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# Interim Focus Group Analysis and Recommendations Final Report

Family Strength Associates, Inc

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## Submitted to:

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**October 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2013**

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October 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2013

Tina Foley, Chair  
Outreach and Communications Committee  
New Jersey Council of Young Children  
New Jersey Department of Education  
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Dear NJCYC and Friends of Family Strength Associates,

It is our pleasure to present the Family Strength Associates Data Analysis Summary and Recommendations in response to the New Jersey Council of Young Children's (NJCYC) Family Focus Groups toward Coordinated and Targeted Outreach and Communications. The development of this data analysis and its recommendations were driven by our commitment to leadership in the emerging field of qualitative research within nonprofit organizations. Raising awareness on the importance of outreach to traditionally under served and under identified populations in the utilization of NJ's early childhood centers, requires that we hear from parental consumers about challenges of center identification being appropriate to their needs. It also requires that we elicit recommendations from these consumers that point out ways to more efficiently employ market strategies and help them positively address their needs to gainfully impact their children.

We would like to thank all contributors to the development of this analysis and its recommendations; specifically the focus group participants from across north, central or southern NJ, who participated through agency collaborations. These included: Ben Samuel Center of MSU of Montclair, the Black United Front of Plainfield, Restoration Station of Edgewater Park, The Learning Experience of Union, Zelphy's Creative Learning Center of Millville, Cumberland County 4-H, the Willingboro Worship Center, Patterson Family Center, Little Darlings Center of Mt Laurel, Isaiah House of East Orange, Little Cherubs Head Start of Hamilton, and the YMCA of Vineland and the NJ Department of Education.

We would also like to acknowledge the NJ Council's Outreach and Communication Committee for its support during this process, the volunteers who collected data, public officials, community-based organizations, and community members who gave input and attended focus group planning meetings. We believe strengthening community outreach using relevant and accessible marketing strategies is a key component to building effective, innovative and culturally sensitive early childhood programs for families, parents and children in the State of New Jersey. This report is a correct step toward ensuring NJ's parents have the resources and support needed to remain involved in the lives of their children at the earliest possible point and in sustainable ways. We are excited about the recommendations and opportunities that remain to be unearthed based on presentation of these data. For more information please contact Ramata Choma, Executive Director, at 732-232-2396 or electronically at [ramata@family-now.org](mailto:ramata@family-now.org). We look forward to the State Council's feedback and working closely with each of the members and the larger state early childhood community, to move forward with these and other recommendations. .

Sincerely,

Ramata Choma, Executive Director  
Family Strength Associates, Inc.

**Family Strength Associates Inc.  
Outreach and Communications Focus Groups  
Data Analysis Summary and Recommendations**

**Table of Contents**

	Page
<b>Executive Summary</b>	4
<b>Literature Review</b>	5
<b>Background</b>	6
<b>Methodology</b>	6
<b>Administration</b>	
1. Gaps	7
2. Data Tabulation	7
3. Broad Themes	8
4. Narrow Themes	10
5. Dissimilar Content/Contradictions	11
<b>Survey Analysis</b>	11
1. Administration	11
2. Gaps	11
3. Data Tabulation	11
4. Frequency and Occurrence of Responses	11
5. Identification of Themes	12
<b>Analysis Summary of Group and Survey Findings</b>	12
<b>Recommendations</b>	13
<b>Conclusions</b>	14
<b>Appendices</b>	
1. Focus Group Responses to Questions	

### **Executive Summary**

Family Strength Associates (FSA) conducted a community needs assessment and asset mapping process to help the NJCYC better understand and respond to real – not just perceived – needs and opportunities to improve outreach marketing with underserved and unidentified parents within the State of New Jersey. Project planning began through identifying and implementing a method to engage the community in order to isolate, from their perspective, program augmentation, outreach and marketing suggestions related to choosing Early Childhood Learning Centers for their children. Asset mapping through focus groups with hard to reach parents and communities was conducted across North, Central and Southern NJ. The data collected was intended to inform NJCYC tactical planning, program recommendations, marketing and outreach strategies. This report compiles and summarizes the information gleaned during the course of planning, focus groups, assessment, and analysis activities. Several dominant and some narrow themes were identified to assist the Council in determining the appropriate steps to foster relevant program planning and agency marketing strategies for parents, their children, agency executive leadership and the Council. These themes are synthesized into six core recommendations for consideration by the Council on Young Children and State child care project management teams. The themes point to possible intermediary and programming innovations that will impact NJCYC objectives and potentially provide strategies and guidance to make inroads with growing numbers of underserved or special needs children; and can also be used to optimize recruitment and outreach efforts that impact early childhood service outcomes for special needs and underserved children. They are identified below:

