



CHILD CARE & EARLY LEARNING

STRATEGIES FOR SUPPORTING FAMILY, FRIEND, AND NEIGHBOR CARE PROVIDERS

Millions of families rely on family members, friends, and neighbors to care for their children every day while parents are at work. These family, friend, and neighbor (FFN) providers make it possible for parents to get and keep a job and ensure their children are safe and well-cared for in a nurturing environment. Many families choose FFN care because they want someone they know and trust to care for their children. Parents working evenings, nights, weekends, or irregular hours may turn to FFN care because it is the only option flexible enough to accommodate their schedules. Families with children who have special needs may prefer FFN providers because they can offer one-on-one attention to the child. Low-income families often choose FFN care because they cannot afford more formal options, which are typically more expensive.

“Family, friend, and neighbor care” can be defined in various ways, but the term generally refers to home-based providers who are exempt from licensing; FFN providers frequently, but not always, are related to or know the families of the children in their care. FFN care is often viewed as very different from a formal child care center or preschool program. But it can still offer children a high-quality early learning experience—and given that many young children spend a significant portion of their time in FFN care, it is important that it does just that. A number of organizations are working with FFN providers to help them better promote children’s learning and development and school readiness and to connect them to federal, state, and local resources and benefits that help the providers themselves. These efforts to support FFN providers take a range of forms, depending on the needs of the providers, the

children in their care, and the communities in which they live. Although varied in their approaches, collectively these efforts demonstrate the tremendous potential for strengthening this group of providers who are so essential to families and children.

States and communities should look for ways that they can support and build on these FFN provider initiatives. They can make investments and design policies so that FFN providers can access supports that help them improve the quality of care they offer and so that parents who prefer this type of care can choose it.

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It may be challenging to devote resources toward FFN care, particularly given that the recent reauthorization of the federal Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG)—which aims to ensure the health and safety of child care, improve the quality of care, and facilitate families’ access to child care assistance—creates new requirements and expectations for states without guaranteeing significant new resources. Yet it is essential that states continue to ensure that FFN care is available for the many families for whom it is the best or only option, and to help bolster the quality of this care.

This report is based on the National Women’s Law Center’s interviews with leaders and staff from approximately 25 organizations (or networks of organizations) that have programs and activities to support FFN providers as well as on background information and materials from these organizations. The organizations were identified as having promising initiatives by FFN care experts and researchers and by state child care advocates. The organizations and



initiatives cited in this report to illustrate the various strategies for supporting FFN providers are described in more detail in the Center’s [Catalog of Strategies to Support Family, Friend, and Neighbor Care](#).

Who Is Served by FFN Provider Initiatives?

The FFN providers participating in these initiatives—across organizations—are primarily female, frequently relatives such as grandmothers and aunts, and often have low incomes. In many cases, these providers are isolated, and therefore greatly benefit from having these organizations reach out to them. Yet, in other ways, the FFN providers served differ from organization to organization. For example, while in some cases, the providers participating in the organization’s activities are largely native-born, in other cases, most or all of the providers are immigrants. Some organizations work with FFN providers who all speak English as their primary language, other organizations primarily work with Spanish-speakers, and a few organizations work with providers who speak a variety of languages. For example, Child Care Resources in Washington serves a community that includes English, Spanish, Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese, Russian, Amharic, Arabic, Somali, and Tigrinya speakers; to meet the needs of this diverse community, the organization makes materials and resources available in multiple languages and partners with community-based organizations whose staff have similar backgrounds to the families they serve.

Each organization adapts its activities and programs to its providers and its community, often adjusting along the way as it becomes more familiar with the population it serves, or as the population it serves changes.

In the case of some organizations, most or all of the providers they work with serve families who receive child care assistance to help cover the cost of care. In other cases, the organizations reported that their providers do not serve any families receiving child care assistance; the families may not be receiving assistance due to a variety of factors—for example, the families may earn too much to qualify for assistance under the state’s or locality’s eligibility guidelines, or they may be eligible for assistance but not able to receive it due to a waiting list in the state or community, or the providers’ immigrant status may make them ineligible to receive payment through the child care assistance program.

