

Promoting School Readiness by Improving Family, Friend and Neighbor Care

THE CHALLENGE

The experiences children have early in life have a profound impact on their development and achievement in school. Children who are cared for in settings that do not stimulate early learning prior to kindergarten begin school without the skills they need to succeed. Nationally, about one-fifth of all kindergartners lag behind on cognitive measures and almost one-third are behind on social and emotional measures. Several studies have demonstrated that as much as half of the achievement gap that exists in the third grade between disadvantaged children and their peers is already evident at school entry, a gap that grows throughout their educational development.

While mayors and city councilmembers have traditionally seen child development as an issue for families and community agencies, a growing number of city officials now view support for early care and education as an important long-term tool for strengthening families, improving education and promoting economic development. To date, municipal leaders have primarily focused on formal child care arrangements — such as center-based child care, Head Start and Early Head Start, and pre-kindergarten programs — because it is easier to identify and engage the leadership of these programs. This approach, however, leaves out nearly half of all children under the age of 6, whose parents choose to ask a relative or friend to care for their young children.

Family, friend and neighbor (FFN) care is the most common type of child care for low-income children under the age of 6 with working parents, yet between one-third and one-half of home-based child care settings provide care that may not adequately prepare children to enter school ready to learn. FFN caregivers rarely have training in early childhood development, and children in informal care typically watch more television and have fewer enriching learning experiences. Children in FFN care are also exposed more frequently to health and safety dangers, such as lack of safety devices or second-hand smoke.

If city officials are serious about curbing school dropout rates, narrowing the achievement gap and preparing all youth in their communities for college or employment, school readiness for all children — including those in informal care — must be part of the reform agenda. Small but growing efforts in cities across the country have shown that municipal initiatives to connect FFN caregivers to information, community resources, personal support and professional development can set more children on the path to success in school and in life.

STRATEGIES

Recent research by the Center for Law and Social Policy and ZERO TO THREE demonstrates that FFN caregivers need better information about child development and activities that can promote early learning; clear guidelines and resources to promote child health and safety; and strong support networks to help them overcome the challenges of raising young children. The cities highlighted in this document have begun identifying and providing support to FFN caregivers, but in many instances, these efforts are in the early stages of development or the scope and scale of the work remains small. Nevertheless, four primary strategies stand out from these local efforts:

EDUCATE PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS ABOUT EARLY LEARNING AND TRANSITIONS TO KINDERGARTEN.

Because parents and FFN caregivers often do not have formal training in early childhood development, cities can take important steps to improve the quality of informal care by educating parents and caregivers about the importance of early learning and the simple activities — such as reading, singing and interactive play — that can lay the foundation for more advanced skills as babies and young children grow. Public education campaigns can also include information on

FAMILY, FRIEND AND NEIGHBOR CARE: A CLOSER LOOK

WHO USES FFN CARE?

- FFN care is the most common form of non-parental child care in the United States, with nearly half of all children under the age of 6 spending time in informal care.
- Nearly a quarter of all children whose parents received federal child care subsidies in 2006 used FFN care.
- Immigrant and non-English speaking children, the fastest growing segment of the child population in the U.S., are more likely to be cared for by FFN caregivers than licensed center-based or home-based providers. Exclusive use of FFN care is higher for families of color (36 percent) and families from immigrant and refugee groups (37 percent).
- Working parents of infants and toddlers across all socioeconomic groups are most likely to choose FFN care.

COMMON CHARACTERISTICS OF FFN CARE

- Unlike other forms of child care, FFN care is characterized by strong personal relationships between caregivers and parents that typically begin before the child care starts and continue after the care ends.
- FFN caregivers often have no formal training and may not consider themselves child care providers, serving in this capacity primarily because they want to assist the child's parents.

- Many FFN caregivers only care for the children of their relatives or close friends, so the number of children per caregiver is generally smaller than in licensed child care settings.
- Earnings, if any, may be paid in cash or in barter and are likely to be lower than for a licensed child care provider.

WHY PARENTS CHOOSE FFN CARE

- FFN care often meets a parent's interest in finding a caregiver with shared values, child rearing practices, culture, language and/or religion.
- Parents are more likely to trust an FFN provider, and may feel that their child is getting the same attention he or she would get if the parent stayed home.
- FFN care is often more flexible and can cover late night or variable work schedules, and the care is provided in the child's home or in a familiar home nearby.
- Costs are typically significantly lower than for center-based or even home-based child care.
- There is no waiting list or formal application process for most FFN child care arrangements. The lack of formal paperwork may also be attractive to immigrants who are wary of sharing family information.



promoting health and safety through such steps as focusing on nutrition, protecting children from second-hand smoke and installing child safety devices.

Boston's *Thrive in 5* initiative, a partnership between the city and United Way, is integrating information on healthy development and school readiness into the everyday lives of parents and caregivers through a “community school readiness wiring” process. By training members of the community who interact with parents and caregivers at work, the grocery store, church, the hair salon and other gathering places, the city is working to get information to those who need it as they go about their daily lives. In addition, parents and caregivers hear these messages through a “Talk Campaign” conducted by ReadBoston to bridge the severe vocabulary gap faced by low-income children entering school, as well as a “Parents are a Child’s First Teacher” campaign conducted by Countdown to Kindergarten.

