

Understanding Challenges to Engagement with Parent Education and Early Childhood Programs in a Historically Black Neighborhood



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INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

In July 2020, the University of South Florida Research **Taskforce on Understanding and Addressing Blackness and Anti-Black Racism in our Local, National and International Communities** announced a funding opportunity to spur research aimed at better understanding issues related to race and racism. Both the task force and the research initiative were created in response to a number of factors that were brought to the surface throughout 2020, including pervasive systemic racism, incidents of police violence, and a global pandemic that disproportionately harmed Black communities. This project was selected as one out of twenty-three studies that were awarded funding for one year and that would be used as a catalyst for improving research related to race and anti-Black racism and ultimately driving social change.

Calls to investigate the systems and processes that facilitate or exacerbate anti-Black racism in the US have brought **heightened attention to the effectiveness of community agencies in serving Black families**. Initiatives to improve resources in historically Black neighborhoods are especially crucial to assess in this moment, as many efforts have been made to address disparities through funding, programs, and services, only to be met with continued challenges and lack of adequate engagement.

The Sulphur Springs neighborhood in Tampa, FL, exemplifies these challenges, where approximately 53% of children live below the poverty line and the majority of residents are Black (53%) and Hispanic (26%) ([American Community Survey, 2019](#)). Sulphur Springs residents experience higher than state averages for unemployment (13%), resident turnover (25%), housing cost (46%), poverty (67%), and single parent families (43%) (Callejas et al., 2017). Several efforts have been made to provide resources and funding to the community as well as implement programs to help improve conditions for families in Sulphur Springs. One of these resources is Champions for Children's **Layla's House, a community-based family center designed to provide early childhood services to residents of Sulphur Springs**. Layla's House was founded in 2012 and provides playgroups, workshops, developmental checkups, community activities, and support for parents and caregivers of children aged 0-5, as well as for expectant parents. Layla's House is part of the Sulphur Springs Neighborhood of Promise (SSNOP), which is a collaborative of residents, agencies, businesses and funders who are dedicated to helping children and families in Sulphur Springs thrive. Despite the efforts by Layla's House and the SSNOP, many challenges remain in effectively engaging Black families from the neighborhood in programs and services. This study, developed in collaboration with representatives from Champions for Children, aims to better understand and

address barriers to engaging Black families from Sulphur Springs in early childhood programs and services at Layla's House in order to improve local resources utilization and early childhood outcomes.

STUDY APPROACH

This study was guided by the following key research questions (RQs), shown in Figure 1.

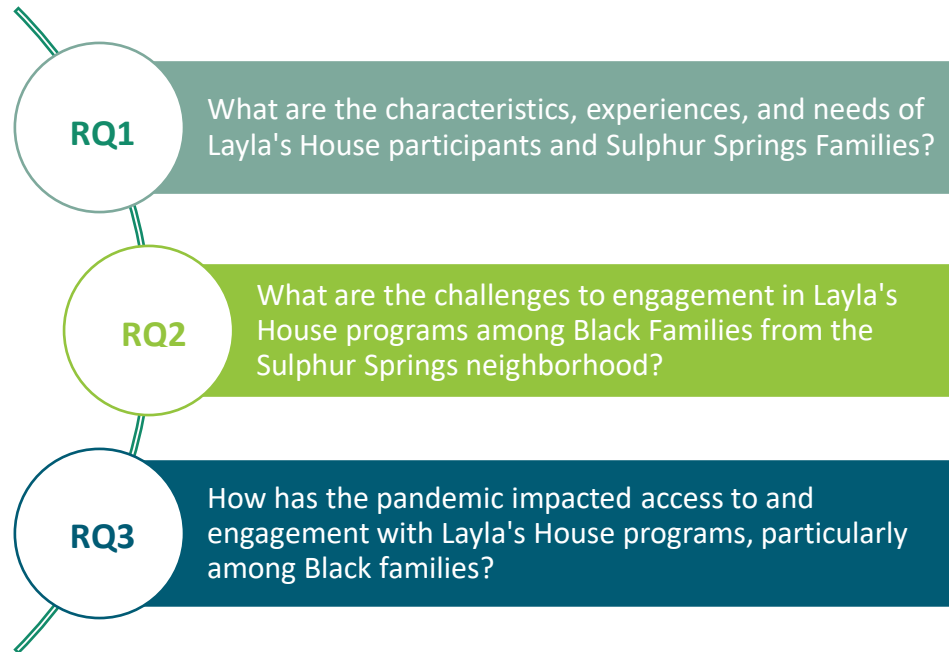


Figure 1. Key Research Questions

To answer these questions, the study team employed an ethnographic approach involving both qualitative and quantitative components to gain a comprehensive understanding of challenges from multiple perspectives (see Table 1).

Table 1. Study design components

RQs	Method	Description
1 & 2	Parent Interviews	In-depth interviews with parent participants and Sulphur Springs parents
1 & 2	Staff Interviews	In-depth interviews with administrators and program staff
1 & 3	Remote Program Observations	Remote observation of developmental playgroups and prenatal class
1 & 3	Comparative Program Outcomes Analysis	Quantitative analysis of program enrollment, family characteristics assessments, and satisfaction surveys pre- and post-COVID

DESCRIPTION OF METHODS

Interviews were conducted with parents and caregivers to gain more in-depth insights on characteristics, needs, and interests of participants in Layla's House programs and families in Sulphur Springs. Staff were also interviewed to better understand challenges and successes with engaging Black families, historically and during virtual programming. Parents and caregivers were asked about household characteristics, perceptions of their neighborhood, knowledge and experiences in Layla's House or other early childhood programs, program need and fit, experiences with virtual programs, and recommendations (see Appendix A and B for full interview protocols). All parent/caregiver interviews were conducted virtually using Microsoft Teams.

The aim of **staff interviews** was to gain a comprehensive understanding of what the challenges in engaging Black families from Sulphur Springs were, as well as what efforts had been made to address them, and what recommendations staff had for addressing the barriers. The protocol also included questions about interviewees' educational and work backgrounds, their role in working with Layla's House, and how race was discussed formally and informally at the agency to learn about how issues of race and racism were addressed (see Appendix C for full protocol).

All interviews were conducted remotely via Microsoft Teams. Verbal consent was obtained prior to the interviews, and participants were asked permission for recording so that transcripts could be produced. Interviews typically lasted between 45 minutes to one hour.

Program observations were conducted with developmental playgroups (for children 0-5 and their caregivers) and prenatal classes (for pre- and post-natal mothers and their partners) to gain first-hand knowledge of the extent to which programming reflects the needs of Black families in Sulphur Springs. Prior to each program's start date, Layla's House staff shared study information with participants, and at the beginning of the first session, a study team member obtained verbal consent from each participant. In one instance, not all participants consented, so the research team thanked them for their time, exited the meeting, and waited until the next class started several months later. Three sessions from each program were observed, and an observation protocol was used to capture relevant study themes (see Appendix D).

The research team conducted a **quantitative analysis of family characteristics and program and outcomes** to examine the extent to which these patterns changed as a result of the pandemic. After completing a data use agreement, staff from Layla's House securely shared a de-identified spreadsheet containing enrollment data for program participants from a two-year time span (April 1, 2019 to March 31, 2021) that captures one year before and after the COVID-19 pandemic began. Variables assessed include gender, race, ethnicity, age, caregiver education level, and household structure.

Finally, the research team held **monthly meetings** with Layla's House staff to stay informed of any organizational or programming changes and to exchange information related to the study. These meetings were informational and were not formally analyzed as part of the study.

In alignment with the grant program's goals providing mentorship and research opportunities for Black graduate students, and as a way to ensure that racial diversity was reflected during interviews, a Black PhD student conducted the majority of the interviews and program observations, along with a White study team member.

The study was submitted to and approved by USF's Institutional Review Board on 2/2/21 (study #001722).

RECRUITMENT

Participants from several groups were recruited for this study, outlined below in Table 2. Due to the short data collection period (5 months), convenience sampling was used for interviews and observations.

Table 2. Number of participants for each group.

Sample	N
Sulphur Springs Parents/Caregiver Interviewees	11
Layla's House Program Participant Interviewees from Outside Neighborhoods	12
Layla's House Staff Interviewees	7
Program Observation Participants (4 groups)	33

The study team worked closely with Layla's House to recruit participants, seeking insights from **two key groups of parents/caregivers for interviews**:

- 1) Participants involved in Layla's House programs from any neighborhood
- 2) Families in Sulphur Springs with children 0-5 years old, regardless of program participation status with Layla's House

Program staff from Layla's House helped to disseminate study information to families currently or recently enrolled in developmental playgroups, prenatal classes, or case management services using a recruitment flyer sent via the Remind app. Because Layla's House is a "universal access" program, families from any neighborhoods were recruited for this sample. The research team also recruited families from Sulphur Springs, regardless of participation in Layla's House programs. For these families, Champions for Children facilitated connections with the leadership committee for the SSNOP. Several leaders from this group disseminated the recruitment flyer to families at their agencies, with many of the participants ultimately being referred by the Sulphur Springs YMCA. Some Sulphur Springs participants were also referred by individual interviewees. Interviewees received a \$50 electronic gift card as compensation for their time.

