of Montgomery County generally interested in the issue. Based on what people said in those focus groups, current childcare offerings in Montgomery County do not meet the full needs of the community. There are three main facets of a successful childcare situation for Montgomery County: **Quality, Accessibility, and Affordability.**

On January 28th, more than 20 participants attended the Community Conversation on Childcare event and another 13 attended the event on the 30th. When they arrived, they were invited to sit down at a table of their choosing, and they were encouraged to fill out a nametag, introduce themselves to other table members, and begin reading the materials in their folder. Participants were also asked to fill out a pre-event and post-event survey.

This report analyzes the data from the table notes, facilitator post-event worksheets, and participant surveys gathered on both days of deliberations. This report is *not* meant to be a complete portrayal of public opinion in Montgomery County, due to the fact that the public deliberation event represents only the opinions and ideas of those present. As such, this document does not suggest a particular action or set of actions, but rather gives a summary of the conversation and participant preferred actions from this specific deliberation event. In reporting, we are not trying to represent the "most popular" responses; this report attempts to give an accurate and complete portrayal of the most frequent themes and supporting arguments, while also identifying less dominant but still significant topics. This report provides observations and analysis based off the facilitator-led conversations, participant feedback, facilitator feedback, and the authors' observations of the community conversation events.

The report is divided into three parts. First, the background section discusses the format and procedures of the conversation, as well as how data for this report was collected. Second, the descriptive analysis section goes through participant perceptions of the problem and their conversations on each approach. Quotations from the table notes are also included to help illustrate particular aspects of each approach. The third section summarizes the preferred actions, both those articulated by tables overall and those suggested by specific individuals.

I. BACKGROUND

As mentioned above, the Wabash Democracy and Public Discourse team researched and organized for the Community Conversation on Childcare in Montgomery County, in consultation with many community participants and partners. After conducting seven focus groups, the research team crafted a Community Conversation guide to frame the approaches to be discussed at the public deliberation event.

This Community Conversation guide was modeled on a National Issues Forum-style deliberative framing, which lays out the problem and three potential approaches towards alleviating that problem. Each approach has a variety of actions and potential actors that could begin to impact the community on this issue. The goal of a deliberative guide is to encourage conversation about the problem from a variety of perspectives, working through those perspectives to identify the best—and therefore, preferred—approach for a community to begin addressing a public issue.

The Community Conversation guide focused on the question **"How can we work together to improve childcare in Montgomery County?"** and gave a snapshot assessment on the issue of childcare for parents and providers alike, as well as aspects of the problem based on the focus groups and community surveys. The five significant aspects hindering a thriving and successful childcare climate were:

- **Lack of accessibility**, including transportation, excessive waitlists, non-accommodating hours;
- **Shortage of quality facilities and providers**, including in-home, church based, and chain based;
- **Lack of engagement** from a variety of stakeholders;
- The **high cost of childcare** in a community that may not be affluent enough to support the prices; and
- The **current business models of childcare do not meet Montgomery County's needs**.

The guide moved on to suggest three approaches to addressing the childcare problem. Each approach offered arguments for the approach, possible actions, as well as possible concerns that would need to be addressed or alleviated for the approach to have success. The three approaches to the problem in the Community Conversation guide were:

- **Approach 1: Connecting Across Divides;**
- **Approach 2: Adapting Existing Structures; and**
- **Approach 3: Creating New Structures, Programs, and Opportunities.**

The guide stressed that the three approaches were not necessarily exclusive of one another, but rather provided a framework to encourage the deliberative process of perspective taking on a public problem before moving towards judgment. Furthermore, the guide also encouraged participants to think broadly about who could be involved, including families, businesses, community members, health care professionals, nonprofits, churches, government, and more.

The seven-page guide was given to each participant as they sat down at their table at the Community Conversation event. There was some time before the event for community members to familiarize themselves with the guide.

At the beginning of the Community Conversation event, participants were welcomed by WDPD Director and Wabash College Professor of Rhetoric, Sara A Mehltretter Drury, Ph.D. Two facilitators then introduced the conversation process and laid out ground rules for the conversation.

Participants were invited to take part in a survey before the event began. While not all participants took surveys, the participant surveys across both events (n=28) offer preliminary information about the participants. Participants could identify with multiple groups below if the information applied, so these categories are not exclusive percentages.

