

Crisis Nursery Services in Washington, DC

Erica L. Walters

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Dr. Sebastian Galindo

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Section 1: Situation Statement

Washington, DC is a city battered by the pandemic both economically and socially. Access to quality childcare for short-term needs is out of reach for many poor families, with disastrous outcomes and at a deep cost to their potential (Belt, 2019; Berkon, 2020). It is established that investing in childcare is a proven and effective way to impact outcomes and potentially lift families out of poverty yet need-based childcare on a short-term basis is nonexistent in Washington, DC (Hufkens et al., 2019). Over and over, research and observation show that the free market is an insufficient method for managing childcare markets, especially for poor families (Lloyd & Susinsky, 2013). There is a distinct need in the District for a nonprofit which provides on-site, short-term, acute-need childcare to families in poverty, with a vision of preventing small inconveniences from incurring catastrophic outcomes (Cole, et al., 2004).

Programs exist to subsidize long-term, full-time childcare in DC. A gap, however, exists in serving the need for short-term, immediate-need services of families for whom a relatively small amount of childcare could allow them to increase family stability and success and prevent catastrophe. Reasons for this need include job interviews, job training, court dates, court-mandated or voluntary substance treatment programs, securing safe housing to enable escape from violent homes, and medical appointments. The public defender's office in adjacent Arlington County, VA, acknowledges that as many as half of its clients suffer for lack of access to small amounts of childcare (Haywood, 2022). Similarly, parents seeking treatment for mental illness or substance use disorder can find lack of childcare destabilizing (Salame, 2022). More prosaically, a parent who can access free, safe, enriching childcare while they go to a job

interview or training can be the difference between long-term stability and instability for their family.

Section 2: Program Model and Program Description

A: Visual Program Model

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DISTRICT EMERGENCY CHILDCARE SERVICES				
Purpose: The mission of District Emergency Childcare Services is to provide free, quality, short-term, acute-need childcare to low-income families in crisis, preventing inconveniences from becoming catastrophes, and helping families remain safe, secure, and available for opportunity. DECS holds a vision of a world in which no family faces crisis or misses opportunity because of a lack of access to quality childcare. DECS has the potential to change family outcomes by addressing an underserved need for short-term, emergency childcare in the District of Columbia and surrounding counties. DECS is unique among childcare services in the DC area in that it addresses short-term and acute need and is nimble enough to provide care at short notice at no cost to families. By placing an emphasis on long-term bonds with families after responding respectfully and competently to immediate crisis need, DECS has the potential to become a robust part of the community, informed by and invested in its family participants, rather than a missionary-style response to immediate need.				
Resources	Activities	Outputs	Outcomes	Impact
Paid childcare staff Volunteers Safe, well-equipped building and grounds Paid social work staff Community members with distinct areas of passion and expertise	Short-term childcare services Community events (such as BBQs) and optional, fun classes for parents and children Respite care for foster families Parents' Night Out childcare evenings Volunteer opportunities for participating families Ongoing professional development for paid childcare staff	Childcare Outputs Number of families onboarded to DECS Number of hours of childcare provided Community Outputs Number of families participating in community events Number of families who receive services who choose to volunteer Professionalization Outputs Number of childcare providers making a living wage Retention rates of childcare providers	Childcare Outcomes Families access emergency childcare instead of missing opportunities or facing crises unassisted. Foster parents receive necessary respite care. Community Outcomes Families in the DECS community get to know one another and form friendships and community networks. Children and families participate in Parents' Nights Out and Community Classes, meaning involvement in DECS programming is not limited to times of stress. Professionalization Outputs DECS becomes a leader in adequate pay and benefits for childcare providers. The best candidates for childcare positions understand that at DECS, they will be compensated fairly and treated professionally, setting a tone for other childcare organizations in the area. Ongoing professional development emphasizes the quality of care provided and prepares a robust and competent cohort of childcare professionals for lifelong, fulfilling careers.	Families avoid crises caused by a lack of access to childcare Families form networks of friendship and support, making childcare emergencies less likely Families enjoy programming meant to celebrate their existence rather than just mitigate their poverty Childcare becomes a realistic avenue out of poverty and into meaningful careers
Assumptions		Internal Factors Influencing Success		External Factors Influencing Success
- DECS is able to find qualified initial staff for all positions. - Parents are willing to trust DECS with their children's care. - Parents are interested in voluntary participation in DECS programming besides simply childcare.		- Ability to use evidence-based evaluation models - Ability to employ evidence-based programs to prevent burnout in staff - Ability to maintain joyful work environment focused on professional growth and excellent programming		- Local government remains supportive of location and mission of DECS - Necessary funding levels are maintained - The public is interested in and engaged with the mission

