

**Waiting to
be seen.**

**Demanding
to be heard.**

**Los Angeles
Inglewood Write-Up**

Fall 2018



Los Angeles - Inglewood Focus Group Write Up

Name of Location: Crystal Stairs, Inc.

Name of Supporting Organization: Community Voices

City: Inglewood

Focus Group Facilitators: Mary Ignatius and Laura Pryor

Date of Visit: September 14, 2018

Focus Group Participants: Seven mothers from the Inglewood neighborhood in Los Angeles with a range of 1-5 children each. All mothers were recipients of subsidized child care.

Ideal Child Care Scenario

Parents painted a very clear picture of the qualities comprising their ideal child care scenario. Parents explained (as described below) how they would like to learn about child care options, how they would like to go about selecting the right provider, how they would like to navigate the system, and their definition of child care quality.

How Parents Would Like to Learn about Child Care Options

- **Child care resources are provided to families in the hospital** after the mother has given birth. Furthermore, child care options are offered and discussed during pre-natal care visits and during follow-up appointments.
- Child care resources provided to families contain several different options that make **child care accessible to all populations**, including: students, single-parent households, families with multiple children, and families with alternative work schedules.

How Parents Want to Choose the Right Provider

- To save time, **parents want to know about a provider's hours prior to calling the provider on the phone**. Furthermore, parents would like a list of days that the provider is unavailable during the calendar year (i.e. winter break, school holidays). This information will help parents determine if a provider will match their work schedule.
- Parents want **all providers to write and advertise philosophy statements reflecting the provider's child care practice**. These statements include a brief explanation of the provider's approach for caring for youth, as well as any special credentials, strengths, or certifications the provider may have. Philosophy statements can help parents know if the provider is culturally aligned and shares the same values as the family.

“But to have a history about [the providers], and even if they can do a write up about their philosophy, because I think even in-home daycare has some type of philosophy, like, how they feel about children. Because if you hear how someone feels about children or something, you can kind of get a feel of if that's the right fit for you.”

- Families want to be able to **trust their child care providers**. Thus, ideally, parents can easily access provider’s records of violations and complaints to feel secure that their child is in a safe environment. Families want providers to offer a free facilities tour to new families looking to enroll their child. Furthermore, they would like workshops on how to address the anxiety they feel about leaving their children with child care providers they do not know.

Definition of Quality Child Care

- As mentioned, families want to build trust with their provider. This can be built through **providers supplying daily check-ins and progress reports** on each family’s child. Additionally, parents want cameras inside the facility that show video updates throughout the day.
- Some families prefer a **small number of providers interacting with their child**. Furthermore, providers ideally have a **small provider-to-child ratio**.
- Families value providers that are on the cutting-edge of early childhood education programming and curriculum. Ideally, **providers undergo continued education** and integrate an educational curriculum into their child care programming.

“That's one of the things that I love about where my son goes. She actually keeps taking courses. And it makes her different. It's one of those things like doctors. Doctors have to continuously be learning. Lawyers have to continually be learning, you just can't stop. And even when I worked as a manager, they constantly had us taking classes, and I'm like, 'Well yeah, even a caretaker should, too'.”

- Families work very hard to keep their children healthy and want to ensure that their child is not exposed to illnesses while at child care. Thus, ideally, **providers have consistent and strict policies around caring for sick children**.
- In addition to providers ensuring quality child care, families believe that the state also has a role. Specifically, families feel that ideally, **the state performs regular inspections and site-checks**.

Reality/Challenges

Parents discussed how their ideal child care scenario fell short of their actual experience. The points below outline the key challenges that parents face for accessing and maintaining quality child care.

Accessing Child Care

- **Parents seeking child care are often put on extensive waiting lists.** One mother reported that it took her 10-12 months to obtain child care due to the time it took to get off of the waiting list. Because of this delay, this mother had to leave her job and was not able to successfully find a new job until she secured child care.
- Even for parents who are not on the waiting list, **child care can still be difficult to find.** One mother discussed how she spent days calling list after list of possible providers. This was a time consuming and inefficient process, especially for busy single mothers. One mother described her experience calling from a list of providers:

“When I was calling [the providers on the list]...then it was well, ‘We don’t do these hours, we don’t do this’ and I’m like, ‘What?’, and also, ‘Right now we don’t have any spots open.’ Well then, what, why am I calling you?”

