

**Untapped Potential:
Partnering with
Community-Based Organizations
to Support Participation of
Lower-Incidence Immigrant
Communities in the
Illinois Preschool for All Initiative**

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INTRODUCTION

The success of prekindergarten initiatives is largely measured by their ability to reach and serve children who are at special risk of facing challenges in school. In recent years, given the rising numbers of children from immigrant families and the risks that they can face in school, children of immigrants have been of particular interest to policymakers focusing on supporting school readiness. However, relatively little is known about barriers these families can face in accessing prekindergarten services, and even less is known about the particular experiences of families from smaller immigrant groups (referred to here as “lower-incidence” immigrants). This is particularly important as immigrant communities are not homogeneous, and to be effective, policies directed towards them should be based on an understanding of the heterogeneity of these communities.

With support of the Joyce and McCormick Foundations, the Urban Institute conducted two studies to examine barriers faced by lower-incidence families accessing the Illinois state prekindergarten program, *Preschool for All (PFA)*. In the Illinois and Chicago context, “lower-incidence” immigrant groups are those from countries represented in smaller numbers than immigrants from Latin American countries, such as Mexico and countries in Central and South America. These communities are often overlooked because of their relatively small size—however, when considered as a group with shared experiences, needs, and concerns, their numbers are far from trivial. In the Chicago metropolitan area, for example, lower-incidence immigrant groups are estimated to make up roughly half of all immigrants.¹ These groups are quite heterogeneous, varying in the size and density of their population, in their race and ethnicity, length of time in the U.S., in whether they are U.S. citizens or legal residents², and in their English proficiency.

In the first study (funded by the Joyce Foundation) we talked with Pakistani and Nigerian families, and in the second study (with support from the McCormick Foundation) we spoke with Vietnamese, Polish, and Haitian families; and in both studies we interviewed PFA providers serving these communities. [The findings from these studies can be found in two Urban Institute reports: the first presents the findings from the Joyce study³, and a second combines the findings of the Joyce project with the additional groups examined with the support of the McCormick Foundation.⁴]

These studies found some significant barriers for lower-incidence families, including that a number of parents did not know about the PFA program, parents who did know about PFA were likely to report language and logistical challenges, and some parents reported that they used intermediary organizations to help them overcome these challenges. In response to these findings, key stakeholders in Illinois asked UI researchers to identify strategies that the PFA community could employ to support effective outreach to these communities. As a result of this request, we conducted focus groups and interviews with a number of community-based organizations (CBOs) serving immigrant and refugee populations in the Chicago area, as well as organizations focusing on outreach to immigrant parents around early care and education. This report summarizes the findings from these discussions.

It is important to recognize that the PFA program has limited funding, which means that many programs have waiting lists and families seeking services may be turned away. This reality makes a focus on outreach somewhat counterintuitive. However, our initial conversations with key stakeholders suggested it was still important to expand outreach efforts to this population because

- Those immigrant families who are least likely to know about the PFA may also be those who are most isolated due to language, cultural, and other barriers, and whose children may therefore be at particular risk of facing challenges in school. As such, they are precisely the families who the PFA program was designed to serve, and failure to reach out to them may mean that their children end up behind when they enter school.
- Local PFA programs now face a new requirement that 80 percent of the children they serve must be “at-risk,” with one of the criteria being that children’s home language is not English. These means that local PFA providers have a stronger incentive to find ways to reach out in targeted ways to communities to meet the 80 percent requirement.

As a result, stakeholders felt that regardless of funding limitations it was important to identify strategies to expand outreach to immigrant families, and to address the particular barriers facing lower-incidence immigrant groups.

Below we first summarize our key findings, provide some background on our study respondents and the questions we asked, and present our key findings in more detail.

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

- Many (though not all) CBOs serving lower-incidence immigrant communities are unfamiliar with PFA. Even those that knew about it in general had many questions about the specifics of enrollment, eligibility, availability, etc. This suggests that outreach to the CBOs directly could be an important component of outreach efforts to these communities.
- Once these CBOs understood more fully what PFA offered families, they expressed interest in being involved. They were interested for several reasons: first, because they understood the importance of early education for the success of their families; second, because it fulfilled their organizational mission to support families and children; and third, because adding outreach/enrollment around PFA to their portfolio often fit in well with their own organizational strategy of offering a broad range of supports to families and children. [As noted below, however, these CBOs had limited resources, making it unlikely they would be able to make any significant efforts in this area without additional support.]
- The CBOs believed that there is a range of understanding among the lower-incidence immigrant families they serve about the value of early care and education. They believe that some families—often the most isolated families, whose children may have the greatest need—do not always understand the value, suggesting that targeted outreach about the value of early care and education (ECE) would be useful. For other families, who already are interested in early childhood education but face other barriers (lack of knowledge, or challenges with enrollment, schedules, transportation, etc.), other kinds of assistance and support may be more important.
- CBOs can be important partners, as they are actively engaged in numerous outreach and service activities with lower-incidence immigrant communities. These efforts provide the basis for a toolkit of PFA outreach efforts and strategies. For example, most of the CBOs in this study worked directly with families, and work to meet a variety of family needs. They were already involved in outreach and/or enrollment assistance for other public programs, though this is not true of all immigrant-serving CBOs. Some provide direct services to families that could be a platform for engagement with children, such as services for adults (such as ESL) or services for their children.