The providers served also vary across organizations in how they see their role as caregivers. Some organizations mostly work with providers who are caring for related children on a

temporary basis and who are motivated by family bonds and obligations, while other organizations work with those who are providing care on a longer-term basis and are interested in becoming regulated and making child care their career. Many organizations serve both categories of providers, as well as providers who start out providing care as a favor to a relative and end up viewing child care as their profession.

Each organization adapts its activities and programs to its providers and its community, often adjusting along the way as it becomes more familiar with the population it serves, or as the population it serves changes. For example, Child Care Resources in Washington, recognizing that many youth in the community were caring for their younger siblings and cousins before and after school, created the Brothers and Sisters Program tailored for this group; this program, which was developed with input from high school students, offers 32 hours of interactive sessions on child development, CPR and first aid, early childhood careers, and youth leadership.

What Types of Organizations Work with FFN Providers?

The entities developing and implementing initiatives to support FFN providers include various types of organizations, such as family resource centers, which connect families to community resources and services; child care resource and referral agencies, which assist families in finding child care that meets their needs and child care providers in accessing professional development opportunities and other supports; and non-profit organizations, which encompass a range of organizations seeking to help children, families, and communities.

In some cases, it is a union that takes a lead role in supporting FFN providers. Several states (including Connecticut, Illinois, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Ohio, Oregon, Rhode Island, and Washington) have authorized collective bargaining among home-based child care providers. The unions chosen by providers to represent them not only negotiate contracts with the state—which have typically included provisions for higher payment rates and improved payment processes for the child care assistance program, among other benefits—but also offer trainings, help in navigating the child care assistance program, and additional resources. For example, the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) won the right to represent family child care providers and FFN providers who serve families receiving child care assistance in New York City; of the 20,000 providers UFT represents, two-thirds are legally exempt. UFT offers FFN providers grants, training, and professional development. Affiliates of the American



Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) and the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) representing FFN providers in other communities and states offer similar supports and resources to these providers.

Some of the organizations with initiatives for FFN providers were established specifically to work with these providers, while other organizations work with all types of child care providers. Some are organizations that offer a range of community supports, and began their FFN provider initiatives because they recognized FFN care as one of the most critical supports for the children and families in their community. For example, First Steps, a public-private partnership that aims to strengthen and coordinate early childhood services in Kent County, Michigan, started its work on FFN care after community members convened to develop an early childhood plan and realized that many children in poverty were cared for by FFN providers and that these providers needed support.

What Supports Do FFN Provider Initiatives Offer?

The organizations with FFN provider initiatives employ a variety of strategies to improve the quality of care offered by FFN providers and the providers' own quality of life.

- **Education and training:** Many of the organizations provide education and training, typically in areas ranging from basic health and safety to promoting child learning and development to business practices. Some have developed a complete curriculum with a series of trainings. For example, the Colorado Statewide Parent Coalition offers training and other supports to providers through the Providers Advancing School Outcomes (PASO) program. Under this program, providers participate in 120 hours of training; sessions are offered on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 4:15 pm to 8 pm and providers are required to attend one session a week. The curriculum for the training, which was designed to align with the Child Development Associate (CDA) Credential, covers social, emotional, and literacy education as well as CPR and other safety training. The Cesar Batalla Family Resource Center in Connecticut provides an eight-week training series that covers topics such as child development, early literacy, discipline, nutrition, safety, and first aid and CPR. Other organizations have an array of offerings, and providers can select individual trainings that best suit them.

Sometimes organizations use their own staff to conduct these trainings, and sometimes they partner with other organizations. For example, in offering trainings to FFN providers, the United Way of Weld County in Colorado collaborates with other local organizations such as the Red

Cross (for first aid and CPR), Lutheran Family Services (for parenting classes on anger management and resource management), the Department of Human Services, the Health Department, and second-hand smoke and tobacco prevention organizations.

