

Highlights from an Evaluation of All Our Kin's Technical Assistance Offerings

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Family Child Care Context

The benefits of high-quality early care and education (ECE) are well established: the earlier children have access to engaging, stimulating, and developmentally appropriate interactions, exchanges, and environments, the better their outcomes in a range of areas.³ Early care and education can also benefit parents/caregivers by supporting their participation in work, training, and/or educational pursuits; has the potential to contribute to the economic well-being of educators and communities through the creation of small businesses and jobs; and has been linked to more productive citizens and less expenditures on costly social support programs.^{4,5} In short, ECE is a critical national resource that facilitates family, child, and societal stability and thriving.

As of 2019, approximately 21 million children under the age of five participate in home- or center-based ECE programs in the United States.⁶ Home-based child care settings, referred to as family child care (FCC) in this brief, is a paid care arrangement for about half of all young children who regularly receive non-parental care prior to school entry.⁶ A wide range of families rely on FCC including those with infants and toddlers, and children with special needs. Family child care is also an important and preferred support for families of color, immigrant families, families living in rural settings, and parents/caregivers who work non-standard hours.^{7,8,9}

Despite its frequency of use and the range of families who benefit from it, FCC faces many challenges.

The supply of FCC has been on the decline for years,¹⁰ and the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the losses.¹¹ Reductions in FCC slots have been occurring for many reasons, including regulations and standards that are inconsistent with FCC operations, educator isolation, high cost of care and low subsidy

Box 1. Overview of child care terminology used in this brief

Different terminology is used to describe individuals who provide child care in home-based settings. Throughout this brief, we use the term **Family Child Care (FCC)** and refer to those offering paid care as **Family Child Care educators** or simply **educators**. Our utilization of this language aligns with the preferred terminology of All Our Kin (AOK). Other terms used to reference the practice of providing child care in a home environment are included below.

Home-based child care (HBCC) is divided into two main categories: educators who are listed and educators who are unlisted. Listed educators are paid directly by families or through subsidies and can be licensed, certified, or registered with a state. AOK's direct service network generally serves licensed educators, known as FCC educators. Unlisted educators are typically not known to state and local systems and can be paid or unpaid.¹ **Family, friend, and neighbor (FFN) care** is provided by a relative, friend, neighbor, or other person. FFN may be paid or unpaid and is typically exempt from licensing and regulations.²

reimbursement rates, and inequitable policies.¹² Importantly, the decline continues to occur despite its popularity and value to such a wide number of families. Since the pandemic, FCC has also been elevated in importance for lessening the potential for parental concerns regarding health and safety issues related to COVID-19, as well as meeting the child care needs of first responders.¹³

The structure of ECE funding in the United States has resulted in system fragmentation that disadvantages FCC. Variability in access to monies, resources, and supports based on issues like geographic location and provider type proliferate in ECE. Even within FCC, there are different categories of educators (see Table 1). In general, FCC educators access and receive fewer resources than their center-based peers and are funded at lower levels through state systems for the care and education services they provide.^{14,15} This is counterintuitive given the reality that FCC serves high numbers of infants and toddlers which results in greater demands on educators.¹⁶ Caring for infants and toddlers also tends to result in the need for more staffing because of licensing requirements that typically mandate lower educator/child ratios which can result in higher costs of care.¹⁷ As identified above, FCC also serves populations who have been marginalized, making them less likely to be able to afford costly child care. The combination of these factors results in lower financial intake and resources in FCC settings than in center-based child care settings.

The characteristics and structure of FCC makes FCC educators financially vulnerable and socially isolated. Family child care educators tend to mirror the demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of the families they serve. This occurs in part because families tend to choose care settings that are geographically close to their place of residence and most neighborhoods and communities are homogeneous.¹⁸ The result is that FCC providers face similar challenges and lack resources in similar ways to the communities they serve. Research on the ECE workforce overall shows that in most states, ECE professionals do not make a living wage and many experience poverty and access public assistance benefits.¹⁹ In addition to low wages, FCC can be isolating since educators work in their own homes²⁰ and often for long hours, which may preclude participation in activities such as group based professional development.²¹

Table 1. Categories of Home-based Educators

Listed		Unlisted
Licensed/certified/registered homes	License-exempt/family, friend, and neighbor care	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participate in trainings and inspections to be registered in states and appear on state/national lists of early care and education providers Maximum number of children able to be cared for varies by state from 6 to 12 per household/business Formal professional development and TA opportunities through state departments, Child Care Resource & Referral agencies (CCR&Rs), quality rating and improvement systems (QRIS), etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> May appear on state/national lists of early care and education providers, but regulatory requirements are not as rigorous as for licensed providers Maximum number of children cared for varies by state, but is often fewer than licensed homes/businesses Limited professional development and TA opportunities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not licensed Do not appear on state/national lists No maximum number of children None/very limited professional development or TA opportunities

Adapted from: Lloyd, C.M. Kane, M., Seok, D., Vega, C. (2019). *Examining the feasibility of using home visiting models to support home-based child care providers*. Bethesda, MD: Child Trends.

