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INNOVATIONS IN FAMILY, FRIEND AND NEIGHBOR CARE

Evaluation Brief

engage R+D

Introduction

Although the field of informal/FFN child care is emergent (compared to research and work that has been accomplished in the field of formal child care), there is a lot of exciting and innovative work being done in this area today, and rapid progress is being made to meet the needs of this important group of caregivers and children. This report summarizes findings from testing and learning experiments completed by community organizations in California.

Background

Children ages five and under spend a substantial amount of time being cared for by parents, extended family, friends, neighbors (FFNs) or a combination. This is also commonly referred to as unlicensed/license-exempt, kith and kin, or informal care. A 2016 U.S. Department of Education survey found that 5.2 million children were in the care of relatives and 2.8 million children were in nonrelative home-based care[1]. These providers thus play a critical role in supporting the health and development of the young children in their care. Not much focus, however, has been given to ensuring that informal/FFN care providers have high quality resources, tools, and community networks they need to be successful in their roles. In addition to the high prevalence of FFN care, there are two other factors that make this focus on engaging FFN caregivers with quality resources particularly critical. First, a recent study by New America found that full time in-home care for infants and toddlers costs 53 percent of the U.S. median household income or 188 percent of income for a minimum wage worker[2]. Second, although FFN care is prevalent across all socio-economic backgrounds, families that are most likely to use it are low to moderate income families, Latino, African American, and refugees and immigrants[3].   The David and Lucile Packard Foundation's Children, Families, and Communities program aims to address this gap by investing in learning more about programs that support informal care providers.

In 2015, the Packard Foundation launched their Informal Care Strategy that was ultimately aimed at supporting parents, extended family and other informal caregivers to know how to provide the kind of nurturing and enrichment children need early in life to reach their full potential. This strategy has three phases: **1) conduct background research and environmental scan to gain a more nuanced understanding about the current state of settings and strategies; 2) fund testing and learning experiments of projects that are designed to engage informal/FFN caregivers; and 3) scale the most promising practices learned through the research and experiment phases**. In 2016 the Packard Foundation began work on the second phase of their informal/FFN care strategy with four testing and learning community grantees. The purpose of this work was to **test strategies to provide information to FFN caregivers, connect them with resources, as well as each other, and support them in providing quality care**. The nature of this work was exploratory in nature and uncharted territory for some grantees, so it was acceptable to discover that some projects did not work out as planned as long as there were lessons learned along the way. For this reason, evaluation services were provided to the first cohort of informal/FFN care grantees and a summary of their work and findings can be [found here](#).

About This Evaluation

This brief summarizes FFN strategies implemented by the **second cohort of five grantees** that started their testing and learning experiments in 2017 (see Exhibit 1), and presents a cross-cutting summary of learnings and recommendations for future informal care projects and the Packard Foundation's grantmaking in this area.

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[1] McPhee, C., Jackson, M., Bielick, S., Masterton, M., Battle, D., McQuiggan, M., Payri, M., Cox, C., and Medway, R. (2018). National Household Education Surveys Program of 2016: Data File User's Manual (NCES 201 -100). National Center for Education Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education.

[2] Schulte, B. and Durana, A. (2016). The New America Care Report. New America *Better Life Lab*.

[3] Porter, Toni (2018). Strengthening our efforts to support FFN child care. Packard Foundation Informal Care Meeting.

Evaluation Goals

The focus of the evaluation was on supporting learning between grantees, helping to build grantees' evaluation capacity, and lifting up successes and challenges from grantees' projects. Our evaluation questions included:

- What are the **pathways** for reaching FFN informal caregivers?

- What are the most **promising ways** to engage FFN informal caregivers?

- What **messages** do FFN informal caregivers respond to?

- What are **promising practices/mechanisms/tools/resources** to improve the quality of interactions between adult caregivers and the children they care for?

- What practices have the **potential to scale**?

Methods

Given that the evaluation of informal care is relatively new, our evaluation methods focused on understanding the work of each grantee and identifying promising strategies. Grantees varied in their capacity to collect and analyze evaluation data, and we adapted our approach to working with each grantee accordingly. The primary methods for our evaluation included:

- **Initial meetings** to gather information about grantees' work, and begin a working relationship between grantees and the evaluation team;

- **Logic modeling sessions**, to identify grantees' project goals, resources, short- and long-term outcomes, and potential data collection methods;

- **Grantee data collection**, wherein grantees shared data they already collected with the evaluation team, following the principles of a lean data approach[4]; and

- **Primary data collection**, where Engage R+D worked with grantees to identify and carry out a data collection method or methods that made sense for the stage/type of projects.

In addition to the data collection activities described above, we also facilitated a series of structured learning opportunities between grantees via video conference and in-person. These included:

- A **launch webinar** in June 2017 where each of the five grantees shared information about their projects and what they hoped to learn from each other;

- A **second webinar** in November 2017 where grantees provided updates on their projects and shared insights on how to address common challenges or issues they were experiencing; and

- An **in-person grantee convening** at the Packard Foundation in March 2018, which gave grantees and partners the chance to share more in-depth information about their projects, brainstorm solutions to common challenges, and tie their work to the field of informal care more broadly (see online postings from the Packard Foundation and Engage R+D for more information).

