



## COMMUNITY SOLUTIONS, FROM THE COMMUNITY

Informal Early Care Insights from Oakland and Los Angeles

April 9th 2015



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## COMMUNITY DESIGN FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

FURTHER by Design (FURTHER) fundamentally believes that collaborative problem solving is the best way to design solutions to solve complex challenges in the early childhood education (ECE) space. We apply design thinking methodologies as we bring together diverse groups of ECE stakeholders to create solutions to some of the ECE community's biggest challenges.



The David and Lucile Packard Foundation's Children, Families, and Communities (CFC) team aims to ensure that infants, toddlers, and preschoolers are on track for success in school and in life, regardless of their family's background. Over the next ten years, the CFC team's focus on early learning will include both the formal systems of care as well as the informal care settings in California.

To inform the informal care focus of the strategy, the CFC program is engaging in research activities to better understand informal caregivers and their networks in California. As one part of these research activities, FURTHER worked with the CFC team to bring together diverse groups of informal care providers (providers) to understand how best to support them in providing high quality care to young children. These dedicated parents, providers and community leaders in Oakland and Los Angeles all care passionately about their communities and their youth.

This program brought these groups together as designers, asking parents, providers and community leaders to help build a common understanding of the challenges they and their communities face, identify the types of activities that would help solve those challenges, and begin designing these activities to be successful.

## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

Design thinking methodologies have been applied to science and engineering challenges for decades. In principle, these methodologies are applied during the planning process to ensure the resulting solution meets a set of commonly agreed design criteria, including desirability from the user's perspective and is technically and economically viable.

To understand parent, provider and community needs, we engaged with ethnically, socially and experientially diverse groups who represent families from communities in Oakland and Los Angeles. The project took these two groups through a process that asked participants to think about their own challenges and interest areas, and design actionable plans for activities that solve common challenges. The three parts of the process were:

1. **RESEARCH & INTERVIEWS** - Understand who should be included in this participatory research process and begin to learn from them through informal interviews.
2. **COMMUNITY DESIGN** - Bring together informal care providers and non-traditional community leaders to discuss their goals, identify challenges and brainstorm potential solutions.
3. **SUPPORT THE BEST IDEAS** - Work with local community partners to identify the best ideas and begin testing them to see if they could be valuable solutions.

Each step of the project generated different insights from the community to help the CFC team and the ECE communities we work with gain insights into the needs of informal care providers, and seed a select number of the most prominent ideas. Through the process, we were also able to strengthen a tremendous community of parents, providers and ECE stakeholders who are all trying to provide the best for young children in the communities in which they work.



## DEDICATED COMMUNITY PARTNERS

To convene the diverse groups of parents and providers in Oakland and Los Angeles, we partnered with organizations who are deeply invested in these communities, providing high quality support to children, parents and providers. We inherited a tremendous amount of trust from these partners, leading to critical insights which we hope to convey through this report.

In Oakland, we worked with Lotus Bloom, a multicultural child and family resource center with seven sites through which they develop and provide innovative programs for over 400 inner-city families, children and youth each year. Lotus Bloom offers early childhood programs, playgroups, literacy, language development, crafts, music and art programs, and is dedicated to connecting diverse populations in support of Oakland's youth.

In Los Angeles, we were blessed to have two extremely dedicated and networked partners. The Magnolia Place Community Initiative is a partnership of over 70 county, city and community efforts dedicated to supporting 35,000 children living in the Magnolia catchment area. Magnolia Place creates sustainable change for families by promoting and strengthening individual, family and neighborhood protective factors through increasing social connectedness, community mobilization, and access to needed services.

Similarly, the Los Angeles County's Office of Child Care plays a critical role in ensuring that a high quality early care and education system that nurtures children's healthy growth and early learning is accessible to all families. They do this by shaping policy recommendations, facilitating planning, and providing a range of services aimed at improving the availability, quality and access to early care and education programs. They also support efforts to promote informed parents' choice of early care and education services and work across disciplines to promote access to concrete supports that families need.