- **Parents who work in the evening often must change their job** due to the lack of child care outside of typical business hours.

“I had to let a great paying second job go because I couldn't find childcare in the evening.”

- Often, child care providers take extended breaks during the holidays or during school holidays. However, many parents still need to work during these days, yet they are not able to include a second child care provider on their subsidy.

“I was gonna say, that’s another issue because there are some providers who keep the school schedule so they’re closed on certain days like Columbus Day. But you still have to work on those days so it’s like you need that other provider to cover those holidays because you can’t take off that day. That’s a burden on you if the school’s out.”

- When discussing child care options, parents felt strongly that **choosing family, friend, or neighbor care did not mean they didn’t care about quality.**

*“Trust me, **just because it has a label of family, friends, doesn't mean we're not being picky of who we choose**, we're being very selective, like you were saying with your three month, we're being very selective, with the reason behind so in order to get that person quality that we trust, well they're going have to pay quality too.”*

“We’re single parents for a reason, like most of us...That makes a difference, why we’re very selective, we don’t trust as it is, we have trust issues...So trust me we do our background check our way, we don’t take the decision lightly.”

“She was saying her twins were born premature, and my son was premature and I was actually advised not to send him to a daycare....I had to wait eight months before I could send him ”

Navigating the Child Care System's Policies and Procedures

- Parents reported **inconsistent case worker practices**. Specifically, some case workers allow recertifications via email while others do not. Also, some case workers provide more detailed and informative information than others. Lack of case worker competence directly impacts the time it takes for families to receive child care.

"My situation was a little different, the lady I had, I guess they had to let her go. So they lost all my paperwork, they had to go back, re-find everything, and then, I guess they spread out everybody's stack, and then half of one lady had half my stuff, then the other lady. So I had two different ladies calling me. I was going to say, "I give up", luckily I know three people that work here so I had to use my resources."

- Families are subject to pay family fees on a sliding scale once their income reaches 40% of the state median income. **Some parents have a variable income (for example, substitute teachers) and receive surprising/unexpected family fees without notification** of a family fee increase. Most families are on a budget and a sudden increase in child care costs can be very problematic.

"I'm a single parent, so I'm on a budget, and you want me to pay like a hundred and something dollars, and you just now telling me? That's not in the budget this month. And if I don't have it, my child can't go to daycare? That's a problem."

"I was substitute teaching, so it's like, whenever they have vacant if I'm assigned to a school for a month, which is the max I can work there, then yeah, there's a surge. And then next month, I only work a couple days, so they were charging me the parent fee, and then it wasn't changed, and I was like, 'But I don't even make that much anymore.'"

- As parents discussed the difficulties with navigating the paperwork required to maintain their child care, they discussed the challenges that arose if something was wrong with their submitted paperwork. Specifically, parents noted that **payment to providers has been delayed without notification**. As a result, parents become vulnerable to losing their child care.

"I didn't even get [the payment delay] in writing. I found out about it, because the child care provider said, 'They're not paying me, and I can no longer watch your child until you pay me.' And I was like, 'What are you talking about?'"

- Another challenge of navigating the child care system is **judgement and poor treatment from county case workers**. One parent shared that she unexpectedly had to seek support for child care when she experienced domestic violence. The county case workers were not supportive of her situation, which made the navigation process even more difficult.

"Because, I'm bruised and I had a cut lip, so I show up like ... Like I told her, "I've never asked for anything. Look at my social security. Never. I've always put in. I worked 15 years. I'm old. 15 Years I've put into the system." And she almost made me cry. She made me wait until the end of the day to file."

"I did feel, from county, very judged. Oh, my god, every time you go you feel so judged. Like, "What do you want? What do you need?" I have had one that's been amazing. Thank god she's been the same one. And a gentleman. Older man. Amazing. But everyone else has been like you're taking their money. That is not their money. They make you feel that. That's been through my experience the last few years, it's just very judgey."

- Parents discussed the constant need to submit paperwork and recertify. This paperwork process puts additional strain on parents' busy schedules. Particularly, **paperwork demands often come up without enough warning**, adding additional strain to parents' lives.

