

Enrollment Forward: Strategies to Address Enrollment Challenges

Glenna Davis: Hello and welcome, everyone, to Enrollment Forward, Grant Recipient Strategies to Address Challenges Related to Enrollment. It is now my pleasure to turn the floor over to Gretchen Jurgens. Gretchen, the floor is yours.

Gretchen Jurgens: Thanks, Glenna. Hello and welcome to our webinar today. Happy Women's History Month, Head Start. My name is Gretchen Jurgens, and I'm excited to kick off our fourth webinar in the Enrollment Forward series. I'd like to welcome to the webcast today, Tabitha Temple, infant-toddler specialist with the Office of Head Start and my co-pilot for this showcase. In today's webinar, we're featuring Head Start programs and their community partners. We'll hear how they work collaboratively to identify, recruit, and enroll eligible Head Start families. In addition, we'll talk to programs about successes they have had with recruiting and retaining staff.

We'll begin first with an ERSEA-focused discussion and then move into a short Q&A. From there, we'll shift the discussion to staffing, followed by another brief Q&A. Be sure to submit your questions. As you're learning from the showcase programs, please feel free to share practices from your own program that have been effective in recruiting and enrolling children and families and recruiting and retaining staff. We hope you enjoy the discussion today. Now let's welcome our first group to discuss ERSEA. Tabitha?

Tabitha Temple: Thank you, Gretchen, for that wonderful introduction. I've been looking forward to this webcast for the last few months. We are so happy to have programs here with us to share their experiences. Now, before we get started with our discussion, we have to be good hostesses and allow our guests to introduce themselves. Please share your name, the program that you work with and your role within the program. We'll just start ... Anyone can get started.

Kristen Phillips: Hi, my name is Kristen Phillips, and I work at Lakes and Prairies Community Action Partnership, CAP LP, and I am the Head Start director.

Shanna Grefsrud: Hi, everyone. I'm Shanna Grefsrud. I work with Kristen at CAP LP. I'm the parent engagement manager.

Erendira Guerrero: Hi, everyone. My name is Erendira Guerrero. I work at Encompass Community Services. We're in Santa Cruz County, California. I'm the program director.

Ramona McCabe: My name is Ramona McCabe, and I work with Erendira at the Encompass Community Services Head Start program.

Tabitha: OK, I think that is everyone. Thank you so much for joining. We know this is an extremely busy time, as always is a busy time. We thank you for taking time out to share with the Head Start community. I think I'd like to start this discussion about ERSEA with Erendira. Where is your program located, and how many children do you serve?

Erendira: We serve 575 children. We serve them through our Head Start center-based option and our Early Head Start home-based and center-based option. We're in Santa Cruz County, California, also known as the Central Coast.

Tabitha: OK. When you think about COVID-19, I understand where you're located, how has COVID-19 impacted the family's willingness to even enroll their children in your program?

Erendira: Wow. When I think of COVID-19, I still feel like ... Man, I still can't believe it happened, right? But one of the important things for us in learning what was impacting our family's kind of desire or willingness or even ability to enroll in our program really had to do with what part of the county they were coming from. We relied on our data to tell us what was going on with our families. For example, in our South County area, a lot of our families ... that's where we had the highest rates of COVID. Families were really fearful, as well as because there's a lot of doubling up or multiple families in one home, we were seeing that once one person got impacted by COVID, the whole family then would be impacted. It was a lot of fear, a lot of lack of understanding of how COVID actually moved around in terms of transmission, and so there was fear.

For our northern part of the county, we also were impacted by fires in our mountain communities. A lot of our families were relocated for a period of time. Access was actually the reason why they didn't enroll in our program. I would say consistently across our county, people were just trying to meet their basic needs. Families trying to stabilize was a big reason why they were not bringing the children or not enrolling in the program or focusing on making sure they had income coming in and they had food and all those basic things families need.

Tabitha: That's interesting. I love the point about using your data to understand family needs, not just within the family, but also based on the area where different sites are located, and families live. What did your program do to address the hesitancy that was due to transmission questions? Then you talked about families being displaced because of wildfires. How was the program responsive to those needs?

Erendira: We really took advantage of what we call being trusted messengers. We know that our families, once they enroll in our program, they really trust us. We tapped into community efforts, and we made sure we were visible out there, giving those messages about first taking care of your health and your basic needs, and that we were still going to be there when they needed us. For example, we volunteered at local vaccine clinics. We volunteered our staff ... Ramona and myself volunteered at diaper distribution sites. Then the other piece was we tripled our communication that was going out and used multiple forms of communication: text, e-mail, phone. We just kept it going to make sure that the families have the information they needed. We put on our public health hat. Formally, we didn't consider ourselves public health workers, right? But during the pandemic, I think we all became public health workers. We embraced that because we're Head Start, and we've always talked about health. We came from that approach, about how we always talked about staying healthy. Most importantly, we really tried to prioritize staying connected and the relationships. The relationships, because we knew families might not be attending because they were going currently, but if we stayed connected, they would come back. We did see that reflected on our enrollment numbers. We didn't see them drastically increase, but we saw that the families that were enrolled in our program continued in our program, even though virtual services that we had to do temporarily, our enrollment numbers stayed pretty consistent.

Tabitha: Wow. Something you said just really resonated with me. You said, "Our program became trusted messengers." I love that, that you made sure that families received the right information. I loved what you said about ... You didn't wait for the families to knock on your door. You went to exactly where they were. You went to the vaccination clinics. You went to the diaper distribution sites. I took down so many notes. I know programs watching are taking notes as well. Thank you for ending with the relationship piece because I think that just highlights everything that you shared with us. Now, I'm going to turn to Kristen. Kristen, tell us about your program. Where is your program located, and how many children do you serve?

Kristen: We're located in West Central, Minnesota. We serve Clay and Wilkin counties. We have 222 children. Our Head Start program is a center-based model, and our Early Head Start program is a home-based model.

Tabitha: Thank you, Kristen. OK, so we just heard about the impact of COVID-19 in California. Now, we're in Minnesota. Talk to us about how COVID-19 impacted the willingness of families to enroll children in your program, and what did your program do to address the concerns?

Kristen: When I think back to when this all started in March of 2020, we as a management team, our first meeting after COVID had hit, decided that we really needed to prioritize enrollment because our reputation depends on our enrollment. Families need to be able to trust us. We need to still be there for them. We decided we wouldn't let hang through the pandemic. We've had a history in our community of serving families that need us, and we were not going to let COVID change that for us.

We really, as a management team, adopted a pause and pivot model, where we worked hard to stay current on the Head Start guidance, the CDC guidance, the Minnesota Department of Health guidance, and our own local public health. We were constantly planning, communicating with staff, and distributing those plans to families. It was really clear to them what our plan was. We had scenario A, B, C, D. We based our scenarios on different COVID thresholds so that there were no surprises for families, and we could be really consistent as we possibly could be in a really inconsistent environment of COVID.

