



HEALTH, INFORMATION, SECURITY, AND COMMUNITY: WHAT FAMILY, FRIEND, AND NEIGHBOR PROVIDERS NEED DURING COVID-19

October 2020

The term “Family, Friend, and Neighbor” (FFN) generally refers to unlicensed or license-exempt home-based providers. The National Women’s Law Center describes FFNs as providers who “may provide care for a short-term period or for the long-term, may be paid or unpaid, and may or may not have a previous relationship with the family.”¹

FFN care is very common — between one-third and one-half of young children² in the United States are cared for by an FFN caregiver at least part of the time. FFN caregivers are the preferred form of care for many families due to greater affordability, flexibility of hours and days of care provided, and cultural and linguistic familiarity to the family. In California, the most common FFN provider is a woman of color between the ages of 30 and 50 (often a grandmother or aunt).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many families came to rely on FFN providers as other child care settings closed or limited their enrollment. A survey from the Bipartisan Policy Center³ showed that a third of families who had previously relied on a child care center were relying

on child care from a relative during the pandemic, and an additional 8% were relying on a friend, neighbor, or nanny for care. **This means 40% of children previously in formal child care are now being cared for by informal FFN caregivers.**

PURPOSE OF PROJECT

Early Edge California is interested in advocating for additional supports and services for FFN providers. The current public health crisis represents an opportunity to provide support and training to this group of caregivers so that they can better guide the children they serve and help prepare them for kindergarten and beyond.

In order to understand FFNs’ experiences, Early Edge California conducted a survey of sixteen agencies serving FFN providers statewide, including Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies, libraries, and County Offices of Education, and we interviewed six FFN providers in Los Angeles and Central California to better understand their experiences and challenges during COVID-19.

“COVID-19 has changed the landscape of child care dramatically and many parents are relying more on FFN child care providers to care for their children. Many are expecting them to also be their teachers during distance learning. This added responsibility and shifting circumstances require more support for FFN providers.” –Agency staff member

INTERVIEW AND SURVEY FINDINGS



“In addition to redistributing funding we have spent down agency reserves to meet the needs of families and caregivers. We cannot continue this indefinitely.” –Agency staff member

FAMILY, FRIEND, AND NEIGHBOR CHILD CARE PROVIDERS

Interviewed providers reported the following:

FAMILY, FRIEND, AND NEIGHBOR PROVIDER-SERVING AGENCIES

Findings from the agency surveys included:

- 54% of agencies no longer provide face-to-face services to providers.
- 77% of agencies indicated that they are providing more support via phone or text than they did prior to the pandemic.
- The most common request from FFN providers was help with cleaning and health supplies (78%), followed by help with supporting families with distance learning (62%), and information on health and safety (62%).
- Providers frequently contact provider-serving agencies for support with basic needs. Housing security, food security, and better access to internet and digital devices were all highlighted as community needs that agencies experienced.
- Current funding can only cover support for a fraction of FFN providers in their area.
- Modifications to meet public health requirements have been costly and difficult to maintain.

- Experiences with their agencies varied widely — some reported receiving comprehensive support throughout the pandemic, while others reported receiving limited or no support.
- Providers received some support for purchasing cleaning supplies, disposable items and materials for use in child care, such as art supplies, but more assistance was needed.
- Closure of community resources, such as the park and the library, significantly impacted how they provided care.
- Anxiety around the virus was the greatest challenge they faced.



POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS



After conducting interviews with providers and agency administrators, four primary takeaways emerged to inform local and state policy. Since the start of the pandemic, FFN providers' experiences have been defined by the need for:

- **Community resources**
- Support to **purchase or obtain needed supplies**
- Support for **mental and emotional health**
- **Consistent communications** around public health recommendations and available community services.

Additionally, as the State moves into recovery and rebuilding, FFN providers and agencies alike across the state implore leaders to see them as part of the overall economy.

COMMUNITY RESOURCES

Many community resources closed due to the pandemic. While middle- and upper-income households may own or be able to purchase substitutes for community resources (for example, being able to buy books if the library is closed) this has left many low-income families and FFN providers without access to the benefits that community resources provide.

Recommendations

- Public health officials should provide health and safety guidelines as soon as possible to allow

"What would help me most is books and toys. Normally I go to the library or get things at yard sales. The kids are bored of everything we have and kids grow out of things fast. I really wish there was some type of book exchange available." –FFN Provider

libraries, parks, and other community resources to open with appropriate social distancing in order to provide book and material lending, internet access, and outdoor recreation. Possible measures could include limiting the number of individuals using the facility at a time, moving indoor activities outdoors, or offering curbside service where appropriate.

