



ALL OUR KIN

**Staffed Family Child Care Networks:  
A Path Towards a Stronger, More Sustainable Child Care System  
July 2020**

Family child care—licensed child care in a home-based setting—has always been an essential part of our child care system. During COVID-19, as families balance the need to return to work with concerns about the health and safety of their children, they are looking for the small group size, flexible hours, neighborhood locations, and strong, trusting relationships that are the hallmark of family child care. Yet even before pandemic-driven revenue losses, family child care businesses were closing at alarming rates, in large part due to decades of underfunding and a lack of resources and support. In the midst of these challenges, staffed family child care networks offer a promising solution.

Staffed family child care networks have the potential to streamline providers' access to financial and other resources during the pandemic while increasing the supply, quality, and sustainability of family child care in the long-term. Right now, policymakers are looking to 1) identify and scale critical supports for children and families and 2) build robust child care businesses that will outlast the current moment and sustain children, families, and the economy into the future. This brief supports those efforts, combining the most up-to-date research with a set of guidelines based on two decades of on-the-ground experience to help policymakers understand what staffed family child care networks are and how they can be implemented for maximum impact.

**What is a Staffed Family Child Care Network?**

Staffed family child care networks have paid, specialized staff members who provide services and resources to family child care providers. Networks offer providers opportunities to develop a continuing, long-term professional relationship with a network coordinator or a family child care specialist and a place to connect with other providers, creating strong peer networks in an otherwise isolating profession. They can be run by a number of different entities, including community-based organizations, state or city-wide initiatives, Child Care Resource and Referral agencies, social service

and family support agencies, universities, Early Head Start and Head Start initiatives, and shared services alliances.<sup>1</sup>

Staffed family child care networks can offer a variety of supports and services to family child care providers, including, but not limited to: program visits to family child care homes; training and other professional learning opportunities; peer support; business support; CACFP; financial support, including grants, loans and scholarships; physical and mental health screening and consultation; help obtaining licensure and accreditation; referrals of families; health and safety supplies; and educational materials.<sup>2</sup>

### **Building Effective Staffed Family Child Care Networks**

In their 2017 publication, *Staffed Family Child Care Networks: A Research-Informed Strategy for Supporting High-Quality Family Child Care*, leading researchers Juliet Bromer and Toni Porter define several essential elements of staffed family child care networks.<sup>3</sup> Building on their foundational research, combined with All Our Kin’s two decades of experience with staffed family child care networks, All Our Kin has developed the following recommendations for policymakers on how to create effective networks. For greatest impact, a network should take a comprehensive approach to supporting family child care that includes all of these elements:

#### **Programmatic**

- **Provide education and business support along with peer networking opportunities.**

Networks should support family child care providers in their dual role as educators and entrepreneurs in order to build and sustain high-quality family child care programs. This means providing a combination of in-home educational coaching (at least monthly over a 12-month period) and training—on topics including trauma-informed care, social-emotional development, and translating child development research into practice—alongside business training. All programming should be rooted in adult learning theory and specifically tailored to family child care settings. Additionally, networks should offer opportunities for community-building, allowing providers to connect with peers in an otherwise isolating profession.<sup>4</sup>

- **Take a strength-based, relationship-based approach.** All network programming and interactions should value the unique perspectives, backgrounds, and experiences of all

<sup>1</sup> Bromer, J. & Porter, T. (2017). *Staffed family child care networks: A research-informed strategy for supporting high-quality family child care*. Washington, DC: National Center on Early Childhood Quality Assurance, Office of Child Care, Administration for Children and Families, U.S Department of Health and Human Services.

<sup>2</sup> Bromer, J., & Porter, T. (2019). *Mapping the family child care network landscape: Findings from the National Study of Family Child Care Networks*. Chicago, IL: Herr Research Center, Erikson Institute.

<sup>3</sup> Bromer, J. & Porter, T. (2017). *Staffed family child care networks: A research-informed strategy for supporting high-quality family child care*. Washington, DC: National Center on Early Childhood Quality Assurance, Office of Child Care, Administration for Children and Families, U.S Department of Health and Human Services.