B: Program Description

DECS has three goals that it sees as inextricable from one another. The first is to use access to free, short-term childcare to prevent minor family inconveniences from becoming catastrophes because of a lack of access to childcare. The second is to elevate and professionalize childcare as a profession, thereby taking a career path which has historically been marginalized and underpaid (but upon which all of society most certainly depends in order to function), and elevating it through adequate pay, middle class-level benefits, and robust professional development. The third is to celebrate families as they are, recognizing that programming that seeks only to mitigate the symptoms of poverty without embracing the humanity and community potential of participating families is based on an outdated and exploitative missionary model of philanthropy.

Outcomes of the successful realization of these goals include families who are able to access emergency childcare, thereby preventing them from missing opportunities (such as job interviews), foregoing medical care, missing court appearances, or otherwise destabilizing family well-being because of a lack of access to childcare. As a community center, DECS will host several events per year that are based purely on enjoyment and connection among program families, such as BBQs. These events have the added benefit of connecting families to one another, potentially in strong social networks which can prevent future need of emergency childcare services. Childcare providers will be paid a living wage aligned with the reality that the family salary needed to responsibly buy a home in DC is \$94,408. DECS will internalize this data to mean that to make a career in childcare a path to home ownership (and thus family and generational stability), one earner in a dual-earner family should make \$47,204, or \$22.69 per hour for a forty-hour workweek, as well as have benefits that allow for a full and healthy life

(Belt, 2019). Investment in training, adequate pay, and quality work environments has a positive outcome for childcare workers, their families, and the children they serve (Shonkoff et al., 2007).

The primary program at DECS will be emergency, drop-in childcare services provided to poor families. The organization will secure and maintain a home-style building in Northeast DC that will be open 24-hours a day to provide childcare to families who have completed the brief and minimally stringent onboarding process. DECS will operate at a capacity of 24 children (six per adult staff member) per day and six children (three per adult staff member) overnight. Daytime care will be defined as care taking place between 6:00 AM and 8:00 PM, seven days a week, and will be staffed by four childcare professionals at all times. Nighttime care will be between 6:00PM and 8:00 AM, with one staff for every three children. Children 12 and younger are eligible for this service.

DECS will also operate twice-monthly “Parents’ Nights Out,” staffed by volunteers and accessible to parents who have been onboarded previously with DECS free of charge. This program will be provided by DECS recruiting and training about a dozen volunteers, committing them each to one weekend evening per month from 5:00PM until 10:00PM. Parents will be able to pick up their children before 10:00 PM if they choose and understand that the service does not include bedtime or bathing care but does include dinner. Care is limited to children ages 3-12. Another community event will be ten community barbeques per year (roughly one per month except for November and December), inviting all onboarded families. DECS will hire a locally based caterer and secure hospitality volunteers for a barbeque hosted onsite the third weekend of each month. Onboarded families will be invited by text message and email, and flyers will be posted prominently advertising each event at the DECS site. Finally, volunteers and families alike will have an open invitation to approach the Board of Directors about offering classes for

fun and growth, at which childcare will be provided. Examples of such classes can be painting, creative writing, crafts, cooking, and yoga.

Impediments to the programming, assuming funding is covered, will be instilling faith in parents that DECS is a safe and joyful place to leave their children. While desperation may realistically initiate first contact, all of DECS staff and volunteers will be responsible for making that initial interaction as positive as possible, underscoring that DECS is a place that has more to offer than just last resort childcare. Community programming will also need to live in awareness that poor families often have limited time for leisure. Providing childcare will be a crucial aspect of encouraging participation in community events, and DECS should ensure that all families know that access to emergency services is not contingent on participation in community events. Having a family is one of the great human experiences, and this is not lessened by having a poor family. Participating families will be engaged with DECS because it treats them as deserving of celebration on their own, not just as problems to be solved.