To recruit for **staff interviews**, the research team used a purposive sampling method followed by snowball sampling. Key contacts were asked to identify administrative and program staff at Layla's House, and Champions for Children executive administrators with general programming oversight were also asked to take part in interviews. Each interviewee was asked if there was anyone else who should be interviewed. The agency received a \$1,000 stipend to help offset the burden of data coordination.

For **program observations**, the research team coordinated with key contacts at Layla's House, who provided schedule information about target programs occurring within the data collection period. The research team selected two different developmental playgroups geared towards 3-5 year-olds—Little STEAMers and Music and More—and one prenatal class—Baby University—to gain insights on different types of programs.

DATA ANALYSIS

For **parent and staff interviews**, transcripts were produced from digital recordings and coded in Atlas.ti using thematic analysis. A deductive coding scheme was used, with codes derived primarily from the interview protocols. Three study team members used an iterative process of coding, discussing, revising, and re-coding for segments of three interviews representing different participant groups. For the family interviews, 60 distinct codes were organized into 7 code groups; due to the number of codes and the fact that the interviews were semi-structured and allowed respondents to go “off script,” agreement was calculated at the code group level, resulting in an inter-coder agreement rate of 86% for one interview and 100% for another. For staff interviews, there were 27 codes organized into four code groups; agreement was calculated at the code level, resulting in an inter-coder agreement rate of 88%.

Observation notes, which were less rigorous, were reviewed for cross-cutting themes and integrated into discussions of family experiences. These observations also provided context for interview discussions about virtual programming as well as program outcome comparisons after switching to virtual programs.

The **analysis of family characteristics and program outcomes** was conducted using SPSS statistics software and included assessment of findings within each time period as well as between time periods. Mean comparison tests (i.e., t-tests) and chi-square tests were used to examine data.

FINDINGS

A summary of key findings for each research question is outlined in Table 3 below, with in-depth description for each area in the following sections.

Table 3. Summary of key findings by research question

<p>RQ1 Family Characteristics, Experiences, and Needs</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Families in Sulphur Springs tend to live in single parent households, have lower income, and have more children than families from other neighborhoods Many families in Sulphur Springs viewed childrearing as a community responsibility, whereas families in outside neighborhoods tended to emphasize parents as caretakers Sulphur Springs families regularly experienced unsafe conditions in their neighborhood Concrete needs (housing, food, transportation, healthcare) are a pressing concern for many families in Sulphur Springs Families in both groups had very positive experiences with Layla's House and felt the focus on child development was unique
<p>RQ 2 Challenges to Engagement</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff described many ways that race and racism were addressed by Champions but also saw opportunities for more racial diversity among leadership and better understanding of minority staff experiences Poor neighborhood conditions (mobility, crime, violence) in Sulphur Springs interfere with accessibility and ongoing participation Perceptions of Layla's House as a child care center, cultural differences in child engagement, and unfamiliarity with types of programs may lead to lack of fit or relevance for some Black residents The agency lacks sustainable funding for community outreach and engagement efforts
<p>RQ3 Impact of Virtual Programming on Outcomes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some differences in enrollment patterns were noticed in the year after the pandemic, including fewer male caregivers in programs, fewer Black program participants, and more Hispanic program participants Program outcomes continued to improve for participants both prior to and after the pandemic; no significant negative effects on outcomes were observed as a result of service changes Concerns were expressed that Sulphur Springs families and others in under-resourced areas may lack technology for virtual programs Staff and families felt that virtual programs had some benefits such as convenience and safety, but all agreed that virtual programming for young children was very difficult

RQ 1: FAMILY CHARACTERISTICS, EXPERIENCES, AND NEEDS

Family characteristics, experiences, and needs were captured during interviews with Sulphur Springs families and families from outside neighborhoods who participated in Layla's House programs. The patterns described here represent a relatively small number of families, though in-depth interviews were useful in understanding how family circumstances, values, interests, and perceptions relate families experiences with raising young children¹.

FAMILY CHARACTERISTICS

Interviews were conducted with 23 parents or caregivers in all, with 11 from Sulphur Springs and 12 from outside neighborhoods throughout Hillsborough County, shown in Figure 2. Many participants from outside neighborhoods discussed traveling at least 30 minutes one way to attend Layla's House programs (for those who attended in-person prior to the pandemic).

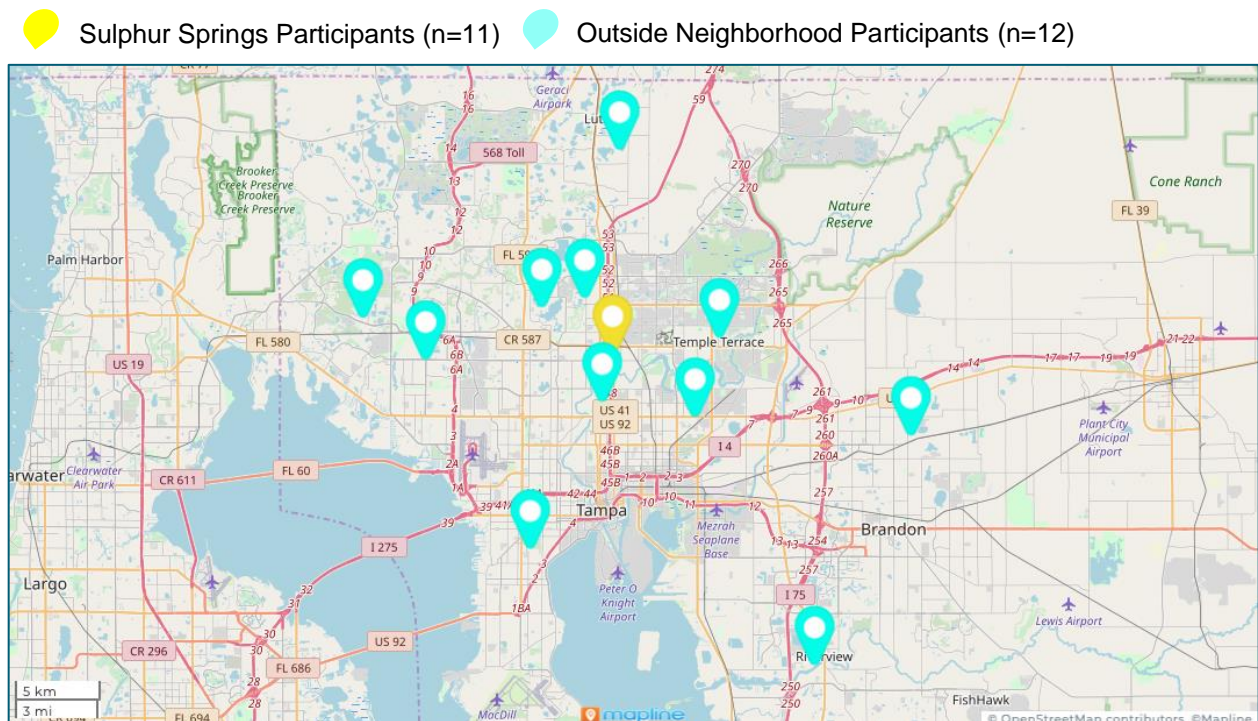


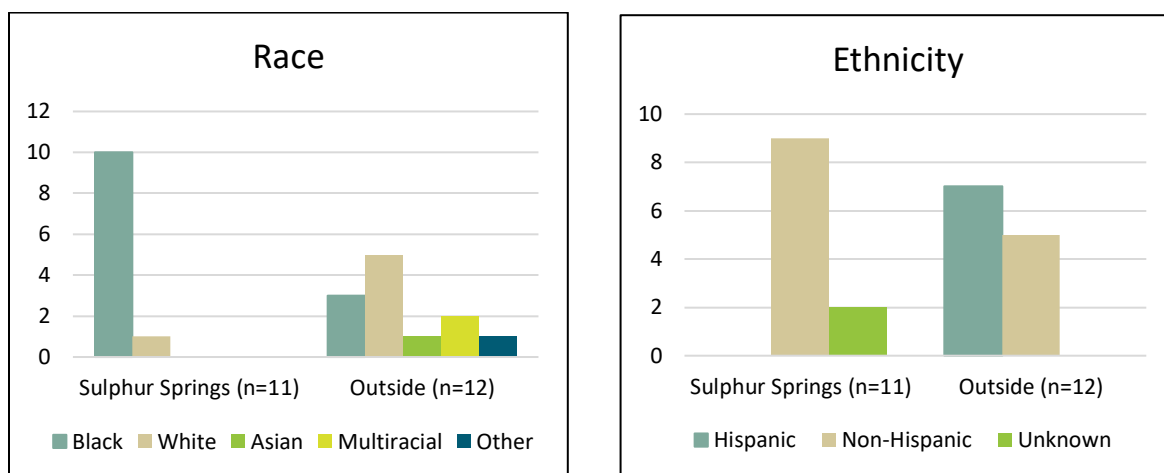
Figure 2. Study participant neighborhoods

Participant **race and ethnicity** are reported by neighborhood in Figures 3 and 4. Almost all participants from Sulphur Springs were Black or African American

¹ An analysis of the characteristics of a larger sample of Layla's House participants is shared in the program outcomes analysis (RQ 3).