<sup>4</sup> Porter, T., & Bromer, J. (2020). *Delivering services to meet the needs of HBCC providers: Findings from the director interviews sub-study of the National Study of Family Child Care Networks*. Chicago, IL: Herr Research Center, Erikson Institute.

providers and center sensitivity, flexibility, respect and commitment. To the extent possible, support should be separate from compliance.<sup>5</sup>

- **Meet providers at every stage of their careers.** Networks should provide a range of supports and services designed for every experience level, from the prospective provider to the 30-year veteran. This includes opportunities for experienced providers to offer training and mentorship to other providers as well as opportunities for continuous professional growth and leadership.

### Structural

- **Develop robust staff capacity.** Network staff should 1) be knowledgeable about and experienced in child and adult development, 2) display cultural competence and have a deep respect for and knowledge of family child care, and 3) reflect the family child care community being served. In addition, staff should have enough dedicated time to provide high-touch coaching and support to network providers and should have access to reflective supervision and in-service training.
- **Build on existing support systems.** In many communities, support systems for family child care—including both formal and informal groups led by providers themselves, such as provider associations—already exist. Staffed family child care networks should collaborate with and build on these assets.
- **Leverage cross-sector partnerships.** Family child care intersects with a variety of systems, including K-12 education, early intervention, health and mental health, workforce development, housing, and more. Networks can help family child care providers connect to and navigate these systems, in addition to early childhood systems like licensing, subsidy, and QRIS. As such, networks are most effective when they build strong relationships across these systems and engage multi-sector stakeholders in support of family child care; doing so creates an opportunity to provide comprehensive services in family child care.

### Foundational

- **Center and elevate family child care provider and family voice.** Family child care providers and families should be engaged as partners and experts in every aspect of network development and implementation. This maximizes networks' effectiveness by ensuring that services are responsive to and representative of the community's needs. Networks should establish strong relationships and clear feedback loops with policymakers, with the goal of lifting up the experiences of family child care providers and families to inform policy.
- **Commit to equity.** A strength of the family child care field is its diversity, which is critical to ensuring parent choice. Providers represent a range of racial and ethnic backgrounds, speak many languages, and operate in urban, suburban, and rural settings. Networks should be culturally competent and committed to equitably supporting all family child care providers in their service areas; strategies include hiring bilingual staff and translating materials, investing

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

in and providing training and support around digital technology, and collaborating with trusted community partners to conduct outreach in underrepresented communities.

Too often, family child care providers begin to engage in a system of support only to have that support disappear as a result of lack of funding—destabilizing family child care businesses and the children and families that rely on them. In order to translate the recommendations above into long-term transformative outcomes for children, families, and providers, **staffed family child care networks require sufficient and sustainable funding.**

### **The Research**

The 2019 report, *Mapping the Family Child Care Network Landscape*, summarizes research on the benefits of staffed family child care networks, including:

- A study of 35 networks in Chicago, which found that providers affiliated with networks were more likely to offer high-quality care than unaffiliated providers;
- A study of the All Our Kin model, which found that All Our Kin providers score over 50% higher on research-based measures of quality than non-All Our Kin providers;
- Qualitative studies that show that networks reduce isolation and connect providers to training opportunities; and
- Focus groups with providers in 9 networks in Washington State which highlighted the importance of peer networking and relationship-based supports.<sup>6</sup>

In addition to the aforementioned quality study of the All Our Kin network, All Our Kin’s model has also been shown to increase the supply of family child care, improve health and safety, produce a significant return on investment, and improve child outcomes. More information about the impact of All Our Kin’s staffed family child care network can be found [here](#).

#### **About All Our Kin**

All Our Kin is a nationally recognized nonprofit organization that trains, supports, and sustains family child care providers to ensure that children and families have the foundation they need to succeed in school and in life. All Our Kin’s work is a triple win: child care providers succeed as early childhood educators and as business owners; working parents find stable, high-quality care for their children; and children gain an educational foundation that lays the groundwork for achievement in school and beyond. Today, All Our Kin partners with more than 1,000 family child care educators across Connecticut and in the Bronx; these educators are caring for more than 5,500 of our youngest children. In addition, All Our Kin offers technical assistance to agencies and communities across the country on educational coaching, business training, network development, and family child care policy. To learn more, visit [www.allourkin.org](http://www.allourkin.org). To request more information about technical assistance, please reach out to [technicalassistance@allourkin.org](mailto:technicalassistance@allourkin.org).

<sup>6</sup> Bromer, J., & Porter, T. (2019). *Mapping the family child care network landscape: Findings from the National Study of Family Child Care Networks*. Chicago, IL: Herr Research Center, Erikson Institute.