

# Equipo de Escucha - Listening Team's Report of Findings and Recommendations

## Executive Summary of the Report and Presentation

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In late spring 2023, Western Oregon University (WOU) Research Institute sought to engage parents/guardians and early childhood educators in the redesign of the Quality Recognition Improvement System (QRIS) – or Spark – a program designed to support, recognize, and communicate to families about high-quality early care and education programs.

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

From more than 96 candidates, a 15-member group of parents of young children and early care and education service providers was selected. The group was called the Listening Team or Equipo de Escucha (in Spanish) and reflects:

- A commitment to supporting early childhood for Oregon children and families with a variety of experiences with the Spark system and early childhood education.
- A variety of Oregon counties: rural, suburban, and urban communities.
- Parents/guardians from a variety of family structures who care deeply about their children (e.g., grandparents, siblings, etc.)
- Early childhood providers reflecting early childhood centers of various sizes and models (e.g. at home, central places, etc.)
- A network of connections with families and providers from a variety of nationalities, races, ethnic and indigenous groups, immigration statuses, and experiences with children reflecting a diversity of strengths and needs.

This summary presents the main conclusions and recommendations of our listening process. To view the full report, access our [presentation](#). A detailed analysis of the listening process was also prepared to accompany these reports.

## Our Process

From April 2023 to August, our team conducted intentional outreach to listen to a representative segment of our communities. Our sampling data made sure that we were listening to people who live in agricultural areas, who live with low economic resources, and who identify as Latine or Spanish speaking, but not exclusively.

To start, we reviewed data from more than 90 applicants from across the state to identify the top areas to investigate. With an idea of which areas to explore based on the initial analysis, we developed our listening instruments: a survey and an interview guide. We distributed the survey to approximately 550 people. In interviews and focus groups, we spoke with 364 parents and providers who shared their experiences with us. In addition, it was important to understand what people who are connected to the Spark system see, so we also heard from employees from different agencies/departments related to Spark, including:

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

In total, we heard from over 500 people and much of this total (364) was face-to-face, in interviews and focus groups. To do so, some of us traveled for more than 2 hours to meet them at their workplaces; Others of us organized barbecues for several families. We learned during this process that for many people in the community, the survey and survey questions were barriers to participation. Our report represents the issues we heard.

It is important to also recognize that we, as parents and providers, have knowledge and experience related to childcare in Oregon and that we had ideas and curiosities before we began the listening process that were reflected in our survey questions. These included:

- What practices do providers have about nutrition?
- What are the educational practices and tools that families use in their homes?
- Inclusion - How do families feel included - is there discrimination based on language, immigration status or special needs?

The following pages include our main findings and recommendations.

## Findings and recommendations

We begin our report with four key takeaways that emerged from the process of listening about what is important to families in our communities. These four areas represent what matters most to families when it comes to caring for their children:

- Have childcare options in their areas that are accessible (close to where they live and/or work) with schedules that fit their work hours.
- The cost of childcare is affordable.
- Language is not a barrier to accessing state resources and participating in their children's conversations with their teachers/providers.
- That they can trust the childcare center because it has trained staff and an environment prepared for their children to be safe.

These areas indicate that families face multiple barriers to accessing childcare and that they doubt whether the training and preparation of staff and center settings are at the level needed for their children to be safe. It is with this information that we formulated our recommendations.

### **Recommendation 1: Grow childcare options and make them more accessible to families, especially in agricultural areas.**

The first three obstacles families face when choosing childcare identified by parents who completed the survey were:

- **Lack of space** in childcare centers, especially during the hours they need it.
- The **cost**
- Language

The survey data and conversations we had confirm that for families living in agricultural areas, these obstacles are even more acute. When it comes to finding childcare, parents look for a site that is located in their community, affordable for their budget, and accommodates their work hours. All these factors were named as obstacles and families find it difficult to find what they need. In addition, for some families, the lack of information in their primary language is an additional obstacle they have to navigate.

