



African American Youth Harvest Foundation (AAYHF)
Planning Process for Early Childhood Expansion
SURVEY REPORT SUMMARY – January 2020



Report Summary

The African American Youth Harvest Foundation (AAYHF), in partnership with Black Women In Business (BWIB), completed a planning grant in November 2019, which was awarded by St. David’s Foundation to explore how to best create messages and interventions to improve the rates of Kindergarten readiness among families within a targeted population (e.g. minority, low income, particularly African American families, boys of color, etc.).

AAYHF and BWIB interviewed 18 community leaders in Phase I of the planning process, and 298 individuals from Travis, Williamson, Bastrop, Hays, Caldwell and Other counties in Texas (262 from the Austin/Central Texas region) responded to the survey for parents and caretakers in Phase II. Approximately 18% of survey respondents were Hispanic or Latino(a); 86% were female and 14% male. The two tables below provide breakdowns based on race and age. The ‘Under 5’ category denotes the total number of young children represented as being under the care of the adults who responded to the survey. The average age among survey respondents was 39 years old.

Race	
American Indian/Alaska Native	2.01%
Asian	1.68%
Black/African American	70.47%
White	16.11%
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	0.00%
Some other race	3.69%
Two or more races	6.04%

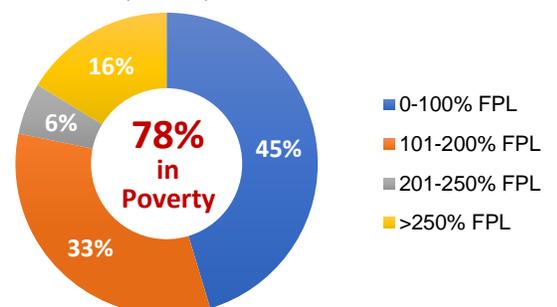
Age	
Under 5	478
5-17	0
18-54	250
55-64	9
65 plus	0
Unknown	39

The majority of survey respondents live in a household with income under 200% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL).

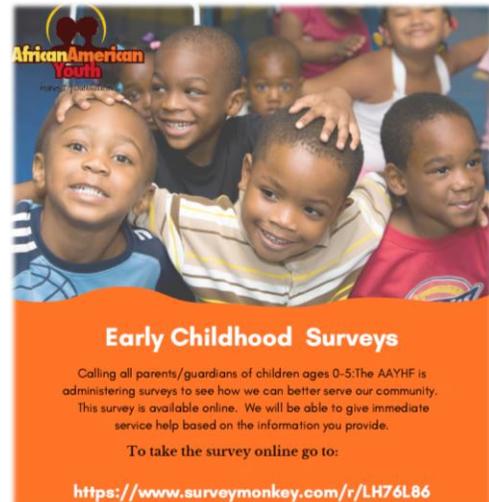
The following characteristics and sentiments were conveyed by survey respondents:

- Over 70% are employed part or full time
- Almost one-third (29.53%) raise their children alone without help
- Childcare arrangements most frequently used are child development centers (42%), the child’s

Poverty Levels of Survey Respondents
(n=289)



- grandparents (27%), and other family/relatives (28%)
- Childcare affordability represents the highest stress factor, causing significant to severe stress for over 53% of respondents, followed by utilities, housing and childcare quality.
 - Respondents are most likely to go to friends or family for assistance with household needs, followed closely by internet searches. These two sources are preferred by respondents when seeking assistance, followed by church, 211, and non-profit service providers.
 - Overwhelmingly, the top reason why respondents do not access services they are aware of is ineligibility due to income or geography, with frustration expressed by individuals who do not earn enough to cover living expenses but earn too much to qualify for assistance.
 - Over 85% indicated that they would be likely to utilize counseling services if they were accessible, with time/schedule and comfort/privacy being the major concerns and over 45% preferring that the provider be of the same ethnic background.
 - Nearly 60% indicated they would participate in support groups to learn about child development milestones (how to ensure their children are on-track), stress management and parenting/co-parenting. Nearly 50% indicated interest in health and nutrition classes.
 - 130 respondents stated they were unaware of any excellent/effective services in meeting the needs of parents with young children. Those who did share about excellent/effective services mentioned WIC frequently, along with a broad array of service providers.
 - Responses regarding negative messaging largely cited abuse/neglect, negative attitudes, and low quality of services, particularly by providers serving low-income and people of color, as breeding significant distrust and apprehension about placing their children in childcare centers.
 - Most respondents feel their parenting is judged by others often or sometimes (63%), with family and friends doing most of the judging.
 - When respondents felt properly supported in obtaining assistance, it was due to positive interpersonal interactions with people who provided encouragement and effective help in a non-judgemental way that reinforced dignity and a sense of accomplishment.
 - 140 respondents expressed immediate need for assistance in completing the survey.