- High-speed internet is necessary to participate in community activities provided over Zoom or other teleconferencing platforms. Communities should create community hot spots or open facilities to allow individuals to access the internet in a safe, socially-distanced manner.
- Public health plans should recognize that community resources serve community members who do not have access to ready substitutes. Equity demands that protocols be developed allowing these resources to remain open in the event of future public health crises or require that community resources be prioritized for re-opening if closure is necessary.

SUPPORT WITH PURCHASING NECESSARY SUPPLIES

In survey responses, 77% of agencies reported that providers requested help in purchasing or obtaining supplies and 46% indicated that providers had requested help in purchasing food. In order to meet these needs, increased governmental support and improved communication is necessary.

"Supply lines are not in our normal everyday work...We cannot do this type of work coordinating and providing supplies indefinitely." –Agency staff member



Recommendations

- Provide financial assistance to agencies to help them support FFN and other providers with necessary items, including cleaning and sanitation supplies, food, and materials to assist with distance learning and provide developmentally appropriate activities, such as books or art supplies.
- State agencies can provide assistance to Child Care Resource and Referral agencies to make large bulk purchases of necessary cleaning and hygiene supplies directly and distribute them to providers.
- Many providers indicated that it is challenging to find necessary materials in stores. Policymakers should ensure that child care workers, including FFNs, are recognized as “essential workers” and if necessary, provide these workers with documents to allow them priority access to services such as store hours for essential workers only.

SUPPORT FOR MENTAL AND EMOTIONAL HEALTH

Nearly all interviewed providers indicated that fear of COVID-19 was the greatest challenge to them during the pandemic, and several were facing significant financial hardship as well. In addition, many providers indicated that they were worried about the mental and emotional well-being of the children in their care. Provider agencies also recognized mental health as a significant need: over half of agencies (54%) reported that “training on providing social-emotional support to children and families” was a request they regularly received, and 38% reported receiving requests from FFN providers for personal mental health support.

“I’m really worried about the anxiety that the kids are showing with everything that is changing. I would like to know how to help them.” –FFN Provider

Recommendations

- FFNs who reported regular check-ins by Child Care Resource and Referral agency staff indicated that these were very helpful in supporting them to manage their stress and the anxiety in children. Agencies serving FFNs should consider providing weekly phone or text check-ins with agency staff and connecting providers with each other to offer mutual support.
- Ensure that children have access to school counseling services by increasing funding for mental health professionals in schools.
- Provide free subscriptions to meditation or wellness apps that are multi-lingual and culturally competent. For example, Los Angeles County is currently offering free subscriptions to the app HeadSpace.

COMMUNICATION

Providers and agency representatives alike discussed the need for clear, reliable information to inform how they provide care and navigate states of the pandemic. Of the agencies surveyed, 62% reported that providers had requested information on health and safety during the pandemic.

Recommendations

- State Agencies such as the California Department of Education, California Department of Public Health, and California Department of Social Services should coordinate and release jointly-produced information to avoid conflicting or inconsistent information.
- The State should ensure that counties have clear, up-to-date information to allow them to disseminate accurate local information.
- State and local government should provide easy-to-read, realistic, and clear information regarding health, safety, sanitation, testing, and social distancing. Materials should be made available in different languages and incorporate images and infographics to facilitate understanding.
- Provide up-to-date information through social media, news outlets, print, and online material in multiple languages.
- Support agencies with online and easy to read print materials to disseminate to FFN providers and the families they serve across the state.



CONCLUSION

As California transitions into rebuilding the state economy and recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, it is imperative that the child care workforce is supported. Providers and agencies have been on the frontline supporting working families throughout the year and the need for child care will continue as other industries resume business.

State and local leaders should ensure that children receive safe, high-quality care and that the providers they are entrusted to have sufficient resources. We are hopeful that the Governor, the Legislature, and Early Learning leaders will continue to elevate the needs of child care providers in California.

Early Edge California thanks the David and Lucile Packard Foundation's Family, Friend, and Neighbor Learning Community for their participation and support. We also express our gratitude to the FFN providers and provider-serving agencies who participated in this project.

¹ National Women's Law Center. (2018, March 27). "Family, Friend, and Neighbor Care: Facts and Figures." Retrieved from <https://nwlcc.org/resources/family-friends-and-neighbor-care-facts-and-figures>

² Kenyon, K. & Ramirez, R. (2019). "Family, Friend and Neighbor For Childcare Landscape Analysis." Burbank, CA: Early Edge California.

³ Tracey, S. & Smith, L. (2020, Aug. 6). "Child Care in COVID-19: Another Look at What Parents Want." Bipartisan Policy Center. Retrieved from: https://bipartisanpolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/BPC-Child-Care-Survey-Analysis_8.21.2020-1.pdf



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