All Our Kin’s Approach to Technical Assistance for Family Child Care

The fit of professional development and technical assistance (TA) to FCC educators’ context is an important motivator of educators’ participation; as such, states, locales, and agencies interested in supporting the FCC workforce must address this issue.²² All Our Kin (AOK) is a nonprofit organization that is well-positioned to address current challenges facing FCC by promoting strengths and capacities of FCC educators and other engaged parties. AOK provides evidence-based, tailored, and customized training and resources to support the success of FCC educators. These trainings and resources are also based on decades of on the ground knowledge and experience partnering and working in FCC.

AOK has been operating a network to support local FCC educators in Connecticut for 25 years and works nationally with other organizations, such as Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&Rs) agencies and state licensing agencies. AOK also works *directly* with educators and supports them in becoming leaders in training their peers. In their work with these system partners, AOK draws on their own implementation experiences, materials, and research to ensure the supports that FCC educators and their engaged parties receive address the unique needs of FCC. AOK’s work centers critical relationships—between educators and local support staff, and between support staff and AOK trainers—to translate training information into real world practice. In short, AOK has a long-standing, successful history supporting high-quality educators, small business owners, and peer leaders, as well as engaging with local and national parties on issues relevant to FCC policy and legislation.

To better understand and shed light on this history of success, the remaining sections of this brief provide an overview of AOK’s FCC Support Model, summarizes findings from evaluations conducted through June 2024, and provides considerations about how policymakers and funders can help strengthen best practices that have emerged from research on AOK’s work.

All Our Kin Family Child Care Support Model

Direct Service Model

AOK’s research-informed and evidence-based direct service model began in 1999. The model includes the provision of training and professional development to FCC educators directly, as well as to state and local jurisdictions and agencies who have an interest in helping to strengthen FCC. For educators specifically, several support options are available, such as:

- Assistance to educators interested in becoming state licensed;
- Home-based program visits where AOK coaches provide in-person educational coaching and support (e.g., through modeling interactions and demonstrating strategies, reflective practice, goal setting, and more);
- Business education and support for educators (e.g., coaching and training);
- Elevation of educator voice in policy discussions and decision making; and
- Access to FCC educator networks to provide “educational mentorship, professional development, advocacy and leadership opportunities, and a network of relationships with other FCC [educators], as well as a “warm line” educators can call for support on a variety of topics.”

This direct support model was designed based on AOK’s significant experience in the FCC field, coupled with the inclusion of research about how to best support FCC educators. AOK’s direct service model has been shown to:

- Support FCC programs and educators by:
 - Increasing the quality of FCC
 - Increasing educator earnings and generating economic returns for communities
 - Improving FCC educators’ quality of life
- Support children and families by:
 - Increasing the supply of licensed FCC
 - Promoting health and safety in FCC programs
 - Building children’s foundation for lifelong learning and future success.

AOK’s provision of direct services to FCC educators has occurred over a 25-year period. During this time, it became clear that reaching more educators would benefit families with young children and the ECE field. In 2017, AOK expanded their direct service model to include the provision of TA to other parties engaged in FCC so that additional people can directly support FCC educators.

Technical Assistance Offerings

As of June 2024, AOK has provided TA in [29 states and Washington, DC](#). AOK TA includes a variety of methods and strategies such as training, coaching, peer-to-peer collaboration and consultation, policy and strategic planning, and others. The TA provided is designed to cover several topics, or “strands,” including: [Network Development](#), centered in AOK’s [Critical Components](#) framework; [Business Supports](#); [Educational Coaching](#); [Licensing Support](#); and [Policy Advising](#), which uses AOK’s [Creating the Conditions](#) guiding framework.²³

