

Spark Connection Listening Team's Report and Recommendations

Executive Summary

In late spring of 2023, The Research Institute at West Oregon University (WOU) sought to engage parent/guardian and early childhood educator community input in redesigning the statewide Quality Recognition Improvement System (QRIS) - or Spark - a program designed to support, recognize, and communicate to families about high quality early childhood care and education programs.

WOU partnered with Community Wealth Partners (CWP) to support a listening, learning, and design process led by parents/guardians and early childhood educators through a Participatory Action Research process over a 16-week period.

A group of 15 members composed of parents of young children and providers of early child care and education was selected from over 350 applicants. The group was named Spark Connection and it reflects:

- A passion for supporting early childhood for the children and families of Oregon.
- A variety of Oregon counties - rural, suburban, and urban communities.
- Parents/guardians from a variety of family structures who care deeply about their children.
- Early childhood providers reflecting early childhood centers of various sizes and models.
- Strong connections to other parents/guardians and/or early childhood educators to gather and listen to their experiences.

This Executive Summary shares our major findings and recommendations based on our listening process. To see our full report, please access our presentation.

What we did

From April through August, our team made intentional outreach to listen to a representative segment of our communities. Our sampling data ensured that we were listening to people who live in rural areas, are living with low economic resources, and who identify as BIPOC or serve BIPOC families.

To start, we reviewed data from over 350 applicants across the state to identify major areas to look into. With an idea on what areas to explore based on the initial analysis, we then developed our listening instruments: a survey and an interview guide. We distributed the survey to 1,200+ people. In interviews and focus groups, we spoke with 50+ parents and providers who shared their experiences with us. Additionally, it was important to understand what the people who are

connected to the Spark system are seeing so we also listened to employees at different agencies/departments related to Spark, including:

- Spark Team
- QRIS
- CCR & R
- Early Learning Hub
- Department of Early Learning & Care

Recognizing that we, as parents and providers, have expertise and experience related to child care in Oregon, it is important to acknowledge that we had ideas and curiosities that came through in our survey questions. These include:

- To what extent are LGBTQ children and families feeling supported in their child care program?
- How are providers embracing the languages and cultures represented in their communities?
- What would drive up retention for providers?

The following pages include our major findings.

FINDINGS

From the survey and qualitative data we collected, we saw eight findings that we will highlight here.

Finding 1: Their child's **safety**, support for their child's **social-emotional development**, and having **flexible hours** is what parents want more of in child care

- 72% of parent respondents believe that their child care providers have the skills to support their goals for their children.
- 61% of parent respondents selected Social Skills/Connection with Friends as a top goal for their children in child care and 51% selected Social Emotional Development as a top goal for their children in child care.
- 59% of parent respondents said they are not offered care during non-traditional hours, such as late evenings and weekends.

Finding 2: For some families, **affordability and availability** of child care in Oregon are major obstacles.

- Across rural, suburban, and urban areas, there was a mix of parents who had an easy time finding child care and parents who had a hard time finding child care. In rural areas it tended to be more difficult to find.

Finding 3: A majority of parents **don't feel they have an actual choice** when it comes to child care.

- 68% of parent respondents indicated they don't have an actual choice in selecting child care for their children
- 37% of parents in rural areas say they don't have a choice

Finding 4: Parents of cisgender children feel their child's identity is supported but qualitative responses indicate that **LGBTQ+ parents and children don't feel supported.**

- 78% of parents selected a high satisfaction score (4 or 5) when asked "to what extent is your child's identity (e.g., gender, culture, etc.) been supported in your child care setting?"
- Qualitative data showed a sad reality that LGBTQ+ children and families feel fearful and are not accepted in the classroom.

Finding 5: Parents want multiple ways of receiving information

72% of parent respondents found it difficult to find information about childcare. People of color and parents living in rural or suburban areas tended to have a harder time finding information about child care than parents who are white and parents who live in urban areas.

