



Portland Children's Levy
Community Engagement



investing in our future

Portland Children's Levy COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Executive Summary

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Research

REPORT GOALS



Present perspectives of diverse stakeholders on the services that are most effective and needed for children—especially children affected by historical inequities.



Identify community-based solutions to improve outcomes for children and families.

“[We need] services that are delivered, measured, and overseen by individuals from marginalized populations and that are representative of the faces and identities being served. [We need] services that aim to call out individual and institutional bias, identify systemic oppression, and reshape positions of power to welcome more diverse leaders. [We need] continuing education requirements for White-identifying persons to understand their privilege and the ways in which their holding [it] withdraws all of the air from the room of those that continue to be unseen and unheard by virtue of their identity.”

SERVICE PROVIDER

Every person deserves to be seen, heard, and validated. Empress Rules, a firm that works with organizations to create inclusive environments, collaborated with a skilled set of racial equity facilitators, translators, and community engagement specialists to collect input from diverse members of the Portland community on how Portland Children’s Levy funding should be allocated over the next 5 years. Because Portlanders themselves are the experts on what the community needs to lead healthy and vibrant lives, we conducted an interest questionnaire, a survey, and 8 focus groups to gather perspectives on the most needed services and community solutions for children and families.

Community-Based Solutions to Improve Children's Outcomes

Service providers need to have an awareness of the culture they are working within.

PARENT FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT

Collecting Community Input

The project team used 3 methods to collect community input over 4 months:

Interest Questionnaire

500 community members completed the questionnaire, providing information about their interests, experiences, and demographics.

Surveys

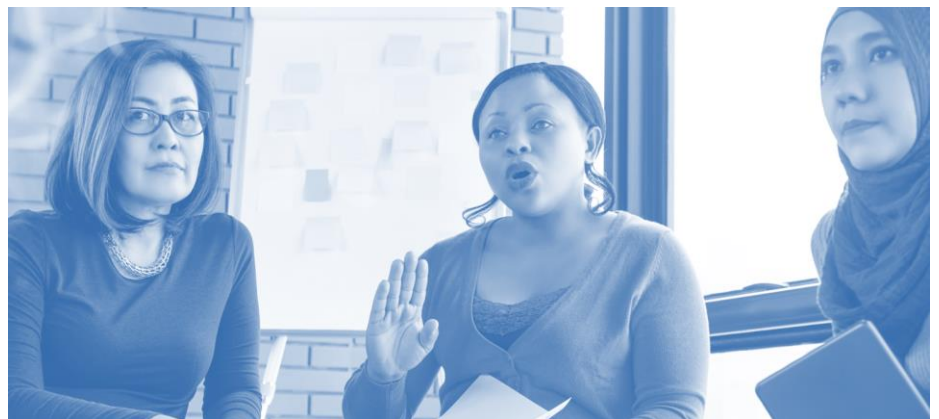
500 community members including parents, foster parents, service providers, and others provided information about most needed services.

Focus Groups

85 community members participated in 8 focus groups including 2 for youth, 1 for community members impacted by disabilities, 1 for community members impacted by foster care, 1 for immigrants and refugees, 2 for Spanish speakers, and 1 for service providers.

LEVY-WIDE FINDINGS

Across all program areas, community members expressed a desire for access to high-quality programming with flexible hours of operation, low- or no-cost food, transportation to and from programming, and centralized access to services and supports. Community members also described a need for more culturally responsive services. They requested, for example, more service providers and teachers who are people of color and represent the races and ethnicities—and speak the languages—of the communities they serve. Community members described a need for professional development for service providers and teachers, including trainings on cultural humility, unconscious bias, and the impact of trauma and racial injustice on children.



Finding quality child care is our biggest challenge.

SPANISH-SPEAKING PARENT

Parents need more help than the children themselves.

YOUTH FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT

PROGRAM AREA

EARLY CHILDHOOD

Community members described a need for culturally responsive early childhood services such as bicultural and bilingual home visits, child care, and Levy-funded programs. Providers suggested centralizing information about culture-specific service needs. Youth whose parents are immigrants described parents afraid to engage with state agencies because of attitudes toward immigrants in the current political climate.

One Spanish-speaking parent observed that finding quality child care is “our biggest challenge.” Community members need more affordable options that meet the state of Oregon’s teacher-student ratio requirements, last the entire work day, and have caring staff. Programs that promote early literacy, English as a second language, speech therapy, and occupational therapy should also be supported. To ensure kindergarten readiness, providers suggested that schools engage with families before their children start school.

Parents are tired and overworked and need intensive support ranging from assistance with transportation to child care and after-school activities to support groups that link parents with services and parenting classes. Providers suggested that home visiting programs could also provide support to families.

Community members described systemic barriers that prevent equitable access to early childhood services. Effective dissemination of information about services is needed—one immigrant suggested engaging bicultural community ambassadors to inform members about available services. Providers reported a need for more professional support such as union representation and support groups. Providers also asserted that indirect service providers such as judges, family law professionals, and child protective services staff need to be educated about the impact of racism and trauma on children’s development and mental health.



Having children complete their assignments during after-school programming allows families more time for bonding and relaxation in the home.

SURVEY RESPONDENT

Children's happiness and exercise are the key to making children grow up healthily.