## DESIGN PRINCIPLES

Design principles are guidelines that ensure a program or product is designed for an intended user. In this case, design principles refer to a set of common program characteristics that parents, informal care providers and community organizations have recommended organizations think about as they design programs, regardless of the type of program being designed. Each principle reflects insights built over decades of community organizing, care provision and parenting. They highlight the most important aspects of program design from these experiences.

While these principles can serve many purposes, ranging from grant evaluation to success measurement, we've introduced them with the intention of giving ECE stakeholders a set of principles to guide them when creating new programs or improving existing programs.

We recognize that every community is different, and each activity suits the unique needs of the community. We also know that we haven't captured an exhaustive list of design principles to consider. However, we do hope that these principles offer a glimpse into the minds of the parents and providers ECE stakeholders are working to help.

This report highlights the nine most important principles we heard throughout the project. They capture the recommendations we received from the communities we worked with.



## COMMUNITIES | INVEST IN TRUST

Transformation is experience-based and highly relational. Programs should invest in the people and organizations that the community already trusts, recognizing it will take patience and commitment to build your own trust in communities. Here are a few ways this might manifest in the community:

1. **CADENCE AND COMMITMENT** | To build momentum, programs, investments and activities should establish a reliable cadence that parents and providers can depend on.

Programs with predictable rhythms and long term commitments will lead to the trust required to create change.

2. **COMMUNITY ASSETS** | Rather than create new things for the community's children, parents and providers, programs should invest in assets that already exist within the community.

These assets could be people, places or programs and events. By adding educational components to these assets, programs strengthen the community.

3. **MEET PEOPLE WHERE THEY ARE** | Programs need to reach kids, parents and providers where they are, by going to the places they already go to, communicating in their language, respecting their culture, and recognizing the context in which they are seeking support.

For the communities we spoke with, these three principles are so important that they re-emerge throughout all of the programs we designed and are pervasive through the rest of the principles.



## PEOPLE | INVEST IN CAPACITY

Programs should invest in raising the capacity of parents, providers and organizations already in the community. These investments not only increase the ability of parents and providers to give better care, but also strengthen the resilience of the community.

1. **PARENTS, PROVIDERS & KIDS** | Programs should bring together parents, providers and kids, rather than designed for individual stakeholder groups.

By doing this, programs will help develop a common understanding of care goals and methods between providers and parents, encourage more communication, and build better relationships.

2. **RESOURCE LITERACY** | Resources do exist. Programs should help providers find the information, people and programs they are looking for by making existing information more accessible, offering multiple languages and sharable formats, whether written, verbal or digital.

3. **COMMUNITY CHAMPIONS** | Programs should invite, give permissions, authority and support parents and providers lead activities they are passionate about.

Community members often have the knowledge and time to organize and lead activities and get the word out about what's going on.



*“Being a grandparent is not generic, it is specific. I have needs and abilities that are different”*

Laura, Grandmother



## PROGRAMS | PROVIDER-CENTRIC DESIGN

Programs are for people. Be sure to design programs that meet the unique needs of communities, parents and providers by “meeting them where they are.”

1. **FUNDAMENTALS** | Programs could support basic skills such as English literacy, computer literacy, logistical support or even revenue opportunities. These programs may already exist, but the community needs more of them, more conveniently located and better timed.

It may not be sexy, but sometimes parents and providers need more support at the most basic levels.

2. **SPECIALIZATION** | Programs should be designed for specific populations, reflecting key provider characteristics like age groups, language abilities, culture and their level of sophistication.

Not all parents or providers are the same, which means they will engage, benefit and add value to programs differently.

3. **TECHNOLOGY ONLY AMPLIFIES WHAT EXISTS** | While communities do use technology, programs should recognize that technology doesn't create communities, or programs, but can be used to extend the reach of existing communities and amplify the impact of existing programs.

Programs too often turn to technology as the solution, rather than remembering it's a tool to get a job done.



## COMMUNITY PROJECTS

Based on the needs, interests and ideas generated through the Community Design Meetings, the community partners worked with parents and providers to select a few ideas that they would be most interested in testing.