Family Representation

Parent of child 0-12	8 (28.5%)
Parent of child 12-17	3 (10.7%)
Parent of Adult Child	8 (28.5%)
Grandparent	7 (25%)
Non-Parent	3 (10.7%)

Industry Representation

Childcare Provider/Employee	4 (14.3%)
Non Profit Employee	7 (25%)
Business Owner	3 (10.7%)
Government Agency	1 (3.6%)

After these opening remarks, trained facilitators, who were members of WDPD program and Wabash College students, led their tables through a discussion of concerns, approaches to the problem, and preferred solutions. Each table had a notetaker who kept track of the conversation on an easel flip chart. The schedule for the event was as follows:

10 mins	Welcome
15 mins	Discussion of the issue and what brought participants to the event
30 mins	Discussion of the three approaches to the issue
15 mins	Large group discussion of the morning conversation
10 mins	Action prioritization in small groups and large group
10 mins	Closing remarks and post-event surveys

II. ANALYSIS OF DELIBERATIVE CONVERSATIONS

Opening Conversation: What brought community members to the conversation and how do they see the problem?

A variety of interests brought community members to the Montgomery County Child Care Conversation on January 28 and 30, 2016. Many participants were mothers whose children attend childcare, and others were employed in the community. Another prominent group that attended the conversation were those who own or are employed at a childcare facility. Some participants expressed that they came because they wanted to learn, they had an interest in improving their childcare facilities, and/or they were driven to improve the community as a whole by creating solutions for the issues surrounding Childcare in Montgomery County.

Across the tables, it seemed that the three approaches of the problem resonated with participants. Participants' comments reflected some of their own struggles with finding solutions for Childcare issues, including:

- Creating a centralized database of information for Montgomery County Childcare
- The affordability of licensed childcare for residents
- The difficulties of childcare facilities having enough income to sustain themselves

Discussion of Approach 1: *Connecting* across divides

In this approach, community members, businesses, and government would focus on improving childcare with "connections and conversations to help more people know where resources are and how to seek assistance when faced with challenges." This approach suggests that in order to connect, the community needs to increase communication and information availability. Approach 1, aims to do just that by prioritizing actions to "improve daily childcare, communicating about childcare resources, and childcare in general."

Across the tables and the two deliberations, the following themes emerged:

- Two groups proposed that displaying brochures at the Local Library would curb the lack of awareness on already available local childcare.
- Three tables extensively discussed the need to improve electronic communication. There is a state database, but only Paths to QUALITY providers are included (http://childcareindiana.org). Ideas for other electronic communication ranged from an updated central database (currently existing, but not updated, at http://www.montcares.org), along with an app to complement the website.
- Two groups mentioned the idea of creating a social media outlet for Childcare in Montgomery County in an effort to create a hub of centralized information. Facebook was the most popular social media form spoken about.
- A few tables suggested the ideas of a professional PR firm, industry, or governmental firm intervening to create an established streamlined method of communication, along with managing marketing campaigns to advertise available childcare.

- Many tables mentioned a Facebook page with centralized data would aid in the communication efforts.

After the conversations, participants noted a few remaining questions and concerns:

- Some tables expressed concern that in-home providers may not want to join the list; others worried about how to encourage more unlicensed providers to register.
- Generating enough users for a centralized database from within our small community was a concern.
- Some groups wondered who could consistently be responsible for keeping the database updated, communicating with providers, parents, and business, and innovating to keep up with current concerns.
- There are challenges with the intricacies of getting a centralized system to inhabit both non-profit and for-profit companies on the same site, as well as consider listing state licensed and non-licensed providers.
- A few groups noted that the Chamber of Commerce and Indiana West Advantage are needed to network businesses and employees to providers. Strategic conversations need to move forward about how to work together for the future.

Discussion of Approach 2: *ADAPTING* existing structures

This approach noted that there are childcare facilities existing in Montgomery County that are successful businesses serving our community. Still, since many parents struggle to find care, other services and structures "need more development and adaptation to improve accessibility, affordability, and quality." Approach 2 encourages organization across the community "to continue and expand successful actions while innovating through an adaptation of existing structures to improve childcare."

Across the tables, the following themes emerged:

- Transportation was a theme that frequently emerged in conversation. One table suggested that the idea of having Boys & Girls club as drivers, or working with the schools to facilitate a bus system for small children.
- Some felt that there is no incentive for in-home providers to become licensed other than having the title. This is not motivational since many of these providers are already full.
- Despite many good providers, there are no 24/7-hour childcare services, which a portion of the Montgomery county workforce needs due to shift work.
- One table suggested that the overall cost of childcare can be too pricey for many residents of Montgomery County. Corporation support may be necessary to solve this issue through the administration of a "Cafeteria Plan," meaning that businesses offer employee flex benefits that could be used for child care or health care costs.
- A voucher program may also solve issues for low-income families, and one table discussed how our community can become a part of advocacy for better voucher programs in the state.

