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Indigenous Families in Monterey County

October 7, 2024

Centro Bilingual, Greenfield, Monterey

About the focus group

- **Number of Attendees:** Seven parents participated in this focus group.
- **Communities Represented:** All parents identified as part of the indigenous Mexican community, with some parents speaking Mixteco and others speaking Triqui. The focus group was facilitated in Spanish, and two interpreters were used to support parents' communication from their indigenous language to Spanish.
- **Number of Children:** Parents in this focus group had different numbers of children. Specifically:
 - One parent had one child;
 - One parent had two children;
 - One parent had three children;
 - One parent had four children; and
 - Three parents had five children.
- **Ages of Children:** Parents' children were between the ages of 1 and 17, with all but one parent having children age 5 or under.

Types of Care

Overall, many parents shared that they are the primary caregiver for their children due to the lack of child care options in their community. For parents that are able to access child care, the types of child care they have accessed is summarized as follows.

- **Parents largely utilize informal care or family, friend, and neighbor care (FFN).** Some parents have sent their children to unlicensed family child care providers. While these settings have larger provider-to-child ratios, they are relatively more

affordable than other options. Other parents have relied on relatives to help provide care.

- **None of the parents used subsidized child care.** While some parents were aware that they can access subsidized child care through the state, no parent had actually accessed this care.

Context for the Unmet Need in Monterey County

There are several contextual reasons underscoring the types of care that parents utilize as well as why so few children eligible for subsidized care have accessed it. This section explores these contextual points to better understand the unmet need for child care in Monterey County. Additionally, the following quotation (as told from a parent through an interpreter) underscores many of the reasons why parents struggle to find child care in Greenfield.

“She applied for a program to help with child care, but since she doesn’t drive, she had to take a bus to get there. She made several stops with her children to get to the application site. After applying, she waited for a call for several days, but nothing came. She had a babysitter for a while, but then saw that the rates were too high and didn’t match her income. So, she looked for another babysitter but didn’t find anyone suitable. She experienced situations where the caregivers didn’t feed the children properly; when she asked, they said they were just asleep without eating. Another caregiver she tried was in poor conditions where she lived. Now, she has found a better caregiver for her two children, but the older child comments to her mom that the caregiver makes her cry, so she’s considering not leaving her there anymore. The last caregiver she had was there for about a month, but the child started getting sick. For her, finding care is important. She also mentioned having to go to Salinas to handle paperwork to receive assistance, which requires traveling far to meet with someone.”

Availability of Affordable Child Care

Overall, there is a low supply of affordable child care options in Greenfield, specifically:

The lack of affordable child care is due, in part, to the low supply of child care providers and high turnover.

In one example, the parent could only take her children to the child care center three days per week due to the lack of providers. Additionally, her children were constantly with a new provider due to turnover. As a result, the children had a hard time adjusting to new providers, which felt disruptive to their care. Parents pointed to the low pay as one reason for the low supply and high turnover of providers in Greenfield.

In particular, there is a lack of supply of infant/toddler care in Greenfield. One parent described how she found a provider, but they only accept children two years or older. This was not ideal because her child was younger than two. Moreover, for parents that have multiple children across age ranges, it is ideal to be able to drop all of them off at the same location, which has proved challenging due to the lack of providers that accept infants.

While some child care options exist, large child care centers with high capacity are not prevalent in Greenfield. Parents only knew of one center called Valle Verde that had capacity to serve a large number of children. However, not all parents in the focus group were aware of this option.

Parent Preferences for Child Care

Given the lack of affordable child care in Greenfield and general lack of awareness regarding child care options, parents shared that they are mainly choosing between caring for their child themselves or finding an option that is safe and with flexible hours. For most parents, they preferred not to work as opposed to sending their child to a provider that they did not know or did not meet the family's needs.

State-Subsidized Child Care

As mentioned, none of the parents in the focus group had accessed state subsidized child care. Parent reflections on state-subsidized child care are as follows.

The application process for subsidized child care feels inaccessible to many parents.