## OAKLAND | Community Choices and Community Capacity

Listening to feedback from participants at the Oakland Community Design Meeting, Lotus Bloom turned back to Oakland's parents and providers for input on where to invest resources. This process resulted in a set of parent and provider selected activities and activity leaders from the community, some of whom a parents and providers and others who participants went out to find to bring their knowledge and experiences to host each activity.

**Uptown** | At Lotus Bloom's new Up Town location, parents and providers prioritized activities that would support:

- **Exercise** | Responding to the community's interest in activities that got kids, parents and providers moving, Lotus Bloom is hosting tumbling classes lead by Deedee, a parent of the Uptown community.
- **Support Groups** | To support new parents, Lotus Bloom is bringing together groups of parents and providers to discuss any developmental concerns they may have about their children or family. The Lotus Bloom community found and hired a family Advocate, Kira Lewis, to facilitate the groups and share parenting tips on development, temperament, creating routines, managing stress, creating separation plans, etc.
- **Father Involvement** | Lotus Bloom is looking at creative ways of engaging fathers and making sure that the program offerings and activities are responsive and representative of father figures and exploring how to better support boys and their trajectory to success, recognizing boys are disproportionately at risk of school failure.

**Room to Bloom** | At Lotus Bloom's Room to Bloom location, parents and providers were similarly focused on health issues, and asked for activities that encouraged.

- **Exercise** | Responding to ideas to encourage exercise, Room to Bloom parent Alicia, is hosting Zumba and tumbling classes for parents, providers and kids, focusing on getting participants moving and providing opportunities to decompress.
- **Nutrition** | To support nutritional awareness, Room to Bloom's Laura, is continuing a series of activities focus on introducing healthy food options.
- **First Saturday Play Time** | Bringing in other community activities, and building on other nutritional and exercise programs, Room to Bloom parent Yolanda, hosts outdoor play time on the first Saturday of every month, including a community market, nutritional courses and exercise activities such as Zumba.
- **ESL** | Ana, a parents at Room to Bloom, is offering English as Second Language classes to support providers and parents who speak a language other than English.

As these activities continue through the spring, Lotus Bloom will work with activity leaders to make sure that content remains relevant for participants. Already there has been tremendous feedback from parents and providers in the community who have appreciated the opportunity to participate in the design and selection process, the opportunity to learn about important issues, and the opportunity to come together with other parents and providers. The pride activity leaders have taken in the preparation and hosting of each activity has also demonstrated the importance in investing in parents and providers from the community as Lotus Bloom builds Oakland's momentum in support of early childhood education.



## LOS ANGELES | Micro Grants - Investing in Reading Groups

Magnolia Place was inspired by the knowledge and passion of the parents and providers in its community. To invest and motivate the providers they work with, Magnolia Place challenged them to work with parents to "make daily reading as routine as brushing your teeth," providing \$250 grants to three groups of five providers to support the work. Each group was accountable for the money and responsible for coming up with new ideas and strategies that could be shared with other community members, programs and partners.

**Group 1** approached the challenge by hosting reading meetups with kids and parents at parks, where they introduced literacy activities using tools such as puppet shows. During their first meetup, they noticed parents were talking among themselves rather than participating. Providers addressed this in subsequent meetups by engaging parents in the activities and by sharing information on other literacy programs and resources.

**Group 2** hosted two reading workshops for parents and kids. The first meeting was hosted at a park and focused on introducing reading activities for kids, however the kids were distracted and wanted to play. After regrouping, the providers decided to host their second workshop for the parents at Magnolia Place, focusing on introducing the importance of literacy, where to find resources and example reading activities.

**Group 3** also hosted a literacy workshop for parents at Magnolia Place. This meeting highlighted the importance of literacy at each stage of development and how to find resources at the library. To support the parents further, the providers also created take-home material, reinforcing the information from the workshop.

