



Webinar: Supporting Newcomers' Access to Early Childhood Services

July 11, 2024, 2:30 – 3:45 PM ET

Transcript

Introduction

Hamutal Bernstein: Hi, everyone. Welcome. We are so pleased to be with you today to discuss this really important topic.

Today's Speakers

HB: My name is Hamutal Bernstein. I'm a senior fellow at the Urban Institute, which is a nonprofit research organization that provides data and evidence to help advance upward mobility and equity. I lead Urban's program on immigration, where we focus on the well-being and inclusion of immigrant and refugee families. I've led the annual survey of refugees for the Office of Refugee Resettlement since 2016.

My colleague, Elly Miles, will also be speaking on this webinar. She is a senior research associate at the Urban Institute. Her research focuses on refugee and immigrant parent-child stress and preventive interventions that holistically support families. We are so pleased to have three speakers with us joined. Maki Park is a senior policy analyst for early education and care at the Migration Policy Institute, their National Center on Immigrant Integration Policy.

Where her research focuses on issues affecting dual-language learners and immigrant families and early childhood systems. Richard Davidson is a biocultural anthropologist with 28 years of experience working in the nonprofit sector. He is chief operating officer of the Family Service Association in San Antonio, Texas, where he oversees strategies to support refugee family participation in Head Start, including a partnership with local resettlement agencies that he'll be talking about later during this webinar.

Last, Danita Huynh is the Director of Early Learning Services at Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization, IRCO, in Oregon. She started as a parent educator in 1997, and she oversees a home visiting program and developmental screenings with diverse families, which she'll be discussing later on in this webinar. During today's session, we plan to provide you some background on the opportunities and challenges in connecting newcomer families to early childhood services.

Then we'll hear from Richard, Danita, and Maki, who will share their experiences leading and supporting innovative program efforts across the country. Then we'll have a discussion panel at the end to reflect on shared lessons.

Learning Objectives



HB: As far as learning objectives, by the end of this webinar, you will be able to, first, explain how early childhood services can support child development and family well-being. Identify three types of early childhood services and their distinguishing characteristics. Describe common challenges that newcomers experience in accessing these services. And last, plan to apply at least one strategy to enhance newcomers' access to early childhood services in your community.

1. How Early Childhood Services Support Child Development and Family Well-Being

HB: We'll start off with some background and opportunities for you to share your experiences with us in this area. I wanted to set the big stage for the conversation and highlight why this topic is so incredibly important. We know that many newcomer families would benefit from early childhood programs. And while data about all ORR-eligible populations are limited, we do know that about 10% of recently resettled refugees to the U.S. are children under the age of 5. That is a huge share of the refugee population.

Newcomer Families with Young Children

HB: We also know that newcomer parents are often not familiar with early childhood programs that are available in the U.S. They're coming from settings where these services are not commonplace, and learning about and navigating programs to enroll their children is a lot to figure out. They are often eligible for programs and subsidies as refugees or as low-income earners, but they face many barriers to learning about and accessing available programs in their communities. Resettlement providers, you all in the field serving these families every day, may have an opportunity to help bridge that gap for families by connecting them to programs that can support their development and their well-being. This can contribute to families' overall stability and mobility as they settle into life in the U.S.

Poll Questions

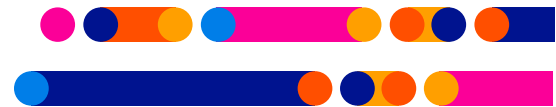
On a scale of 1-5, how familiar are you with early childhood services in your community?

HB: We wanted to start by asking you all a couple questions, and we'll be using an engagement tool called Slido. If you could take out your phone and scan the QR code on your screen, or you can open up a web browser and go to slido.com, S-L-I-D-O, and enter the number on your screen, great. Y'all are already on there. Answering the question on a scale of one to five. How familiar are you with early childhood services in your community?

We've got a pretty good mix all across the scale of people who are not familiar at all, and people who are about mid-level in their comfort. We have a good variety of experiences out there. Thank you.

Which of the following early childhood services have you connected families to?

HB: We'll ask you one other question on Slido. Which of the following early childhood services have you connected families to? Child care and early education, maternal, infant, and early childhood home visiting, and early intervention, or preschool special education.



Great. We see actually a majority, really large share of you saying that you have connected families to child care and early education, and less going into early intervention or home visiting. Okay. That's really helpful background, and I'll pass it off to Elly Miles, who will start talking about these programs.

A Window of Opportunity

Elly Miles: Great. Thank you so much, Hamutal. I want to start today with discussing why early childhood services set such an important foundation. Many of us in this webinar are in roles where we already know that intervention makes all the difference for newcomer families. We also now know that while intervening at any time point in the lifespan can be very effective, interventions in the earliest childhood periods are associated with the highest impact in the shortest amount of time on a really wide range of important outcomes. And that is because they set a foundation in which a child is more open and ready to benefit from later interventions.

These children benefit the most readily from later education and job training opportunities later in life for example, and they have been found to have higher rates of high school graduation, college attendance, reduced criminal justice system involvement, higher adult earnings, and even less reliance on public assistance as adults. Early childhood interventions are an important way that the cycle of poverty can be disrupted and the next generation set up for success.

Benefits of Early Childhood Services

EM: You might be wondering if those benefits I just described really apply for children of immigrants and refugees. Currently, the available evidence that we have suggests that children who are learning more than one language are dealing with additional challenges and often start kindergarten at an academic disadvantage. They are, in fact, benefiting even more from high-quality early childhood services that support their readiness to learn by the time of school entry. High-quality early childhood programs are preparing children in both academic and non-academic ways to be ready to learn. Some of the non-academic skills that are critical for being ready to learn include the child's development of social skills, their ability to persevere on tasks, and their ability to delay gratification.