Local United Ways can be especially effective partners in launching public awareness campaigns as they have access to the *Born Learning* campaign materials developed by United Way Worldwide. *Born Learning* offers a tested set of strategies and materials to promote public engagement in early learning. In Charleston, S.C., the director of the Mayor’s Office for Children, Youth and Families has been an active member of the local United Way’s Success by 6 coalition, which partnered with the public library, public health department and local children’s hospital to launch a Born to Read campaign. Through this campaign, prospective and new parents receive “welcome baby” kits that encourage parents to read to their new baby and encourage informal caregivers to do the same. The project also includes written child development materials, public service announcements and numerous early literacy events.

A growing number of cities around the country are also partnering with schools to help parents and caregivers better prepare children to enter kindergarten. “Ready for school” initiatives typically highlight the skills that rising kindergarteners are expected to know and how to make the most of everyday learning opportunities, such as utilizing trips to the grocery store to discuss numbers, colors and shapes. Some communities have even developed an informal curriculum that parents and informal caregivers can use to structure activities in the year prior to school entry to help students enter school ready to succeed. In St. Paul, Minn., the Blast Off to Kindergarten program offers monthly activities that support language and cognitive development in the year prior to school entry, along with a backpack of school supplies and some preview activities (such as a bus ride and classroom experience) that ease the transition to school.

In addition, some cities are developing innovative new ways to guide and support early learning activities throughout the community. For instance, the parks and recreation department in the District of Columbia helped create a “learning trail” for young children at the entry point to Marvin Gaye Park by painting a pre-existing pathway with cognitive games so that caregivers walking with young children could engage in fun learning activities. The city also installed park benches and signs with messages to reinforce the importance of early learning.

CONNECT FFN CAREGIVERS TO COMMUNITY RESOURCES.

One easy way to support FFN caregivers is simply to help them take full advantage of the child development resources that are already available in the community.

Resource fairs can allow FFN caregivers — along with parents or formal child care providers — to gather information and learn about how to engage with cultural, educational and family support organizations in the community. In the World Café model, organizations that support and engage young children or their caregivers — from libraries to health departments — each staff a table, while participants rotate among the tables for brief, small group discussions. In 2008, the City of Providence and its community partners shared information and available resources with early educators, including FFN caregivers, at its Early Education World Café. Similarly, community events such as family fun days bring parents and caregivers out and allow local programs and service providers to share valuable information about community resources.



Cities can also develop newsletters and resource guides covering child development topics and highlighting community resources. The City of Denver has partnered with Mile High United Way to produce a parent resource guide with information about early care and education resources in the community.

The Internet provides additional opportunities to facilitate connections to programs or services. A website hosted by the city or a community-based partner may include a searchable database or links to area resources, such as city-sponsored training sessions for FFN caregivers and information on topics such as child development, early literacy and school-readiness. In Longmont, Colo., the city's Division of Children and Youth Resources developed a database that included more than 200 programs and resources for children and youth. Parents and caregivers can access the information online or by picking up a printed resource guide available throughout the city.

PROMOTE PEER NETWORKING AND SUPPORT.

Peer support opportunities can be another valuable strategy to enhance the quality of FFN care. City staff can create opportunities to bring FFN caregivers together to provide emotional or practical help to each other in homes, local schools, faith institutions, community centers, libraries, family-serving agencies or even at the mall. Through facilitated discussions, early childhood experts and FFN child care providers can also share resources, best practices and enriching and academically appropriate activities.

In Providence, R.I., city staff and community partners take trainings to the neighborhoods, organizing peer networking gatherings in familiar, easily accessible venues. In facilitated discussion groups, providers are given information about how to turn common household tasks into opportunities to learn. Some of the strategies are modeled and a group discussion follows. The City of San Antonio hosts Learning Circles for FFN participants to encourage social networking opportunities and the City of Madison, Wis., helped fund volunteer-run support groups for family child care providers and FFN caregivers.

Play & Learn has emerged as a prominent model for promoting peer networking and support while teaching FFN caregivers how to encourage play activities that stimulate learning. Play & Learn groups are facilitated play groups for young children (infancy through age 5) and their caregivers. Play & Learn group facilitators have backgrounds in child development and early education. The facilitator guides the children and adults through group and individual activities focused on developing early learning skills.

In Boston, the city has developed a *Play to Learn* program that offers children from ages 1 to 3 years and their caregivers opportunities for play, reading, singing, art, movement and other activities. In Des Moines, the local United Way uses a mobile Play & Learn van to bring services and resources to FFN caregivers, offering the opportunity to meet other caregivers, learn about how toddlers grow and develop and get connected to community resources.

In addition, cities can help organize a network of FFN caregivers for mutual support and economies of scale. Such a network could develop a system of back-up care, coordinate a system to share toys, books or equipment, and develop a group purchasing plan for diapers, wipes, snacks and other common care items. Similar to parent networks, an informal caregiver network could publish a newsletter, operate a listserv (if enough caregivers have regular access to the Internet), organize group outings and facilitate playdates to reduce feelings of isolation.

ENCOURAGE TRAINING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT WHEN APPROPRIATE.

While many FFN caregivers think of themselves more as surrogate parents than as formal child care providers, cities can encourage caregivers to participate in training that will help them better serve the children in their care. In addition, more intensive training and professional development can be tailored to the needs of informal caregivers who would like



to open their own in-home child care business or pursue a career in the early childhood development field. While the city may not have the capacity to offer these training opportunities directly, municipal leaders can build partnerships with local schools, child care resource and referral agencies (R&Rs), community colleges, Head Start programs or other community-based resources with expertise in early education to ensure that such training is available.