1. Location and transportation barriers, trump service provision alignment with child/family quality of care needs, because of income demands;
2. Affordable, comprehensive behavioral and developmental service provision, integrated into childcare curriculums, will attract special needs consumers;
3. Parental education about special needs and child developmental behavior, will attract special needs and ESL consumers;
4. Diversity was broadly defined and often absent of racial connotation; definitions of diversity are different for different people.
5. Childcare Center organizational cultures (attitudes) and professionalism, child level of comfort, diversity and accreditation were determinants in the initial choice - but the primary determinants in childcare choice were safety, bilingualism, location and transportation.
6. Intermediary policy -vs- integration of direct behavioral healthcare and therapeutic service, needs closer examination; policy intent -vs- child care center practice and impact.

Of the six commendations cited in this report, overarching recommendations are very much in alignment with the More Than Marketing global commendations and suggest the NJCYC, in terms of advocacy on the ground, should:

- a. Explore recommendations to DOE that integrate behavioral and early childcare developmental health tracks as part of overall childcare care center training and curriculum integration;
- b. Recalibrate partnerships and marketing outreach with state and county departments to educate low income parents about additional NJ services meeting their child's special behavioral and developmental needs and how to receive them;
- c. Explore strategies with county Family Service Associations to build infrastructure and outreach capacity - particularly targeting structural supports that enhance proactive therapeutic and quality of care outcomes for special needs and underserved children and parents;
- d. Develop and distribute a resource directory electronically and print in English and Spanish; position these props in supermarkets, doctor's offices and laundry mats.
- e. Develop subsidized transportation supports in outlying counties for children through incentives to childcare centers to purchase vehicles or contracts with specialized transportation service providers.
- f. Establish a hotline for parents to get needed resource information and confidential assistance during emergencies and times of crisis.

NJCYC intent is to take a lead role in coordinating multi layered approaches, interventions and services that address the continuum of program service and policy needs for Early Childhood Education and enrichment services across the State of New Jersey. Family Strength Associates looks forward to its continued service and involvement in NJCYC initiatives as a strategic resource and Council stakeholder. For additional information please contact Tina Foley, Chair, New Jersey Council of Young Children, New Jersey Department of Education at: 609 633 9795 or at [tfoley@ccdom.org](mailto:tfoley@ccdom.org).

## Literature Review

Established by Executive Order on January 8, 2010, the NJCYC serves as the State Advisory Council for Early Education and Care as authorized under the Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007. The Council is a “separate entity located in, but not of,” the New Jersey Department of Education. The Council has a diverse membership of 25 leaders representing the state’s child care, education, disability, health and mental health sectors as well as the state’s academic, research and philanthropic sectors. It has seven goals, each with a specific set of objectives that will not be reviewed here. Charged with assuring collaboration and coordination among various State early childhood programs for children from birth to age eight, the Council’s vision is to align and improve New Jersey’s numerous and complex initiatives into one streamlined system of early education and care that reaches all infants and young children in need of services.<sup>1</sup>

To this end the Council commissioned a study through the National Institute of Early Education Research entitled, “More than Marketing: A New Jersey Study on Outreach to Underserved Populations Ages Birth to Five.” Using a synthesis of collective research on effective outreach strategies for each of the targeted populations, the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) developed and conducted the study analyzing current practices and procedures used to access targeted populations focusing on two objectives defined by the Coordinated and Targeted Outreach Committee:

- a) **Objective one:** Evaluate the effectiveness of current recruitment and outreach strategies carried out by early childhood providers, state government agencies, and intermediary organizations based on research, best practices and interviews.
- b) **Objective Two:** Develop recommendations for optimizing recruitment and outreach efforts for early childhood services for under-represented, at risk, and special populations in New Jersey.

Overall, this report reached the following conclusions:

1. Issue joint statements from Head Start, child care, and public Pre-K administrators on best practice outreach strategies identified in More than Marketing
2. Promote cross agency training for providers who serve young children (child care, Head Start, school districts, Early Intervention, Child Welfare, etc.) In particular, cross-training between Child Welfare and ECE providers would address ECE provider concerns about meeting the needs of families in crisis.
3. Promote the Head Start Multicultural Principles and National Association for the Education of Young Children cultural competencies as well as successful partnership models between Head Start, child care centers, family child care providers and schools to serve target populations.
4. Create written partnership agreements which encourage collaboration among early childhood agencies to recruit, screen, select, enroll, and provide services to target populations.
5. Create a single application process for multiple services across departments and use this process to employ consistent data collection with families.
6. Expand state eligibility for federal programs.