When parents search for information about resources and childcare, the survey showed that more parents tend to rely on three sources of information:

1. Other parents or parent centers
2. Schools/teachers and other professionals (such as doctors)
3. Other organizations in the community (NAEYC, the bookstore, Peggy's Primary Connection, educational institutions)

Finally, many of the parents who responded to the survey indicated that they want their children to have bilingual programs where they can learn in English and Spanish.

**Recommendation 2: Invest resources so that childcare centers are better prepared (in their environment and staff training), to care for children with different abilities, needs, and so that parents have confidence that their children will be well cared for.**

The findings indicate that parents want providers to have the training to care for their children with different abilities, such as children on the autism spectrum. We considered these data:

- 85% of parents feel unsafe leaving their children with untrained providers and this is in addition to their experiences that some childcare centers receive certification (and enrollment) without doing a study of which people live in those areas. Many parents spoke of the lack of quality in the centers, which are committed to children and their development.
- Most providers indicated that the areas most in need of training to improve quality of care were related to special needs and bilingual education.

We noticed a need for children's centers focused on children with disabilities, including children on the autism spectrum. And many providers chose training to teach children with special needs as an area where they want more training.

It is also important to explore the number of centers that do not have the ramp for children who need a wheelchair. Other parental concerns were directed at nutrition, lack of understanding, good practices, and trainings with children with disabilities or special needs. This could reflect the lack of knowledge, training, and follow-up by various organizations.

## **Recommendation 3: Reform Spark so that training is accessible to more providers and prevents them from being overburdened.**

Spark's reform should consider the experiences and suggestions of the providers. What emerged in this process was that:

- Providers require a more accessible and simple solution that allows them to enhance and improve the quality of their program, supported by the right resources and guidance.
- Creating Spark's physical portfolio presents challenges, as it is expensive, difficult to understand, and time-consuming.
- We suggest the creation of an interactive digital platform that simplifies the management of the Spark portfolio. This electronic tool would centralize documentation, allow for more efficient follow-up, and offer intuitive guides for completion.
- We suggest that advanced trainings in Spanish be increased.
- 4 of the providers we spoke to commented that working on a portfolio becomes a very heavy load after a 7-day work week. A provider noted that she would prefer not to feel so much stress completing the portfolio and that would help her better perform in providing quality education.
- The providers work in their centers about 9 to 10 hours a day, then have to take trainings of 1 to 2 hours once or twice a week, follow every day a list of DELC rules to keep children safe, in addition to improving their quality with Spark where they invest more than 5 hours a week. This is not counting the number of emails that need to be checked per day for daily changes in DELC.
- Providers say there are some providers who have a good educational program but have little information about Spark's star ratings and their benefits.
- In addition, comments included knowing providers who have Spark stars and have two or more centers and their programs are of poor quality and high cost -- some families who have been part of their program seek other options because of the cost. For them, it is surprising that these programs with Spark stars are not supervised.
- The providers considered that to provide a better and more efficient service, they need to take specific training – mentioning topics like: how to attend to children with autism, Down syndrome, and children with Hyperactivity. Providers feel insecure when parents come to them desperately seeking for care for their children with these conditions.

### Addendum to Recommendation 3 from a team member:

*On August 17th I had an interview with NeighborImpact CCRC, as I want to open a Child Care Center in the Deschutes area, specifically in the Bend area.*

*NeighborImpact offers a 6-month training program which I think is great because they are training people before they open the center. But the first barrier I faced was that one of the requirements is to have 36 months of budget as capital. Another point was that the grant is given after opening the center. It is very difficult to have that kind of money. When I asked if there were more grants to which I could access, the person who assisted me told me that there were no other grants and that if at the time of opening the center the grants ran out, I would not have the opportunity to receive it.*

*This is troubling because yesterday's experience is at odds with what I heard at the DELC meeting on August 1st. At that meeting they commented that there were several types of grants. If they talk about grants, training, support for providers but it is not reflected in these communications, clearly access to all the opportunities they talk about are not reaching the communities. How will you get these supports to the people who really need it?*

#### **Recommendation 4: Improve facility observations and supplement them with training and coaching for providers, including on supporting immigrant and refugee families and children with special needs.**

In addition to monitoring and evaluating the level of learning and development of both children and teachers periodically, Spark should have a provider monitoring system that verifies that what they show in the portfolios is carried out and not just a photograph.