Early childhood settings provide a space where when there's a concern or a noted delay, that those issues can be flagged and addressed early. These programs also boost resilience for children by facilitating nurturing, positive relationships between parents and children or between teachers and children. Those positive relationships are a big part of what help children be resilient following some of the hardships or trauma they may have experienced in early life.

These programs also are often connecting families to a wide range of services and supports. Not only is that important for the whole family's well-being, but also for the child's readiness to learn. A child who is hungry, unhoused, or whose parents aren't receiving needed services is likely not showing up ready to learn until their family is stabilized. There are many early childhood services out there that can contribute to a child's positive development and to family well-being.

2. Three Types of Early Childhood Services

EM: Today, we're going to introduce and discuss a set of programs that are publicly funded and widely available to families with low incomes. We're going to be discussing child care and early education, home



visiting, and early intervention. I also want to note that across this webinar, we may be using the term parents, but when we say parent, we really mean any primary caregiver that's in a legal guardianship role for a child.

Child Care Centers and Homes

EM: I want to start by noting that the phrase child care and early education is glossing over a lot of diversity. At a high level, I want to break down into three different kinds of publicly funded child care and early education options that may be available in your local communities. The first is Head Start. Head Start is a subsidized, comprehensive child care and education, nutrition and health, and wraparound support program for whole family, whole child well-being. There is significant national investment in this program. More than \$10 billion is spent annually on Head Start programming, and it's available in every state and territory.

Head Start programming is provided in many contexts, in child care centers, in family child care programs, even directly in families' homes. The structure and specific services that are provided vary based on what is needed in a community. However, across all of those different structures, Head Start programs are always focused on whole family well-being. They provide adult-focused supports in addition to child-focused services, and they conduct regular needs assessments with parents to help them identify goals and achieve self-sufficiency across a wide array of areas that include their housing stability, their continued education, and their financial security.

Pre-K Programs

EM: Second, there is financial assistance that's available for child care programs more broadly, and the form that assistance comes in varies by state. But it's typically provided through vouchers, certificates, or subsidies that can result in free or reduced-cost child care for families with low incomes. I also want to note that in addition to child care allowing parents to work or build skills, high-quality child care is also supporting the development of early language skills, it's promoting early academic skills, and it's nurturing child social-emotional development, especially in high-quality settings.

Then lastly, there are publicly funded preschool programs available in many states, and these often include financial assistance as well for low-income families that can make those programs reduced cost or even free, or in some locations, pre-k program is universally available and cost is not a factor for families. Traditionally, pre-k programs are going to be focused more on academics and getting those kids kindergarten-ready. In addition to those academic skills, they're also focusing on those non-academic skills that are essential to succeed once the child begins in kindergarten.

Home Visiting

EM: The second broad early childhood service that we want to talk about is maternal, infant, and early childhood home visiting, which we're going to refer to as home visiting. This is present in all states and territories, although the specific program offerings vary by state and target populations vary by model.

For example, some programs are designed for first-time parents and others are for parents with low income more broadly or other populations that are designated as facing some sort of risk. For example, some focus on adolescent parents, parents that didn't complete high school education, and so on. There are currently 27 models that are considered evidence-based, and there are even more that are being tested for evidence, but they all focus on a similar set of goals.



All of these programs are focused on promoting caregiver health and well-being. They're seeking to establish, oftentimes, relationships with mothers during pregnancy to support their access to prenatal care, to support their transition to parenting, and to support their mental health and well-being across that child's first five years. They're also educating on healthy child development, milestones, and supporting parents to feel confident in parenting their child, strengthening and nurturing parent-child relationship, and they connect families to additional resources to support whole family well-being.

Early Intervention and Preschool Education

EM: The last early childhood service we want to discuss is early intervention and preschool special education. These services are often referred interchangeably with the federal legislation that supports them. IDEA Part C and Part B. IDEA stands for the Individuals for Disabilities in Education Act. Part C is for infants and toddlers, and Part B is for preschoolers. What do we mean by disabilities and delays? Some disabilities are medically evident early on, like when children are born with a major physical disability. And others emerge in the form of not meeting expected milestones, like talking, walking, eating, or learning within a normal range of time for a child's age.

I want to note that early experiences of trauma or high-stress situations, which young refugee children are more likely to have experienced as a result of their family's displacement and migration, can be associated with developmental delays, which is one of the reasons why screening early and often is so important to catch and address any possible early impacts of trauma on a child's development.

Screening and intervening early when a child has a delay is, in fact, so crucial that states all have a responsibility to look for, find, and evaluate children that have those special needs, and that's because intervening early is linked with many positive outcomes in both the short and the long term for children and families.

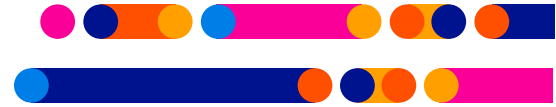
3. Common Challenges Newcomers Experience

EM: Hopefully, by this point, you're with us in seeing the many benefits of children enrolling in these services, but there are challenges that are unique to newcomer families accessing these services and supports.

Barriers to Early Childhood Services

EM: First, it's important to note that refugee children, despite being eligible, are less likely to be enrolled in Head Start, subsidized child care, early intervention, and in-home visiting. And we want to point out this disparity because it appears to be a lost opportunity for handoff and synergy between resettlement and early childhood programs. There is this alignment that exists in the mission and the goals of both resettlement providers and early childhood programs.