How parents want to receive information from providers:

- 10 parents preferred all methods of communications (call, text, email, in person)
- 9 parents preferred phone and text only
- 6 parents preferred phone only communication
- 5 parents preferred text only

How parents want to find information about child care options:

- 19 parents indicated a desire for there to be an easy to search centralized web site that is updated regularly (incl. improve the existing ones for easier navigation)
- 6 parents suggested email and mailed materials to churches and community based organizations to connect with populations who don't access the Internet
- 4 parents would like there to be information exchanged between doctors, community organizations, and families with children in childcare.

Finding 6: Providers are passionate about what they do, but a majority say they are unable to take steps to prevent burnout and are **underpaid, understaffed, and have insufficiently trained staff.**

- 66% of providers indicated a 1, 2, or 3 (out of 5) to the question, “To what extent are you able to take steps to prevent burnout in yourself / your staff”
- 55% of providers indicated that they struggle to meet their basic needs (rent, food, bills, etc.)
- 53% of providers said an increase in pay and having benefits would help them meet their basic needs

When asked if more funding were available, where they would want those funds to go, providers said higher salaries, staff training, and subsidized care.

Finding 7: Providers are managing multiple stressors at once.

When asked what are the top stressors for providers, these four causes were mentioned the most:

- Insufficient staffing
- Children’s behavioral needs
- Insufficient time to plan, assess, do paperwork
- Staff not trained for what is needed

Finding 8: Providers want supports that helps them meet their needs in the classroom and a shift away from a system that feels punitive.

Insights from CCR&R system and partner Focus Group

- Coordinators have seen providers who could not progress past level 3 of Spark rating because of language barriers.
- Some providers with learning disabilities would benefit from being able to submit portfolios in different ways such as video. Coordinator went out of their way to help them type up the portfolio.

When asked what would make getting a Spark rating easier, providers selected

- Consultative TA services to assist providers who are operating, and
- Observations to assess what may be needed for their portfolio.

The trainings most selected as affecting the quality of care providers can provide were:

- Classroom behavior management
- Understanding and guiding behavior

- Human growth and development
- Trauma-informed care
- Self-care (to prevent burnout)

When asked what could make Spark a better support tool, some providers shared ideas, which are shared below in their own words.

- *Getting observations done*
- *By not allowing the ratings to be used as a criteria for state and federal funding. Allowing for differing philosophies of early child education and care receive higher ratings.*
- *Its use is in grant securing. Some people want to know if you have been assessed by a third party. That is Sparks only value. That's a lot of work when I work with community agencies that would willingly give a third party assessment.*
- *Recognition and support; More creativity; Labelization with meaning*
- *Really look at their regulations and requirements, and how that inhibits the learning and play of children*
- *Spark should be modified to be achieved by all programs throughout the state. If you want a program from Eastern Oregon to match Central Oregon you will find that will not happen as stated before we don't have the resources or funding to do so. Make the stars for centers and home providers different as a home is NOT a center and a center is NOT a home so to have the same requirements does not make sense.*

Conclusions & Recommendations

Based on what we heard and know from our experiences, we propose the following recommendations for the Spark Redesign and generally.

Recommendations for the Spark Redesign

- Remove star rating system and replace with a badges of competencies providers do and have meaning for parents (i.e., inclusion, safety, sensory-friendly, Head Start, Relief Nursery)
- Use coaches and strengths-based systems to support the development of providers (strength-based support to licensed, followed by strength-based growth support)
- Use observation to ease burden on providers to demonstrate quality
- Focus on attaining positive outcomes for providers so they can achieve positive outcomes for children
- Existing licensing be the marker for ECE providers and focus Spark on supporting the development of providers
- Offer rewards to teachers/directors of child care programs to prevent burnout and help them feel valued
- Provide resources and trainings to support social-emotional / behavioral support in the classroom

Conclusion and General Recommendations

In conclusion, without actual choices in childcare available to parents Spark and the quality of provider has no practical value to a parent in determining a program because many parents have to accept whatever is available/and or they can afford/be eligible for. Additionally, without addressing the lack of choice and affordability, the Spark system benefits providers with the size/capacity to participate and the parents who live in areas where there are more choices and can afford child care and leaves out many families and children. We believe that the realities of families' socio-economic realities are important to consider and a recalibration is needed to help families who on paper seem to be making enough but are struggling. To this end, we recommend.

