Abstract

A lack of services for children with disabilities is a challenge nationwide. Securing appropriate child care is a major issue for families. This is particularly true for children with disabilities who are not yet of school age, and do not have access to specialized services. This project practicum assessed the need for a therapeutic child care program for children five years and younger in the Central Kenai Peninsula in partnership with the Infant Learning Program. The ecological theory provided the framework for assessing the need for services at a community level. A needs assessment model provided guidance on the research design, data collection methods and analysis. Parents, child care providers, and key informants from community organizations were interviewed to learn about access to and the availability of child care services in the community for children with disabilities. A comprehensive literature review indicated that children with disabilities and their families with little or no access to services experienced significant financial and emotional stress. Although at least half of parents interviewed stated they would utilize a therapeutic child care, it was discovered that most families enrolled in the Infant Learning Program had access to services and the level of need for services was not beyond their financial means. Knowledge gained from this project will be a useful tool in determining the need for a therapeutic child care program from the perspective of those interviewed.