One parent shared that she had to find public transit to travel from Greenfield to Salinas to try to apply for state subsidized child care. Transportation was a significant barrier given the lack of infrastructure. Additionally, because many parents in Greenfield do not speak English or Spanish (they speak indigenous languages such as Mixteco and Triqui) and county agencies have limited language options, the subsidized child care application process is not linguistically accessible.

Among the limited supply of subsidized child care options, many do not offer the hours that parents need care. One parent described how she met the requirements for state subsidized child care, but the center she found would not care for her child until 8am. However, this parent needed to drop off her children at 5am due to her work schedule. Therefore, the subsidized child care option did not meet her needs.

“There are some people who work in the fields and come in a bit earlier. But there are others who also work with grapes and lettuce and come in even earlier. So, it’s necessary to have the daycare open by five so they can drop off their kids.”

State subsidized child care is full. Even for parents that are able to navigate the application process and find care that meets their needs, there is a lack of supply of subsidized child care spaces. One parent shared that when she applied, she was told that all the state subsidized child care slots in her area were full.

Other Options

Given the lack of supply of licensed child care that is affordable and meets families’ needs, parents often use informal/unlicensed care due to availability and cost. However, parents shared that there can be challenges with informal care. Notably, one parent shared that her provider would give Tylenol to her child to make them fall asleep, and her children would come home with diaper rashes due to lack of changing. In another case, a parent reported that the provider was not feeding her child the meals she had packed for them. While parents reported that informal care has been a good option for them in some cases, they shared concerns about health and safety given the lack of regulations with informal care.

Community Assets

Given the challenges families face with finding affordable child care that meets their needs, they rely on community assets to help make ends meet. Examples of these community assets are outlined below.

Friends and family provide recommendations on different child care provider

options. Given that many parents do not know where or how to find out about child care, families in Greenfield often rely on one another to learn about available child care options. Parents also shared their perspectives with one another on their satisfaction with the care their child received.

Parents support each other with finding transportation to/from school. Given that many parents work together, they often coordinate transportation for their children to help reduce cost and increase efficiency.

Families are starting to share how to go about applying for state subsidized child care. More families are learning through word-of-mouth that they must go to Salinas to apply for subsidized child care. Given that the process feels inaccessible for so many Greenfield families, having someone in the community to explain the process can be helpful.

“Many parents don’t know about the programs or the providers available. We’re starting to spread the word in the community to encourage people to apply for these programs. Like I mentioned earlier, the office is all the way in Salinas, and if they don’t drive or don’t know how to get there, they miss out on applying for these programs.”

Child Care Priorities

Given the child care context for families in this focus group, several priorities emerged regarding the characteristics and qualities parents would like to see in their child care options.

Community-Specific Priorities

Primarily, parents shared priorities related to child care in their community.

Parents prefer to have more licensed care so that health and safety regulations apply. Given parents’ experiences with the lack of health and safety oversight at unlicensed care, they would like to see an expansion of licensed child care. This would support parents with trusting providers to care for their children, given that licensed providers are accountable to health and safety regulations.

Parents want to leave their child with someone they trust. Many parents assess their trust in a provider based on how their child behaves when they return from child care. For example, if their child is crying excessively or has rashes, they know they need to find a different provider. Too often, parents shared that their children have a negative experience with a provider, prompting families to find another option.

Parents would like providers’ support with basic needs, such as food and diapers.

Several parents commented that they do not trust their provider to serve their child nutritious food. Moreover, even when they send food with the child, the provider does not always serve it to them. Beyond food, parents often are required to pay more for providers to use diapers and wipes for their child. Parents prefer for these basic needs to be covered by the providers and not be added as an extra cost.

“We had to send food; we had to send meals. In my case, I would send fruits, but the provider wouldn’t serve them to the child. Even if you send food, it’s not likely they’ll serve the child with their own meal...but they feed the kid with whatever food...”

“At one point I was with a provider that offered diapers and food, but now I’m with another that doesn’t provide those. I think nowadays, the need for diapers is very pronounced, especially in our community where there isn’t much work during certain seasons. Diapers, as we know, are very expensive. First, it’s hard to obtain them, and second, it’s impossible to manage without them while also paying for child care. Sometimes, diapers get mixed up or confused, and that’s what happens to me. I bring diapers, but sometimes they request them too late, or other times very soon, and I have to question the child care providers about this. If we’re asking what we want from child care, diapers are a big part of it since that’s something I appreciated when I was with that provider.”