Home visiting and other mentoring strategies represent the most common way to support and enhance the quality of care and education that FFN caregivers employ at home. For example, the Parents as Teachers (PAT) program, which operates in communities across the country, has extended its parent home visiting program to include informal caregivers in many locations. PAT educators provide information on child development, discipline, health and safety; help caregivers detect developmental delays and health issues; provide support and encouragement to FFN caregivers; and connect them to community resources. The United Way of Metropolitan Atlanta has used the PAT model to support FFN caregivers.

In San Antonio, the city hosts an annual training institute specifically for local agencies working with FFN caregivers and for the FFN caregivers themselves. Popular topics include brain development and developmental milestones, social and emotional development, language and literacy, health and nutrition, and home and personal safety.

For informal caregivers who see child care as a potential career, there is also a high level of interest in record keeping, business planning and how to earn a degree or certification in early childhood development. In Seattle, the local R&R, Child Care Resources, provided training to help informal caregivers set goals and benchmarks to measure progress, assess feasibility and identify a marketing plan for a child care business. Cities can also partner with a local community college to provide credits toward child care certification or partner with an Early Head Start or Head Start center to open training opportunities to FFN caregivers in the community.

ACTION STEPS

To strengthen the design and implementation of these local strategies to improve informal child care, city leaders can build partnerships to identify and support FFN caregivers; create culturally-appropriate and accessible materials, activities and gathering places for FFN caregivers; use data to improve programs over time; and build public support.

1. Partner with the local United Way, family-serving agencies, cultural and faith-based organizations and the business community to identify and reach FFN caregivers.

An initial step to improving the quality of care offered in informal settings is to identify and reach out to informal child care providers across the city. The state (or in some places county) agency that provides child care subsidies can help identify those FFN caregivers who receive subsidy payments, and this agency may be willing to send information or surveys to these individuals. Cities have also used registration forms at events for children (e.g., free library story times) to help locate and continue to engage FFN providers, especially those who do not receive subsidies. However, the most effective outreach efforts typically rely heavily on partnerships with organizations and individuals that are rooted in the community.

The United Way often has staff capacity to help manage special initiatives and a strong set of local partnerships with the nonprofit and business communities that can be helpful in identifying and reaching out to FFN caregivers. The United Way of Central Iowa has partnered with housing complex managers, health care providers and leaders of neighborhood advisory groups to reach FFN caregivers. R&R agencies, large child care centers and child- or family-serving community-based organizations can be effective partners as well. For example, the United Way of Metropolitan Atlanta partnered with Quality Care for Children (QCC), the metropolitan Atlanta region's R&R, to coordinate and market Play & Learn groups for FFN caregivers and connect them to available resources.

Local faith-based and cultural organizations can also be important partners in reaching out to FFN caregivers. Informal child care providers — who are frequently low-to-moderate income, in a cultural minority and in some cases are



distrustful of government — are more likely to respond positively to community groups that have already built trust and credibility with local residents. Cities can ask these organizations to spearhead outreach efforts to FFN child care providers, host professional development opportunities or sponsor focus group or peer support sessions in order to build trust in a safe and familiar environment.

In Madison, Wis., the city, local United Way and the R&R worked with the Latino Project, a local initiative that trains human and social service staff to connect with the Hispanic community, to reach out to FFN providers and engage them in its trainings and activities. Surveys are administered during the trainings to get information about how they teach children in their care as well as resources they need to equip children with foundational skills for success. This information helped the local collaborative connect caregivers to resources, improve the quality of learning and build a strong Play & Learn network in the city and surrounding counties. United Way of Metropolitan Atlanta has joined forces with local churches, neighborhood school leaders and managers of housing complexes to identify and provide training and technical assistance to formal and informal child care providers, and has partnered with the Atlanta Chapter of the Black Child Development Institute to conduct phone surveys and focus groups.

In addition, these groups can help recruit trusted individuals who can reach out directly to FFN care providers, either door-to-door or in common community gathering places. A cadre of well-respected community leaders with the same ethnic background as targeted groups of FFN caregivers can serve as ambassadors, helping to identify and recruit FFN child care providers, raise awareness of the importance of training, serve as mentors for FFN caregivers and even participate in advocacy efforts at the local or state level.

For instance, the City of Charleston, S.C., conducted extensive outreach to churches to disseminate materials to informal child care providers. They also enlisted the support of trusted members of the community from various ethnic and racial groups who served as “cultural ambassadors.” The city’s Office for Cultural Affairs and Parks and Recreation Departments also collaborated to incorporate cultural activities into existing community festivals designed to connect parents and providers to existing services.

Initial efforts to locate FFN providers may only identify a portion of providers, but if activities are well-designed, “word of mouth” will help bring others forward.

SUMMARY OF CITY LEADERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

- Work with the state/county child care subsidy agency to send out surveys.
- Ask FFN providers to sign up for activities (e.g., Play & Learn groups, home visiting) at other programs offered by the libraries or parks and recreation department.
- Form strategic partnerships with a local United Way or local R&R agency to conduct surveys and focus groups.
- Reach out to faith-based, neighborhood-based and cultural organizations in the community to help with outreach or host activities.
- Train “cultural ambassadors” to do door-to-door outreach or engage families in community-based settings.

2. Develop materials and activities that respond to the needs, interests and cultures of FFN caregivers.

Materials and activities that offer clear benefits to FFN child care providers and are offered by trusted organizations, located in familiar settings and provided in a culturally sensitive manner yield higher participation rates and have a greater impact.

