

thread *connecting*
early care & education
to alaska

Quality Early Care & Education

A Guide for Alaska's Families



Table of Contents

Welcome.....	1
Getting Started in Your Search	3
What Quality Care Looks Like	4
Meeting Your Child’s Needs.....	6
Types of Regulated Early Care and Education Programs....	7
Child to Caregiver Ratios	8
The Cost of Child Care	10
Interview Checklist.....	11
Helping Your Child Feel Comfortable in Child Care	14
Checking on Your Child’s Care.....	15
Other Helpful Information	16



thread understands families want the best for their children. This includes ensuring their children have great care that enhances development and learning potential. Staff at **thread** are dedicated to helping families make informed choices about early care and education by providing customized child care referrals with individualized information, community resources and short term support to meet families needs. We encourage you to use this guide along with our staff support and website to assist you in understanding and finding quality child care.

Family services at thread include:

- Referrals for child care. **thread's** child care referral services provide families with information about child care programs that may fit their needs. Talk directly with a referral specialist by calling or visiting a local **thread** office or use the online referral option available by visiting our website at www.threadalaska.org
- Information about quality in early care and education programs. **thread** can help you understand the different choices available and provide you with researched based information on quality early learning so you can be confident in your search and choice for care.
- Enhanced referral services for military families and families who have children with special needs.
- Warm line phone support to assist families with challenges they encounter.
- Parent workshops. Come together to ask questions, share resources and network with others.
- Opportunities for advocacy and action. Join **thread's** Parent Action Network to learn about trends, information, news and early care and education action alerts. Stay informed about early care and education issues locally and nationally.



Welcome *continued*

We are committed to providing high quality services and follow these standards of customer service:

Parent Choice

thread understands each family and child has different care preferences and needs. The information you receive are referrals only; we do not recommend a particular child care program.

Confidentiality

Information received from parents/clients about their family and/or child care needs is used for referral services, research and grant purposes. All personal or identifying information remains confidential. **thread** does not share or sell mailing lists of client names. For **thread**'s Complaint and Confidentiality Policy, please see page 15.

Commitment to Diversity

thread serves all families and children without bias and does not discriminate because of race, color, national origin, age, sex or disability.

Fee Statement

Child care referral services are free of charge. Each regional **thread** office is a 501(c)3 organization that accepts charitable contributions. If you are interested in making a tax deductible donation, please visit www.threadalaska.org

Feedback Regarding Services

It is our pleasure to serve you and your family. If you have questions, concerns or would like to give feedback, please contact your regional **thread** office. Feedback is important to us so we can continue to provide the best services possible.

National Association of Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies (NACCRRA) Quality Assurance

NACCRRA Quality Assurance is a voluntary, national certification program for Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) Agencies. The process guides CCR&R's toward continuous improvement and excellence in service delivery. **thread** follows these national standards to ensure high quality service is delivered in Alaska.



Getting Started in Your Search

Making a decision about an early care and education program is an important one. This decision affects your child's early years and **thread** is here to help.

Staff at **thread** customize your child care search according to your location, needs and preferences. You may also visit our website at www.threadalaska.org to get your search for child care started. **thread** child care referrals include information about programs that may be a good fit for your family's needs. By utilizing the tools in this booklet, you can feel more prepared in knowing what to look for and how to find the right environment for your child. You can begin by calling, visiting, talking with others and preparing your child for child care.

We strongly recommend you call and visit at least three programs before making a decision. You may also contact **thread** if you need further suggestions or helpful tips for meeting with providers, asking detailed questions or are in need of more referrals. Following this process increases the likelihood that you will be more satisfied with your choice in child care.

While all referrals are individualized, **thread** staff offers enhanced referrals for families with unique needs.

Military Enhanced Referrals

thread can assist military families who are searching for child care off base/post. In some cases, a subsidy is available through a partnership with NACCRRA and the Department of Defense. Please contact your local **thread** office or visit www.naccrra.org/MilitaryPrograms

Alaska IN!

This program is for children with special needs whose family qualifies for and uses the State of Alaska Child Care Assistance Program. The goals of this program are to expand the availability of child care, to increase early identification and intervention and to provide training and support to child care providers working with children who have special needs. Contact **thread** and ask to learn more about the Alaska IN! program.