- **Home visits:** Some the organizations have staff visit providers' homes to offer them guidance on how they can improve the care environment and better support children's learning and development. During home visits, providers receive one-on-one advice and support and the home visitors model activities that providers can do with the children in their care. While home visits can be an effective strategy for working with providers, some organizations do not offer them—because they do not have sufficient staff to make visits to individual providers, or because providers prefer meeting with fellow providers in a community setting rather than having someone come into their homes, or for other reasons. For example, the Association for Supportive Child Care in Arizona has a Kith and Kin Project that included a home visit component for two years, but it was discontinued because providers preferred a group setting for receiving their training and support.
- **Play and learn sessions:** Caregivers attend these sessions with the children in their care and have opportunities to learn about activities they can do with children. Providers also have time to socialize with one another. Some play and learn models entail other supports for the children, such as developmental screenings. First Steps in Kent County, Michigan offers 90-minute Play and Learn sessions twice a month where experienced coaches—typically former teachers and principals—read a story and model teaching strategies for providers; providers receive the book and an activity bag with supporting materials to take with them. The YMCA of Silicon Valley has an Early Learning Readiness program (locally known as Nana Y Yo) where providers meet twice a week for 36 weeks for two-and-a-half hour sessions; sessions consist of circle time and a message for providers at the beginning, an hour and 45 minutes during which providers interact with children at 13 interest centers, and a closing circle.
- **Facilitating participation in the child care assistance program:** Some organizations help providers navigate the CCDBG program (the major federal child care program, which provides funds to states to help low-income families afford care). The organizations assist providers in qualifying for payment from the program when they serve eligible families, in receiving timely and accurate payment, and in understanding other aspects of the program. For example, the Children's Council of San Francisco's subsidy



provider coordinators hold an orientation meeting with 40 to 60 potential new license-exempt providers each month to help familiarize them with the child care assistance program and inform them about eligibility requirements for providers and parents, how to complete attendance sheets, when payments are issued, and who to contact with questions.

- **Support for participation in the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP):**

Depending on a state's policies, FFN providers that serve families receiving child care assistance may be eligible to receive reimbursements for the meals they offer to children in their care through the federally funded CACFP. These organizations play a range of roles related to CACFP—which may include informing providers about the program, helping them enroll, serving as the CACFP sponsor responsible for inspecting providers, and/or offering them related training on child health and nutrition. For example, the Family Enrichment Network of Greater Binghamton in New York, a CACFP sponsor, offers ongoing training to participating providers on topics such as child nutrition, food safety, menu planning, and physical activities. Illinois Action for Children, in its role as a CACFP sponsor, serves 250 FFN providers in Cook County; it has eight staff who administer the CACFP program and conduct monitoring, including four nutrition advocates who make three visits to providers each year as required by CACFP to ensure compliance.

- **Collaboration with other early childhood programs:**

A few organizations work to coordinate the services offered by FFN providers with other early care and education programs to support providers and to enable children to have a continuum of early care and education that fosters their learning and development while also covering their parents' work hours. Illinois Action for Children's Community Connections Preschool for All program offers a particularly innovative model for bringing together FFN care and preschool. On the four days a week children attend the state-funded half-day preschool program, the children's FFN providers can visit the preschool to observe classroom activities and the children receive transportation between FFN care and preschool. On the fifth day of the week when children do not attend preschool, the preschool teachers visit the FFN providers' homes for one-hour sessions with the child and provider, during which the preschool teacher demonstrates to the FFN provider how to have extended conversations with children and offers ideas for math and literacy lessons.

- **Connections to additional resources and benefits:** Some organizations help providers connect with resources that

can help support them and/or the children and families they serve. For example, Voice/Civil Service Employees Association (CSEA), an AFSCME affiliate that represents FFN and family child care providers who serve families receiving child care assistance outside of New York City, offers a two-and-a-half hour financial literacy course that includes information about tax deductions available to providers.

- **Peer networking:** A number of organizations offer opportunities for providers to network with one another through meetings or other interactions. The networks allow providers to learn from one another about caregiving strategies and useful resources and supports. These networks can be immensely helpful to providers, who are often isolated and who appreciate the chance to interact with other adults in similar circumstances. For example, Illinois Action for Children's Community Connections program holds weekly sessions for parents and providers that use a curriculum adapted from Community Organizing Family Issues (COFI) and the National Black Child Development Institute (NBCDI). Participants have opportunities to meet other caregivers, connect with resources in the community, build leadership and advocacy skills, brainstorm and collaborate, and gain knowledge.