In conclusion, each group shared what they learned with other participants, the Magnolia Place team and community parents, by creating presentation boards, sharing information packets that they created for the parents, and discussed what they would do differently the next time.

Overall, the project was a positive experience for everyone involved. Participating parents were both surprised and inspired by daily requests from their kids to read to them. However, it was the providers who may have benefited the most from this experience. They felt a huge sense of pride from their responsibility and achievements, and highlighted the benefit of working together as groups and with parents, to build a greater awareness of the support kids and parents need and how they could help. Perhaps most significantly, the program increased providers' self confidence. Even their own kids and spouses were impressed with what they were working on and wanted to get involved.

From this feedback, Magnolia Place is planning to run this program again, potentially continuing the literacy theme, or applying the challenge and grant model to other interest areas that emerged from the community design meeting.





## COMMUNITY IDEAS

The community design processes resulted in over 250 ideas from parents, providers and community leaders to help informal care providers provide high quality care for young children.

In **Oakland**, these ideas focused on three areas:

1. How to build community and increase information sharing
2. Increasing activities that encourage health and wellness
3. Developing more and higher quality educational activities for kids

In **Los Angeles**, similar themes emerged, including:

1. Increasing activities that encourage healthy eating and exercise
2. Information and educational activities for kids and parents
3. Developing community and career pathways for providers

In this next section, we highlight the activities participants designed to address the most pressing challenges they face.





OAKLAND



OAKLAND



### OAKLAND | COMMUNITY & INFORMATION

Building community and accessing information was a key theme throughout the Oakland project. To support community collaboration, participants designed an activity to rally communities of providers and families, mindful of:

- Local contexts, whether the counties, cities, neighborhoods or even blocks families are from.
- Communities' cultural characteristics, whether ethnic, religious, generational or otherwise.
- Communities' developmental stage, whether new and uncertain, settled and connecting or integrated and accessing.



#### COMMUNITY IDEA | CARE MOB - A flash mob for early childhood education

An ECE flash mob would bring the community to come together in support of each other, through spontaneous acts, dance or performance, and are reinforced by longer-term activities that build an ECE social movement. Longer-term activities would include support to:

- **MAP** - Improve awareness and understanding by identifying and mapping existing community resources.
- **CONNECT** - Create local coordination and information hubs that help more parents and providers find and share information and come together.
- **INVEST** - Use existing assets in the community, whether physical, virtual or human.

During the Community Design Meeting, we even did a mini experiment that got everyone in the room moving their feet and shaking their... hands!



### OAKLAND | HEALTH & WELLNESS

Health is the foundation for parents and providers to be able to provide high quality care for their children. Focusing on health also serves as a unifying activity through the larger ripple effect throughout the community. Because of the complexity of health challenges, the group divided to spend time thinking about three approaches to wellness, healthy eating and movement.



#### WELLNESS IDEA | COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT

To help parents and providers build self-esteem, understand positive discipline techniques and address violence in the home and in the community, we discussed therapy and mental health services led by professionals who are rooted in the community. We also discussed holding community-based healing and reflection opportunities after a community crisis. For example, gathering at the place where the incident occurred for an act of service to "reclaim" the area for peace, followed by trips to nature or a peaceful place, where communities can reflect and discuss.



OAKLAND



OAKLAND



### HEALTHY EATING IDEA | COMMUNITY COOKING CLASSES

To help parents and providers introduce health eating habits, discussions focused on creating community center-based classes that cover a variety of nutrition and health topics. Parents, providers, teachers, school administrators, doctors and nutritionists should all be involved in shaping the 'curriculum' and the teaching. The classes could take place in school facilities, such as cafeterias, and would be promoted through flyers and in community catalogs. Some of the discussions and learning will be focused on the following:

- How to buy nutritious food.
- How to cook healthy foods.
- Cooking with kids, not just for them.
- Cultural cuisines that reflect the make-up of the community.

The learning from these classes can be further shared across the larger community through events, such as block parties, showcasing what people have made in the class and also providing highlights from topics covered in the class.



