



Help Me Grow[®]
Pierce County



Community Feedback Report

June 2021

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Executive Summary

Help Me Grow Pierce County provides both an access point for families to be connected to community resources, and a system framework for providers to work together to ensure an organized system of support is available in our community. To ensure that we are providing resources that are needed and helpful to families, we seek continuous feedback from parents with children from pregnancy through age 5 to determine what support they would most like to see available in their community.

From October 2020 through June 2021, Help Me Grow Pierce County conducted a literature review of promising practices nationally for supporting families, completed (33) parent interviews, and held Community Conversations that included (47) community providers and (11) parents. Community Conversations were facilitated discussions that presented the findings of the literature review and parent interviews, and engaged participants in determining action steps to address the top needs identified by parents. The top six resource needs that parents identified were:

- 1. Child Care**
- 2. Access to Consumables / Food Assistance**
- 3. Provider Diversity**
- 4. Parent Education**
- 5. Children's Activities**
- 6. Emotional Support**

For Year 4 of Implementation (July 2021 through June 2022), Help Me Grow Pierce County partners have identified the following three action steps to address the top three needs:

- **Expand options for flexible, drop-in child care and develop a plan for a crisis nursery:** Collaborate with the Pierce County Child Care Strategies team to expand opportunities for flexible, drop-in child care in Pierce County including adding a crisis nursery model.
- **Increase awareness of and use of the Family Resource Navigator referral pathway and other connection points:** Ensure families are connecting to needed resources, whether via 2-1-1, in person at Family Resource Centers / Diaper Banks, or via Family Connects.
- **Increase provider diversity and cultural responsiveness of Family Connects and other partner providers:** Explore opportunities to invest in providers of color. Launch culturally specific parent support groups. Develop a plan for building a more culturally relevant Family Connects program by contracting with interpreters.

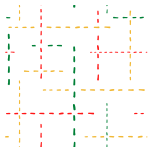
Executive Summary

(continued)

To address the remaining three needs, we know that there are many opportunities already available in Pierce County, but finding the right one for your family can be challenging. Help Me Grow Pierce County plans to continue building out an on-line community calendar of events, activities, and support groups for parents to easily find opportunities to connect to community resources and to each other. Our children deserve opportunities, and we believe that Pierce County is and can continue to be a great place to raise a child.

For more information on services available and how to get involved, please visit HelpMeGrowPierce.org





Introduction

Help Me Grow Pierce County (HMG PC) is a community-based initiative with a mission to promote the healthy development of all children from pregnancy through age 5 through the following activities:

- **Connecting families to information, activities, and community-based resources**
- **Nurturing family relationships and offering individualized support**
- **Partnering with families and communities to improve the availability and quality of services**

By utilizing a national model that includes data collection and analysis, HMG PC works to identify gaps in community resources. HMG PC has demonstrated an effort to engage parents and community members in providing feedback by having ongoing conversations with providers and holding community spaces for Pierce County parents.

From October 2020 through June 2021, HMG PC conducted a research project and held interviews and focus groups with 44 parent participants focusing on the South Tacoma, Lakewood, and Parkland areas of Pierce County. HMG PC's focus zip codes of 98408, 98444, and 98499 have higher rates of poverty, lower life expectancy, and high rates of child welfare involvement.

Purpose of this Report



We have been asked to review the research, engage the community in conversations, share the research results, and deliver a summary of lessons learned as well as create action steps that can be taken to promote child well-being in Pierce County. These action steps are based on information provided by HMG PC and parent participants. We have incorporated strengths from successful models and practices, which could potentially be used within Pierce County to support families. These action steps focus on identifying culturally relevant supports needed for families of color. In addition, these steps focus on reducing existing barriers (including stigma) which prevent families from accessing support.

The top six needs identified by families involved in this project were:

1. **Child care**
2. **Access to Consumables / Food Assistance**
3. **Provider Diversity**
4. **Parent Education** (*specifically in Spanish/English*)
5. **Children's Activities**
6. **Emotional Support**