- Make increasing child care options throughout the state a priority in Oregon, especially in child care deserts.
- Given that many parents need flexible child care options, create more rewards/incentives for child care settings that can offer extended hours and weekends.

- Direct resources to build a pool of substitute teachers for all programs to address provider stressors and burnout.
- Create an LGBTQ+ friendly designation providers can earn by attending Spark-led training on inclusion and safety for these families, and provide this training to any/all providers even if they don't plan to earn the designation.

APPENDIX

a. Open Comments from survey

How can training be better for providers?

- *More set two and three trainings*
- *Hands on and examples*
- *No ice breakers, cut to the chase*
- *Surveys out to providers to see what they would like to learn about not just assume independent study*
- *Access to a wide variety of accepted trainings that are free (there are a lot of good ones out there but are not in the budget)*
- *Support the coordination and funding when providers identify a specific training of interest that is cutting edge to the field.*
- *Just have it be really good. Always train to the next level. Do not meet people where they are that's where the repetitive boring stuff happens.*
- *"Refreshing is the key. Belonging to a group*
- *Backing up system"*
- *Same content, trainings need to be offered at multiple levels depending on your experience this offers a choice for staff to go into a training with experience and knowledge on the topic, and be able to skip into a place where they are ready to learn more about the topic*
- *Allow centers to be the leaders in the trainings, we know what our teachers need more information or want to learn more about.*
- *Have higher set trainings and trainings that fit with current needs of communities.*
- *Let people decide and participate in what trainings they feel is most relevant to them*
- *Give the choice of high quality trainings*
- *Not so many irrelevant required trainings*
- *I think it would be very helpful to have smaller group trainings with content that is relevant for those particular people. My teaching assistant last year was new, and she voiced this. She wished there had been a group for new hires, where they could discuss questions and resources. And she said that although the teacher trainings were interesting, she wasn't the one planning lesson plans, or doing conferences, so she felt that some of that was a waste of her time. Some trainings, such as how to report child abuse are good to review, but it isn't always great to have to sit through the same trainings every year. We tried to do this a bit with PLTs. But they were not very organized or effective this year. And not everybody got into the one they wanted.*
- *Offer certain trainings to new hires, but don't make them repeat every year.*
- *Give a survey before or let managers make the decision.*
- *More provider input on training topics needed, classes offered in-person and virtual and recorded, classes offered in the evenings or on weekends.*
- *Offer multi level trainings, give options/levels and let staff choose what to take*
- *More set 2 and 3 trainings offered*

- *More advanced trainings offered regularly. Greater variety of topics offered.*
- *N/A*
- *Trainings tailored to the specific environment the staff members are in.*

Is there anything else you would like to share around what's important to you or ways to support you as a provider?

- *Needing more affordable set two and three trainings*
- *It frustrates me that many important things are only cared about when we have an inspection from the childcare division. I wish more of my colleagues genuinely cared about following the rules.*
- *How about a childcare center at the community college so parents can attend school full-time and visit their child on campus. The childcare center can be a teaching site for students learning to be teachers and caregivers.*
- *Our EOCCR has been working hard providing great trainings. We need more grant opportunities for rural areas*
- *Please ask us when you try something new. More piloting. Make opting in less punitive and time intensive. Let us use our time to improve our programs and less time proving it. Please make the quality rating criteria at least related to cutting edge ideas in the field and closer to what parents are basing their decision on.*
- *Appreciate an opportunity to express what teachers need in order to support our children!*
- *Support is key*
- *Trust teachers they already do a very important job caring for our children, it requires them to be present, thoughtful and be safety focused all the time for very little compensation and they are always being evaluated and monitored at a more intense level then Dr, nurses, counselors, engineers*
- *Support from those that are suppose to support or a way to seek support that will assist when needed.*
- *Early child care/teaching is such an important role but also such a tough one to do day after day. Support these people to no end and help ease the stress that drives them to other professions.*
- *"We are expecting way too much of our young children*
- *Families are in crisis*
- *Violent media is having a great impact on classrooms. Families have no idea how much media is affecting classrooms in a negative way."*
- *I just want to be recognized and validated. I work really hard and parents voice their appreciation on the last day of school. But then the rest of the year it can be tough. But the kids make it worthwhile. And that's the reason I'm here. I do love my job in the work than I do is important!*
- *I love my job ,but I would really love to get paid like a school district professional. I have multiple degrees and 20 years experience, but my wage does not reflect that.*
- *"Eradicate the divisive DEI nonsense so pepper can focus on the actual job.*

