

**CLASP**  
CENTER FOR LAW AND SOCIAL POLICY



# The Challenges of Change

Learning from the Child Care and Early Education  
Experiences of Immigrant Families

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## **PART III.** Examining the Barriers and Identifying Solutions: Immigrant Families’ Access to High-quality Child Care and Early Education

The following section explores whether and how children of immigrants have access to high-quality child care and early education programs. Our examination of the barriers to participation faced by immigrant families looks at a continuum of contact between immigrant families and child care and early education providers and programs. At each point of contact, immigrants face multiple layers of barriers.

Many of the barriers faced by low-income immigrant families are the same as those faced by all low-income families—for example, a lack of affordable child care and early education opportunities, mismatches between hours of employment and hours of child care, transportation limitations, and a shortage of high-quality programs for young children in low-income communities. However, interplay with other barriers unique to immigrants can exacerbate these general barriers for immigrant families. The aim of this report is to highlight the distinctive issues that immigrant families face in accessing high-quality child care and early education. We recognize that an overall expansion in funding and improvements in quality and coordination of child care and early education programs are critically important and would result in improving access to high-quality programs for all families.

We identified and explored three potential areas that could be serving as barriers to participation:

1. **Awareness.** To what extent are immigrant families aware of the existence of high-quality child care and early education? To what extent are they aware of the eligibility rules for various programs? How do immigrant families receive information about child care and early education?
2. **Accessibility.** If immigrant families are aware of child care and early education, what factors affect their ability to access it? How affordable and available are child care and early education opportunities in immigrant communities? How do programs' hours meet the needs of families? How manageable are enrollment processes for immigrant families?
3. **Responsiveness.** Once immigrant families have enrolled in child care and early education, how responsive are programs to families' diverse needs? Are providers equipped to provide children of immigrants with high-quality educational opportunities? Is there an adequate supply of qualified bilingual and culturally competent providers who work with young children? Do programs have culturally competent content and program standards? Are available programs facilitating access to high-quality comprehensive services and family supports?

At each point of contact, immigrant families face barriers related to demographic factors, language, culture, and immigration status, barriers that must be adequately addressed in order to ensure access to high-quality child care and early education. This section outlines our findings on each of these three key issue areas, and highlights strategies in each area that are working on the ground to connect immigrant families to high-quality child care and early education.

## 4. Immigrants' Awareness of Child Care and Early Education

In order for immigrant families to seek out a high-quality setting for their children, they must have a basic awareness of the importance of early education, the availability of programs and services, and the eligibility rules around participation. Obtaining information about child care and early education may be the first step toward immigrant families accessing these services. Our examination of immigrant awareness of child care and early education focused on the following:

- Awareness of child care and early education programs,
- Understanding of eligibility rules, and
- Outreach to immigrant communities.



### Awareness of Child Care and Early Education Programs

#### ***Immigrants are Often Unaware of or Unfamiliar With Child Care and Early Education Programs.***

Immigrants arrive in the United States for a variety of reasons, including economic and employment opportunity and humanitarian and political relief. Thus the circumstances of their arrival often necessitate an immediate focus on addressing the most pressing, basic needs—such as securing employment and housing. While child care is necessary in order for a parent to work, families may not have the luxury of time to identify child care and early education options in their community. If information does not reach them, they may be unaware of what providers and programs exist and of eligibility rules for public programs.

As a result, immigrant families often lack the necessary information to make informed choices about which settings will best support their children's development. States such as Arkansas,

Georgia, and Oklahoma—new destinations for immigrants—have recent immigrant populations, which are less likely to be knowledgeable about child care and early education

options. Immigrants in California, Florida, and New York may be connected to stronger networks for receiving information.

**First, families are looking for child care so they can work.**

**Then, word of mouth spreads about the academic benefits.**

**Families begin to be more aware of what early education is as they experience it.**

**Immigrants who have been here longer are more aware.**

—Child care provider,  
San Jose, California

Parents may be unaware of the developmental benefits of early education until after their child has participated in a program and they have witnessed the child's growth. Child care and early education providers report that some immigrant families that initially are looking for child care so they can go to work later come to understand the importance of the educational components of high-quality care.