Parents want providers that support their child’s development. For example, parents shared that they would like to send their children to a provider that can help with learning colors, shapes, and days of the week. This support would help their child with kindergarten readiness. Additionally, having a provider that focuses on child development also helps parents’ children get used to a routine and work with other children.

Parents prefer that providers support their children with multilingualism. Specifically, given that many children speak an indigenous language at home and Spanish in the community, it is helpful for the provider to support the children with developing the child’s English skills. Parents see this language development as critical for their success in school and important for the child care provider to be attentive to.

“One of my nieces, when she was in daycare before starting kindergarten, seemed smart; she spoke perfectly. But when she entered kindergarten, we went to her conference, and they said she was very restless, moving around, and she was behind in her reading. We noticed she hadn’t learned to count or read; she only knew her colors. So it’s crucial because she doesn’t know English and is still learning. This is why at home we speak to her in Spanish with her friends because at the daycare, there were more kids who spoke Spanish. It’s still a bit challenging because she’s not at the level she should be.”

Age Group-Specific Priorities

In addition to the priorities listed above, parents also said that expanding infant toddler care is important for meeting the needs of working parents. Given that many parents prefer to return to work relatively soon after their child is born, having options for infant care is vital for supporting working families with successfully returning to work after having a child.

"I like the daycare she's in, but they don't accept younger children. I would like a program for kids from one year old or even from birth, since there are mothers who return to work when their babies are three months old."

Information for Policymakers

During the focus group, families shared important information for policymakers to develop a deeper understanding of the policy decisions that create challenges for their lives. These policy challenges are outlined below.

Child care availability does not align with the schedules of families working in agriculture. Key examples of this include the following:

- Many families work seasonally. Therefore, they are off from October until about January. During this time, many families do not need child care. But, when they start looking for child care after January, it is very difficult because that is when all the other families are looking for child care as well.
- Child care providers charge by the day and not by the hour. Therefore, when work schedules shift, as they often do in agriculture, the parent still has to pay the same for child care even though she's utilizing fewer hours of care.
- Parents that work in agriculture often start their days very early, and most child care providers in the community do not provide care during these early hours.
- Because of the nature of agricultural work, the location of families' jobs change, which makes it challenging to navigate finding a convenient place for child care.

Without affordable child care, parents cannot work. Several parents shared that they have not worked for several years because they cannot find child care. For example, one parent discussed how she hasn't worked in five years because child care is too expensive. Another parent explained that she makes \$500 per week working in agriculture. However, with child care and transportation costs, she only has \$200 left per week.

"I don't have anyone to care for my children. I've been out of work for five years. Working doesn't cover the costs of child care."

Poor transportation infrastructure exacerbates families' child care challenges. Many of the families in the indigenous community in Greenfield do not drive. While families live in Greenfield, many must pay someone to take them to work, which can be about 40 minutes away. Their work transportation will not take their children to school or child care. Therefore, some families pay an additional \$25 per day for their provider to support transportation needs.

"So if there's no transportation, [the parent] can't go to work because she has to take the child to school. So, let's say if that day there wasn't someone to take the child to school, she would rather not go to work to take them...you feel more confident when it's someone you know and everyone knows someone they can trust for transportation or on days when they can't find a babysitter. It's complicated because everyone is working."

Lack of outreach and accessibility to sign up for child care subsidies limits access. Language and geographic barriers have prevented families from knowing how to apply for state subsidized child care and from traveling to the office to sign up for affordable child care. Parents from indigenous communities often have language barriers because they don't speak English or Spanish. They are unable to apply for state subsidized child care because of these barriers.

"Language barriers are also an issue because many don't speak English. They need help in Spanish, and it complicates things a lot. The office has the requirements, but they don't really understand them well. So it makes it challenging, and they don't go."

There is a lack of transparency in how the child care waiting list works. In addition to facing barriers with applying for subsidized child care, some parents do not understand where they are on the waiting list and why they don't receive care. This lack of transparency presents additional barriers for accessing affordable care.