- *Increase salaries substantially, so that they actually reflect the importance of the work being done as much as the regulations do."*

PARENTS: What has your experience been like in finding accessible and inclusive care for your child? (responses from parents in rural and suburban areas)

- *It's been difficult but we manage*
- *It's been very difficult.*
- *Hard to find child care, let alone child care that i trust to have my children.*
- *My oldest (of two) child is in a childcare facility (head start) to which I feel the accessibility has been great. However my youngest (1 year) is unable to start school for another year minimum and I haven't found anyone I would trust to watch him in home or anywhere outside If a head start program.*
- *Not the easiest.*
- *Hard locally, but very fortunate for the tribe.*
- *My youngest child was on a wait list at 2 different childcare facilities for 2 years prior to being offered a spot at 16 months.*
- *I felt supported all through,My family has been there for me,My community especially Black moms local support group has been of so much help ,they helped me through my worst financial times*
- *It has been hard to find good fit for my child. My children have a hard time leaving my side and building relationships with new people.*
- *Very Limited*
- *It's been good*
- *Good, but I know other parents have troubles*
- *Fortunately, it has been easy for me.*
- *CAIRO has been amazing and one of the only we found offering inclusive and culturally responsive care*
- *Terrible very little to no openings*
- *Good*
- *i've only had childcare through the school i go to and family and the experience i've had has been great*
- *Terrible*
- *Very difficult considering I live in a very rural area.*
- *Around our area it is very hard to find childcare*
- *It has been nearly impossible I have had to train my own support using friends and family that I already knew.*
- *Very limited care available in our area*
- *Good child care is expensive*
- *It was nearly impossible. I had to be a stay at home parent to care for our children.*
- *I have found it mainly through school and other parents.*
- *Hard to find and very expensive.*
- *Good*

- *It's been good with ILA, trying to figure out how to navigate the greater public school system beyond preschool.*
- *Great*
- *Not great*
- *I got lucky and there was a spot open right when I called to place my youngest when he started to attend Giggles & Grace.*
- *Sometimes it's better to listen to the parents of other kids*
- *There is very limited options available in my region and I ended up putting my children in a program with staff who didn't know how to work well with children and resorted to demonstrating they were in control and punished them when there was a problem instead of finding out the root cause of behaviors. Said things like "this program isn't designed for children who aren't typical" and "they need a special school." Only spoke to me when there was a problem. Spoke very poorly about my children. I didn't have any other option because I needed to work. It broke my heart and harmed my children.*
- *Not a walk in the park. It was harder than i thought*
- *It's been easy, but we also have money to pay for it.*
- *It's been okay. I would love for my children to experience a lot of diversity.*
- *We were able to quickly find a qualified, caring, and skilled provider but she does not have backup so there are frequent times when our child cannot attend. She is also not close by, and we are finding few options other than small, in home options near her eventual Head Start and elementary school so bussing to or from care will not be an option*
- *Extremely frustrating. There is no public ECE in Eastern Oregon that my family qualifies for. We ended up begging an acquaintance and paying university students 15-20 an hour to help us.*
- *challenging. We currently use a friend and/or I work from home*
- *I have not been able to find childcare that our family feels good about utilizing. There are currently only two preschool options in our town. There is (hopefully) a new preschool option beginning soon that sounds promising.*
- *I have been unable to find affordable child care openings.*
- *Hard*
- *I got lucky in getting on a wait list at 5 months pregnant in McMinnville. Then, Covid hit and the center director called wait list families to see if they were still going to attend after "lock down". I confirmed yes both my husband and I still had jobs, so we were able to continue and the center was able to survive financially with the director's savings and commitment from other families from after initial Covid. Otherwise, if the center (Care for Kids in McMinnville, OR) was not able to financially survive, I am unsure what my child care situation would be and if I would be working. I love working and am so very grateful for my son, which will be our only child, to go to care with his friends and teachers every day. Initially, I only had 3 days of care a week and had to stay home one day a week and grandparent care the other until space opened in the infants about 6 months later and then he was able to go full time closer to the age of one.*
- *It was very difficult to find childcare on the east side of Oregon! We do not have many options!*