What Quality Care Looks Like

Health and Safety

All regulated early care and education programs are required to meet basic health and safety standards. Some simple things to look for include:

- Children are supervised at all times
- Proper hand washing for children and adults
- Disinfection of materials and classroom areas including diaper changing surfaces
- Staff are trained and able to respond during an emergency
- Medications are labeled and out of the reach of children

A healthy and safe environment will offer both indoor and outdoor space for children and be free from hazards, broken toys or aged equipment. Positive guidance, including the early educator's classroom management techniques and practices, are part of a safe and healthy environment. Positive guidance practices that are focused on teaching children not only support healthy child development but model learned behaviors through adult example and encouragement. Guidance should not be punitive or shaming and never include harsh or physical punishment.

Ratio and Group Size

"Ratio" means how many adults are required to care for children based on their age. When each adult is responsible for fewer children, your child can be provided with more one-on-one attention. This attention is crucial to your child's social and emotional development including how well caregivers know your child and plan activities based on his/her learning needs and interests. The term "group size" means the maximum number of children together at anytime. A smaller group size ensures your child will receive one-on-one attention and is part of a group that is easier to manage. Small group sizes are particularly important for young children who need more individual attention and can become overwhelmed in large groups. Ratio and group size guidelines are set by the regulatory agency. Please see page eight and nine of this booklet for more information.

Early Educator Training and Staff Turnover

Staff education is the best predictor of quality in an early care and education program. Adults with training in early childhood education provide higher quality programs for your child, implement more appropriate activities and do a better job of preparing your child for school. An early care and education provider that receives ongoing training related to caring for children ensures they have knowledge of the newest research on how children develop.

Staff turnover can be difficult for children and families because quality early care and education is formed by strong, supportive and respectful relationships. It is important for you to know who is caring for your child, how long they have worked at the program and what type of training or education they have received. Typically a high quality program will have less staff turnover because they are able to pay higher wages, have more teachers with fewer children and provide a supportive adult work environment.

Family Involvement

Quality early care and education programs involve the families of the children enrolled in the program. Programs have the needs of many families to balance, however, as a parent you should always feel welcome in the program, have access to your child and have opportunities to provide input about their care. Well managed programs operate using a set of policies and procedures that include addressing needs and interests of families. This information may be available in a parent handbook. In addition to daily communication, another example of family involvement is parent-teacher conferences. This allows families to visit with the child's provider and focus on the child's individual development and progress. This is also a nice time for families to be involved with the program to create shared plans and goals.

Accreditation

If an early care and education program is accredited by a national organization, this means the program has voluntarily gone above State of Alaska regulatory requirements and meets national levels of quality. National accreditation is a process that typically requires self-study, feedback from families and a visit by an outside organization. More information about accreditation and other types of regulated early care and education programs are listed on page seven of this booklet.



Meeting Your Child's Needs

Choosing a child care program can seem daunting, but using your instincts and knowledge of what's best for your child and family will help you to make the right decision. When choosing a program it is important to take into consideration your child's individual differences and stage of development to find a program that will meet your child's needs.

In general, all children need a consistent schedule and built in opportunities for active and quiet play. Children thrive when they are in environments with interactive teachers, materials and activities. Here are some important things to look for at varying stages of development.

Infants

Infants grow and develop through responsive interactions with their caregivers. This includes cuddling and talking. Their feeding and nap schedule in child care should match their home schedule. Infants need to be held when they are bottle fed. Infants experience their world through their senses. Bright colorful toys that make sounds and have different textures are ideal for infants. Infants put toys in their mouth, as part of learning about their world, so it is important to ensure toys and materials are safe and do not contain parts that are toxic or easily swallowed. Opportunities for indoor and outdoor play should occur daily and infants should be provided with the ability to crawl around and to walk/toddle with appropriate toys and materials.

Toddlers

Toddlers are active and should be provided with ample opportunities to explore their environment through push toys, climbing, sliding and jumping. Toddlers enjoy building, creating and playing pretend. Opportunities for messy play that stimulates the senses are important. Toddlers also like being read to, having opportunities to create with a variety of materials and learn best through interactive hands on activities.

Preschoolers

Preschoolers are curious and highly interactive with their surrounding world. They like to take things apart and use their imaginations. Preschoolers like to know the "how and why" of things and like to build and make things move. Opportunities for building, putting together, taking apart, messy sensory stimulating play, pretending, socializing and being active are important.

School-Age Children

Since school-age children have a structured schedule in school all day, they should have many choices for activities before and after school. The opportunity for play is important. There should be lots of room and equipment for active play, as well as quiet places for reading, painting, doing homework and just being alone. Putting on plays, doing art projects, hands on activities, messy play and cooking are good activities for school-age children.