Cumulatively, these indicators inform this data collection effort to identify the best way to shape, augment and target services to:

- a) meet developmental and training needs of parents so they have stronger impact on their children and families;
- b) increase agency program reach and impact with hard to reach children and parents across New Jersey;
- c) inform NJCYC tactical strategies with recommended programming; and
- d) identify the best ways to market the NJCYC brand and service constellation toward DOE programming initiatives.

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<sup>1</sup><http://www.state.nj.us/education/ece/njcytc>. Division of Childhood Education, NJ Council for Young Children Home page.

## **Background**

The Coordinated and Targeted Outreach/Communications Committee, in collaboration with the other committees of the NJ Council for Young Children, seeks to identify and improve services for infants, young children, and families by coordinating outreach efforts across state agencies, school districts and community and faith based organizations. This committee is also charged with finding ways to more meaningfully engage families in decision making roles around their children's education and care. The NJ Council for Young Children is expected to develop recommendations for increasing overall participation and engagement of children and families in existing federal, state, and local early care and education programs, with particular attention to children and families in underrepresented and special populations.

In 2011, the Coordinated and Targeted Outreach/Communications Committee entered into a memorandum of understanding with the National Institute of Early Education Research (NIEER) to design and conduct a study of the type and efficacy of recruitment and outreach strategies, with a focus on underserved populations. These activities culminated in a report released in 2012, entitled, "More than Marketing: A New Jersey Study on Outreach to Underserved Populations" that includes identified strategies for reaching underserved populations in early childhood programs, current processes and procedures to reach underserved populations in New Jersey, and recommendations for optimizing recruitment and outreach efforts for early childhood services.<sup>2</sup>

Outreach Activities are strategies designed to ensure full participation of families and children who have not experienced equal access to early childhood services. Outreach incorporates an array of methods, including marketing (e.g., advertising in places frequented by the target population), procedures (e.g., hiring bi-lingual staff), policies (e.g., prioritizing enrollment), strategies (e.g., developing MOUs between agencies or engaging families of young children in peer-to-peer outreach and support) and other courses of action (e.g., ensuring broad participation in advisory councils).

## **Methodology**

The content of focus group discussions, perspectives elicited, context sensitive clues (emotions, ironies, contradictions and tension) that existed for group participants, and the written survey are meant to inform NJCYC regarding empirical, anecdotal factors; and particular insights into how to improve methods of outreach to the special early childhood education needs of children and families birth to age five, and their relevance to marketing and program implementation strategies. Overall, the method consisted of two data collection tracks:

1. Focus groups across 11 municipalities across the State and tabulation;
2. Written parental surveys and tabulation.

This method emphasized an empirical approach to distill the qualitative elements of data collected. Research questions were:

- a) How do parents find out about the programs their children are enrolled in?
- b) How do (did) parents select the early childhood education center?
- c) What are the characteristics of the early childhood program their children are enrolled in?
- d) What outreach strategies are (were) most effective?

Focus group data collected by volunteers and transcribed by FSA; recordings of the groups, and the written surveys - form the basis for this analysis. Family Strength Associates queried (79) parents representing the identified municipalities across the State of New Jersey. The representative sample consisted of (77) completed written surveys and 427 cogent answers from respondents participating in eleven focus groups to 14 guided questions and their sub-elements. Participants were a predominant sample of low-income parents, grandparents and guardians; including some migrant and military families residing across the State of New Jersey.

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<sup>2</sup> Sharp, J. Alexandre, J., Barnett, S.W., "More than Marketing: A New Jersey Study on Outreach to Underserved Populations Ages Birth to Five," 03/2012, National Institute of Early Education Research, <http://www.nj.gov/education/ece/njcyrc/reports/MoreThanMarketing.pdf>

The template used to distill these data through tabulation, analysis and reporting, suggest an empirical approach to extract, assist and implement certain components NJCYC programming. The report therefore, is designed to provide qualitative anecdotal data for Council planners, administrators and to generate valid information, important to the advancement of its programs and services – in as sounder manner as possible, but is premised on a participatory and fluid design. Despite these factors, a rich body of responses that identified broad and narrow themes was extrapolated from the data.

### **Administration**

Participants were a predominant sample of low-income parents, grandparents and guardians; including some migrant and military families residing across the State of New Jersey. Focus Group development of questions and delivery format was designed to elicit a discussion based on the NIEER report. The protocols did not discuss if the questions identified were vetted by the project management team. As is natural in focus groups, additional refinement and “real time” adjustment of focus group questions upon administration did occur.