They both want to support whole family well-being, stability, and self-sufficiency. But there are many reasons why families aren't enrolling that we already know about. Families may meet a variety of systemic barriers when trying to participate in early childhood services. To successfully promote access, it's important to understand and prepare to address those barriers. Those include language and communication barriers. For example, newcomers, as we know, are speaking many different languages, and so one barrier that families might encounter when navigating the early childhood system is having limited information in their native



language, and that's especially a challenge for less commonly spoken languages. Application systems are also a challenge. In early childhood programs, these are often complex. They often require digital access and digital literacy, which compounds language barriers.

And even when systems are not digital or are available in a family's spoken language, they might assume a level of literacy that the family member might not have. Then there's the issue of awareness. As Hamutal mentioned at the beginning, families are arriving with a wide range of experiences in their countries of origin or in the intermediary hosting countries they were in prior to resettlement.

Early childhood services like the ones we are discussing were largely not available in these settings, and so they might not even be aware of their existence or of their value in the U.S. Also, families are bringing their own cultural and religious traditions, practices, and norms into the equation, and that affects their perceptions of these programs as well. Families might also have stigma around certain services, such as those that are addressing early delays and disabilities or mental health concerns.

Some families might also have mistrust, and that can be due to experiences of betrayal from government institutions in the past. It's possible that they may view home visits as intrusive. Then lastly, there are systemic barriers that also are facing early childhood programs, which can complicate this whole equation. Programs may desire and even have guidance to implement culturally responsive practices, but struggle with limited resources, high staff turnover, and long waiting lists. They may struggle to meet the demand that they already have.

Poll Question

What barriers most significantly impact the newcomer families you work with in accessing early childhood services?

EM: We're going to return to Slido for a moment. We really would like to know about the kinds of barriers that you've observed in your work. What is most significantly impacting the families that you work with, and preventing their access to early childhood services? Yes, so already seeing lots of agreement with language barriers. Yes, number one, the issue of wait lists. Wait lists, not enough spots. Transportation, that's another good one.

If these programs are not embedded and walkable for families, it can be very challenging for them to access them, especially when juggling children's school schedules. Lots of agreement on language. Yes, wait lists. Yes, I'm seeing a lot of agreement and some concerns about the cost of care. Yes, and subsidy application requirements, and definitely those vary a little bit state to state, so it is a good practice to understand what those requirements look like in your state. And cultural expectations.

Yes, good to see these are all being mentioned. Difficulty with applications. Yes, distrust. Wonderful.

4. Strategies to Promote Access

EM: Okay, we're going to turn now to thinking about access. I'm going to kick us off with a high-level perspective on approaches that support this, and we'll then get to hear several examples of efforts that have



been successful in boosting access to the services we've been discussing. There are multiple ways of tackling this issue that range in how time and resource intensive they are to implement.

Approaches to Increasing Collaboration and Access

EM: Probably the easiest strategy to implement at the top of the funnel is an individual-level strategy. Anyone in this webinar, for example, can build awareness of the early childhood services in your state and community, begin building relationships with those entities, and find out about their eligibility processes, and begin screening and referring families to those services when that makes sense with the family's goals and needs.

Next, you can join community-wide or state-level initiatives, consortiums, and collective impact efforts that focus on the needs of young children to bring more awareness of the refugee community to the table with mainstream service providers. This also works in the reverse where mainstream early childhood service providers should be invited to refugee-focused intersectoral meetings like quarterly local consultations. Next, you can develop partnerships with specific programs in your community to streamline access and reduce barriers.

That could look like having personnel on-site to support families with enrollment or information sharing with each other's programs so that enrollment barriers are reduced. Partnerships come in many forms, but they can enhance the quality and variety of services that families have access to and communicate about the presence of a relationship between organizations. Lastly, and possibly the most time and resource-intensive would be to house early childhood programs on-site as a refugee service provider.

This could happen as a result of a partnership where the partner provides the services on your property or some resettlement providers directly run and manage programs drawing on federal, state, and philanthropic funding. While this is a time and resource-intensive strategy and one that requires thoughtful planning, it can also be a very successful approach because it enables children to simultaneously receive services while their parents access learning opportunities being offered on-site.

Before we move on, I want to quickly share that all of this information and specific tips are being shared in more detail in several publications we've developed and we'll be sharing those in the chat towards the end of the presentation. With that, I'm going to turn things over now to Richard and then Danita, and they're going to share how their organizations have supported access to early childhood services among refugee families.

Program Highlight: Family Services Association, Texas

Richard Davidson: Thank you, Elly. First of all, I want to say it's an honor and a pleasure to be with you all. I hope you find something of a value because I do not consider myself an expert in this area, but over the past two decades, we have done quite a bit of intentional work to really incorporate newcomers in our early childhood education programming. Family service, just brief history. We were founded in 1903, and we really work to address the social determinants of health, the five pillars of the social determinants of health with all the families that we work with.

Regardless of what you're coming to the agency for, if you have other community needs, other needs in the social determinants of health realm, we will work with you to either provide the service ourselves or one of our 200 partners to really make sure their services are met. We really believe that family service, and I was



heartened to hear how many of you were accessing early childhood education for newcomers because we have found that to be essential.

Currently, right now, I have 136 newcomer children attending our Early Head Start and Head Start programs. We do have 986 Head Start slots and 276 Early Head Start slots. Over the past 15 years, we've had 787 newcomer children and their families access our services. We really believe that it's important to design your recruitment strategies around the immigrant populations, and I heard that loud and clear, language is definitely an issue. For any early childhood right now with Afghanis, with Pashto and Daro, that's difficult. I'm going to tell you, that's difficult. We've struggled with that. It took us a while to get where we're able to start serving them because it was very hard to accommodate those languages. It's important to design your strategies and services around their cultures and values. For instance, between the Iraqi diaspora and then the Afghan diaspora, there were very different values regarding education. It really took some work in understanding those values around education and being able to incorporate those to better serve those individuals and families.