To ensure that activities and materials will be most relevant to their needs, cities can periodically offer FFN caregivers opportunities to provide input. In Lakewood, Ohio, the city conducted a survey to assess the needs of parents and other



caregivers of young children. From the initial needs assessment, the team formed focus groups to better understand areas in which parents and providers indicated they had the greatest need. The information gathered through the surveys, focus groups and research helped staff determine which programs and curricula to implement at their Family Resource Room to engage and empower parents and providers. In addition, local population data helped staff understand the importance of focusing on bilingual and multicultural services.

Local colleges and universities can be important partners in this process. In Nashville, Tenn., Vanderbilt University's Child and Family Policy Center works with the United Way of Tennessee and the city to identify FFN caregivers and to improve the quality of care that they provide. Survey questions addressed basic characteristics of informal child care providers, reasons why they care for children, challenges they face and resources and services they use. The information collected informed local agencies, including city government, about how to better tailor services to meet the needs of providers.

City leaders have the greatest impact when they take their materials, messages and programs directly to FFN caregivers, rather than waiting for them to seek out these resources on their own. Communicating at the neighborhood level — in churches, shopping centers, grocery stores, neighborhood newspapers and schools — can be an effective way to reach and engage FFN caregivers.

Initiatives that offer clear, tangible benefits — and address barriers to participation — are also more likely to engage FFN caregivers. Offerings such as developmentally-appropriate activity ideas, free programs at local museums or libraries, or a lending library system for books, toys, puzzles, games and videos can be attractive to FFN caregivers. In addition, opportunities to spend time with peers or receive concrete advice on challenges they are facing with the children in their care are also popular. For some individuals, the ability to earn college credits for training activities can be an added benefit. As in other initiatives that seek to engage busy caregivers, the availability of food and transportation — or ideally a local neighborhood location — will also facilitate participation.

Through a United Way/Home Depot partnership in Greenville, S.C., for instance, Home Depot stores sponsored carpentry workshops to help FFN caregivers make big book easels to share books with the children in their care. This event also helped connect FFN child care providers to a broader array of community resources and elevated the important role they play in children's education to business leaders.

Finally, it is important to take into account issues of language and culture when developing materials and activities to support FFN caregivers. The cities of Denver and San Antonio translate materials — including Play & Learn resources, family resource guides and training materials — into Spanish and many trainers/mentors are bilingual. In Minneapolis, where young people speak more than 80 languages, materials for the *500 under 5* early childhood program and the Family Academy are translated into multiple languages to help caregivers of diverse cultural backgrounds build school readiness activities and skills into their daily lives.

Based on its increasingly multi-cultural population, the City of Seattle recruited child care outreach liaisons for various cultural groups (African American, Hispanic, Asian American/Pacific Islander) to ensure that parents can find child care and to offer caregivers — including FFN providers — the support they need to provide high-quality, culturally-appropriate care. By building bridges with families of different cultures and backgrounds, cities can ensure that all providers can access available resources for themselves and the children in their care.

SUMMARY OF CITY LEADERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

- Gather information on FFN caregivers' needs, interests and primary language to ensure that materials and activities are appropriately designed.
- Disseminate materials and host activities in familiar, trusted community settings.



- Ensure that offerings have tangible benefits for FFN care providers (e.g., access to books and toys, free children’s activities, meals included with activities or college credit for training).
- Work cooperatively with community organizations serving particular cultural communities within the city, including immigrant families, to get assistance with translation and feedback on the cultural relevance and accessibility of materials and activities.
- Designate child care liaisons to cultural communities within the city.

3. Create places where FFN caregivers can come together for support and learning.

One way to create designated places for FFN caregivers to gather for peer support and training is to seek out spaces where people in the community already gather. For instance, the Town of Enfield worked with the owners of Westfield Shoppingtown Mall to set up informational kiosks near the mall’s play area to connect parent and caregivers to educational materials and community resources. They also used the mall’s family lounge to share informative videos about child development.

Cities often can make space available at municipal facilities so that FFN caregivers can come together for support and learning. For example, many parks and recreation departments and libraries have regular opportunities to engage with parents and may be able to host new FFN-focused programming. Similarly, housing officials not only have regular contact with families, but may also have community rooms that can serve as sites for training and celebratory events.

Housed in a city recreation center, the District of Columbia’s Department of Parks and Recreation operates a Cooperative Play Preschool program through which young children (ages 18 months to 5 years old) are introduced to a structured play setting. The program emphasizes socialization (e.g., learning to take turns), cognitive growth through activities such as music and painting, and gross motor development by running and jumping. Parents and FFN caregivers also participate and the program’s early educators model behaviors that encourage child development and learning through play.

Going a bit further, cities can create early childhood “neighborhood hubs” that serve as a gathering place and resource center for parents, FFN caregivers and other child care providers in the area. An accredited child care center, Head Start or preschool program could serve as a centrally-located communication hub between center-based and home-based providers to promote information sharing, mutual support, professional development, and in some cases, even a coordinated system to share lesson plans, toys, books or equipment.

The City of Fort Worth, Texas, created several city-funded Early Childhood Resource Centers. These neighborhood hubs offer parent education programs, lending libraries of materials for parents and children to use at home, consultation with early childhood specialists and facilitated support groups of parents. They also offer the opportunity for families to learn about other community services and resources, and they host a variety of free activities that support children’s healthy development. FFN caregivers were encouraged to attend not only the parent education programs, but also special monthly sessions that focused on various aspects of caring for others’ children. During these two-hour training sessions, FFN providers discussed topics ranging from child development to business relationships among friends and family. Upon request, child care consultants also visited FFN caregivers in their homes to offer technical assistance and advice on improving their caregiving.