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[4] "The Lean Data approach is a new approach to social impact evaluation that is designed for testing and learning. It emphasizes using data to create value for an organization and its beneficiaries (vs. reporting and compliance) and uses methods and technologies for data collection that favor efficiency and speed while maintaining rigor. This approach was designed for and tested in environments that are uncertain, dynamic, complex and resource-constrained." SSIR, Winter 2016.

Exhibit 1. Summary of Grantees and Their FFN Strategies

Strategy and program	Evidence base	Credible trusted pathway	Outreach	Connection	Mentors, facilitators	*Expansion or Scaling*
FFN Toolkit for Resource and Referral agencies - *BANANAS*	California Child Care Resource and Referral resources	Resource and Referral (R&R) agencies	Leverage R&R staff relationships with parents and caregivers.	Counseling sessions with R&R staff, parent workshops, caregiver workshops	Trained R&R staff	*Present at the CA R&R Network conference and share/distribute kit through thumb drives; promotion through webinars*
FFN use of early education apps – *Community Resources for Children, Napa*	Footsteps to Brilliance and Vroom apps	Napa's early learning center and lending library	Establish partnership with Napa Valley Community Housing to reach families that use FFN care.	Coaching and training on the apps at the CRC Lending Library.	CRC and Community Housing staff.	*Formalize app/technology training at the CRC Library and pre-load apps on Library tablets*
Neighborhood-based FFN playgroups - *Go Kids, Inc.*	Strengthening Families Initiative; Infant-Family Early Childhood Mental Health; First 5 Quality Enhancement Framework	Go Kids in Salinas and neighborhood elementary school	Neighborhood-centered open house events and lawn signs	Consistent, weekly, 2-hour playgroups; reflective practice sessions; materials available in multiple languages	Knowledgeable, trained, bi-lingual-bi-cultural playgroup facilitators.	*Continue expansion in current neighborhoods, expand to other communities based on need and sufficient resources.*
Themed tool kits and mentors – *Placer County Office of Education*	Early literacy principles (e.g., dialogic reading), CLASS, PITC, Talk Read Sing Initiative	Placer County Office of Education, First 5 Placer County	R&R waitlist for subsidized child care, flyers, social media, schools, libraries	Consistent series of 4-5 home visits to receive kits from mentors who are similar to them	Knowledgeable, trained mentors recruited from Head Start, State preschool and family child care	*Formalize materials into a manual for others who want to implement, addition of new tool kit on numeracy*
Promotora caregiver training and support – *Family Caregiver Project, Visión y Compromiso*	9 Intelligences	Visión y Compromiso	Network of Promotores and Community Health Workers	8-week peer support groups following 48-hr. caregiver training – in Spanish and Mixteco	Promotora leaders and culturally competent staff of Visión y Compromiso	*Develop community leadership and identify more caregivers*

All the Informal/FFN Care grantees and their projects demonstrated that, without a doubt, they were meeting a critical need in their early childhood community landscapes. The first year/cohort of the FFN testing and learning evaluation lifted **six key characteristics of promising and/or successful projects**. Those characteristics included the following:

- They are based in and **use evidence-based practices.**

- They are delivered or organized by **a credible and trusted source in the community**.

- They allocate a significant amount of resources towards **outreach and it is active and ongoing**.

- They help **reduce isolation** and connect or **anchor FFN caregivers to a "community."**

- They have knowledgeable **mentors or facilitators** that guide FFN caregivers.

- They recognize and emphasize their **value as caregivers** to children.

The work of this second cohort of grantees further confirmed the above findings such as the use of **evidence based practices** by Go Kids in their playgroups and Community Resources for Children with their apps; the delivery of services by a **credible and trusted organization** like the Placer County Office of Education and BANANAS; the creative and **ongoing outreach** by all grantees; creating a **supportive caregiver community** like the promotora-led support groups of Visión y Compromiso; and the use of knowledgeable, trained **mentors and facilitators** like PCOE, Go Kids and Visión y Compromiso.   New insights were also gained, as outlined below.

What More Did We Learn?

- **Focus on diverse populations/communities through targeted outreach.** Grantee organizations recognized very specific needs in their communities and tailored their outreach to these groups. Visión y Compromiso, for example, saw that many of their promotoras who work with the Spanish- and Mixteco-speaking communities were also FFN caregivers. These promotoras, therefore were the key to their outreach. Go Kids focused on specific zip codes/neighborhoods in Salinas and held open house events through the neighborhood schools and strategically placed lawn signs. PCOE used their R&R/AP waitlist to identify FFN caregivers or families who may use FFN caregivers that live in rural areas of their county.