PARENTS: What has your experience been like in finding accessible and inclusive care for your child? (responses from parents in urban areas)

- *It has been relatively easy.*
- *"It has been smooth and very easy for all the times I've really sourced for it, although its with the help of schools and Family members*
- *Although it has seen quite a struggle to get a child care that has a direct partnership with Specialist like Special education teachers and therapists or counselor."*
- *We could not find preschool care for my oldest (this was school year 2020-2021). The preschool for all initiative made it possible for me to find an option for care for my son this year. Outside of school, we have been unable to find care for our children.*
- *It has been a great experience. It was hard to find the free preschool sign up initially.*
- *I felt like the pre-school for programming was accessible and inclusive for childcare.*
- *It's been surprisingly easy but I know how to navigate resources*
- *It's been amazing. CAIRO is an incredible organization.*
- *It has not been the best I feel as a teen parent I am not heard by doctors in the area.*
- *Sometimes I don't have the time to take care of my children, so I have investigated different types of care options and talked to other parents*

PARENTS: How could it be easier to access childcare information?

- *Mailed information, unified data online, link from PPS site, there isn't a lot of unified info about preschool for all or any other place to start looking for child care*
- *Easier to use website. Places to pick up paper application. More advertising of where and how to sign up.*
- *Connect with 211, regular contact & updates with community/family organizations*
- *Centralized database online broken down by regions*
- *Not sure*
- *Centralized site like FB or another social media page that's easily accessible and engaged with often*
- *I'm not sure.*
- *a centralized website*
- *More info on websites*
- *Maybe a site built with info in your area*
- *more trustworthy apps, sites or centers*
- *Put it in the mail, or have vendors set up at stores or churches. Not everyone has social media or internet access*
- *Email*
- *Our area just doesn't offer enough childcare so I don't think it's advertised because there isn't any*
- *If more childcare workers advertised*
- *They should be a centralized online platform where parents can easy go to, to get the relevant informations on childcare information and probably childcare providers.*
- *One place for reviews*

- *So much is depressed in the name of not slandering a business or in institution and people need to be free to speak out completely about their experiences without fear of reprisal.*
- *Updated websites*
- *More reviews on yelp*
- *doctors could be well versed in which providers would suit specific children and refer parents.*
- *An app with certified quality people.*
- *If the childcare facilities had up to date easy to use websites.*
- *The state website could be easier to find and navigate.*
- *Childcare fairs with different booths for different places*
- *One page for all, weekly monthly articles sent through email or posted. Everything is digital now.*
- *Unsure*
- *Community web page/newsletter*
- *n/a*
- *Having information easily identifiable in social media or other internet platforms*
- *One location that has more information about child care programs like photos of the space, examples of activities/experiences for children, examples of how they involve families, and maybe even family testimonies/reviews.*
- *Have a site or one place to look up all current options and information about each site local to me and my family.*
- *Update the website interface*
- *"The ones available should make themselves more visible through the many available platforms.*
- *Get more reviewers of the industry"*
- *A reasonable use of the Internet to search for childcare information on websites would make it easier for me to access*
- *It's easily available on Google and from community leaders.*
- *Ask the parents who have children in childcare around you and go to see for yourself.*
- *A social media page/website for the community with all childcare providers listed and their availability.*
- *standardized one-page fact sheets that include a range of important information and metrics, such as operating hours, tuition cost, food provided, class-size, teacher pay, teacher turnover, parent ratings, etc.*
- *I wish it was more upfront about what childcare costs, it's so hush hush I feel like. So many factors come into play but it's so all over the board with how much to pay someone for drop in care.*
- *One site with a rating system and information regarding licensing, monitoring results, staff experience, years in business, facility information and pictures*
- *Childcare is marketed by the state to some extent, but it is not provided or funded. It is like the cyber truck, "look at this amazing thing, but you can't get it".*
- *There are a lack of childcare options in our area... it's not so much a lack of information as a lack of options*