Tabitha: Thank you so much, Kristen, for sharing your program's response. I will also just add, we are already getting quite a few questions in the chat. Please keep your questions coming. Some of your questions are actually asking panelists to clarify some things, there's some follow-up questions. After each segment, we will have a Q&A opportunity, and we'll try to get to as many questions as possible. Kristen, thank you for sharing your experiences. Now I'm going to turn things over to Gretchen who has a few follow-up questions.

Gretchen: Erendira, you talked about being trusted messengers and gave some examples of ways that you communicated with families. Can you talk to us about some specific strategies that you found to be effective in identifying and recruiting those eligible families into the program that would be new to Head Start?

Erendira: Yes, and I will be bringing in Ramona to respond to this because she is one of our leads in terms of implementing these strategies. But I just want to say before I pass it onto Ramona that we've spoken about this in other platforms, but leveraging community partners and already existing efforts is something that we really like to tap into because there's no need

to duplicate efforts. Also, you can actually offer more to the families when you are tapping into those community efforts. I will pass it onto Ramona to add a little bit more specifics around the strategies we've implemented.

Ramona: Thank you, Erendira. I wanted to share with you all that I know of a little girl in the north of our county who is living in a tent encampment with her dad. The only reason I know about this little girl is because of a new community partnership that we are starting, that we've been trying to get off the ground. Finally, as COVID starts to maybe give us a little breather, we are able to reengage those partners. We have really been leaning on our community partnerships. In this particular case, we have a new partnership with our County Office of Education and there specifically with their Homeless Liaison, which is a position that I believe all school districts have. Hot tip. If you don't know who yours is, go find out because these are ... Our community partners are often serving already our families who are in the most vulnerable situations, like this little girl.

We have been really working with our community partners to help them see how a partnership with us can be mutually beneficial. That we support them in reaching their goals while they support us to be able to reach our families, right? Which is one of our number one goals. Our community data shows us that homelessness is a really big impact in our local community in Santa Cruz County, and that it impacts our community across the county. Our program has historically been really successful in reaching families experiencing homelessness in our north county because there's some strong established partnerships there already. But we really wanted to expand that to our south county because we know actually that our south county area where we live is even more heavily impacted by homelessness, but that our families are often in more informal situations and not as likely to be in a shelter.

We said, "How can we reach those families? How can we expand ourselves into this community that we know needs us?" The County Office of Education serves our entire community, and they have already sent us referrals. We're in just the early days. We're actually still finalizing our MOU, our memorandum of understanding. But already we've been seeing referrals coming in for families that are in those more vulnerable situations that are moving from house to house and don't have an address that we can reach them at. That is definitely one of our major strategies right now coming out of the crisis mode that we have been in and reestablishing those.

Gretchen: Ramona, thank you so much for highlighting the importance and the hard work that it takes to not only identify those community partners, but build and continue to strengthen those relationships. What a great example.

Kristen and Shanna, so can you talk to us about what you found to be effective strategies? Have you had to change your approach from your initial thoughts and implementation from March of 2020 – that Kristen you had mentioned, and now 2 years later – has that changed?

Shanna: Well, Gretchen, as we said earlier, [Indistinct] is everything. It's so important to maintain quality service. Again, that's important to the families we serve and also with our community members, our community partners. Similar to what Ramona was sharing, we also have those relationships with our homeless shelter liaisons and just make sure that as soon as a

family enters into that situation that they can be sure that their child will be enrolled in Head Start.

Another change we made was really strengthening our relationships with local pediatricians. We had a local pediatrician present at a virtual parent meeting that we did about vaccination. She was there to answer all kinds of questions from our parents about vaccines and do a little myth busting and things like that, and our parents were very responsive to that. Then we were then in turn able to close the loop on vaccine education and meet each family where they were at.

We found that individualizing our response really paid off on that so that we could be sure that parents were making very informed decisions for their family. We also used kind of a neat marketing gimmick called a prescription pad that we gave out to pediatricians. It was a small notepad that bulleted the benefits to families for an Early Head Start prescription from their doctor, and that worked out well. We also enjoyed using that, and the clinics were very receptive to that.

Another thing we did at the agency level was we have a No Wrong Door screening tool. Any time any family comes to CAP LP, enters our doors, we know that we'll also screen to see if they might qualify for the Head Start program for their youngest members. That whole family approach kind of ensures that the comprehensive needs of the family are met, not always just the most immediate, but exactly what their family needs.

Throughout the pandemic and at all times, it's every staff person's responsibility to support families with enrollment, maintaining attendance and continuing to work on family needs and goals. Every staff person contributes to our reputation in that way, so we know that's important. While all of us, staff, and parents, had setbacks in our personal lives due to COVID, we knew that we would all be there for each other, that everyone would pick up for one another and pitch in so that the families didn't experience anything other than our best every day. I think again it's that trust that families have for our staff and our program that has kept us fully enrolled.

Gretchen: Shanna, thank you so much for sharing that. I heard trust. I heard trust from Ramona. I heard trust from, again Shanna, from you, communication. Prescription pads, what a great idea to partner with pediatricians. But again, going back to the mission of Head Start and encompassing the entire family and encompassing your Head Start family as well to giving that shared responsibility to all of your staff. Not only supporting children and families but supporting each other. Tabitha, do you have any more questions?

Tabitha: OK. I have to keep reminding myself that I'm a facilitator, and I need to stay on top of this discussion, but you're just giving me all kind of flashbacks from when I was a family services manager. Actually, my mentor who is director of a program still, she said, "Hi, I see you." I remember we just tried to do everything to make sure we met our funded enrollment. I do have a question for our programs. What would you say to our programs who are feeling frustrated? They're like, "We're trying everything, but we still can't find eligible families." What message do you have for them?

Erendira: I can go first. I can also say I've been there. I've felt frustrated myself. I don't want to say that I'm humbled to be presenting because it's not like I have all the answers and I don't know that anybody does. I haven't met anybody yet that has all the answers. But what I try to focus on is that story that Ramona shared. There's this little girl living in a camp outdoors and needs Head Start, needs Early Head Start. That means I still need to keep trying. We still need to keep trying.

I like to give us permission to be in that place where it's frustrating. We also have a shortage of staff because our staff went through the same thing that families went through during the pandemic. There's a lot of transitioning happening right now. I always like to kind of ... When I'm sharing with a policy council or a board or our staff, I like to remind them of that little girl that's out there that needs our program and who better to serve that little girl than us? We know how. We have the quality. We have the strategies. There's more of those little girls out there. It's about just assessing where we are, what is our capacity and keep kind of looking for answers.

We're in a time where we can't go to a script and look for those answers because there's not a script for how do you do enrollment during a pandemic? But there is a script about what are our values as a program and what do we stand for, and what does Head Start stand for. When I am having a hard day or hard time, I just go back to why do we exist? Why do we exist as a program in this community? Then I also get a lot of affirmation from our community partners who say, "We need Head Start here. Thank you for being here. Thank you for keeping the doors open." I think it's just reminding myself that we're here for a reason. If somebody is going to make it through, it's going to Head Start. Yeah.