In discussions about Approach 2, there were a few questions and concerns noted by participants:

- Tables were concerned that adapting such a large business, would include lawyers, and other agency approvals. Making this an intricate and difficult issue.
- A concern of one table was the process of creating a coalition to speak to the Corporations in Montgomery County for financial aid.
- Other tables discussed that changing a 1950s model of work-home balance can be a difficult challenge; our community needs to think more about single parents and two income households.

Discussion of Approach 3: *CREATING* new structures, programs, and opportunities

In many ways, this approach was the most radical since it suggested innovations through "infrastructure and creative opportunities." Essentially, Approach 3 would work to build new childcare facilities, bringing forth new types of structures to address community needs.

Across the tables, the following themes emerged:

- For any innovation to succeed, groups across many tables agreed that there must be a collaborative effort amongst employers, corporations, and potentially the government.
- It might be possible to combine childcare with existing infrastructure of schools.
- Some tables suggested businesses could create their own childcare services, but other tables noted that this is a challenge for industrial businesses due to safety. A few tables agreed a centralized childcare facility for multiple businesses to support could be a solution going forward.
- It was noted that having a sick-care program that worked with any childcare provider in the community would be an important resource to develop.
- Some tables asked if the Stellar Grant could be used to help fund the new structures, programs, and opportunities for childcare.

Like earlier approaches, participants also had a number of concerns and questions about implementation for Approach 3:

- It could be challenging to find a group of childcare providers and businesses that would be willing to collaborate.
- A general consensus was that it would be considered unfeasible to create a brand new infrastructure for childcare to stand strong.
- A table mentioned that it could be difficult and expensive to have full-time nurses, along with back-up nurses at any daycare facility, even a centralized one.
- One table mentioned that creating a system that covers not only children, but also infants, as this is perceived as a severe need.

III. DISCUSSION OF PREFERRED ACTIONS

After working through the 3 approaches of the participant guide, each facilitator led their group through the judgment phase in which the groups discussed preferred actions. Each group developed short and long term goals, and they mentioned who needed to be involved to during the process. It is important to note that judgment varied amongst each groups, but similarities arose on how the community should face the issue among the groups as well. For example, a few groups decided that a central website for childcare needed to be established.

The authors of this report summarized and categorized public preferences into the table below.

The event closed with thank you remarks from members of the Wabash Democracy and Public Discourse initiative, and then a request was made for participants to take part in the post-deliberation event surveys as well as filling out a contact card. The closing survey data (below) indicates that participants were satisfied with the event and learned new information. Additionally, participants reported that they wanted to stay involved in improving childcare in Montgomery County, with an average rating of 4.28 on a 5.0 scale. However, the surveys also acknowledged that the turnout at the event did not reflect the entire community, echoing a theme heard in the deliberations.

Short Term Actions	Long Term Actions	Who needs to be involved in the Process
• Website to establish and update childcare availability in the community (x3) • Develop a place for snow days or sick days for children to go (x1) • Community wide communication of the issue and how it impacts families; stories in the media/advocacy (x1) • Lobbying for the expansion of the state vouchers program to include families just above current qualification levels (x1) • Scholarships + Training for future providers (x1)	• Expand childcare providers through new structures, business partnerships (x4) • Maintain and continuously update a website; update social media and connect digitally to parents (x3) • Business Involvement (x2) • Work with providers to develop 2nd and 3rd shift care (x2) • Providers should work with the state to become certified and encourage safe, quality communities; apply for/give grants to encourage certification (x2) • Combine/utilize elderly care with childcare (x1) • Analysis of care available and those looking for care (x1) • Develop an action that implements a mix of each approach to succeed in the long term (x1)	• Community members • Parents • Local businesses • Local government • State government • Childcare providers • Large employers • Educators

Post-Survey Data

(scaled response questions, with 1 being Strongly Disagree and 5 being Strongly Agree)

	Average
Today I learned something new about childcare in our community.	4.07
Today I heard a lot of different viewpoints regarding the state of childcare in our community.	4.00
My viewpoint was heard at today's event.	4.54
The discussion at my table was productive.	4.56
Everyone that is affected by the issues discussed today was present in our conversations.	2.57
A variety of groups and actors are necessary to improve childcare in our community.	4.70
I plan to stay/become involved with improving childcare.	4.28
The facilitator at my table was helpful for the conversation today.	4.82

This report is available at http://blog.wabash.edu/wabashdpd/category/reports/