### **Gaps:**

- a) The original 14 original questions and their sub-elements, during actual administration were delivered in a pattern of unevenness.
- b) A few of the participants were employees at centers where they had their children in day care, which may have had an effect on the responsiveness other participants..

These gaps had potential to hamper the scientific method, but they did not interfere in the collection of a robust and useful pool of data. The analysis uncovered pertinent information that will assist in the ability of the NJCYC to apply relevant, ground based perspectives from parents and in some cases providers, toward improving marketing and community outreach to this specialized population of consumers.

### **Data Tabulation:**

Each group’s content and conversations were tape-recorded and generated process notes or a written record of all communication – verbal and nonverbal—based on the recorders’ observations and word-for-word descriptions of group responses. The focus groups averaged two hours each. For each question answers were recorded and counted. The focus group portion of the analysis in raw numbers represents (n=427) responses in the overall data sample. Similar responses were categorized into core clusters that point to overall themes elicited from the group discussions.

The focus groups yielded a full-bodied sample of answers from participants representing 11 different statewide early childhood education centers. Some of the more poignant answer examples are included below as part of describing the iterative process of this analysis. The complete data set consisting of focus group answers to these 14 guided questions is included in the appendices:

1. How long have your children been enrolled at the center?
2. How did you learn about the Early Childhood Program?
3. What characteristics are important and were any of these features used to select your program?
4. Does this center facilitate any connections with other agencies or programs in the community? How important is this to you? How did it impact your decision to enroll your child?
5. Could you describe any special services that your child's center provides to your child or your family? How important is that to you? How did it impact your decision to enroll your child?
6. Could you describe any steps that your center uses to promote diversity?
7. What would you define as a welcoming and supportive environment in an early childhood center? How important is that to you? How did it impact your decision to enroll your child?
8. How important is it to you that early childhood programs hire staff that reflects the races, cultures and home language of the community?
9. Could you describe any family engagement strategies that are currently in place in [sic] the center? How important is that to you? How did it impact your decision to enroll your child?

10. Please describe any obstacles families like yours may face in finding out information about early childhood programs and ultimately enrolling their children in programs?
11. What systems or strategies would be helpful (to overcome obstacles)?
12. What marketing strategies could be used (to overcome identified obstacles)?
13. What partnerships would be helpful to overcome these obstacles?
14. What features do you look for in a program?
15. What is the best way to communicate information to parents about early childhood programs to help them enroll their children? How could the child support system be improved?

### **Broad Themes**

Broad themes were based on responses and identified context clusters occurring across all groups. These clusters were used to determine the range and relevance of themes overall and to assist in determining core issues and barriers for parents. Broad themes reiterated in all groups were:

- a) **Location and transportation barriers trump service provision alignment with child/family quality of care needs because of income demands** – Respondents in all groups indicated that having childcare was of tremendous importance because of the need to earn a living and that transportation was a primary determinant of choice. Thirty one percent of responses supported this occurrence. For example, "...what I thought was good about the daycare was that they did transportation, so at one point I used the transportation to have [my children] picked up from the school and brought to the daycare. That was one of things that I appreciated a lot because I couldn't come out of work to pick them up from school and take them to daycare and that was a big plus" or [my choice was based upon] "location, distance from the home, road and weather conditions, affordability and transportation." Further examples include "It is very important because, my sister and I both work long hours, so the more that they can offer, the better" or "extended hours are very helpful too... I started working part time then, I qualified for the extended day program which was phenomenal because they could stay even longer and that was very helpful." Earning a living trumps comprehensive quality center care for accessible home care, "work is a priority, quality is not an issue."
- b) **Affordable, comprehensive behavioral and developmental service provision integrated into childcare curriculums will attract special needs early childhood education consumers** – Respondents were quick to segregate childcare centers based on additional and enriched service provision and did so in all groups. Respondents were also quick to cite their appreciation for the ability of programs to plug them into the social welfare net. There was an expressed need for wrap around services that included occupational, physical, speech, early intervention and other behavioral healthcare services. Head Start was cited repeatedly as a preferred placement because of its rich integration of auxiliary service provision and comprehensive programming. "I know... because my children were in a Head Start they got everything; it was very nice, like they would do physical exams; they checked their eyes, they checked their backs to make sure their backs were straight, they would take them to the dentist, a mobile dentist that came to the daycare center; they had family workers if there was a situation in the family, so there was so much that was provided, it was very helpful, plus breakfast, lunch and snacks that they provided; it was extremely helpful having those services, like the medical services that were right there at the Center." Of 71 respondents, 24% cited they had special needs children.
- c) **Parental education about special needs and developmental behavior will attract special needs and ESL consumers** – Parental engagement strategies were welcomed by parents as structural supports; these included parent education, parent/grandparent volunteer roles, alternative referrals, advocacy, and assistance with meeting qualifications to certain programs. Parents were consistent in requesting information specific to early childhood developmental challenges and syndromes. Respondents consistently indicated an interest in knowing more about the special needs of their children across all groups. For example, "I think it is important - maybe there are things parents don't know about that the school can tell us or refer us to other agencies. The occupational therapy they were doing here wasn't my priority, but they were willing to cooperate with another agency providing occupational therapy to my son," or "The rule of thumb is to establish a relationship. The child benefits in the long run. Build rapport and be receptive. Staff members alerted me that there were concerns about my child's growth and development. As a young parent, I did not want to hear that my child

