



## Family Listening Session

# Hearing from Parents About Their Child Care Needs

## Head Start Seaside

In January 2020, a listening session with parents was held in Seaside, Oregon to learn about their needs for, and experiences with, child care in their community. These interviews were part of a series of family listening sessions funded by the Preschool Development Grant as a part of a statewide early learning needs assessment. The goal of the listening sessions was to hear family voices that have not yet been reflected in ongoing work to better understand families' early learning needs and experiences. The interview sessions were co-designed, planned, and conducted by researchers at OSLC Developments, Inc. and Portland State University with Northwest Early Learning HUB and the Lower Columbia Hispanic Council. Four mothers and one grandmother attended the session, currently living in Seaside. The listening session was conducted in Spanish.

## Current Child Care Experiences and Building School Readiness

### What are the most important things you look for when seeking child care?

For all moms, safety was the most important factor in their search for childcare, including safety related to ensuring their children's health. Good communication, trust, and respect were also important elements in their search for childcare. These mothers also expressed their need for child care that can be offered during flexible and non-traditional work hours, because their work schedules are variable.

One mom described how her list of expectations has decreased as she has become aware of the reality of child care expense:

**"The list of things that I look for is more realistic now that I know my options. Safety, communication, relationship and flexibility."**

**"Mi lista de cosas que tengo que tener en mente es más realístico según las opciones que tengo. La seguridad, la comunicación, la relación que formemos y la flexibilidad en los horarios."**



### Support for Cultural and Family Traditions and Values

One of the mothers described that she was pleased that her child care provider speaks Spanish so her daughter will start out speaking Spanish, and noted cultural knowledge as helpful in caring for their child (for example, that she is familiar with the types of home treatments they use for their daughter's skin condition). At the same time, however, most of these mothers agreed that providers generally do not support their language or culture, and that they would like to see more events and dances that correspond to the culturally relevant dates and celebrations so that children can grow up understanding and accepting these traditions.

### Where do you get information about child care and preschool options?

Moms reported seeking information through DHS and by calling 211, but told us that when they contacted these places, the options turned out to be inaccessible to them due to waitlists, expense, and scheduling inadequacies. All of these mothers found their current child care situations through word of mouth and recommendations, which is their preferred method:

**"More than anything else, we can get information among ourselves as a community and make a decision from there."**

**"Más que nada, entre nosotros como comunidad podemos conseguir la información y de allí tomas tu decisión."**

**"At first, I tried the resources they tell you to use, DHS and 211, and I asked all the questions they tell you to ask. But I realized after so many calls that I couldn't afford those child care centers. [The information] didn't prepare me for reality."** This mom chose an in-home child care situation for her daughter, but after talking with the provider about her concerns around her daughter watching television, she found that the provider no longer wanted to care for her. **"So, I stopped asking those questions and when I took this job, I used this as a reference."**

**"Al principio fui donde te dicen en la información, a DHS y el 211 e hice las preguntas como te dicen. Pero me di cuenta después de tantas llamadas que no podía pagar por esos centros de cuidado. [La información] no me preparó para la realidad."** Esta madre escogió a una señora para cuidar a su bebé, pero después de hablar con la proveedora sobre sus preocupaciones en cuanto a la televisión, la señora ya no quería cuidarlo. **"Así que dejé de hacer esas preguntas y cuando tomé este trabajo, fue de referencia."**

### Their Ideal Child Care Situation

The mothers laughingly admitted that they would prefer to be with their children themselves. One mother expressed that she liked and appreciated her child care provider, but she wishes that there was a bigger space appropriate for young children to play and that her daughter had the opportunity to play with other children in a school or park setting. Another mom preferred a child care center with well-trained staff. These mothers agreed that each family has different child care needs that vary depending on work, so a flexible schedule is ideal: "Sometimes I have to drop her off at 6am and sometimes I have to pick up at 9:30pm."

### Challenges Finding Care

The affordability of care was clearly a challenge, with these mothers reporting they could only afford about \$1-\$2 per hour. Two women who share the same caregiver report that she charges \$1/hour for potty-trained children and \$1.50/hour for children in diapers. They have the flexibility to pay every 2 weeks or every month and, importantly, only have to pay for the days and times their children are in care.

These mothers shared how the reality of looking for child care compared to their ideals:

**“These centers do exist, but there’s a long waitlist, and then when they finally call you, you realize that it’s \$780 or \$900 per month, from 8am to 5pm. It’s like, ok, I can’t do that. And what’s more, I’d have to take him somewhere else too because I have to work outside of those hours. And it’s monthly, not flexible, they’re going to charge you whether you go or not.”**

**“Y si hay centros de cuidado, pero hay una larga lista, y además cuando ya te llaman, te das cuenta que es \$780 o \$900 al mes, de 8 a 5. It’s like ok, no puedo. Más, aparte, tendría que llevarle a otro lugar porque fuera de esas horas tengo que trabajar. Y no se ajusta, es algo mensual, te van a cobrar si vas o no.”**

**“If they [referring to working mothers] go to work and have to pay most of what they earn, it doesn’t make sense to work. And the reality is that they have to help their partners.”**

**“Si van a trabajar y tienen que pagar la mayor parte de lo que ganen, no tiene chiste que trabajen. Y la realidad es que ellas tienen que ayudar a sus parejas.”**

Two of these mothers told us that they had taken their children out of care because it cost more than they earned. Another mother took a year off of work, which was only possible with the support of other family members helping her with housing.

