



Photo courtesy of Jen Croce | Seventeen percent of Massachusetts children attend family child care homes, according to NACCRRRA, including those at highly rated GreenBaby Home Daycare in Billerica (above).

Finding the best child care provider for your family

By Leslie Benson

JODI GAROFOLO, a working North Easton mom, believes she's found the best child care option for her two preschool children: part-time enrollment in a licensed day care center and a live-in au pair. "For

us, it's worth the peace of mind," Garofolo says.

After her children were born, the Angie's List member says her husband,

Greg, began working even longer hours, and she felt overwhelmed when trying to find care for their daughter, Chiara, now 4, and son, Luca, 2. She had researched child care options in the Boston area, she says, and had settled on highly rated Creative World Children's Learning Center. Later, "it became too difficult to take the kids to and from the center every day," she says.

Before hiring 20-year-old Merika Eckerskogg of Sweden, one of

To verify a child care provider's licensure, visit www.eec.state.ma.us/ChildCareSearch/EarlyEduMap.aspx.



300 au pairs placed by the Au Pair in America program in Boston, Garofolo paid \$2,000 a month for her children to attend Creative World full time. They now go to the day care center for five hours, two days a week, while Eckerskogg attends classes, and stay at home with her the rest of the time. She pays the au pair an \$800 monthly stipend, and \$960 a month to the center. “We wanted the kids to spend more time at home playing with their friends,” Garofolo says. “We’re happy with our decision.”

In 2009, 53 percent of Massachusetts children under age 6 received child care from centers in the state, according to the National Association of Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies. The average monthly cost was \$973 per child.

In January, the Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care launched new regulations that make it easier for parents to verify a center’s licensure. All caregivers working outside a family’s home are required to register annually and pass criminal background checks, as well as local building,

health and lead paint inspections and other restrictions. Parents may also contact Child Care Choices of Boston, part of the Massachusetts Child Care Resource & Referral Network, to identify affordable, licensed providers in their area.

Regulated federally through the U.S. Department of State Office of Private Sector Exchange, au pairs must pass a criminal background check, an interview, reference checks and have documented child care experience, including at least 200 hours of infant-specific care.

“It’s an ideal option for families who prefer to leave their children at home,” says Ruth Ferry, senior vice president and director of Au Pair in America.

Before deciding which option works best, Linda Geigle, executive director for the National Association for Family Child Care, advises parents to visit the provider. “Talk to other parents about how they like the care, find out about the provider’s training and procedures, and pay attention to child to provider ratios,” she says. ☞

Average monthly costs for full-time child care in Massachusetts

FAMILY CHILD CARE: \$817 (per toddler) — \$860 (per infant)

CHILD CARE CENTER: \$973 (per toddler) — \$1,325 (per infant)

AU PAIR: \$1,388, plus housing costs and a \$500 educational component (per family)

NANNY: \$2,000 — \$2,400, plus application and placement fees (per family)

