What we know about Benton County...

The majority of married women with children work outside the home (70% nationally). For widowed, divorced or separated women with children, the rate is even higher — 77%. With welfare reform even more mothers are entering the labor market. This begs the question: What is the adequacy and availability of child care for these working mothers? According to the FSSA, as of June 30, 1997, there were 2 licensed day care centers and 9 licensed homes in Benton County, with a capacity for 201 children. The last census showed that in Benton County 499 children under age six were likely in need of child care (as “all” parents in the home were working). National research shows that most children are cared for either by relatives (43%), by their mothers at their place of work or while working at home (6%) or in unlicensed homes. Only 29% of preschoolers went to an organized facility such as a day care center (21%) or nursery school (8%).

Welfare reform in Indiana has focused on the needs of welfare-to-work families in need of child care. A major change in child care services in state fiscal year 1998 created a single, integrated child care system. Guaranteed Child Care and Transitional Child Care are now combined under the Child Care and Development Block Grant program. Subsidized child care services are available in Benton County to eligible parents through voucher programs. The voucher agent determines eligibility based on established criteria. Reports indicate that this new voucher system has become quite successful in many counties throughout the state (county data on vouchers will become available by early 1999).

Benton County also provides services to children in need of residential or foster care. In 1997, 3 homes were licensed by the Division of Families and Children and an additional 2 homes were licensed by Child Placing Agencies. Benton County had no residential facilities.

Questions to ponder...

Is there adequate child care available to working parents? Is there sick child care? Or second or third shift child care? Are child care workers adequately trained and by whom? What happens to latch-key children when school is not in session? Who teaches adults the life skills necessary to parent children, maintain their homes and budget their monies?