The survey results in this report speak to a compelling need for critical and coordinated services, examination and reconsideration of policy and practice, and focused outreach to improve perceptions and increase awareness about the many services available to the community. The following recommendations are aligned with the Harvard Center on the Developing Child principles and complement the Austin/Travis County Success By 6 Coalition’s strategic plan to increase Kindergarten readiness as well as other local systemic efforts to achieve improved outcomes for children and families. These actions can create a brighter future for all children in the current Central Texas educational pipeline and transform their social, emotional, educational and economic trajectory for generations to come.



Recommendations

Support responsive relationships for children and adults

Respondents overwhelmingly indicated that they were most motivated by positive experiences in which they feel respected, unjudged, effectively supported, validated, encouraged, accomplished, and cared for by family, friends, providers and the community. At the same time, they felt most judged by friends and family, who they also view and prefer as a top source of support in taking care of their children. The following recommendations can help support responsive relationships that lead to community-wide impact and outcomes:

1. Develop home visitation strategies through which trusted non-profits in the community can support families with information and best practices that lead to more healthy interactions and the creation of a household environment that nurtures the social-emotion and learning needs of young children, as well as a clear understanding of developmental milestones that are conducive to success in school, work and life. Consider friends and family as an extension to integrate into home visitation strategies.
2. Provide/require training and support for agencies offering services to low-income families and people of color, focused on exemplary customer service practices, cultural proficiency, and sensitivity to families dealing with high levels of stress.
3. AAYHF can strategize with United Way and others to determine how to coordinate with systems such as 2-1-1, Aunt Bertha, etc., to ensure families can connect positively with people and continue searching for solutions when those systems are unable to fully meet the needs of families, or to establish a “warm hand off” after receiving a particular service, to connect families to a place where they can continue to receive other wraparound services needed to thrive over time versus simply survive at the moment.
4. Work collaboratively to explore, implement, support, and/or strengthen effective practices for serving the community through friend and family networks.

Strengthen core life skills

Respondents indicated high levels of valuation and interest in programs such as parent support groups and counseling services that can result in learning pertinent life skills, addressing high levels of stress experiences, and understanding how to better support their children’s development. Resulting recommendations are:

1. Support the implementation of parent support groups, led by trusted non-profits and peers in the community and provided in locations such as neighborhood centers or apartment complexes, starting with topics highlighted by respondents’ as being of the highest interest.
2. Increase investments in family counseling services and the creation of a pipeline of counselors/therapists of similar racial and ethnic background as the families served to support families dealing with high levels of stress.

Reduce sources of stress in the lives of children and families

By far, respondents in this process associated the highest levels of stress with finding affordable childcare, housing, utilities, and childcare quality, followed by an array of other stressors that adversely affect their mental health and ability to properly nurture and guide the development of children in their care. Almost half (140) of the survey respondents indicated crises in their households for which they need immediate assistance, and we are confident more families would come forth for critical assistance if survey/awareness efforts are continued. After friends and family, a majority of respondents indicated internet searches and 2-1-1 as preferred methods to find assistance. Incorporating their survey input, as well as the input of leaders interviewed, AAYHF is presenting the following recommendations:

1. Examine current eligibility thresholds for critical services and assistance and create/identify a source for looking up the requirements of multiple agencies at one time, so case workers can most effectively service clients. This could include understanding systems like AuntBertha.com or the development of a document that lists various agencies and their requirements in highly utilized areas of assistance.
2. Funders and systems leaders may consider modifying policies and requirements that prevent families from receiving assistance needed by providing more flexibility, particularly as it relates to geographic constraints, parents with multiple children, and/or income levels for working parents who need assistance.
3. Support implementation of a major awareness campaign that dispels misconceptions about child development centers and provides practical guidance on where/how to access assistance. Leverage existing resources such as the *No Small Matter* documentary and associated awareness and advocacy collateral.
4. Offer services and support at times and locations that are convenient for parents and caretakers, which may include modified or extended hours for working parents. This could include a physical “one-stop shop” and/or leveraging of existing infrastructure such as neighborhood centers. Explore, implement, support, and/or build capacity for effective models of this type of service coordination.
5. Reinforce the understanding that poor mental health for Black, Brown and low-income individuals is most often a result of significant or severe levels of stress, rather than genetic or physiological defects, and by implementing the above strategies, systems, and agencies can contribute significantly to improving mental health through a universal approach (versus counseling only).
6. Invest in case workers and building capacity of agencies such as AAYHF to meet the immediate, critical need expressed by survey respondents, as well as hundreds of additional families who could be identified and supported as we increase awareness of services available.

End of Summary: For full report, contact BiNi Coleman at bcoleman@aayhf.org