Types of Regulated Early Care and Education Programs

Accredited Care

All accredited programs ensure the quality of children's daily experiences in early childhood programs and promote positive child outcomes. Accreditation standards are built on evidence-based criteria and represent the following values:

- The uniqueness of childhood as a developmental phase
- The essential contribution to optimal child learning and development of reciprocal, respectful relationships with children and their families
- The distinctive opportunity from birth through kindergarten to support children's intellectual, language and social-emotional development
- The essential role of partnerships with families and communities
- The significance of a strong program infrastructure in providing high quality care and education
- The importance of the quality of children's lives in the present, not only as preparation for the future

Accredited programs are high quality programs that follow established criteria which contribute to children's optimal development and learning. National accreditation is a voluntary system by which programs measure themselves against a national set of standards. Accrediting associations include:

- National Association of Family Child Care (NAFCC) for family child care programs
- National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) for child care centers
- National AfterSchool Association for school-age programs

Licensed Care

Licensed child care programs include child care centers, group homes and family child care homes. A community care license is issued to these types of programs, which is different from a business license, after they have met the following requirements:

- Everyone in the home or program over age 16 has had a federal background check
- At least one person with a current CPR and First Aid card is on duty at all times
- Basic health and safety standards are met with annual monitoring visits
- The program agrees to follow the state health and safety standards
- Providers have at least 12 hours of child development training each year for family child care, and at least 20 hours per year for programs caring for more than eight children
- Specific child to caregiver ratios are followed (see pages 8 and 9)

Approved Care

Approved care is often the first step for someone starting a family child care program and takes place in the provider's home for up to four non-related children. Requirements for approved care state everyone over age 16 in the home has a federal background check, within six months the provider has a current CPR and First Aid card and self-certifies they will follow basic minimum health and safety standards. Approved providers can participate in the Child Care Food Program and accept families on Child Care Assistance. Unless care is for immediate relatives only, the provider has one year to become licensed.

Child to Caregiver Ratios

Municipality of Anchorage - Licensed Child Care Centers

Ages of Children Served	Number of Children	Number of Caregivers	Maximum Group Size <i>(Children to Caregivers)</i>
6 weeks through 11 months <i>(or older if not walking independently)</i>	4	1	8:2
12 through 18 months	5	1	10:2
19 through 35 months	6	1	12:2
36 months through 5 years <i>(if not in school)</i>	10	1	20:2
5 through 12 years	10	1	20:2
13 through 17 years	20	1	40:2

State of Alaska - Licensed Child Care Centers

Ages of Children Served	Number of Children	Number of Caregivers	Maximum Group Size <i>(Children to Caregivers)</i>
through 18 months	5	1	10:2
19 through 35 months	6	1	12:2
3 and 4 years	10	1	20:2
5 and 6 years	14	1	28:2
7 through 12 years	18	1	36:2

State of Alaska and Municipality of Anchorage - Family Child Care Homes

Ages of Children Served	Approved <i>(State of Alaska)</i>	Licensed <i>(State of Alaska and Municipality of Anchorage)</i>	Group Home <i>(State of Alaska)</i>
Infants and Toddlers <i>(Under 30 months)</i>	Up to 2	Up to 3 <i>(Only 2 may be nonambulatory**)</i>	Up to 5 <i>(Only 4 may be nonambulatory**)</i>
Total Children* <i>(Under 13 years)</i>	Up to 5 <i>(Only 4 may be non-related)</i>	Up to 8	Up to 12 <i>(No more than 10 with no other children under 30 months)</i>

*Total children means the total number of children in care at anytime.

**Nonambulatory means not physically or mentally capable of achieving mobility to exit a building without the aid of another individual.



The Cost of Child Care

There are many things that affect the cost of child care. For instance, infants and toddlers need more one-on-one time with adults, which may require more staff and smaller groups of children. Other things that affect the cost of child care include:

- Education level of staff and ongoing training needs like First Aid/CPR
- Materials needed to create a safe and exciting learning environment
- Healthy snacks and meals
- The type of program that is offered and/or special features that make it different

Listed below are **average** regional costs for child care. Rates will vary; please contact individual child care programs for more detailed information. (Averages based on **thread** database, Spring 2010)

