

Connecting Communities



**Understanding Caregiver Needs for Outreach,
Recruitment, and Retention in Resource and
Referral Agencies**

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Executive Summary

Child Care Resource Center (CCRC) facilitated two in-person feedback sessions, one in Los Angeles County and one in San Bernardino (SB) County, to explore family engagement with Resource & Referral (R&R) agencies. The Los Angeles (LA) County feedback session was conducted in Spanish with families served by either Pathways LA or St. Anne's Family Services. The San Bernardino (SB) County feedback session was conducted in English with families served by CCRC. Both county sessions were held immediately following a parent café and were guided by the same focus group questions. In total, 53 participants attended the sessions, with 29 attendees in LA and 24 attendees in SB. Child care was available to parents for both feedback sessions. After each session, participants were also sent a survey link that included demographic questions and a question about marketing preferences.

Demographics collected in the post-group survey demonstrated differences between the two groups. The post-group survey had a 53% response rate, as 28 participants completed it. The LA group consisted of 100% Latino/a/x or Hispanic participants, likely because the session was conducted in Spanish. The SB group consisted of mostly (69%) Latino/a/x or Hispanic participants, 15% participants that identified with two or more races, 8% Pacific Islander/Native Hawaiian participants, and 8% White/Caucasian/European American participants. Most participants (27) reported that they were parents; one participant reported that they were a foster parent. Participants were of various ages, ranging from 21 to 50 years old.

Broadly speaking, participants in the two groups differed in how they learned about R&R activities. When asked how they first learned about parent cafés, the LA group mainly reported email or through other social service agencies. The SB group, however, reported more personable methods like through their R&R's community events or through an R&R staff member. Both groups also differed in how they generally stay up to date with their local R&R's events. The LA group mainly utilized social media, while the SB group mainly stayed in touch through word-of-mouth. Overall, the LA group learned about R&R activities through more online methods and the SB group through more personal methods. These findings reflect the preferred methods of connection found in other programs as well with parents in LA preferring quick and efficient methods and parents in SB preferring relationship-based methods of connecting. One change that R&Rs may benefit from implementing is establishing a centralized method for caregivers to learn about services and programs through existing services (e.g., during the application process, confirmation emails, etc.).

Both groups had many similarities in what they associated their local R&R with, as well as the reasons they go to their local R&R. The LA and SB group both commonly associated their R&R with child care and with positive words such as "play" and "community." Additionally, both groups reported the availability of resources as their main reasons for going to their local R&R. Generally, the LA group went for educational resources (e.g., parent trainings) and the SB group went for social resources (e.g., play groups, parent cafés). When specifically asked about their reasons for attending that day's parent café, both groups cited the educational benefits as a motivator. Overall, participants in both counties enjoyed educational benefits from their R&R's resources.

The two groups differed in their awareness of services. When prompted to share some of the services their R&R provides, many parents in the LA group shared their experience with different services their R&R provided. In the SB group, the subgroup of parents who was involved with their R&R's father program shared

examples of different services. However, the subgroup of parents who was only receiving child care financial assistance often mentioned they were learning about their R&R's additional services for the first time during that feedback session. In the LA group, no participants mentioned learning about services for the first time. Overall, the LA group had more parents aware of their R&R's different services as compared to the SB group; and the SB group had a subgroup of parents who reported they were learning about additional R&R services (i.e., aside from child care financial assistance) for the first time during the session. With this in mind, it could be helpful for R&Rs to update families about programs or services through a mailing list, either via email or mail, to provide more families with information while balancing a personable approach.

The LA and SB groups offered different suggestions for how R&Rs can encourage parent participation in events. The LA group mainly expressed a desire for more in-person cafés. They also mentioned that they would like afternoon English classes as an additional service. The SB group discussed the desire for additional information promoting their R&R's various services to give them opportunities to engage; and this may be related to the SB group having parents who weren't aware their R&R offered services besides child care financial assistance. Additionally, the SB group advocated for a more intuitive website design from their R&R, as well as personal outreach practices (i.e., one-on-one in-person outreach). With respect to barriers to parent engagement that R&Rs can try to address, the LA group highlighted lack of child care as a barrier to attendance to events, and the SB group provided unique, individualized barriers (e.g., non-traditional work hours, fatigue, lack of time) with no theme in the group. In consideration of the barriers mentioned, R&Rs may increase parent participation by providing child care during events where possible, and scheduling events at various times of the day to accommodate families with non-traditional work hours.

In discussions about marketing locations, both groups offered similar responses with some nuances. For example, both groups recommended places that families consistently visit, such as community centers, library centers, and agency or county offices. Both groups also mentioned partnerships with schools as a helpful marketing location. The LA group also added that places families visit for resources (e.g., food banks) could be good marketing locations; and the SB group added the suggestion of digital platforms (e.g., social media). R&Rs may reach more families through using the aforementioned locations for marketing.

Moreover, both groups provided similar perspectives on wording that R&Rs can use or avoid in their marketing to encourage parent engagement. The two groups agreed that simple and direct wording would be effective. Furthermore, both groups agreed that uplifting wording, like “help” and “free,” that focuses on the benefits R&Rs provide to families would be engaging, as opposed to wording that focuses on negative circumstances that may prompt families to seek R&R services. Relatedly, both groups also shared that words like “poor” or “low-income” should be avoided in marketing. Parents in the LA and SB groups shared that these words discourage them from engaging with marketing due to the stigma associated with it; and parents in the SB group added that this wording can feel exclusive for parents who are struggling financially but do not qualify as “low-income.” Families may benefit from R&Rs' use of accessible, inclusive, and straightforward wording in marketing materials.

Introduction

The Preschool Development Grant-Renewal (PDG-R) helps states assess and streamline the Early Learning and Care (ELC) mixed delivery system to improve quality services. CCRC leads California’s efforts to engage families in feedback sessions that inform policymakers on ways to improve the ELC system.

CCRC hosted two feedback sessions in October and November 2023 to discuss caregivers’ needs and experiences with R&R agencies. The LA session was held in October and the SB session was held in November. Both sessions explored how families currently use R&R agencies and their services or programs, as well as what could encourage families to engage more with their local R&Rs.

Survey Demographics

Across both counties, a total of 53 participants provided their perspectives on R&R outreach, recruitment, and retention practices. As seen in Table 1 below, the LA session had 29 participants who attended, and the SB session had 24 attendees.