- There was significant variation across the CBOs in the extent to which the immigrant communities they served were highly concentrated or dispersed across a much broader area. While in some cases, individual PFA programs may be in a catchment area that dovetails with that of a particular CBO, in other cases a particular CBO may serve families spread across a broader set of communities, as many PFA programs and/or individual PFA programs are located in highly diverse communities with several different immigrant populations. The diversity of organizations, cultures, and languages, and the variation in population distribution patterns for lower-incidence immigrant groups, in conjunction with the similar diversity of PFA programs and models, suggests that it would be inefficient to rely upon individual PFA programs to reach out to individual CBOs. Instead, it seems likely that a centralized—probably Chicago-wide—entity would be the most effective way to undertake any systematic outreach effort, rather than leaving it up to each PFA site.
- A number of promising strategies emerged from the conversations with the CBOs. However, all of these strategies require resource investments to varying levels, and respondents agreed that the payoff in terms of reaching most at-risk families—i.e. those who are most isolated—is likely to be commensurate with resources put into these efforts. Furthermore, because CBOs serving low-incidence populations have limited resources for new outreach efforts, resources to support these efforts would need to be provided for any of these strategies to be effective.
- The strategies discussed by the CBOs fell into the following categories. These are roughly ordered from the least to most resource-intensive,
 - *Information-based outreach.* PFA programs could provide basic information, materials, and resources to immigrant-serving CBOs, both about the PFA program and services, and about the importance of early care and education. To be most effective, resources would be needed to make this information language-accessible and culturally- appropriate.
 - *Relationship-based outreach.* PFA providers could develop relationships with the CBOs serving low-incidence families so as to build trust, cultural awareness, and ongoing communication; do targeted outreach to families getting services through the CBO; and/or build PFA outreach into CBO community outreach efforts. These efforts

require staff time and project resources from both PFA providers and the immigrant-serving CBOs.

- *Screening, enrollment, and retention activities.* More resource-intensive strategies include supporting CBOs' involvement in PFA screening, enrollment and retention activities by building on a number of current activities and models for such efforts,
 - o Building PFA into existing efforts to screen and enroll immigrant families into core public benefit programs (such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Medicaid/SCHIP),
 - o Creating a PFA outreach and retention effort for lower-incidence immigrant groups by building upon parent outreach models used for Head Start in Chicago,
 - o Allowing CBOs to function as clearinghouse for early childhood services, and to enroll families directly into PFA programs,
 - o Helping CBOs provide ongoing support to low-incidence families who are enrolled in PFA programs through exploring the applicability of efforts such as the Parent Mentor model.

- *Providing early childhood services and PFA programming.* With sufficient resources and support for quality, it seems possible that some CBOs could potentially directly provide PFA services and/or other early childhood services to their communities. Specific suggestions included supporting two-generational models (which could involve, for example, providing PFA services to the children of parents attending ESL classes) or delivering parenting education and other early childhood services.

- The CBOs reported that while there are ways in which PFA and early childhood education services are unique, some of the challenges it faces in reaching out to lower-incidence communities are similar to those faced by many other social and educational services (such as health care and services for the elderly), who are interested in making their services available to these communities. They also noted that their efforts to support enrollment and retention, and to broker cultural relationships, could be very helpful to the public schools who sometimes struggle to meet the needs of lower-incidence immigrant students and their families. It is worth exploring whether the

lessons learned from this project could be coordinated or leveraged to support a broader agenda around outreach to lower-incidence populations.

OUR RESPONDENTS AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

For this study, we focused on CBO intermediary organizations serving lower-incidence populations for several reasons,

- 1) These organizations are the main entities experienced in conducting outreach to lower-incidence immigrant groups, and as such have a unique perspective and knowledge-base to share about promising practices and challenges to conducting outreach for these populations.
- 2) Some immigrant families in our focus groups for the earlier studies suggested that such organizations had facilitated their access to PFA programs.
- 3) PFA providers face several challenges for reaching out to lower-incidence groups, including a large number of different lower-incidence immigrant communities (with the corresponding variety of languages, cultures, and faiths), as well as their wide geographic distribution across the Chicago metropolitan area. These challenges, coupled with the scarce resources of PFA providers, suggest that PFA outreach would be greatly facilitated if PFA providers could reach out to entities with established relationships with focal immigrant communities, overcome key language and cultural barriers, and could facilitate outreach efforts or broker relationships.