C: Fundamental Assumptions and Keys to Success

Nursery Way, a trademarked program developed through a collaboration by researchers at the University of Minnesota's Institute of Child Development and Harvard University's Center on the Developing Child, is in place at a number of crisis nurseries around the country, notably the Greater Minneapolis Crisis Nursery, which allows its practices to serve as both a site of research and a resource for those developing similar crisis nurseries in other regions (Greater Minneapolis Crisis Nursery, 2018). Many families who interact with Crisis Nurseries using Nursery Way credit this experience as their first positive interaction with a "system," and one which equipped them to expand their well-being and the well-being of their children (Minnesota House of Representatives, 2020).

Nursery Way is developed specifically to serve families who need substantial - but still temporary - assistance with childcare to avoid adverse outcomes for the children or the family. The programming focuses on mitigating risk factors for adverse outcomes (such as poverty, unemployment, and generational patterns of abuse) with protective factors (such as parental resilience, community involvement, and education on child-rearing techniques), while interacting with families in a respectful and affirming manner (Greater Minneapolis Crisis Nursery, 2018). Centers using the Nursery Way protocol also emphasize the health of the providers in Crisis Nurseries and enlist them in a holistic program of developing the centers as sites of calm and community for parents, children, and providers. Pilot studies demonstrate that staff training in mindfulness- based stress-reduction techniques for children in their care have a ripple effect - children who are better able to self-regulate and mitigate chronic stress, leading to more content childcare providers and happier (and therefore more effective and peaceful) parents (DePasquale et al., 2020).

In order to operate, DECS assumes that it will be able to fund and staff all of its childcare, administration, and social work positions. This assumption further relies on the belief that people are engaged and happy in their work when they feel they are providing a good service, with good people, in an atmosphere of growth (Rubin, 2015). The “atmosphere of growth” is key when considering especially childcare providers, who have largely been marginalized within a labor market that nonetheless relies on them for a functioning society. Childcare, requiring no formal education, is drastically underpaid and provides no opportunities for advancement. The key to DECS’ success in training and retaining top-quality and committed caregivers will be in seeing the organization and the caregiving employees as partners in the growth of the organization *and* the growth of the individuals providing care. DECS will hold as

values that childcare providers should be paid a living wage, receive benefits associated with middle class, salaried jobs, and engage in educational and training opportunities at no cost to them which will equip them for positions in the field that require education which may be inaccessible without support (an example is a childcare provider who gets her Bachelor's degree through UF Online part-time through a tuition subsidy while working at DECS, and is then qualified to become a lead teacher in a private preschool). DECS understands that its childcare providers are the foundation of its mission and supports them robustly.

DECS will be successful because it understands that none of its missions exist separately from the others. Parents who can take care of themselves and their lives are better community members, as are people who are paid adequately for their work and given opportunities for growth and advancement. Children who see their parents supported by the community grow up to trust and invest in that community. Families who can access small amounts of childcare in times of dire need have the stability to improve their entire lives, a growth which spills over into community life. Early Childhood Education and Care are not a panacea for poverty, but providing care that supports parents, and ensuring that care is provided by professionals who can *be* supportive parents and community members, is necessary to begin sustainable paths to financial stability for poor families (Simpson et al., 2018).

DECS rejects the old-fashioned model of the wealthy giving to the poor, with a wall between the two, and embraces a model which understands the symbiosis of belonging to a family, and organization, and a community.

Section 3: Evaluation Purpose and Overview

A: Orientation of the Evaluation

The purpose of the evaluations (which are focused on the goal of positive client experience) shall be to determine whether parents feel comfortable seeking out DECS services, feel positively about the childcare their children received, and feel that using DECS helped to stabilize their family and avert crisis in a stressful situation. Since barriers to such programming include knowledge of the service and trust in the safety of leaving their children with people they have not personally vetted or hired, it is appropriate that some of the evaluation be focused on whether the outreach of the program is meeting the needs of parents to trust in the Nursery and believe it can meet their acute childcare needs. DECS will primarily use a Needs and Assets Evaluation style for this facet of evaluation, to ensure that families' need to trust DECS and its services is met before the services are utilized.