### WELLNESS IDEA | EXERCISE AND STRESS RELIEF

To help relieve stress and get parents, providers and kids moving, we discussed a number of different approaches to introduce, model and reinforce healthy exercise habits:

- Hosting activities for families to decompress together, including mindfulness, breathing, meditation, yoga and spa activities. Or outdoor field trips and retreats, such as camping, which provide providers and parents with opportunities for educational experiences in nature.
- Creating dedicated places for parents, providers and the community to come together around exercise. The group discussed the old Parkway Theater as one option, envisioning it could house a community recreation center where parents, providers and community members could lead youth exercise, swimming, hip-hop dance, yoga, zumba and other classes.



### OAKLAND | EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES FOR KIDS

Parents and providers want to be able to provide a huge variety of educational activities for their kids. These activities revolve around culture, language, academics, creativity, sports and a variety of other types of exciting ideas, however, there are few places participants feel they can turn to for high quality and affordable educational experiences for their children. To build on this, parents and providers want to share different levels of experience, expertise, knowledge and skills, that they are all passionate about sharing, but don't have a venue.



### THE IDEA | COMMUNITY LED CLASSES

To encourage parents, providers and others from the community to share their skills and take leadership roles in early childhood education activities and programs, the group suggests creating an educational program that tapped into their knowledge and skills of the wider community to provide a huge range of educational experiences for kids, parents and providers. These educational activities for children could include nature exploring, field trips, language classes (Chinese, English, Spanish, Arabic), math, art, music classes and science classes. For parents and providers, this could include career training programs, parent development class, provider education and professionalization, nutrition classes, computer classes or English as a second language.



LOS ANGELES



LOS ANGELES



### LOS ANGELES | HEALTH & EXERCISE

Solutions to health and exercise challenges include activities that encouraged stress relief, provide opportunities for community exercise and help parents and providers prepare for emergencies. However, the most interest from these discussions called for activities that help parents and providers build health nutrition and cooking understanding, skills and habits.



#### HEALTH & EXERCISE IDEA | FOOD PARTIES

To solve this challenge, the community suggests an activity that brings various nutrition and cooking classes together into community building educational experiences. This activity could be modeled after Tupperware parties (or Avon/Mary Kay), bringing educational experiences out into the community, while building bonds between providers and parents. To make this work, participants outline five key steps:

- Training for providers and/or parents at an accessible time and place, to teach them the skills to host one or more “Food Parties” in their own communities.
- Supporting parents and providers with resources, including information, tools and food to support participants to host these parties in their communities.
  - » Recruit champions from outside the community, to encourage participation
  - » Identify venues to host parties, whether people’s homes, restaurants, schools, churches or other appropriate places.
- Provide participants with sharable information about what they learned and how to host future parties and spread the word.



### LOS ANGELES | INFORMATION AND EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES FOR PARENTS AND KIDS

Educational activities for parents and kids focused around two central themes: that different types of information percolate through the community more easily when delivered by the right messenger, and that programs need to be designed for key factors, including age and experience levels, language ability and cultural contexts. These factors led to the design of two activities that provided educational experiences for children, providers, parents and communities, and helped parents and providers access critical information for providing high quality care.



#### EDUCATIONAL IDEAS | ART EXPERIENCES AS EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATIONS

Parents and providers were keen to see more art experiences for children, parents, and providers as a foundation from which to build educational activities. These programs could recruit teachers from the community, building a ‘community curriculum’ reflecting the skills, knowledge and resources available from within the community. To further engage the community, these programs could culminate in celebratory events, possibly parades where children, parents and providers move through the community with their arts on mobile display.



#### EDUCATIONAL IDEAS | “BUILDING BLOCK” CLASSES

To help parents and providers provide better care for their children, participants recommend activities that build the skills they need to succeed.

- **ENGLISH FOR PROVIDERS** - Mastery and comfort in English helps providers find more opportunities, discuss appropriate care, and negotiate appropriate compensation for their services. For parents, a better command of English, allows them to advocate for their own children, especially at school and with providers.
- **COMPUTER LITERACY** - Understanding how to use computers allows parents and providers to access and share information, programming, resources and tools for their children.