Accordingly, we held focus groups with 10 organizations serving lower-incidence groups, two organizations working with refugee families, and 5 organizations serving Latino families in suburban communities (which we thought might provide some insights for communities where Latinos are less prevalent). This approach allowed us to obtain insights from a broad array of organizations, serving a wide variety of lower-incidence immigrant groups. [See table 1.] The CBOs we interviewed varied in size—from organizations with effectively a single staff person providing outreach to a particular immigrant community, to organizations that were large multi-service agencies serving a large number of different immigrant groups. They also varied widely in the kinds of services they provide, with

some providing a broad array of services to families and children, others providing a smaller set of targeted services.

Table 1. Selected immigrant groups served by focus group participants

Albania	Iraq	Somalia
Bosnia	Korea	Vietnam
Burma	Kosovo	Yugoslavia
Burundi	Mongolia	
Cambodia	Montenegro	Regional focus:
China	Pakistan	Mexico, Central and Latin America
Eritrea	Philippines	Africa
Ethiopia	Serbia	Middle East

We also interviewed key experts, including Jennifer Kons at ICIRR who runs the Immigrant Families Resource Program (IFRP), a benefits access project that works with a coalition of immigrant-serving community-based organizations; staff from Community Organizing and Family Issues (COFI) which sponsors the Head Start Ambassador’s project which conducts outreach around Head Start enrollment with African American and Latino parents; Bridget Murphy from the Logan Square Neighborhood Association (LSNA), the organization which developed the Parent Mentor model; and Choua Vue who is involved in community outreach efforts at Illinois Action for Children. [Ms. Kons of IFRP/ICIRR also played a critical role in helping us to identify and recruit participants for the focus groups.] Appendix 1 has more information on some of these projects and models.

The focus groups and interviews were designed to explore a set of core questions—specifically, the respondent’s insights as to

- Whether the immigrant communities they served already saw early care and education as a priority, or (alternatively) whether part of any outreach efforts would need to focus on communicating with families about the importance of early care and education services,
- Promising outreach strategies to *inform* families about PFA and local PFA programs,
- Promising outreach strategies to *help families enroll and participate* in PFA programs,

- Other roles and strategies to support early care and education for lower-incidence immigrant communities.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

PFA outreach to lower-incidence immigrant CBOs needs to be a key strategic element

Despite some exceptions, we found that a number of the CBOs we talked with were not familiar with the PFA program and were not able to help their families access the services. Even those who were familiar with the program had questions about key aspects, or about the location of services. This underscores the important role of conducting PFA outreach not only to lower-incidence populations, but also to the CBOs that serve them.

CBOs are interested in being involved in helping their families access PFA

Generally, whether or not they are familiar with PFA at the beginning of our conversations, the CBOs were quite supportive of the goals of PFA, and interested in helping their families access these services. Their interest was multifaceted. They understood the importance of early childhood development and education, and the important role it played for their families. Helping their families and children access PFA fulfills their organizational mission to support the well-being and development of the families in their community. And finally, adding outreach/enrollment around PFA to their portfolio often fit in well with their own organizational strategy. Many of the CBOs worked to provide a multiplicity of services to families to maximize the likelihood that a family might find some service compelling; they also worked to build trust by making themselves visible and useful in a range of ways. [As discussed more below, however, these organizations had limited resources, and would not be able to do any significant efforts in this area without support.]

CBOs report broad variation in the extent to which their families are receptive to, or understand, the importance of early care and education

Our respondents reported a broad variance in the extent to which their communities understood the importance of ECE services. From their conversations, it appears that

- There is a subset of families who may be less likely to understand value of/importance of ECE:
 - Some respondents suggested that these were most often families who had more recently come to the United States, who came from rural areas in their country of origin, and/or who had lower educations in country of origin.
 - Some respondents felt that there was a subset of the “most isolated” families who were probably least open to ECE, but also were the least connected to CBOs or any social services. These families were seen as being the least trusting, having great suspicion of government or formal organizations (including the CBOs), and gradual trust-building was particularly important.

Interestingly, both of these groups may be the exact families whose children are at greater risk of school failure, suggesting that focused efforts to reach these families are important.

- There are a number of families who already highly value early care and education, and do not need convincing. However, respondents discussed that some of these families see ECE as something that takes place in a school setting, and think of child care as being a service to support work, rather than a child development service. As a result, if they need child care for work, they may not see it as an early care and education opportunity. In this case, they may be more likely to seek out family or neighbors to care for their children, as they may trust them more around culture, language, religion/faith, and other critical issues. This suggests that outreach about the importance of early learning in all settings would be useful for these families.
- Finally, respondents noted that even if families believe in the importance of early care and education, they face a number of other challenging barriers to enrolling their children, including the schedule (particularly for the school-based programs which operate 2.5 hours a day), lack of transportation, language barriers, lack of information about enrollment, cost (particularly if in a community-based child care program), and so forth. The barriers they discussed matched those identified by families in earlier stages of this research effort (Adams and McDaniel, 2009, and Adams and McDaniel, 2012 forthcoming.)