Once parents have enough faith in the nursery to walk through the door and leave their children in its care, evaluation of the actual service provided and its effectiveness should use the existing framework of trademarked Nursery Way programming for Crisis Nurseries. Facets of success are whether parents feel they are better able to care for their children and whether they feel access to childcare on an acute-need basis increased their family stability. To evaluate whether the Nursery has met this requirement, evaluators can use Impact Evaluation in order to find any gaps between expectation and delivery of effective services.

B: Evaluation Questions

Evaluation questions will be divided into Pre-Service Questions (evaluated by a Needs and Assets Evaluation) and Post-Service Questions (evaluated by an Impact Evaluation).

Pre-Service Evaluation Questions

1. Do families believe that access to free, short-term childcare would improve outcomes in times of crisis?
2. Are families aware of DECS and the services it provides?
3. Do families feel confident that DECS can provide safe and pleasant care to their children?
4. Do families feel they will be negatively judged for using DECS services?

Post-Service Evaluation Questions

1. Did the family feel positively about their DECS experience?
2. Were the children happy about their time at DECS?
3. Do the families perceive their outcomes from crisis positively impacted by using DECS services?
4. Did DECS connect the family with additional resources that positively impacted them?

C: Composition of Evaluation Team

The small size and simplicity of the DECS evaluation team will reflect the organization's nascent stage, with the potential to expand and hire an external consultant as the organization grows in breadth and impact.

The Program Director of DECS will take responsibility for leadership of the Evaluation Team, and will plan and execute the evaluation. They will be assisted by a panel of one social worker and two childcare providers from the staff of DECS, who will be compensated for the increased responsibility. The social worker will provide insight on determining post-service

experience of connecting with other social services and long-term impact on family stability, and the childcare providers will advocate for evaluation of child and parent experience of the DECS service itself.

D: Audiences for Evaluation

There will be two primary audiences for evaluation: those who are responsible for tailoring the services DECS provides and its presence in the community, and those who have an interest in the effectiveness of DECS from the perspective of donors and other supporters.

Since DECS is a new organization, confidence in its solvency and effectiveness is of primary importance for establishing it as a nonprofit where the philanthropic community in Washington, DC can feel confident giving their funds and support. The Impact Evaluation, paired with rigorous and transparent financial auditing, will provide material for a robust public relations campaign to inspire donor and community confidence in the organization and its effectiveness in mitigating crises among poor families in Washington. The Impact Evaluation will also inform the activities and priorities of the Social Work Department at DECS, who connect client families with additional services and resources in order to maximize the benefits they gain from a relationship with DECS. Childcare leadership will also use the knowledge gained from the Impact Evaluation to improve the experience of children while they are at DECS.

The Needs and Assets Evaluation data will be most useful to the Marketing and Social Work departments at DECS, as the former work to increase initial confidence in DECS among families who have not yet used its services, and the latter is responsible for evaluating need for the services that DECS provides.

E: Timeline and Resource Implications

Until DECS grows to the point of needing an outside independent evaluator, the financial impact of the evaluation plan is negligible, since it is utilizing the labor of existing salaried staff. There will be a need during the evaluation process to hire an additional childcare provider to enable the two childcare providers on the evaluation team to devote salaried hours to the evaluation project. The Social Work Department, which employs three full-time social workers, can spare the labor of one social worker at 50% for the nine weeks the evaluation is anticipated to take.

Timeline:

Weeks 1 and 2: Develop evaluation plan

Weeks 3 and 4: Identify participants and make contact, distributing surveys

Week 5: Follow up with participants who are non-responsive

Week 6: Identify holes in data (for instance, due to non-responsiveness) and identify additional participants as needed.