"My sister-in-law wanted to go back to work when the baby was three months old, but there was nowhere to leave her. We registered her and applied for a daycare, but they never called us. They said it would be open on a certain day, but when we went that day, there was no space. Right now, there's still no space. I realized that at this daycare, there was availability, but I don't know what happened. It seems like there's a lot of politics involved. We are earning little, but I'm not sure what the problem was. They said my niece was first on the list, but then someone else took her spot. They said she had applied, so I don't understand what the issue was."

Recommendations

Given the themes presented throughout this summary, parents shared the following recommendations for improving child care in their community.

1. **Expand child care supply, focusing on infant/toddler care and nontraditional hours.** Specifically, parents want options that open at 4am or 5am and go until 6pm.

"It would be nice if the schedule went until 4:30 in the afternoon, but the problem is that they only accept children from two years old. So, there are certain places that open at five in the morning and close at four, but it's not for everyone. So, if you have, say, a child under two, you can only take one of them to that daycare, and the rest have to find another place."

2. **Incentivize providers to work non-traditional hours.** This includes supporting providers with finding coverage for double shifts so providers do not have to work twelve hour days.
3. **Create child care facilities with ample space for children to run and play.** Parents would like larger centers that allow for more space for children's activities and generally, larger capacity.
4. **Support family, friend, and neighbor providers with professional development related to child development and education.** While parents trust many providers, they shared that some providers lack child development knowledge. Parents would like providers that help their child learn and grown, such as learning how to count, colors, shapes, days to the week, etc.
5. **Support multilingual child care settings.** Parents would like support from providers with helping their children learn English. One parent shared that her child speaks Mixteco and Triqui at home and Spanish with her friends, but her child is still learning English. It would be helpful for her child care provider to support with developing her language skills so that the child can be ready for kindergarten.
6. **Provide child care providers with diapers, wipes, and food for the children they care for.** Right now, parents shared that these costs come out of their pocket. Or, they have to pay additional fees for these basic needs. Having these resources provided by the provider would help parents with making ends meet.

7. **Provide transportation support.** For example, parents shared that they would benefit from a bus with easy drop off and pick up to and from the child care location.
8. **Create a pipeline for people from the community to become child care providers.** Parents shared that there are people from within the community that would like to be trained to become providers. And, it would be helpful to support these people with the infrastructure they need to open the child care.

“Yes, there are some programs that are coming out saying that moms can be providers. It seems related, but they ask for many requirements, and there is also a lot of space needed for them to care for the kids. But, there are also some in the community who would find it difficult to train and take care of the kids themselves. They know the community well, so there's a lot of trust in leaving the children with someone familiar. However, when it comes to applying for the license, there are many requirements, and I think it would be good for an ideal daycare to have some community members with licenses.”

9. **Create a 1-to-5 child-to-provider ratio.** Parents have experienced higher child-to-provider ratios and shared that a 1-to-5 ratio seems ideal for child development.
10. **Create an office in Greenfield where parents can apply for state subsidized child care, as opposed to having to travel all the way to Salinas.** As mentioned, transportation is a barrier for many families in Greenfield. Providing an option for families to apply for subsidized child care would help mitigate access issues.
11. **Support child care providers with developing an educational curriculum.** Given parents' preference for providers to support child development, parents also recognize that providers may need support in this area. Therefore, it would be helpful for child care providers to have access to this support.
12. **Provide language assistance for families that do not speak English or Spanish.** When applying for subsidized child care, many parents would benefit from language supports so that they can fully understand the process and application guidelines.

13. Support parents with child care when the child is sick through having nurses or an infirmary room on site. Parents shared that they must go pick up their child when they are sick. However, this is a hardship for many families given the distance they have to travel to child care and the lost wages as a result. Therefore, parents would benefit from another option for their sick child to be cared for during working hours, similar to how K-12 schools have a “nurses office.”

“When I was working, they called me to say I had to come pick up my child because he had a cold or something. So I had to ask for permission and look for someone else to pick him up. It was very frustrating because they call you, and you have to go right away, sometimes even to Salinas, which is far.”