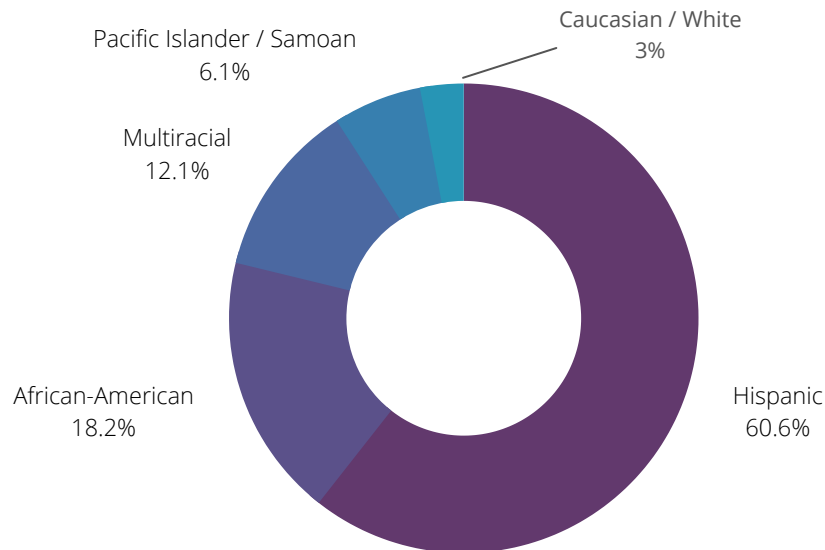
In addition to identifying needs in the community, parents were asked about specific services that HMG PC provided or was preparing to provide to the community such as Family Resource Navigation services at South Sound 2-1-1, diaper banks, and Family Connects brief nurse support for families with newborns. The top five attitudes and opinions regarding the newly launched Family Connects program were enthusiasm, comfort, mistrust, skepticism, and feeling that the service was valuable. Over 90% of participants reported they would utilize this in-home or telehealth service to support them in a child's first few months of life.



Research Limitations & Recommendations

33

Total Participants



A gap in the research that was immediately identified was the lack of diversity in the sample size. Over half of the parents who participated in the interviews were Hispanic/Latino/a/x/e, and nearly half were Spanish speaking. Although we acknowledge the strength of this group and value the information provided, we do not believe it is an accurate representation of the targeted neighborhoods and zip codes. In addition, there was only one person who identified as male in the interviews, as well as one male of the 14 parent participants in the Community Conversations. We would encourage future research to be conducted on a larger scale, with the same survey questions.

To engage additional community parents in the research and conversation, it is recommended that HMG PC partner with existing organizations which specifically connect and engage with families. Examples of these organizations include but are not limited to: Tacoma Urban League, Legally Black, Centro Latino, and the Tacoma Community House. In addition, it is recommended that HMG PC contract with researchers of color and/or train community members to conduct the survey questions in a door-to-door fashion or other similar means. This would financially support existing members in the community, provide leadership opportunities to families within the community, engage members in the community, and reduce biases in the research.

Research Limitations & Recommendations

(continued)



In the future, we would encourage HMG PC to use various advertising methods and means of engagement. Examples of this include advertising and connecting with communities at barber shops, medical facilities, and specific cultural stores in focus neighborhoods. Most importantly, we encourage HMG PC to partner with organizations in the community that serve families of color. These efforts will advance racial justice and promote an anti-racism lens while families are seeking or receiving support services within Pierce County.

The following sections discuss the top six needs identified by families, lessons learned, and recommended community action steps to address each need. We would like to emphasize that the data overwhelmingly showed child care was the top concern.



Child Care

Access to child care is impacting Pierce County families at a disturbing rate. This is due to the cost, lack of access, and availability due to significant barriers (financial, age of the child, full-time status), and concerns from parents about the qualification of child care staff and quality of the facility. The median cost of full-time, center-based child care for an infant in Pierce County was \$1,211 in 2019. A family making a livable wage (\$20/hour at full-time work) with two children would pay nearly half of their monthly wages to ensure their children are supervised while working. Families struggle to locate child care that is open during the hours that they need, and participants shared they are concerned about the trustworthiness of the child care agency that is identified or accessible to them.

Community Conversation participants shared:

"Where can I find cheap child care? ...seems like they don't qualify for child care. You can make a few dollars over and you still don't qualify."

"State is all up in your business...it makes a person shut down the help because they are so invasive..."

"It's hard to find somewhere where your kid is safe. If you have DSHS or what money you have is going to determine where you're getting sent to." (DSHS is the Department of Social and Health Services)

"Not finding child care for me, it's trusting people with my kids, I hear different stories and I want someone to look out for my child..."

"...Drop-in, like a parents' night, and they would keep the kids overnight for one night. As a single mom of four...Would love it...don't get breaks..."

The cost should be free, "I think that is highly important when considering parents with young kids because we are paying for diapers, formula, etc."