Two additional thoughts are worth noting. First, one value to having the CBOs involved in outreach is that they can help provide PFA programs with feedback loops about how the

program is working for the families they serve and about barriers or challenges they face, and also provide input on strategies to improve services to lower-incidence groups. Second, it is interesting to note that there was not consensus within our respondents about the most appropriate setting for ECE services and PFA. There was some discussion as to whether school settings were the most appropriate for early education for immigrant children, or whether early care and education would be more efficient and culturally appropriate if offered by CBOs.

CBOs are actively engaged in numerous outreach and service activities with lower-incidence communities

Our interviews and focus groups made it clear that the CBOs are actively involved in outreach to their communities and provide a wide array of services to them. While the particular strategies they use vary across the different organizations, they include,

- Providing a variety of direct services so as to meet the diverse needs of their families, including service screenings and referrals, direct service provision, community education, and other efforts,
- Sponsoring events for the community, such as information fairs and community bazaars,
- Recruiting families and publicizing services by going to events and locations where members of their focal communities can be found, such as churches/mosques, community festivals, and other community events,
- Taking advantage of public media resources where possible.

The fact that CBOs are engaged in outreach is important on two fronts. First, it is important to recognize that the CBOs themselves are actively doing outreach to these communities, and working hard to make themselves trusted entities for the families in their community. They report that even for them, with the lower language and culture barriers, it can be hard to build trust with the most isolated families, as this takes time and effort.

Second, this underscores the benefits of working with CBOs to reach lower-incidence communities. In particular, the challenges faced by the CBOs doing direct outreach to families underscore the even greater challenges that PFA providers might face in starting such outreach efforts from scratch. It suggests that many PFA providers would benefit from

working with CBOs to build on the existing connections and the foundation of trust that has already been developed or is progressing.

CBOs serving lower-incidence populations have limited resources for new outreach efforts

The CBOs we spoke with provided an overview of organizations that have very limited resources (both in terms of funding and staff) to support new outreach efforts. While open and interested in supporting outreach around PFA and early education, it was clear that their ability to take on these efforts would be quite limited unless resources were available to support outreach.

However, as is described below, it is also clear that these organizations provide a rich array of services and expertise that could be built upon for potential PFA outreach efforts, if resources were available. Furthermore, it is not clear that supporting expanded outreach would be enormously costly if it were designed to build upon existing efforts, expertise, and organizational strategies. The ICIRR Immigrant Family Resource Program (IFRP), which works with a coalition of immigrant-serving CBOs to do benefits outreach, provides one model of a way to support targeted CBO activities (see appendix 1 for more information on this model).

The lower-incidence immigrant communities served by CBOs vary in whether they are concentrated or dispersed geographically, which has implications for outreach strategies

There was significant variation across the CBOs regarding the extent to which the immigrant communities they served were highly concentrated or dispersed across a much broader area. This has important implications for PFA outreach efforts, as the payoff for outreach for individual PFA programs will be greater if they are able to focus on building connections with a CBO that primarily serves families within their catchment area. This suggests that it may be important to develop two levels of outreach efforts—first, efforts that help individual PFA programs to work with particular CBOs working with families in their mutual catchment areas, and second, an additional set of strategies for PFA providers to conduct outreach with CBOs serving more dispersed communities. The latter set of strategies could include developing a more centralized set of tools or materials or using a central organization to facilitate connections and relationship building across a range of PFA programs and CBOs. This larger problem also suggests a first step of identifying the

distribution of CBOs and their target populations, and to map that onto the distribution of PFA programs and their catchment areas, so as to allow both CBOs and PFA programs to identify appropriate partners.

CBOs have a broad range of outreach efforts and services that could be the basis of a strategy to support PFA participation and enrollment

In talking with CBOs, we identified a continuum of service and outreach efforts that could be used as a foundation to support greater outreach and enrollment in PFA for lower-incidence immigrant groups. On one end of the continuum are outreach efforts that are relatively less intensive in terms of resources from PFA—though would still require some investments -- and on the other end are those that are more resource-intensive.

Each of the strategies described below has its strengths depending upon the context. In fact, to maximize the effectiveness of these strategies, it might be most effective to see these strategies as providing an outreach tool kit, with some strategies seeming likely to work better under some circumstances, and some under others. However, regardless of the strategy, respondents suggested that the payoff in terms of reaching most at-risk families—i.e. those who are most isolated—is likely to be commensurate with resources put into strategy. In other words, the strategies that involve less resources and effort seem likely to be less effective at reaching families who would most benefit from the services.

a) Information outreach

A relatively less resource-intensive strategy would be for PFA providers to provide basic information to the CBOs through materials and resources. The CBOs suggested that two kinds of information would be helpful—information about PFA services, and information about the importance of early care and education (ECE). Some of the kinds of information outreach strategies and content they suggested include,

- *Information outreach about PFA services.* Respondents said that at a basic level, it would be useful for them to have information they could give their families about the PFA services available in their communities. The information they requested included,
 - Information about PFA and the nature/ content of the services,
 - Name and location of the program(s) in their community,