To effectively provide these courses, parents and providers suggest:

- **JOINT INSTRUCTION** - Combining classes that reinforce each other, such as English and computers, or English and safety.
- **COMMUNITY LEADERS** - These classes could also be community-led, taught by instructors who may also be care providers and have already taken the course, or have that skill-set.
- **RESOURCE REWARDS** - Once these classes are completed, a lending or trading system for cribs, toys and other needed resources could help the provider be more effective. Similarly, access to free smoke alarms, extinguishers, and carbon monoxide monitors, to translate safety lessons into action. To encourage computer literacy, participants suggest several public-private partnership options such as a mobile computer lab and computer lending services that lead to ownership.



LOS ANGELES

## COMMUNITY INTERESTS

The community design processes resulted in over 250 ideas from parents, providers and community leaders to help informal care providers provide high quality care for young children.



### LOS ANGELES | DEVELOPING COMMUNITY & CAREER PATHWAYS FOR PROVIDERS

Developing as a care provider is dependent on having access to a supportive community, and the ability to gain skills and potentially certifications. To support providers, the community discussed two activities that recognize providers for their current skill sets while charting a path for their growth, and building capacity through classes that strengthen basic skills and encourage specialization.



### COMMUNITY & CAREER IDEAS | PROVIDER DATABASE & PATHWAYS

Providers identified the need for a way to track and advance their careers. Discussions focused on designing a career database for informal care providers, or integrating licensed providers into existing career tools. These database options would help providers:

- **SKILL ARTICULATION** - Understand their current skills, experiences and certifications.
- **PATHWAYS** - Understand next steps to raise the quality of care they provide and their income potential.
- **COMMUNICATION** - Articulate the type of care they are able to or want to provide.

And help parents and employers:

- **EXPERIENCE REVIEW** - Provide specific reviews about the provider and their expertise areas.
- **REFERRALS** - Aid in referrals from other parents, providers and ECE stakeholders to income generating opportunities.

To design this database, providers made three key recommendations:

- **BLENDED INFORMATION** - The database needs to include “traditional” information, certifications and licenses, as well as “non-traditional” information, healthy snacks or creative arts and crafts experiences, allowing potential hirers to see provider personality and caregiving experience.
- **ACCESSIBILITY** - The database needs to be available in a format accessible to the provider, parents and other potential decision makers, whether online or offline.
- **PRIVACY** - The database needs to safeguard the privacy and security of the information collected and the individuals involved.



# OAKLAND

Based on the information we gathered from preparatory interviews, ideas are organized into four categories: education, community, informational workshops, health.