Child Care (continued)



What you can do:

- Open or expand child care centers.
- Expand hours, late nights and weekends.
- Offer centrally located facilities between Parkland, South Tacoma, and Lakewood to ensure the most negatively impacted zip codes have access.
- Offer those who do not qualify for Working Connections Child Care (state subsidy) the ability to have a sliding scale and/or flexible payment options to reduce financial barriers. The facility should offer care to families from a variety of socioeconomic statuses.
- Offer emergency child care and/or the “no-questions-asked” model. An emergent “no questions asked” model would reduce the stigmas associated with seeking help. This could reduce stress in the home by supporting families' child care needs.

Child care providers must follow a Family well-being model, such as:

- The Whole Child model: focusing on social and emotional learning for the whole family.
- The Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP) model: to ensure children are receiving more than just child care, but that their families are being engaged, building rapport, and developing with their children.

Train providers on cultural humility and how to talk about race and racism. In addition, have opportunities for families and in the classroom by continuously teaching the children of these differences. The more we talk about things that make us (adults) uncomfortable, the closer we are to changing the tide of taboo conversations. These agencies can encourage curiosity in the children they serve and foster safe spaces for cultural development, acceptance, and humility at a young age.

Child care providers must employ persons who are reflective of the community they serve.

- Providing/supporting educational opportunities to community members who are interested in child care.
- Partner with community colleges to provide credits and/or internships.
- Hire parents and have parents and children as board members.
- Continue to educate their staff on best practices and meaningful family engagement.

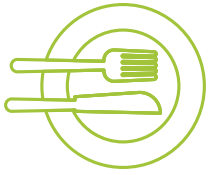


Child Care (continued)

Lessons learned:

The community conversations taught us that while some agencies provide child care and/or child care subsidies, many families are just over the income requirements to receive assistance or enrollment is only for children needing full-time child care. Families are often waitlisted to get into child care and parents felt state-run or state-pay-accessible child cares are not created equal. It was clear child care costs are not solely an issue for low-income families, but middle-class families are struggling too. Having a facility that is available to the community through public investment will allow families to use their financial resources for other household needs. Some families need extra support to maintain emotional stability in their home, and this was exacerbated during COVID-19 when much of the world needed a break and many families struggled to access child care support. Several agencies received grants for child care support because of COVID-19, but still numerous families did not qualify unless they were working, essential employees, or experiencing homelessness. Many families were unaware of the child care grants available during this period and did not receive information regarding resources.

Families reported wanting a safe child care center with the following attributes: workers who connect and communicate with the child and parents, daily reports of what the child did and ate, workers who are trained on how to collaborate with “difficult children,” and workers who have great empathy for family situations.



Access to Consumables / Food Assistance

Families need consistent, accessible, low-barrier access to food and nourishment. Many families with school-aged children were aware of the Tacoma School District and other's free food programs during the COVID-19 pandemic, but families with non-school-aged children found it difficult to access food. Some were unaware of the free lunch for children under age 18 provided by school districts during the COVID-19 Pandemic. The innovative, creative, and accessible way that school districts made sure their students had access to food was an amazing example of how to care for the community in their time of need. This model should be offered yearly and daily to the community because the need is continuous regarding food access.

What can you do:

- Partner with school districts to continue free lunch programs throughout the pandemic.
- Established food networks need to continue the successful models utilized during the pandemic, such as dropping off food to families lacking transportation.
- Partner with Food is Free Tacoma or similar models. Use advertisements and notices online, as well as corner setups in multiple neighborhoods.
- Partner with food bank consumers and offer incentives to drop off food to neighbors and/or community members.
- Partner with large distribution agencies:
 - USPS
 - Amazon
 - Food delivery services (Uber Eats, Door Dash, Instacart, etc.)
- Partner with “like-service” providing agencies
- Assist with financial supports
- Food banks should collaborate to expand their outreach, share funding and access.

Multiple agencies in Pierce County shared that their organization supported families with food insecurities. Some agencies had gift cards, some delivered food, and some had access to food items. These agencies provided services to their specific population. If these agencies collaborate, they could serve more families. This would allow services to be more accessible by utilizing shared funding. We would encourage agencies to discontinue the use of the “self-reliance” method and adopt a community-focused approach.

Provider Diversity



The Community Conversations held with service providers and parents agreed that community agencies and supports must reflect the community. Specifically mentioned were the nearly non-existent medical providers of color who support pediatric and OB/GYN services. In addition, there were concerns that leadership and front-line workers within community agencies do not reflect the community they serve, including non/not-for-profit organizations.