Table 1. Number of Participant by County

County	# of Participants
Los Angeles County	29
San Bernardino County	24

As a follow-up to the feedback sessions in both counties, a demographics survey was sent out to participants. **53% (28) of participants completed the post feedback session demographic survey.** Results from the demographic survey include participants from the two counties: Los Angeles County, with 14 participants and San Bernardino County, with 14 responding to the survey. The majority (96%) of participants in the feedback session identified as parents and one caregiver identified as a foster parent (Table 2). Ethnicity plays a significant role in the composition of the participant pool, with 86% of participants identifying as Latino/a/x/e or Hispanic (Figure 1). This highlights the importance of considering cultural distinctions in the session’s findings. In terms of age, participants spanned a range from **21 to 50 years old (Figure 2)**. The mode, or most frequently occurring age **was 34 years old**. The demographic details provide valuable insights into the participants in the feedback session, encompassing their geographical location, parental status, ethnicity, and age range. However, because only half of the session participants responded to the survey, caution should be taken in assuming the data is fully representative of the feedback session participants.

Table 2. The majority of survey respondents are parents.

What best describes you?	
Parent	27
Foster Parent	1

Figure 1. 86% of survey respondents identified as being Latino/ Latina/ Latinx/ Latine/ Hispanic.

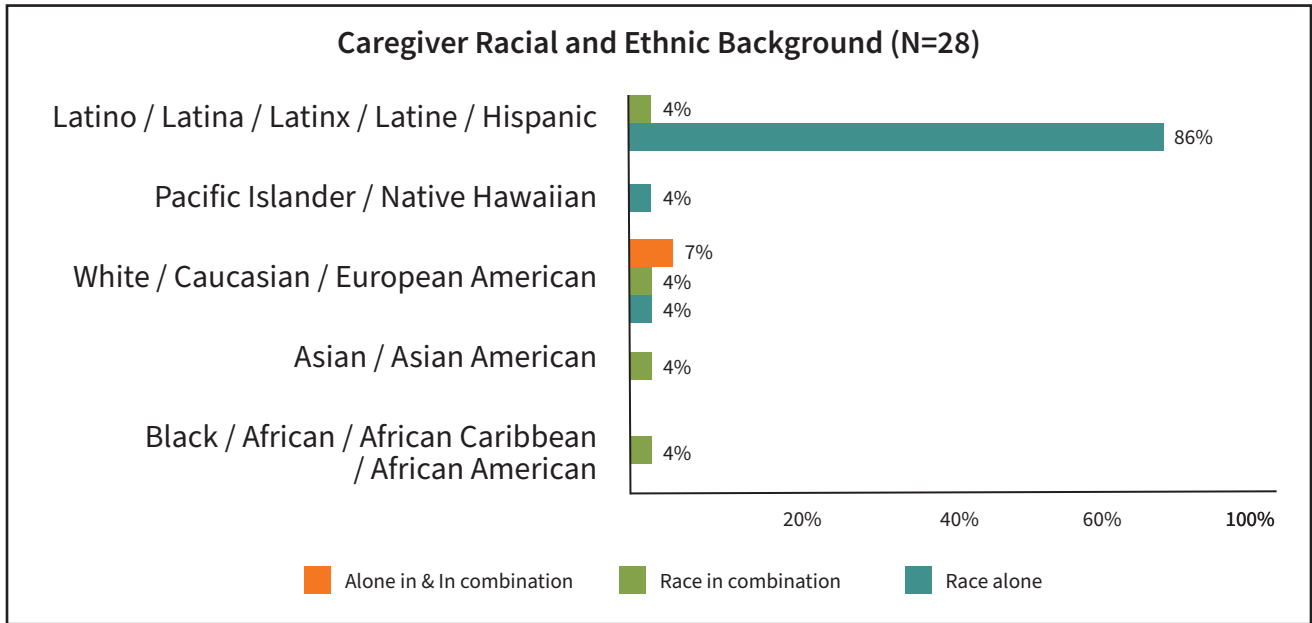
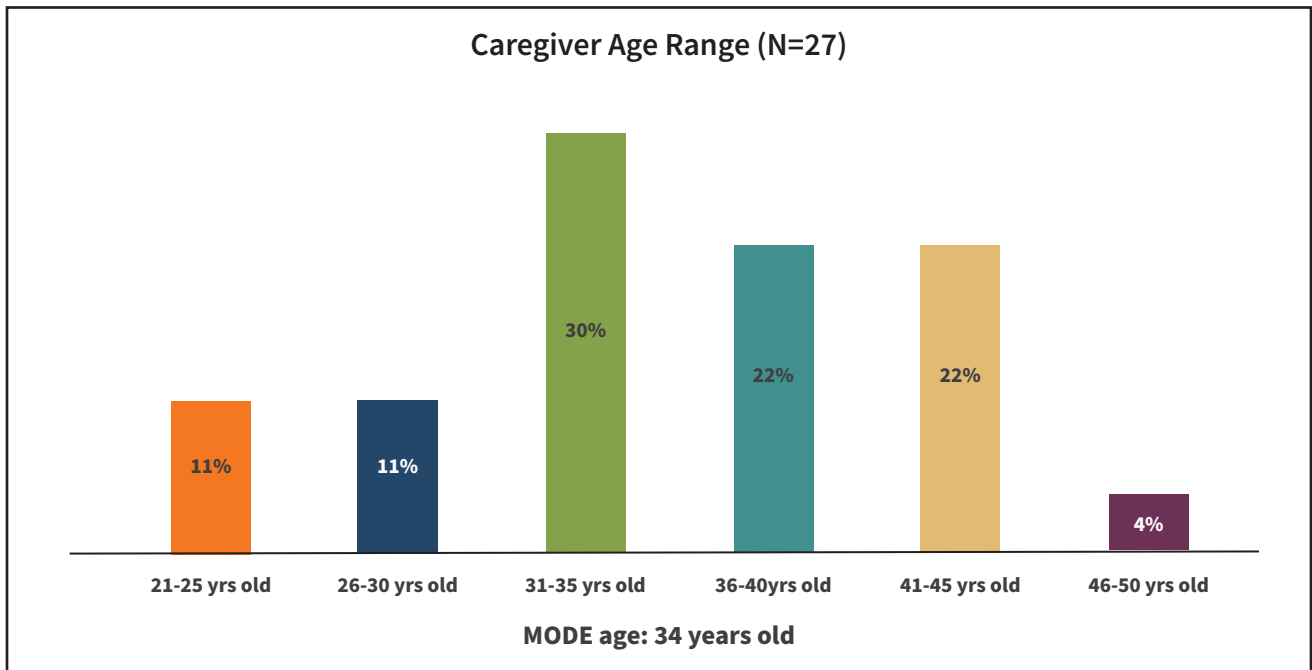


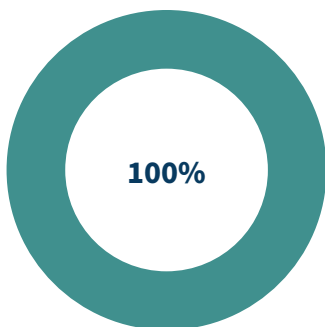
Figure 2. Caregiver ages range from 21 to 50 years old.