SURVEY RESPONDENT

PROGRAM AREA **AFTER SCHOOL**

Students need academic support and tutoring to stay on track to graduation. Community members desired greater support for high-quality after-school programs with low teacher-student ratios that promote science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) education and offer opportunities for creative development such as singing, acting, and storytelling. Parents also noted a need for more physical activity programming, and several youth focus group participants advocated for life skills training (e.g., food preparation, money management, career exploration and training).

Communities need culturally responsive after-school programs that support the development of positive relationships and healthy behaviors. Noting that one child's behavior can challenge a whole class, one community member cited the importance of providing social-emotional support and identifying learning disabilities early. A Spanish-speaking focus group participant stated that some teachers do not understand cultures other than their own and asserted that after-school programs tend to cater to White students. Others echoed this desire for culturally relevant after-school programming, suggesting offerings such as East African cooking classes and sports popular in immigrant communities.

PROGRAM AREA **MENTORING**

Community members described a need for more experienced mentors with training on dealing with children's past trauma. Providers described a need for mentors who have a shared identity or experience with youth (e.g., racial, ethnic, religious, LGBTQ). Others suggested mentoring programs that support academic achievement, physical activity, relationship building, and social-emotional development.



We need to have more programs to help immigrant families understand what domestic violence looks like, what child abuse looks like. . . . Until you find out from classes or groups, you're not gonna know it's not normal.

SERVICE PROVIDER

Our foster care youth are disproportionately Black and Brown, end up homeless, and are being trafficked. They are commonly the most vulnerable youth. We need ongoing, dedicated resources to support them.

SERVICE PROVIDER

PROGRAM AREA

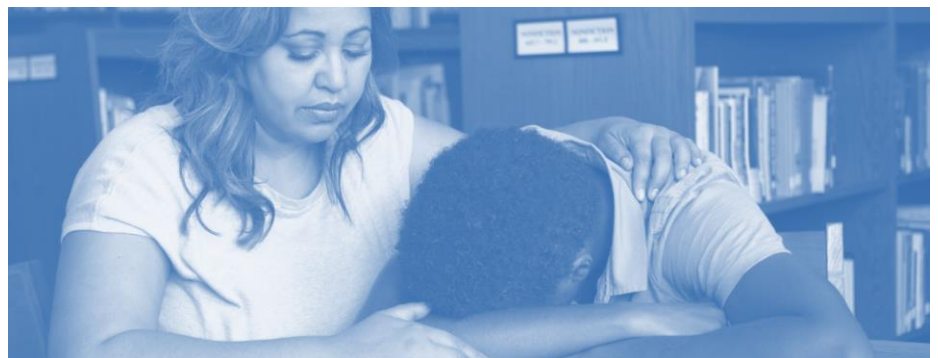
CHILD ABUSE PREVENTION AND INTERVENTION

Youth focus group participants cited a need for classes that educate parents about the impact of abuse on children's development and effective strategies for managing children's behavior. Several immigrant parents noted that physical punishment is viewed differently in other cultures, and recent immigrants require education on U.S. laws regarding abuse. Providers also requested training to recognize signs of abuse suggesting, in one provider's words, "Rather than mandatory reporting, have mandatory *inquiry*." Community members described a need for wraparound services to assist parents struggling with substance abuse, mental health issues, and domestic violence. In addition to addiction treatment and mental health services, families need housing, food, financial assistance, and medical care.

PROGRAM AREA

FOSTER CARE

Several foster parents stated a need for culturally responsive foster care policies—such as ensuring that children are placed with foster parents from the same racial and ethnic background—and mechanisms to ensure that foster children remain connected to their biological families. Other community members observed that safe visiting locations for parents and children are needed, and incarcerated parents need support to stay connected with their children. Foster children also require consistent relationships with supportive adults who are not related and contact with other foster children. Foster parents and providers emphasized the importance of educating foster parents about the impact of past trauma on children and providing guidance on creating a safe, structured environment and managing difficult behaviors. Additionally, foster parents mentioned needing access to mental health resources for foster children.



Hungry kids can't learn. Schools are not offering healthy, nutritious food and they should be the ones promoting it.

SERVICE PROVIDER

PROGRAM AREA

HUNGER RELIEF

Community members described a general need for access to fresh, culturally relevant, nutritious food that meets dietary restrictions. Families especially desire fresh, perishable food (e.g., meat, eggs, dairy, vegetables). Although community members value food banks, food is often expired and inedible. Transportation is a barrier to accessing food banks and could be mitigated with: mobile food banks or food trucks that brings food to specific locations each month; food banks located at convenient places such as schools and levy-funded programs; and transportation stipends. Parents and youth expressed a desire for food-related education such as meal preparation classes, budgeting classes, and smart shopping classes. School-based food programs are essential to hunger relief for children, however food offered at school meals is often of poor quality. Parent and youth focus group participants described shame about accessing food resources, especially resources that require releasing personal information (e.g. income). One provider suggested that programs could normalize access to food banks through advertising at libraries, schools, social service offices, and county health clinics. One Spanish-speaking focus group participant said that when schools send food home with *all* children, stigma of receiving the food is reduced. In general, parents also stated that information about food resources could be better disseminated.

CONCLUSION

Our work highlights the strength of diverse perspectives and the commonalities that we share as people. The Portland Children's Levy has been a kind response to historical inequities that have tremendously impacted people of color and people who face physical and economic challenges. We hope that these community perspectives are helpful in allocating the next 5 years of Levy funding.