Many parents do not realize that quality child care settings can support children's healthy development. Uninformed about the importance of quality early education, they may look simply for a safe place to leave their children. They may not know to look for a provider who will offer an environment that nurtures their child's physical, cognitive, and socio-emotional growth. All families, including immigrant families, may be unfamiliar with the indicators of high-quality care, as well as with the various licensing and accreditation standards for child care and early education providers. As one provider told us, "If families do not understand the differences between providers, if they do not know what it means to be licensed, then they will take the lowest-cost provider."<sup>1</sup>

**If families do not understand the differences between providers, if they do not know what it means to be licensed, then they will take the lowest-cost provider.**

—Child care provider,  
San Jose, California

Immigrants may also be unfamiliar with the services and supports available to help children with special needs, including physical, emotional, and learning disabilities. Also, there may be some cultural barriers to seeking help for developmental issues. Early education providers report that immigrant parents may feel responsible for a particular problem, and they might be ashamed. High-quality child care and early education programs can provide an avenue for young children to be assessed for special needs and connected to services.

There is little research that explains how immigrants receive knowledge of child care and early education. Nor is there research on immigrant families' awareness of the potential benefits of high-quality experiences and how this compares to awareness among U.S.-born citizen families.<sup>2</sup> Related research does show that immigrants are less likely than U.S.-born citizens to be aware of multiple health and community resources.<sup>3</sup>

1 Meeting with child care providers at Provider, Training, Resource and Activity Center (P-TRAC), San Jose, California, February 7, 2006.

2 One study suggested that immigrant mothers of toddlers are less knowledgeable about child development than U.S.-born citizen mothers. Bornstein and Cote, "Who Is Sitting Across From Me?"

3 Yu et al., "Parental Awareness of Health and Community Resources among Immigrant Families."

While there is a need for additional research in this area, our site visits revealed a lack of awareness of high-quality child care and early education among immigrant families with young children. Focus groups conducted by Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families confirmed that immigrant parents, especially those in new-growth areas, were largely unaware of the availability of state pre-kindergarten and often lacked traditional social networks to help them access additional information about pre-kindergarten and other services.<sup>4</sup> Interviews with refugee parents in Atlanta also identified a general lack of knowledge about Georgia’s universal pre-kindergarten program, including knowledge of how and when to enroll and how to access transportation.<sup>5</sup> CLASP found that immigrant parents’ familiarity with available child care and early education programs depends on many factors, including the circumstance and recentness of their arrival in the U.S., country of origin, child care and early education experiences in their home countries, their own education level, and English language proficiency, many of which are related. These same factors contribute to immigrant *participation* in child care and early education.<sup>6</sup>

**CLASP found that immigrant parents’ familiarity with available child care and early education programs depends on many factors, including the circumstance and recentness of their arrival in the U.S., their own education level, country of origin, experiences in their home countries, and English language proficiency. These same factors contribute to immigrant participation in child care and early education.**

**Circumstance and recentness of arrival.** We found that immigrants who have been in the United States for a longer period of time tend to be more familiar with child care and early education programs. More recent immigrants, on the whole, tend to have limited awareness of both the availability of early education programs and the educational benefits they can provide. In particular, they may be removed from traditional social networks that would help them access local information.<sup>7</sup>

Recent immigrants also have had less time to adjust to life in a new country and less time to become naturalized citizens.<sup>8</sup> Research confirms that preschool participation for immigrant families increases by generation.<sup>9</sup> Recent immigrants are also more likely to be lower income, to have fewer years of formal education, and to have less English proficiency—all of which may correlate with lower awareness of child care and early education. The circumstances of immigrants’ arrival—that is, whether through legal or unauthorized channels—also affects the extent of their awareness.

4 Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families, *Final Report to the Center for Law and Social Policy*.

5 Refugee Family Services, *Immigrant and Refugee Family Voices*.

6 Matthews and Ewen, *Reaching All Children?*

7 Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families, *Final Report to the Center for Law and Social Policy*.