AOK’s TA is relationship focused and requires intentional engagement in behaviors and strategies to ensure participants feel heard and are positively reinforced. Previous evaluation findings have shown that participants appreciate AOK’s cohort structure which enables them to build strong relationships within their teams, as well as learn from and build connections with other teams from around the country.^{24,25,26,27,28} Participants in AOK TA include FCC educators, community organizations, funders, FCC networks, provider associations, state agencies, CCR&R agencies, and others. This wide range of individuals and entities is reflective of AOK’s recruitment practices which are designed to ensure a varied pool of TA participants. For instance, AOK’s criteria for acceptance into the Business Train-the-Trainer TA includes attention to the applicant’s commitment to equity and their capacity to offer the Business Series to a diverse group of educators.^a

Participating educators and agencies identify strands of interest and/or areas of assistance that best suit their context and specific needs. While each of the strands are individualized in their focus, they also have intersecting content and include an emphasis on ensuring accessibility of ECE supply, high quality, sustainability, and equity in FCC. The strands also are designed to promote the achievement of positive outcomes for FCC educators and the families and children they serve; and elevate educator leadership using a strengths and relationship-based approach. Combined, AOK delivers a comprehensive program for FCC educators and parties interested in supporting FCC.

^a AOK consistently receives more applications than they can accept for this TA offering and has created waitlists and limited the number of participants per organization to address the high demand.

Technical Assistance Evaluation Findings

As noted earlier, several evaluations have been conducted of AOK’s TA offerings. Most recently, in 2021-2023, Child Trends conducted an evaluation of AOK’s Network Development, Business Development, and Policy Advising TA strands. The findings of this evaluation are presented in this section.

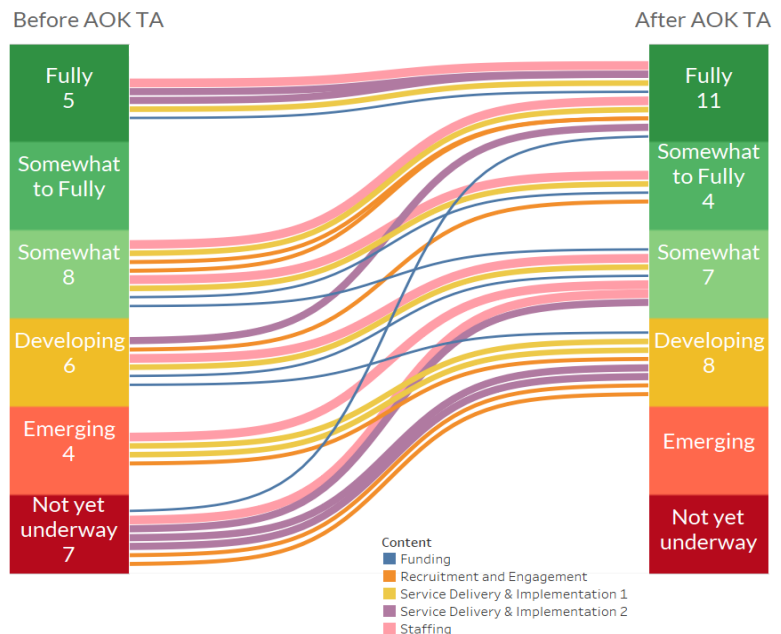
Overall, evaluation findings demonstrate the success of AOK’s TA offerings across strands.^{29,30,31,32}

Approximately 90 percent or more of participants between 2021-2023 indicated they were satisfied with the TA they received from AOK. Participants found AOK facilitation and expertise vital to the success of each strand and commented on the helpfulness of resources, activities, and meetings.^{33,34,35} Below, we note select examples of successful outcomes for Network Development, Business, and Policy TA strands, drawing on effectiveness evaluations of AOK TA.

