

Nonprofit adds income-generating service

With donations in flux, ChildCareGroup seeks funding alternatives

BY JOYCE TSAI | STAFF WRITER

To help make up for lost revenue in the economic downturn, ChildCareGroup, one of Dallas' oldest and largest nonprofit organizations, is launching this month a for-profit venture: an online referral service to help parents and corporations in North Texas select child care providers.

The program will offer parents free access to the online system; its business model relies on charging fees to corporations that

wish to access the nonprofit's proprietary database of 2,000 licensed and regulated child care providers on behalf of their employees, says Stacey Cochran, resources and referral manager for ChildCareGroup. It also will charge membership fees to licensed child care centers and family day homes — where child care is provided in a home — and offer corporate services, such as performing needs assessments for companies interested in starting their own on-site child care programs.

"Most parents find child care by asking a friend for advice — or when driving on the side the road, they see a sign for child care and they go in," Cochran said. But "child care is not a one-size-fits-all kind of thing," and the online service should help parents to research what's best for

CHILDCARE FINDER

NAME: ChildCareGroup

BUSINESS: Nonprofit that serves low-income children

HEADQUARTERS: 8585 N. Stemmons Fwy., Ste. 600, Dallas 75247

OWNERSHIP: Nonprofit

TOP EXECUTIVE: Betsy Edmondson, interim CEO

EMPLOYEES: 245

ANNUAL BUDGET: \$13 million (FY 2009)

PHONE: 214-630-7911

WEB: www.ChildCareGroup.org

their child's specific needs.

ChildCareGroup has an annual operating budget of about \$13 million. Since 2008, the nonprofit has seen its funding stay fairly

flat — and funding decreases are likely for next year, Cochran said.

The group decided to look at leveraging its resources to create new revenue streams and, according to Cochran, it's not alone.

"Many nonprofits are coming up with innovative solutions, such as this, to try to make up for lost dollars, as charitable giving decreases," she said.

ChildCareGroup was founded as a nonprofit in 1901. It provides a range of services for low-income children, including Head Start and Early Head Start centers. It also administers a subsidized child care assistance voucher program.

The nonprofit has had a free child care referral service since the 1980s. The online service will reach more people through its convenience of use and by tapping into what Cochran calls an unmet need in the marketplace.

Start-up support

To assist with the initial start-up costs of about \$120,000 for the venture, the nonprofit received \$50,000 from Meadows Foundation and \$20,000 from Simmons Foundation.

The database, at www.GetChildCare-Now.com, currently contains an extensive list of child care providers in Dallas, Collin and Rockwall counties, but will be expanded to cover the entire North Texas area.

In addition to aid-



COCHRAN



to find their significant other. If you are willing to pay to find a date, you are willing to pay to find a quality child care provider.

Tanya McDonald
Dallas After School
Network

Texas area.

In addition to aiding parents, the database can help companies reduce employee absenteeism, which often is tied to child care issues.

As one of the area's oldest and most robust nonprofits, ChildCareGroup certainly has the reach to execute something on the scale that's needed to serve North Texas, says Tanya McDonald, executive director of Dallas After-School Network, a nonprofit that runs a free online directory of after-school providers.

And choosing any kind of preschool, child care, after-school or summer school program can be very stressful and overwhelming for a parent, she added.

"You don't what resources exist and you don't know how to compare and evaluate programs," McDonald said.

ChildCareGroup's online referral service is one that many parents likely would pay for, she said.

"Think of all the people who pay fees on Match.com to find their significant other," McDonald said. "If you are willing to pay to find a date, you are willing to pay to find a quality child care provider."