Schools and children's programs are underrepresented as well. The misinterpretation of children of color's behaviors in these organizations creates shame and judgment for the families of these children, and this is concerning for parents. These thoughts consist of parents feeling like they are not doing enough and their children are viewed as "bad."

Community Conversation participants shared the following:

"Need to walk into a building and have representation."

"Little Black boys are put into a group in school while they are there, they look at them like: they have no pain, no fear, it's okay to put them here...this creates shame, being called loud, they're not loud this is "how we talk at home". Then getting referred to Child Find, etc. because they are culturally on track."

"Just had a baby 2020, no Black doctors..."

"You don't need to be a doula, to help someone raise kids."

"Stop over professionalizing the professions."



Provider Diversity (continued)

What you can do:

- Further outreach to persons of color in focus areas to gather additional information on the needs identified in this report. Utilize the same questions, as well as ask additional questions.
- The surveyor should be a person of color, preferably representing the community they survey.
- All agencies working within focus areas must actively search for, recruit, and hire a workforce representative of the community.
- Develop an action plan to recruit medical providers of color. Incentivize medical professionals of various backgrounds to work in focus zip codes.
- Policy actions must take place to offer competitive wages to medical professionals and social service professionals.
- The workforce must be trained consistently on their populations' cultural needs, languages, communication, and engagement style.
- Hire within the community:
 - Interpreters, when needed
 - Family Navigators who can support accessing services for their neighbors
 - Surveyors/researchers
- Promote individuals from diverse backgrounds.
- Services must be offered in Spanish and English.
- Hire/recruit diverse and multilingual leadership and front-line/field workers who reflect the communities they serve. These agencies include HMG PC implementing agencies, foster care, mental health, non-profit, etc. To hire persons of color the following should be considered:
 - Ask the community to identify potential community members to fill positions.
 - If a community member is identified, ask them to apply and/or hold interviews for identified persons.
 - Instead of formal applications, hold interviews with applicants providing discussions or summaries of their experience as it applies to the job posting.
 - Build relationships and rapport with community members and assess if they have the skills for positions.

Provider Diversity (continued)



What you can do: (continued)

- Offer opportunities and support within the community to encourage members to enroll in courses, colleges, certificate programs, and specific career or development training to become qualified to work at your agency. Funding ideas:
 - Work-study programs.
 - Work first programs.
 - Paid internships.
 - Policy changes.
- Pay community members for their lived expert experience.
- Move away from entering communities to “save” these communities. Instead, engage the community in becoming stronger. Provide natural support, leadership, and educational opportunities. The goals of the agencies should be to build the next leaders of the community to prevent child maltreatment. Parents need to feel they are part of the change. Families need to feel they have a say in what happens.
- Partner with existing organizations to gather more participants and continue to collect data on community needs. For example, connect with the Black Collective, Centro Latino, the Puyallup Tribe, and the Korean Women’s Association to develop relationships that can connect you to the community.
 - Identify leaders or encourage the development of leaders within the community to support the community.
 - These partnerships should create accessible opportunities for community members to have input and “buy-in.”



Provider Diversity (continued)

What you can do: (continued)

- Communication:
 - Advertise in a variety of formats: social media, buses, and large and consistent public service announcements, specifically regarding 2-1-1 services available.
 - Hold continuous community conversations with the families you serve to find out what is working and what is not, then adjust.
 - Understand not all cultures or ethnic groups communicate in the written word.
 - Community members shared that they would get fliers of accessible services, but when they would arrive at the location or request the service, the service or resources was no longer available.
 - Create a web page or phone number that has up-to-date daily accessible services for the community.
 - Create trust that when a community member needs something they will access that service in confidence.

Lessons Learned:

The hierarchy of the organizations must reflect the communities they serve as well as front-line workers. If agencies are unable to hire people that are reflective of that community, we must ask ourselves, why are we not actively developing ways and means to get community members employed? Or why are we not developing plans with the community while simultaneously offering opportunities for growth, so this is not a lasting issue? Too often, families feel stigmatized and judged when asking for support based on their appearance and the need for services. This is coupled with perceived attitudes of the workforce offering support to them. We need to utilize the community and families as experts and encourage the building/nurturing/connecting of natural supports by offering spaces, places, and opportunities to grow, with this we will begin to see families thrive.