Los Angeles County Session

In partnership with St. Anne’s Family Services and Pathways LA, the October 2023 feedback session was held at St. Anne’s Conference Center in Los Angeles, CA. The feedback session was conducted in Spanish and held immediately following a Spanish parent café. Families who received services from St. Anne’s or Pathways LA were invited to participate and child care was available to families for the duration of the event. In total, 29 parents attended the feedback session.

Figure 3. Caregiver Race and Ethnicity, Los Angeles County (n=14)



Latino / Latina / Latinx / Latine / Hispanic

Los Angeles Session: How Parents Learn About R&R Activities

To inform how to reach new parents about cafés, participants were asked how they first learned about parent cafés. Additionally, families were asked to raise their hand if this was their first parent café, and three families indicated it was their first. The most common way that families reported first learning about parent cafés was via email, sent either from café facilitators or from staff at their children’s programs. The second most common method was through other organizations. For example, one parent shared that they “learned about it through a meeting with St. Anne’s...they shared the information about [local R&R’s parent cafés].” Less commonly, a couple of parents also mentioned first learning about cafés through flyers. Emails from a trusted source (e.g., program staff) may be an effective way to reach new parents in LA that have not previously engaged in their local R&R’s parent cafés.

As a follow-up, participants were also asked how they typically learn about R&R events or activities, like parent cafés. Almost all parents reported that social media was the most common way they stayed up to date on events held by their local R&Rs. One parent also shared that they use the calendar of events on their R&R’s website to learn about events. With this information in mind, R&Rs may benefit from using social media to market their services and events to families.

Los Angeles Session: What Parents Associate with Their Local R&R

In order to learn about what parents often associate R&R agencies with, participants were asked what comes to mind when they think of their local R&R. The most common words shared were “help” and “support,” as multiple parents cited that their R&R’s services allowed them to work and trust that their children were safe while they worked. Many parents expressed their gratitude for the support they receive from their R&Rs in finding and paying for child care. As seen in Figure 4, parents associated their local R&Rs with overwhelmingly positive thoughts, feelings, and experiences. It is evident that R&Rs’ services are beneficial for parents, their children, and the community.

“ You are all a blessing for mothers who need to work for their children. And because of you we have much better child care for our children. “

“ Through these agencies we feel supported. I am a single mother, and my only support is Pathways.”

Figure 4. When thinking of their local R&R, parents in the LA group most associated the words “help” and “support.”



“I feel blessed and proud of this little café that you have given us. I feel special, like a fancy restaurant, especially with the food and everyone has shared so much. I have learned more about the program, what benefits there are... my daughter is very safe, and it is a great blessing from you all.”

Los Angeles Session: The Reasons Parents Use Their Local R&Rs

When participants were asked to discuss some of the reasons that they go to their local R&R, parents agreed that they generally go for help and out of necessity. Regarding specific services that they go to their local R&R for, education was discussed the most. Participants noted that R&R events like parent cafés are educational for them because they receive information on different topics, such as child development. For example, during the parent café prior to this feedback session, the facilitator started with a brief presentation on the five protective factors of the Strengthening Families framework before providing some related discussion questions. In addition to receiving academic information, parents also noted that they learn from the ideas or stories shared during discussions with other parents. One parent also mentioned that their local R&R helped connect them to mental health support. Parents seemed to enjoy and appreciate the educational benefits that R&Rs provide for their families.

“For education, for support, also for information and learning. With parent cafés we learn a lot about different topics.”

“It also helps on how to raise the children; my daughter likes the connection she has with children.”

Los Angeles Session: Parent Awareness of R&R Services

To gain insight into parents’ level of awareness of the different services that R&Rs offer, participants were also asked to share the types of services their local R&Rs offer. They enthusiastically shared that their local R&Rs offer services like activities for children, family activities, parent workshops that focus on parenting and child development, child care, and help with paying for child care. Some parents also shared services offered by other social services agencies. Parents’ responses demonstrated that they were thoroughly aware of the services their local R&Rs offered; and very grateful for them as well.

“The most important thing for me is that you pay child care for my daughters. They are twins and it is very difficult to pay for two girls... more than half of my money was for someone to take care of them for me. Thank you very much for that help paying for my daughters’ child care.”

“Mental, and psychological help of ways that we can relate to our children, how we can know our children better, how we can identify our children’s character which are quite important, because none of us parents are born, and the children come with a little book, and we are guided by that little book. It’s not possible. So, all this help and workshops do help us understand better every day.”



Los Angeles Session: Increasing Parent R&R Engagement

In order to learn what R&Rs can do to help increase parent engagement at parent cafés, participants were asked what changes they would like to see. Many parents endorsed that they would like to see more in-person parent cafés, referencing how much they enjoyed the in-person café that transpired prior to the feedback session. Parents agreed that while virtual cafés are enjoyable and convenient, they feel more focused and find greater connection at in-person cafés. Relatedly, one parent noted that they would like to see R&R events, like parent cafés, held in different locations so that some events might be held closer to their home. Generally, it may be helpful for R&Rs to increase in-person events, potentially by building partnerships with other organizations to expand their reach.

“I would like to see more events like today’s, in-person. Because they do them on Zoom [and] they are very nice too, but it makes a difference to be in that communication with another person.”



Participants were also asked about what additional services or outreach practices might encourage them to engage more with their local R&R. One parent suggested that afternoon English classes would be helpful, and other parents in the room agreed. They noted that English classes would be most helpful if child care or another children’s activity could be provided while parents attend classes. Another parent shared that they would like to see their R&R offer dual language programs. For example, they would like to see the use of bilingual books during activities like story time. Overall, parents would like to see immersive language activities for themselves and for their children.

The conversation on increasing parent engagement naturally led to discussions about barriers to attending R&R events. One of the main barriers discussed was lack of child care. Parents noted they are unable to engage meaningfully in events like parent cafés when they are simultaneously attending to their children during the event. In other cases, parents altogether cannot attend R&R events because they do not have someone to take care of their children at home. Parents agreed that it would be helpful if child care was offered during R&R events. One parent also raised the barrier of irregular work hours (i.e., work hours outside of the traditional 9-5 weekday schedule) that prevent them from attending events. While many parents can typically attend evening events, it would be helpful for R&Rs to occasionally provide activities or events during the day for the subset of parents who work evening hours; and to have child care available when possible.

“To offer more child care because sometimes us parents have no one else to support us when there are activities like this one...Like the event today that offers child care, it is excellent because my husband and I can both be present. Because sometimes I tell my husband to stay with the children...I wish that he could go with me, but that is difficult for us. We don't have family around and any situation can happen. Child care would be essential.”