Specific actions include more training with a greater variety of topics and levels in Spanish, and more detailed DELC courses on new provider rules with help lines for questions.

#### **Recommendation 5: Facilitate collaboration among provider organizations.**

Collaboration is necessary between organizations (Childcare Division, CCR & R, Spark, USDA, etc.) that provide some level of assistance, preparation, registration to providers. This collaboration would create a common understanding of how preparation, stars, education, good practices determine the level of quality and cost. This is important because families want better coordination so they can find what they need.

In addition, monthly meetings could be held with these institutions, where all providers have access, including those who are not licensed, so that everyone knows the benefits of being part of this guild.

## Recommendation 6: Increase awareness of Spark among parents and providers and inspire confidence in the system.

Three important themes emerged from our listening process.

1. Parents cannot trust the centers if there are no trained staff to care for children, especially children with different abilities and special needs.
2. The concerns and desires of providers and families are similar.
3. Providers feel overwhelmed with their responsibilities and even more with the requirements to be part of Spark.

Spark really needs **to evolve into a supportive and backing resource for providers**, as there are also providers committed to doing a good job who need more support to make improvements.

Representative people are needed who know how to recognize the needs of our community and reflect the knowledge and confidence so that those who are, were, or want to be providers, see the advantage of being part of it.

In conclusion, Spark's redesign plan should take into account the following:

- There is a disconnect between parents' and providers' understanding of Spark:
  - The general feeling of providers is frustration and disappointment. None of the providers we spoke to in one of our groups could recall the last time a parent asked about Spark's stars or the quality of their care or at least ask how Spark benefits in their pursuit of quality care and benefit for their children.
  - The huge disconnect of understanding and information between parents and Spark is troubling. A parent did not relate Spark to the quality and education of their children and that is the biggest problem.
- Providers need a system with fewer barriers, support such as computer management, and more support for access to training in Spanish.
- Providers are not able to cope with care and when they hire help. It is very difficult to find people with experience in childcare, so they have to settle for whoever wants to work in childcare. Many times a lot of staff turnover causes disruption for the children. There must be a type of help that allows providers to find qualified personnel that does not negatively affect the children.
- Childcare becomes a very tiring job, where many hours of work, a lot of personal time and a lot of stress are invested and it is underpaid, so providers choose to open educational programs of less than 4 hours a day, without a license. As a result, they do not have to invest so much time and the compensation is better.

## Appendix

### Acknowledgments

Our Listening Team – Equipo de Escucha thanks Western Oregon University and the Spark team for supporting this project and for the tremendous effort and work they put into supporting families and providers.

Special thanks to the people, the moms and dads, and the providers who participated in our survey and focus groups. We hope we have accurately represented your concerns and feelings about childcare and the Spark program.



## Biographies of the Equipo de Escucha Listening Team Members



### **Erendira Pin**

**My Community:** I live in Hermiston, Oregon. I have been living there for over 30 years! It is a rural community of about 20,000 people. The community is engaged with many migrant farmers. It is a very small community, but it is very happy and calm.

**My story:** I am a provider, and I am also a single mother of two pairs of twins. I decided to join the listening group because I have had to experience firsthand how difficult it is to find childcare. My youngest son is in special care and it is very difficult to find someone who is trained for children of different abilities. I think

change has to start with listening and if you don't speak nobody listens to you!



### **Fernanda Lucas De La Torre**

**My community** is all those people who identify as Hispanic, Latino, immigrant, parents, and educators. Fighting and dreaming people who want a more equitable world.

I was born and raised in the beautiful city of Quito (Ecuador) surrounded by mountains and volcanoes. I am the mother of a child of almost three years and I have ten years of experience in initial and primary education. I have worked in children's creativity centers as a teacher and academic coordinator in international schools in Argentina, Ecuador, and Poland. I am a specialist in artistic languages in early childhood. I am principal and founder of Little Creek Bilingual School in rural Coos Bay. In my program I seek to approach education from a perspective that respects childhood, with a multicultural and nature-based approach.