Weeks 7 and 8: Analyze Data

Week 9: Prepare Report of Evaluation

Section 4: Evaluation Design and Data Collection

A: Evaluation Designs

Both the Needs Assessment and the Impact Assessment will be done through surveys. The pre-service evaluations will focus on families who are likely to benefit from DECS services, and will include voluntary respondents from area elementary schools, social service providers, and churches. All families who use DECS services in the six months preceding the evaluation will be encouraged to participate in the post-service evaluations which use an Impact Evaluation design. The post-service survey will aim to identify the outcomes that can be directly linked to using DECS services during a time of short-term childcare need. The Needs Assessment will be limited particularly because many families do not frame negative outcomes due to lack of childcare as originating from lack of childcare, but from other problems of poverty. The survey therefore must ask participants to imagine the potential impact of a service that they never thought about existing in the first place. The Impact Evaluation will be limited in its ability to determine whether positive outcomes are related exclusively to accessing short-term childcare through DECS, but will have the strength of looking at the holistic aspects of DECS' childcare plus social services during and following family crises.

B: Outcome Variables by Evaluation Question

Pre-Service Needs Assessment

Evaluation Question	Outputs	Outcomes	Data Collection
Do families believe that access to free, short-term childcare would improve outcomes in times of crisis?	-survey responses	Families recognize short-term childcare as a valuable tool in mitigating crisis	Pre-service survey of families who meet demographic criteria for DECS client families, but have not yet used the service
Are families aware of DECS and the services it provides?	-survey responses	DECS effectively markets its services to families who can benefit	Pre-service survey of families who meet demographic criteria for DECS client families, but have not yet used the service
Do families feel confident that DECS can provide safe and pleasant care for their children?	-survey responses	DECS determines how to increase confidence in its services among first-time client families	Pre-service survey of families who meet demographic criteria for DECS client families, but have not yet used the service
Do families feel they will be negatively judged for using DECS services?	-survey responses	DECS facilitates judgement-free culture among staff and client families	Pre-service survey of families who meet demographic criteria for DECS client families, but have not yet used the service

Post-Service Impact Assessment

Evaluation Question	Outputs	Outcomes	Data Collection
Did the parents feel positively about their DECS experience?	-survey responses	DECS fosters a positive relationship with families and develops a reputation for quality, judgement-free services	Post-service survey of families who used DECS in the past six months.
Were the children happy about their time at DECS?	-survey responses	DECS improves the experience for children, including activities, snacks, and discipline protocol	Post-service survey of families who used DECS in the past six months.
Do the parents perceive their outcomes from crisis to be positively impacted by using DECS services?	-survey responses	DECS targets its services to families in situations which are shown to have the greatest positive response to short-term childcare services	Post-service survey of families who used DECS in the past six months.
Did DECS connect the family with additional resources that positively impacted them?	-survey responses	DECS prioritizes connection to resources that families perceive as the most impactful.	Post-service survey of families who used DECS in the past six months.

C: Methods of Data Collection

The scope of the DECS evaluation project is limited, and primarily focused on qualitative perceptions and experiences of families who might benefit from DECS, and families who have already used DECS services. For this reason, surveys will be the method through which the evaluation team obtains the relevant data for evaluation. The post-service survey population will be simple to identify: it will include all families who have used DECS services in the six months

preceding the start of the evaluation program. The pre-service survey will be more challenging, relying on voluntary respondents found at area social service centers, churches, and elementary schools. Mindful of the troubled history of outside organizations preying on the time and attention of poor families with whom they have no existing relationship, DECS will ask leaders in each of these facilities to identify and approach potential willing respondents, primarily focusing on those whom the leaders think might benefit from DECS services presently or in the future. This will fulfill two goals: spreading awareness to those who might benefit from a relationship with DECS, and obtaining survey responses from those who DECS would like to target.

D: Specific Surveys

Pre-Service Survey

	Strongly agree	agree	disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know / doesn't apply
I have experienced difficulty finding short-term childcare when I need it					
I have experienced hardship because I did not have childcare.					
I have missed out on opportunities because I did not have childcare.					
A few hours of free childcare would positively impact my family's well-being					
I am comfortable leaving my children with trained childcare professionals.					
I feel comfortable using social services.					
I am familiar with DECS and the services it provides.					

Post-Service Survey

	Strongly agree	agree	disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know / doesn't apply
My children enjoyed their time at DECS					
I would recommend DECS to another family.					
I was able to avoid negative outcomes because I could use DECS for childcare.					
DECS connected me with additional services.					
I felt that DECS cares for me and my family.					
DECS adequately followed up with me and my family after I used their temporary services.					
My family's well-being increased because we were able to use DECS.					
I felt respected and appreciated by the staff at DECS.					