(n=10), while participants from outside neighborhoods represented a wider range of racial identities, the highest proportion being White (n=5).

Responses from participants about how they saw **neighborhood patterns of race and ethnicity** demonstrated the complexity of both talking about and accurately assessing these factors. Perceptions of racial/ethnic makeup from neighborhoods outside of Sulphur Springs ranged widely, with some participants identifying mostly White neighborhoods, some predominantly Black, and some emphasizing a sizeable Hispanic population. Several participants from external neighborhoods described their neighborhoods as “a huge mix of different races and ethnicities” or “very multicultural.” Residents from Sulphur Springs largely agreed that their neighborhood was mostly Black and Hispanic, though several participants made a point to say that they don’t teach their children to see race or they “don’t see each other as a skin color over here.” Participants also identified some changes in demographic patterns over the years; a long-time resident from Seminole Heights noted that the neighborhood used to be predominantly Black but seems “mostly White lately,” while some participants from Sulphur Springs said there has been an increase in both White and Hispanic residents moving in recently.



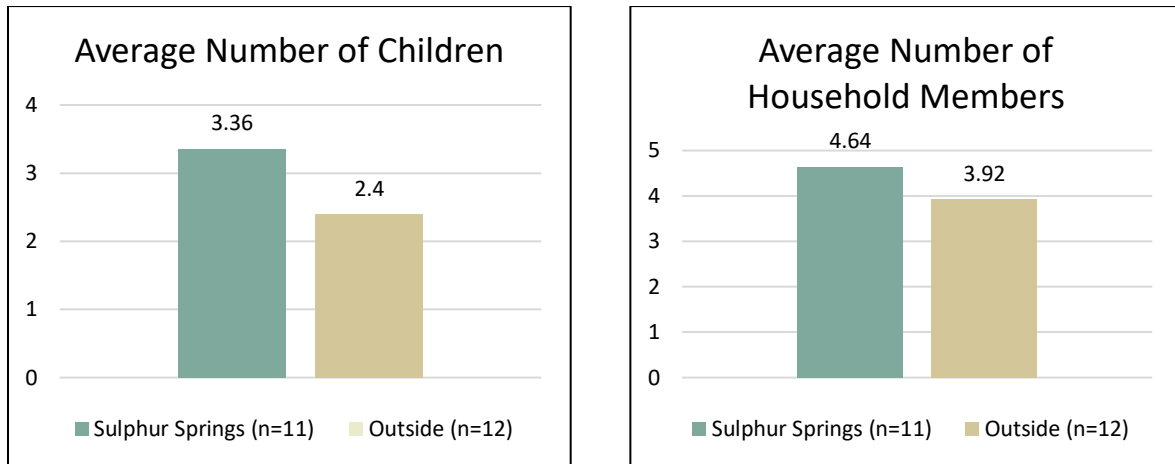
Figures 3 and 4. Participant race and ethnicity by Neighborhood group

The **length of time** that families seemed to live in each respondent’s neighborhood varied across both groups. Participants from outside neighborhoods gave a range of 2-7 years while those in Sulphur Springs suggested anywhere from under a year to 37 years. Several Sulphur Springs participants spoke to the mix of families who live in the neighborhood:

Oh, it's a family neighborhood, a lot of people move in here and they never move out. They just rent with their families the entire time. Our neighbors have been here over 10 years, another set of neighbors for over six years. But then, you know, there's also intermittent and a very transient population, people who just come, and they either leave their

funding for their housing or they can't, they can't take living in the neighborhood...

Differences between neighborhood groups were also apparent for a number of other factors. On average, Sulphur Springs participants reported both more children (3.36) and more household members (4.64) than participants from outside neighborhoods (2.4 and 3.92, respectively) (See Figures 5 and 6).



Figures 5 and 6. Average number of children and household members by neighborhood.

With regard to **income**, there was a marked difference in the self-reported average household income for each group, with Sulphur Springs at \$26,000 and families from outside neighborhoods at \$55,000 (see Figure 7). The majority of external respondents described income levels in their neighborhood as “middle” or “average,” while most families in Sulphur Springs used descriptors such as “poor” or “very low income.” Sulphur Springs respondents regularly commented that the neighborhood was the most affordable they knew of. “[Sulphur Springs is] the cheapest neighborhood that you can really live in for the lower class.”

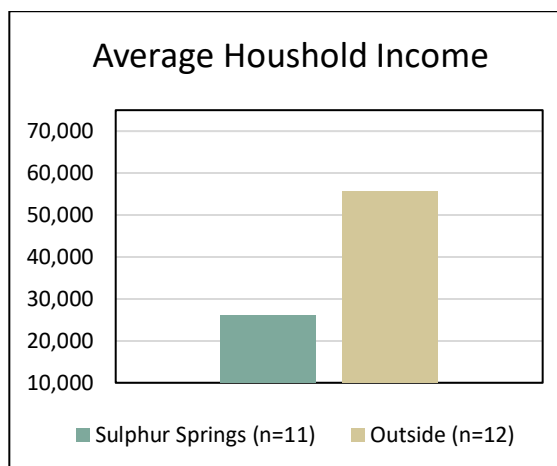
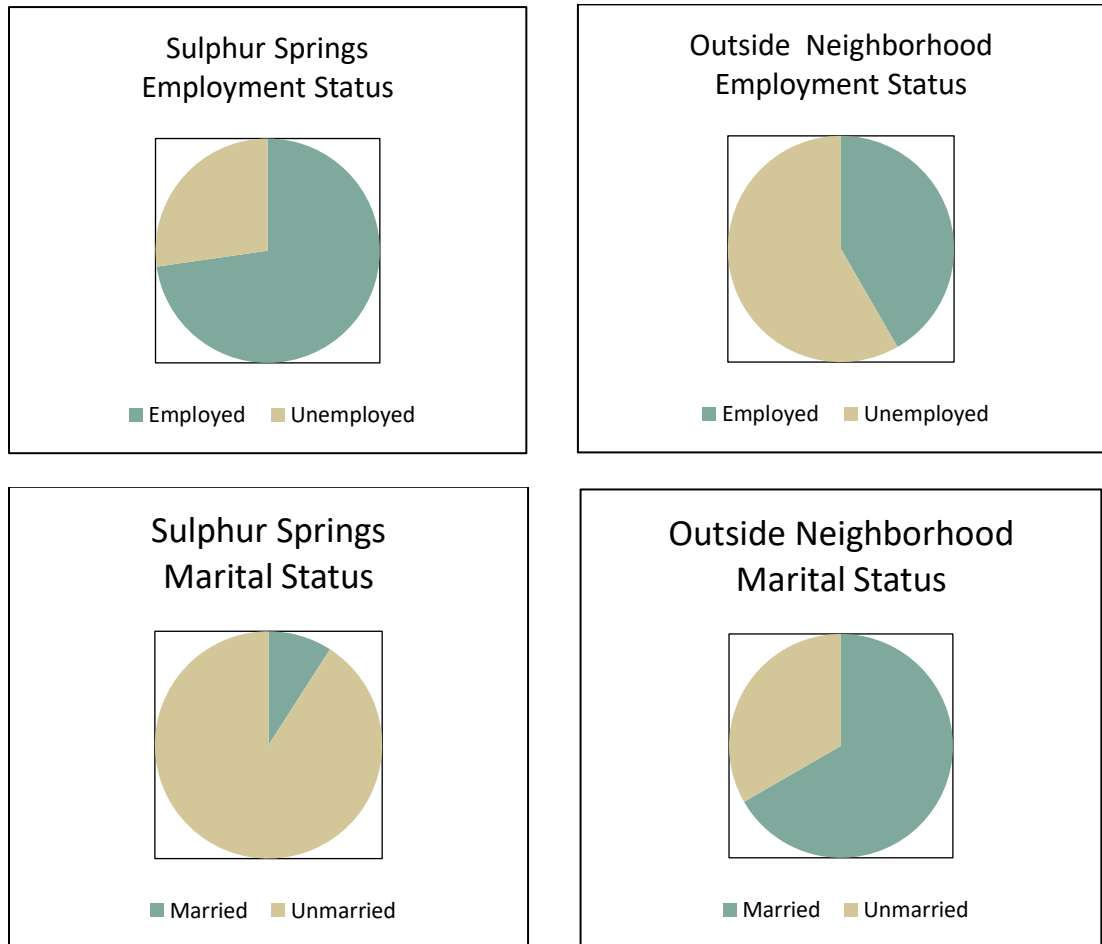


Figure 7. Household characteristics by neighborhood group.