- *The information is out there and somewhat easy to find. There just aren't enough providers. They are forced to follow so many overreaching regulations that no one wants to provide childcare any more. The regulations are too demanding of their time.*
- *More ads*
- *If centers could submit their center information and availability on a central website, that would be great. I am also a home visitor, so then that would be easy for me to look up for families. But, I don't want centers to have to do more work. Something every 3 months that centers could submit basic info on as updates are available and parents could view for location, ages, openings, name, contact.*

b. Acknowledgements

Spark Connection would like to thank Western Oregon University and the Spark team for supporting this project and the tremendous efforts and work you do to support families and providers.

A special thanks to the individuals, parents and providers, who participated in our survey and focus groups. We hope that we have accurately conveyed your feelings about child care and the Spark program.

We would also like to thank the team at Community Wealth Partners, Maria Fernandez, Idalia Fernandez, and Walter Howell, who facilitated this process and supported our work.

c. Bios of the Spark Connection Team



Bethy Annsa

My name is Bethy Annsa, and I live in Eugene. I have four children ranging from preschool to teenage. As a queer Latinx person and parent of neurodivergent children, I wanted to share my perspectives and experience with early education. It's been an honor to advocate, collaborate, and ensure that the feedback from my communities is included in this process.



Bruna Pimentel

My Community: Togetherness. Our small town, Cave Junction, is diverse in all aspects: racial, cultural, economical, and political. When it comes to our children, we all come together to make our community a safe place for them. My community believes that teaching and raising at least one generation to be kind and respectful, we can change the future of the our valley while showing our children how to love and care for it and one another.

My History: I am a dedicated learner and am passionate about keeping children safe. I am a Brazilian immigrant who moved to Cave Junction over 8 years ago. I am a mother of two, a preschool teacher, and the bookkeeper at Art and Science Kids - an outdoor program providing care to children in the Illinois Valley. Joining this team meant my voice and my community's voice would be finally heard and we could be hopeful to see change in providing more quality care programs to ALL children.

Bios of the Spark Connection Team



Chelsey McAlister

I am from Pendleton Oregon, “The Real West”. Pendleton is an agriculturally-based rural community that also finds pride in ranching. I am a mother of three beautiful children, a wife, sister, teacher, and leader. I am a Program Director at Pioneer Relief Nursery. Everyday I see the shortages my community has for family support, child care, and preschool. I joined this team in hopes to help identify concerns and offer solutions that can help advance these areas for future generations in this community.



Chyanne Schlappie

Who I am: I am a Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde tribal member. I live and work on my reservation serving my tribal community primarily through youth and family outreach. My passion is to help my people heal and thrive. My partner and I are enjoying the amazing adventure of raising our 3-year-old son, Bennett.

My community: My homeland is filled with strong, resilient, and beautiful indigenous people. My mother, partner, and friends are my main supporters. And everything I do, I do for my son.