Parent Education

Parent participants reported needing a variety of parenting education and support groups. Participants indicated it is important for this education to be available in various formats. This includes online, in-person, and different languages (i.e., Spanish and English). Parents want opportunities to increase their knowledge in financial literacy and parenting practice/skills. Parents want support groups, a place to ask questions regarding medical issues, and postpartum support.

Parents shared feelings of being deficient in their parenting skills and abilities, simply because they didn't have an answer to a child-rearing question, or because they needed additional support. Parents who lacked natural supports or had negative natural supports shared they do not have a lot of people to go to with questions.

Community Conversation participants shared the following:

"In order for me to succeed, we need mentors."

"No support in the minority community..."



Parent Education (*continued*)

What you can do:

Offer the community a variety of educational opportunities, including support groups. These opportunities should be continuous and incentivized to promote participation (i.e., providing child care). They should be held in different formats: in-person, via zoom, and hybrid. They should be facilitated by community members and/or be reflective of the community. Parents requested the following supports:

- Substance Use Disorder and Mental Health support (Recovery Support Groups such as Alcoholic Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, Overeaters Anonymous, Alanon, Celebrate Recovery) Peer support and Coaches.
- Support Groups (Parenting meetings, women's group, men's group, Teen Group)
- Educational Classes (Financial literacy, Career specialties, GED for individuals over 25, After school programs, Language Proficiency classes)
- Advancement Courses (Parenting Classes, Mentorship Programs)

Opportunities for parent education and support must be accessible to all community members regardless of background or economic status.

Lessons Learned:

The major themes from parent participants included growing the community by investing in the community to increase community buy-in and participation in educational opportunities. By developing community members and parents into leaders, they can then coach and mentor other community members into leaders. Community members could be offered employment, job experience, and scholarships to further their education, both related to parenting skills and workforce development. It is important to include the community in conversations about what they want in regard to their future, be creative with their options, and support them in achieving their goals.

Children's Activities



Children's activities are vital for the development of children. They need places to build partnerships with their peers, community, and bonding with their families. The community expressed that there was little to no free and/or low-cost opportunities for them and their children to participate in. Families want consistent access to community opportunities without the attached judgment of accessibility because they do not have enough money.

Community Conversation participants shared the following:

"...if you don't have natural supports to guide you to resources...looked at as a young black single mother with a child..."

What you can do:

- Advertise early and consistently upcoming community events and children's activities such as through social media, cultural stores in the community, WIC, diaper banks, and Door-to-door flyers
- Offer community days not based on income (i.e., Tacoma free days at the Zoo)



Emotional Support

If available, families look for emotional support within their natural resources. When natural resources are not available or have been exhausted, they look to community resources. Community Conversations informed us that families felt little to no emotional support when seeking resources within the community. This made many families feel defeated and alone during a time of need. It is evident the pandemic did not help alleviate this heaviness; it made the lack of support worse. Families often felt out of place, or judged for asking for support, subsequently, some families did not ask and instead sought other means of support. Through Community Conversations, parents expressed they wanted their voices and opinions heard. Incorporating families in developing their action plans for themselves and their community is vital to community self-sufficiency.

Community Conversation participants shared the following:

"As a young mother, there wasn't support."

"Not so structured that you feel uncomfortable."

"Young men need a lot of services these days for men, no services teaching young men to be men. We need more services for young men to teach them how to be men. My dad took me to the barbershop."

"People that don't look like us don't understand they can't really relate to us with what we are going through or what we need."

"Sometimes people need a purpose and I was resentful of my role as a parent because their dads weren't there."

"Someone to go to just to vent and connect with me on what I am feeling."

"It just takes time and positive effort, reaching out to each other to check in."

Emotional Support *(continued)*



What can you do:

- The ability to show empathy, passion, and genuine concerns for families.
 - Training on emotional support.
 - Training on cultural competence.
 - Being emotionally and physically present for families.

- Caseload reduction for front line workers
 - Allows the consumer to be heard and not feel like a number.
 - Allows workers to build rapport and trust.

- Train workers on how to identify mental health and substance use disorder concerns and have available services, should the family choose to engage.

- Be emotionally supportive
 - Listen to the family's needs.
 - Validate how families feel.
 - Ask the family what they want or need before giving providing resources.
 - Avoid judgment.

- Follow-up with families after appointments.
 - Whether this is the caseworker, peer support, i.e., follow-up will build rapport and trust with the family.
 - Physical and virtual safe spaces to “vent” without judgment or worry.