Average Cost for Child Care	Child Care Center Monthly Full Time	Child Care Center Monthly Part Time	Family Child Care Monthly Full Time	Family Child Care Monthly Part Time
Southeast				
Infant and Toddler	\$797.00	\$480.00	\$680.00	\$456.00
Preschool	\$657.00	\$417.00	\$614.00	\$402.00
School-Age	\$653.00	\$394.00	\$558.00	\$368.00
Southcentral				
Infant and Toddler	\$732.00	\$450.00	\$650.00	\$409.00
Preschool	\$655.00	\$387.00	\$582.00	\$360.00
School-Age	\$605.00	\$363.00	\$552.00	\$337.00
Northern/Interior				
Infant and Toddler	\$774.00	\$504.00	\$725.00	\$459.00
Preschool	\$676.00	\$431.00	\$636.00	\$400.00
School-Age	\$648.00	\$400.00	\$600.83	\$378.00

Child Care Assistance Information

State of Alaska Child Care Assistance Program

www.hss.state.ak.us/dpa/programs/ccare/

Phone 907.343.6700

Toll-free 1.888.224.4536

Interview Checklist

The following questions relate to high quality care and can be used as a basic guide to help you through the process of choosing child care. For more information about choosing quality child care visit www.childcareaware.org

Place a check in the box if the program meets your expectations.	
Will my child be supervised?	
	Are children watched at all times, including when they are sleeping?
	Are adults warm and welcoming? Do they pay individual attention to each child?
	Are positive guidance techniques used? Do adults avoid yelling, spanking and other negative punishments?
	Are the caregiver/teacher-to-child ratios appropriate and do they follow the recommended guidelines* <ul style="list-style-type: none">• One caregiver per 3 or 4 infants• One caregiver per 3 or 4 young toddlers• One caregiver per 4 to 6 older toddlers• One caregiver per 6 to 9 preschoolers
Have the adults been trained to care for children?	
	If a center: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Does the director have a degree and some experience in caring for children?• Do the teachers have a credential*** or Associate's degree and experience in caring for children? If a family child care home: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Has the provider had specific training on children's development and experience caring for children?
	Is there always someone present who has current CPR and First Aid training?
	Are the adults continuing to receive training on caring for children?
	Have the adults been trained on child abuse prevention and how to report suspected cases?

Interview Checklist *continued*

Will my child be able to grow and learn?

	For older children, are there specific areas for different kinds of play (books, blocks, puzzles, art, etc.)?
	For infants and toddlers, are there toys that “do something” when the child plays with them?
	Is the play space organized and are materials easy-to-use? Are some materials available at all times?
	Are there daily or weekly activity plans available? Have the adults planned experiences for the children to enjoy? Will the activities help children learn?
	Do the adults talk with the children during the day? Do they engage them in conversations? Ask questions, when appropriate?
	Do the adults read to children at least twice a day or encourage them to read, if they can read?

Is this a safe and healthy place for my child?

	Do adults and children wash their hands (before eating or handling food, or after using the bathroom, changing diapers, touching body fluids or eating, etc.)?
	Are diaper changing surfaces cleaned and sanitized after each use?
	Do all of the children enrolled have the required immunizations?
	Are medicines labeled and out of children’s reach?
	Are adults trained to give medicines and keep records of medications?
	Are surfaces used to serve food cleaned and sanitized?
	Are the food and beverages served to children nutritious, and are they stored, prepared, and served in the right way to keep children growing and healthy?
	Are cleaning supplies and other poisonous materials locked up, out of children’s reach?
	Is there a plan to follow if a child is injured, sick or lost?
	Are First Aid kits readily available?
	Is there a plan for responding to disasters (fire, flood, etc.)?
	Has a satisfactory criminal history background check been conducted on each adult present? • Was the check based on fingerprints?

	<p>Have all the adults who are left alone with children had background and criminal screenings? In a center: • Are two adults with each group of children most of the time? In a home: • Are family members left alone with children only in emergencies?</p>
	<p>Is the outdoor play area a safe place for children to play? • Is it checked each morning for hazards before children use it? • Is the equipment the right size and type for the age of the children who use it? • In center-based programs, is the playground area surrounded by a fence at least four feet tall? • Is the equipment placed on mulch, sand, or rubber matting? • Is the equipment in good condition?</p>
	<p>Is the number of children in each group limited? • In a family child care homes and centers, children are in groups of no more than** <input type="checkbox"/> 6-8 infants <input type="checkbox"/> 12-20 preschoolers <input type="checkbox"/> 6-12 younger toddlers <input type="checkbox"/> 20-24 school-agers <input type="checkbox"/> 8-12 older toddlers</p>

Is the program set up to promote quality?