The difference in household income is especially important given that, in both groups, **income largely reflects one person's earnings**. Several participants from external neighborhoods were stay-at-home mothers whose spouse was employed, and most participants from Sulphur Springs were from single mother households, with several on fixed incomes. Figures 8 through 11 below show differences between groups by employment and marital status.



Figures 8-11. Employment and marital status by neighborhood group.

Interview participants were asked about what types of support they had for raising young children, including support from family and friends, formal or informal childcare, or any other types of resources they saw as important in providing support during the early years. **Among families in outside neighborhoods, most respondents typically didn't utilize support outside of their nuclear family** and only named one or two people whom they could count on in situations where they needed to be away from home, such as one of the parent's mothers. Interview responses indicated that these families saw it as the norm for children to be cared for by immediate family, as shown in statements like, *"...normally we try to take care of ourselves,"* *"...we just support one another*

in parenting,” or “I just take care of my child alone and sometimes my husband helps me.”

Families from Sulphur Springs generally named more sources of support, particularly family, in addition to the local school and programs like Early Head Start, the YMCA and Layla’s House. However, **having a lot of family members nearby wasn’t necessarily indicative of support** because some respondents had complicated relationships with family and felt they couldn’t be trusted to care for their children. One parent explained:

...that's always been a touchy subject for us. I don't--neither my parents, nor [my husband's] parents are safe places to leave the kids with. They're just very...they raised lots of kids and they're great and we love them, but we're not going to leave our kids with them.

Another respondent shared, *“Well, I have support, but I don’t have support. It’s kind of hard.”*

EXPERIENCES

Parents and caregivers were asked about what early childhood resources were available in their neighborhoods and what their experiences were in accessing them, including Layla’s House. They were also asked how safe they felt in their communities and how safety affected engagement in programs and activities with their children.

Early Childhood Resources

Participants from both groups named a variety of **early childhood programs and resources** in their communities they felt were valuable for families with young children (see Figure 12). Collectively, parents were knowledgeable about and utilized a wide array of resources, though there were significant differences between individuals in terms of whether they felt there were sufficient resources. Many respondents from both groups said there weren’t enough or they weren’t aware of very many resources, while some named several or said there were “a ton.”

Some differences between the groups highlighted distinctions in purpose and need. For instance, some of the **resources unique to the Sulphur Springs group are designed to support families in under-resourced areas** (e.g., RICH House, Resource Center of Sulphur Springs, Tampa Family Health Clinic) or are prevention services for children in need of additional support (e.g., Boys and Girls Club, Early Head Start). Churches and the Tampa Police Department were described in terms of the concrete resources they offer such as school supplies or formula, or for specific programs they offer for children. Also, even though respondents named the school as a resource, most parents and caregivers had negative experiences with the school and felt there was poor

communication from teachers and administrators and sometimes poor treatment of children. Likewise, for resources like the YMCA, some participants had concerns about its safety: “...*sometimes it’s hard because people can still get access to [places like the YMCA], shootings and stuff, they’ll take place ‘cause it’s right in the middle.*”

One interviewee who cared for grandchildren discussed her view that **funding and programs for children have eroded over the years**, recalling numerous programs from hers and her children’s upbringing that no longer exist, and suggesting that policymakers now treat children as if they are “on the back burner.” Synthesizing several challenges to utilization of resources, one participant noted, “*You could put a bunch of stuff in the community. It’s the people got to come out.*”

Alternatively, **families from outside neighborhoods discussed more resources intended to provide enrichment for children**, some of which were exclusive to particular neighborhoods, such as a clubhouse with a pool. Many families from outside neighborhoods pointed to libraries as a community resource, though no participants from Sulphur Springs mentioned this, despite having a library in the neighborhood. Both groups discussed parks, playgrounds, and schools as a resource, and at least one person from each group named WIC as a resource. Families from outside Sulphur Springs named home-visiting parent education programs such as Healthy Start and HIPPY.

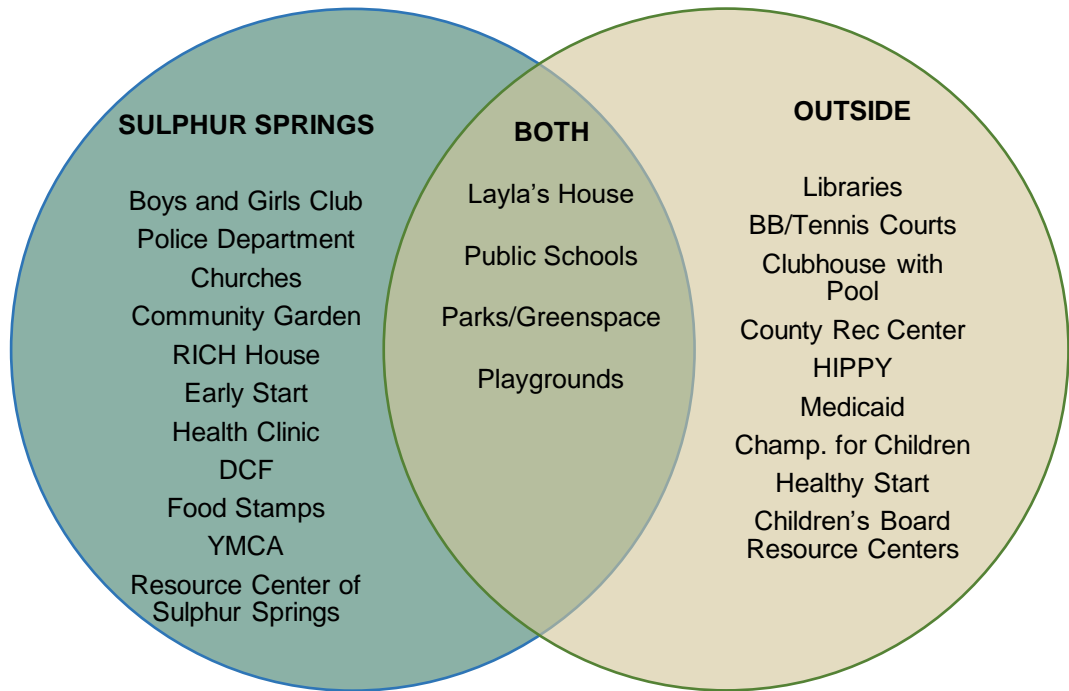


Figure 12. Early Childhood Resources Named by Participant Group

Experiences with Layla's House

Families who attended Layla's House were asked about how they learned of programs and what their experiences were in them; families from both groups were asked about their familiarity with and perceptions of Layla's House. **Most respondents said they were introduced to Layla's House by word of mouth.** Parents and caregivers from outside neighborhoods typically heard about Layla's House while participating in another program such as WIC or parent/child playgroups. Participants from Sulphur Springs typically heard about the program through a friend or while shopping in their neighborhood or walking nearby Layla's House.

Respondents who participated in programs regardless of community or racial/ethnic background had very favorable perceptions of Layla's House. Respondents from Sulphur Springs who did not participate in programs were typically more familiar with Layla's House through one-time holiday events and give-a-ways hosted by the center. **Some Sulphur Springs families expressed reservations about engaging with Layla's House and other early childhood programs due to concerns about being judged;** some of these respondents expressed awareness of long-standing negative stereotypes about Sulphur Springs residents that intersect race, gender, age, and economic status. One respondent shared her hesitation about going to programs: *"...because of the fact that I'm young with so many kids, I was so used to feeling the judgment from people that it was like, I don't like being around people."* Additionally, some Sulphur Springs respondents who did participate in programs suggested that other parents in the community did not engage because of their pride and because of the stigma associated with seeking help.

The majority of the responses from families regarding their experiences with Layla's house was overwhelmingly favorable regardless of socio-economic status, racial, ethnic, or community background. Families from both groups felt that **Layla's House services differed from other early childhood resources because of their explicit focus on child development and opportunities for socialization.** Many of the families from outside neighborhoods said the reason they drive 45 minutes or more to Layla's House is that it is a valuable program that provides their children with a good learning and social foundation. Layla's House participants from Sulphur Springs also felt their families received important developmental and educational benefits from the programs.

It was widely agreed by program participants that Layla's House staff were knowledgeable professionals who were relatable and supportive. Several participants said particular staff were the reason they started going to (and remained in) programs. Staff relationships were especially important for parents with special needs children, as one Sulphur Springs parent explained:

I know everybody there, everybody know me by name. They--everybody knows my children. My, my oldest son was born in 2015--2014. And, we

started going, he was one years old when we started going, and he got very bad ADHD, very bad. And Layla's House definitely knew how to work with him, keep him calm and everything.

Similarly, a respondent from outside Sulphur Springs likened Layla's House to family: *"Those people that work there have literally become like my second family. [My son is] on the autism spectrum and they have literally catered to him..."* Several parents enjoyed the opportunity for their children to gain in-person socialization skills at Layla's House.

