

## East Bay Business Times

### Equal time

## Employers want more child care options

David Goll

Companies beginning to confront the issue of child care needs for their work force have a good friend in the folks at One Small Step, an employer-sponsored, nonprofit work-life balance organization.

The group has just released its latest version of "Taking Care: an Employer's Guide to Child Care Options." The 2002 update of the guidebook last published in 1997 was produced jointly with the United Way of the Bay Area.

The update has greatly expanded in content. While the 1997 guide focused only on child care centers run by employers on-site, the new 105-page manual includes information not only about these

centers but other forms of child care assistance: financial help for backup care when regular arrangements fall through, reserving spots in nearby off-site centers for employees and direct subsidies for workers.

The guide offers details on how to set up on- or off-site care programs. In-house centers bring up issues ranging from methods of financial support and insurance considerations to licensing requirements. It also delves into such off-site assistance as summer and holiday care, resource and referral services to outside child care, and flexible work hours for employees.

"There's much more interest today among employers in a variety of child care solutions," said Berkeley resident Elizabeth Cushing Payne, a One Small Step project manager who helped compile the guide. "More companies are looking at backup care, reserving slots and subsidies because they're realizing on-site care is not the only way to go."

The poor economy of the past year has also affected company-sponsored child care programs, though not in a drastic manner, Cushing Payne said. "Among our member companies and what we hear about other employers, it doesn't sound like anyone has closed an on-site center or dropped other programs," she said. "On the other hand, most are not adding programs or expanding existing ones." One Small Step itself, founded in San Francisco in 1986 as a project of the United Way of the Bay Area, is supported today by a veritable who's-who list of major Bay Area corporations. They include ChevronTexaco Corp., soon to be based in San Ramon, and Oakland-based Kaiser Permanente, as well as Cisco Systems Inc., Wells Fargo Bank, Sun Microsystems Inc., Morrison & Foerster LLP, Hewlett-Packard Co. and Genentech Inc.

All these companies, along with employers throughout the state, have a large number of employees who spend much of their salary and time dealing with child care issues. In California alone, 1.4 million children under 6 years of age have parents who both work or a single parent who is employed outside the home. "Less than 50 percent of that group can be served by licensed child care around the state," Cushing Payne said. "And not everyone has a relative who can help out, either full- or part-time."

According to One Small Step's guide, employees at Redwood City-based Electronic Arts Inc., a computer game manufacturer with more than 1,100 employees, will be lucky enough to have child care a few steps away from their offices by September. And, Lori McAdams, director of human resources at Electronic Arts-owned Maxis Corp. in Walnut Creek, was instrumental in getting a new on-site child care center established at the Maxis headquarters office on the Peninsula.

Maxis, a 200-employee company that also creates computer games, was bought by Electronic Arts but retains its name and East Bay offices.

"Electronic Arts has a corporate goal of becoming the top 'people' company for high-performing employees in our field, and (the child care center) is one way of doing that," McAdams said. "Our work force is aging and many of our employees are beginning to have children."

McAdams explained that the computer game industry tends to be populated by younger workers "aging" in that setting doesn't mean approaching retirement. The young folks with offspring at the Walnut Creek office don't yet have the benefit of an on-site center, she added.

"But we do have a resource and referral program for them and a backup program that pays up to \$50 a day, seven days out of the year," McAdams said. Other East Bay employees featured in the guide include: Dublin-based Sybase Inc, which opened its on-site SyberKids child care center in March; Alameda County, which operates the county Child Development Center for employees in

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Oakland; UC-Berkeley, which operates seven child care centers in close proximity to the campus for use by its 6,033 employees ; and Morrison & Foerster, the San Francisco-based law firm with a large office in Walnut Creek, which offers its employees in-home backup child care services.

"Our members that have had on-site child care for a number of years report they are really happy with the results," Cushing Payne said. "Their employees can focus on their work tasks without a lot of the usual distractions when you have children. A lot of the older workers say they wish they had such a benefit when they were raising their kids."

*Equal Time explores workplace issues. To comment or suggest stories, contact David Goll at [dgoll@bizjournals.com](mailto:dgoll@bizjournals.com) or 925-598-1436*