	Does the program have the highest level of licensing offered by the state?
	Are there written personnel policies and job descriptions?
	Are parents and staff asked to evaluate the program?
	Are staff evaluated each year; do providers do a self-assessment?
	Is there a written annual training plan for staff professional development?
	Is the program evaluated each year by someone outside the program?
	Is the program accredited by a national organization?

Does the program work with parents?

	Will I be welcome anytime my child is in care?
	Is parents' feedback sought and used in making program improvements?
	Will I be given a copy of the program's policies?
	Are annual conferences held with parents?

* These are the adult-to-child ratios and group sizes recommended by the National Association for the Education of Young Children. Ratios are lowered when there are one or more children who may need additional help to fully participate in a program due to a disability, or other factors.

** Group sizes are considered the maximum number of children to be in a group, regardless of the number of adult staff.

*** Individuals working in child care can earn a Child Development Associate credential.

Helping Your Child Feel Comfortable in Child Care

Talk with your child

Tell a story about child care and things that might happen there to prepare your child for the routine and schedule. We encourage you to visit the program and spend time there with your child before they begin. Once they have started attending, spend time with your child at the end of the day and ask them about their experience.

Anticipate transition

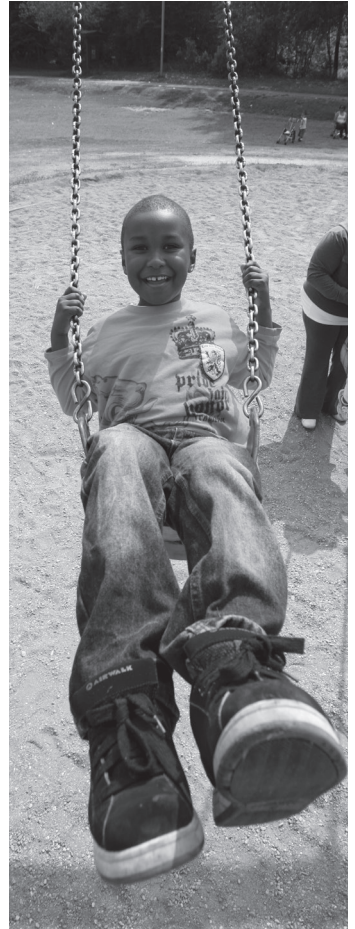
Stop in and visit the program for a few short visits with your child before they begin care. Goodbyes are important and we encourage you to begin a routine during drop-off and pick-up times. Sneaking away, even if your child is upset, is not as effective as saying goodbye and letting your child know when you will be back. Starting care is a big family event; try to avoid other major changes in your child's life when they begin care.

Build a relationship with your provider

Take time to share information about your child and family and get to know the teachers at your program. If concerns arise, talk about them right away. It is easier to problem-solve when open communication is established. Your involvement in the program helps to build a strong connection between you and your child's program.

Be a part of your child's care

If your child seems happy and cheerful, chances are that everything is fine. Consistency in your child's care is important and we encourage you to be active in making sure your child is in a positive, stable environment. You can make visits to the program, volunteer, establish a positive relationship with the teachers and talk with your child frequently about their experiences. Frequent change can be difficult for children. We suggest you watch for signs including high staff turnover or unfamiliar adults, harsh and cold behavior towards the children, not enough supervision, unexplained injuries or changes in your child's mood or attitude. If you are unable to resolve your concerns with your provider, if your concerns are serious or if you suspect your child is being abused or neglected in any way, contact your local Child Care Licensing office using information provided on page 15 of this booklet.



Checking on Your Child's Care

Questions or Concerns about Child Care Providers

By spending time at the facility and talking to your child about their experience in care, you are investing in your child care program and building a stronger relationship with the provider. This relationship of open communication can help the child care program and teachers better meet your family's needs. Parents who have built a relationship with their providers often find it more comfortable to address concerns with them directly.

However, if you have a concern about a provider that is unresolved, we strongly encourage you to contact one of the regional licensing offices listed on this page. You are the ultimate advocate for your child's care, and if your voice is not heard, the concern may not be addressed.

Licensing specialists will investigate complaints received about child care providers and document the findings. Information on completed complaint investigations is public information and available for viewing. It will be the parent's responsibility to continue checking on the status or outcome of a complaint.

thread Complaint and Confidentiality Policy

thread representatives will respond to concerns responsibly and fairly. While we do not directly investigate complaints received, we provide confidential documentation of all complaints and forward them to the appropriate agency. Any information that we receive from parents about their child care needs is entered into our database and is used for referral services, research and grant purposes. All personal or identifying information will remain confidential unless otherwise authorized. thread does not share or sell mailing lists or parent names with the public. Please contact your local thread office if you need further information regarding these policies.