Network Development. All Our Kin provided TA on implementing and sustaining a staffed family child care network (SFCCN) to two national cohorts in 2022 and 2023. The teams represented various location, state, and entity type (i.e., community organizations, funders, networks, provider leaders, state agencies, child care programs). Teams were also in different stages of network development and team member roles varied. In 2022, AOK encouraged FCC educator representation on each team and in 2023, it was required. TA cycles for the cohorts lasted about nine months. Although SFCCNs have become a common strategy for enhancing child care quality and supply, little is known about their design, implementation, or outcomes. The components included in FCC networks also vary widely, making them challenging to evaluate and operationalize. To address this issue, Child Trends and AOK partnered to develop a rating tool to evaluate team progress on network implementation before and after AOK TA. The Network Development Continuum Rating Tool (NDCRT) was designed to help teams rate their stages of implementation. The tool includes a five-point scale that covers four domains: (1) staffing; (2) recruitment and engagement; (3) service delivery and implementation; and (4) funding. AOK and Child Trends reviewed and co-developed indicators for each implementation level in alignment with key resources from the [National Center for Early Childhood Quality Assurance](#); [HOME GROWN the Erikson Institute](#); and the [AOK Critical Components](#). Across domains, teams began the cohort in various stages of network implementation, ranging from *not yet underway* to *fully implemented*. **By the end of the nine-month AOK TA engagement, all teams had progressed to active planning or implementation across all domains of a SFCCN** (see Figure 1). Nearly all participants across both cohorts agreed that their confidence in the team’s ability to launch and sustain a SFCCN increased over the course of TA, and that the resources provided by AOK helped their team build their network development plan.

Business Supports. The Business Train-the-Trainer (TTT) is designed to prepare staff from early childhood organizations to provide the Business Series training to FCC educators. The Train-the-Trainer is currently delivered

Figure 1. Team Implementation of SFCCN Practices, Before and After All Our Kin Technical Assistance Period

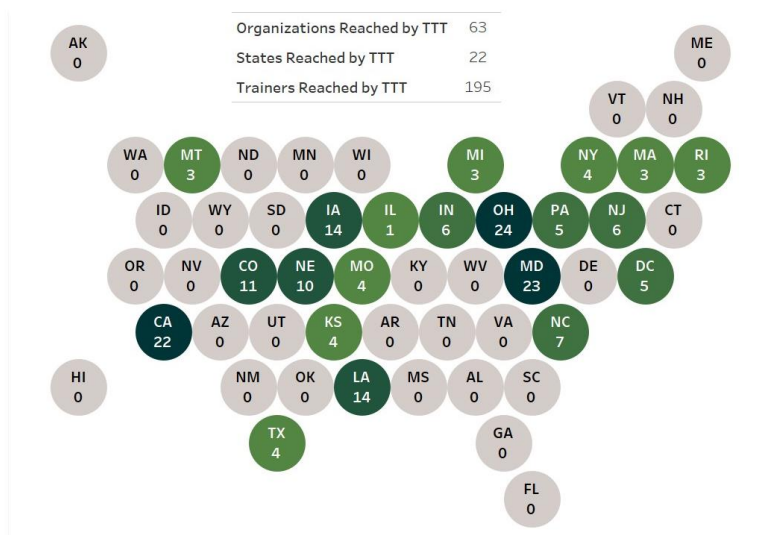


in a virtual format over the course of five days with daily five and a half-hour sessions and pre-work, totaling 34 hours of cumulative training. All Our Kin offers this TTT program in cohorts several times throughout the year, with approximately 20-25 people participating per cohort.

As of May 2023, there have been **195 trainers who have completed the TTT program across almost half of the states in the US (n=22 states)**. These trainers come from **63 different organizations** (see Figure 2).

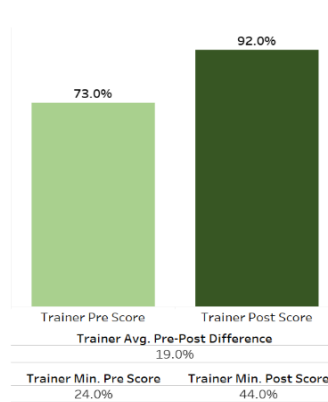
Participants in the TTT training (n=135) and educators who participated in the Business Series (n=131) both reported statistically significant increases in their knowledge of FCC operations (p<.001). Nearly 90% of TTT participants across six cohorts also agreed or strongly agreed that they felt prepared to teach the Business Series. **These findings suggest that AOK is successfully preparing trainers to deliver the Business Series, and that the Business Series enhances educator knowledge in FCC operations** (see Figures 3 and 4).