8 Hernandez, “Demographic Change and the Life Circumstances of Immigrant Families.”

9 Chiswick and DebBurman, *Preschool Enrollment*.

Immigrants' initial contacts in a community also contribute to their awareness. Many immigrants access jobs, housing, and child care through informal networks comprised of immigrants from the same countries or of the same linguistic groups. Often this means a lack of knowledge of services that exist outside that network. This is particularly true in new immigrant gateways.

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Immigrants whose first and primary contact is an employer—such as those who come to Northwest Arkansas for employment in the poultry and construction industries—may have limited awareness of public health and social services in general, unless they have been introduced to these services through a social service agency. On the other hand, some immigrants in Northwest Arkansas initially immigrated to other parts of the United States, including California and Texas. These families may already have been introduced to federal programs—including Head Start, Medicaid, and Food Stamps—through more established immigrant networks in other states.<sup>10</sup>

**Country of origin.** The extent to which immigrants are aware of early education also appears to depend on their country of origin and its opportunities or norms for early childhood. Research shows variations in immigrant families' participation in early education by country of origin, variations often related to the education levels of immigrants from particular countries.<sup>11</sup> In some countries, everyone participates in caring for children, and no formal network of paid child care providers exists. If preschool programs are not offered in a particular country, or if families there rely on extended family to care for children, then immigrants to the United States might not be aware of more formal programs that exist here. For example, in Boulder, Colorado, it was reported that families from rural areas in Mexico are not familiar with formal child care; they commonly rely on extended family to help while parents are working. Some women from Mexico who have immigrated to Boulder now stay home and provide low-cost child care for other families.

Some immigrant groups may be especially unfamiliar with formal child care and early education options. For example, some refugee communities—such as Cambodians in Long Beach, California and Liberians in Atlanta, Georgia—come from agrarian societies in which formal elementary and secondary education is not available or common.<sup>12</sup>

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10 Interview with Frank Head, Catholic Immigration Services, Springdale, Arkansas, April 3, 2006.

11 Hernandez, "Demographic Change and the Life Circumstances of Immigrant Families."

12 Telephone interview with Him Chhim, Cambodian Association of America, Long Beach, California, April 25, 2006 and meeting with immigrant and refugee service providers at Refugee Family Services, Clarkston, Georgia, October 28, 2005.

Without additional information, these immigrant groups may not seek out early education.

**Child care and early education experiences in home countries.** Immigrant families that are familiar with preschool programs may have experience with programs in their home country that are much different from those in the United States. For example, one provider reported that families from India are familiar with preschool and begin looking for programs when their children are two years old.<sup>13</sup> In the U.S., many Indian mothers are working and prefer to have their children in a program. Because there are not enough public programs, however, they end up using informal caregivers instead.<sup>14</sup> A Miami focus group of immigrant mothers from various Latin American countries found that, in their home countries, children were routinely cared for by grandparents while parents worked. Generally, educational programs were not available in their home countries until age five.<sup>15</sup>

Although an immigrant family's country of origin may influence whether or not they are familiar with early education programs, it does not necessarily determine participation. In addition, there are regional differences in participation, both in the United States and in other countries. For example, overall preschool participation for four-year-olds in Mexico was at 81 percent in 2005.<sup>16</sup> Yet, enrollment varies greatly by region, including rural and urban areas.<sup>17</sup> In Mexico, where preschool is free and obligatory for all four-year-olds, the preschool enrollment rate for four-year-olds is higher than it is among four-year-olds in Mexican immigrant families in the United States.<sup>18</sup>

**Parental education.** Many recent immigrants have low levels of formal education. Nearly 30 percent of young children of immigrants have a parent with less than a high school degree, compared to only 8 percent of young children of U.S.-born citizens.<sup>19</sup> Immigrant parents with lower education levels are less likely to have children who attend preschool or center-based child care.<sup>20</sup> One immigrant service provider told CLASP, "If

