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Demanding to be heard.

**Los Angeles
San Fernando Valley Write-Up**

Fall 2018



SPR

**PARENT
VOICES**



Los Angeles – San Fernando Valley Focus Group Write Up

Name of Location: The Child Care Resource Center

City: Chatsworth

Focus Group Facilitators: Mary Ignatius and Laura Pryor

Date of Visit: September 15, 2018

Focus Group Participants: Eight mothers and two fathers from the San Fernando Valley area with a range of 1-8 children each. Seven of the families were current recipients of subsidized child care and one family was a former recipient of subsidized child care.

Ideal Child Care Scenario

Focus group participants were asked to describe their ideal child care scenarios and how they would like their child care journey to unfold from pregnancy forward. The points outlined below reflect parents' hopes and dreams for accessing and maintaining quality child care.

Child Care Access

- **Child care outreach workers are abundant and available** to inform families about child care options prior to their child's birth. Parents can easily find out about child care options, similar to how other services are advertised.

"There should be outreach to let people know [about child care subsidies], because I'm always telling people like go apply to CCRC, go apply. Just like when you get pregnant, they tell you about WIC and stuff."

- Parents want to be as efficient as possible with their time and resources. Therefore, having quality **child care options that are close to home and/or work** allows parents to minimize travel time and child care costs.
- **Foster families also need child care, and the process for obtaining child care should be barrier free.** Foster families often have unique contexts and circumstances that should be considered when they apply for child care.
- Parents recognize the importance of child care, regardless of family background characteristics. Therefore, ideally, **child care is available and accessible to all families, regardless of income.**
- Many families have multiple children and therefore need multiple child care subsidies. Ideally, the **process for adding a second child into an existing subsidy is readily**

available and seamless. Parents do not have to go on the waiting list when adding more children.

"If when you're pregnant again, say you're already on the program, because you're pregnant again. I heard that we must still wait. It's another waiting process. It should be easier to add the second and third child in."

Selecting the Appropriate Provider

- Parents appreciate and value the opinion of other parents when making their child care provider decision. It would be ideal to have a **system mirroring "Yelp" for child care provider reviews to help parents make child care selection decisions.** This review page should show different certifications, provider specialties, and parent opinions.
- In addition to an online or virtual application for selecting child care providers, parents also value face-to-face conversations with other parents. To facilitate these in-person conversations around child care provider selection, **families can ideally attend parent support groups at a location apart from potential child care providers.**

"Because I remember I when I would take my kids to the provider. It was another parent ... We would bump into each other in the parking lot, and she would be like, "How do you like it here?" And she would tell me some things that she didn't like, and me too. And I was like, "I don't know I'd feel like I have to move my kids out of the program."

- Families communicated the importance of getting an in-person sense for a provider's environment prior to enrolling a child. Ideally, **providers offer tours of their facilities for new families prior to enrolling.**

"The touring of the school is really important, because that's when you get the feel for is this the right place."

Navigating the Child Care System

- Depending on a parent's income, they will pay a family fee in addition to the subsidy. Parents located in cities with higher costs of living may have tighter budgets than other families in less high-demand areas. Therefore, ideally, the **family fee reflects a fair payment structure that acknowledges differences in rent across locations.**

"Yeah, so subtracting your rent, subtracting your basic needs. Subtract that, then see how much income I have, and then sort of base the family fee off of that."

- Parents lead busy lives with many competing demands. To help minimize burdens on parents, **the child care recertification process should be easy to navigate, relatively seamless, and allow for consistent acceptance of documents via email or fax.**

Child Care Quality

- Families want to establish and maintain trust in their child care providers. To help promote that trust, **providers should ideally have cameras throughout the facility and provide progress reports on their child** (i.e. including their eating and napping schedule).
- Parents want to ensure that their **children are given high-quality and nutritious food** when they are not in their care. Ideally, all providers have quality nutrition options to feed their children.
- Many parents attend child development and parenting courses and see this as connected to their child's provider. It would be ideal for **child care facilities and other parent/child development organizations to collaborate and offer parent workshops** at the child care facility.

"And I was talking about I went to a parenting class, it's called Eco Parenting, and it teaches non violent empathy skills for kids. I feel like that should be incorporated with the provider's program, because it's so important, and it's so supportive to continuing to provide the care for the children."