- Eligibility information (age of child, income, residency, etc.),
 - Enrollment information (timing, paperwork requirements, other special requirements, etc.),
 - Basic information about the program (schedules, cost, availability of transportation, language abilities of staff/teachers),
 - Contact person for parents or CBO to call if they have questions.
- *Centralized information outreach about PFA.* The CBOs also suggested that if the PFA initiative was able to centralize the development of any resources for a broad array of CBOs, it would be helpful to
 - Develop mechanisms whereby CBOs could access the information described above for a broader set of programs. One informant suggested that the IECAM system provides some ability to access information on location of programs, though that appears to provide only some of the information requested. Another possibility would be to explore the extent to which this might be an effort that could be built upon the child care resource and referral information available through Illinois Action for Children.
 - Develop a short video, available in different languages, that CBOs could play in their waiting rooms to introduce parents to PFA and the importance of early childhood services, along with basic information about where to go for more information, who can get services, and how/when to enroll
 - Support the translation of these materials into a range of languages, as translation is expensive and is not something that CBOs can do without resources
 - *Information outreach about the importance of early care and education.* Respondents suggested that their families would benefit from tailored outreach materials and tools to help them understand the importance of early care and education. They recommended the development of culturally appropriate, language accessible outreach materials and tools on this topic, which could be distributed to CBOs serving lower-incidence families. For example, they suggested that it would be helpful to have culturally appropriate materials about the importance of child development and early learning, what happens developmentally for children at young ages, what can be done at home to support early

learning, what to look for in caregivers, and the various early care and education services that families can access (such as home visiting, literacy efforts, PFA, child care assistance, etc.). This information could be also distributed as a short video, such as suggested above.

While these strategies require less resources than those described below, our respondents were clear that the effectiveness of any of the above kinds of information would depend upon whether it were developed in ways that was appropriate for their communities—both because CBOs would be more likely to pass it on if it were appropriate, and because families would be more likely to take advantage of it. Therefore, to be effective, resources would still be needed for PFA providers to tailor their materials to be appropriate to the target audiences in terms of language, literacy, accessibility, and so forth. To preserve scarce resources, this suggests it would be useful to explore using a central entity to work with CBOs to develop and tailor such materials, rather than individual PFA providers doing this with individual CBOs.

Finally, the effectiveness of these information outreach strategies is likely to vary, depending both on whether it is the sole strategy that is undertaken or is coupled with other approaches, and on the target audience. On the one hand, CBO respondents suggested that relying solely on providing information for outreach purposes would not as effective as more intensive efforts to build relationships between PFA providers and CBOs (see next section), because the staff at the CBOs would not be as well equipped to help their clients navigate the process, have the trust that the provider would be able to meet their family's needs, or have the connection with the program to deeply encourage the families to attend. They would more likely to simply put out the information and let families access it if possible, with less proactive efforts to make sure that families understood and used the information.

On the other hand, this set of strategies could be very useful for PFA outreach with CBOs whose families do not come from a particular community or neighborhood, and instead are more dispersed across different communities. For CBOs and PFA providers seeking to reach out to these more dispersed communities, this strategy might be the most cost-effective given the resource demands of trying to develop relationships between many PFA providers with CBOs with dispersed populations.

b) Relationship-based proactive outreach about PFA services

A number of respondents discussed the importance of PFA providers developing relationships with the CBOs serving lower-incidence families to build trust, cultural awareness, and ongoing communication. However, given that these are strategies requiring time and effort for PFA providers, and willingness of CBOs to reciprocate and support these efforts, these seem to be strategies that would be most effective for PFA programs that clearly fall within a community where the CBO serves enough families to make it worthwhile for both the PFA program and the CBO. In the case of CBOs that serve a broader area, it might be possible for a central organization to broker or facilitate these relationships across a broader set of PFA providers. Some of the specific ideas suggested by respondents included,

- *Building relationships with CBO staff.* PFA providers could work to develop closer relationships with relevant CBOs—visiting CBO offices, meeting/connecting with CBO staff, helping staff understand the importance of ECE and the PFA program, working with staff to identify best ways to get PFA information to families, and identifying the ways to connect PFA outreach to existing outreach and community building efforts. This effort would both help staff have the information needed to support families accessing PFA, but also build trust so CBO staff members are comfortable referring families to the provider.
- *Doing targeted outreach to families getting services from CBO.* A number of the CBOs provided services to families with young children, such as Parents as Teachers, WIC outreach, English as a Second Language (ESL) classes, and so forth. Local PFA providers could work with the CBO to target outreach and recruitment to these families, for example during the enrollment period for the PFA program.
- *Work with CBO to insert PFA information into existing outreach efforts.* A number of the CBOs described a range of outreach efforts they were involved in, from hosting information fairs and community events, to going out into the community to reach new families. PFA providers could work with CBOs to connect PFA outreach efforts into these existing outreach activities.