had issues. I thought that the teachers were crazy and kept it moving. Yet, because of the rapport I had developed with the staff... my child was referred to the PIRT Team and was [diagnosed]ADHD/ODD. I was a young parent. I didn't know." Special services and parent education programming while not a primary determinant was a central theme and surfaced in 33% of responses regarding special services and their impact.

- d) **Diversity was broadly defined and often absent of racial connotation; definitions of diversity are different for different people; there was a disdain for homogeneity in childcare enrollments** – Definitions of diversity were described in terms of Center holiday celebrations reflecting culture; having staff that represent the student population, assured bilingualism; and the recognition of many ethnic and cultural attributes through books and curriculum offerings. What parents cited most often was an aversion to sameness that was perceived as against the interests of their children's development in a world where appreciation of difference is seen as a key factor. For example, "the Head Start program exposes the children to families of different backgrounds and cultures. My child is bi racial. My daughter is tan. My daughter is aware of the difference and says 'you're not my color.' I wanted her to know that everyone is not the same. In Camden County, the children were exposed to blacks, whites and Hispanics," or "I like a mixture of races in the classroom only because it prepares our kids for the world. My kids are minority and they need to know how to thrive and excel when not being around our race. This school is not that way...now they are predominantly black." Questions regarding diversity and staff reflection of the community being serviced elicited 19% of total focus group responses. Of these, 23 responses were averse to a homogenous student enrollment.
- e) **Childcare Center organizational culture (attitude) and professionalism, child level of comfort, diversity and accreditation were determinants in the initial choice but the primary determinants in childcare choice were safety, bilingualism, location and transportation** – The questions about a supportive child care environment generated 61 responses or 14% of total focus group responses. This was the largest response ratio to any questions raised in the focus groups. Staff warmth, responsiveness, availability as well as child level of comfort were important choice and context sensitive considerations regarding the human environment and child care centers. Organizational culture was exceedingly important to focus group participants and was reiterated through various responses, "One thing that I appreciated when I first brought my daughter to daycare... they made it a point to express that they care about the children, it wasn't just an every day job or a business that they were running. They hired people that would be good with the children and wanted to take care of the children and like [others] said they wanted to impress my daughter, just as much as they wanted to impress me.... I've been to daycares in the past where they didn't let me see what she did all day, so to come to where my daughter is now they let me ask any question I wanted. I explained to them that if I'm leaving her with you guys every day I need to know that she is safe, and I felt like they showed me that I can feel ok knowing that she is there."
- f) **Suggested marketing tactics indicate diverse direct marketing in community outlets, through early childhood education centers and word of mouth may be the most compelling methods to reach underserved populations** – "Word of mouth is very important for us 'cause how are you going to generate business? So the fact that someone in preschool who is currently searching then they can say, oh I know teachers there, they are great, you'll love it, it's clean; it's fun." "When you're going there you meet other parents, you get to socialize, talk about your children together. You can actually relate to the center, you can relate to the teachers, the classroom." Respondents also suggested emails, parent education workshops, a web based Early Child Hood Center Resource Directory where you plug in your zip code and it gives you an idea of what's centers are in your geographic region along with reviews from parents and community users. Also suggested were conducting an open house with cohorts of early child care providers; support groups for parents; brochures, pamphlets, information forums and developing a registry (putting all the information together in one place); and leveraging consumer hangouts like supermarkets, doctor's offices and laundry mats to post written materials and flyers. "Like I said, things like handouts, the perfect place is the grocery store, mom's and kids are going to be there, you hang it up you put it at the register, doctor's offices, Chuck E Cheese, whatever the case may be go to where the parents are."

