



Understanding the Child Care Subsidy Program in Steuben County

"Child Care Solutions for Our Community"

Steuben Child Care Project
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SCCP is a member of Early Care and Learning Council and the National Association of Child Care Resource & Referral. Steuben Child Care Project is Nationally Quality Assured.

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INTRODUCTION

The Child Care Subsidy Program was created to assist eligible families with the cost of child care. This handbook is designed to provide parents (caretakers) and the Child Care Program staff with an understanding of the Child Care Subsidy Program. We hope this handbook will be a helpful resource for the providers and families we serve.

The staff of Steuben Child Care Project, as well as the Steuben Department of Social Services, is happy to provide any additional assistance needed. You may contact this staff at the Bath office at 1-800-553-2033 or 607-776-2126 at the following extensions:

Subsidy Coordinator	x 215
CACFP Processor (Food Program reimbursement)	x 219
Subsidy Processor (provider's last name starts with A – K)	x 249
Subsidy Processor (provider's last name starts with L - Z)	x 216
Subsidy Specialist (parent's last name starts with A – I)	x 214
Subsidy Specialist (parent's last name starts with J - Z)	x 239

You may also visit our website at <http://www.proactioninc.org>

Please refer to the Definitions section in the back for terminology used in this handbook.

CHAPTER 1

THE ORGANIZATIONS INVOLVED

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES (DSS)

DSS is the lead agency in child care subsidies at the state and county levels. They are responsible for receiving child care subsidy funds from the federal and state governments. DSS has contracted with Steuben Child Care Project (SCCP) at Pro Action to administer the majority of these funds. A close partnership has been developed between DSS and SCCP on the management of the child care subsidy cases. DSS retains the final approval for opening and closing all child care subsidy cases based on New York State regulations.

PRO ACTION OF STEUBEN & YATES, INC.

Pro Action of Steuben and Yates Inc., is a multi-purpose, private, not for profit human service agency assisting families since 1965. Steuben Child Care Project (SCCP) is one of several of its departments.

Pro Action Mission

To promote the creation of quality family life, self-sufficiency, and the ability to thrive for all people in our community.

STEUBEN CHILD CARE PROJECT (SCCP)

SCCP has provided child care resource and referral services throughout Steuben County since 1985. It has four main departments:

- ❑ *Child Care Subsidy Department* - guides parents and providers through the application process and is responsible for processing subsidy and CACFP reimbursements to registered and licensed providers.
- ❑ *Quality Department* - provides technical assistance, training, CACFP sponsorship and supports all types of child care providers.
- ❑ *Family Services* - responsible for assisting and educating families in accessing child care.
- ❑ *Registration and Resource Development Department* - handles the recruitment and inspection of new family child care providers.

SCCP Mission

SCCP is a nonprofit resource and referral service dedicated to helping all parents obtain affordable care, which will benefit their child and meet complex family needs. The Project builds the supply of various child care options throughout the county and improves the quality of care through community education and caregiver training, technical assistance and tangible supports.

CHAPTER 2

FAMILY ELIGIBILITY

QUALIFICATIONS

To qualify for assistance, families must be:

- ❑ A resident of Steuben County **and** working
- ❑ Document the need for child care
- ❑ Age guideline for children eligible for assistance is 6 weeks through 12 years old
- ❑ **And** meet the following income guidelines

At this time, the need for subsidies exceeds the existing subsidy funding level. Steuben County Department of Social Services has instructed SCCP to begin a waiting list of families seeking subsidies. As funding levels increase, cases will be opened according to the Steuben County Child Care Plan.

CHAPTER 3

PARTICIPATING PROVIDERS

Families participating in the subsidy program may choose any of the following types of providers:

- **Registered/Licensed Child Care Providers (Required to comply with NYS regulations)**
 - Day Care Centers – care provided in a facility (not a home).
 - Group Family Day Care – care provided in a home, for no more than 14 children, by a caregiver with an assistant.
 - Family Day Care – care provided for up to six full time children and two school age children in the provider’s home.
 - School Age Child Care – a program for school-age children operated outside a home.

- **Legally Exempt (Informal) Child Care Providers (Exempt from NYS regulations)**
 - Family Child Care – care provided by a caregiver outside the child’s home.
 - In-Home Child Care – child care furnished in the child’s own home by a provider or relative within the third degree of consanguinity of the child.
 - Group Child Care – care provided by those caregivers that are not required to be registered/licensed with NYS but meet all applicable state or local requirements for such child care programs. Examples are pre-kindergarten and nursery schools.

- **Out of County Child Care Providers**
 - Providers, either legally exempt or registered/licensed, residing outside of Steuben County who care for Steuben County residents.

NOTE: Child care providers are independent business individuals and are not employed by ProAction. They may have other requirements in their contracts, which may dictate additional charges.