Kristen: I guess I would like to say there's been tough days here too. There certainly has been. But I think as a program, we have really leaned into ... and this is what I encourage all of you to do, is to lean into what you're really good at. Focus on and prioritize what your strengths are as a program and brag about those. When you're meeting with community partners, tell them why they should refer kids to Head Start. Tell them the services that you offer and why this is the best program for kids that are eligible. Let your staff know that too. Because it's all their jobs to recruit. I just think recruitment happens every day through our interactions with people in our communities.

Tabitha: Thank you so much. That was a nice pep talk. Ladies, thank you. There are so many questions that we have, and I just like to say that probably 50% of the questions have to do with the prescription pad. OK, so a few folks joined late, and they were like, "OK, we missed it. What about this prescription pad?" We can just provide a quick overview of what it is again for our folk that joined late. Then others want to know, "We want to see what this looks like." We don't know if that's possible or not, but those are two questions I'd like to present.

Kristen: I do not have one in front of me, but I can describe it. Then, Tabitha, I could send you to go out with the e-mail. But basically, what it is, it was just a little sticky note pad with our information, our phone number, our website. Then it just listed a handful of benefits of why pediatricians should refer kids to Head Start. Then we just put it in the mail with a letter and sent it to all the pediatricians in our community and then followed up with a phone call.

Tabitha: Thank you. Thank you so much. I think it's a brilliant idea. I absolutely love it. Head Start is definitely what the doctor ordered, so love that. We have a question about: Is this being recorded? Will it be distributed? Yes, yes, yes, of course. This webcast will be posted for you to access. There's a question about competition. We have ... and this actually came from three programs. How do you handle a climate where there are several different pre-K options competing for the same children?

Kristen: I guess at CAP LP, I would say we partner really close with the other programs that are serving young children. We work together on enrollment. If a family qualifies for Head Start, Head Start is where they need to be. Of course, this took years to establish, but we just kept bringing them to the table and informing them that if a family qualifies for Head Start, we have the comprehensive services that those kids need.

Erendira: I would just add that we are doing similar things, and we're also looking at what we offer in the community and what is needed. We have in the last couple years started shifting to more of the Zero to Three services because that's really where the gap is in our community. I don't see it as a competition. I just see it as our partners will be able to provide services, and then we could focus on perhaps the gaps that are in the community. That's the other piece that we're looking at.

Tabitha: Thank you so much. I know right now my colleagues over at PMFO are doing a happy dance because it's really just focusing on what are the changes in the community, that community assessment. What are those gaps? Is there a population of children that aren't receiving services, and can we provide those services? Love that you pointed everyone back to the community assessment. That was great. We have a few more questions that I would like to ask. One question has to do with home visiting recruitment. How is it done? Also it ... How do you enroll when incomes are even higher now? For example, wages have raised from \$13 to \$15 an hour. How are you managing home visiting recruitment?

Erendira: So ...

Shanna: [Indistinct] I'm sorry.

Erendira: No, go for it, Shanna.

Shanna: OK. Thank you, Erendira. I think again that whole family approach. If a family has a child enrolled in our center-based classroom, we're, again, maintaining that relationship. We know when another baby has come along. We know how many little ones there are in that family, and we're constantly recruiting that piece. I think not that home-based is always a feeder program for the classroom, but I think in reality, you want the family to look at the fact that home visiting lays a foundation, a learning foundation for those children as they become old enough. Another thing is the data. We've had some wonderful data that shows that children with 2 years in our Early Head Start program are coming into our center-based performing at a higher level. They're doing better on their developmental assessments. That's been meaningful for parents.

Erendira: Yeah. I would say similar strategies, and the other piece is also, again, looking at families at that are not currently being served in our home-based that could really benefit from

that type of service. For example, we are really working hard at trying to expand our services to pregnant women – pregnant women, also pregnant women in shelters and pregnant women going through recovery. Another gap identified in our community where we feel like home-based is really the best option as families are working to stabilize and that we'll support them as they then enter into our center-based options. We have a couple of examples of families that have started that way and made it all through our Head Start programs, and to see the growth for these families is truly amazing for the family as a whole, not just the child.

Ramona: I would just add one thought on home-based as well is that we've also shifted the way that we talk about and share about our home-based program and really highlight it as an excellent option for families that could use more one-on-one support and having that direct relationship with their home visitor who has a small caseload and is really able to work with that family individually and so really highlighting the unique benefits of home-based in addition to maybe the more well-known benefits of our center-based programs.

Tabitha: Thank you so much for your responses to that question. There's a question about going back to center based. We know in thinking about just the COVID-19 climate, what are your programs doing to allow for in-person open houses in the classrooms for recruitment purposes?

Erendira: Officially, our county is still considered to be in the surge, so we are not doing any in-person open houses. But like I said, I think that we're trying to kind of share what the experience would be through other options like our recruitment materials, as well as for example orientation. We did a virtual orientation, which although it might seem it might not work, but it still allows the parents to be able to go in. We also supported if they wanted to invite other people that wanted to see what orientation would be for the program as well. It opened it up a little, but we're not doing any in-person at this time.

Kristen: In our program up until last week, we were in the high qualification too. Shanna and I just started talking this morning actually. We were planning an in-person event that we're going to have with the public schools for transition. That's a great recruitment place for us too. But I think if you are still in the planning stages, some of the things that have been successful for us have been outdoor events. We purchased shade tents. We've taken those many places, parks, our parking lot, wherever families will meet us. We've used those quite a bit, and that has been effective for our program.

Tabitha: Thank you. I'm just going to ask two more questions, and then hopefully we'll have time towards the end of our webcast for more. Are you offering in-person or virtual enrollment application completion?

Ramona: We are using a combination. In ERSEA, we like to do no wrong door, right? Open as many doors as possible for families to come through. We have ... We're utilizing an online application as well as paper is still available. We also will mail. If a family needs it, we'll mail a paper application out to their address if they call us. For enrollment purposes, we've started using DocuSign to do going into the last two years to start the year, really prioritizing more contactless interactions with the parents, and so we transitioned to using DocuSign, which was actually ... It was a heavy lift to get it started but has been really well received by both the staff

and the families, and we still maintained an in-person option for those families that DocuSign was not a good option for them, or I should say the electronic ... They didn't have access to e-mail for example. We had an in-person option as well, but we found that the majority of our families were able to do it ... able and glad to do it online.

Tabitha: Thank you. OK.

Kristen: Very similar here.

Tabitha: Oh, go ahead, Kristen.

Kristen: We have a virtual option, an in-person option or an over the phone option, and we too have found DocuSign to be very helpful. Most of our families are choosing to do enrollment applications virtually. It's just easy. They don't have to bring the kids into our office or don't have to have our enrollment manager go out to their home. They can just do it over their phone.

Tabitha: Got it. Erendira, we have a specific question for you. The California programs, they're going crazy because they're like, "Oh, that's our people. We need ... We have questions." There's a question about what is your current enrollment, and are you full in all programs?