Safety

There were significant distinctions between participant groups on perceptions and experiences of safety. **Most respondents from external neighborhoods described their neighborhoods as "safe" or "very safe"** and generally expressed little to no concerns about crime where they lived. However, there was some variation in this group, as two participants described recent experiences that made them feel unsafe, including a house invasion.

In contrast, **families from Sulphur Springs identified numerous factors that led to feeling unsafe**, from regular instances of property theft and vandalism, to gang activity, to drive-by shootings—two of which occurred just prior to and during the study period. Participants pointed to ways the neighborhood felt unsafe, specifically for families with young children, such as frequent theft of children's toys or bikes, older kids pulling down basketball hoops, or even problems like inefficient garbage removal, which leaves hazardous materials in walkways, preventing families from walking through the neighborhood. The following narratives expand on some of the concerns residents expressed:

I don't necessarily feel safe walking with my young kids because the ground is covered in glass and other kinds of terrible, you know, rusty metals or whatever...Um, they fall down, it's not a safe space to ride bikes or anything like that. Um, I would say, since I've lived here, I've heard, you know, gunshots, maybe four or five times. Our house has been broken into. Our neighbor's house has been broken into.

I don't let my kids walk the streets. I don't let my kids go too far. Like if they go outside, I'm outside, but we more so stay in the house in the backyard...because you're never sure what would happen...If a car will drive past while shootin'...Like it's just basically not some environment that you want to raise your child in.

Despite many of these safety concerns, some participant affirmed their sense of safety and said these problems weren't unique to their neighborhood.

Interviewees were asked about **what it would take to feel safe (or safer) in their community**. Because many of the respondents from outside neighborhoods reported already feeling safe, they provided little input, though some mentioned getting to know neighbors better and having some kind of

security or patrol of the neighborhood. The majority of the feedback came from participants in Sulphur Springs, who tried to unearth some of the root causes of problems with safety. For instance, some respondents felt that other residents needed to stop instigating violence when they had disagreements, or that some parents *“haven’t grown up [themselves]...so they don’t know what to do with their kids.”* Others emphasized the need to look out for each other and have mutual responsibility for children in the neighborhood: *“It really takes the neighborhood itself. Like we have to look out for each other’s kids...”*

Several families echoed these beliefs, especially that children and older youth should be able to be active and involved in school and structured activities and parents shouldn’t keep them home all day. One respondent emphasized that Sulphur Springs had fewer opportunities for children, who needed to be shown “a different direction” to keep them from being involved in crime or violence:

...[children are] not getting an outlet of seeing different areas because all they’re doing every day is seeing the same thing instead of, more so going to a football practice...or, you know, a resource to cheer, to dance, play basketball, baseball. Like you got more areas that people is supporting it out there...but over here they don’t have that...It would give us more chances of being safer because that way we know our kids is not caught in no cross-fire...

Respondents had **differing views on police presence** in the neighborhood and whether it was helpful or harmful. One resident said that enhanced security, like cameras and increased police presence would help improve safety, while another saw police involvement as potentially dangerous: *“So if you have an encounter with somebody who’s doing something that you don’t like, if I call the police, they’re going to show up and there’s a possibility that they’re going to escalate on that person.”* Several respondents also suggested that being able to walk freely in the neighborhood would contribute to improved safety in the neighborhood, but they identified barriers to walkability such as poor garbage removal and people dealing drugs on street corners.

NEEDS

To understand where there might be discrepancies between what resources were available and what participants desired or needed, parents and caregivers were asked to describe early childhood supports they would have if they could use a magic wand to make them appear. Additionally, interview participants were also asked what their ideal family life would look like if they had access to everything they needed.

Early Childhood Supports

From outside neighborhoods, responses varied based on employment and marital status. One single mother expressed a need to have more childcare

support like a nanny so she can occasionally do things on her own: *“So it's just basically to support the hands-on [childcare] 'cause I'm a mom that does everything, you know, everything in the household, as a single parent.”* Two respondents who worked away from home wished they could stay home or at least work from home so they could “be there” and “devote more time” to their children, watch them grow, and participate in activities and play dates. Another respondent wished for free childcare. One married mother who stayed home to raise her children said she did not need a magic wand and had plenty of support but wished for a regular community of friends and acquaintances for her children. **Several families expressed a desire for their children to have regular interaction with other children and to be able to engage in developmental activities and assessments**, with one saying she wanted to be able to provide “extra child development” for her children.

Some of these developmental needs were echoed by **respondents from Sulphur Springs, who wished for their children to have “the best education available” and to have access to tutoring and educational materials that help children read and write at an early age.** In addition, interviewees also envisioned supports that would help alleviate their financial burden, such as free daycare, children’s scholarship funds, free lunches at parks during the summer, and help with affording children’s activities such as amusement parks. A Sulphur Springs parent wanted to see team sports for children be more accessible through the County and feel that her family was a fit in activities like this, as opposed to feeling that they’re designed for “South Tampa moms.” Importantly, one participant said ideal support would mean their children aren’t judged for their race, culture, or environment:

It would look perfect for me to be able to know that a lot of people [are] standing behind me and the children, seeing everybody coming together and improving instead of them, one minute being there and the next minute the resource is gone because [the children are] being judged by the culture and the environment they live in... They actually, they're actually sittin' here and paying attention to the child, instead of what their religion, their culture, their skin color, like, it would mean a lot.

This excerpt speaks to the judgment that several families touched on, especially when describing the Sulphur Springs neighborhood compared to wealthier neighborhoods.

Ideal Family Life

Families from both groups had similar **visions of ideal family life that included a focus on children’s education, financial stability, and generally having everyone’s social, emotional, and health needs met.** Some participants from both neighborhoods said they were already living a “pretty good life” or that “everything looks great now.” Families from outside neighborhoods discussed

children's development as important and mentioned "practicing" with children or "stimulating" their development. The topic of home ownership came up in both groups, though in Sulphur Springs, participants discussed complications of buying an affordable *and* comfortable home: *"I would like to own a home, but we are completely priced out of the market. And I don't understand why...There are no homes within the price range that we qualify for at our income level that will give us a gateway, an on-ramp to...to owning a home...It's infuriating."* Another parent illustrated what comfort and safety would look like for her family:

[An ideal family life is] somewhere where we are comfortable, where you feel safe...like just a comfortable environment where I know my kids aren't going to school having to worry about being bullied. They can go to the store and not have to worry about if there's going to be a gunfight or shooting or people fighting them. That would be peace to me, not having to worry, not seeing so many homeless people, like out here begging...That would be my ideal life.

RQ2: CHALLENGES TO ENGAGEMENT

AGENCY INTEGRATION OF RACE AND RACISM

One aim of interviews with program staff and agency leadership was to gain insight into the ways race and racial inequality were reflected by organizational processes and staffing, as this provides an important basis for understanding community engagement. Findings from this component demonstrate numerous levels at which discussions and consideration of race have been incorporated into the agency's practices, while at the same time, some staff felt there may be some implicit racial bias.

Backgrounds and Roles

The seven staff interviewed for this study ranged in position type from direct service programming staff to administration and worked for the agency for approximately two years to more than 20 years (see Table 4). Staff represented diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, though programming staff were more racially and ethnically diverse than administration. When asked whether the racial makeup of staff reflected that of Hillsborough County, all participants agreed that the agency is very racially diverse the program staff and managerial level but not diverse at the administrative level. One staff member commented, *"We're a very diverse workforce at the practitioner level."*

Table 4. Race and Ethnicity of Staff by Role

Role	Race	Ethnicity
Layla's House Leadership Staff	Black or African American	Non-Hispanic
Layla's House Programming Staff	Black or African American	Non-Hispanic
Layla's House Programming Staff	Two or More Races	Hispanic
Layla's House Programming Staff	White	Hispanic
Layla's House Programming Staff	(Declined)	Hispanic
Champions Administration	White	Non-Hispanic
Champions Administration	White	Non-Hispanic

Educational backgrounds reflect a general child and family focus with some mention of courses related to cultural competency or diversity, though none report specific concentrations on race. **Staff's work-related backgrounds highlight many years of experience working with children, families, and disadvantaged groups across different sectors.** Four respondents report discussing race in their previous work outside of the agency or at a minimum working with racially minoritized families. Staff members said that they have taken part in formal trainings on topics related to race or racism at Champions for Children, through conferences, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion quality circle meetings, and external courses.

Addressing Race and Racism

Champion for Children and Layla's House implemented a DEI quality circle led by employees in 2019. The DEI circle aims to facilitate sustainable conversations to enhance cross-cultural competence and improve ways of serving the community and staff members. Although DEI quality circle meetings began before racial unrest protests of 2020, some staff members suggest directly and indirectly that discussions specifically focused on race or racism tend to follow popular mainstream media. **All staff agreed that understanding race and racism in the agency is a top priority**, with several pointing out that because Sulphur Springs is a predominantly Black neighborhood, residents of this community are directly impacted by racial inequality. Most respondents agreed that the needs of Black families are represented in Champion for Children's programs, particularly in Sulphur Springs through representation of Black staff at Layla's House. Staff agreed that there were opportunities for informal conversations and discussions about race, racism, and concerns in the community at the agency, including the race-related topics addressed in the DEI meetings.