CHAPTER 4

APPLICATION PROCESS

OVERVIEW

To apply for the Child Care Subsidy program, a parent may contact SCCP by phone, e-mail or in person. This process will include:

- ❑ SCCP – Family Services will send the application and checklist instructions to apply for child care subsidy after the initial contact. **During the application process, the parent is responsible for the full cost of care.**
- ❑ The parent must complete all required sections on the application and provide the required documentation identified in the checklist instructions. It is only necessary to complete one application per family even if using more than one provider.
 - The completed application and required documentation must be returned to the Subsidy Specialist.
 - It is important that all documentation is received in a timely matter. A NYS regulation requires eligibility to be determined within 30 days from the date of the completed application.
- ❑ **Any application submitted incomplete will be held pending receipt of requested documentation.**

ELIGIBILITY DETERMINATION

- ❑ The Subsidy Specialist will determine eligibility based on the annual gross household income and the need for care according to the NYS regulations.
 - The parent fee is also determined at this time according to the county's family share percentage.
- ❑ Once eligibility is determined, DSS has final approval for all requests for child care.
- ❑ Final approval or denial of an application normally takes less than 15 days but the process may take up to 30 days.
- ❑ See "Notification" section

NOTIFICATION

Approval

Once the documented request is approved by DSS it is sent back to SCCP for the Child Care Certificate to be processed.

- ❑ SCCP will print and mail the Child Care Certificate based on the approved information within 2 days.
- ❑ A copy of the certificate is mailed to the parent and child care provider(s)
- ❑ The Child Care Certificate should be carefully reviewed by the parent and child care provider. Any discrepancies should be brought to the attention of SCCP immediately:
 - **Authorization period**
 - **Hours of care (in school and no school)**
 - **Weekly parent fee amount (family share)**
- ❑ Eligibility may be authorized up to a six month period. Actual authorization may vary based on individual circumstances.

Denial

Denial of a subsidy application can occur including, but not limited, to the following reasons:

- ❑ The family's gross income exceeds the income eligibility guidelines (refer to page 2)
- ❑ Schedules do not justify the need for child care assistance

When any of these situations occur, SCCP will notify the parent of the denial by issuing a legal State form ("*Action Taken on Your Application for Child Care Benefits*") indicating the date of the denial, reason and the NYS regulation number for the decision.

Fair Hearing: If funding is denied and you do not agree with the decision made, or think you have been treated unfairly, you have the right to request a Fair Hearing. This can be done by phone or in writing to:

Office of Administrative Hearings
P.O. Box 1930
Albany, New York 12201-1930

Rochester (585) 266-4868

CHAPTER 5

PARENT COSTS

RESPONSIBILITY

The weekly parent fee (family share) is calculated at the time of determination of eligibility.

- ❑ The amount of the parent fee is based on the annual gross income and family size (not the number of children using care).
- ❑ The parent fee is to be paid directly to the provider each week as stated on the Child Care Certificate.
- ❑ If the parent is using more than one child care provider, the parent fee is paid to the provider that cares for the youngest child or the provider who provides the most hours of care.
- ❑ The parent is responsible for any additional provider fees (i.e. registration fee, supplies, etc.), if they are notified ahead of time.

DELINQUENCY

Parents are required to pay their weekly family share to their child care provider in order to retain their eligibility.

- ❑ If at any time the parent fee becomes delinquent a delinquency letter (“Delinquent Family Share for Child Care Benefits”) will be issued to the parent and provider. Failure to make satisfactory arrangements for payment will result in action to discontinue (terminate) the child care benefits.

CHAPTER 6

ABSENCES

The Subsidy Program in Steuben County allows a family to have 12 absent days per child (not to exceed in any rolling three month period), if the child was scheduled to attend but was not present. (For registered/licensed and group providers only) The parent may still be responsible for the weekly parent fee and non-reimbursable absences depending on the provider contract.

- ❑ SCCP will not reimburse absences when a provider is closed for vacations, holidays, illness, etc. Some providers may have a policy to charge parents for such days and subsidized families may agree to pay this cost on their own as a condition of enrollment.
- ❑ Required notification of withdrawal outlined in agreements between parents and providers must be enforced through independent court action.
- ❑ When a child is claimed absent for more than three (3) consecutive days with no explanation, SCCP may consider the child withdrawn.

CHAPTER 7

REDETERMINATION

CHANGES

- ❑ Regulations governing child care subsidy require parents (caretakers) to report any changes of their *circumstances immediately*. **Supporting documentation must be received within 10 days to ensure accuracy of eligibility decisions.**
- ❑ Changes in parent circumstances between authorization periods may require a redetermination of eligibility; potentially resulting in an increase, decrease, or ineligibility for child care subsidy.
- ❑ Parents may report changes by **phone, e-mail, in writing or face to face.**

RECERTIFICATION

Continuing eligibility for child care services in Steuben County must be redetermined every 6 months. This process of redetermination of eligibility is referred to as recertification.