Erendira: We are not fully enrolled at this time. The classrooms that we have open are full. We do have four of our classrooms that are not open due to staffing, but we do have a wait list. I saw a couple of people had questions or comments about staffing, which I'm glad this presentation will include conversations around that, so I won't talk about it, but I will just agree with everybody who is making comments that staffing is creating a challenge for enrollment. Addressing both of those simultaneously is crucial in whatever plan. One of the things Ramona and I did is we joined our HR team to create a recruitment plan for both children and staff so that we are leveraging some of the strategies we're using with children for staff and vice versa because we know we need both, right? It's not one or the other, and so we want to make sure that we're putting those efforts, but the centers that are open are fully enrolled. We are not fully enrolled because we have centers closed due to staffing.

Tabitha: Thank you, and that was a beautiful setup for our next segment, but I will say before we officially thank you for joining us that there are some questions that are really for our OHS leaders. We will collect those because our fifth webcast will be a Q&A with our OHS leadership. Some of those questions we ... It's not appropriate to ask programs at this time, but we will save those for our leaders.

Thank you so much, panelists for joining us. This is a very, very rich discussion. I know my toolbox is full. I'm so glad we had that last question that brought up staffing because our next guests will actually talk about their approaches to recruiting, retaining and developing staff. Thank you so much.

Gretchen: Next, we'd like to welcome you all to our discussion on staff recruiting and retention. Today we have five Head Start programs, two of whom also brought their community partners to talk to us about strategies that they have found effective in recruiting, developing, and retaining staff. Partners in Community Action, who do you have here today to represent your program?

Monshari Chandler: Well, Gretchen, it's actually Parents in Community Action, and my name is Monshari Chandler. I'm the Head Start-Early Head Start director for Parents in Community Action, also known as PICA. We're located in Minneapolis, Minnesota, serving 2,600 children, prenatal to 5, in 14 centers across Hennepin County. My partner and friend today with me is Candee Melin, who is PICA's deputy director.

Gretchen: Welcome. Stanislaus County Office of Education, can you introduce yourselves?

Veronica Garcia: Sure. Good morning. My name is Veronica Garcia. I'm the director here at Stanislaus County Office of Education Child and Family Services, and we are located in Modesto, California. With me today, I have our community partner, Miriam Medina.

Gretchen: Welcome to you both. YMCA, thank you for joining us. Who's here today with your program?

Melanie Mueller: Hi. Good morning or afternoon wherever you are. My name is Melanie Mueller. I'm the executive director of the YMCA of the East Bay Early Childhood Impact program. We are located in northern California in Contra Costa and Alameda Counties, and I have with me today my team member. I'll have Daryl introduce himself.

Daryl Bright: Hello. I'm Daryl Bright. I am the success manager of the workforce development unit here with the YMCA of the East Bay. Happy to be here.

Gretchen: Thank you, YMCA, and welcome. El Valor, please introduce yourself.

Nina Duenas: Good afternoon, everybody. My name is Nina Duenas, and I am the senior Vice President of the children's services at El Valor. El Valor is located in Chicago and the neighboring western suburbs of Chicago. We are both a grantee and a delegate serving about 1,500 children in four different sites. Today with me is Ms. Lucero Robles. I'll let her introduce herself as well.

Lucero Robles: Thank you, Ms. Nina. Good afternoon. Good morning. How Melanie said, my name is Lucero Robles. I am the data and communications manager for the children's services of El Valor.

Gretchen: Lucy and Nina, thank you for joining us. Finally, we have the leader of Children's Learning Center of Fairfield County with us today. Please introduce yourself.

Marsha Guthrie: Hello, Head Start community. My name is Marsha Guthrie. I'm the director for the Head Start and Early Head Start programs at Children's Learning Centers of Fairfield County. We serve 236 center-based children in Stamford as a grantee, and in Greenwich, our delegate program in the state of Connecticut.

Gretchen: Welcome. Thank you all for joining us today. I know I'm seeing lots of love from your different regions, so, again, we're so happy to have you here with us today. Tabitha has questions for you about your approaches to recruiting, developing, and retaining staff. Tabitha?

Tabitha: Yes. OK. This is what everyone has been waiting for. You listened to the part A discussion, right? You know programs want to know all about strategies to meet funded enrollment, but they also want to know, "OK, now, once we get the children there, we need to have staff to teach the children and to provide comprehensive services." I would like to start

with Candee. Candee, can you please share the most effective approaches that your program uses to recruit staff?

Candee: Yes, thank you. At PICA, we have a grow your own program that includes a series of five parent training programs, including working in the Early Head Start or a Head Start classroom, working in a commercial kitchen, working in a clerical role, greeting people, monitoring the front entrances and answering the phones and lastly, learning how to drive a school bus – all essential high-need positions that are in critical demand in our community and in our program. All of these are 96-hour training, and at the end, parents receive a \$300 stipend.

For those parents that are interested in pursuing a teaching career, they then can apply for our paid 700-hour internship program, learning more in-depth teaching strategies as well as joining in on our in-house CDA program. As a result of these and other grow your own programs at PICA, we currently have 52% of our staff who are current or former Head Start parents.

Tabitha: Wait a minute, Candee. Wait a minute. Because sometimes I don't ... You said 52%?

Candee: That's correct.

Tabitha: I was wondering because you went into detail talking about the different pathways, and I was thinking, "OK. They're doing all that. I wonder what the results are." Fifty-two percent, that is incredible.

Candee: Yes. We've been very fortunate. We've been doing this ... these parent training programs for over 40 years, and now more than ever, they are critical for us and have really had very good positive results for us in that way.

Tabitha: Thank you so much, Candee, for sharing. Veronica, you're in central California, and you heard from our previous conversation. We have programs in California. They want to hear from you. Have you used a different approach or a similar approach to recruiting staff?

Veronica: As you all know, we all have problems recruiting, especially in the early childhood education field, when there is such a need in all areas. What we started doing this past year is having a focus in early childhood education and providing that information to those folks that maybe are just thinking about going into the early childhood education field because as you all know, when people go into the counseling office at the colleges, sometimes that early childhood education field isn't the first thing that they start selling. They sometimes tell them that's not where the money is. Go into the K-12 field. Well, what we started doing is what's called the early childhood education career fair, and so that helped us because we advertised on the radios, local magazines, social media, at the colleges, job recruitment sites.

With that, when we had that education fair, the career fair, we provided information regarding career paths because people want to know, "If I get into this field, first of all, what is it? Second, where is the career path for me?" We had colleges there representing, different colleges in the area, with that information. "If you get into this field, this is where you can go." Then also what made it helpful for those interested is we had our partner agencies, our delegate agencies, and our partners there with job postings – jobs that are available now. Here are the positions that you may qualify for, and if you don't, here's the pathways where we can offer some assistance

training, and most helpful, people said, was we had our human resources office there with their laptops assisting those on site to, right then in there, interested for this position. Sit down; we're going to help you apply for it now.