## IDEA MAP

0 Number indicates the number of parents that had similar ideas

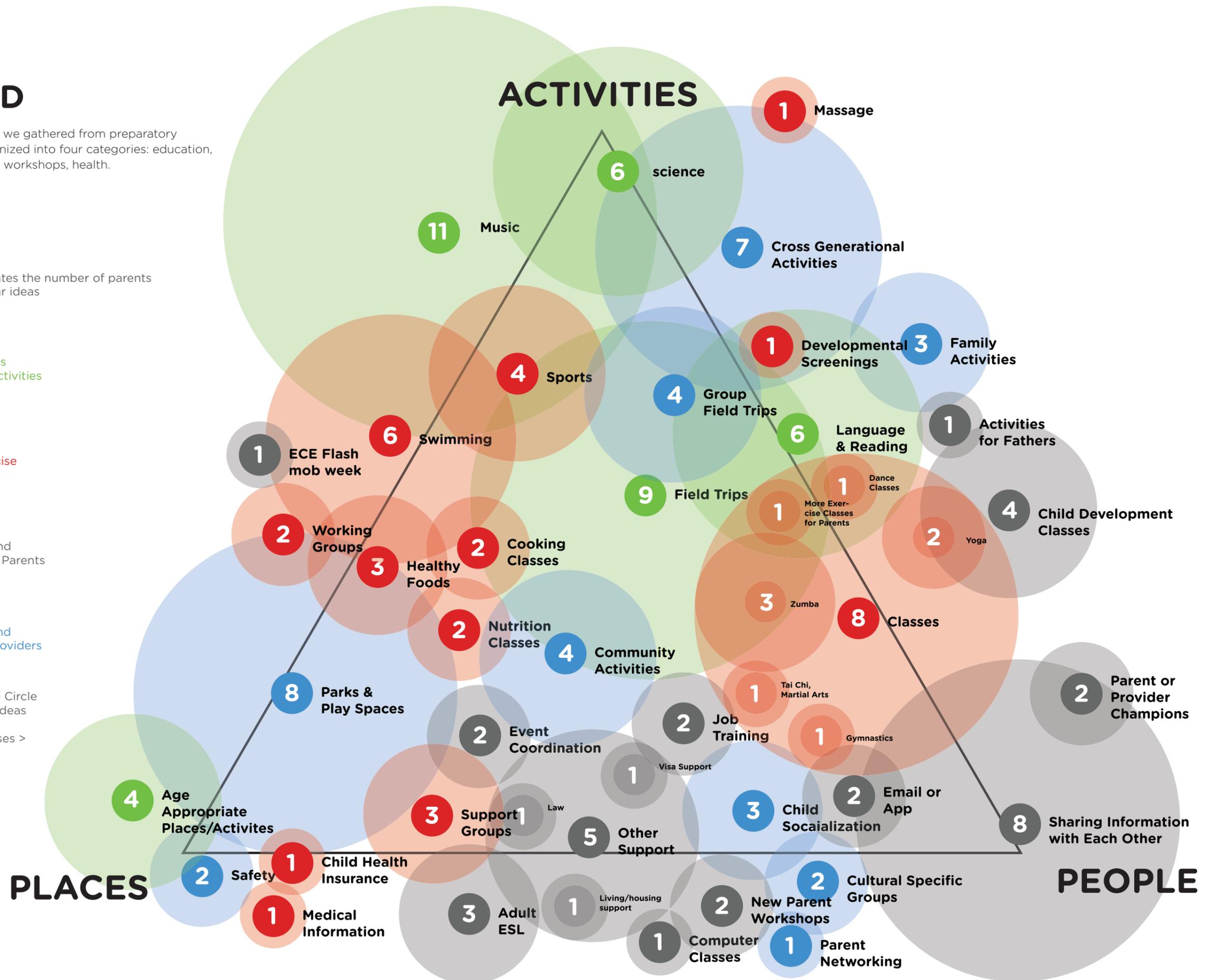
Green indicates Educational Activities For Kids

Red indicates Health & Exercise

Gray indicates Information And Education For Parents

Blue indicates Community And Careers For Providers

Circle Within a Circle Indicates sub ideas in an idea  
Ex: Adult Classes > Dance



# LOS ANGELES

Based on the information we gathered from preparatory interviews, ideas were organized into four general categories; health and exercise, parent information and education, educational activities for kids, and community and careers for providers.