One of the challenges with this effort is that it can take time, energy, and staff resources from both PFA providers and the CBO, with the level of resources needed depending upon the specific activities and who takes responsibility for them. Again, such efforts are likely to

be most cost-effective for PFA providers who can identify specific CBOs that serve families in the PFA program's catchment area. Our respondents were, however, clear that they have very little extra resources, so to the extent that CBOs are asked to systematically take on extra responsibilities to help conduct PFA outreach to their families, they will need assistance to do so. As mentioned earlier, it is worth considering whether a central entity could support these efforts by serving as a broker or facilitator.

c) Helping CBOs actively support screening, enrollment, and retention into PFA

Respondents also discussed the possibility that, if resources were available, CBOs could more actively work to support screening, enrollment, and retention for PFA services. In particular, they suggested,

- ***Build outreach and screening into existing screening and enrollment strategies.*** Most of the CBOs we interviewed were involved in the Immigrant Family Resource Program (IFRP), which is a benefits access initiative coordinated by ICIRR (see Appendix 1 for more information). In this initiative, CBOs are funded to screen families for eligibility for safety net services such as SNAP and Medicaid, provide translation services to support enrollment and retention, and ongoing case management services for families who need additional help. CBOs discussed the possibility of incorporating screening and enrollment support for PFA (including screening for child care assistance for those working families needing full-day services) into the existing IFRP model. While these additional responsibilities would need to be funded, the structure is already in place to build upon. For example,
 - In their initial screening, IFRP CBOs already ask questions about child age for the Illinois All Kids program (the state child health insurance program). The protocol could be adjusted to use that screening question to trigger a set of questions about early care and education.
 - They also screen for some programs (i.e. Low Income Heating and Energy Assistance Program) that have single enrollment points during the year, so have experience with programs that do not have ongoing enrollment.
 - They are funded to provide translation services for families needing assistance with enrollment procedures and paperwork, and to help families navigate the process of getting and keeping the services, and could expand

this capacity to cover PFA if resources were available to support these extra activities.

Note that help with PFA enrollment and paperwork is a critical component for families. In our research, we found that the enrollment process can be complex and challenging for families facing language and culture barriers. While our earlier study highlighted particular challenges working families faced trying to access child care assistance needed to get PFA in community-based child care programs, the CBOs participating in this set of focus groups reported that families can face complex and inconsistent enrollment and paperwork requirements for school-based PFA services as well.

- *Tailor the parent outreach model used by COFI to support enrollment and retention in Head Start, to outreach/enrollment/retention of lower-incidence immigrant communities in PFA or ECE programs.* COFI currently has a program whereby Head Start parents serve as Head Start Ambassadors, and do door-to-door outreach to find parents to encourage them to support their enrollment and ongoing participation in Head Start. While this model has focused on African-American and Latino parents for Head Start, the approach is one that could be tailored to support CBOs in doing PFA outreach for lower-incidence communities, and/or could be expanded to incorporate a broader set of early care and education services (i.e. Head Start, PFA, and whatever other local ECE services are a priority for outreach) for these populations. [See appendix 1 for more information on this project.]
- *Allow CBOs to function as clearinghouse for early childhood services, and enroll families directly.* Some respondents suggested that CBOs would ideally be able to directly enroll families for PFA and child care assistance, though there was some skepticism as to whether local schools, or the child care subsidy system, would be able to delegate that set of responsibilities to CBOs. Nonetheless, it would be useful to explore whether there are elements of these processes that could be delegated or supported at the community level, or whether cooperative relationships could be developed with organizations primarily responsible for enrollment.
- *Create a formal role for CBOs to provide ongoing support to lower-incidence families who are enrolled in PFA programs.* Some respondents described the challenges that immigrant families can face understanding the expectations of schools and PFA programs, including how to communicate with teachers, overcome cultural norms that

sometimes go against school expectations of parental engagement, and other cultural challenges. They suggested that CBOs could be funded to be a resource for parents, helping them navigate the system, providing workshops on key areas of confusion, and facilitating communication and cultural understanding between the family and the PFA program. Such efforts could also be valuable to support immigrant families and students for K-12 education.

- *Support the development of a parent mentor model focused on early childhood.* Respondents also discussed the possibility of building upon the successful Parent Mentor model developed by the Logan Square Neighborhood Association (LSNA) which trains parents—including immigrant parents—to work in classrooms alongside teachers, and pays them a small stipend for their work. . [See appendix 1 for more information.] This model is one that could be explored as a way of supporting families and children, as well as PFA classrooms, in working more effectively to support children in PFA programs. While this would probably be most effective for PFA programs serving a significant number of children from a particular immigrant community in a school-based setting, it would also be interesting to explore whether there are ways to tailor this model for smaller, more dispersed populations and/or community-based settings.

Some of these strategies have the additional benefit of helping immigrant parents in their ability to support their children’s education over the long-term, as they provide an early opportunity to help parents connect to teachers and education settings.