That was successful because all the support is right there. That was one thing that we started this year, and then the second thing that we started was the dual enrollment at the high schools. Again, where are we getting our folks to come into the early childhood education field? Start them there. They're dually enrolled in high school. They're like seniors, and then they're taking – through UC Merced extension – they're taking the 12 core units needed for here in California we have the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing Permit, and so those 12 units that they take there with some experience that we provide gets them their permit, and they're ready to start with us. We start there. Once they become staff, then we have all those career paths from there: AA degrees, BA degrees. That has been successful for us in addition to all the parent to teach programs and CDA programs and family development credential programs that we assist parents in and train our work field.

Tabitha: Thank you, Veronica. Melanie, you have a community partner here. Do you have a joint approach to recruiting and developing staff with your community partner?

Melanie: Well, so for the YMCA, we have ... A few years back, we have identified that we really needed to find an innovative recruitment strategy for staff. We have worked leveraging outside funding through Social Services, our first five California systems and other foundations to support an early childhood apprenticeship for teachers, and so what's really exciting about that is when you think about someone going into the field. It's like we're inviting them in and saying, "You're interested in the field. Come on in. We're going to give you an opportunity to take classes with tutoring and support. We're going to welcome you into one of our centers with a mentor to help you learn on the job and get paid, and you're going to leave the classes debt free because we're working with our funders to make that happen.

What we're trying to do is really give people an on-ramp into the field that's practical for them, that goes at a pace that helps them really get into the field, so our ... We really have leveraged our community partners to help us fund that, and then to help us make it great and give us feedback. I would also like to pass it to Daryl, who is our success manager, to share a little more.

Daryl: Absolutely. We were able to kind of leverage the opportunity to become a registered apprenticeship program with the Department of Labor and the California Department of Apprenticeship standards, and we had an agreement or a partnership with what's called ECEPTS here in California. That is our liaison to allow us to kind of be able to receive these funds because we are a registered program. We have all of the traditional elements of what you would have in a regular apprenticeship program. You have the on-the-job training. You have the classroom experiences or the education base, as well as the raises with each tier. We do have three tiers, as Melanie was saying earlier. We have all of those as well as a more intentional piece that kind of supports individuals outside of their regular education or on-the-job training.

With that, we've been able to kind of see a lot more success because a lot of these individuals that are coming into our programs may not have as much college experience, and some are

second language learners, so we really want to make sure we have set them up with a supportive system that will allow them to progress through and become highly qualified teachers.

Tabitha: Daryl, I have a follow-up question for you. Thank you, first of all, for being here. Apprenticeship programs, they are growing all over the country. Programs are finding apprenticeship programs to be extremely valuable. Then, I know Melanie talked about partnering with high schools and recruiting from high schools. We all know this is a female-dominated workforce, but we need our male teachers, and even my colleague, Damon Manning, he started off as a Head Start teacher, made a tremendous impact. Talk to us just for a few seconds about what can programs do to make this career a viable option for males?

Daryl: Absolutely, and I think Veronica and I kind of talked about this the last time we met, but I would say just really going a little younger, recruiting them out of high school with those early years of college to get people interested into the field because once you get into the field, you really find your place, and you start to show that love. Even with this apprenticeship, it's an opportunity to give people the chance to say, "Hey, this is ... I wanted something a little big. Is this what I really want? Then I can go all the way in without that full commitment." We're really focused on getting high school males and college, early ... males into the program early just so they could develop that aspect, and as you matriculate through college, and you can earn money and then get a debt-free degree because we go all the way through a BA degree. Not only do you get your BA degree, you have a full-time job, a full-time career with benefits because we show you the pipelines of where you can get once you get in the door.

Tabitha: Thank you so much, Daryl. Nina, your program also has some intentional strategies that I would love for you to share.

Nina: Yes. Thank you, Tabitha. Yes, we do a lot of the same things that the other programs are talking about. We really do grow our own as well. We have some programs for parents with ... First of all, we welcome our parent volunteers, and we always have those superstar parents that show up and come into our doors and want to help with whatever they want to do, whatever they can do. For us as well, 30% of our staff is current or former Head Start parents. We also now have a handful of alum who came through our doors and are now working for us as teachers, family advocates and other positions as well. It's really nice to see the alum coming in too.

Some of the things that we do is that we have some ... As we are planning our budgets, we plan for some entry level positions for these parents, such as paraprofessionals that work with our children with disabilities, our kitchen staff that support the kitchen, and also we have a lot of parents who have taken the CDA with us, and then they are working as Head Start aides or Early Head Start aides as well as teachers and teacher assistants. One of the other things that we have here with us is that we partner with the local universities and colleges. Once we have them with us, we're able to support them through to get themselves into college. Once they're done with their CDA, we tell them, "OK. You were able to do this. Now let's enroll you into a college program one class at a time," and that has been very successful for us.

The other thing that I would say as I was listening to Ms. Melanie and Daryl reminded me of, for many years now – I would say at least 15 – we have been taking on summer interns. Those are the teenagers that are 15 to 21 years of age. We've been a site for them for that amount of time, and many of our current staff also have come from that program. They come back every year while they're teenagers, and then once they're in college, they come back to work for us. Our HR manager came through our program. Our CM manager came through that program. Daryl is right. That has been a great strategy for us as well is getting them ignited with the Head Start spirit early in their formative years so they can come back and work for us. That's been a great success.

Lucy, I'm not sure if I missed anything. If you want to help me a little bit here. No? OK. Well, that's ... Those are some of the strategies that we're doing. The health aides too. That's a position that we have as an entry level for parents, and we give priority to hiring those parents in those positions, and many of them have moved on to go to school and have become a CNA or a registered nurse, or many of them are now working as family advocates or supervisors in our program.

Tabitha: Thank you, Nina. Oh, wow, so many great ideas. Marsha, would you like to share what your program is doing to recruit staff?

Marsha: Sure. Absolutely. At CLC, our community is really our greatest resource. We partner with 26 different local colleges and universities, and we engage in regular outreach to our network of community partners. Our teachers, and we always say in Head Start that it takes a village, and that recruitment and enrollment of children is everyone's responsibility, but recruitment and enrollment of ... and supporting the entryway of staff is also everyone's responsibility, so we need everyone as part of that process.

Teachers recommend their friends or acquaintances with an interest or a background in early childhood education to work at CLC, and if that person is hired and stays with CLC for at least 6 months, the staff person will actually receive a \$500 employee referral bonus. There's no limit to the number of referrals or payouts. We've also been creatively utilizing our COVID-19 and ARP funds to support those endeavors. We also have a teacher development manager on staff who sources qualified teaching staff and is involved in streamlining the hiring process because as we know, the hiring process can also take quite some time and delay the process of getting teachers into our classrooms.

Once teaching staff are hired, the teacher development manager also assists them with professional development plans, short-term and long-term goals. They provide guidance and connect them with continuing education resources and opportunities to obtain financial aid and scholarships. This role in particular is incredibly valuable to CLC because it supports our own capacity to hire and retain high-quality staff.

