

**Waiting to
be seen.**

**Demanding
to be heard.**

Fresno Write-Up

Fall 2018



SPR



Fresno Focus Group Write Up

Name of Location: Central Valley Services Network

Name of Supporting Organization: Parent Voices Fresno

City: Fresno

Focus Group Facilitators: Mary Ignatius

Date of Visit: September 26, 2018

Focus Group Participants: Seven mothers participated in the focus group. Each woman has one to four children and are current or former recipients of child care. These women all came from Fresno and surrounding cities.

Ideal Child Care Scenario

While reflecting on their child care journeys, the parents in this focus group discussed what they would like to experience throughout the process of finding and maintaining quality child care. Key points from this discussion are highlighted below.

How Parents Would Like to Learn about Child Care Options

- Primarily, parents would like to **find out about child care options when they are in the hospital or at the doctor's office.**
- While at the doctor's office, ideally, the **doctor should connect the parent to a social worker** who can assist with enrolling the parent in a child care subsidy program.
- Furthermore, **child care subsidy information is advertised in easily accessible places** such as the television and radio. This information is provided in multiple languages. Also, employers inform parents about various child care options that meet their work schedule.
- Government funds are enough to ensure that **no child is left on the waiting list.**

How Parents Want to Navigate the Child Care System

- When a parent gives birth, the **system offers up to one year of paid family leave.**
- Additionally, **child care options are readily available for parents that must go on disability leave.**

"I think when you're pregnant is when you go to the doctor and they say, 'Ok, you're pregnant' and they send you to the social worker, who tells you what food you're going to eat and everything...They ask, 'Are you a single mom?' 'Do you have your partner?' That's when they can offer help."

- Many parents in the Fresno area work in agriculture. As a result, their work schedule and location often follow the crops and the regulations put forth by the Migrant Program. To accommodate this work schedule and movement, the **child care system should be seamless from one county to the next**. Parents can smoothly move their child to a new provider in a new county. Furthermore, migrant parents need flexibility and care offered early in the mornings and late in the evenings because their schedule is unknown.

" [I receive my schedule] that day. Because it can be twelve hours, depending on orders that one has to do. You always know what time you're going to enter, but never in packaging-you never know what time you're going out."

" We can leave 30 minutes early by not taking our 30 minute lunch break. But there is not an afternoon dismissal schedule, on all the days. There are different departure times"

How Parents Want to Choose the Right Provider

- Parents can **easily find out about child care provider quality through helpful apps or call centers**. For example, the app would include recommendations from parents, background information on the provider including background checks of criminal history, and a description of activities and resources offered at the facility.

"Ok, like a rating that—you know—recommendation, like someone says, 'Oh this person is a good provider' and that way you get good feedback. So recommendations...Ok, so parents among parents - she has a good provider, she recommends, then you know, she shares that information with her so it's parents rating."

- Additionally, **information on the type of provider and the subsidies that are accepted at the facility is easy for parents to find**. Furthermore, it should be clear if providers will enroll children without documentation.

"Also knowing what kind of provider is this? How it works? Is it subsidized? Is it migrant?"

- For parents to find out about the range of providers available to them, **providers should advertise their services on the internet**, such as a Facebook advertisement.

Definition of Quality Child Care

- Parents have the **option of receiving text and photo updates of their child at least three times per day**. This will help the parent build trust and confidence in the provider.

- Quality **child care is available at all hours and all days of the year** to accommodate parents' work and school schedules. Parents who work in agriculture often hold irregular hours, including nights and weekends. Ideally, providers can and will accommodate their alternative schedules.
- **Every school has an after-school program until 7pm** that includes nutrition. Furthermore, parents are allowed to use their vouchers to find after-school care for their children.
- **The provider is a cultural fit for the child and the parents.** This means that the provider can help the child learn both English and their parents' language (if not English).
- Child care providers offer **high quality nutrition options.**
- The child care **provider follows an early learning curriculum and can assist children with their school assignments.** Moreover, providers are proactive about asking children about homework and ensure that children complete their assignments.

“But what I like about the provider is that there, since a very young age, they start drawing, writing the alphabet, their name. So by the time they go to school— Because, in my case, my girls went to child care at a much older age, so later in school they struggled a lot. This is due to the language but also— they learned to read almost until third grade. And my other child, the boy, he was in child care from a very young age. So, in kindergarten, in first grade, he already knew how to read. And I think that helped him, the things they taught him at the provider helped him. Because they follow a routine.”

“Not all providers are the same. Some do not help with school activities, and they do not ask the children if they have homework.”

- Child care providers are qualified, and **the facility is safe.**

“First and foremost, you look into the fact that you have a good provider, that your child is going to be safe.”

Reality/Challenges

As parents reflected on their experiences with the child care system, they brought up several challenges that illustrated the reality of their situations. These challenges are outlined in the points below.