- ❑ At the time of recertification the parent is responsible for completing the renewal application.
- ❑ **SCCP is not responsible for any recertifications not received due to unreported address changes.**
- ❑ Families are required to update their documentation and return the application and supporting documents **before** the expiration of the existing authorization period. (See Chapter 8 (“Closure”) for failure to comply with the required documentation in a timely manner of submitting recertification’s.)
- ❑ When the recertification process has been successfully completed, a new Child Care Certificate will be issued.
- ❑ If a parent fails to meet recertification requirements, the case will be terminated on the expiration date of the previous authorization.

CHAPTER 8

DISCONTINUANCE OF CHILD CARE SERVICES

Termination of a child care subsidy case can occur in a number of ways including, but not limited to:

- ❑ The parent may request closure
- ❑ A case is terminated due to a completed training or educational program
- ❑ The parent's income exceeds the income eligibility guidelines
- ❑ Employment has ended
- ❑ The parent fails to recertify
- ❑ A parent does not comply with requested information

When any of these conditions occur, SCCP will notify both the caretaker and provider. SCCP will issue an "Intent to Discontinue Child Care Benefits" notice.

Right to a Fair Hearing: If you disagree with the decision made you have the right to request a fair hearing. This can be done by phone or in writing to:

Office of Administrative Hearings
P.O. Box 1930
Albany, New York 12201-1930

Rochester (585) 266-4868

CHAPTER 9

FRAUD

Parents and child care providers must ensure all information submitted is accurate.

“It shall be unlawful for any person, firm, or corporation knowingly by means of a false statement or representation or by deliberate concealment of any material fact, or other fraudulent scheme or device, on behalf of himself or others, to attempt to obtain or to obtain payment from public funds for services or supplies furnished or purportedly furnished pursuant to this chapter.” (Quoted from Social Services Law 145)

At anytime fraud is suspected, the relevant facts will be referred to the Department of Social Services Fraud Investigation Unit.

DEFINITIONS

Word (s)	Definition
Block Grant	As a result of a welfare reform bill, the federal government provides money for child care to states in the form of a block grant.
CACFP	Child and Adult Care Food Program
Caretaker/Parent	Includes the child's parent, legal guardian, caretaker relative or any other person in loco parentis to the child.
Child Care Certificate	A certificate that is issued directly to a child's caretaker which verifies that the caretaker is eligible for subsidized child care services which the caretaker arranges.
Child with Special Needs	A child who is incapable of caring for him/herself and has been diagnosed as having a condition to such a degree that it adversely affects the child's ability to function normally.
Consanguinity	Blood relationship or kinship.
DSS	Department of Social Services
Family Share	The amount the child's family is required to pay towards the cost of child care. Also known as "parent fee".
Family Unit	This is the number of family members that should be considered in the family size. This would include all members, even if they are not within the age guidelines.
Informal	Also known as "Legally Exempt".
Legally Exempt	Includes family, in-home and group child care providers that are not required to be licensed or registered with NYS, but meet applicable local or State requirements for such child care programs.
OCFS	Office of Children and Family Services – contact for Fair Hearing.
Parent	Includes the child's parent, legal guardian, caretaker relative or any other person in loco parentis to the child.
Parent in Loco Parentis	The child's guardian, caretaker relative or any other person with whom a child lives who has assumed responsibility for the day-to-day care and custody of the child.
Recertification	Continuing eligibility for child care services must be re-determined as often as case factors indicate. This process of re-determination of eligibility is referred to as recertification.
SCCP	Steuben Child Care Project

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQ'S)

Q 1. *If I live with my parents, does their income count in determining my eligibility?*

A 1. No, the only income to be used in calculating the gross income are those applying in

Q 2. *May I apply if I am in job search or going to college?*

A 2. No.

Q 3. *Once I fill out my application does that mean I'm approved?*

A 3. No, refer to the "Application Process" section. You are responsible for the full cost of care until you receive notification that you have been approved.

Q 4. *Am I required to come in for an interview to apply for child care subsidy?*

A 4. No face to face interview is required, but may be requested to expedite the process. You may call to obtain the documents to apply and mail in the required documents/application once completed.

Q 5. *If I am approved, how far back will my child care expenses be paid?*

A 5. Your eligibility can go back to the date a conversation (phone or walk in) with the Subsidy Specialist occurred. For example, if you called January 15th for an application and your child care started January 2nd, we will pay from January 15th and on. You are responsible for the total cost of care prior to January 15th.

Q 6. *How do I get reimbursed for what I have paid my child care provider once I'm approved?*

A 6. If you are approved and SCCP/DSS makes retroactive payment, these funds are paid directly to the child care provider. It is the responsibility of the child care provider to reimburse you less the weekly parent fee.

Q 7. *May I use two different providers?*

A 7. Yes

Q 8. *What if my family share (parent fee) is higher than my cost of care for one week?*

A 8. Parent is responsible for the actual cost of care up to the weekly parent fee amount.

Q 9. *Can my child care provider charge me for a registration fee?*

A 9. Yes