I saw that a lot of you in trying to develop relationships with other early childhood education providers in your audience will probably really require you to be very intentional in your relationships because you've got to go work with providers who are going to serve the entire family. You've also going to have to ensure that your partners, early childhood partners' values are supportive of your values. What I'm trying to say with that is a lot of early childhood education providers do not provide dual generation services.

It may truly just be an early childhood education program. For newcomer families, you really need a dual-generation approach. One of the examples I want to share, because I think many of you might be able to see how to partner with, is we really partnered in the first round of Immigrant Diaspora from Iraq with Catholic Charities. They were the primary, at that time it was more centralized in our community, they were the primary agency dealing with newcomers coming to our city.

We really did partner with them intentionally to incorporate their families into early childhood education. This meant better integration between both us and Catholic Charities to reach those families. That meant we actually were embedded in their apartment complexes that were dealing with the Iraqi refugees so that we could actually work with them, with Catholic Charities, they'd get to know who we were, understand the services we provide, and it resulted in much better enrollments and really activation and services to those families.

The key, though, in partnering early childhood, I really can't stress this enough because I've seen it over and over again in our community, is you really do need to partner with an agency that's going to help you address the entire family's relationships, their strengths. That's what makes them feel welcome in the community. That's what helps them build a relationship in the community. That's what helps the children better be prepared for kindergarten because it's more of an integrated situation.

Now I want to share with you what really has become a secret for us over the years. It can be challenging to parent anywhere you are and how you can find individuals, but our secret is to hire the immigrant parents. Hiring newcomer parents has been essential for our program to not only us better represent and serve their children and their members from their community to really understand their culture, their values, it brings us the language, it really helps us expand that relationship with that community.



I do want to warn you that often requires special training and education for parents. That's one of the good things about Head Start and Early Head Start is we have that flexibility to be able to provide that and family service. We do job training. So we really connect the families together to understand both connecting the community, but connecting their child's education going forward, and then building a relationship with their schools and their immediate community.

It really results in greater child and family enrollment and trust. The last thing I wanted to talk about is by hiring immigrants or newcomers within the Early Childhood Education Program, and this is where each state's going to be very, very different. Texas and where I'm at is actually one of the more difficult states to be able to hire them. For those that we've been able to hire, it really helps improve our program, helps improve the services we're providing.

We were finally able this past year to be able to hire an Afghani who was an early childhood educator, worked with them to get the English so that they could work with their non-Pashto students, and it's been very successful in getting other families enrolled in the program. It has been slower with that particular population. It has to do more with the mistrust of education in our country and understanding the system, but we've definitely seen those numbers increase from initially like 6 to now we have 36 Afghani students in our centers.

The biggest challenge in Texas is the Latin and South American newcomers. We have intentionally as a state put some restrictions that make it difficult to serve some of those families, but it would be better for our community in the long run and better for those families if we were able to do that. The key is partnership. The key is really working together and embedding your services, working with both the immigrant or newcomer provider and early childhood education, and really building that long-term partnership. Now I'm going to transition to Danita who will share about how access to home visitation has been supported in Oregon. Thank you.

Program Highlight: IRCO Early Learning, Oregon

Danita Huynh: Thank you for having me here, and good day, everyone. My name is Danita Huynh, Director of IRCO's Early Learning Home Visiting Programs and Preschool Services, and thanks for attending this webinar today. I want to give you a little bit of background about IRCO. IRCO is an acronym for Immigrant Refugee Community Organization. We're a nonprofit that began in 1976. We began for refugees and by refugees.

At IRCO our mission is to welcome, serve, and empower refugee immigrants and people across cultures and generations to reach their full potential. We imagine a future where refugees and immigrants belong, our staff are nurtured, and all communities thrive. Our programs are structured into divisions. Currently, we have early learning services, youth and academic services, community safety and well-being services, workforce and refugee services, asset and opportunity-building services.

In 1997, IRCO began its initial home visiting program for Asian and Pacific Islander families. We used one of the evidence-based curriculums called Parents as Teachers. We began back then with just three parent educators providing home visits to 50 families. [silence] Our home visiting services use two screening tools called Ages and Stages Questionnaire. We use these questionnaires, the ASQ 3 and the ASQ SC 2.

The ASQs are usually conducted in the home visits where families feel most comfortable by a bilingual early childhood educator. Screenings are conducted in the home language of the family, which is one of the most successful techniques and adapted approaches that we instill. All educators are trained in conducting the ASQs prior to working with the families, including how to explain the ASQ and its purpose to the families, how to adapt the ASQ, and how to score and appropriately explain those results, but on subsequent home visits.



One example of adapting the ASQ is to use wooden beads or blocks in place of Cheerios, as for some families using food to play with is forbidden. We use this adapted approach to help in determining if a child has age-appropriate fine motor skills development. Another example is to remove the question on an ASQ referencing communication skills by using words that end in ING, ED, and S, and the reason is because in many languages these endings on verbs, they don't exist, therefore, the scoring must be adapted.

One of our successes to our home visiting model in IRCA's Early Learning Services is that all of our educators who work directly with families are from the refugee immigrant communities. Just as Richard mentioned, we do the same. They are from those communities or from the BIPOC communities. It's really important to provide families with supports from the communities they identify with and in the languages that are spoken in the home. This is one successful key component of our culture-specific model.

Another important aspect and what helps us to be successful is collaborating with early intervention. This component to our model has been a collaborative partnership that we built with one of the local early intervention programs called MECP, Multnomah Education Childhood Program. Multnomah Early Childhood Program provides early intervention and early childhood special education services to children birth to age five in Multnomah County.