Los Angeles Session: Marketing R&Rs

Another prominent goal of the feedback session was to learn about what types of marketing parents would find engaging from R&Rs. First, participants were asked about where they would find it helpful to see marketing materials. For instance, what they would consider a good marketing location to reach parents. Next, participants were asked about both the type of language and wording they would like to see, and not like to see. Additionally, participants were asked what images or phrases would encourage them to learn more about, or want to participate in, R&R activities and programs.

General Marketing Locations

Most parents agreed that places where families already go for resources or support would be ideal marketing locations. For example, community centers, libraries, food banks, shelters, and WIC offices could be good places to reach parents about R&R services. Similarly, many parents proposed that schools could be a good place to market R&R services. Less commonly but still importantly, a couple parents suggested social media and the inside of buses because it was how they personally learned about resources.

“I found out through social media...that was a wonderful day. I had asked for a quote for a child care for my girl, but they charged me a lot of money. Half of [my] salary was going to go towards taking care of my daughter.”



General Use of Language and Wording in Marketing

Regarding language and wording in marketing materials, the consensus was the use of multiple languages and simple, direct wording. Primarily, many parents agreed that Spanish marketing was important; and it is important to acknowledge that this group was conducted in Spanish. However, many parents also advocated for the use of multiple languages, acknowledging that people of multiple races and language backgrounds may need help. As far as wording, parents noted that easy-to-understand vocabulary is important. In other words, avoiding extensive wording in marketing and getting directly to the point of what is being offered is more likely to engage parents' attention.

“There are a lot of us who don't speak English. Or there are persons who need help and don't speak Spanish.”



Parents were also asked what type of wording they would not like to see in marketing materials, to help inform what to avoid in marketing. The most common wording parents recommended avoiding was “poor” or “low-income.” Parents opened up about how disempowering this type of wording can feel and emphasized that they associated stigma with it. It can discourage parents from picking up a flyer or clicking on a link, and further discourages wanting to engage with the services being marketed. Additionally, parents noted that wording like “people who are receiving CalFresh can apply” can discourage them from picking up flyers because of the same stigma. For example, one parent shared that this wording reminds them they are already receiving help somewhere else and makes them feel bad about soliciting additional help. Ultimately, parents may not engage with marketing materials that employ the aforementioned wording because they do not want others to perceive them negatively.

“People have the impression that if you need help it’s because we can’t take care of ourselves. If they are in that program, it’s because you are a single mother, you can’t take care of your children or pay for day care.”

Overall, parents would like to see more uplifting wording in marketing materials. For example, words like “extra help” that highlight the positive nature of receiving the services being offered would be beneficial. Parents feel supported by services and would like to see that wording reflected in marketing materials. They shared that they are less likely to engage with marketing materials that spotlight being in subaltern economic positions. Instead, parents would like to see marketing materials that highlight the help and support that is being offered. This would encourage them to engage more with marketing materials.

“You feel bad when you hear ‘low-income.’ It feels bad because it means that you can’t. But everyone sometimes needs help. We sometimes just need help for the moment, for a little while, to be able to get up. One needs ‘help,’ ‘lift up,’ [or] ‘extra help.’”

Figure 5. Parents recommended using positive words in marketing and avoiding wording associated with socioeconomic status.

WORDS to AVOID vs USE

Avoid	Use
<p>“Poor”</p> <p>“Low-income”</p> <p>“You qualify if you already receive [benefit]”</p>	<p>“Help”</p> <p>“Little boost”</p> <p>“Support”</p>

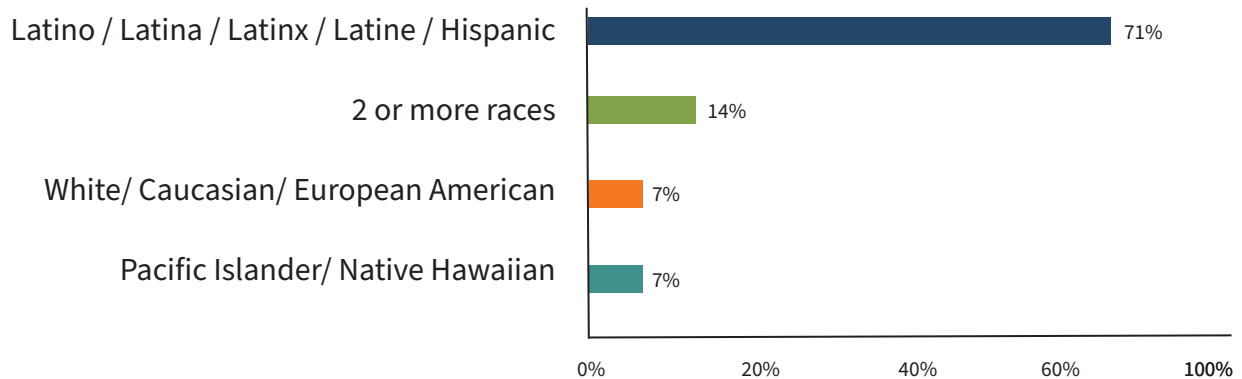
Activities/Event Marketing: Use of Images or Phrases

Participants were also asked to provide examples of images or phrases in marketing that might encourage them to want to learn more about R&R activities or programs. The most common suggestion from parents was affirming that the use of the phrase “café” is appealing and encourages them to want to participate. As one parent noted, the word “café” is more motivating and exciting than a generic label like “parent meeting.” In regard to images, parents agreed that they would like to see pictures of parents who have attended previous cafés; images that depict parents smiling and enjoying themselves. For images advertising programs, parents agreed that images of happy children, or happy mothers with their child(ren), would encourage them to associate the program with their child being in a safe place. Overall, parents would like to see images or phrases with positive connotations that reference families enjoying themselves at R&R activities or programs.

San Bernardino County Session

In November 2023, Child Care Resource Center hosted a feedback session in a conference room at the San Bernardino office. The feedback session was conducted in English and was held immediately following a parent café. Families who attended the parent café were invited to stay and participate. Child care was available to families for the duration of the event. In total, 24 parents attended the feedback session.

Figure 6. Caregiver Race and Ethnicity, San Bernardino County (n=14)



San Bernardino Session: How Parents Learn about R&R Activities

Participants were asked to share how they first learned about parent cafés. Most parents shared that they first encountered the parent cafés through a community event hosted by their local R&R, or through their participation in a program at their local R&R. Many parents also shared that they first learned about the parent cafés through their connection to a staff member at their local R&R. Two parents mentioned learning about parent cafés through a friend, and one parent also noted that they learned about their first café through social media. Overall, most parents that participated in the feedback session became aware of parent cafés through their existing participation with their local R&R. In consideration of this, R&Rs may benefit from promoting the additional services they can provide to families already receiving one of their services. However, if R&Rs are

interested in reaching parents not already connected to their services, other methods of outreach described in this report are suggested.