In considering these strategies, it is also interesting to consider the activities and efforts undertaken by refugee-serving organizations that are funded to help refugees access critical social services and get the supports needed to become established in the United States. These organizations are funded to do a rich array of services to refugee families, including linking them to services, brokering/facilitating enrollment in schools, and providing translation and supports. As such, they provide a useful model to consider in thinking through approaches to support enrollment and retention in ECE services.

d) Allowing CBOs to provide early childhood services and PFA programming

Finally, our discussions highlighted some opportunities around potentially supporting CBOs to be more directly involved in providing PFA services and/or other early childhood services. In particular, three interesting ideas emerged:

- *Support two-generational services within CBOs.* A number of the respondents provided intensive ESL services to their families, which requires adults to attend daily classes for a few hours over several months (schedules that are similar to those required for PFA). Some of the CBOs noted that they already provide basic child care services to support the ability of the adults to participate in ESL services, and discussed concerns about this being a lost opportunity to invest in the children’s development. However, they do not have the resources to hire more qualified and trained staff to actively support the children’s learning. Respondents discussed the possibility of providing good quality early education services at these times—for example, by finding resources to hire more trained staff to ensure good quality early care and education services. They also were interested in exploring whether PFA programming could be provided on-site during these times.
- *Support parenting education.* A number of CBOs discussed the importance of providing parenting support and education to families in their programs, and in particular, their feeling that families need information regarding how to support their children’s development at home. This was particularly highlighted in terms of the families who seek to get into PFA but are unable to get services because of waiting lists (though respondents were also clear that such services were important to their families more broadly).

CONCLUSIONS

These findings suggest that immigrant-serving CBOs could play a valuable role in working with PFA providers to reach out to underserved and at-risk immigrant children. They also suggest that there are many different options for where to start and how to combine strategies to best fit both available resources and immediate and longer-term goals for children. As PFA and early childhood stakeholders consider these questions, we offer a few overarching thoughts:

- All of these strategies require resource investments to varying levels, although they also all leverage existing investments by the CBOs. Respondents agreed that the payoff in terms of reaching most at-risk families—i.e., those who are most isolated—is likely to be commensurate with resources put into these efforts. As a result, any strong effort to support enrollment and participation of low-incidence populations will require resources to help overcome barriers.
- There are a number of promising models and strategies in place in the Chicago area which could potentially be tailored to support more intensive outreach efforts to these communities, thus effectively leveraging existing investments to allow additional resources to have a greater impact. Some of these efforts have been developed primarily for larger immigrant communities, and thus would need to be tailored (in collaboration with the CBOs) to meet the specific needs of the broad spectrum of lower-incidence communities.
- The diversity of organizations, cultures, and languages, and the wide variation in population distribution patterns for lower-incidence immigrant groups, in conjunction with the similar diversity of PFA programs and models, suggests that efforts to improve outreach would benefit from a centralized entity functioning to develop common materials and broker relationships between the key stakeholders. [ICIRR’s Immigrant Families Resource Program project is one example of this approach.]
- The issues faced by PFA for reaching out to lower-incidence communities are similar to issues faced by many other social and educational services, including health care and care for the elderly. In addition, the role that CBOs can play in supporting enrollment and retention, and functioning to broker cultural relationships, could be very helpful to the public schools who can sometimes struggle with meeting the needs of lower-incidence families for K-12 education. It is worth exploring whether the lessons learned from this project could be coordinated or leveraged to support a broader agenda around lower-incidence populations.

APPENDIX 1

The Immigrant Family Resource Program (IFRP) of the Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights (ICIRR)

The Immigrant Family Resource Program (IFRP) is a partnership with the Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights (ICIRR), the Illinois Department of Human Services, and 39 ethnic community-based organizations across Illinois that that educates immigrants on eligibility and assists them to navigate the benefits process. In 2010, the 39 IFRP partner organizations reached over 160,000 individuals in 53 languages regarding public benefit eligibility, assisted 22,015 families in applying for benefits (such as food stamps and healthcare) or navigating mainstream systems, and provided 56,932 professional interpretations and translations between mainstream agencies and Limited English Proficient (LEP) individuals. IFRP also conducts trainings for mainstream and ethnic service providers on best practices for working with immigrant communities and immigrant eligibility for services. Over the past 11 years, IFRP has become a well-run, cost-effective, sophisticated program that draws upon the strengths of ethnic CBOs to create real change in the lives of immigrant families.

Contact information:

IFRP/ICIRR

<http://icirr.org>

The Head Start Parent Ambassador Project of Community Organizing and Family Issues (COFI)

Since 1995, Community Organizing & Family Issues (COFI) has been training and organizing grassroots parents to be powerful community leaders. COFI parent leaders are mostly women of color, mothers and grandmothers, who are working to make a difference, not just in their own families and communities, but in the way decisions get made about policies and programs that affect families across the city and state. These parent leaders built POWER-PAC (Parents Organized to Win, Educate, and Renew—Policy Action Council).

Between 2006 and 2008, the parent leaders of POWER-PAC interviewed over 5,000 parents with preschool-eligible children who were not participating in structured preschool programs. Asking these parents why their preschooler wasn't in an early education program, they found many families lacking basic and needed information:

- They didn't know the importance of early education;
- Or if they did, they didn't know that there were free preschools in their community;
- Some worried that the family might lose their child care subsidy;
- While others worried about their immigration status;
- And many thought that their child was not ready for preschool because the child did not speak English, was too shy, or for a myriad of other reasons.