MECP serves families in eight school districts in Multnomah County and the services are individually designed to address the special needs of those young children with developmental delays or disabilities. The wonderful thing is that all the services are free of charge to the eligible children. At IRCA, our early childhood educators who work with each family to share the identified potential delays with early intervention and then we start the referral process for serving those children with identified delays.

One of the things we do is once the screening of the ASQ is completed and we discuss it with the parent and then the parent agrees on that referral, then we are integrally involved in that referral process. We work together with EI staff and we do the scheduling of the home visits with them, we go on the visits with the early intervention specialist, and we do that to help to build the trust and engagement with the family and then we continue to attend future early intervention home visits with early intervention staff.

We also do lots of collaborative work with local entities and I just want to share one of those collaboration efforts. We're working on a community partner collaboration project to improve the way we as a community engage families in early childhood screening and assessment. We want to strengthen everyone's understanding on how we can ensure cultural and linguistic responsiveness in family engagement and how it's incorporated and embedded in every aspect around their child's development. We've offered our wisdom and how we work with parents and caregivers in screening their children. We work to understand what our families want for the children's development. Early childhood educators apply their cultural wisdom and the approaches and strategies for building trust with the families and this collaboration has been to strengthen how we can screen or measure health and wellness of children in our community.

The All Ready Network has worked on conducting listening sessions from community providers who work with families including families who are non-native English speakers to help medical providers in understanding the importance of ensuring that the cultural and linguistic responsiveness and family engagement is intentional, meaningful, and mindful. Lastly, our early learning leadership team believes in the importance of reflective supervision. It needs to be consistent and regular and scheduled and the integration of professional development allowing time for staff to learn how to facilitate an ASQ, how to adapt it as needed, and provide training for the specific communities and ongoing support.

Now we'd like to transition to Maki who will share her reflection on strategies to increase access to early childhood services broadly.

Key Points from Program Highlights



Maki Park: Thanks so much, Danita. My name is Maki Park and I'm based out of the Migration Policy Institute or MPI which is a research organization and I'm going to be speaking briefly in this section about the key points that we saw in Danita and Richard's presentations that can really help us think strategically about how folks on this webinar and beyond can help to improve refugee access to beneficial early childhood services. We just heard two really wonderful examples of how incredibly impactful and powerful early childhood programs can be for refugee families.

To reflect a bit on some key takeaways, I think one of the most important pieces that really circles back to much of what Elly also spoke to in her initial comments and that Richard also really underlined is this fact that early childhood services are so beneficial from a two-generation perspective. Often when we think of programs and policies in silos and of course early childhood services are so important for early childhood development and cognitive and socio-emotional outcomes for young kids. However, early childhood programs are also so unique in that they have the potential to really lift up whole families at a critical period not only in a young child's development but also in that family's trajectory.

Early childhood programs as we've heard, also provide accessible employment opportunities for refugee parents who have unique skill sets and incredibly valuable assets including language and cultural skills as well as lived experience to bring into classrooms and early childhood settings benefiting their family as well as their community as a whole. Another piece I wanted to speak to is that by design the refugee resettlement process is not as focused on the unique needs and opportunities around young children as so much of the program is really honed in on economic security and employment.

Understanding young kids needs and serving them through intentional programming is such a high impact opportunity again for the whole family. From a long-term perspective reaching these kids holistically and across silos by for example connecting kids with early intervention services at this stage has so many long-term benefits for that child as well as for that family in terms of being introduced to programs and institutions and empowering parents to navigate new systems that could otherwise seem very foreign and distant despite their many benefits.

Relative to the K-12 system for example, early childhood services have more of an opportunity to reach families in a way that becomes less possible and less integrated as time goes on and as children get older. Then this final point similarly highlights the fact that early childhood services are also more likely to have the bandwidth and be designed to be truly supportive of things like home culture, home language, and identity. Again at this critical time when things like cultural identity are being formed and native languages have the chance to be supported and preserved.

The kinds of supports, community connections, family engagement, and cultural adaptations that we heard about just now from Richard and Danita are unfortunately less likely to be in place in larger institutional settings. I will say here of course though as a caveat that not all early childhood programs are going to have this level of quality and responsiveness and this is actually something that we also need to be advocating for further which I think we'll be speaking to later in our discussion. On the next slide I'll talk a bit more about strategies and opportunities we can look to try and leverage the benefits of early childhood services for refugee families.

Strategies and Opportunities

MP: One clear strategy we've heard from our presentation so far is the importance of building and sustaining partnerships and connections with early childhood programs so that the relationships and the knowledge are there when we have families come in who need these connections. In the same way that the world of early childhood programming and systems may be new to some of you on this call, I can tell you from experience that the world of refugee services is highly unfamiliar and potentially completely unknown to many in the early childhood world, even in areas where newcomers are quite prevalent.



Reaching out to make these connections can be such a powerful way to open up opportunities for collaboration. I saw, for example, one example in the chat, a participant mentioned a child care resource and referral program that partnered with a refugee service organization to facilitate payments to refugee parents and grandparents to receive state subsidies to care for their own kids as well as others. The second point speaks to just the practical strategy of offering information and of course providing it in relevant languages to refer families to programs they could benefit from.

Ideally these would be referrals with warm handoffs knowing that enrollment and registration processes can often be quite complex and require not only language skills but also technological literacy that can be challenging for newcomer families. Being able to potentially visit and also work together in enrolling for and registering in programs to offer that systems navigation and cultural navigation support can be a really powerful way to increase connections and ultimately improve access.