## Narrow Themes

Narrow themes present repeatedly within one or more groups. These themes are conspicuously separate in that they did not occur in all groups. They also provide informed guidance for NJCYC to identify pathways for program development, strategic planning and marketing outreach. Narrower group themes were:

1. **There was a current of underperformance cited about some centers that included a lack of parent engagement, no open door policies, disgruntled, unmotivated and noncertified staff** – Respondents were critical of underperformance and dysfunction in certain centers (being attended or having been attended) in four of eleven groups. A number of statements echoed this theme. For example, “They should just check up on them often. I know some licensed childcare centers they have to have a certain amount of training hours in order for the license to be renewed. What that license is giving is to [maintain] standards. Do they come in only when the parents call? It should be every two months or one person assigned to a cohort of childcare centers.” Also, “I don’t like the way teacher spoke, the teacher’s way of disciplining my child and it wasn’t just my child. She told my child to hit another child back. I don’t teach my child violence at all. I rather they address the problem in a different way and believe a lot of training should be held for licensed childcare centers in NJ especially ones where the percentage is high for children that are funded by the state”

Underperformance was also unearthed in the following quotes, “Curriculum is also important as well... A lot of the time they can have the curriculum but the teachers are not necessarily certified to teach the curriculum to these kids and don’t know how to relay information to a young child. A young child’s attention span is only a second long so you have to know how to work with younger kids... the temperament of staff helps keep the kids safe. We need more stable teachers. I realize it is tough to get stabilized teachers [at some day cares] because of the lack of benefits and no union to protect them,” and lastly, “a lot of people are afraid to report childcares that are not doing the things that they should be,” and “one thing that I find really important is the attitude of the teacher because I think even if a daycare has a lot of stuff, if the teachers are not actively engaging and involved, then it’s not a good daycare center.”

2. **Physical configuration of Centers was important to parents; ability to monitor and see activity, appropriate security measures** – In eight of eleven groups, parents cited the security and facilities layout as a major concern. Respondents echoed that they now have to call ahead of time to pick up early and show ID. “What I liked about the security also was they have video cameras in all the classrooms and even outside around their premises and the doors are locked and parents have an entrance key, it’s basically like a card and just swipe it at the box and it will unlock the door and you can come in at any time and they tell you to come in at any time or whenever the center is open and check on us, they welcome that, you know that’s a good thing.” Most parents also reiterated the following quote, “The way the preschool looks is important. If you see a classroom that’s not organized and you don’t see a clean area, something is wrong... to me that is not right. The environment has to be stimulating for the child.”
3. **Identified obstacles to receiving information included poor communication and lack of targeted outreach and promotion by Centers about additional services** – Lack of information made available to access services or be involved in Center activities was cited across seven of eleven groups. 12% of respondents indicated the coordination and availability of service was a barrier and source of frustration and concern. For example, “I need information specific to Autism. The information is about early childhood but not autism,” and “staff should build rapport with children and families. In the school districts, the rapport is lacking. If you bring a child into the room and they don’t even acknowledge you, you’re not going to want to leave your child there.” Parents provided a litany of outreach strategies that were specific to meeting the needs of parents “on the ground.”

## Dissimilar Content/Contradictions

1. Poor service coordination and human service responsiveness was cited between Boards of Education and communities, there was an acknowledged lack of wrap around services particularly in the Southern part of the state. “The Stroke Creek and Cedarville areas have no special services offered at all. I found

the Family Center's information by accident at the doctor's office and at the public school. There isn't anything else here other than programs that provide enrichment programs and that kind of stuff for the kids. I begged for services, and had to fight tooth and nail" or "In Commercial Township nothing is available for your child in the way of additional services. No transportation and child care costs about \$150 a week; we have inadequate choices. You often have to take what you can find. Many people do not know that Head Start exists."

2. Dissimilar from other respondents, one participant repeatedly called for CPR and First Aid training by the staff. She was tearful during the two moments in the group when citing the need for special services and qualified staff.

## **Survey Analysis**

### **Administration**

The written survey was created by Family Strength Associates to provide an overall profile of the respondents completing the focus groups. Surveys were circulated prior to the start of each focus group for completion by participants. A total of (76) usable surveys were completed. A survey example is included in the appendices.

### **Gaps:**

- a)- A picture of the ethnic/racial makeup of the sample is not possible as this indicator was not identified as part of survey construction or focus group inquiry;
- b) Testing the survey would have assured the instrument was aligned with the intent defining the demographics of the group towards useful analysis and alignment with the More that Marketing investigation.