I wanted to be part of the listening team in Spanish because I wanted to bring a different perspective from my professional experience, be a generator of ideas that support and revalue the work of early education professionals and be able to find solutions to improve educational quality, suggest more resources and training for early childhood programs in Oregon. It's very important for me to represent my community and be able to bring their voices and ideas to be included in the redesign of Spark.



## **Janet Marlene Hernandez Ramirez**

My community is Cottage Grove Oregon is a rural city located in Lane County, Oregon, with a 2023 population of 10,607. The “mom” is a Mayan language spoken by a good part of the Guatemalan population of Cottage Grove. We are a population of cultural diversity. The community of Cottage Grove is very generous and adapts to the needs of the people.

I am Janet Marlene Hernandez Ramirez. I emigrated from Mexico Guadalajara 6 years ago to Cottage Grove, Oregon. When I first arrived at Cottage Grove, Oregon with my family exploring my community, I found Early Learning Center (Peggy's Primary Connection) currently located at Cottage Grove, OR. The center was a port of entry for my family. We felt welcomed and there I realized the importance of the first five years of life

that are so important for our children. There I found a lot of support for my children and us, the parents. Visiting the Early Education center has given me the tools to see my children's developmental skills and work as a team using them. I am a mother, student of (Early Learning Education), innovator with a lot of initiative, exploring my community, studying English, and learning the school system. Getting involved as a volunteer in my community, I realized the needs of the people, and that was how I was inspired, motivated, and became passionate about studying "Early Education in children". For me it is very important to be part of this listening team because I am here representing my community and the state of Oregon. I want all voices to be heard. We need high quality early care and education programs, financial support for low-income families, we need more trained childcare providers so that children receive a quality education because together we can make big changes and get Oregon's children a high-quality education.



## **Judith Murillo Tuesta**

I work with underserved communities, families with low incomes and minorities - hardworking mothers and fathers who left their lands to offer something better for their children and their families. I like to empower my Latino community through education and information. Many of these communities have no say. Unfortunately, the immigration situation can be a very big challenge for these families who seek to have more access to employment opportunities,

education, health, and state support for childcare. The Latino community is very joyful and welcoming. I feel blessed to be able to serve and support my community to navigate a system foreign to them and that can often be even more complex when there is a language barrier.

My name is Judith Murillo Tuesta, born in Lima-Peru, and daughter of provincial parents who migrated to the capital for better opportunities and it is where I and my two brothers were born and grew up. I have been an early childhood educator for over 19 years. I emigrated to the United States in 2007. I am a mother of two beautiful girls Celeste 3 years old and Esperanza 10 years and reside in Portland. Like my parents, I was also looking for better job opportunities and professional growth. Early education is the most powerful and fundamental tool to shape our children of the future. Thanks to the sacrifice of my parents and the education I received, I have been able to have better opportunities in a foreign country. I graduated in my native country with a bachelor's degree in early education from the National University Federico Villareal, but when I emigrated to the United States, I wanted to continue with this wonderful field so I went back to school and got a master's degree in early childhood elementary education at Concordia University. I've always been passionate about social work and working with underrepresented communities. I am currently working with IRCO (Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization) as director of IRCO preschool where we serve children from 3 to 5 years old. We serve low-income families, many of them immigrants or refugees, and I also oversee a home visiting program.

I have had the opportunity and honor to have joined the Equipo de Escucha where I have met parents and educators who are very passionate about the subject of early education. I am moved that many of my colleagues share the same ideals and desire to support our communities in need. For me it is very important to be part of this listening team and be more involved in this movement to improve the quality of education; both as a mother of two girls and as an early childhood educator. As a representative of this team, it is important to me that parents can participate and get involved in the education of their children and at the same time bring the voices of the least heard in our marginalized communities. It is important that all children regardless of race, color, social status have access to a good quality education, and that these children feel represented in their centers, day care centers, etc. It is also important for parents to feel supported when choosing childcare for their children. We need to be able to change/improve the Anglo-Saxon education system and design a system that invites all races that live in this territory.