- **Leadership development:** A few of the organizations aim to not just help providers improve the quality of care they offer to the children in their own homes but also to help the providers become leaders in the broader community. These organizations have initiatives that foster providers' leadership skills through trainings and experiences mentoring other providers. For example, Child Care Resources in Washington offers Early Learning Conversations with Communities, a peer education model in which parents, grandparents, and others receive training and support to facilitate conversations within their personal networks about healthy child development and school readiness. After receiving training, parent/caregiver leaders commit to hosting conversations on at least eight topics during the following six months; parent leaders receive ongoing support from Child Care Resources staff, including a monetary stipend.

- **Assistance in becoming licensed:** While not all FFN providers are interested in becoming licensed, and not all of the organizations emphasize it as a goal, many of the organizations give providers that wish to become licensed help in doing so. The organizations may cover fees for getting licensed, conduct a preliminary home assessment to determine what providers need to do to comply with licensing requirements, provide materials and equipment to



enable them to comply, and help them with the application process. For example, All Our Kin (which serves providers in greater New Haven, Bridgeport, Stamford, and Norwalk, Connecticut) has a full-time licensing coordinator who helps providers submit licensing materials and prepare for their state inspection; providers also receive four Tool Kit boxes with professional resources, health and safety equipment, toys, books, and curriculum materials. The Tool Kit program, a collaboration with the Connecticut Children's Museum, results in approximately 50 new providers receiving their licenses each year.

Many organizations implement several of these strategies in their efforts to support FFN providers. In some cases, an organization may offer multiple activities so that each provider can select the activity that best fits her interests and needs. In other cases, organizations may support each provider through multiple activities in order to reinforce information and lessons. For example, under its PASO program, the Colorado Statewide Parent Coalition supplements its training sessions with three-hour home visits at least twice a month; during these visits, providers receive coaching and mentoring on applying the skills they have learned at the trainings.

How Do Organizations Encourage FFN Providers' Participation?

Organizations use a range of strategies to encourage and maintain FFN providers' participation in their activities, including through extensive recruitment efforts, ongoing engagement, and financial incentives. The organizations also design their programs and activities in a way that makes it as convenient as possible for providers to participate.

Recruiting Providers

Organizations recruit providers to participate in their programs through a range of means, including word of mouth, mailings, text messages, emails, social media, phone calls, newsletters, newspaper advertising, and/or flyers distributed at libraries, laundromats, and other community locations. For example, the United Way of Weld County in Colorado recruits providers to participate in its activities by going out to churches, grocery stores, factories where a large number of their workers speak Spanish, and schools, and by having staff make presentations around the community. The United Way of Pinal County in Arizona uses its Facebook page and a private Facebook group for FFN providers to not only recruit providers but to maintain communication with and amongst providers. Some organizations partner with trusted community leaders to help recruit providers. For example, First Steps of Kent County, Michigan had school

principals help with outreach to providers. Several organizations reported that they identify providers to contact using the state's list of FFN providers receiving payment through the child care assistance program.

A few of the organizations are already a point of contact for FFN providers because they serve as the community CACFP sponsor or as the agency responsible for enrolling the community's providers in the child care assistance program; these organizations take advantage of this interaction to connect providers to other resources and opportunities. For example, Home Based Childcare Services, which offers a variety of supports for FFN providers, is the screening and enrollment agency for New York City families who receive child care assistance and use license-exempt care and for the license-exempt providers who serve them; the agency screens approximately 35,000 to 40,000 providers each year. The Family Enrichment Network in Binghamton, New York is the agency responsible for enrolling license-exempt child care providers in Broome, Chenango, and Tioga Counties that serve families receiving child care assistance and is also the CACFP regional sponsoring agency for registered, licensed, and enrolled license-exempt family child care providers.

Offering Incentives

To incentivize providers' initial and ongoing participation in their activities, many of the organizations offer monetary rewards or free materials to providers. Some organizations provide books, toys, and other supplies related to the training classes a provider attends. Some offer providers health and safety equipment—such as outlet covers and fire extinguishers—based on needs identified during home visits by program staff or outside inspectors. For example, providers participating in the Colorado Statewide Parent Coalition's PASO training program receive educational materials each week; over the course of the program, a provider receives \$1,000 worth of materials. The West Haven Family Resource Center in Connecticut offers providers free passes for six to a local children's museum after they complete Ages and Stages developmental screenings for the children in their care.