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- 13 In India, early care and education programs, modeled after the U.S. Head Start program, serve children from birth to age six. While India plans to make access to such programs universal for all three- to six-year-olds, an estimated 20 percent of children are currently enrolled in preschool. Levine, *Take a Giant Step*.
  - 14 Interview with Lois Lee and Shalini Dutth, Queens School Age Day Care Center, Chinese-American Planning Council, New York City, October 19, 2005.
  - 15 Florida Immigrant Advocacy Center, *Final Report for Breaking Down Barriers*.
  - 16 Hernandez et al., *Children in Immigrant Families*.
  - 17 Section for Early Childhood and Inclusive Education Division of Basic Education, Education Sector, UNESCO, *Early Childhood Care and Education in E-9 Countries*.
  - 18 Hernandez et al., *Children in Immigrant Families*.
  - 19 Capps et al., *The Health and Well-Being of Young Children of Immigrants*.
  - 20 Hernandez, "Demographic Change and the Life Circumstances of Immigrant Families." Regardless of immigration origin, parents with fewer years of formal education are less likely to enroll their children in center-based child care or preschool.



## Immigrant-serving Organizations and Awareness of Child Care and Early Education

While some immigrant-serving organizations provide services to young children, including child care and early education, for the most part we found that the expertise of immigrant-serving organizations often does not include knowledge of child development issues, child care and early education opportunities, or the existence of child care subsidies. Therefore, many are not able to convey information about early education to immigrant families. Many of the organizations interviewed asked for information about child care and early education programs to relay to their clients, especially translated materials.

immigrants are seeking or participating in early education programs, it's directly related to the education and economic status of the parent. Those working at the very bottom of the pay scale don't have the context to be aware of services. Their network doesn't extend to public services."<sup>21</sup>

**Limited English proficiency.** More than half of all young children of immigrants have at least one limited English proficient (LEP) parent, and nearly one-third live in

**A GAO study found that LEP parents of young children are unaware of the availability of child care assistance and that children of LEP parents are about half as likely to receive financial assistance for child care.**

households characterized as linguistically isolated—where no one over the age of 13 speaks English fluently.<sup>22</sup> LEP status may make it more difficult for parents to find information about high-quality child care and early education.<sup>23</sup> A recent Government Accountability Office (GAO) study found that LEP parents of young children are unaware of the availability of child care assistance and that, after controlling for other factors, children of LEP parents are about half as likely to receive financial assistance for child care.<sup>24</sup> A 1999 study by the Coalition for Asian American Children and Families found that, in New York City,

along with a critical, citywide shortage of subsidized child care, language was a major barrier to securing child care services for many Asian families. Child care programs did not commonly employ child care providers that spoke Asian languages other than a Chinese dialect. There was no targeted outreach to families who spoke Asian languages other than Chinese; and many families in Vietnamese, Korean, Filipino, Indian, and other Asian communities did not know they were eligible for child care subsidies.<sup>25</sup>

21 Interview with Frank Head, Catholic Immigration Services, Springdale, Arkansas, April 3, 2006.

22 Capps et al., *The Health and Well-Being of Young Children of Immigrants*.

23 Fuller et al., "Rich Culture, Poor Markets"; Schnur and Koffler, "Family Child Care and New Immigrants."

24 U.S. Government Accountability Office, *Report to Congressional Requestors, Child Care and Early Childhood Education*.

25 Coalition for Asian American Children and Families, *Half Full or Half-Empty?*

### ***Immigrant Populations Are More Familiar With Some Child Care and Early Education Programs Than With Others.***

We found that, like U.S.-born citizen families, immigrant families are more likely to be aware of and to seek child care and early education programs for their three- and four-year-olds—to prepare them for school—than programs for their younger children. Immigrant-serving organizations by and large confirmed that immigrant parents are very interested in programs that will help their children be better prepared for school. One child care resource and referral agency found that Latino immigrant families look for schools and centers, not family child care, because they are seeking education and do not perceive family child care homes as educational settings.<sup>26</sup>