## **Jorge Martinez Yañez**

Born and raised in Mexico City, having been part of the National Autonomous University of Mexico and as a member of the Faculty of Sciences and Humanities of Mexico City.

Living in Oregon for over 23 years, I have served as an Employment Developer, Employment Specialist, Career Specialist, Coordinator and Program Director for different state and non-profit organizations.

Always in touch with the Spanish-speaking community, I began my career as an employment developer for OCHA (The Oregon Council for Hispanic Advancement), also worked at

Portland Community College, Oregon Department of Employment, Fuego Program, and currently employed by Easter Seals' Connecting Communities Program as Program Director for the past 19 years.

My involvement in the Spark Redesign process is due to my passion in the education system and my community! Understanding that education is the foundation of our children's personal, intellectual, and emotional development, and being the parent of three children who experienced childcare in Childcare, Head Start, and private provider community centers, in addition to also experiencing lack of provider education, inconsistency in safety protocols, nutrition, and educational curricula with my own children were key to my interest in being part of this great project.

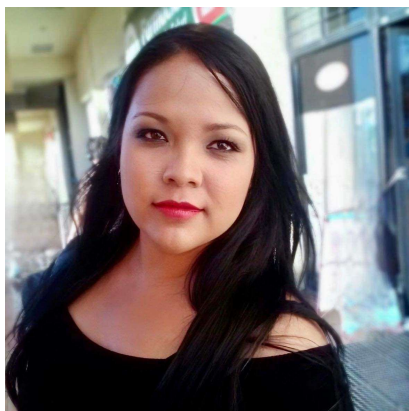


## **Juana Leticia Barcenas Sanchez**

Early Childhood Teacher - Spark (QRIS) 4 stars  
Owner of my own Family Program  
Registered  
Volunteer as a Hospital Health Promoter  
St. Vincent de Paul of Portland OR

I am the mother of Axel Cortes Barcenas of 14 years of age, Ashley Cortes Barcenas, 11, and Itzel Cortes Bárcenas, 7. Together with Miguel Cortes, we form this great Family. I am of Mexican descent. I like to get involved in groups to continuously improve my life and be part of advocacy to bring about continued improvement to different communities. I like to be learning every day and feel and improve on each change that is required and implementing new strategies. I am currently a provider / teacher in early education, and I have my program together with my family. Being part of this committee to "listen and carry the voice of each person" to new solutions is a great challenge since it involves many events in this story and reflecting to make a change is a process of time, effort, and sacrifice. By listening and knowing the needs of our Spanish-speaking community, it requires us to face, evaluate, propose, raise, and provide follow-up so that this inclusive change really takes place - so that there is continuous inclusive quality improvement. Thank you for the invitation to this Group of "listening and carrying the voice of each one" and take it further. I leave this short video of less than 2 minutes ( Parent Voices for Change de OHA) ([Juana's Story](#)) so that they understand me better why I want to be and be part of "listen and carry the voice of each one", for the success of each of our children and be given the value they deserve.

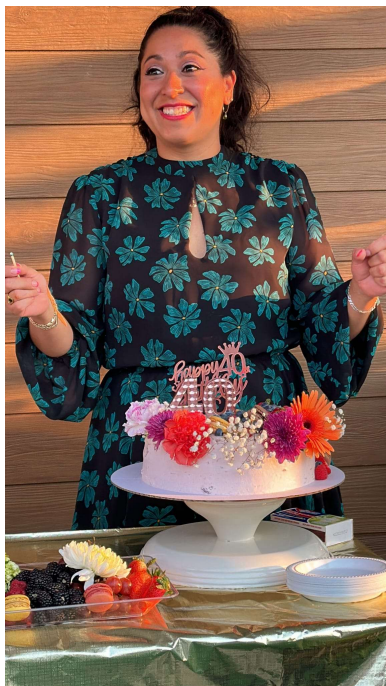




## **Karen Alejandra Macias**

Proudly Mexican, I was born in Guadalajara, Jalisco. I studied Business Administration and I must mention that I graduated with Academic Excellence. I like reading, traveling, walking, learning new things. I am currently a Social Activist, Volunteer, Child Care Provider and Mom of 3 amazing children. I live in a very small community in southern Oregon, where there are many needs since most people are farmworkers.