SUMMARY OF CITY LEADERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

- Look for opportunities to create learning and networking spaces in existing gathering places, such as malls or restaurants.
- Actively engage city agencies that serve families with children, such as the parks and recreation depart-



ment, public library or housing and community development department.

- Create neighborhood early childhood hubs in existing child care or Head Start programs, family centers, recreation centers or libraries.

4. Assess needs and build capacity in the community over time.

While data collection efforts designed to improve the quality of FFN care are relatively new at the city level, municipalities that have tackled this issue have identified key areas in which good data can help shape a more effective initiative. In addition to using surveys and other mechanisms to identify and locate FFN caregivers, data collection efforts can help city leaders understand: 1) the current quality of care that occurs in this type of setting; 2) what supports are available to FFN caregivers and where there are gaps; and 3) what measurable difference these interventions have on caregiver practices and child outcomes. Local universities and R&Rs can be key partners in the data collection process.

To gather this information, cities may consider carrying out door-to-door interviews, hosting focus groups and/or collecting survey data that may include questions that address:

- The utilization of space to promote learning (e.g., activity stations) and the presence of standard safety precautions (e.g., outlet covers, safety gates);
- The extent to which activities and materials used by FFN caregivers are developmentally appropriate, the frequency of reading with children and the number of child-focused outings per week;
- The capacity of providers to evaluate child development and recognize the need for early intervention (e.g., familiarity with major developmental milestones, ability to report on how the children in their care are progressing);
- The extent to which FFN caregivers are accessing available community resources (e.g., support groups, library resources, community college courses); and
- The opportunities for increased support, asking what FFN caregivers find to be the hardest part of raising children in the community and soliciting their opinions on how to make the system work better for families and caregivers with young children.

In Seattle, the University of Washington conducted a statewide survey to collect information about FFN caregiving. The city and community-based organizations were able to look at the data to determine what resources were currently available and where there were gaps in services. Partners from various agencies then worked together to strategize as to how best to connect and provide services in an effective way. Play & Learn groups formed throughout the city and county to reach FFN providers and give them professional development opportunities.

Similarly, in Nashville, Tenn., the local United Way and the city felt that it was important first to conduct research to identify what early care and education services already existed for young children in Nashville and Davidson County. Their results identified more than 40 partner agencies in Nashville that provide educational opportunities for pre-school children. In Providence, Making Connections and the local United Way conducted a survey of all the organizations and state departments with education and professional development opportunities open to FFN providers. This effort has connected professional development opportunities to the statewide quality improvement initiative.

Gathering baseline data can allow cities to assess the impact of their efforts over time. This approach can be used to capture the impact of a specific intervention. For instance, in San Antonio, the city conducted pre- and post-training surveys of FFN providers to see what new knowledge about child development, health and safety they took away from the city's annual FFN training institute. In Atlanta, the Black Child Development Institute collected information from FFN child care providers in targeted areas to gain a better understanding of the nature of their work. Data can also be

collected to measure overall impact on child outcomes.

For city leaders seeking to impact school readiness, data collection is a tool, not an end in itself. Ultimately, even imperfect or incomplete information can be helpful in improving a city's FFN initiative. Door-to-door surveys may only get good information on one or two of the questions listed above, but these surveys might highlight some new opportunities to provide support for informal caregivers. City officials can help ensure that the data that are collected do not simply end up in a report on a shelf, but are used to enhance the quality of programs offered to support FFN caregivers.

SUMMARY OF CITY LEADERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

- Partner with a local university or other organization with the capacity to gather and analyze local data.
- Use surveys, focus groups and door-to-door interviews to assess provider needs and gaps in existing supports for FFN caregivers.
- Continue to gather information over time to evaluate and improve local FFN initiatives.

5. Embed efforts to improve FFN care in larger structures and initiatives to support early childhood success.

FFN initiatives will be most effective and sustainable if they are connected to the leadership, partnerships, public will campaigns and advocacy efforts of a broader early childhood agenda.

City officials may appoint a city employee, office or agency to lead the city's early childhood efforts (including support for FFN caregivers). Nashville, for instance, created an Office of Children and Youth in the summer of 2002, and hired an early childhood specialist as one of the office's staff members. In Denver, staff in the Mayor's Office for Education and Children advocate for children and youth, serve as the city's liaison to the Denver Public Schools and develop policies and initiatives to help every child in the city, beginning at birth, grow up confident, strong, smart and skillful. In both cases, the staff in these offices were able to coordinate with outside partners in moving forward an agenda to support FFN caregivers.

In other cases, cities have effectively used partnerships — either through an early childhood task force or a designated community-based organization — to ensure that the work is sustained over time. For example, in 2004, then-Mayor of Indianapolis Bart Peterson launched a community-wide early childhood planning process, and asked the United Way of Central Indiana to take the lead. The United Way, along with the nonprofit Making Connections-Indianapolis, now leads much of the local work to support and strengthen the FFN child care community through such programs as a Born Learning public engagement campaign, Play & Learn group, a book donation program and general training. Similarly, the City of Richmond, Va., works closely with — and partially funds a staff person at — the United Way of Greater Richmond to carry out many facets of its early care and education work, including outreach efforts to provide support and resources to FFN caregivers.

Municipal leaders are also well-positioned to build public will for these efforts by communicating key messages to residents about the importance and benefits of supporting children and child care providers in both formal and informal care. In Charleston, S.C., Mayor Joseph P. Riley, Jr., invited local media outlets — newspaper and television — to a meeting in his office to discuss the importance of early care and education to the overall success and growth of the city. Mayor Riley asked that they commit a certain portion of their coverage and resources to promote early childhood issues and programs. Leaders in the local media agreed to support these efforts and the amount of coverage of early education issues has increased tremendously.