My story: I was born and raised in Salem, OR. At the age of 10 we moved away from city life to reconnect with our native culture. My mother raised me and my two brothers. In reconnecting with my traditional roots, I learned of inter generational and historical traumas and found passion in helping others on their healing journeys. I earned my bachelor's degree in Psychology and started working as a Family Partner for my tribe 2.5 years ago. As a Family Partner I help families in my community connect to resources and culture to promote stability and connection.

Bios of the Spark Connection Team



Hadiatu L. Johnson

My name is **Hadiatu L Johnson** and I was born in Sierra Leone and an American citizen, I'm a mother and a devoted Christian and I live in Beaverton, Oregon. I am an enthusiastic preschool teacher at Education Explorer LLC, a diverse child care program that caters for all children. I am also a member of New Song Ministry, a close-knit church community which is situated in MLK in Portland, Oregon. I am passionate about child care and joined this team to contribute to the well-being and development of children. As part of this team, it has allowed me to connect with other child care professionals and share experiences and knowledge. It

has been a rewarding journey to be part of this listening community that values the importance of early childhood education and supports one another in this important work. As an infant/toddler teacher and early education educator, this program has helped in identifying the importance of childcare programs, accessibility and inclusivity for all regardless of race, background, identity and economic status. The exchange of childcare knowledge between and among service providers, emphasizes common values and understanding.



Jennifer Rodrigues Bell

My Community (something about your community, its characteristics, etc.) *My community can be found anywhere there are parents, teen moms, Brazilians, and anyone looking for friends.*

My History (who are you, how do you identify, what would you like the readers of the final report to know about you. If you would like, you can share how you are connected to child care and early learning programs and why joining this listening team was important to you.) *As a mother of two boys and a*

leader in a non profit working with teen moms, I want to help contribute to enhancing child care programs.

Bios of the Spark Connection Team



Jessie Carpenter

HISTORY: I am a white, cis-gender woman in my 40's. I am the parent of a 14-year-old son, and a respite provider for foster children. I am originally from Idaho, but I have lived in Oregon for almost 20 years. For 16 of those years, I have worked at Relief Nursery in Eugene and Springfield. Relief Nursery is a family support organization serving families raising children birth through age 5 who are experiencing multiple stressors. One of the many services provided by Relief Nurseries is the Therapeutic Early Childhood Program, a classroom model that focuses on social-emotional development and building resilience while also providing home visiting and parenting support to families. I have been a teacher and home visitor, a supervisor, a trainer, and most recently the Deputy Director of Quality Assurance. I have appreciated the opportunity to join the SPARK listening team because I care about quality early childhood programming, and I value the way that this process has elevated the voices of experts – parents of young children and the professionals who work in early childhood settings. No system can be successfully designed without input from those the system is intended for.

My community: In addition to my siblings, my partner, and a few close friends, I am grateful to have a community of colleagues at Relief Nursery who contribute, each in their own way, to making Lane County (and all of Oregon) more supportive of parents and young children. For many of us, this is more than a workplace. It offers a sense of purpose, inspiring examples of resilience, and unending opportunities to learn and grow.



Robert M. Kleng

My Community (something about your community, its characteristics, etc.)

Eastern Oregon has breathtaking landscapes, from majestic mountains to fertile valleys and picturesque high deserts. My vibrant community embraces a rich cultural heritage celebrated through festivals and museums. Its tight-knit and welcoming spirit fosters a warm atmosphere, has a thriving agricultural industry, and many opportunities for outdoor enthusiasts.

My History (who are you, how do you identify, what would you like the readers of the final report to know

Bios of the Spark Connection Team

about you. If you would like, you can share how you are connected to child care and early learning programs and why joining this listening team was important to you.) I am a Head Start Director where I work to build connections, foster empowerment and enhance resiliency. I was born, and raised in La Grande then spent many years living and working worldwide, always knowing that I wanted to return to Eastern Oregon to raise my own family. My wife and I have two young children, and like all proud parents, have made them the center of our world. I believe that improving early childhood care and education is the best public investment that can be made and the key to bringing equity into every community.