The next point builds on the idea of partnering with early childhood programs to really look at how so many of you have so much valuable knowledge about the families you serve that may be lacking in some early childhood programs in your community. Providing trainings and information about the services you provide, the kinds of families you serve, and the specific language and cultural needs that they have can raise awareness for those who may be unaware of shifting demographics and improve the responsiveness of programs while also continuing to strengthen those bridges between the sectors of immigrant service and early childhood services.

This last point I hope is a key takeaway for all of us coming out of this conversation that you will feel equipped to raise awareness of and advocate for the needs of families with young children and the potential programs that are available to them to make sure that we're connecting folks with the services they need during this really high opportunity period of life. I wanted to address very quickly the fact that language came up as the number one barrier that folks were seeing in the Slido feedback.

We at MPI put out a policy brief recently speaking to language access requirements from a civil rights perspective and I just think this can be a useful advocacy tool for all of us to realize that there are explicit civil rights requirements in place that mandate that any programs that receive any federal funding, so this would include all three buckets that Elly mentioned, child care which receives CCDBG funding, Head Start and MIECHV home visiting, these programs are required to provide meaningful language access to families who speak languages other than English.

This is absolutely something that we can all be pushing for across programs to make sure that these needs but also these requirements are brought to folks' awareness. I will stop there and pass this back over to Hamutal who will be facilitating our panel discussion.

Q&A Panel

HB: Great, thank you. Danita, Richard, and Maki, why don't you turn your video on? I'll start us off on the panel conversation. Audience members, if you have any questions that you haven't posted yet in the Q&A, please feel free. I've seen quite a few in there that Elly and some of our other speakers are handling but if there are other questions that you'd like us to speak to, please go ahead and post in there. Elly will be monitoring the list. I'll start off with our first question.

[What challenges do resettlement providers facing when it comes to connecting newcomer families with early childhood services? Are any of the challenges systemic, like requiring a policy assistance or a culture-level change?](#)

HB: We'll start off with Maki.



MP: Yes, thanks for this question. I think one systemic challenge that I mentioned that we talk about at MPI a lot is, and I think that conversations exactly like this one are so helpful to address, is the simple fact that the refugee resettlement process doesn't necessarily focus on this age band, making it difficult to identify key challenges and opportunities. Of course, no one system can do everything and that's why collaboration and information sharing is so important. One key example that I've been thinking about over the course of this panel discussion is actually the lack of mental health assessments for this age group, which is something that Elly mentioned. Upon arrival for refugees, there's just nothing there for young children. We see that mental health is gaining increasing recognition as an important area, and many states now have refugee mental health coordinators. We've also thoroughly debunked the myth that young children are too young to be traumatized or to be affected by adverse experiences. In many ways, we know that the reverse is true, and early traumatic experiences can really significantly shape future trajectories if left unaddressed.

Currently, though, the tool that's commonly used to identify mental health challenges for newcomers is what's known as the Refugee Health Screener 15, or RHS 15. This is not valid for use with children and youth. As the name implies, it's only validated for use with those ages 15 and older. Having culturally responsive tools in place that can identify mental health needs for younger children is such an important policy and systems change that I think could be really impactful. Again, connecting with organizations that have the capacity to assess for these needs is one way that we can just work on addressing these gaps between systems.

HB: Thank you. Danita, do you want to go next? You're muted.

DH: I'm sorry. Looking back at the poll, it seems like one of the top answers to barriers was the linguistic piece. I would just say, I think that's across the U.S., is just there's a lack of early childhood providers that speak the many needed languages for the families that are needing those services. I think it starts even at the high school level getting students interested in early childhood, building those connections with colleges and universities, building a—here in Multnomah County with our Preschool for All.

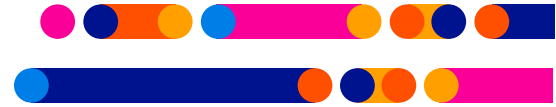
We actually, IRCO has a grant with helping immigrant and refugee families who want to become childcare providers and work in the early childhood workforce to create those pathways and help pay for some of their coursework to do that, to get an ECE certification. I think if there's a lack of it, then you have to think big picture on how do you break the systemic issues is by creating new pathways and helping and guiding the community and wanting to work in the workforce.

HB: Great. Thank you. Richard, do you want to take a stab?

RD: Yes, thank you. I really think it depends. I think it depends upon where you're at. I think it depends upon what type of program you're running or what type of programs are available in your community. Language is definitely an issue, particularly Pashto or Dado. There's not a very large percentage of Americans who speak those languages and a lot of places where the Afghans ended up being deposited. Here in San Antonio, I know exactly how many Dado speakers there were before the newcomers arrived, six.

Guess what? They were all doctors. Do you think they're going to come work in an early childhood program? They're not. There wasn't a lot of forethought with that, but I want to challenge something different because I've seen a couple of the chats and I've tried to answer those that I had a chance to. To make it work with an early childhood educator, it's really going to be incumbent upon the newcomer serving organization to build that relationship. Early childhood educators were typically not out there in those particular communities unless you're—it's like family service where we like to be embedded and we're willing to do that.

Most early childhood educators aren't that way. It's really incumbent upon you guys to build the relationship with them. I think most of them would be, but systemic, for instance, most of the public Pre-K expansions, they have no language requirements that we reflect the people that we serve. Headstart does, but it is true, Headstart is, there's going to be slot reductions across the country because our staff are paid so low with the Headstart funding previously. There'll be reductions across. However, if you do have Headstart providers in your community and you want to build a partnership, this is the time they're enrolling children right now.



This is the time to take your families in, get them enrolled, ask them, how can you communicate with my family, et cetera. I'm going to be honest with you, when we first started with Catholic Charities, I didn't have staff at that time who spoke Arabic. Catholic Charities helped me find the newcomers who could meet and work for me. It was that partnership that made that possible. That's what I really encourage you to do, is be bold and go find that early childhood educator who's willing to work with you, but also willing to work with the whole families because I think that's crucial.