Notable Mention: Early Learning / Headstart

Several parents from the Community Conversations praised the work and model of the Early Learning/Headstart Program. Families reported feeling welcomed and helped by these agencies in the community. Their experiences with the staff and access to resources were supportive. This model seemed to effectively partner with families to provide access to resources, information, and rapport building with families and children. They also allowed the families to have open and honest dialogue.

Community Conversation participants shared the following:

"Without... Head Start program, I wouldn't have made it where I am today."

"...ECEAP, they always help me, there should be more people like her to put information out there.... early learning making sure they have information..."

"... other agencies could learn from ECEAP."

What parents appreciated most about this service model was the continued rapport building by staff, being included in knowledge about their children, and having access. This service model is effective if accessible. Children usually start this program at the age of three, but in most cases it is only available to families at or below 130% of the Federal Poverty Level. Expanding access through eligibility requirements or through a similar model for more children and families to have access should be explored.



The Ideal

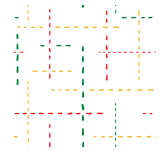
During Community Conversations, we asked providers to imagine a resource that would benefit the community with no limiting factors. The idea of a one-stop shop where families could enter and leave with tangible resources was identified. Multiple agencies, one hub, central to the communities that need it the most.

Community members illustrated a business model where they can participate in a variety of support groups, access community resources, build rapport with the agencies, and overtime. The community shared their biggest need, besides what was identified, was rebuilding their communities.

What you can do:

- Open a facility that is accessible to Lakewood, South Tacoma, Parkland residents.
- This facility must be open throughout the year with extended hours and days.
- Have child care on site.
- Provide multi-purpose rooms and spaces to support community gatherings and meetings.
- Rental spaces for local businesses, mostly owned by people of color who reside in that community and who agree to mentor other community members.
 - Ideas include haircare, braiding, barbershops, wellness studios, therapy, brokers, real estate, etc. The possibilities are endless.
- Multiple community providers/agencies in one location.
 - Supports a cut in overhead costs, the ability to share resources and information, promote unity and transparency to those you serve.
- Open floor plans that encourage play, wellness, and creativity
- Make the building décor people of color friendly and welcoming.

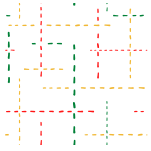
Conclusion



In the future, we would recommend all community partners and agencies be reflective of the communities they serve. We would caution agencies in making assumptions regarding the needs of community, specifically the needs listed in this report. Although there are always additional needs, we would ask that you set those aside and focus on what the community has requested. The reason for this is simple: to build trust in the community. You asked them what they wanted and needed to successfully raise and parent their families and to promote child well-being. Now it is time to deliver what they have requested. If this is not delivered upon, it would contribute to the existing feelings of the community feeling unheard, unimportant, and underrepresented.

Often, organizations and entities come into communities with great intentions; often providing singular local organizations with grants, resources, or funding opportunities. Organizations must be aware that the traditional siloed approach is no longer working. It is essential for partnering to occur between agencies in order to create lasting change. In order to expand access to resources, organizations must engage in sharing financial and staff resources.

Investing in the community is imperative to improve outcomes for children and their families in focus zones. Investing in the community is no longer supportive without investing in the individuals in the community. Giving parents of color a seat at the table is no longer enough; agencies in the community must change the way they respond and reflect the people they serve. Investing in individuals provides opportunities for learning, growth, education, and long-term career and financial success. We need to move away from providing goods and start providing long-term financial solutions, opportunities for growth, and sustainable solutions. Agencies need to equip the community with long-lasting supports rather than interim resources. When a community is built to be self-sufficient, it lessens the shame and stigma of asking for help and the community thrives. When the community thrives, parents thrive, and subsequently, so do their children.



Conclusion *(continued)*

We implore HMG PC and partners to continue learning from the community who are the experts of their family. Ultimately, families want to connect with other families. Communities want to be self-sufficient and reliant without the need to ask for support from larger entities. To reduce disparity and increase child well-being, spaces and opportunities must exist for families to obtain financial well-being, access support from other community members, and increase community bonding. Through these efforts, the community can build their natural supports and encourage individuals to show up for their neighbors. Families want activities, affordable and accessible child care, consistent access to food, and professionals who reflect their culture. Families want to belong and feel like a part of the solution. When consistently offered spaces, places, and opportunities for neighborhoods and communities of color to come together, it encourages the building of natural supports. As one participant stated: "Community resources can turn into natural resources."





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