Similarly, mayors can get these messages out in speeches to the public and outreach to influential members of the community, such as police officers, faith leaders, doctors and business leaders. In Minneapolis, leadership from Mayor R.T. Rybak, coupled with research from the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis, has led to strong support



for early childhood investments from the business community, including Target, Best Buy and General Mills.

Finally, local elected officials can use their powerful voice to inform state and federal policymakers of the benefits of early learning, and, where appropriate, advocate for greater funding and flexibility to use federal or state resources to improve the quality of FFN care. In 2007, with strong support and advocacy from community and municipal officials, the Minnesota Legislature appropriated \$750,000 for the following year for a new FFN care competitive grant program to expand services and supports for FFN caregivers throughout the state.

SUMMARY OF CITY LEADERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

- Assign a staff member to lead efforts to promote school readiness in a variety of settings, including FFN care.
- Designate a lead agency or task force in the community to manage and sustain early childhood (including FFN) initiatives.
- Cultivate champions from the public safety, medical, faith and business communities to support and expand local commitments to young children.
- Use state and federal influence to build support for FFN initiatives.

RESOURCES

NLC's Institute for Youth, Education and Families

The YEF Institute helps municipal leaders take action on behalf of the children, youth and families in their communities. The Institute offers local officials the opportunity to join the Early Care and Education City Network and to take advantage of publications and resources on early childhood development. www.nlc.org/iyef

The Annie E. Casey Foundation

The Annie E. Casey Foundation fosters public policies, human service reforms and community supports that more effectively meet the needs of today's vulnerable children and families. One of its major initiatives, KIDS COUNT, is a national and state-by-state effort to track the status of children in the U.S. By providing policymakers and citizens with benchmarks of child well-being, KIDS COUNT seeks to enrich local, state and national discussions concerning ways to secure better futures for all children. The Annie E. Casey Foundation also supports a variety of initiatives aimed at supporting FFN care, including research, publications, convenings and technical assistance projects. www.aecf.org/MajorInitiatives/KIDSCOUNT.aspx

Bank Street College of Education Institute for a Child Care Continuum

The Institute for a Child Care Continuum at Bank Street College works with family, friends and neighbors who provide child care for other people's children. Their National Kith and Kin Child Care Initiative aims to achieve acceptance of kith and kin child care as an integral part of the child care system. www.bankstreet.edu/ICCC

BUILD Initiative

BUILD, a national initiative created in 2002 by the Early Childhood Funders collaborative (ECFC), helps states construct a coordinated system of programs, policies and services that responds to the needs of young children and their families. In addition to other important components of an early care system, the BUILD initiative supports a variety of research-based projects designed to help policymakers and practitioners understand and support FFN care. www.buildinitiative.org/content/family-friend-and-neighbor-care



Child Care Aware

The National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (NACCRRA), through a cooperative agreement with the federal Child Care Bureau, receives funding to operate Child Care Aware — a national, toll-free child care consumer telephone hotline and Web site that connects families and child care providers to a variety of local and national resources. Through their website, Child Care Aware also provides tools and information for starting a family child care home or child care center. www.childcareaware.org

Families and Work Institute Sparking Connections

Families and Work Institute (FWI) is a nonprofit research and planning organization committed to developing new approaches toward balancing the changing needs of America's families with the continuing need for workplace productivity. Sparking Connections, a demonstration and evaluation project run by FWI, is a three-phased, four-year national initiative to demonstrate and evaluate strategies to support family, friend and neighbor caregivers through partnerships with retailers and other non-traditional partners. www.familiesandwork.org

Human Services Policy Center

The Human Services Policy Center (HSPC) is dedicated to improving the lives of children, families and communities, with a special emphasis on addressing the needs of those who are disadvantaged. HSPC's interdisciplinary teams conduct applied policy analysis and research that informs policy at local, state and national levels. Since 2001, HSPC has been conducting quantitative and qualitative research on the characteristics and quality of FFN care in Washington state, and is also involved in testing strategies to support and improve FFN care in the state. http://hspc.org/topics/educating_caring_children/informal_care.aspx

National Alliance for Family, Friend and Neighbor Child Care

The National Alliance for Family, Friend and Neighbor Child Care (NAFFNCC) is a work group of individuals and organizations that share a common interest in family, friend and neighbor child care. It consists of a diverse group of practitioners, researchers and policymakers who are at the forefront of work in this field. NAFFNCC aims to influence policies for family, friend and neighbor care; enhance caregivers' access to services; and increase awareness of the role that family, friend and neighbor care plays in the child care system. www.bnkst.edu/naffncc

National Center for Children in Poverty

The National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP) is a national public policy center dedicated to promoting the economic security, health and well-being of America's low-income families and children. NCCP uses research to inform policy and practice with the goal of ensuring positive outcomes for the next generation. NCCP has conducted a variety of research-based projects to help policymakers and practitioners understand and support FFN care. www.nccp.org

National Child Care Information Center

The National Child Care Information and Technical Assistance Center is a service of the U.S. Child Care Bureau. It is a national clearinghouse and technical assistance center that provides comprehensive child care information resources and assistance to Child Care and Development Fund administrators and other key stakeholders, including policymakers, national organizations, early care and school-age professionals, and businesses. <http://nccic.acf.hhs.gov>