School-based programs may be more attractive to immigrant families if they believe that schools are safe places. It may be that some immigrant families seek school-based programs because they know that all children, regardless of immigration status, are eligible for public education. On the other hand, some families may be more trusting of community-based providers in immigrant neighborhoods, because their location may lessen families' fear of accessing unfamiliar programs or providers. However, immigrant families may not know that state pre-kindergarten programs may be delivered in settings other than schools, through other community-based providers. One child care provider suggested that immigrant families may need the opportunity to tour family child care homes and other early education settings to learn that a school is not the only place that can provide an educational environment.<sup>27</sup>

At each site we visited, we found that Head Start was commonly known among immigrant families and immigrant-serving organizations. In Tulsa, Oklahoma, the Child Care Resource Center reported that approximately 90 percent of those Spanish-speaking callers looking for child care asked about Head Start or Early Head Start. Generally, these parents were not aware of other programs.<sup>28</sup> Knowledge of programs, however, varies by community: a survey in Oklahoma found that Mexican immigrants were more than six times as likely as Vietnamese immigrants to have heard of Head Start. One Vietnamese parent described being told by a friend that Early Head Start was a program “for Mexican families.”<sup>29</sup>

**I have heard from my friend there's a program for children from zero to three years old. This is a special program for low-income families. The program provides people who come to your house to teach parents how to take care of their children. They also told me this program only is for Mexican families.**

—Vietnamese parent  
Oklahoma City

26 Interview with staff at Child Care Resource Center, Tulsa, Oklahoma, March 13, 2006.

27 Interview with Yvette Robles, Go Kids, Gilroy, California, February 9, 2006.

28 Interview with staff at Child Care Resource Center, Tulsa, Oklahoma, March 13, 2006.

29 Long, *Immigrant Families and Early Education in Oklahoma*.

Immigrants and immigrant-serving organizations seemed less aware of state pre-kindergarten programs, though in Atlanta, Georgia and Tulsa, Oklahoma—both of which are in states with universal pre-kindergarten programs—they tended to be more aware of state pre-kindergarten than in other states. In Oklahoma, 70 percent of four-year-olds attend the state pre-kindergarten program, which is delivered mostly in public school buildings.<sup>30</sup> We found that more people in Tulsa knew about state pre-kindergarten than at sites in other states.

Our Miami site visit occurred during the first year of implementation of Florida’s universal Voluntary Pre-kindergarten program (VPK). Immigrant-serving organizations and immigrants were becoming familiar with VPK, but some providers speculated that the program probably was not yet sufficiently reaching at-risk communities. In site visit locations with *targeted* pre-kindergarten initiatives—which serve far fewer children—there was less knowledge about the initiatives’ existence, even though English Language Learners are included among the at-risk groups targeted or prioritized for services in these states.

Child care resource and referral agencies (CCR&Rs) across the country help families find child care and access child care subsidies; they also provide training and technical assistance to child care providers to improve the quality of child care. CCR&Rs can assist immigrant parents in finding high-quality child care and early education programs in their communities, access resources to help meet the costs of such programs, and provide information on the developmental benefits of high-quality experiences—provided they have the language capacity to do so (i.e., bilingual staff and translated materials).

In some areas, CCR&Rs are not yet equipped to meet the needs of immigrant families. When language access is provided, CCR&Rs report increased use by immigrant families. In Boulder, Colorado, calls from monolingual Spanish speaking parents increased by 42 percent in the year after a Spanish-speaking child care referral specialist was hired.<sup>31</sup>

We found that many immigrant families, especially recent immigrants, are not aware that these agencies exist. For example, the Coalition for Asian American Children and Families reports that “immigrant families across the board had a hard time accessing information on child care resources. Most were unfamiliar with the Child Care Resource and Referral Hotline and while some knew of 311 [the citywide non-emergency public information and services line], they also found it confusing.”<sup>32</sup> CLASP also found that many immigrant-serving organizations are not aware of CCR&Rs. Many immigrant-serving organizations are interested

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30 Barnett et al., *The State of Preschool*.