- **Use trained mentors that reflect the community to enhance how the program is received.** The mentors and facilitators that were part of the grantee programs were often experienced FFN caregivers, current and former licensed caregivers, and early learning program staff that additionally came from the same cultural background and/or community as the FFN caregivers themselves. FFN service providers and caregivers remarked about the valuable relationships that were formed between caregivers and mentors that helped with learning and continued participation. Additionally, as a part of many of these projects (Go Kids, PCOE, VyC and BANANAS) was a training component for mentors and facilitators to work with FFN caregivers. This may be a good component to any early learning professional development program. As BANANAS discovered, they needed to increase the awareness and knowledge among their staff of FFN as a care option and thus enhanced their trainings and workshops.

- **Consistent participation in FFN programs helps to improve FFN caregiver learning.** Through their evaluations, grantees reported increased learning following FFNs' consistent participation in their programs such as regular use of apps (Napa CRC); participation in playgroups over several months, sessions and hours (Go Kids); completion of a series of home visits and receipt of kits (PCOE); and attending weekly FFN support groups (VyC). Participants reported increased confidence in their skills as caregivers, increased knowledge of

developmentally appropriate activities, and ability to advocate for their needs with parents. Many of these funded projects offered programs that were a series of sessions versus one-time events.

What is Quality in the FFN Setting?

A definition and standards for quality in the FFN setting have not yet been established. All grantees have continued to use a combination of best practices and experience from other early learning work to develop and test FFN projects. When these service provider grantees were asked to describe what quality in the FFN setting looks like, three themes emerged from their responses.

1. **Nurturing adult-child interactions.** Grantees stated that the most important indicator of quality, and what they look for in the implementation of their programs, is the quality of the interactions between the caregiver and child. They described that a caregiver should be concerned with the "emotional wellbeing" of the child, provide "love in the home," and demonstrate "nurturing interactions." As service providers described,

   "Quality care in the FFN setting can be described as positive, warm, and responsive child and adult interactions and relationships while providing engaging and stimulating age-appropriate learning opportunities to the child. Quality care is about giving FFNs the tools and knowledge, so they can encourage the learning within their own environment, of the children under their care."

   "It comes down to the relationship with the kiddo - [the] quality of that interaction. [Programs have] been able to put high quality materials in the hands of kids and adults, but at the end of the day it's about that attachment and shared joy."

2. **Access to quality resources.** The resources described by grantees included both necessary resources (i.e., food, car seats) and, as these programs demonstrated well, high quality, age-appropriate learning resources. These resources also need to be packaged and delivered in ways that work for the FFN setting including materials always/predictably being available at playgroups; portable and organized kits; materials brought to home visits; uncomplicated apps; multiple languages. One grantee stated the following:

   "The project presented information, created dialogue and reflection with the FFN caregivers to improve the dynamics in each of these [FFN settings] and improve the caregiver's ability to understand and respond to the needs generated within each one."

3. **Safety.** Often safety is something that many of these programs address first as an entry point of FFNs to their programs or as an incentive with free safety materials as part of their outreach. Interestingly, safety was framed by service providers as a quality element that meets the immediate needs of parents and FFN caregivers so that they do not worry. Once they address this, they can move on to the other areas of quality as described above and throughout this report. In many cases health and safety is also a requirement to receive child care vouchers. The cost of implementing safety measures can often be a barrier to caregivers and families so programs that can offer these resources, such as the health and safety kit of the PCOE project, can bring relief to FFN caregivers.

Lessons Learned and Recommendations

The evaluation of this work strives to continue learning and building the evidence base for informal/FFN setting child care. Our lessons and recommendations include the following:

- **Continue the FFN Service Provider Learning Community.** It is a rare opportunity for these community grantees to come together to exclusively focus on Informal/FFN care; further many do not have the time and resources

to learn about what others in their field are doing, or even to pause and reflect on their own work. The webinar and grantee convening this past year generated momentum for learning from each other and reflection. We recommend continuing this learning community with themed webinars and another convening. The hope is that this can also accelerate the spread of good ideas.

- **Testing Measurement of Quality in the FFN Setting.** As demonstrated by two cohorts of testing and learning grantees, the innovative work happening in these communities are beginning to set a standard for quality in FFN quality care. We recommend the exploration of a project to address the need for a greater understanding of the quality of care children receive in the FFN setting and for measures that are appropriate to assess quality in these settings. Settings may include playgroups and library story time groups designed specifically for FFN caregivers and children. The hope is that this kind of study will provide a more robust picture of caregiver-child interaction quality in out-of-home FFN settings through assessments.

- **Support experiments with evaluation.** We have learned that in an emergent field not only is it important to support exploratory experiments, but to also provide evaluation support so that there is continuous learning for grantees, funders and evaluators. With a quick grant cycle of 1 year, there is also a quick turnaround of data to learn from what did not work and to lift up promising strategies whether they be outreach, partnerships, learning strategies, and learning communities. The lean data approach has allowed us to capitalize on data that they already collect or add on to existing data systems; develop logic models; and conduct quick interviews at strategic points of the project.