As a follow-up, participants were also asked how they generally learn about events from their local R&R. The most common response was through word of mouth from a friend; and the second most common response was through another agency. For example, one parent shared that their husband learned about parent cafés through their local foster agency's Bridge program. One parent also mentioned that they consistently received text messages from a staff member at their local R&R and did not show up to events at first, but with the consistent outreach they did eventually attend their first event. In sum, parents often learn about their local R&R's events through word of mouth, either from a friend, another agency, or staff members at their local R&R; and maintaining consistent outreach can be fruitful for families' engagement.

“I was having a terrible day... but she [friend] called [me] to come to a parent café. And I was having a terrible day and didn't want to come but I just showed up and this changed my life. I love it.”

San Bernardino Session: What Parents Associate with Their Local R&R

To learn what parents associate with their local R&R, participants were asked what comes to mind when they think of their local R&R. Many parents initially expressed their gratitude for the child care provided, but also went on to describe that their R&R provides a lot more beyond child care. For example, the most described words were “child care,” “play,” “community,” and “resources” as parents referenced their positive experiences with the playgroups and parent cafés available to the community. Parents also stated that they think about additional resources that their R&R provides, such as trainings, annual family events, and evidence-based programs, which they were also grateful for. Most of the parents who responded to this question also discussed their efforts to spread the word and increase awareness about the resources their R&R provides. Overall, parents thought about the various services their R&R provides and expressed positive, heartfelt associations.

“At the risk of sounding overdramatic, I would describe it as lifesaving. I get excited about the play work, and parent café, I feel so cheese, that I have to contain my answer that I am going to burst...One thing I did want to say that did draw me is the fact that there is child care, and dinner is such a big deal for some people. For me it was the first time I could breathe and hear myself.”

Additionally, participants were asked if they had heard of an R&R before or knew what an R&R is. Although most parents in the group actively engaged with their local R&R, none of the 24 parents indicated knowledge of what an R&R is. As a follow-up, participants were then asked to raise their hands if they knew of other agencies that provide social services. About 30% of the group raised their hands. These responses indicate that families may not have recognized the official term “R&R,” but their responses throughout the group indicated that they were very familiar with their local R&R by its name.

Figure 7. When thinking of their local R&R, parents in the SB group most associated the words “childcare,” “play,” “community,” and “resources.”



San Bernardino Session: The Reasons Parents Use Their Local R&Rs

When asked to provide the reasons that they go to their local R&R, one participant responded to the question; however, many other participants indirectly responded to this question during the conversation for the previous “when you think of your local R&R, what comes to mind” question. In direct response to the question, one parent mentioned that they go to their local R&R for subsidized assistance for child care and another parent agreed. In the previous question, however, many parents discussed going to their local R&R for additional reasons like for parent cafés, trainings, playgroups for their children, the nurturing father’s program, and communitywide annual or seasonal family events. One parent shared that with the parent cafés, she specifically attended them because she benefitted from hearing other parents’ experiences and perspectives. Overall, parents expressed that they go to their local R&R for all the helpful resources provided.

“[For] expanded knowledge and socializing, coming to see other faces... we are all out there, you would never think we are going through the same thing.”

Additionally, to gain insight into what motivates parents to attend parent cafés, participants were asked to share some of the reasons they chose to attend the parent café that day. The majority of parents shared that they attended parent cafés to learn more about parenting or to learn how to change the way they parent. For example, a couple of parents discussed how hearing other parents' perspectives throughout the group was beneficial for their own parenting. Many parents also noted that they attended the parent café because they enjoyed the socialization opportunity. One parent acknowledged that the incentive motivated them to attend that day, but that even without an incentive, they would still attend parent cafés. Altogether, the learning and social benefits of parent cafés seemed to mainly motivate parents to attend; though the provision of incentives during parent cafés, like food and child care, was a helpful motivator in parent café attendance as well.

“I have an age gap; I have a 16-year-old and a 1-year-old. I want to change the way I parent so that’s why I’m here.”

“I want to learn how to be a good parent. That’s why I came.”

“We come and what we get here, we hear people’s milestones, hear different stories. You guys are doing a great job, I wish you guys had more parent cafés. I enjoy it.”

San Bernardino Session: Parent Awareness of R&R Services

Throughout conversations during the feedback session, participants indicated varying levels of awareness of their R&R’s services. The majority of parents shared that they actively engaged with one of their R&R’s programs for fathers and learned about events or other services through their connection to a staff member involved with the program. Many parents who receive child care financial assistance, however, shared that they were not aware their R&R provided additional services beyond help with child care. In sum, parents involved with the R&R’s father program seemed aware of many services as a result of their relationship to a staff member in the program, while many families receiving child care financial assistance were not aware of additional services. It could be helpful for R&Rs to implement ways to increase parent’s awareness of their additional services during the application and recertification processes for child care financial assistance.

“I would have thought [R&R] is just for child care, but it’s more than that...There are different resources, and I am still learning.”

San Bernardino Session: Increasing Parent R&R Engagement

When asked about what would encourage them to learn more about R&Rs, participants noted barriers to learning what their R&R offers. Mainly, parents shared that they were learning about services for the first time during this feedback session. For example, one parent shared that they didn't know about the father's program but would love to join it. Parents also shared that they never thought to look for additional services beyond financial assistance for child care. To increase engagement, R&Rs may consider finding ways to raise awareness about the services they provide in addition to child care financial assistance. Increasing parents' awareness of the various services an R&R provides could give parents more opportunities to engage with their R&R.

When prompted about their R&R's website, the majority of parents highlighted that they were aware of it but did not engage with it. Most parents agreed that their R&R's website was overwhelming to navigate. One parent shared that they used the website's search engine to look for information on parent cafés to share with a friend and found that the results were not intuitive to navigate. Instead, they opted to connect their friend with a staff member to help them provide information about upcoming parent cafés. Throughout this group, parents mentioned the importance of personal connections and that they stayed up to date with their local R&R through word of mouth. For this particular group, it seemed that personal methods of engagement were more effective.

“I didn't know about the extra stuff like this [parent café]. I wouldn't ever looked into it or even thought of it. I only know because of my friend, and I know [R&R staff member] for many years. So, when she said [R&R staff member's name], I said put me in there.”

“As we are sitting here learning about other services, I didn't know about all these services. But it reminded me that I did get on the website and it kind of scared me.”