While most staff appreciated the DEI conversations, some staff members suggested that **some issues related to race or racism were not adequately addressed**. For example, one participant raised some concern that if questions about race and poverty were probed deeper with agency staff, it might "unearth"

some conflation between the two: *“I think that there's a real, um, mental model [connecting] race and poverty.”* This quote relates particularly to Black low-income communities that the agency serves. Another staff member pointed out ways the agency was grappling with more in-depth ways to address race and racism: *“Maybe we've skimmed the surface, and I think we're working as an agency [to figure out] how do we go deeper?”*

Some staff commented that there was **room for improvement on addressing race and racism among staff**, particularly as it relates to feeling safe and acknowledged. While Layla's House staff shared that, in many ways, leadership listened to and responded to the needs of Layla's House staff, some felt their safety was only moderately attended to and that there was a perceived expectation that choosing to work at Layla's House inherently meant taking on more risk and there were limits to how much that risk could be mediated. This frustration was compounded by the fact that administrators and other staff worked in the main office in South Tampa and did not have to regularly engage with the same kind of issues of safety in their environment. For some staff, their personal experiences with race informed their understanding of these responses: *“...our staff, we're a hundred percent minority staff here. Um, and so I think if, if we were 100% Caucasian staff, I do think that it might be a different response. I can't help but think that because that's what history has told me.”* Staff interviews took place shortly after two neighborhood shootings—one of which was visible on the security cameras—and it was clear that some staff were shaken by these incidents and reflecting on what it meant for them and their place in the agency.

BARRIERS TO COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

When staff were asked about the challenges they've faced in engaging Black families from Sulphur Springs in Layla's House programs, they described persistent barriers related to neighborhood conditions, such as frequent mobility, lack of capacity to integrate outreach into programming, unsafe neighborhood conditions, and uncertainty over whether existing programs meet the needs of Black families in Sulphur Springs. Efforts to address these barriers were also discussed.

Neighborhood Conditions

Staff shared that one primary reason engagement is difficult is because of pervasive problems with **frequent mobility** among some families. Responses indicated that, while there are numerous families who have lived in the neighborhood for many years, for others Sulphur Springs may serve as a “stopping point” or a place where families go to “get on their feet” until they find something more desirable. Also, many families may struggle with employment or income stability and may not be able to stay very long. Several staff highlighted the need for outreach and engagement efforts to be continuous and discussed the difficulties of building relationships with so much residential fluctuation: *“I*

think that's been one of the frustrations, um, is that you make the connection with the family, they participate, but then they move. And so you're constantly, you know, there's this constant churn." Agency capacity to address outreach has fluctuated, but respondents generally felt that community outreach was undervalued by funding agencies because it doesn't have a tangible outcome in the same way that program enrollment does. It was also noted that, while programming staff are very adept at providing services, community outreach is a unique skillset that many staff may lack experience with.

A related theme that emerged from staff interviews was challenges related to **crime and violence** in the neighborhood. The topic of violence was especially prevalent because there had been two recent neighborhood shootings in the period just prior to some of the staff interviews. Participants shared that, while Sulphur Springs was long known for being a "tough" neighborhood, the levels of crime and violence seemed to increase in recent years. Staff discussed reasons they thought crime and violence had worsened recently, such as the exacerbation of financial struggle related to the COVID-19 pandemic. The major concern as it relates to family engagement with Layla's House was that crime and violence prevented families from feeling safe being out in the neighborhood, potentially walking to programs with their children. In other words, it prevented Layla's House from being accessible. Staff pointed out that they didn't feel Layla's House or the staff were targeted in any way. However, the violence was seen as a deterrent for families who might otherwise stay in the neighborhood longer, as one interviewee explained:

The way it was described to me is that, once you can get yourself in a position to kind of get out of Sulphur Springs, at least in the immediate area that we work in, then you do because you want better for your family, you want a safer environment for your family.

Relevance and Fit

Staff provided valuable insights on possible discrepancies in programming fit and relevance for Black families in the neighborhood. Several respondents suggested that **the focus of programs—child development, parent/caregiver bonding, interactive play—may not be very tangible to families who are facing immediate stressors**, such as finding employment, paying bills, or ensuring housing and food security. Interviewees shared observations that some families came to Layla's House looking for resources like computer services or childcare, and not somewhere they interact *with* their children. There were concerns that programs offered by Layla's House were "unfamiliar" to families, and perhaps even seen as "corny." One response highlighted a cultural disorientation some Black families from the neighborhood have about expectations for children's behavior; where Layla's House encourages children to freely explore spaces,

some parents and caregivers may have conflicting historical or cultural expectations, which may lead to feeling out of place:

...my assessment has been that it's sometimes stressful for families in the community because they're so focused on trying to make sure that their kids stay in line and then they're yelling, and then you got people looking at them, and so then they feel, again, isolated, they feel targeted.

Staff also mentioned that some local Black families have felt that Layla's House is not "for them" when they've heard families and staff speaking Spanish during programs.

Meeting Black Families' Needs

Staff interviewees discussed ways they felt their programs were and weren't meeting Black families' needs. Some responses indicated that **Layla's House has been successful in hiring staff who are representative of the neighborhood in terms of race and ethnicity, which may help families with relatability**. All staff showed an awareness of many Sulphur Springs families' concrete needs and how these may interfere with accessing Layla's House programs. One interviewee elaborated the problems associated with unmet needs:

And if a family's basic needs aren't being met, we know that, you know, unfortunately their child's development kind of falls to the wayside... So we have in Sulphur Springs, children that were already being underserved, they already had all these odds stacked against them.

Despite addressing some of these concrete needs by providing diapers, formula, and other infant care items; installing a washer and dryer for community use; and providing some discretionary financial assistance, staff felt that **addressing things like rent assistance, transportation, and landlord/tenant issues more comprehensively was outside the scope of the agency's mission** and there was no infrastructure or funding support to provide these services on a larger scale. Another concern raised about meeting families' needs was whether the agency had a strong understanding of trauma in Black families, as one participant explained:

I don't know if we fully understand how trauma looks in Black families...I think we've got a ways to go to look at, to be more tuned to the traumas that are experienced by many of our African-American families in communities like Sulphur Springs, to understand what those behaviors look like for children and families, to understand and evolve our services better.

This was coupled with frustrations that getting a good understanding of children's social, emotional, and developmental needs and families' support needs was

especially difficult during the pandemic, when in-person contact was restricted and many families were wary of physical engagement if it wasn't necessary.

Other barriers staff mentioned were that the space may appear "sterile" to some families, that the physical location is not near other community resources, and that the programming doesn't accommodate families who work during the day. Finally, several respondents said that many Black families participate in the Baby University program but are underrepresented in play groups, and one staff member shared an observation that many Black families in the neighborhood go back to work sooner after having a baby whereas many Hispanic families have more of a social support network and may stay home longer when children are young.

Efforts to Improve Engagement

Staff reported numerous strategies they've used to improve engagement among Black families in Sulphur Springs, ranging from formal efforts to adapt programming to meet families' needs to informal efforts to improve community presence and share information.

Community Outreach. Community outreach was one of the most frequently discussed efforts and has taken many forms. Some examples of the more structured efforts included hosting community celebrations or events like a diaper drive, conducting surveys in the neighborhood, and partnering with other agencies around outreach. One staff member described this process:

...we would go into the WIC office and we would approach the moms and talk to them and explain to them what we do and our programming. We would set a table at the library across the street from the high school...and we would put a table out and give little incentives and pass out flyers. We would go to the school or specifically to the preschool area, like in VPK and talk to the parents picking up the children, 'cause most, um, a lot of them have younger [children] at home. So we approach them and explain to them what we do.

However, these efforts were put on hold during the pandemic, when the main recruitment and engagement activities were done through social media.

Both parent and staff interviewees frequently referenced the community events as times when community members are more likely to engage, in part because they are typically on weekends and because they offer fun activities, food, and giveaways; community members are also likely to spread news of the events by word of mouth. Other community engagement efforts were described as more informal, such as being present at commonly visited places in the community (e.g., laundromat, barbershop, dollar store), fostering an "open-door" policy for non-participants, doing follow-up outreach with families who haven't been to programs in a while, and seeking input from families about what they like and

don't like about programs. Faith-based organizations were mentioned as places where Layla's House needed to develop stronger relationships.

Programming and Staffing. According to staff, there have been numerous efforts to develop programs that are responsive to specific needs, or in some instances to ensure that community engagement is integrated into staff roles. Several examples of programs that centered community interests and needs were provided. One was the Explorer's Club, a summer program oriented around cultural excursions to places like the zoo and the aquarium as a way to engage children and parents in conversation and expand children's literacy skills and help build attachment. One respondent gave insight into the first cohort of families that piloted the program:

...we called them our co-developers and we engaged them as equals in the process and said, "here's where we think we would like to go, but we're kind of building this ship as we're sailing it. And we really would like your feedback and expertise of what's working, what's not...And I would say that that lesson, that we've learned of engaging families as equals in the development of our programming, we've had bits and pieces of that all throughout Layla's house.