HB: Fantastic. Okay, thank you to all three. We'll move on to the next question.

[How would you advise a resettlement provider who wants to take steps toward considering the needs of younger children in their case management practices?](#)

HB: Danita, we'll start with you.

DH: I would say putting the parent voice, or the member, or the client, or the customer, however they categorize, and depending on which program, putting the parent voice or the customer voice as a priority. I think in so many programs, they build their program and then they fit the community into the program. It should be the other way around. We need to fit our programs based on what the community needs and what the community is voicing. Doing things like community needs assessment is a very good way of getting feedback, which IRCO does every three to five years.

We do a huge community needs assessment and intentionally creating a space and a place for opportunity for leaders and community members to provide input and using that input to develop your services. I think if refugee resettlement providers intentionally reached out to parents and maybe it's creating focus groups, maybe it's doing something unique, but providing those opportunities for parents to be heard and to actually work closely with them, give them stipends for their voice, for their time, whatever it may be, for their child care, for transportation, to those focus groups, and keep them informed along the way.

So many times we ask for their voice or we ask for a person's voice in focus group and then we don't follow up and tell them what we did with their voice. I think it's a full circle.

HB: Thank you. Richard, do you have anything to share on how you would advise a resettlement provider?

RD: I do. Danita, excellent points that you just made, by the way. I think it's essential that if you're dealing with newcomers who have small children, which is going to be the vast majority of them, that we really do link them with early childhood education for two reasons. One, it helps the family better acculturate quickly because they're then integrating, not only they're seeing their child benefit. Believe me, our children right now in Boone, I have a classroom where all the three kids are exposed to three languages, English, Spanish, and Pashto. They're all really growing in those three languages. Those children, the Pashto speakers, when they go home, they're speaking those other two languages to their parents. Their parents are picking up words and phrases. It really is important to help understand that it really does need to be a partner that can work with the whole family. If you can't find one that can work with the whole family, then you have to make up that difference.

HB: Thank you. Okay. Our last question that we've planned is—

[What is one immediate action that you think resettlement providers and other stakeholders participating in this webinar today could take to improve access in their communities?](#)



HB: I'll ask you, Maki.

MP: Yes, thanks, Hamutal. I feel like there have actually been so many important and practical ideas already raised in this discussion. One starting point that immediately comes to mind for me that I think can be a very doable place to begin this process for those who are really fresh to these issues is just beginning the work of a landscape analysis at a community level. If your organization doesn't already have something like this in place, you could potentially begin populating a list of relevant early childhood programs in your community, knowing that could be pretty fast-changing, especially at a community level.

Include information like languages spoken by staff, so you have that on hand and key contacts that you can reach out to for warm referrals and handoffs. I think it's possible that you'll be surprised by the kinds of diverse and targeted resources that are available in your community that you may not be aware of and that could be really helpful and timely for families that walk in your doors. In general, I'm just so heartened to be having a conversation like this and to see so many people interested in making these connections and bringing increased attention to young newcomer children.

I think just having more conversations like this is always a great way to achieve that cultural shift that we've been talking about.

HB: Thank you. Danita, did you want to share an answer on this question as well? What would you want to suggest to the participants on the call what they can do?

DH: I mentioned previously about the community needs assessment, but also consider the location of where the services are being held at. Can you be flexible? Can you move the services to the home or to the library or somewhere close so that transportation barriers aren't a problem? Again, state the participant's voice. Where would they like the services to be at and try to accommodate them?

HB: Okay, great. It looks like we have time to answer a few questions from the audience. We have one question for Maki.

[Do you have any advice for navigating conversations with providers who receive federal funding but don't provide language access and push back when you ask for it? How can you educate and advocate for newcomer families?](#)

MP: Yes, thanks for that question. I'll say that working at a bipartisan organization, I'm very sympathetic to this. Immigration is a very broad topic, and you're not always going to be met with, I guess, same-mindedness. I can just share our key strategy at MPI has always been data, data, data. Just start with the facts. Often, especially at a community level, there's such a significant share of folks who speak another language. It's not like a boutique niche issue. I think just showing the sheer number of young children who speak languages other than English, which we have available on our website at a state level.

I'm sure there are ways that you can find some information at a community level. Just that, look, these are the kids we're trying to serve. This isn't a nice-to-have. It's a need-to-have. Also just from a human perspective, starting with an offer of partnership, understanding that, of course, programs are so stretched thin. We know that there's a childcare crisis right now. Offering training resources as you're able, start on that friendly note. Then on like a less friendly and more logistical side, I'll say that we were pretty surprised when we reviewed state childcare development block grant plans.

Every state has to submit to the federal level what they plan to do with their childcare funds. All of these states already promised to do these things. They said they would provide translated websites, translated materials. They said they would go to the community to help with enrollment. Just showing them the state plan, which is accessible for everybody on the ACF website, and saying, "Hey, we're supposed to be doing these things. It's not your fault, probably, that the state never informed you that this is the plan moving forward."



Just that it's not really an ask from our side. It's something that's already supposed to be being done. There's a lack of accountability there, but I think that's why it's on us as advocates to continue pushing for implementation. Actually, at this point, it's less of a policy issue and more of an implementation issue.

HB: Yes, that's really interesting. Thank you for that. We've got another question. Actually, I'll ask first if Richard or Danita, you want to add to that. We have one other question from the audience. I'll try the other one.

RD: Yes, Maki answered that one real well.

HB: Yes, that was pretty solid.