Tabitha: Thank you, Marsha. I knew you had something good to share with us, so we appreciate you sharing your program's approaches. Gretchen, so I got everyone warmed up for you, and we're already sharing ... They're already sharing some great strategies. I'd like you to dive a little deeper into the discussion about retention and development. Our programs talked about how they actually recruit staff. Let's talk more about some of the other aspects of staffing.

Gretchen: Great idea, Tabitha. Veronica, can you talk to us about what your program does to develop and retain those staff that you have started recruiting from high school?

Veronica: Definitely. Again, it all goes back to making sure that they understand that there is a career path for them here when they start, right? It's all ... That's the first thing is letting them know that we're here to support them in any way we can, and of course professional development is the first thing. We definitely provide lots of professional development opportunities.

One of the things we want to ensure is that they keep those qualifications. As mentioned before, in California, we have the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing permit matrix where certain positions have to keep that permit in order to continue to be employed. One of the struggles we've had over the years, especially with COVID, is people continuing to get their training hours, their units to move up in the permit matrix. What we have done is actually developed what's called professional growth days where there's specific days ... They can either go online or in-person, meet with a professional growth advisor, and get that one-to-one. There's somebody here to help you and continue your path, and with that, we hear the needs of people. We provide the training.

With that, we also provide cohorts, right, with AA degrees and some specific cohorts out in the colleges, and that's why I want to bring in Miriam Medina, our Yosemite Community College workforce development specialist that has made our programs ... Definitely I need to give credit where credit is due. Miriam and her team and our colleges have truly been such help for us to continue to provide these cohorts and give ... We start mostly with parents, right? We have some parents that continue, that say ... First time let's say we have a cohort of 30. Twenty-eight of them were first time college students, and they're very nervous, of course. Miriam is one of those, and her staff, to say, "It's OK. We've got you. We're going to support you along the way."

That is one of our ways that we ensure that once they're in, they stay with us, and then we give them experience because one of the things in the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing permits is that you have to have a certain amount of hours of work experience or volunteer in the classroom to get that permit, so we also have what we've developed a Head Start substitute assistant position so that they can get not only their hours they need, but they actually can get paid. Obviously, then they love us so much hopefully that they stay with us.

Miriam, I will stop talking and let you tell everybody how you have been such a great partner, you and your team, with our cohorts in not only just the parent to teacher program, the AA degree but also our infant-toddler classes, our administration classes. I can call Miriam at any time and say, "We need a cohort on this class or this program," and her and her team support us in every way they can.

Miriam Medina: Good morning. Thank you for having me. Just as a side note, I'm not going to date myself, but I was in one of the very first Head Start programs that started way back, so this program is dear to my heart. We have been partnering with Veronica, and what I do is, when she calls me, she says what she needs. I get together ... We get specific faculty that will teach specific classes that are closed to the general public. They're only open to Veronica's staff. I walk them through the whole process. Like she says, there's some that have never been in

college. There's some that have. But the ones that haven't and are a little nervous, we really try to get them at ease. We have them come in. We do an orientation. We go through the application process. We go through the enrollment process. We do matriculation orientation. We get them all set up. We enroll them in the classes. They don't need to do anything. We provide the textbooks for them. I meet with them regularly to make sure that nobody is falling behind. If anybody is having issues, then we provide different resources for them.

The cohorts tend to be small. They're about 20 students. Sometimes we have gone as high as 30, which the faculty really likes because then they can really take the time to meet with the students and help them along if they're having any kind of problems. In one of the degree cohorts, we did have a tutor, embedded tutor, in that program so the students were able to reach out to somebody for extra help if they needed to. We also provide laptops, hot spots for the students if they need it, and like I said, I meet with them regularly to make sure that nobody is having any issues either with their coursework or outside. Addressing the male ... We do have two male students in this cohort for the first time. One of them is because his wife was also in it, so they decided to do it together. The other one, he was picking up his child at the center.

The teacher gave him the flyer, and he said, "You know what? I really like working with kids," so we're really excited from the feedback that I've gotten from the other students. They really enjoy that male perspective, so we're really happy about that, and we're hoping to get more males into these kind of cohorts. We also partner with the Child Development Training Consortium. They are actually located also on our campus. We regularly have workshops that will help prepare them to be able to apply for that permit once they're ready to go. That's it in a nutshell.

Veronica: Thank you so much for sharing that. Absolutely.

Tabitha Temple: Can I just say, Ms. Gretchen, Daryl is literally about to jump out of his seat. He's just so happy. Miriam, thank you for highlighting your efforts amount male engagement.

Gretchen Jurgens: Daryl, Melanie, can you share with us your approaches?

Daryl Bright: Absolutely, and it's really just an extension of our early educator apprenticeship program. Now, that ... Once you become ... and you get your 12 units and your associate teacher permit and you're a teacher with us, we allow you to go in and continue your education to get your AA, which then allows you to qualify for a higher degree, which is a raise and other things, and you get all the supports that those individuals that are coming in get, so you have your ... what we call success coordinator. It's more of a ... We wanted to do a strength-based modeling of case management. It's technically a case manager, but it's more a cheerleader in your corner that could help you out and point you to resources and kind of liaison between the YMCA itself, the colleges, and the apprentice. They're that the point person for each person

Typically, between each semester, we have between about 109 and 130 apprentices enrolled in about three to four different colleges across three tiers. We have about three coordinators that are experts in their tier and what it takes to get an AA or what it takes to get the BA, and they are the point people for these individuals who are now employees to get that. In addition, we kind of seek those opportunities within a community to give funds for retention of teachers.

There is a lot of funds out there for starting and bringing teachers in, but we are starting to find that there are some funds out there for teacher retention and keeping teachers with us.

Just really being intentional about what we're looking for, how we're using what we have and making sure that we support all of our teachers while they go through. That kind of comes with any time that we meet, we have childcare on site. Anytime that we have anything, you can bring your children. We have childcare providers there, so that kind of takes the worry out of it.

We typically have been having online classes recently, but when we did have in-person classes, the classes were at our sites. The colleges would bring instructors to our sites, which would allow for us to have the childcare, the embedded tutoring. As Miriam was saying, we have embedded tutors in all the classes, and just the opportunity to make sure that everybody is met where they are to be able to bring them to where they ... we want them to be, which is excellent teachers.

Gretchen: That's great, Daryl. Who couldn't use their own cheerleader, right?

Daryl: Exactly.

Gretchen: Marsha, can you talk to us about what you have found to be effective in retaining and developing staff?

Marsha Guthrie: Well, at CLC, we've really been prioritizing supporting the wellness of our staff, especially during the pandemic, from offering opportunities to minimize stress and burnout, such as music and movement sessions for staff during our PDs, creating a more comfortable and inviting environment in our staff lounge where staff can enjoy a cup of coffee or a cup of tea and see positive affirmations posted on our walls.