Accessing Quality Child Care

- Most of the parents participating in this focus group immigrated to the US from other countries and often move to and from different counties. Several **parents were not told about child care resources** when moving to Fresno. One parent stated that she stopped receiving cash aid when she moved to Fresno and nobody informed her that she still

qualified for child care services. In general, parents are not given sufficient information about child care resources.

“No, one of my classmates actually told me, like, ‘Hey, you should apply.’ And I applied. You have to really self-advocate.”

- In addition to parents not receiving enough information, some parents explained that they were told mis-information or provided no information at all. Specifically, **parents were given the wrong information regarding where their child care voucher could be accepted.**

“ I had never asked for 3 days of sick leave, and even though one of my children had his appendix operated on, I asked for a week to be with my son and in fact I was pregnant with my other baby. I was not paid for those sick days. And my son was operated on and my employer never notified me that I had the right to ask for sick days.”

- Parents discussed **the meaning of cultural and linguistic preservation. When asked if they feared their children will lose their language and culture, 100% of the participants raised their hands.**

“ Because you cannot be speaking Spanish all day [while you are working]. And you do not want them to lose that.”

“With mine, so they answer me in English, I say, “I do not understand you, tell me in Spanish to understand you. But I tell them, “I do not understand what you say...And then at school she speaks pure English. Pure English. And then if they go elsewhere, they speak pure English.”

- Rural towns, such as those outside of Fresno, offer a **limited number of providers.** Parents are therefore left with options that do not meet their quality and schedule standards.

“There’s only 3 providers. The one stopped, so then there were 2 providers. And one I didn’t feel comfortable with, so then she was my only choice.”

“And you cannot stay at work because something happens with the provider, you depend on the provider, you have to get off work suddenly. It has happened to me many times, I’ve been very close to losing jobs, I have even become sick due to the stress of not wanting to lose the job, because of the providers – there is no one, you can find no one to take care of the children.”

- Parents reported that some **providers will not enroll their children if the child or their parents do not have documentation or social security cards.**

“I struggled a lot to be able to get help to take care of them. In welfare I asked for childcare but they said no, because my children needed to have social security cards. Since I am an immigrant, my children are immigrants, we do not have social security cards. So, that was a limitation. I had to pay for someone to take care of my 2 boys. Back then I was a single mother. I called different places, but they always required for my children to have social security cards. Right now I can’t remember the

names of the places that I called asking for childcare, but they said that my children had to have social security cards, otherwise they were not eligible. So, my children suffered more.”

- Because parents’ schedules change week-to-week and sometimes day-to-day, it is difficult to find a provider that can accommodate shifting schedules and weekend hours. Parents are also trying to balance school schedules with work schedules so they can learn English and obtain a better job. However, **balancing school, work, and child care schedules is incredibly difficult.**
- In many cases, **parents have turned down jobs because they cannot find a child care provider** that accommodates their work schedule.
- Parents commented on how some child care providers are not qualified and do not have a safe environment.

“ I was going to change from a home, because sometimes my child told me that they gave her pinches... Who are watching the children, right? Let nothing bad happen. But in family child care, even if they have a license, you do not know how safe your children are.”

Navigating the Child Care System’s Policies and Procedures

- When parents move from one county to another to accommodate the Migrant Program and/or their job, they have **lost their child care and were forced to reapply.** This has resulted in gaps in service and inefficiency for the parent.

“I got it in Merced— the financial help to be able to overcome a problem that I had. And I started working. They helped me— they soon sent me help to take care of my child. And they were helping me with all that, stamps, food, MediCal, money, childcare— I started to thrive. They offered me a job here in Fresno. When I moved here, a friend of mine helped me to take care of the child. This was only during my adjustment period. Here I applied to other places, but they didn’t tell me that I could notify about what I had left back in Merced. So, I notified them late, 2 years later— After leaving Merced, I couldn’t get any help.”

- Parents discussed how **some providers can set very strict pick-up times** that do not accommodate their work schedules. Because there are so few providers in these rural areas, parents do not have more flexible child care options.

“So I had to commute to Hanford and if I wasn’t back in Huron by 5:30, then they were going to stop my services. So I had to move to Hanford.”

- Given the typical income for a parent working in agriculture, **child care is not affordable.** One parent stated that she spent \$800 per month out of pocket for child care, which equated to her monthly cost of rent.

- The **pre-July 2017 cap on income was problematic**. Parents reported that they would exceed the maximum income to qualify for a subsidy, but they still could not afford child care without the subsidy.
- **Updating contact information is cumbersome for parents who move frequently**, such as those in the Migrant Program. As a result, breakages in service provision happen.