Figure 2. Number of trainers and organizations who completed the Train-the-Trainer program by state, November 2020-May 2023



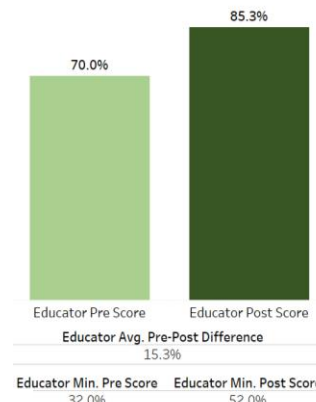
Educators who participated in the Business Series were also asked to answer questions about their attitudes and beliefs related to their jobs, both before and after the Series. Educators generally reported being satisfied with their jobs at the beginning of the Business Series, and their satisfaction remained stable throughout the training period. After completing the Business Series, educators reported an increase in their interactions with other FCC educators. They also reported a notable decrease in stress about managing their businesses. **These findings indicate that, in addition to the knowledge gains associated with AOK TA, participants increased their connections with peers and feel better equipped to manage the stresses of owning and operating an FCC business.**

Figure 3. Change in Trainer Knowledge (n=135)



Source: AOK Business Train-the-Trainer Pre/Post Test; p<.001

Figure 4. Change in Participant Knowledge (n=131)



Source: AOK Business Series Pre/Post Test; p<.001

Policy. Teams from the policy cohorts have catalyzed policy changes as a result of their participation and learning from the AOK policy TA. For example, participants' jurisdictions have expanded eligibility for child care subsidies, made legislative changes to allow FCC educators to be eligible for tax credits and higher subsidy rates, and overturned local ordinances that changed the number of children FCC educators can care for.

For example, in Tarrant and Dallas counties in Texas, educators participated in the inaugural policy cohort, with an aim to better engage FCC educators in policy conversations related to child care. To help achieve that goal, participants successfully designed and hosted an Advocacy/Policy 101 training for FCC educators in the counties. The training taught educators “how to advocate for themselves, talk to legislators, and think through what it looks like to partner and collaborate with others.” Given the success of the initial training, Tarrant and Dallas counties offered the training six additional times to engage more educators. This work has also led to several other positive changes. For instance, individuals in Tarrant and Dallas counties have reported: 1) increased visibility and attention to FCC in programmatic, policy, and funding discussions; 2) improved capacity to advocate for the needs of FCC educators; and 3) strengthened connections between the two counties which has facilitated ongoing engagement in support of FCC educators. Two individuals from the Tarrant and Dallas counties' inaugural policy cohort also participated in AOK's Network Development and Business Institute TA strands. The expertise of these individuals was used to explore the possibility of launching an FCC network in Dallas County, Texas.

Policy TA Outcomes Highlight: Texas

- Partnerships with [Home Grown](#) to affect a change in local policy in Grand Prairie, TX that prohibited FCC educators from business expansion. The ordinance change allowed an increase in the number of children that could be safely cared for in homes, facilitating opportunities to increase incomes.
- Meetings between FCC educators who participated in the first Advocacy training and the Office of Child Care, Texas Workforce Commission.
- Developing connections between Texas FCC and the National FCC Panel, “a federally sponsored workgroup comprised of FCC educators and other key parties nationwide that aims to elevate the voice of FCC educators by giving them the opportunity to speak on FCC topics on national platforms.”
- Working to create a new, distinct, and FCC focused division in the [Early Learning Alliance](#).

Promoting AOK's Promising Practices

The considerations outlined in this section reflect research findings on implementation and outcomes of AOK TA and incorporate the perspectives of TA participants and AOK staff. Drawing on these perspectives, we provide recommendations for AOK to apply these research findings to their future work as well as considerations for policymakers and private funders to support these recommendations within their unique roles and contexts. These recommendations and considerations are organized across three activity areas: TA model implementation, policy, and research.

TA Model Implementation

The efficacy of AOK TA is predicated on flexible approaches and participant teams with varied stakeholders, common goals, and a commitment to “get to work”

We recommend that AOK continue to design and implement TA models that are tailored to participant context and needs, promote the development of strong within-team relationships among those participating in TA, and work towards fully engaging all Cohort team members, particularly educators.

- ✓ **Role of policymakers:** Support and participate in child care networks or collaborations to help strengthen relationships between child care partners (including policymakers and/or state or local

government staff) to provide a stronger foundation for engaged parties to work together to improve FCC.

- ✓ **Role of private funders:** Provide support for team-building activities for participants, trainings for how best to engage educators, and support for the time AOK staff spend vetting potential participants to ensure values, goal, and readiness alignment.

Financial support and educator incentives for TA participation helps ensure broad reach

We recommend AOK increase efforts around TA sustainability, including fundraising to cover the costs for TA participation to help ensure AOK's TA can reach more FCC and FCC-engaged partners. We also recommend offering participants tangible benefits for their participation in TA. For example, while AOK provides self-issued certificates for Business Train-the-Trainer participants, we recommend AOK explore relationships with institutes of higher education to provide formal certificates or continuing education units (CEUs). Having a tangible benefit has the potential to not only bolster interest in AOK TA, but may also make TA participation fees more palatable to participants and sponsoring agencies.