“I was also one of the first to be at the [R&R program for fathers]. That was something very special to me in my life too. It has made a big real impact for me as well. And I believe that the connections we made in that group are deep in my heart, I will always feel like family because of that connection we made. And I agree there are not enough fathers' groups.”

Along with the theme of learning how R&Rs can increase parent engagement, participants were also asked to discuss anything that prevents them from participating. Parents shared their individual barriers. One parent mentioned that their partner could not attend due to their non-traditional work hours. One parent also shared that stress and fatigue sometimes prevented them from participating, as the parent cafés can involve serious conversations. Additionally, one parent shared that they have limited available time and sometimes preferred to spend quality time with their family. Overall, parents shared different barriers that applied to their unique experiences.

San Bernardino Session: Marketing R&Rs

As with the LA feedback session, an important goal of the SB session was learning what types of marketing parents would find engaging from R&Rs. Participants were first asked to share locations where they would find it helpful to see R&R marketing materials for parents. Additionally, participants were asked about the type of wording, phrases, or images they would like to see in marketing for R&R services.

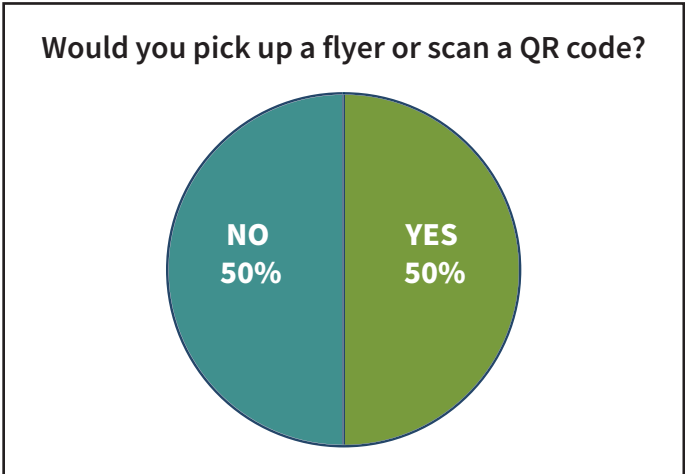
General Marketing Locations

Participants were asked to provide their opinion on good locations to market R&R services to parents. Parents provided a variety of recommendations; by far, the most frequently mentioned was the use of flyers at various locations. Specifically, parents recommended distributing both paper and digital flyers (i.e., images of flyers that can be sent via text or email); as well as including QR codes on paper flyers (Figure 8). As far as locations for distributing flyers, grocery stores and county (e.g., preschool department, employment services department) or agency (e.g., WIC) offices were the most mentioned. Many parents also expressed their willingness to distribute flyers at their children’s schools or at their respective workplaces, citing that they greatly benefit from their R&R’s services and want others to benefit as well.

“I love looking at flyers. I would love to see them more in the libraries...You tell me why you go to CCRC, sell it to me.”

“Work with county preschool department. A lot of parents that can piggyback off this resource [parent cafés]. Sometimes parents ask for certain services and sometimes we don’t have the resources. So having a flyer there too.”

Figure 8. Half of parents endorsed that they would pick up a flyer or scan a QR code to learn more about their R&R’s services.



Another popular marketing location parents suggested was social media. When asked to raise their hand if they had a social media account, all but one participant raised their hand (Figure 9). However, when asked who was aware that their R&R had a social media account, only about 20% of parents raised their hand. Parents cited the convenience of social media ads. One parent shared that they would like to see ads in the form of video testimonials, and that they themselves would like to volunteer and discuss how they have benefitted from their R&R's services. Parents also noted that they would be more likely to see ads or marketing content on social media because they already regularly engage with social media. In consideration of parents' endorsement of wanting marketing on social media and the low level of awareness about their R&R's social media account, R&R's may benefit from promoting their social media account to parents.

“Social media – if the ads pop up, if the location would be mentioned, if it said San Bernardino. It would get my attention. It’s easy, you’re already on it, it’s convenient.”

Figure 9. Almost all parents reported that they have a social media account.



Parents also commonly suggested marketing through partnerships with schools. Two parents mentioned that their school uses an app to send announcements to parents, and that they would like to receive announcements about R&R events or services through their school's app for parents. One parent highlighted that they first learned about their R&R because their child's school promoted the R&R's annual family play day event. Another parent shared that they would like to see banners announcing R&R services or events during school drop-off and pick-up, as they are likely to see it while waiting in line for their child. One parent also suggested that parents involved in their school PTA groups could share information about their R&R at meetings. Overall, parents endorsed wanting to learn about their R&R's events or services through their children's schools.

Parents provided some additional suggestions that were not mentioned often, but still notable. One parent shared that they would like to see a person from their R&R stationed at locations that families frequent, like

the grocery store. One parent also suggested sending an R&R representative to library events, so that they can talk to families about the resources the R&R offers. Another parent also suggested using billboards for marketing. Additionally, one parent suggested marketing at staffing agencies or places where people look for work, as they may be looking for child care as well. Parents offered a variety of marketing locations they thought would be helpful.

General Use of Language and Wording in Marketing

When asked about the type of wording they would like to see or hear in R&R marketing materials, parents generally advocated for the use of positive and encouraging words. The word “free” was the most endorsed wording. Parents discussed positive associations with the word “free,” with one parent acknowledging that the words “free event” (in the marketing for the parent cafés) specifically engaged their initial attention. Parents also discussed wanting to see positive, inclusive words like “community” and “support” in R&R marketing. As a couple parents noted, the word “community” is more open and general than a word like “parent.” Additionally, a couple parents recommended leading with the words “did you know” to get families’ attention. Overall, parents recommended that R&Rs use encouraging and inclusive word choices in their marketing.

“If I see ‘free events’ - that’s how we found the resources here. ‘Free’ and ‘events,’ that would be great.”

“I think when things like ‘low-income’ are included in marketing because they think it will help include those people, but it makes me feel like I am excluded. Because my husband and I are struggling with income but every time I try to look for help, my husband, on paper, is making too much. But we are struggling...Use ‘free,’ ‘resources,’ ‘community.’ That leaves it open, you can gain something.”

Parents also provided insight on the type of language they prefer in marketing materials. Altogether, parents most endorsed wanting to see simple wording. Parents highlighted that they were more likely to dismiss long or heavy wording and would prefer to see marketing that only highlights the most important points. Parents reported that they were more likely to engage with marketing that utilizes simple, straightforward language.

Relatedly, parents also provided recommendations about the type of wording they would not like to see in marketing materials. Parents recommended avoiding one specific term in R&R marketing: “low-income.” One family shared that they felt excluded when they read “low-income” in marketing because they did not qualify as a low-income family but still struggled financially. They discussed how the term “low-income” in marketing discouraged them from engaging with the advertised resource, due to fear of not qualifying. Another parent also shared that they associated the word “low-income” with stigma, and that it would discourage them from engaging with the marketing. Parents unanimously agreed they did not want to see the term “low-income” in R&R marketing.