Another staff member shared ways Layla's House has been successful in responding to families' circumstances and needs with the Baby University prenatal program:

I think we were really, really intentional with the development of that program and thinking through what are the barriers that our families from this community, or the families that we're really targeting are experiencing. So when we were onsite, we were providing childcare...Um, we're also going to provide a hot meal because we know that that's important too. Um, and the time of the day that we're providing the classes, usually from 5:30 to 8:00 PM. But we're also not going to make an assumption that you have the dad in your corner. So we're going to tell you any support person can come, so it can be a mom, it can be a cousin, it could be auntie whoever it is...

A third program that staff referenced was the Little Steamers developmental playgroup, where families were involved in naming and developing the program based on the "buzz" they were hearing about STEM/STEAM programs. Offering structured play time, where families can reserve a play space for a set amount of time, was seen as a way to help build trust with families in the neighborhood by allowing them to participate on their own time and get to know staff. It was also noted that Layla's House has tried adjusting program times to meet residents' needs.

Layla's House also made intentional efforts to develop staff positions that helped engage families from Sulphur Springs. At one point, a Sulphur Springs resident

was hired to do community outreach, though the position ultimately ended because of tensions with others in the neighborhood. However, several staff discussed the success of the family outreach coordinator position, which provides case management services and connects families to concrete resources. This position was seen as crucial to engaging families, in part because serves as an entry point to other programs and services. Respondents also discussed a parent advisory group made up of parents from both Sulphur Springs and other neighborhoods. They've provided feedback on programming as well as issues related to building security; however, it was noted that very few families from Sulphur Springs have been involved in the board.

RQ3: IMPACT OF PANDEMIC ON PROGRAM OUTCOMES

Most Layla's House (and Champions for Children) programs transitioned to a virtual format by April 2020 to accommodate families to provide continuous support to families. Because this modality of service provision was new, there was little knowledge of how program engagement would be impacted, especially for programs involving children 0-5. Additionally, the research team was interested in understanding whether there was a noticeable impact on access to and engagement with services among Black families in Sulphur Springs. A quantitative analysis comparing program outcomes before and after the pandemic is provided below, followed by a description of family and staff perspectives on how virtual programs affected engagement.

OUTCOMES COMPARISON

Enrollment data and program outcomes were compared within and between two time periods (Time 1 = April 1, 2019 – March 31, 2020 and Time 2 = April 1, 2020 – March 31, 2021). Family characteristics and program assessments were included.

Family and Household Characteristics

Prior to the pandemic, 262 parents were enrolled in Layla's House programs. However, in the year since the pandemic, considerably fewer families were enrolled (n=137). Significantly fewer dads were engaged, and the proportion of Black parents reduced from 46% prior to the pandemic to 33% since the pandemic. Further, Hispanic families made up 50% of engaged parents since the pandemic which was a significant increase from the prior to the pandemic.

Table 5. Family Characteristics

	Time 1 2019 / 2020	Time 2 2020 / 2021
<i>Parent Characteristics</i>	<i>(n=262)</i>	<i>(n=137)</i>
Adult males	23% (n=60)	6% (n=8)
Adult females	77% (n=202)	94% (n=129)
Black	46% (n=105)	33% (n=36)
White	44% (n=100)	50% (n=55)
Other (Multi-race/Asian)	10% (n=24)	17% (n=18)
Hispanic	30% (n=80)	50% (n=69)
<i>Child Characteristics</i>	<i>(n=178)</i>	<i>(n=104)</i>
Females	56% (n=99)	56% (n=58)
Males	44% (n=79)	44% (n=46)
Black	37% (n=55)	29% (n=22)
White	41% (n=61)	50% (n=38)
Other (Multi-race/Asian)	22% (n=32)	21% (n=16)
Hispanic	51% (n=91)	68% (n=71)
Age	M = 26.8 months	M = 21.2 months

Household characteristics were also reported (see Figures 14 and 15). In the year prior to the pandemic, Layla's House families reported an average of 2 adults living in the home and 1.2 kids in the home. Similarly, in the year since the pandemic, families also reported 2 adults in the home on average and slightly more children in the home (M = 1.6). Household structure is illustrated in the charts below. The majority of families—about 60%—consisted of two parent households and about another 30% consisted of single female headed households. There were not significant difference in household structure across timepoints.

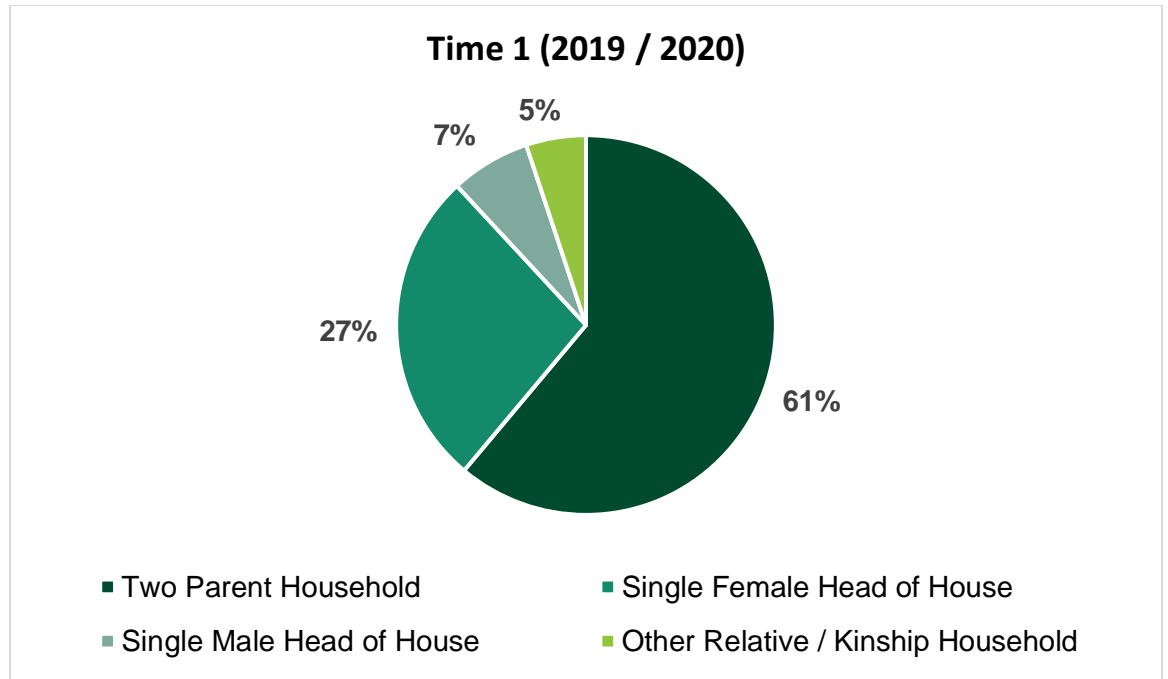


Figure 14. Household structure during Time 1

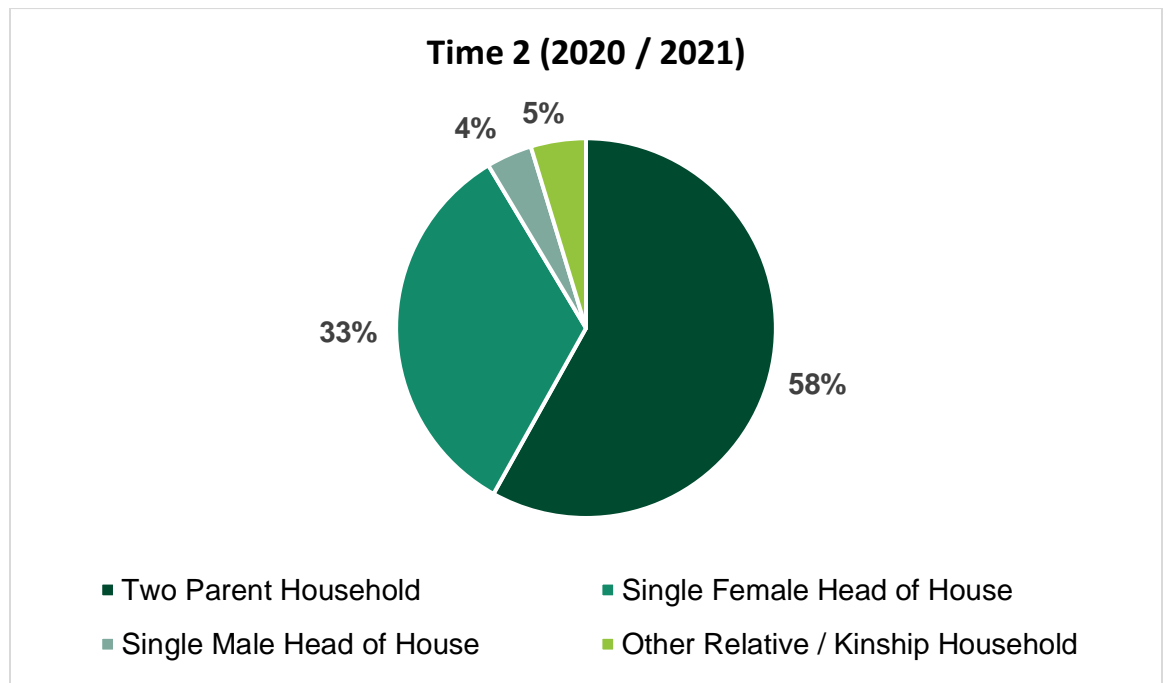
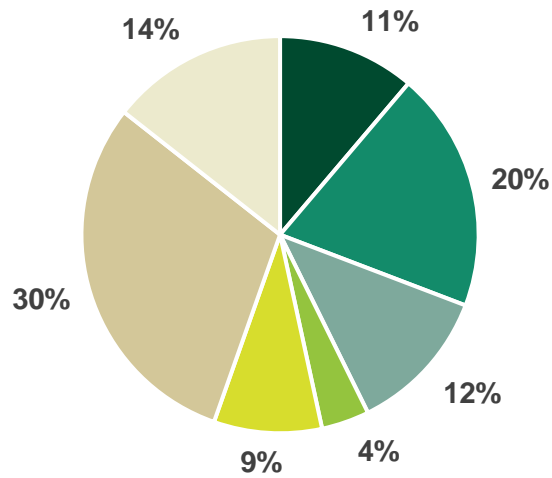