## IDEA MAP

0 Number indicates the number of parents that had similar ideas

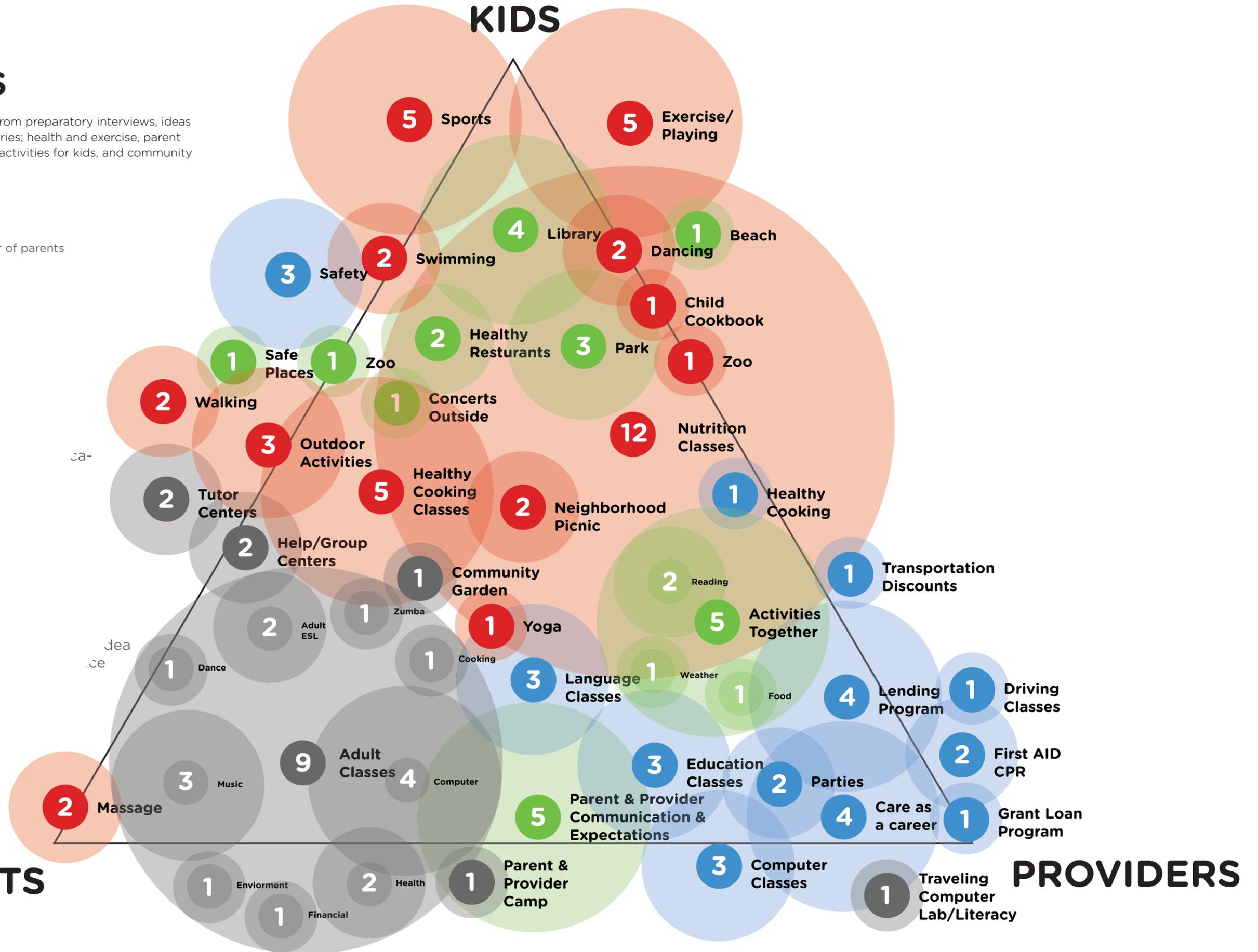
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Circle Within a Circle Indicates sub ideas in an idea  
Ex: Adult Classes > Dance



## THANK YOU

FURTHER by Design inherited a good deal of trust and knowledge from our partners in Oakland and Los Angeles to make this project possible. We know our insights won't make a bit of difference without the people and organizations already doing great work in these communities.

We would like to thank the communities, families and providers who welcomed us and trusted us with this information. We hope we're honoring your contributions.

We also need to thank our amazing partners at Lotus Bloom, Magnolia Place and the Office of Child Care who walked hand in hand with us through this process. So much trust for a sprint through the fog.

Without the inspiration, leadership and resources from the David and Lucile Packard Foundation we never would have started this journey. It's a long one that we're excited to be a part of.

Finally, we would like to also thank you, the reader, for using anything you learn from this work to help communities, parents, providers and ultimately our country's most important and vulnerable assets, our youngest children. We know your work is ultimately what makes a difference.

If you have any ideas on how to improve on this work or any thoughts to add, we'd love to talk.





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