- ✓ **Role of policymakers:** Consider subsidizing professional development with public ECE monies to help offset TA costs and/or make professional development for FCC educators available at low to no cost. Also consider building incentives or recognition into licensing or other state/local government-sponsored efforts for participating in professional development, such as financial supports and/or rewards or designations as recommended child care providers.
- ✓ **Role of private funders:** Provide financial support opportunities for FCC educators and leaders to participate in TA, including "scholarships" that might cover release time for attending professional development activities; substitutes to cover educator responsibilities while they are engaging in TA; and higher participant fees for more intensive TA engagement. Allocate dedicated funding streams to support the development of partnerships with institutes of higher education and FCC certificate programs.

Policy

AOK TA participants have driven policy changes that affect FCC because of their participation in TA

Benefits of participation in AOK TA are known among participants, but those external to the process may have less knowledge about TA successes. We recommend AOK strategically share policy wins with a broad audience of those familiar and unfamiliar with FCC to support the sustainability and spread of their work.

- ✓ **Role of policymakers:** Host convenings or other opportunities for discussion with ECE professionals and intermediaries including those focused on FCC. These discussions can help to better inform spending on and decision making about how TA and other efforts specific to FCC may better support ECE initiatives and systems.
- ✓ **Role of private funders:** Support public relations campaigns, policy briefs, videos, and other methods of publicizing successes for FCC that have occurred because of AOK TA. Intentionally target states and locales with large populations of FCC educators and/or with policy makers and other key parties familiar and unfamiliar with the value of FCC. This strategy has the potential to aid in advancing knowledge and understanding of AOK TA and its benefits.

Policy-focused TA provided by AOK results in state policy changes that may positively impact FCC educators and families

To increase the likelihood of positive policy development and/or reform for FCC, we recommend AOK consider use and expansion of time for policy consultants and/or AOK staff to work directly with states and locales to support FCC.

- ✓ **Role of policymakers:** Hire or provide dedicated government staff knowledgeable about and focused on FCC specific issues to ensure ECE funding and policies are supportive of FCC.
- ✓ **Role of private funders:** Fund time for an AOK policy consultant and/or TA strand facilitators to partner and work directly with states and locales to strategically and intentionally plan for the use of ECE funding to maximize its use and ensure inclusion of FCC. Fund the creation of “how to” or “best practices in innovation” guides or tool kits to support state and local leaders and policy makers with developing or adapting currently existing policies to ensure they are supportive of and facilitate the success of FCC.

Research

AOK has commissioned evaluations of their work to ensure their efforts are based in evidence and adapted when needed

We recommend AOK formalize evaluation processes, strengthen data collection, synthesize findings across prior evaluations, and commission a TA-focused impact evaluation.

- ✓ **Role of policymakers:** Provide access to data and/or funding to support utilization and/or participation in evaluations of AOK’s TA within the state or community.
- ✓ **Role of private funders:** Provide funding for more robust evaluations of AOK’s TA approach so that AOK can invest their resources in a way that most effectively supports the FCC field. For example, a TA-focused impact evaluation could identify if participation in AOK TA *causes* various outcomes (e.g., improved knowledge, readiness, etc.). Studies could also explore which aspects of or approaches to TA are most effective, and the extent to which there are cumulative effects of participating in multiple strands.

Conclusion

Family child care is a core part of the early care and education (ECE) system, and often the preferred care option for families. It is vital for ECE leaders and other engaged parties to pay close attention to the strengths and needs of FCC educators, and to design strategies that draw on their strengths and address barriers to their success. The need for systems that are supportive of safe, high quality, accessible, and affordable ECE are needed more than ever. Federal legislation has been passed, and monies allocated to respond to these needs. One challenge, however, is a lack of capacity in states and locales to create policies and programs that are responsive to the needs of children, families, ECE professionals, and the systems that serve them. This task requires individuals at the table who understand the many facets of the ECE context, including the multi-layered strengths and complexities of FCC. Our understanding of and reflections on the AOK service model and research suggests AOK is well positioned to respond and provide support to states and locales grappling with these issues. Additional policy maker support and philanthropic resources can be helpful for expanding AOK’s capacity to meet these emerging and ongoing demands.

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³² Lloyd & Shaw (n 26)

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