“[When] you see ‘low-income,’ you don’t want to seem like you are struggling. Makes you feel, you feel a certain way. You don’t want to click even if you need the help.”



Summary of Findings in Both Counties

As previously mentioned, the group structures and focus group questions were relatively consistent across the two counties. In both LA and SB, the feedback sessions took place immediately following a parent café and child care was available during the cafés and sessions. A semi-structured protocol was used in the feedback sessions. Specifically, while the same feedback session questions were used for reference in both sessions, adjustments were made according to time limitations or the dynamic of the group conversation (e.g., if parents responded to a question through natural conversation before it was asked, the question was skipped because it was considered covered). The questions were intended as guides for discussion, to allow parents to lead the conversation while still providing structure. Generally, however, the same focus group questions were used in both groups.

It is also important to highlight that each group of parents provided their unique perspectives based on their individual and collective experiences. For example, the groups had language and cultural differences. The LA group was conducted in Spanish with Latino/a/x or Hispanic participants, and the SB group was conducted in English with participants from four different race and ethnicity backgrounds. Overall, participants shared many similar responses throughout the feedback session, but differences existed as well.

The groups provided unique responses regarding how they learned about R&R activities. In the LA group, participants generally first learned about cafés through email or other social service agencies. The SB group mainly first learned about cafés through their R&R’s community events or through their relationship to a staff member. Both groups also had different methods of keeping up to date with their local R&R’s events. The LA group mostly used social media to stay up to date, whereas the SB group most often used word-of-mouth, either through friends or other agencies.

Both groups had related responses in what they associated their local R&R with. Participants in both counties associated their local R&R with child care; the LA group additionally specified that they saw their R&R as a safe place for their children’s care. Moreover, participants in both groups associated their R&R with encouraging words. The LA group mentioned words like “help” and “support” and the SB group mentioned words like “play” and “community.”

The groups had a mixture of similar and unique responses for the reasons they use their local R&R agencies. Both groups shared that they go for resources; but the LA group most commonly went for educational reasons and the SB group most commonly went for help with child care and for social opportunities for themselves and their children. Each group had unique responses for why they chose to attend that day’s parent café. Most parents in the LA group shared that the availability of child care, and the opportunity to attend an in-person café and socialize was their main motivator. In the SB group, most parents attended that day’s café to

learn more about parenting. When accessing R&R services for educational needs, the LA group went to the R&R for services and activities in general. However, when the SB group accessed the R&R for their educational needs it was specific to their attendance at that day's parent café.

Parents were asked about their awareness of R&R services. The LA group had more parents that were aware of many of their R&R's services, though both groups had subgroups of parents with varying levels of awareness. In the LA group, many parents shared examples of services their R&R provides. In the SB group, mainly the subgroup of parents involved with the R&R's father program shared some examples of services. Additionally, in the SB group there were multiple parents that expressed they hadn't known about many of their R&R's services and were learning about them during that session; this was not observed in the LA group.

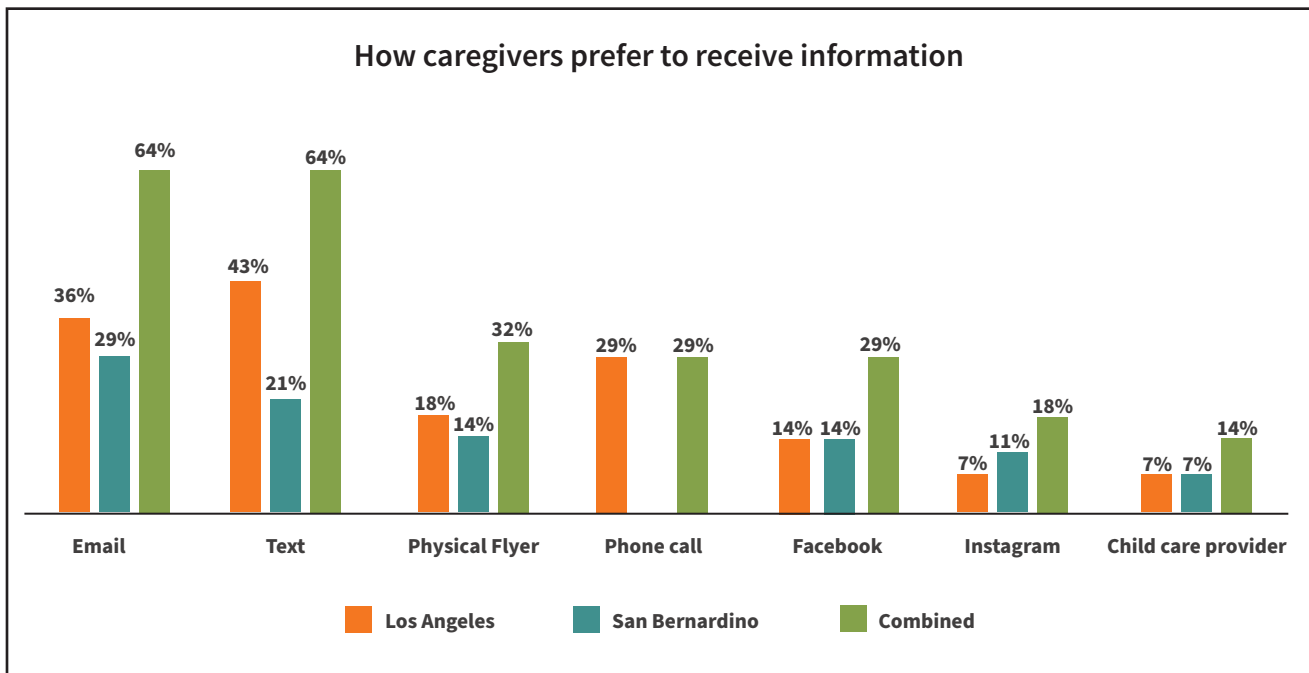
Parents were asked about how R&R's can increase parent engagement and the two groups had unique perspectives. When asked about what changes they would like to see, the LA group mostly endorsed wanting more in-person parent cafés while the SB group most commonly endorsed wanting more information distributed about their R&R's services so that they can engage more often. When asked about the additional services or outreach practices they would like to see from their R&R, the LA group's responses centered around additional services and suggested afternoon English classes for professional development purposes. The SB group's responses focused on outreach practices and mainly suggested a more intuitive website design and a preference for more personal (i.e., one-on-one in-person) outreach from staff or peers. With respect to barriers to participating in parent cafés, many in the LA group highlighted that lack of child care during events was a significant barrier while the SB group did not have a consistent theme in their responses (one parent had non-traditional work hours, one parent shared stress and fatigue prevented their attendance sometimes, and another parent shared that they had limited time).