Parents as Teachers

Parents as Teachers (PAT) is a nonprofit parent education organization that provides parents of children prenatal through age five with support and information on healthy child development. The PAT National Center is the organizational vehicle for delivering programs and services to parents and those caring for children in their homes, including FFN caregivers, to equip caregivers with the knowledge they need to raise healthy children. www.parentsasteachers.org



United Way Worldwide

United Way is a national network of more than 1,300 locally-governed organizations that work to create lasting positive changes in communities and people's lives. United Way Success By 6® is the nation's largest network of early childhood coalitions, focused on improving school readiness through community change. In addition to partnering with NLC on a multi-year project to increase FFN care supports in six communities, United Way also continues to address FFN care issues in their school readiness and family strengthening work. www.national.unitedway.org

ZERO TO THREE

ZERO TO THREE supports the healthy development and well-being of infants, toddlers and their families. The organization provides an extensive collection of resources to support the work of multidisciplinary professionals who are working with very young children and their families in a variety of early childhood settings. www.zerotothree.org

EXAMPLES OF PROGRAMS

From 2007-2008, NLC partnered with United Way Worldwide to provide technical assistance to six cities and their local United Ways to improve the quality of care for children in informal care settings. These communities serve as examples for other cities as they seek to reach out to and support FFN caregivers.

Atlanta

In Atlanta, the city and United Way established an Early Learning Partners group to coordinate efforts to improve children's school readiness, including a system of support for informal child care providers. To better understand and connect with FFN caregivers, the Atlanta chapter of the Black Child Development Institute helped identify informal child care providers and gather information on their needs through surveys and focus groups. Meanwhile, a partnership of city, county and community leaders conducted interviews with 12 local partner organizations to gather information and perspectives on FFN care. United Way of Metropolitan Atlanta worked with local churches, neighborhood school leaders and managers of housing complexes to identify formal and informal child care providers.

Based on information gathered in this process, Quality Care for Children, one of the team's partners, began providing scholarships to help FFN providers achieve a Child Development Associate (CDA) certification, and Atlanta's child care resource and referral agency began hosting Play & Learn groups at locations such as GED classes, WIC offices and area child care providers. The City of Atlanta Parks and Recreation Department also partnered with United Way to renovate a local park as a distribution point for Born Learning materials, and community groups are encouraging FFN caregivers to help the children in their care use the new learning stations throughout the park.

FFN caregivers can also access supports through neighborhood hubs that function as vital community resource centers. Some of these centers use the Parents as Teachers (PAT) program to reach diverse families in public housing. In this program, parent educators conduct home visits to FFN caregivers to model early learning activities, conduct health, vision, dental and literacy screenings, offer appropriate books and toys to enhance school readiness and connect caregivers in small groups. After getting engaged through home visiting and other training, FFN providers and community leaders helped design "La Escuelita" or "The Little School" in a local apartment complex to provide 3-year-olds with early learning experiences to help them transition into Georgia's Pre-Kindergarten program.

Atlanta continues to build the capacity of local organizations and teachers to engage and support FFN caregivers. In early 2009, the team participated in a train-the-trainer session with Bank Street College of Education to learn how to identify the strengths of FFN providers and develop strategies to overcome weaknesses.



Denver

Initiated in 2007, Denver's efforts to support FFN caregivers have benefited from the leadership of the Mayor's Office for Education and Children (MOEC), strong partnerships with the Mile High United Way (MHUW) and Making Connections-Denver, and the collaborative planning efforts of the Mayor's Early Childhood Education Commission. Early in this effort, city and United Way leaders worked to better define the FFN community, including babysitting or child care in a home during the day, evening or overnight for grandchildren, other relatives, younger siblings and children of friends and neighbors, whether or not the provider was paid.

The city and United Way embarked on this effort by reaching out to FFN providers connected to the Colorado Child Care Assistance Program (CCCAP). After trust and relationships were developed with these FFN providers, they would bring other FFN caregivers outside of CCCAP to local support and training programs. To ensure that these programs are accessible to all parents and caregivers, the city and its partners engaged A Place of Our Own/Clayton Early Learning for training and outreach to Spanish-speaking providers.

MOEC, MHUW and Making Connections-Denver worked together to provide financial support and coordinate in-kind donations from community organizations to FFN providers, and launched a Play & Learn facilitated play group in both English and Spanish. In addition, a parent resource guide provides information about early care and education resources in the community, literacy resources have been enhanced in Family Resource Centers and the One Book Program supports the distribution of books to young children and early literacy materials to providers throughout the city. Finally, the city created a Resource Facilitator Mentor (RFM) program to respond to the needs of small early childhood providers (both Spanish and English-speaking). The RFM now provides community-based technical assistance, mentoring, social network development, resources and health and safety training to a cohort of 21 FFN caregivers. The goal of this program is to help these child care providers improve the quality of care and become licensed.

Using ongoing data collection to assess impact, the city and its partners realized that the traditional coaches employed in this program were not achieving measurable results because they were not adapting their approach to the unique situation of informal caregivers or the cultural and linguistic diversity of the participants. In response, staff secured support and resources from the local Quality Improvement (QI) Fund to bring aboard new trainers with more culturally and programmatically relevant experience and to provide additional training for a small subset of existing trainers. As a result of the program — and the city's willingness to make mid-course corrections — FFN providers who received RFM coaching were more likely to purchase developmentally appropriate educational materials and curricula, address health and safety needs and improve communication and relationships with families.

Des Moines, Iowa

In Des Moines, the United Way of Central Iowa operates two community resource hubs that help FFN care providers understand their role in children's school success. One of these resource centers is located in a housing complex where a large number of residents are new immigrants, and includes a Play & Learn program for informal caregivers. These two FFN Hubs helped the Des Moines team identify 75 new FFN caregivers throughout the area.