Sage Halvorson

I live in rural Oregon, and am the parent of one preschool age child. I have learned a lot about the issues, limitations, and successes facing Oregon families and childcare providers today by having the opportunity to be on the Spark Connection Listening Team.



Shawn C. Reynolds

My community and those surrounding Ontario, Oregon are diverse by virtue of its land and people. We are the Four Rivers region, which created a centralized location for us to gather and make a life sharing water in a desert area during the days of the Oregon Trail to present day. The Owyhee Dam and Reservoir, which served as the blueprint for the Hoover Dam, has allowed us to flourish agriculturally. The heritage within our community is rich in Basque, Hispanic, Indian, Japanese, and European ancestry. We brought water to the desert and it brought us together as well as our cultures that have beautifully blended thereafter. We are a diversely acclimated community that loves our children dearly, and despite limited funding in an economically poverdized rural frontier, we work together to ensure the future of our children for generations to come.

Bios of the Spark Connection Team

Aside from the history of my community, I am a blessed and proud husband and father of two children, one girl and one boy, in addition to being a community leader/voice for Early Childhood Education at the helm of Giggles & Grace. I am an advocate for children, disability services/supports, and a coach/mentor as the Assistant Track Coach for Treasure Valley Community College. I also manage/own my own personal business, SpeedGoat Cleanup & Removal, that assists in the beautification of our community and surrounding areas. In my community, I am connected with children all the way from infant to young adult. Once I tried on these pairs of shoes as an Executive Director of Giggles & Grace and advocate for children and local communities, I knew I had found my calling and business home. For that reason, I was ecstatic to join the Spark Redesign Listening Team as we seek to advance child care in Oregon and beyond!



Sheila Ward

My community: My community is daycare providers, teachers, caregivers, who are all advocates for families and their children.

My History: I am a mother, wife and an advocate for families, childcare providers and children. I have worked in the childcare field for over 30 years. I wanted to be part of the listening team to continue my work advocating , and giving families a voice in their community.



Teri McClain

My name is **Teri McClain**, and my family and community are made up of African American, Russian, Latin, and multi-racial descents. My people are inclusive of any human who chooses love over hate. We support each other, and are committed to helping each other with personal and emotional growth. There are lots of struggles with most families, but we are there for each other through it all. It takes a village to raise a child. And my diverse little village is pretty awesome.

Offering child care services is one support that I bring to my village. I provide care for young parents struggling mentally and financially. I offer a lot of pro bono hours for mothers in crisis, or for those trying to get on their feet. I provide care for children with mental health issues that other providers can't care for. I offer care after hours and on weekends. I know how difficult it can be to find childcare when you have no money or family to help. Having childcare can make the difference between having a job and home, or living on the streets with your children.

Bios of the Spark Connection Team

A trustworthy provider is critical to parents and to children. That is why I joined this listening team. I wanted to contribute to this process, and speak out for the voiceless parents who need hope. I am privileged to be a part of this group to improve the childcare system, and serve all Oregon families and children.



Tram Gonzales

Tram Gonzales, my community are families who are underserved and are from the BIPOC community. I have worked in early childhood for over 10 years and have my Master in the Education field. I am a first generation immigrant. I wanted to be a part of the listening team to understand the needs and concerns from the community we serve. It was a privilege to be a part of a working change, to help parents and provider voices to be heard.



Dr. Massene Mboup

Dr. Massene Mboup is a School Administrator, entrepreneur, a Lake Oswego city Councilor Mboup, an educational scholar, and community volunteer. He is an immigrant from Senegal, West Africa. Massene and his wife Patricia moved to Lake Oswego in 2011 to create a French Immersion School.

Massene holds a Bachelor of Arts in Linguistics, a Master's Certificate in American Literature and Civilization from The University of Dakar, and a Doctoral Degree in Education from Portland State University.

Before being elected to the Lake Oswego City Council, he was a member of the Lake Oswego School District Legal Budget Committee and the City of Lake Oswego Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion task force. Dr. Mboup is also a board member of the antiracist organization Respond to Racism.

Amran Noor