Additional Questions:

1. Describe the situation that led you to use DECS
2. Describe services that DECS connected you with after you used DECS
3. Describe what your children liked and disliked about attending DECS
4. Describe your experience with the staff at DECS
5. Describe any concerns you have about DECS

Section 5: Data Analysis, Use, and Conclusions

A: Methods of Data Analysis

For the quantitative responses to the pre-service survey, a simple analysis of the responses will give each question an average number. If there are any noticeable outliers, the Evaluation Team will attempt to identify demographic or situational commonalities among outliers and may follow up with respondents for quick telephone interviews about the reasons for their responses.

The team will use the same method to evaluate the responses to the quantitative questions on the post-service survey, giving each question a numerical average and following up with outliers. The qualitative responses will be counted by category (such as counting the number of families who use DECS for job interviews, court dates, medical care, etc.) and grouped into areas of concern (such as if multiple families report children being bored or left out at DECS).

Even after outliers are addressed, the team should contact a random assortment of families from each survey to conduct exploratory telephone interviews in order to get a fuller understanding of the reasons behind their quantitative responses. If the team sees particular areas of weakness, it is possible that further evaluation will be necessary.

B: Maximizing Utilization of the Evaluation Findings

The Marketing team will make most use of the pre-service evaluations, since these will address perceptions of DECS' ability to provide quality childcare in a judgement-free environment, and awareness of the services DECS provides. Upon completion of the Evaluation Process, the Marketing Team will determine if there is enough information upon which to act in designing a marketing strategy, and will proceed to focus on areas the survey and follow-up

interviews determined are crucial for instilling the community with confidence in the quality and effectiveness of using DECS for short-term childcare needs.

The Childcare Team will use information from both pre-and post-service surveys to create a childcare environment which instills parents and children with excitement and confidence. They will evaluate responses to post-service surveys to ensure that discipline strategies, activity programming, and the physical space of DECS are meeting the needs of all client families. The Childcare Team will separately continuously evaluate perception of its effectiveness and quality.

The Social Work Team will use post-service survey responses to prioritize the relationships it has with other social services organizations and direct client families to the services which have demonstrated themselves to be maximally beneficial to families who use DECS. They will also evaluate the ways in which using DECS has a long-term impact on the well-being of families, and whether they feel connected to further community and governmental support due to their connection to DECS.

The Fundraising Team will use the information gained from post-service responses to contribute meaningful statistics to the fundraising material they publish as a part of their annual campaign. The team will emphasize the situations in which DECS shows itself to have the greatest impact (for example, if the survey finds that families experience the greatest positive change after using DECS to care for their children during a job interview or training, or if it finds that using DECS connected them to additional social services with which they were previously unfamiliar). The team will emphasize data which shows the stabilizing impact of DECS, particularly the ways in which it allows families to avoid adverse legal or health outcomes or increase financial well-being.

C: Analysis of Key Issues and Challenges

The primary ideological concern of evaluating perceptions of DECS and its effectiveness will be avoiding the missionary/savior model of poverty intervention. It is of primary importance that DECS be a trustworthy partner in the community, rather than an outside force delivering services that cater to a philanthropic-class *idea* of what is good for poor families, rather than what poor families actually need. It is of paramount importance that the Evaluation Team treat respondents' time as valuable, demonstrated not through compensation but through respect and flexibility. No family should feel that participation in the survey is a requirement for using DECS services, since "strings attached" is against the primary ethos of the organization. A guiding principle of DECS is "serve, don't save," which should carry over into the attitude and operation of the Evaluation Team.

Getting an adequate number of responses will be challenging, especially in the Needs Assessment, which relies on families who have no existing relationship with or affection for DECS. The Evaluation Team will rely on leaders at the sites chosen as potential survey populations, including clergy, school administrators and social workers, and providers of existing social services. DECS aims to thrive by creating positive relationships and meaningful impact for its client families, which will begin by being a positive partner to organizations which already serve potential client populations. DECS and its representatives should be humble, generous listeners when operating within a new community, and the evaluation process is no exception.

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