This listening project has been an extraordinary experience. I really put myself in the role of listening and I tried to convey to people that their ideas, thoughts, and life experiences were important for this project. Thank you for the opportunity. You just have to know that anything is possible!



## **Leonor Adriana Iturbe**

My community is full of loving moms who are looking for the best for their children -- moms who are dealing with finding a job that at the same time allows them to be mothers, moms who are tired and still go out to enjoy life, moms with fears but brave. I live in a community of moms who fight for their dreams.

I am Leonor Adriana. When I was at the University studying Psychology, I realized that many of the wounds we suffer as adults were generated in childhood creating wounded adults, and one day I thought that if I dedicated myself to caring and giving tools to children, we could have resilient adults. Now I am a preschool teacher, and I am convinced that if we focus on children - creating environments of discipline, love, management of emotions, acceptance, in the future, we will have resilient adults.



## **Maria del Rosario Gaytan**

My community is a rural area, with needs, where many of the people are humble and noble. It's a close-knit community. The most beautiful thing about my community is when there is a family in need, the community does not hesitate to support. But it is also a community where leaders are required to be the voices of the community because there are families who for some reason do not dare to raise their voices or feel that they are not valued, listened to and in some cases are discriminated against and do not dare to report abuses out of fear.

At 7 years old my second-grade teacher was my motivation to become a great teacher like her and help my students as she helped me. Due to economic situations and situations of destiny this was not possible. My dream went dormant, but I never erased it from my mind. And one day came the long-awaited opportunity and for 23 years I have been a Teacher of Early Education. My life is full of traditions, customs, principles, and teachings that my grandparents and my mother taught me since I was little. I had the privilege of growing up with difficulties, cadences and in a low-income house but full of love and wisdom. I never lacked good advice and had excellent role models (MY GRANDPARENTS AND MY MOTHER).

I know that what you learn as a child does not define what we can be as adults. However, in my experience I can say that thanks to all the difficulties and the love I always received I am today the person I am. Beyond that, I will never change it for anything. If I were given the opportunity to be born again and choose how or where to be born, I would ask without hesitation to be born in the same environment that taught me to be strong and value every moment of my life - but above all, to have respect for each human being and our beautiful Nature. This is me and I LOVE who I am.

Being part of this listening group was very important for me because I know that I contribute with a grain of sand for a great change. I had the opportunity to be the voice of people who dare not speak. I am proud of everything we achieved in this team. I thank Idalia Fernández and María Fernández for giving me this great opportunity to be part of this great group where I felt included in every moment.



## **Maria Ines Piza Espinoza**

I am Mexican from the state of Guerrero. I emigrated to the United States at the age of 16 looking for a better future and since that time, I live in Jefferson County. My community is farmworkers. When I immigrated to the United States, my first job was agricultural work, and thanks to this work, my son qualified for the program called OCDC where I was given the opportunity to attend as an apprentice parent and eventually, I was hired. It was there where I began my career in early education. I am currently working for Healthy Families America, my focus has always been on children and their families.



## **Mayra Ramirez**

My community is all the people around me, regardless of race or gender. My community is those people who, like me, seek to improve the place where we live for the benefit of everyone but especially children!

My story: I am a single mom, a daughter, a friend, a community leader, a responsible worker, a fighting woman, and I want to improve my environment and help my community for the benefit of our children. I am from central Mexico and with 93 percent indigenous in my blood it is very important to me that

my daughter grows up accepting and treasuring our culture. This project offers the opportunity to make improvements and listen to many marginalized families and I hope all these aspects are heard and improve the childcare system.