31 Child Care Resource and Referral Program, Department of Housing and Human Services, City of Boulder, *Summary of Services and Findings*.

32 Coalition for Asian American Children and Families, *Breaking Down Barriers*. 311 provides information about government services, including child care and Head Start.

in receiving translated information about child care resources to provide to their clients. In some areas, however, child care resource and referral is *carried out* by immigrant service organizations. In New York City, the Committee for Hispanic Children and Families provides child care resources and referrals for child care, pre-kindergarten, afterschool programs, and summer camp for Hispanic families, many of whom are immigrants.

## Understanding of Eligibility Rules

Even those immigrant families who are aware of the existence of some child care and early education programs and services may be misinformed of the eligibility rules for individual programs—including that their U.S.-citizen children can access most non-cash benefits, including child care, without impacting the parent’s immigration status.<sup>33</sup> Misinformation is not always intentional. Families may be confused about or misunderstand eligibility rules; they may be directly misinformed by state, local, or program personnel; or they may be misinformed by friends and informal networks.

Federal education programs have differing rules regarding immigration eligibility (see box on p. 33). Research shows that low-income immigrants often do not understand eligibility rules for public benefits. For example, in a survey of low-income immigrants in Los Angeles and New York City, half the respondents gave incorrect answers to at least two of three questions about program eligibility and mistakenly thought that receiving public benefits—even for their citizen children—might jeopardize their immigrant status.<sup>34</sup> The Florida Immigrant Advocacy Center reported to CLASP that “the immigrant community is confused about whom to trust and where to go for accurate information. Many immigrants had incorrect information about the eligibility requirements for early education programs and child care providers.”<sup>35</sup>

**Many immigrant families assume that they do not qualify for public programs, including Head Start and child care subsidies.**

Many families assume that that they do not qualify for public programs, including Head Start and child care subsidies, due to immigrant restrictions. In at least two sites visited, parents and providers—including providers from immigrant serving agencies—believed that children of undocumented parents cannot enroll in Head Start.<sup>36</sup> In actuality, Head Start does not have immigration restrictions. In some communities, awareness of publicly funded benefits and

33 A child’s use of cash assistance, if it is the sole income for the family, could have “public charge” consequences and may impact a parent’s application for legal residency. See U.S. Department of Justice, *Field Guidance on Deportability and Inadmissibility on Public Charge Grounds*, 64 Fed Reg. 28689 (March 26, 1999).

34 Capps et al., *How Are Immigrants Faring After Welfare Reform?*

35 Florida Immigrant Advocacy Center, *Final Report for Breaking Down Barriers*.

36 Florida Immigrant Advocacy Center, *Final Report for Breaking Down Barriers* and meeting with parents and SPARK Hub coordinators, La Escuelita, Norcross, Georgia, October 25, 2005.



services was coupled with confusion about services that could have immigration or other consequences. The GAO conducted focus groups of Spanish- and Vietnamese-speaking parents that uncovered misconceptions about subsidies, including the belief that children might later be drafted into the armed forces to repay assistance.<sup>37</sup> Immigrant-serving organizations and other cultural mediators can play a key role in clarifying eligibility rules and misinformation—if they are knowledgeable and have accurate information.

Widely disseminated misinformation often creates confusion related to accessing programs. In a classic example of unintended consequences, CLASP found that early education and immigrant service providers in Tulsa commonly believe that the Oklahoma Department of Human Services (OKDHS) is connected to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and that the two share information over the same computer network. The abbreviation DHS has been used for both agencies, leading some to believe that if non-citizens were participating in OKDHS-funded programs, they may be subject to investigation by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. The confusion was worsened by substantiated reports that some frontline workers in OKDHS were reporting undocumented immigrants.<sup>38</sup> OKDHS has consequently issued policy guidance clarifying that OKDHS employees should not report applicants and/or recipients to Immigration and Customs Enforcement and that persons who are not applicants for or recipients of benefits should not be asked about their citizenship status.

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37 U.S. Government Accountability Office, *Report to Congressional Requestors, Child Care and Early Childhood Education*.