### **Data Tabulation**

The data set consisted of responses to each of three survey questions. Two of these were Likert scale in format, identified ranges of income and certain demographics in each sub-element. For each question, answers were recorded and counted. Percentages were tabulated across the range of possible answers.

### **Frequency and Occurrence of Responses**

The frequencies of response by each question are shown in the distributions below:

1. Are you a parent? (94%)                      Grand Parent? (5%)                      Guardian? (1%)
  
2. Please check all that apply: **(Bold added for clarity of report)**

a) I receive child care subsidy. <b>(Low income families)</b>	17%
b) I receive public assistance or unemployment. <b>(Low income families)</b>	12%
c) I have a child with a special need. <b>(Families with children with special needs)</b>	22%
d) I'm without permanent housing. <b>(Homeless families)</b>	4%
e) I move seasonally for work. <b>( Migrant families)</b>	----
f) I am a military family. <b>(Military families)</b>	4%
g) My child speaks/will speak more than one language. <b>(Families with dual language learners)</b>	45%
h) One of the parents was born outside of the United States. <b>(Immigrant families)</b>	34%
i) I have an active case with the Division of Youth and Family Services. <b>(Families with Children under Protective Services)</b>	5%
  
3. Please check your yearly income:

a) \$5,000 - \$10,000	17%
b) 10,001 - 15,000	17%
c) 15,001 - 20,000	5%
d) 20,001 - 25,000	6%
e) 25,001 - 30,000	10%
f) 30,000 - 35,000	3%
g) 35,001 - 40,000	13%

## Identification of Themes

The clusters that materialized in the synthesis of survey questions were also cross referenced with the focus group data themes to see where there might be some overlap across data collection methods. Among written survey clusters there were almost no responses that seemed to undergird themes identified in the focus groups. Largely due to the demographic nature of the written survey, the questions did not correlate with the focus group inquiry. The exceptions are:

1. Bilingualism was cited as a primary determinant when choosing a child care center.
2. The cluster of responses in the lowest income ranges substantiates the respondent assertion that financing of early childhood education are major barriers.

## Analysis Summary of Group and Survey Findings:

The research questions follow below with answers elicited from the methodology:

### **a) How do parents find out about the programs their children are enrolled in?**

Parents overwhelmingly agreed (62%) that word of mouth was the most popular way they found out about the early childhood education center their child was enrolled in. A smaller percentage (27%) acknowledged being referred through resource and prevention linkages or their respective boards of education. An even smaller group canvassed their communities for clues to child care provision and some identified the internet as resource for their investigation of childcare centers (14%).

### **b) How do (did) parents select the early childhood education center?**

Upon investigation and selection of childcare centers, respondents in all groups indicated having childcare was of tremendous importance because of the need to earn a living and that transportation availability and cost were primary determinants of their selections. Thirty one percent (31%) of responses supported this occurrence. Parents (14%) also give serious consideration to other choice determinants that include a supportive child care environment generally defined as staff warmth, responsiveness, availability as well as child level of comfort, safety, security and meeting various certification thresholds. These were the most important parental choice and context sensitive considerations regarding the physical and human environments at the child care centers sampled.

### **c) What are the characteristics of the early childhood program their children are enrolled in?**

The constellation of early childhood programs represented in the responses included licensed certified ECE centers, unlicensed centers, Head Start programs, faith based daycares, neighborhood, and family networks, and in one case a specialized behavioral healthcare environment. Along these lines, there was also a constellation of characteristics associated with these program types that ranged from well-staffed, resourced and curriculum integrated provision to those meeting only the most basic care needs of the children in placement. The majority of enrollments were described as safe, secure facilities, with warm and supporting staff and program structures. In contrast, there were some described as poorly organized with inappropriate staff/consumer interface and staffing matches that seemed averse to meeting the high energy and structured support needs of early childhood education consumers.

### **d) What outreach strategies are (were) most effective?**

Respondents indicated Word of mouth is very important and forums for parents allow meeting and greeting. In addition there was a significant call from respondents for more parent education and training forums. Further, respondents suggested e-mails, a web based Early Child Hood Center Resource Directory. Regional open houses with cohorts of early child care providers was a novel suggestion and heavily stressed were traditional methods of outreach including; brochures, pamphlets, and leveraging consumer hangouts like supermarkets, doctor's offices and laundry mats to post written materials and flyers.