I have a 3-year-old daughter and being a mother has taught me many things, but the most important thing has been the quality of care or rather the lack of quality and for many experiences of my own and families close to me. I am very interested in participating in this project to contribute those experiences and help improve the system. I have been studying positive parenting for 3 years and for me it has been a great challenge to be able to work, take care of my daughter without childcare for almost 3 years, and without family in this country. It has been a great job though the early education system does not offer accessible help and it is difficult to navigate the system.

I hope this project helps the design taking into account the most vulnerable families. I am interested in the quality of education for all because it is the basis of a healthy society, which is what I want most for my daughter and for all the children of families in general, to grow up and live in a mentally healthy country. I am grateful to have been selected to participate in this listening project to redesign Spark!



## **Norma A. Marín Favela**

Originally from Mexico in the state of Sonora, I was born in 1962 in a united family. My parents always showed me service to others, that pushed me to carry that principle in my professional life. Once I immigrated to this country 21 years ago, I found myself as a mother with the language barrier, which prevented me from getting involved as I wished in the education of my daughters.

Seeing that this was an obstacle for many other parents, I took the initiative and began looking for resources that would serve both my family and other families in my community who were in the same situation as me. One of my first social tasks was working with men and women suffering from domestic violence and listening to their testimonies and referring them to help centers pushed me to persevere in service.

Then the opportunity presented itself and I worked at Holiday Center as an Early Head Start teacher at Portland Community College. There I understood that inclusion is very valuable and that my Spanish brought peace of mind to Spanish-speaking parents because they could communicate and learn more about the program.

As I got more involved with my community, I realized that migrants were not considered regarding health services. This was an incentive for me to agree to collaborate with Portland State University in a research project "Arthritis among Latinos". For two years I had the opportunity to make contact with farmworkers in several counties (Clackamas, Yamhill, Marion, Polk). During my outreach service in their communities, I was able to contact more than 500 field workers, conduct focus groups, interviews, visit churches, organize groups where nutrition and exercise classes were promoted. All this focused on the prevention of chronic diseases in Latino migrant families. I obtained the certification by Stanford University. It was a great learning opportunity these 2 years to know the comments of so many people working in the field who suffer from this health condition.

Later, I was a coordinator of three community places of Adult Education CONEVYT-INEA in collaboration with Hacienda CDC and the Consulate of Mexico in Portland, where I was administrator of the INEA system. During my time I taught literacy, Primary and Secondary. It has been a great experience to see the commitment of my students, some 30 years of age, some 60 and 72, eager to know and I saw great fruits for 6 years. And I understood that we all deserve those opportunities of knowledge and that there is no age to learn. In my coordination, 460 students of legal age graduated.

I have belonged for 19 years to the World Marriage Encounter movement along with my husband Hugo Manuel, where we are missionaries to support married couples and couples who deserve to live a dignified life for themselves and their families, offering retreats and conferences in 6 states surrounding Oregon.

In general, the story can be for some indifferent and for others motivating, but what I am sure of is that no one can give what we do not have, and I committed myself to be a child care provider for 6 years, for the love I have for children and especially those who need help, because their parents do not speak the language, because they are abused mothers, or because they do not



have the economic resources to pay for quality child care, for me it is a great opportunity for growth to have participated in this listening project, because I believe that there is still much to modify, enrich in early education and child care in Oregon.

Regarding what I consider for each Child Care and Early Education Provider, it would be excellent to get all the training to be up to date and give security and tranquility to parents who go to their jobs aware that their children are in the best hands, that parents feel the peace of mind that the center / home where they leave their children is provided with the best care, good nutrition, special attention according to their condition, and safety and above all that there is never a lack of love for children and that between providers and parents it is possible to have clear communication and accurate information about the mission handled by each center or registered home, and it would be great if more teachers or providers also speak the language of the parents in that way both parties will feel connected and this will have wonderful results with our Oregon children in the future. Many thanks.



## **Miriam Orozco**

I own a certified home childcare center in Milwaukie, Oregon. I started my journey with my business almost 2 years ago. My career changed as a case manager working in a hospital setting and working with children ages 0-18 and their families to connect them with resources in their community. I connected a lot with all the organizations that support families from early intervention to financial and specialized assistance. I realized there was a gap in services for non-English speaking families and children with special needs.