**“We lived with them while I wasn’t working, so I didn’t have to pay rent. They helped me with other expenses so that my costs were reduced and I could make that decision.”**

**“Vivimos con ellos mientras no trabajaba así que no tenía que pagar la renta. Me ayudaron con los gastos, o sea mis gastos fueron reducidos y pude tomar esa decisión.”**

Finding providers who speak both Spanish and English (their preferred situation) was another barrier; although, mothers of children too young for Head Start told us that providers within their financial means are primarily Spanish speakers. When working with providers who do not speak Spanish, these mothers described the strategies they relied on to communicate, including using hand signals, both parties making an effort to communicate, finding someone who speaks Spanish to help, and relying on children to interpret.

**“The obstacle for all of us is that we don’t know English. Even if we want to say a lot, we say a few words and are stuck wishing we could say what we want to say, but we can’t.”**

**“El obstáculo que hay para todas nosotras es que no sabemos el inglés. Aunque a veces queremos hablar mucho, [decimos] unas cuantas palabras y nos quedamos con las ganas de decir lo que nosotras queremos, pero no podemos.”**

## **Early Learning Supports for Kindergarten Readiness**

Kindergarten readiness was seen as very important to these parents, and they shared a keen desire for more information and help in building these skills in their children. For example, they would like guidance—starting as early as possible—about how to answer children’s myriad questions; how to help them solve problems; how to help them be socially prepared to interact with other children, including older children in a school setting; and how to be ready to separate easily from their parents. They would also like to feel more prepared themselves for what will happen when their children start school. Parents agree that going to Head Start is a tremendous support for school readiness.

One mom shared that her daughter did not get into Head Start and has not had much opportunity to spend time with other kids so she gets anxious when there are a lot of kids around. This mother told us that she is looking for ways to give her the chance to socialize before her big kindergarten transition. This experience was mirrored by other mothers who felt the kindergarten transition would be difficult because their family did not qualify for Head Start.

**“When the kids start [Head Start], they don’t know anything. Then pretty soon they learn how to be social, how to play with friends, how to talk with them, to communicate, about what is right and wrong. For me this is very helpful.”**

**“Los niños no saben nada cuando vienen aquí. Dentro de poco aprenden cómo ser sociales, jugar con los amiguitos, hablar con ellos, a comunicar, sobre lo que está bien y lo que no. Esto me ayuda mucho.”**

## Key Takeaways

- ▶ These mothers would like to see quality preschool and child care for all children, regardless of income levels, because they all need to learn and be socially prepared for school. They would like to see additional options for families who fall just above the income limits for Head Start.
- ▶ These mothers valued activities that help prepare their children for kindergarten, particularly social activities that help them learn to interact with other children and gain confidence in a school setting.
- ▶ These mothers held a high value for culturally specific activities, but none of their care providers do activities to celebrate their children's culture or traditions.
- ▶ Some mothers struggle to find care providers who speak Spanish, and they especially want to make sure that their children are learning both Spanish and English.
- ▶ These mothers were challenged by the cost of care, which often exceeds what they make at work. One half of them stopped working to take care of their children.
- ▶ Most mothers relied on referrals from friends or coworkers to find care. Information about center-based care that they found through 211 and the information provided by DHS were financially outside of the families' means, had long waiting lists, and did not fit their scheduling needs.
- ▶ Some mothers needed to choose between affordability of care and quality of care.

In their current child care settings, these mothers talked about some key supports that were helping their children. They described how their children get excited about reading the books that providers send home with their families and tracking their time spent reading together. These mothers described how important it is that books are sent home in Spanish. They also receive learning games like memory and dice games and were asked to track how much they play together and if they liked the game.

**"All children need to learn so they know what to expect at school. Because they will all go to the same school, some more prepared than others. When will they catch up? If two years have passed and he was at home all that time?"**

**"Todos los niños tienen que aprender para que vayan despiertos a la escuela. Porque todos van a ir a la misma escuela, unos más preparados y otros llegan hasta abajo. ¿Cuándo los van a alcanzar? ¿Si ya pasaron dos años y él se la pasó en la casa?"**

**"And then they tell parents to have quality time with their kids but we have other responsibilities, to take care of the house and prepare meals. So I try to make time for learning. But those moments I share with her don't compare to this (Head Start). It's a different type of learning. I can't do this in my house."**

**"Y luego les dicen a los padres del tiempo de calidad, pero tenemos otras responsabilidades de arreglar la casa y preparar las comidas. Intento dedicar tiempo al aprendizaje, pero esos momentos que comparto con ella no se comparan con esto. Es otro tipo de aprendizaje. No puedo convertir mi casa en esto."**

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