38 Interviews with staff at Child Care Resource Center, Tulsa, Oklahoma, March 13, 2006 and Division of Child Care staff, Oklahoma Department of Human Services, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, March 16, 2006.

## Outreach to Immigrant Communities

Outreach for child care and early education programs does not necessarily reach all immigrant communities and often is not uniquely targeted to diverse immigrant communities. The extent and types of outreach vary dramatically among programs; programs have differing outreach requirements and are limited by funding. Across the board, outreach is rarely conducted when limited slots are available, programs are at capacity, or waiting lists already exist.

In every community CLASP visited, there are substantial waiting lists for child care subsidies.

Because subsidies are limited and agencies cannot serve all eligible families, agencies are reluctant to advertise subsidies, for fear of expanding existing waiting lists. Limited available space may be one reason that many state pre-kindergarten programs conduct little or no outreach. In the 2006-07 school year, the Colorado Preschool Program served approximately 17 percent of all four-year-olds. School districts identified nearly 8,000 additional eligible children who were not served due to insufficient slots.<sup>39</sup> In Boulder, we were told that when there are no open slots to fill, state and local providers rarely advertise. Head Start, which is required by regulation to conduct outreach, often conducts more targeted outreach to immigrant communities than other early education programs do. Head Start outreach includes translated flyers, attending community events in immigrant neighborhoods, and door-to-door canvassing. Yet, Head Start programs also face the difficulty of waiting lists and an inability to serve all eligible children.

Examples of outreach targeted to immigrants vary widely. At a minimum, many programs translate outreach materials, most commonly into Spanish. Fewer programs have outreach materials available in languages other than English and Spanish.

Many programs reported putting advertisements in ethnic newspapers and on minority language radio stations, as well as disseminating translated flyers during health fairs and

A local Mexican-American social services agency runs a family literacy program in Gilroy, California. Most of the staff is Mexican-American and from the local community. To recruit participants, they target specific neighborhoods of recent immigrants and go door-to-door inviting parents to participate.

### Parent Focus Group Responses to the Question, “Where Do You Get Your Information About Early Education Programs?”

**“I came to the library, and incidentally I discovered this program.”**

**“My brother and sister let their children join this program. That’s why I got the information.”**

**“I got the information about this program through my son’s school. They mailed the information to my house.”**

**“I got it at the immunization clinic.”**

**“I got it from YWCA.”**

—Vietnamese immigrant parents, Tulsa, Oklahoma

Source: Long, *Immigrant Families and Early Education in Oklahoma*.

<sup>39</sup> Colorado Department of Education, *Colorado Preschool and Kindergarten Program*.

community events. Some programs partnered with immigrant-serving organizations, local businesses, or foundations to develop outreach initiatives, some of which were aimed at LEP communities. In Northwest Arkansas, Tyson Foods—a large employer of immigrants—sponsored a campaign advertising state pre-kindergarten enrollment on the radio, in television advertisements, and in the newspapers. Tyson’s multicultural community relations manager found that radio and television were effective modes of outreach. She also recommended that person-to-person communication and small-group information exchanges are effective

**The GANAS (Glen View Alliance for Neighborhood Achieving Success) program in Gilroy, California provides in-home outreach and services to families in the Glen View Neighborhood, which has a large presence of recently immigrated families. Outreach staff canvas the neighborhood—going door-to-door—to identify families with young children and provide them with information and in-home school readiness activities. The GANAS project is supported by the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation.**

methods of outreach to immigrants.<sup>40</sup> The Sant La Haitian Neighborhood Center in Miami uses its weekly television program, *Teleskopi*, to provide Creole-language information about services and programs—including Head Start and pre-kindergarten—to the Haitian community.<sup>41</sup>

Immigrants who are aware of child care and early education opportunities find out about them primarily through word of mouth, from friends and relatives. This makes it more difficult for families that are new to a community to learn about programs. Also, many immigrant families do not know where to get information about child care and early

education. Focus groups in an immigrant neighborhood in San Jose, California found that “parents want to, but do not know how to, access information about various types of day care, preschools and kindergarten readiness programs and opportunities. In addition, they would like training and information on preparing children for kindergarten.”<sup>42</sup>

Information on child care and early education should be available to immigrant families in places that immigrants frequent, such as churches, health centers, migrant worker centers, and places of employment. A Korean social service agency in Montgomery County, Maryland suggested using Korean churches to spread information about child care and early education, as many Koreans in that area are church oriented and trust the church more than the government.<sup>43</sup> We found that immigrant families’ points of contact vary among immigrant communities and among locations.