- Some parents have children that have gone through traumatic experiences. As a result, they may have certain behaviors that require a trauma-informed response from providers. Thus, ideally, **providers undergo training on trauma-informed care.**
- Regardless of the requirements for providers, all providers should ideally be qualified. Part of this qualification process should **be pursuing ongoing education around child development.**
- Additionally, provider facilities should be safe and welcoming for children of all ages. Furthermore, one parent suggested that part of facility tours should include a chance to talk to other parent's attending the program.

" Make sure when they go into child care, they have a place where the parents can all talk without the childcare there. So the parents can tell you, 'This is what you're coming into. This is what they eat, how it is.'"

Reality/Challenges

Parents' descriptions of their ideal child care scenario were however, often far from the reality and challenges they experienced. The following points highlight the key challenges faced by parents.

Child Care Access

- **Low-income parents stated that they were sometimes denied or put on the waiting list when seeking a child care subsidy.** One parent was put on the waiting list for a year. She was ultimately able to get child care when a provider called on the parent's behalf and requested that the parent receive a subsidy. For those parents that are on the waiting list or denied, they pay out of pocket and struggle to achieve economic stability.

"Even just getting in the waiting list. A lot of people get denied. I know a lot of people that seem to qualify, but just got denied for whatever reason. And I'm like, 'You should be able to get it. You're single parents or ... And I just don't know about the application process now. I think it's a little bit more difficult.'"

- **Parents who work non-traditional hours struggle to find quality child care** that meets their schedule. Overall, there is a lack of child care options for parents with alternative work schedules.

"Because for me, I work six days a week. So I need providers that are available for Saturdays...some Saturdays I can't work 'cause I don't have a sitter."

- Additionally, some parents work more than eight hours a day or have long commute times. Several child care **providers are strict about their pick-up times and are unwilling to accommodate parents who may need a later pick-up time.** Current regulations allow for travel time based on commute, but administrators often give a **general 30 minute allowance instead.**

"She won't go after 6:00. And [the provider's] kind of like, 'Why can't you get off, and take 'em back to work?' He literally has the kids [at work] for half an hour more, an hour-"

"Considering also the driving time, 'cause I work far! I work in West LA, and I live out here in the Valley, so it takes me about an hour everyday to get there. I had to really fight for that travel time to get an extra hour of my child care, because I needed it."

- Low-income parents who are also full-time students qualify for child care subsidies and are not required to work. However, once a parent moves beyond a Bachelor's degree, this support is not provided. Specifically, **low-income parents seeking a Master's must work part-time in order to receive a child care subsidy.**

"And I decided back in 2012-2013 I want to go back to school. My worker was like, 'We don't help the Master program, only for Bachelors. And I was like, 'But I want to get a Master's degree, what do I need to do?' So she was like, 'But if you work part time, we can save your information and you're working part time, you're still on the program, then you can go to school. So that was a challenge. Go to school full-time, and work part-time, to show that I was working doing an activity, so that I could qualify for the program, and still go to school. It was hard!'"

- Parents communicated that **the paid leave offered to mothers is not sufficient** when they also have to pay for child care for an earlier child. As a result, parents choose to not take paid leave and return to work immediately after giving birth so that they can retain their income.

“With my first one yeah. With my second one, I couldn't afford it. I literally was put on bedrest, but I was still working from home. Literally, that's what happened. I went into labor, had my baby on Saturday morning. I was supposed to get discharged Monday morning, but that didn't happen, so that was the only day I took off, and then Tuesday I was back to work.”

“Because with the paid family leave, my ... Based upon my family's needs here would still stay the same, and I was like ... Yeah, that's not going to work, because I'm not going to get my full check.”

- Additionally, **foster parents face a specific set of issues when trying to obtain subsidized child care**. Often, they do not have the right paperwork or information needed to enroll. There is a clear lack of resources to help foster parents access the child care system.

“Another thing too, as foster parents, even though it's my nephew, they do not provide birth certificate. They would just give me a copy... It takes months. So for me to come in and do the whole application stuff for a niece or nephew, they ask for social security card, they ask for the birth certificate, the medic help. I didn't have any of that.”

Navigating the Child Care System

- **Re-certification paperwork is extremely burdensome for low-income parents**. The amount of paperwork adds extra steps that places additional strain on parents' busy lives.

“Once you get the application, the re-certifications are a drag! We have to submit the same stuff! I'm already, I'm fixing to print out a whole stack of birth certificates, because everywhere they want it. Is something going to change?”

“I think maybe it would help, maybe just submitting the tax returns would be a lot easier by myself. I don't get pay stubs, I get paid cash. So I'm self-employed. It makes it a little bit harder to have to provide the proof for myself when I don't have paycheck stubs.”