Number one are childcare organizations that were unable to support children due to a lack of language and skills to understand or work with the diagnoses the child had. That's when I realized I had to make a change in my community and be able to welcome children of all backgrounds and abilities. I am also bringing the lens of a family member. I have two sisters with Down syndrome and autism who don't speak and have some sensory needs. It's very hard when you get a diagnosis without expecting it. When my sisters were babies, they had several appointments and therapy at the clinic. About 3 or 4 days at the clinic with no staff who could assist my mom in Spanish about the day or therapy. I became the interpreter for my family and the rest of the families who came to the clinic when we were there. It became a support group where I prepared for them and explained them to them. I became familiar with medical systems, early intervention, government programs, SSI, and school. This was my way of making a change by helping families connect. Now, my goal is to let those families or providers in my community know what changes we can make by providing our feedback to these large organizations that can implement these changes. Early education is very important for all children but, especially for those children who are multilingual and have a diagnosis. I prepared them in a school setting and to advance in different milestones. I am the voice of those families and children. I want to empower childcare programs to have the capacity to support children with all abilities and provide them with the necessary training.

My community is very large but doesn't have many resources to support it yet. My community is ready for a change and leaders to make that change happen. There aren't many resources for my Latinx or families with children with special needs who need that extra help or how to connect to other resources they can access. We are ready for new opportunities for these families and providers. That's why it was very important for me to be part of the listening group to bring these concerns.



### **Ramiro Diaz**

Ramiro Diaz, resident of Wilsonville, Oregon. Family man and an active member of my community. Grateful and blessed for the opportunity to serve on this project, benefiting parents, children, and childcare providers throughout the state.



### **Sabi Velasco**

My name is Sabi Velasco, and my roots go deep into the indigenous Mexican heritage. My journey in the United States has been a journey marked by unwavering resolve and an unwavering commitment to the diverse community of Washington. My odyssey began in 1990, when, together with my husband, we emigrated to the United States with the hope of a better future. For years, I worked tirelessly as a farm worker, harvesting fruits to support my family. I faced the difficult realities of the countryside and sometimes took my three daughters to work in harsh and unhealthy weather conditions.

It was precisely this experience that led me to a moment of revelation: the urgent need for safer and more appropriate childcare for children from migrant families in my community. My determination knew no bounds, and in 1994, I joined the OCDC Early Head Start parent-child program. It was in this program that I earned my GED and CDA, and where I took the first steps toward working with children from migrant families in the OCDC Early Head Start organization.

Over the years, my commitment only grew. In 2002, I achieved a significant milestone by establishing my own childcare at home, obtaining the appropriate license. In 2007, I faced the challenge of raising my five children as a single mother, and that's when the idea for Amazing Minds Child Development came about. By 2008, this small seed had blossomed into a childcare center capable of caring for up to 39 children and employing 15 childcare team members. Despite obstacles, including an economic downturn, I kept my unwavering commitment to provide a safe and nurturing environment for the children of my community.

In 2011, I adapted my license to accommodate 16 children while maintaining exceptional quality standards. In 2018, I opened a second location with capacity for 14 children. Currently, we serve more than 37 families in Washington County, maintaining the same standards of excellence.

My involvement was not limited to the operation of my childcare. I participate in key initiatives, such as the Preschool Promise program, in which Amazing Minds was integrated as the pilot in 2006, and we have continued to support low-income children to this day. I also take active roles on Early Learning Washington County's early education committee, tirelessly advocating for children, parents, and childcare providers. My commitment extended to the CCR&R advisory committee, and since 2013, I have held various positions in the Oregon Child Care Providers Union, fighting for the rights and well-being of providers and the children we care for. Even in the most challenging times, such as the pandemic, my team and I continue providing service to the children of essential working parents, demonstrating that our dedication knows no limits.

Joining the listening team was a choice of great meaning to me. I recognize the importance of elevating the voices of childcare providers and parents to the state. My story underscores the vital importance of quality childcare and education early in diverse and constantly evolving communities.