POWER-PAC leaders concluded that, despite the efforts of early educators and public education campaigns, many of the hardest-to-reach families were still not aware of the importance, ease, and benefits to their families of preschool enrollment.

The Head Start Ambassador program is a peer-to-peer outreach strategy operating in low-income Chicago communities. It was created in partnership between POWER-PAC, COFI, the City's Head Start program and the Coalition of Site-Based Child Care Administrators to address a recommendation from the POWER-PAC leaders that peer-to-peer was the most promising strategy for aiding hard-to-reach families about the importance of early education. Parent leader ambassadors are trained to connect with Head Start eligible families and encourage enrollment of their preschoolers. In three years, through the Head Start Ambassadors program, parents have had peer-to-peer conversations about the importance of early education with 19,797 families, 9,085 of them with a child under age 5, and 3,163 of them have requested referrals to Head Start. Since the program was created, the City Head Start programs have been able to fill every open slot by the enrollment deadline each fall.

Community Organizing and Family Issues (COFI)

(312) 226-5141

cofionline.org

The Parent Mentor Model of the Logan Square Neighborhood Association (LSNA)

The Logan Square Neighborhood Association (LSNA) Parent Mentor program brings layer upon layer of benefit to schools and communities. Parents learn how to help their own children while getting actively engaged in school improvement, students receive extra individual attention, teachers get support and learn about the community, and the school climate is improved by the consistent presence of additional caring adults. Parent mentors—primarily low-income immigrant and African American women—grow as leaders for themselves, for their families, for their schools and for their communities.

LSNA partners with 8 low-income schools in our neighborhood to recruit and train approximately 15 parents per school to assist teachers in the classroom for 2 hours per day. Parents are assigned a classroom (not their own child's) where they are mentored by a teacher on how to work one-on-one and in small groups with children. After successfully completing 100 volunteer hours (approximately one semester), parent mentors receive a stipend of \$600. As part of a cohort in their schools, parent mentors grow as leaders, transforming their schools and communities.

The Parent Engagement Institute, housed at LSNA and the Southwest Organizing Project (SWOP), work with community-based organizations and school districts interested in replicating the Parent Mentor program. The Parent Mentor program is now operating in 28 schools in Chicago Public Schools and several other communities around the country. The Parent Engagement Institute is premised on the idea that the respect between parents and educators requires intentional relationship-building. Parents are central to the educational system, not outsiders. When schools treat parents as partners and welcome what they have to offer into the classroom, we can create schools that engage students, increase student achievement, and become centers of community.

Contact:

Logan Square Neighborhood Association
(773) 384-4370

ENDNOTES

¹ Unpublished data from the 2007-2009 American Community Survey, analyzed by Urban Institute, show that 51percent of the immigrants in Chicago Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) were from countries other than Latin America. This includes 23percent from Europe (the largest representation from Poland at 9percent), 24percent from Asia (largest representation from India at 7percent and the Philippines at 5percent), 3percent from Africa, and 1percent from Canada.

² Unpublished data from Urban Institute find that 97percent of the children of the immigrants in Illinois in 2008-2010 were citizens. Looking at the adults as well, Paral and Norkewicz, 2003, found that roughly half of lower-incidence immigrant individuals in the Chicago metro area are citizens – in 2000, for example, 49percent of Chicago-area immigrants from countries in Asia (other than Middle-Eastern countries) were citizens, as were 52percent of immigrants from Europe and former U.S.SR, and 62percent of immigrants from the Middle East. Paral, Rob and Michael Norkewicz, 2003. *Metro Chicago Immigration Fact Book*. Chicago: Institute for Metropolitan Affairs, Roosevelt University. <http://legacy.roosevelt.edu/ima/pdfs/immigration-factbook.pdf>. Other data suggest that a significant proportion of non-citizen immigrants are legal permanent residents – nationally, in 2005, 35percent of foreign-born individuals were naturalized citizens, 33percent were legal permanent residents, and 31 percent were unauthorized. (Passel, *Growing Share of Immigrants Choosing Naturalization*, 2007. Washington, DC: Pew Hispanic Center. <http://pewhispanic.org/files/reports/74.pdf>

³ Adams and McDaniel, 2009. *Fulfilling the Promise of Preschool for All: Insights into Issues Affecting Access for Selected Immigrant Groups in Chicago*. The Urban Institute: Washington, DC. <http://www.urban.org/publications/411934.html>

⁴ See Adams and McDaniel, 2009. *Fulfilling the Promise of Preschool for All: Insights into Issues Affecting Access for Selected Immigrant Groups in Chicago*. The Urban Institute: Washington, DC; and Adams and McDaniel, 2012. *Access to the Illinois Preschool for All Initiative: Insights from Five Lower-Incidence Immigrant Groups in Northern Cook County*. The Urban Institute: Washington, DC.