Some organizations help providers access financial benefits through the child care assistance program. For example, New York State offers a higher reimbursement rate for FFN providers that complete 10 hours of training; unions and other entities have helped providers receive this bonus by letting them know it is available, offering trainings needed to meet the criteria for this rate bonus, and assisting them with any paperwork or other administrative processes required to demonstrate they qualify for the bonus. Similarly, the Early Childhood Investment Corporation in Michigan provides



training and professional development opportunities to enable FFN providers to qualify to serve children receiving child care assistance (which requires seven hours of orientation training) and to then qualify for a higher reimbursement rate (which requires 10 additional hours of approved training each year).

Facilitating Access

The organizations also encourage providers to get involved in programs and activities simply by making it easier for them to do so. A number of factors can keep providers from participating. Providers can have great difficulty finding time to participate given that their work as caregivers frequently involves long hours, often during evenings, nights, and/or weekends—and they may be juggling this work with their responsibilities to their own families. The providers may lack their own means of transportation because they cannot afford to own a car. They may be reluctant to participate because of language or cultural barriers or because they do not feel comfortable going to classes or programs in an unfamiliar environment.

To address these and other barriers to participation, the organizations take a number of steps. They often offer classes at a variety of times to accommodate providers' schedules. For example, Home Based Childcare Services in New York City offers trainings on weekdays, weeknights, and Saturdays. Many of the organizations offer the trainings and other activities at community locations that the providers know and that are close to providers' homes or accessible by public transportation. The United Way of Pinal County in Arizona offers trainings for FFN providers in locations such as a library, a parks and recreation facility, and a charter school building; providers who do not have their own car to get to the trainings can use the program's private Facebook page to arrange a carpool with other providers. Vermont Birth to Five provides transportation to bring providers to and from activities. In addition, to help boost participation, the organizations frequently have food available during training sessions and offer child care for the providers' children.

Many of the organizations make classes and other materials and resources available in multiple languages. For example, Voice/CSEA offers trainings in Spanish and has bilingual staff to respond to calls from providers who have payment and other issues. The Association for Supportive Child Care—which serves about 1,600 providers in Arizona, approximately 80 percent of whom are immigrants—holds 90 percent of its trainings in Spanish and the remaining 10 percent in English, French, Arabic, or other languages spoken by refugee populations.

This report would not have been possible without the generous support of the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, Ford Foundation, Heising-Simons Foundation, and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation.

How Do Organizations Fund FFN Provider Initiatives?

These organizations—often with great difficulty—patch together funding from a range of sources to support their efforts on FFN care. Some receive federal and/or state funds, either for their organization as a whole or for specific FFN-related activities. For example, the Local Investment Commission in Kansas City, Missouri receives funding for its FFN care work from Educare, a state-funded initiative that provides resources, technical assistance, and training opportunities, at free or reduced costs, to child care providers. Illinois Action for Children's Community Connections Preschool for All program is funded through the state's Preschool Block Grant. The United Way of Pinal County's Family, Friend and Neighbors Caregivers Outreach Project is funded by First Things First, an initiative approved by Arizona voters that aims to support the development, health, and early education of children birth through age five.

A number of organizations demonstrate that with creativity, perseverance, patience, and respect for providers, they are able to develop effective strategies for improving the quality of FFN care and reaching out to providers—and as a result, make a real difference in the lives of providers, the children in their care, and their families.

In many cases, the organizations rely on private foundations. For example, Vermont Birth to Five's FFN activities are supported by the Permanent Fund for Vermont's Children, the A.D. Henderson Foundation, and the Turrell Fund, among other private foundations. Stratford Parents' Place, a family resource center in Connecticut, receives funding for its FFN project from the United Way of Coastal County.

Organizations trying to sustain initiatives supporting FFN providers must overcome a variety of challenges. It can be a struggle to build trust with providers and to obtain funding for the organization's efforts. While some states' and localities' policies may facilitate FFN providers' access to supports and resources through CACFP, the child care assistance program, the state prekindergarten program, or other programs, or by allowing providers to unionize, the policy context is not always so supportive for FFN provider initiatives. However, a number of organizations demonstrate that with creativity, perseverance, patience, and respect for providers, they are able to develop effective strategies for improving the quality of FFN care and reaching out to providers—and as a result, make a real difference in the lives of providers, the children in their care, and their families.