We actually have quotes that we've put all along the walls of our staff lounges just to continue to keep our staff feeling positive about the work that they do. We want our teachers to be able to have an environment available to them where they can disconnect from the classroom because just as they are truly the heroes and the support that we need in the classrooms, they too need an opportunity to disconnect so that they can actually return to the classroom rejuvenated. We acknowledge birthdays and celebrate birthdays. We send thank-you notes and shout-outs to our staff because we recognize that our teachers have truly been our biggest heroes, as I mentioned before, during these very challenging times.

In addition, as I mentioned before, we do have the employee referral bonus program, which is certainly a nice benefit to our employees. We have staff members here whose children were Head Start children and now they're working side by side with their mom or with their dad, and that's really a really nice thing to see and such a great model for the children that are in our program. We also work closely with the Office of Early Childhood. The OEC is the state agency that oversees early childhood programs in Connecticut. They offer a great deal of trainings and scholarships and development opportunities for professionals in early childhood. They actually currently are offering a workforce incentive program, and that program recognizes and incentivizes formal early childhood education completed by teaching staff, so awards actually range from \$250 up to \$2,600. Many of our teachers in our Head Start program have applied and received the incentive. Just knowing the challenges around wages and parity in our field,

connecting our staff to these types of incentives is really critical for us to be able to continue to sustain our early childhood workforce.

Gretchen: Marsha, thank you so much for reminding us how important staff wellness is when we're thinking about staff development and retention. Candee, why do staff want to work for Parents in Community Action?

Candee Melin: Well, at PICA, for the last 7 years, PICA has been named a top workplace among hundreds of employers in our metro area. This is determined through a third-party employee survey. Consistently, the No. 1 reason that staff love working at PICA is the diversity that we have. We have 369 staff, and 88% are people of color that are culturally, racially, and linguistically reflective of our children and our families. The other, more common reasons include longevity and the number of opportunities for growth and professional development. As far as professional development opportunities, from day one, staff get hands-on training in our lab school, working alongside our master teachers, drivers, advocates, learning Head Start and the ins and outs of their position. Throughout the year, staff continue to get support through job-specific trainings and ongoing coaching. Monshari, I think, has some other things she wants to share as well.

Monshari Chandler: Well, yeah, Candee, thank you for that. I think I really would like to point out that while diversity is the No. 1 reason that our staff have selected and why they love working for PICA. I want to point out that it's actually a byproduct of our grown-your-own approach. It's because the staff reflect the families that we serve, the children that we serve culturally, racially, linguistically, I think that that ... You kind of get a two-for-one with that grow-your-own concept. I think that's something that other programs will definitely benefit from

In short, really, what our staff love is the diversity, the longevity. Sixty-one percent of our administrative and executive staff have been with PICA for at least 20 years. That's a big deal. Yeah, right? They also love the longevity ... well, the opportunities for growth. A number of our administrative and executive staff, 70% to be exact, started in positions like teachers, drivers, advocates, and they've worked their way up through the program, and finally, it's the professional development, like Candee mentioned. We have lots of opportunities for professional development and support for our staff. Our staff are paired up with coaches who support them. They work hand in hand at our training lab school with master teachers and drivers and advocates, and we don't let them go once they leave that training program. Those master trainers stay with them throughout their time at Head Start. They get ongoing training and support, and then we continue to provide training opportunities throughout the year. We have lots of reasons why our staff love working for us

One last one is we have great benefits. We have great benefits. We have mental health supports. There's dental and regular health benefits, and we provide support to our teachers to obtain their AAs and BAs, so we pay all of their tuition and books if they're going after child development certificate or a AA or BA. Again, lots of opportunities for our staff, and lots of reasons to love working at PICA.

Gretchen: Thank you to both of you for sharing that. It's so great to hear about staff longevity, and certainly I would expect if you have – such as 52% of your staff were former parents or current parents – then certainly we would expect to see that diversity, but I'm certainly sure that the children and families as they continue to enroll in PICA's programs appreciate seeing themselves reflected in your staff and what that brings to the classroom. Thank you for that.

Candee: I would add, Gretchen, too, that just those parents, the staff who were former parents, those are our staff that are most loyal. They are grateful for the opportunities that were given to them, the number of years that they started with us. They're the ones that stick with us.

Gretchen: Absolutely. It sounds like you have a great career ladder in place that they can see the opportunities. They can hear it from their peers as well. Lucy, can you tell us what El Valor does to be responsive to the needs of staff?

Lucero Robles: Of course. Thank you so much, Gretchen. First most, I think also for us, staff well-being is our priority. We ensure that our staff receives that emotional support too, asking ourselves how can we ask staff to support parents if we don't support them first, right? I think it's the question that we should all reflect on. We found it definitely crucial to incorporate mindfulness sessions during the day led by our mental health team. These groups are about 10 to 15-minute guided meditation breaks for all staff to unwind from the day-to-day work, and emotional support is not just limited to the mindfulness sessions. The staff are able to really schedule one-on-one consultations with the mental health team.

Then, to further motivate them, we are also implementing employee of the month, so I think that encourages staff to be here, be present and be acknowledged for the work that they do.

Then, second, ongoing professional development as well, and I think focused on skilled training, retraining and cross-functional training more than anything, and skill training really focusing on job-related knowledge such as for new hires or correcting performance gaps. Then, there's retraining that comes there after. It's really for that maintenance and upkeep of one of the peer set of their certificates and updating of any staff who need that just refresher more than anything. The cross-functional training really helps employees learn about other components, and I think it's one of my favorite sections because you're able to build the capacity on other departments and just be able to share that knowledge with your peers, so it really speaks to all the departments tied to the hip, no silos.

In the end, all of these opportunities enable staff opportunity for advancement. I'd like to put the spotlight on Ms. Nina because she doesn't share this as much, but she leads and organizes the CDA cohorts for the agency, so I think having that in-house is more than a plus for staff because she encourages staff, and she'll become a mentor to them, and if one of them is falling behind, she's behind them, and "Come on, you can do this. You can do this." Really having that in-house cheerleader is definitely helpful.

Then, we also offer tuition reimbursement for staff. Part of that building of cohorts ... There is that tuition reimbursement where staff know that they don't have to be sole responsible for that scholarship or payment for their schooling and just being really flexible with work schedules, accommodating to their need of work and school balance and whether it is that they

need to accomplish and do their internship, why not do the internship here within the agency, right? It makes it easier for staff.

Then, lastly, really ensuring that we are being culturally responsive, not only with our families but with our staff too, and cultural responsiveness grants a whole conversation of its own, but one thing that I can say today is that it's really important to create safe spaces where staff can show up and feel they have equal power to be themselves. Did I miss anything, Ms. Nina?

Nina Duenas: I think you covered most of it, Lucy. I appreciate what you have talked about. Also, I would say that having been a former teacher as well, not being so prescribed. Of course, we always follow Head Start's standards and above, but we also allow our staff to own their space, right, and teachers to own their space and that they are happy to come in to work every day. I also think that a great piece that we have is that we have a lot of support staff. We pay as much attention to support staff than we do to teachers as well equally so that there's multidisciplinary staffing's when they're having issues with a family or a child that's presenting certain behaviors, that the multi ... The support team, the education, health, mental health, disabilities, everybody comes together to try to figure out how to best support the family and the children in our centers, and each other too. I think that multidisciplinary approach is key.