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40 Interview with Ana Hart, Tyson Foods, Springdale, Arkansas, April 5, 2006.

41 Interview with Sophia Lacroix, Sant La Haitian Neighborhood Center, Miami, December 15, 2005. See also Metellus et al., *Effective Outreach Strategies in the Haitian/Haitian-American Community of Miami-Dade County*.

42 City of San Jose, California, *Exempt Care Collaborative*.

43 Interview with Tae Lee, Program Manager, Korean Community Service Center, Gaithersburg, Maryland, September 8, 2005.

## Cultural Mediators

One essential element to effectively reaching and serving immigrant communities is using trusted messengers as a bridge to the community. Cultural mediators, or cultural liaisons, can be employed by public and private agencies to help build trust and create linkages with immigrant communities and families. Cultural mediators have the trust of the community they represent and are thoroughly knowledgeable about their cultural group. Cultural mediation is about more than translation and language. Cultural mediators interpret nuances of culture and communication. They can help translate child care and early education practices for immigrant families and provide relevant cultural information for program staff. They help build cultural competency and in doing so facilitate relationships between diverse individuals.

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## Strategies That Work

In this section, we highlight some promising practices and local solutions to improve outreach to immigrant families and immigrants' awareness of child care and early education programs:

- **Linking to immigrant-serving organizations or cultural mediators.** Immigrant “leaders” or trusted messengers can serve as a bridge to a community. As immigrant service organizations are often the first points of contact for immigrants in this country, they can convey to families information on positive child development and the importance of quality child care and early education. Child care agencies and others can partner with immigrant leaders and immigrant service organizations to do outreach, provide resources and referrals, and inform child care and early education providers about the needs of immigrants in their communities.
- **Using face-to-face communication.** Successful outreach techniques use face-to-face contact and personal communication to reach immigrant families. Information shared through a trusted source is the most likely to reach immigrant communities.
- **Targeting outreach to immigrant communities.** In addition to outreach in multiple languages, child care and early education programs should identify immigrant neighborhoods, immigrant service providers, and places immigrants frequent for targeted outreach and information dissemination. Points of contact may include large employers, churches, and immigrant social service agencies. The use of ethnic- and language-minority media can also be effective.
- **Increasing bilingual and bicultural staff.** In order to increase awareness of child care and early education opportunities among immigrant families, more bilingual and culturally competent staff are needed at all levels—including resource and referral, direct providers, and administrators and policymakers.



## Key Findings: AWARENESS

Overall, CLASP found that immigrant families are often unaware of child care and early education programs and services, including licensed child care, state pre-kindergarten and Head Start programs, and child care subsidies.

- Awareness differs among immigrant groups, based on factors including length of time in the U.S., the circumstance of immigrants' arrival, child care and early education experiences in their home countries, parental education levels, and English language ability.
  - Immigrant families may be unfamiliar with the concept of "early education," as well as with licensing and accreditation standards for providers and indicators of high-quality child care and early education.
  - Those immigrant families who are aware of child care and early education often are misinformed or confused about eligibility requirements.
  - Immigrant-serving organizations, often the first point of contact for immigrants in the United States, also are largely unaware of child care and early education opportunities.
  - Information on the benefits of high-quality child care and early education often is not available to immigrant families in accessible formats in their primary languages.
  - Outreach for child care and early education is frequently limited and is inadequately targeted to diverse immigrant communities.
  - Successful outreach includes dissemination of translated materials and face-to-face communications with trusted messengers, including immigrant-serving organizations.
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