"The office that I work for is in Long Beach, but I don't work there. So, I would have to go through, because you don't want to fax it, it might get lost. It's your personal ... So, I have to take time off to go there and then if they're not busy, they'll fill it out, if not, you got to leave it there and you got to go back and get it. Because, [the subsidy provider] doesn't take it email. So, it's like, that's why we have email and fax nowadays. But, they won't accept it. So then I got to go back and get it."

"I guess so many people don't realize how stressful it is, because, it's already hard enough trying to find good childcare, especially in LA. There's a lot out there, but there's limited good child care. And then you're already struggling with, I got to go to work, I got to take care of the baby, I got to cook, clean, I got to do all this, and then take care of yourself. So, you're already stretched thin, and then you have somebody who's just like, "I need this paperwork and you didn't do ..." And I'm just like, "Had you asked me that in the beginning, when I was ... " Or, give me a notice and don't say I need it by the end of the week and it's Wednesday."

"I was stressed out at one time, where I was like, 'You know what? I'm just going to have take care of my baby and I guess we going to be poor and broke, because I just...it's stressful. It's really stressful."

- Additionally, **parents have faced breakages in child care when giving birth to a new child**. In one case, the subsidizing agency assumed that a mother would take leave from school after she had her child and therefore stopped her child care subsidy. However, the mother went back to school immediately after giving birth and still depended on the subsidy to finish her degree.

"So, I had my child on a Monday, went back to school on that Tuesday. [The subsidy provider] stopped it. They stopped it. I'm thinking like, "Why she stopped it?" That's why. Because, they didn't pay her. And that's you saw she just got this year. They didn't pay her, because they said, I guess, I wasn't going back to school. I was like, "No. I went back to school." Once my worker got with them, then they fixed it, but it was that gap. "

- **Filling out time logs is very cumbersome**. Parents must log every day and at a different time each day. For many families, they are on a set routine and not only is it

burdensome to fill out a timesheet, but they are in fact showing up at the same time every day.

"I have three kids...at the same daycare. So I have to do three different time sheets. I don't have time to do that in the morning."

- Child care regulations stating that a parent cannot live in the same home as the provider. This has raised challenges for parents, particularly around infant care. For example, **parents would like to pay their own parents to watch their newborn**, but this is not allowed under family, friend and neighbor care. As a result, some parents had to quit their jobs.

"I had to quit my job, because they said no, I can't do that and I wasn't about to leave my three month old with a daycare provider I was like oh no, forget I'll just ... I'm not gonna send my daughter to daycare."

"Yeah it comes to the point where you have to quit jobs, and you can't go, jobs are there but you can't take it because of a little rule."

"Because when you have a premature child, they haven't gone through the fetal development yet, you have the trimester, if your child is premature they have to go through those certain trimester it takes them longer because they're out of the womb but they have to feel like they're still there in order to have a proper development. If you give them to someone who doesn't have that, type of bond or even just it's your mother so she has the same type of hormones"

Recommendations

Parents considered their current child care challenges in light of their idea child care scenario, and suggested the following set of recommendations:

1. Better pay for providers, particularly family/friend/neighbor pay.
2. Seamless/continuous paperwork when transferring from Stage 1 to Stage 2 child care and when adding a second child.
3. Consistently and timely pay for providers.
4. Providers are required to complete continued education.
5. Provider facilities are inspected annually and facility records are easily accessible online.
6. Families receive support around how to pick the best child care option; families have access to workshops and parent groups to help make child care decisions.
7. Employment verified through pay stubs.
8. Recent policy changes around variable income and 12-month eligibility are enforced and implemented.

Concluding Thoughts: What do Policymakers Need to Know?

The following quotations exemplify parents' overall thoughts on what policymakers need to know about the realities of findings and keeping quality child care for low-income families.

*"I got a lot on my plate. I'm back and forth to court with my child's father, I'm doing this, trying to work. It's a lot. So, that's the last thing you need. Is to have to be concerned, and be even more stressed, about how you're going to take care of childcare. **Because, you need childcare in order to work. It's like a catch 22. I can't work unless I have childcare.**"*

"I've worked more being on the system, then working."

"You have to choose your job to meet the schedule of your child care provider."