### **Recommendations:**

While the following recommendations are primarily based on data garnered and analyzed in this study, they are augmented with subject matter expertise and understanding of the State of NJ, Early Childhood Education landscape and where possible, recommends potential innovations. We recommend NJCYC:

1. Pay particular attention to recommendations in the More than Marketing report pertaining to: 2) provide cross agency training and cross-training between Child Welfare and ECE providers; 3) promote the Head Start Multicultural Principles and National Association for the Education of Young Children cultural competencies; 4) create written partnership agreements which encourage collaboration among early childhood agencies to recruit, screen, select, enroll, and provide services to target populations; 6) and expand state eligibility for federal programs.
2. Explore recommendations to DOE that integrate behavioral and early childcare developmental health tracks as part of overall childcare care center training and curriculum integration.
3. Recalibrate partnerships with state and county departments to educate low income parents about additional NJ services meeting their child's special behavioral and developmental needs and how to receive them.
4. Explore strategies with county Family Service Associations to build infrastructure and outreach capacity - particularly targeting structural supports that enhance behavioral healthcare, proactive therapeutic interventions, and quality of life outcomes for underserved children and parents;
5. Develop and distribute an online resource directory electronically and print in English and Spanish;
6. Develop subsidized transportation supports in outlying counties for children through incentives to childcare centers to purchase vehicles or contracts with specialized transportation service providers.

### **Conclusion:**

The investigation points to intermediary process difficulty moving from policy machinations of state and public bureaucracy, to ensuring quality of care standards, outreach innovations and marketing on the ground – where impact can be felt. For example, while the most obvious and pronounced barriers and primary choice determinants remain limited financial capacity and transportation or lack thereof, a number of others were highlighted by focus groups that bear consideration for NJCYC planning:

- a) Auxiliary early childhood education services to benefit underserved and at risk families, predominantly in the south, are offered outside many parents' primary jurisdictions and reach.
- b) Additional services are viewed as luxury items in comparison to necessary ECE daycare services often identified as the unlicensed day care option.

These choice determinants support the broad theme that intermediary policy -vs- integration of direct special needs and therapeutic services, needs closer examination and increased input participation from consumers. This is highlighted - in the matter of fact simplicity, but insightfulness, of marketing suggestions from parents to:

1. Promote literature where parents congregate (supermarkets, doctor's offices, laundry mats);
2. Establish a web based Early Child Hood Center Resource Directory based on zip code to determine what Centers are in a geographic region, see reviews from parents and community users, and potentially check their 'report card';
3. Conduct open houses with cohorts of early child care providers in specific locals;
4. Establish behavioral health, child development training and support groups for parents.

This investigation overall, supports recommendations 2, 3, 4 and 6 of the More than Marketing report to:

- a) Promote cross agency training for providers who serve young children (child care, Head Start, school districts, Early Intervention, Child Welfare, etc.) In particular, cross-training between Child Welfare and ECE providers would address ECE provider concerns about meeting the needs of families in crisis – This training is aligned with parental feedback in reference integration of curriculums with parent education on child development and well-being, as well as support with behavioral health care interventions within family systems. The data indicated staff within centers could benefit from cross agency training efforts.

- b) Promote the Head Start Multicultural Principles and National Association for the Education of Young Children cultural competencies as well as successful partnership models between Head Start, child care centers, family child care providers and schools to serve target populations – Thematically, diversity was broadly defined and often absent of racial connotation; definitions of diversity were different for different people; there was a disdain for homogeneity in childcare enrollments. Parents most cited an aversion to sameness that was perceived as against the interests of their children’s development in a world where appreciation of difference is seen as a key factor. These tendencies point towards opportunities to increase cultural competence.
- c) Create written partnership agreements which encourage collaboration among early childhood agencies to recruit, screen, select, enroll, and provide services to target populations – Service integration was particularly demanded within the southern region of the State of NJ. As marketing and intermediary supports are rolled out and reinforced, the Council may consider emphasizing this recommendation from More than Marketing in the southern region of the state first.
- d) Expand state eligibility for federal programs – this expansion is premised on casting a wider net to qualify eligible early childhood education consumers for federal programs through participation in NJ child welfare system. While this absolutely supports enrollment and distributes costs of ECE programming, the data indicate that an intermediary infrastructure on the ground, perhaps through silos in North, Central and Southern regions might be better equipped to provide the types of supportive services, hands on delivery and program integration that parents are requesting.

Lastly, while the Consultant recommends a more aggressive integration of the above mentioned strategies, we strongly adhere to our aforementioned recommendations as relative points for consideration as well. For additional information, please contact, Ramata Choma at 609 880 - 5196 or electronically at: [ramatajoy@gmail.com](mailto:ramatajoy@gmail.com).