Richard and Danita, by hiring immigrant and refugee parents, the question is, how do you address the education and licensing requirements for early childhood providers for licensed programs?

RD: Here in Texas, we have probably some of the weakest childcare licensing requirements for education. All that's required is they get a CDA. We actually do CDA training in the community. We do have to partner, particularly for the Pashto speakers, we had to partner with a translator. I think they were in San Francisco. They did it online so that the person could listen to the classes, understand, ask their questions because it's an interactive class, in-person class. Same with testing. When it came time to do her state test, he had to read the questions to her. We were able to do all the stuff with her to get it going. She did finally get her CDA. In Texas, they do make it a little harder sometimes for immigrants, but it depends on where they're coming from, whether it's harder or not. I'll give you an example. There's two states that if you ever are wanting to know who's really-- Because Maki's absolutely right, there's a huge child care crisis looming, not only now in some communities, but it's looming nationwide in the next few years because we have so many early childhood educators who will be retiring.

There are two states that are intentionally targeting newcomers to fill those positions, and that's North Carolina and Colorado. They both have very innovative programs that are working on that. We tried to talk to Texas about that, but there was absolutely no interest. That's part of what I'm saying. It depends on where you live, et cetera. There's usually ways around it. You just got to go through childcare licensing, see what it is. A lot of times, there's partners...

They specialize in job training for Northern African, Arabic, and what is that, Southeast Asian nations. That's been a better partnership in helping us get these, they get the minimum English they need to get to be able to interact in the classroom. They've been very helpful with that. Always look for those partnerships.

HB: That's great. Danita, do you have anything to add on that question about licensing?

DH: We have an experience. We have just one preschool classroom, and we haven't experienced any language concerns. Although, all three of our teachers, assistant teacher, they speak Arabic. Instruction is completed in English. We have different languages in the classroom from the students and the families. I guess because our other early childhood programs, we have so many different language capabilities that if we have some issues, we just collaborate. We ask for help from one another. If we need someone to translate something, we'll call or schedule a virtual meeting.

If there's a parent-teacher conference and they need some help, then we just reach out to one another. We're very fortunate that we have over 20 different languages among our early childhood team that we're able to do that. As we grow, we'll just see what happens.

HB: What about on the home visiting side, Danita, what are the requirements for home visitors?

DH: Some of our programs require that they have equivalent to a bachelor's degree or experience working in childhood. Typically, that's the Healthy Families America program. They're more strict on educational requirements. Our other programs, our funding sources are very flexible. If you have a GED or if you don't have



any formal education in the United States, then I take into consideration what they've done in their home country as equivalent. They're hired, we do the orientation, we do training, and then we just do, like I mentioned in the PowerPoint, we just do lots and lots of supports.

We do reflective supervision with staff every month. When they're new, we do it every week. It's just like ongoing support. The staff speak the languages for the families that they work with. That's just intentional. That's always been our model and it's what's worked.

HB: Great. We're coming to the end.

Are there any additional reflections from any of our speakers that you want to share after having heard all of these different questions and inputs over the last hour?

RD: If you don't partner with an early childhood educator, I highly suggest you do. It's better for your families in the long run. It's amazing how you see those kids develop so quickly because that's what children do. It takes advantage of those essential years of brain development. They're then exposed to another culture. They relate and do so much better in school than their siblings did. Take advantage of that. Do keep in mind, partnership takes intentionality and it takes work in developing those partnerships and developing those relationships.

HB: Great. Thank you so much to our speakers for that conversation and sharing your experiences in the field. I will turn it over.

Conclusion

Reviewing Learning Objectives

EM: Great, thank you so much, Hamutal, and thank you to all of our panelists for sharing your insights and experience. I just want to quickly return to our learning objectives for the webinar.

So hopefully at this point you're feeling confident and ready to explain how early childhood services can support child development and family well-being, and as a reminder, we've really talked about three broad types of early childhood services and their distinguishing characteristics.

We've also described common challenges that newcomers experience when accessing those services, and lastly, we have discussed how to apply strategies, what are some of the strategies that we know of currently that can enhance how newcomers are accessing early childhood services in communities across the country.

Recommended Resources

EM: As we mentioned at the beginning, we have several exciting new publications that were just released. In fact, they were released today on Switchboard's TA website to support you with this topic. Before we share those recommended resources, we would like to ask you to help us help you. There is a survey. It's extremely important to help us improve future training, so if you could scan that QR code, the survey is only three questions long. It will take about 30 seconds to complete, and so we're going to start a 30-second timer right now. We're going to wait so you guys can finish that, and then we will move on to sharing those resources.

Great. Hopefully, everybody had enough time to finish that survey. Like we said, we have three exciting resources for further reading available to you that were just published today. One is an evidence summary. This is a systematic review that we did of all peer-reviewed published literature, following a strict regimen to do a comprehensive search, and we have synthesized what we know from the literature about what works to



promote access. We also have written a blog with strategies and tips to support you as you begin this journey in building access and an information guide.

The information guide is an introduction to all the different programs we talked about today, includes lots of tips and lots of links, and lots of resources to get you started and to connect you to a variety of resources so that you aren't having to start from square zero trying to search online, but can get some really helpful connections. Also, just want to quickly note our emails are up on the screen. Hamutal and I are both welcoming of you reaching out to us if you'd like to keep this conversation going.

Stay Connected

EM: For more training and technical assistance, we also want to invite you to stay connected with Switchboard. You can email the Switchboard team at switchboard@rescue.org or visit www.switchboardta.org, and you can follow us on social media at [switchboardta](https://www.facebook.com/switchboardta). On behalf of all of us at Switchboard and the organizations that are represented here, we just want to thank you for coming, for learning with us, and we hope to see you again soon.

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