Working together, the United Way of Central Iowa, Polk County Early Childhood Partnership and the Des Moines-based Child and Family Policy Center carried out several focus groups to identify effective strategies to support parents and FFN caregivers.

Building on the success of existing Play & Learn groups, the team developed a mobile Play & Learn van to bring this model to new community locations, including schools. As a result, school staff can participate in joint training sessions with parents and FFN caregivers. The Des Moines partners also distributed 60 *Ready, Set, Read* backpacks to the FFN network, and a parent educator provided training on how to use the materials in the packs. To improve ongoing



communication, the Des Moines City Council granted permission to use the city's neighborhood advisory groups to disseminate FFN care resources and information on trainings and other activities.

Nashville, Tenn.

In Nashville, municipal leaders and United Way representatives developed a new campaign and branding logo to unite partners throughout the community around a coordinated "Ready For School" initiative called RuFuS, which focuses on children ages birth to 5 who are cared for by family, friends and neighbors. More than 30 partner agencies participate in RuFuS, which is housed in the local United Way and has a common logo that all partner agencies have adopted.

As part of this effort, Vanderbilt University's Child and Family Policy Center worked with the city and the United Way of Tennessee to identify FFN caregivers and learn more about who they are, why they care for children, what challenges they face and what resources and services they use.

RuFuS used this data to offer needed information, supports and activities for parents and caregivers in the greater Nashville community to ensure that the children in their care are prepared to begin school. Key RuFuS activities include three workshops for parents and caregivers; fundraising to support the development of two Born Learning Trails; distribution of materials to help FFN child care providers promote school readiness at three United Way "Days of Action;" and distribution of these materials to 250 community partners to share them with child care providers, including FFN providers. In addition, RuFuS partners created a website, which is awaiting funding for its official launch.

Providence, R.I.

In Providence, key community stakeholders — including the City of Providence, Making Connections-Providence and the United Way of Rhode Island — convened an Early Education World Café during the summer of 2008. The goal was to connect local FFN child care providers with resources from the public sector, nonprofit organizations and the business community through rotating small group discussions.

As a result of this convening, FFN providers have access to monthly professional development sessions with new partners. For example, Lifespan, a hospital management business, shared information on handling asthma and other chronic illnesses that impact children. Recycling for RI Education (RRIE) a nonprofit educational and environmental organization, offered FFN providers free membership to their program, facilitating access to donated materials for hands-on learning and art programs. Staff also provided training on activities that build the skills of preschool children.

One of the Providence team's initiatives focused on ensuring that home-based care meets state quality standards for language and literacy development. Their first step was to develop a plan to integrate FFN providers into the statewide early learning system. To improve the quality of home-based care, the partners created a local coordinator position to carry out school readiness and professional development activities, which will be filled when funds are available.

Based on effective models from around the country, Making Connections-Providence and local United Way staff developed and conducted a survey of all the organizations and state departments with education, training and professional development opportunities open to FFN providers. They analyzed how each opportunity could be accessed, what curricula are being used, what credentials — or how many Continuing Education Units — can be earned and how many providers can be trained in each cycle. The survey results have already helped them determine which professional development opportunities can be connected to the statewide quality improvement initiative, Bright Stars, and will inform any future efforts to expand or coordinate training for FFN caregivers. Moreover, the team continues to work on a marketing campaign to inform providers about the opportunities within the early learning system.

Finally, efforts are underway to train home-based providers to understand health and safety requirements through home visits and trainings at local venues where FFN providers can receive information on improving the quality of care.



San Antonio

The City of San Antonio's Department of Community Initiatives, United Way of San Antonio and Bexar County, and Making Connections-San Antonio have been working together since October 2000 to strengthen informal child care providers' knowledge of children's developmental milestones and enhance the learning environment for children in their care. The city contracted with community-based "delegate agencies" in all 10 city council districts to host a series of five workshops for FFN providers in 2006, and the following year, partnered with a variety of early education, cultural and family service groups to launch an annual FFN Training Institute for delegate agency staff. To dramatically expand this effort in 2008, the city more than doubled the number of workshops offered throughout the year and opened up the annual training institute to FFN caregivers. Community-based organizations conducted door-to-door outreach and distribute materials announcing the trainings, and participating providers received tote bags filled with age-appropriate learning materials and the opportunity to win special prizes. As a result of these efforts, the city was able to engage 3,625 caregivers during 2008.

The city's FFN initiative also seeks to connect caregivers and the families with whom they work to available community resources and promote peer networking and support.

A "One Stop Resource Binder" provides information on various types of community resources available for FFN providers, and one of the city's partner agencies has implemented a resource library, allowing FFN providers to both access and share resource information with other participating members. In addition, the United Way, city and community partners host community-wide Play & Learn groups in various sites across all 10 council districts and are piloting "Shop-N-Learn," a program that capitalizes on existing community gathering spots in east and south-side San Antonio by integrating early learning into families shopping experiences.

The city and its partners continue to find new ways to engage parents and informal caregivers in activities that support school readiness. In addition to monthly dissemination of new ideas to FFN providers, the United Way convened trainings emphasizing the use of Born Learning materials to enhance learning during everyday activities. The city and United Way also produced school readiness public service announcements and jointly held neighborhood events highlighting the importance of early learning to healthy growth and development. Finally, the public libraries partnered with the United Way to host workshops for parents, formal and informal caregivers through their "Little Read Wagon" program, providing free books and tote bags and encouraging participants to use the library.

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