Gretchen: Thank you, Nina and Lucy. Appreciate that.

Tabitha, what can I say? As each of our panelists were talking, I saw so many of the thoughts and implementation ideas and strategies resonate with our other panelists, so lots of head nodding, lots of smiles on folks' faces. What themes that I heard reoccurring were the importance of communication, the importance that's placed on professional development, and ongoing opportunities within the organization and beyond, and staff wellness.

Tabitha: You're exactly right, Gretchen, and just I'm looking right now at Nina, and Nina said, "You know what? I was a teacher. I was in the classroom," and so it just reminds us of the power of programs, and I'm trying not to get emotional because when I started working with Head Start, I was in school. I was in graduate school. They recruited me to be a family service worker, home visitors. That was my first role, and my manager used to ask to see my grades. She wanted to make sure that I was staying focused on my career aspirations. Now, I'm working with the Office of Head Start, so I just love the power of programs in creating opportunities for us and pathways for us, so kudos to everyone.

OK. You got a lot of questions, and so we'd love to spend the remainder of our time asking you some questions. One of our most asked questions has to do with funding. How do you fund teacher retention efforts? How do you fund education efforts? Anybody can answer that.

Melanie: With ... For The Y, we have been developing our program over several years, and I think that's really, really important for everyone to know. We didn't start out with the budget we have now. What we've done is we started small, and then with our successes and with our marketing to our community, we've been able to grow our funding and get additional partners. I want everyone to know that, and I also want to share that we have prioritized in our full program budget a position for someone who really spends most of their time on this effort of writing grants and connecting with potential funders.

We're fortunate at The Y to have a lot of fund raising going on just in our grantee, and we also do get some funders in that way. But I wanted to share. It takes time, and it takes a lot of networking, and it takes a lot of prioritizing of someone's time to really look, write those grants, make meetings with people, and connect. That's been an important part of our success in getting funding, and it's great to look at diversified funding. Maybe there are ... For example, we have funding from Social Services, but we also have funding from private donors and foundations, so it's kind of like looking for a combination of funding sources will help. Some of them are short-term, and some of them are long-term, so it's really important to know, "How long is this going to last?" and "What do we have to do to keep it?" It's a lot of time and a lot of effort. It's definitely not a magical thing, but I really encourage other programs to think about how to look outside the program to supplement some of what we do.

Tabitha: I actually want to ask a question. This is kind of a follow-up because I see my colleagues Kate, Sara, and Heather on the line, and they will be so mad at me if I don't ask this. For programs actually using COVID funding to support staff retention efforts, can you please talk to us about ... If that, is you, please let us know, and then what are you specifically doing? How are you using those funds?

Marsha: Well, I can talk specifically – at least to CLC – so very similar to YMCA. We have a development department, and they handle private donors and foundations for us to get support in that respect, but most importantly the Office of Head Start really has given us the opportunity to be able to apply for and use COVID-19 relief funds and ARP funds to continue to support our programs during the pandemic.

As I mentioned before, for our employee referral bonus, we were able to utilize some of our COVID-19 funds in order to offset the agency's cost for our Head Start and Early Head Start employees. Also, as it relates to our staff lounge, we've purchased some materials using those funds just to make our staff lounge feel more comfortable and inviting for our staff. We've just thought about how we want to utilize those dollars creatively in order to not only recruit staff into our program but retain the staff once they're here with us.

Tabitha: Thank you, Marsha, for your response. OK. Just ... I'm going to try to get to a few more questions. Programs want to know if you're fully staffed. You're talking about all these wonderful efforts. Are you fully staffed? If not, at what percentage are you staffed?

Nina: I can take that one. No, we are not fully staffed, but we're close. I would say we're about 85% fully staffed. I don't think we struggled during the pandemic with staffing. Other than, yes, they got sick. Yes, they had to take time off and things of that sort, but because we were only closed those 2 months that we were sheltered in place, we still had staff coming in. We were rotating, making sure families got whatever they needed. I think that our staff was used to coming into the center and staying with us once we reopened 2 months later in June of 2020. We're not experiencing what I see sometimes with some of our colleagues because we were there, right?

One thing we did do to help with that is because all of the schools in our area were closed were that we had the luxury of having an extra classroom, a smart room. We also started servicing our children, our staff children that were out of school. We regularly had staff children on site,

and there was two of our floating teachers that were dedicated to supporting them, and I think that also helped with maintaining our staff because as Lucy mentioned, how were we expecting them to come in and help us and do their work when they didn't have any place to leave their children, so we set up a nice routine for them and supported them in that way, but I think that we've been able to have all our sites and all our classrooms open because we really never closed.

Tabitha: Thank you. There's also a question about ongoing education. If you have a staff shortage, how do ... How are you able to provide coverage for staff to take the time off to go ahead and go to the university or to do whatever they're doing along their professional pathway? How do you staff programs while teachers meet those requirements?

Daryl: I think I can answer for what we do with the Y. We've actually leveraged that with the college and asked for the classes to be in the evening. We were able to kind of dictate how we need the classes to best fit our teachers and their lives. Like I said, currently we've been virtual for the last 2 years that we've been running the program. That was a transition, but just being able to negotiate that with the college and making sure that you do what's best for the employees.

Candee: Tabitha, at PICA, with our internship program, we're able to place those parent interns into places that use for coverage and are part of our ratio. That allows some flexibility for the staff to work on their degrees and credentials.

Veronica: Tabitha, also, here at Stanislaus, we actually survey staff first to see what's going to work for them, so as Daryl saying, evening obviously is mostly what everybody chooses. However, there have been times people choose Saturdays. They prefer to go, right, to college on Saturdays so they don't have to do the whole full day of an intensive workday and then have to go into classes. We also ask them, "Would you like virtual or in-person?" Guess what, we're doing both for them. We're doing in-person now and online and both what languages. We have Spanish and English now with our UC Merced college extension program. We've been able to utilize all the options that we possibly can and meet the needs of our staff in that way.

Tabitha: Wonderful. Thank you, Veronica. OK. Now I would like to invite all of our panelists to turn their cameras on so our programs from the RC discussion, our program from the staffing discussion, please turn your cameras on. Thank you. The Office of Head Start is just so grateful to you, our programs, and their community partners for taking the time out to share with the Head Start community. If you look in the chat, you'll see programs saying, "This is the best conversation ever. This is so useful." Folk have just so many questions for you.

We know that many of our programs are leveraging their data, their partnerships and funding to be responsive to families and staff. On behalf of the Office of Head Start, we'd love to thank our panelists and our entire Head Start community for your heart, creativity, passion, and excellence. We'd like to remind you that we have an upcoming webcast, a Q&A with our Head Start leadership where we'll continue to answer some of the questions that you have. Please remember to be good to yourself and each other, and we'll see you soon. Bye, everyone.