If you have concerns about a child care provider or questions about regulations, please contact one of the following:

Child Care Licensing in Fairbanks

907.451.3198

Child Care Licensing in Juneau

907.465.4756

Child Care Licensing in Anchorage (within MOA)

907.343.4758 www.hhs.muni.org/childcare/

Child Care Program Office (outside of the MOA)

907.269.4500 or 1.888.268.4632

For more information about State Licensing Regulations

www.hss.state.ak.us/dpa/programs/ccare/

Other Helpful Information

Listed below is contact information for statewide resources and services you may find helpful. Please visit the **thread** website at www.threadalaska.org to access additional information to support you and your family. The website highlights statewide and local community resource information. Please contact **thread** directly if you are in need of any further assistance.

thread Parent Action Network

The **thread** Parent Action Network offers you quick links to up to date parenting information and activities in your community, along with national news related to early care and education. Sign up for the **thread** Parent Action Network and receive email news and action alerts to stay informed and take action on local, state and national initiatives. Visit www.threadalaska.org

Alaska 2-1-1

2-1-1 is an easy to remember telephone number that connects callers, at no cost, to information about health and human services available in communities around Alaska. This free, confidential, health and human services information and referral system is supported by the United Way of Anchorage. Call 2-1-1 or 1.800.478.2221 or visit www.alaska211.org

Alaska Parent Line

The Alaska Parent Line offers direct support for families including parenting tips or parenting class referrals. This line is available 9am-9pm, seven days a week. Call 1.800.643.KIDS (5437).

Denali KidCare

Denali KidCare provides health insurance coverage for children and teens through age 18 and for pregnant women who meet income eligibility guidelines.

Visit www.hss.state.ak.us/dhcs/DenaliKidCare

Office of Children's Services (OCS)

The Office of Children's Services focuses on the safety and well being of all children. If you suspect a child is being abused or neglected call 1.800.478.4444 or visit

www.hss.state.ak.us/ocs/Offices/default.htm

Women, Infants and Children Program (WIC)

WIC offers free healthy food, nutrition information with counseling, health screening and referrals. 1.800.478.2221.

American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP)

The AAP is dedicated to the physical, mental and social health and well-being for all infants, children, adolescents and young adults. Visit www.aap.org

Child Care Aware

Child Care Aware offers resources for information about finding child care, child care options, national organizations, glossary of terms and a Stay at Home vs. Return to Work tool.

Call 1.800.424.2246 or visit www.childcareaware.org

National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)

NAEYC is a professional organization which promotes excellence in early childhood education.

Information for educators and parents, conference information and professional development resources are available at www.naeyc.org

Additional Care Options

thread referral services include information about child care programs, licensed or approved through the State of Alaska or Municipality of Anchorage only. Additional care options in your area may include Certified Preschools, Head Start programs, Approved Tribal programs or School District Preschools.

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thread Offices

Southcentral Alaska

Anchorage - Lead Office

3350 Commercial Drive, Ste. 203, Anchorage, AK 99501
9am - 5pm, Monday - Friday
Phone 907.563.1966 Toll Free 800.278.3723
Fax 907.563.1959 Toll Free Fax 877.563.1959
info@threadalaska.org

Wasilla

Westside Center
DPA Building, 877 W. Commercial Drive, Wasilla, AK 99654
9:00am - 5:00pm, Monday - Friday
Phone 907.373.5024
Fax 907.373.5067

Southeast Alaska

Juneau

3100 Channel Drive, Ste. 215, Juneau, AK 99801
8:30am - 5pm, Monday - Friday
Phone 907.789.1235 Toll Free 888.785.1235
Fax 907.789.1238
info@aeyc-sea.org

Interior/Northern Alaska

Fairbanks

1908 Old Pioneer Way, Fairbanks, AK 99709
8am - 5pm, Monday - Friday
Phone 907.479.2214 Toll Free 866.878.2273
Fax 907.479.2486
care@pnlcdc.com

Fairbanks

Child Care Referral
520 Fifth Avenue, Ste. D, Fairbanks, AK 99701
7:30am - 5pm, Monday - Friday
Phone 907.459.1439
Fax 907.459.1280
ccreferral@fnsb.us

The **thread** Network provides services statewide.

Service can be provided in many languages.

Please contact the above offices or visit www.threadalaska.org
to learn more about local services near you.