“One problem that we see is that they return the mail to us, because if you write your address wrong, or if you move, or your income changes, all this changes, and it is your responsibility to update your information in the program. Otherwise, they are unable to do modifications unless you call and update your file. You have to call them, again, and again, and again. Parents don’t have time for that.”

- The Migrant Program offers subsidies specifically for migrant agricultural workers. However, to qualify for services, parents must move to a new county at least once during a twelve-month period. However, this **constant moving is often not necessary to work in agriculture and results in parents having gaps in service provision and overall instability**.

“The qualification, you have to be migrant, so you have to move every 12 months or else you don’t qualify.”

“Because locally—the season for the tomato is like, you know, summer. And then you have a different fruit. So, ok. Tomatoes here, the other factory for lettuce, whatever. Garlic is over here. This is done, ok. So here, but all are in nearby cities. So, you don’t necessarily have to move when the season changes.”

“And there are programs for immigrants, but the program for immigrants requires for you to move every year, every 12 months – from one place to another, that’s very hard. It is very hard on the children to move that many times. It is hard to take them from one country to another, moving from one home to another, from one town to another.”

“That was also my experience, when I arrived from Mexico, I applied to the immigrant program, but after a year I lost it since I was not able to migrate somewhere else.”

“Because a child goes to a school, you have to move to another place and change them from school...we want stability.”

- **Child care in the summertime brings a distinct challenge** because children are not in school and do not have access to after-school programs. Parents do not know where to send their children in the summer, especially if parents do not have friends or family nearby.
- Parents sometimes **struggle to find providers that are a good cultural fit**. Specifically, parents fear that their children may lose the ability to speak their native language if they are not with a multilingual provider.

“My children, when they answer me in English, I say, “I do not understand you, tell me in Spanish to understand you.” And then at school he speaks pure English. Pure English. And then if they go elsewhere, they speak pure English.”

- Parents who work in agriculture have schedules that often change weekly; parents do not know their schedules in advance. Often, parents will receive their schedule the day of, and their work shift could be for up to twelve hours. Therefore, it is **difficult to find a provider with flexible and weekend hours**.

Recommendations

Given parents’ perspectives on both their ideal child care scenario and their reality, the focus group conversation produced a set of recommendations for improving the early learning system.

1. Clarify or reform migrant child care regulations to not require a parent to move out of the county within 12 months to remain eligible for services.

2. Allow all children, regardless of their documentation status, to access child care.

“Ok, so in general, what I wish, ideally, would be that no child is on the waiting list. That there is enough funds so that every child can access the services.”

3. Offer support and incentives for individuals to become child care providers and extend the hours of existing providers to provide more non-traditional care hours, particularly in rural areas and particularly for bi-lingual child care providers.

4. Provide support to providers to improve their skills and continue their education related to child development.

“And that’s because—it goes back, again, there needs to be funding for staff to go out and train because that’s why she’s doing good, because she’s part of the provider network and the staff go out and train the providers. They go with books and activities and all that, so if there’s no staff—no money for staff to do that, then it affects the quality”

5. Advertise child care in accessible places and in multiple languages.

“When you first arrive from another place, you know no one, you know nothing, and you lack a lot of information. It’s just that there, you— first, you arrive looking for what you have available. People, who can help take care of your child, and asking where to find a job. There should be more information. I don’t know, at the stations, in the radio.”

6. Train case workers to provide comprehensive information about child care resources that are culturally and linguistically accessible

7. Mandate employers to provide at least one year of paid family leave.

8. Provide training for providers on how to work with children who have special needs.
9. Mandate regular inspections of provider facilities.
10. Create seamless systems for transferring parent information across counties.
11. Put employers in touch with child care subsidy administrators so the recertification and outreach process is more efficient.

“To send the information from the workplace— so, there should be a direct contact between your employer and the childcare services. So that we could have permission to be able to do— to take care of these matters. To have your employer give you permission without a penalty— — that could harm your work and to be able to keep doing your work at ease. My employer also has information from here, but he doesn’t— they do not put us in contact directly with these programs and let us, parents, be able to keep working at ease.”

“Families want information about their rights and it should be provided with cultural sensitivity and in accessible languages.”

Concluding Thoughts: What do Policymakers Need to Know?

Parents closed the focus group conversation with the following concluding thoughts.

- Parents who are stuck in the system **do not have time to advocate for their rights** because they are just trying to survive.
- **Rural areas need more providers and more child care options.** Opening new child care facilities is good for the community and good for the economy.

“If one cannot work, you are not helping the taxes nor the system, you are not helping for the environment to improve. Because you are stuck in a situation where you cannot work. Then, you become— you need financial support, you need stamps— so, it makes everything worse because you are not able to work. If you don’t have someone who can take care of your children, how are you going to do that? Anyhow, to be able to progress and help the community we need more jobs, also for the providers, so that one has the possibility to go on. And also help the system grow.”