- More specifically, **physically going to the county office to enroll and recertify is very challenging for parents or in some cases, they may be charged for collecting the forms**. Often, parents must take time off of work to complete the necessary recertification steps.

“The CCRC cannot reimburse that \$25 dollars. So every year, [my brother] has to get another form from his doctor, and they charge \$25 dollars, and his doctor takes a week, sometimes 10 days to return.”

- Sometimes, parents may forget a small step in the paperwork or make a small error. Instead of allowing parents time to correct the error, their child care subsidy may be cut off. This **lack of leniency with paperwork and detail required often results in holds and gaps in child care. When asked if they ever wanted to give their subsidy up because of the paperwork requirements, approximately 90% of participants raised their hands.**
- Parents also reported **rigid and inconsistent case worker practices.** Sometimes, case workers will lose important paperwork or allow email extensions to some parents but not others. This lack of consistency and disorganization adds additional obstacles for parents trying to navigate the child care system.

"And they won't admit like that they lost it. And it's like, it's fine we're all human, but [don't blame the parent]."

"Be consistent. Like, her caseworker wouldn't give her an extension on an email or phone call, and our case worker did. She gave us another 10 days to get that returned."

"They lose all the paper work, I don't know what the workers are doing. But in my case, every time I go [to social services], I will make copies, I will stamp it, I will make copies of the stamp. And I will need two copies."

- In July 2017, a new law went into effect stating that parents can keep their affordable child care until their income reaches 85% of the state median income. However, before this law was put into place, the ceiling on how much money parents can make forced some parents to reduce their income levels.

"I actually had ... When I got hired, when I was done with my program in school, they gave me an offer by phone, and then I called my case worker and she said it was over the bracket. So I had to call HR and say, "I need to take this [lower] amount,""

- Stage Two time logs require parents to check in and out of child care at different times every day. **Parents have busy schedules and find that the time logs are overly burdensome.**

Child Care Quality

- **Families with children who have special needs reported an overall lack of providers** with special needs experience and qualifications. In one case, a provider thought she was qualified, but then asked a parent of a special needs child to not bring her child back after the provider realized she did not have the skills to care for him.
- Parents also reported stories of **neglectful and unjust provider practices.** In general, some parents found it very difficult to find a provider that they could trust with their child.

“Then at the time, my daughter was three years old, so she would speak up. And then she would tell me, “Mom, the baby cried all day. Mom, they didn’t change diaper. So that’s how I [found out] because she would tell me.”

“Yeah, and since I was the oldest, they would have me make some pancakes, and I thought they’d be for everyone. But, they gave my brothers half an apple, and the family had [the pancakes]” – daughter of focus group parent

Recommendations

Parents reflected on their ideal child care scenario in light of the reality and challenges they face and produced the following set of recommendations.

1. Allow parents to re-certify via email.
2. Mandate consistent case worker practices.
3. Create more child care options for alternative work schedules.
4. Incentivize providers to offer more child care hours in a day.
5. Create neutral spaces for parents to talk about child care quality and child care provider selection.
6. Facilitate collaborations between child care providers and parenting resources.
7. Mandate ongoing training and education for providers.
8. Child care payment structures reflect the local cost of living.
9. Allow for longer travel time allotments, particularly in high traffic areas like Los Angeles
10. Allow for some documentation, such as birth certificates or medical forms to be collected one time and be stored electronically.

Concluding Thoughts: What do Policymakers Need to Know?

When asked what policymakers need to know about child care for low income parents, parents responded with the following comments.

- **Parents are trying hard to make it** and get out of poverty, but the system often makes it difficult for them to do so.

“What I really want them to know is to be a little bit more reality based, on what real families are going through, and the struggle in a way that we have kids, we have jobs, we go to school. We’re trying to better our self.”

- **Child care is not affordable** for low-income parents, but it is necessary for economic and social mobility.

"I would want them to know for sure childcare is not affordable. So it doesn't even seem possible for some people to get it, but it is fundamental. Like the kids, it doesn't matter the family situation or what not. They're safe, they're learning, and society's going to be better for that."

- **Child care is good for children and good for society;** all parents should have access to child care.

"Well because we for sure, if it wasn't available, who knows where the kids are. Who's abusing them or what not. It could happen anywhere, obviously. Even in the centers. But, to facilitate a school and training, and what they've learned could teach these kids how to be in the world, it makes a huge difference. So, the alternative is no childcare, and people are still going to have babies, still going to have children, but they're going to be where?"