Parents were queried about suggested marketing locations and the two groups had some things in common and some differences in their responses. Both groups suggested advertising at places where families already frequently visit (e.g., community centers, libraries, grocery stores, and agency or county offices) as well as through partnerships with local schools. However, the LA group also mentioned places where families go for resources (e.g., food banks, shelters), and the SB group proposed using digital platforms like social media as well as repeated marketing to families to encourage them to follow their R&R's social media account.

Parents were asked about the general use of language and wording in R&R marketing and there were a lot of commonalities in both groups' responses. Both the LA and SB groups expressed a desire for simple, direct wording in marketing. Additionally, both groups recommended using uplifting wording, like "help," "free," and "support" to highlight attention on the benefits R&Rs can offer families. Moreover, both groups agreed that they did not want to see words like "poor" and "low-income" in marketing. In both the LA and SB groups, parents highlighted the stigma of these words and their effect of discouragement from engaging with the marketing material. The SB group also had a couple of parents who highlighted that they felt excluded when they saw these in terms marketing, because they did not qualify as low-income but still struggled financially. Overall, both groups provided the same responses, with slightly differing reasoning in respect to avoiding terms like "low-income" in marketing.

After the feedback sessions, participants were also sent a post-group survey link that included a question on marketing. The purpose of the question was to supplementally quantify how parents would prefer to receive information from their R&Rs. As seen in Figure 10, email and text seemed to be the overall most preferred methods of receiving information. When looking specifically at LA county, participants most preferred email, text, and phone calls. When looking specifically at SB county, participants most preferred email, text, physical flyers, and Facebook.

Figure 10. Most parents would prefer to receive information from their R&R via email or text.



Note: Participants were able to select more than one method

Recommendations

Recommendations were pulled from the feedback provided by participants in both sessions.

- Utilize the R&R mailing list to leverage the number of families who prefer receiving updates and program information through this method.** Participants from both sessions shared learning about the café by email from the host or staff at the child care program. R&Rs are advised to expand their mailing list to include families across various programs and consistently employ email as an effective way for reaching families regarding programs and services.
- Increase the in-person events with child care services available.** A recurring theme found in both groups was that participants found virtual cafes convenient. However, parents also greatly enjoyed the in-person café experience. One participant highlighted her enjoyment of virtual cafes but emphasized the unique connections that were made with other participants during the in-person events. Another caregiver

highlighted feeling more connected and present during the in-person event knowing their children were well-cared for. Additionally, parents expressed they would like events to occur around various locations, including at partnering agencies, to address distance-related barriers and facilitate more participation during in-person events. It is recommended that R&Rs increase the frequency of in-person events and ensure child care is available to facilitate caregivers to fully engage.

- **To accommodate families with non-traditional work hours, consider scheduling events at various times of the day.** Participants from both the LA and SB groups expressed the need for more daytime events, as some working families work nontraditional hours. Scheduling events during the day or weekends will offer an opportunity for those with unconventional work hours (beyond the 8 to 5 work schedule) to participate in the activities and engage with the R&R community.
- **Ensure that marketing and outreach materials are easily and widely accessible and incorporate empowering language.** Caregivers emphasized the importance of advertising programs and services in locations frequented by families. Examples provided by participants included banners at local schools visible during pick-up or drop-off, connections with PTAs and advertising through apps used by schools. Other suggestions included advertisement at social services offices such as the Employment and WIC offices, food banks, shelters, and San Bernardino County Schools (SBCSS) where families already go for resources and support. Caregivers also mentioned promoting programs at libraries through in-person engagement would be beneficial. They also noted they would like marketing materials to be clear and direct and use everyday language that is easy to understand, such as “Did you know”, or “Free”. They also suggested the use of uplifting language such as “extra help”, “little boost”, or “support” included in the marketing materials and avoidance of language with negative connotations such as “low-income”, or “poor”. Caregivers would like to see marketing videos and/or ads featuring actual program participants sharing their experience. They find images of a child and parent smiling to be attention-grabbing images that evoke a sense of happiness. Additionally, social media was mentioned as a helpful tool that should be leveraged to promote events. It is recommended that R&Rs enhance their social media presence, and raise parent awareness of their social media account, to effectively enhance family engagement.
- **Establish a streamlined or centralized method for caregivers to learn about services and programs through existing services.** Some participants learned about additional services and events during the feedback session as participants shared the types of services they receive from their R&R. It is recommended that R&Rs implement a process to communicate the various events or services during the intake or application process. For instance, when caregivers apply and recertify for financial assistance for child care, implement a communication process to inform them of additional services provided by the R&R. This could involve sending a link along with a confirmation email that the child care application was received or sharing a flyer with a calendar of events during the in-person applications. Furthermore, it is recommended that agencies conduct a review of client-facing website(s) to incorporate user-friendly features, such as location or a targeted calendar of events.

Appendix A: Focus Group Questions

1. How did you first learn about the parent cafés?
 - a. How do you usually learn about the events like these cafés?
 - b. How do you usually learn about events posted by your local R&R?
2. “Resource & Referral agencies are commonly known as R&R’s. Every county in California has R&Rs. The R&Rs help families find child-care that best meets their needs. They also recruit and train child care providers and collect data from parents and child care providers. The R&Rs provide a variety of services to parents seeking care, to providers seeking professional development, and to communities seeking support for their children.” When you think of your local R&R, what comes to mind?
 - a. What are their names?
 - b. What reasons do you go to your local R&R for?
 - c. Could you share what type of services they offer?
3. R&R agencies offer different activities and programs for families, such as parent groups like this one, family play day events, school supply drives, financial assistance for child care, Head Start programs, help finding a child care provider, and home visiting programs. What would encourage you to learn more or click a link or call a phone number?
 - a. Would marketing materials be helpful? Where are good locations to market these services to parents?
 - b. What type of language would you like to see/hear in marketing materials?
 - c. What language would you NOT like to see/hear in marketing materials?
 - d. What images or phrases would encourage you to learn more or participate in the activities/ programs?
4. What are some of the reasons you chose to attend today’s group?
5. What are some of the things that prevent you from participating? For example, time, not knowing where to go, transportation, language, child care, etc.
 - a. Is there anything else that prevents participating that hasn’t been mentioned?
6. What activities or programs would you like to see more of?
7. Are there any words in marketing materials that make you uncomfortable?

For questions, please contact: Dr. Susan Savage, Director of Research at (818) 349-3095 or ssavage@ccrcca.org