Figure 15. Household structure during Time 2

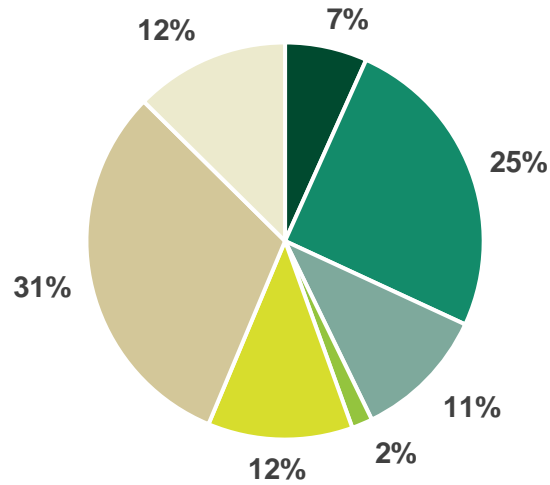
The highest level of education in the household was also reported and illustrated in the charts below. At both time points, Bachelor's Degrees represented the most frequent highest level of education (about 30%) followed by high school graduates and advanced degrees. No significant differences were observed in highest level of education across timepoints.

Time 1 (2019 / 2020)



- Some High School
- High School Grad / GED
- Some College
- Technical Certificate
- Associate Degree
- Bachelor Degree
- Advanced Degree

Time 2 (2020 / 2021)



- Some High School
- High School Grad / GED
- Some College
- Technical Certificate
- Associate Degree
- Bachelor Degree
- Advanced Degree

Figures 16 and 17 below illustrate where Layla's House participants reside. Although Layla's House is located in the 33604 zip code, participants reside in several of the surrounding communities. As shown in the heatmap, prior to the pandemic and since the pandemic, most participants are located within or adjacent to the 33604 zip code. The 33612, 33647, and 33610 zip codes were also among the most frequent reported.

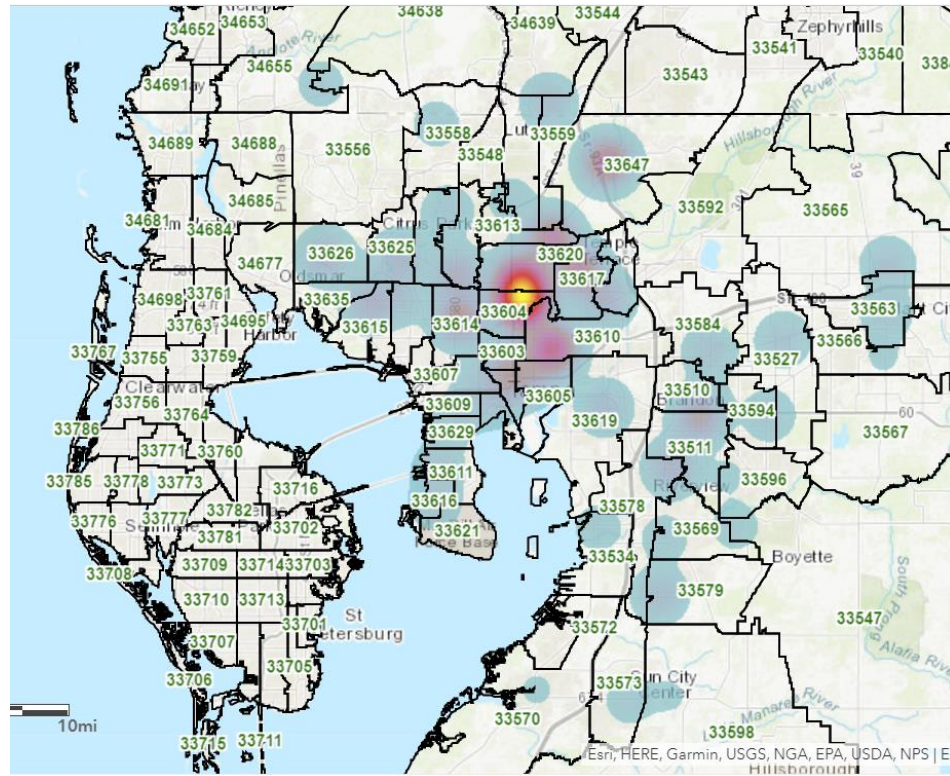


Figure 16. Layla's House Participant's Residence Zip codes (2019 / 2020)

Following the initial ASQ assessment, Layla’s House provides parents with developmental activities to engage in with children. Parents of children whose ASQ falls within the range of scores indicating the need to monitor development or refer children to services are encouraged to engage in developmental activities with children. A large majority of parents attempted these activities with their children. As a result, improvement in children’s development was observed (see Figure 18). Prior to the pandemic, the proportion of typically developing children increased from 76% to 97%. **Similar to the pre-pandemic pattern, the proportion of typically developing children in the year since increased from 82% to 100%.**

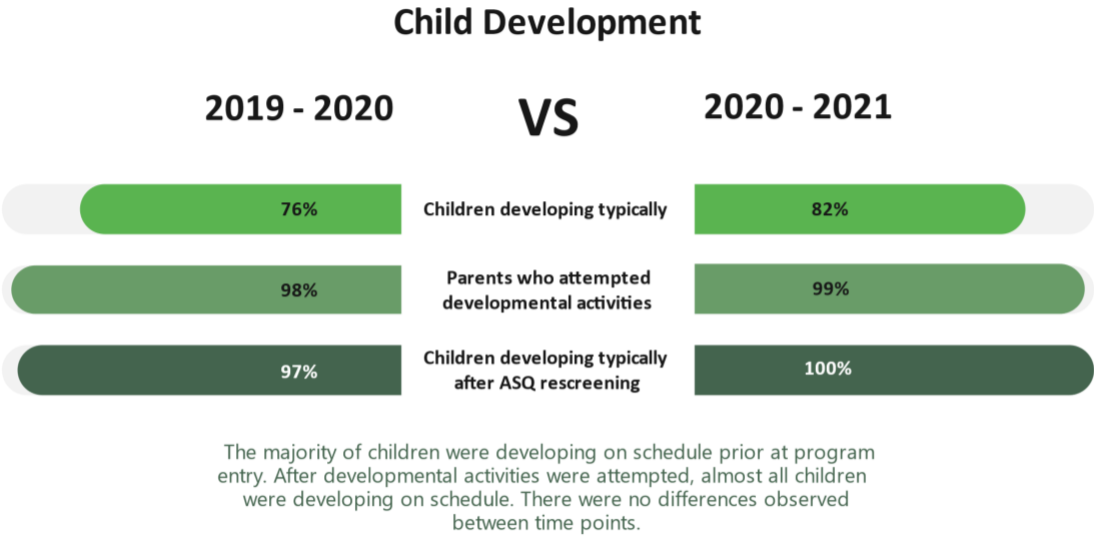


Figure 18. Child development outcomes based on ASQ scores

Knowledge Assessments

Baby University and Childbirth, Ready Set Go are two of Layla’s House programs designed for expecting parents and parents of newborns to gain knowledge on newborn care, child safety, healthy attachment, healthy development. Knowledge assessments are administered to parents prior to and following the program to assess knowledge gained, and outcomes are provided in Figure 19. Prior to the pandemic, for Baby University, 97% of knowledge assessment questions were answered correctly before the program began. Scores significantly improved following the program suggesting knowledge of newborn care, child rearing, and healthy development significantly improved. A similar finding was observed with data on the Baby University program that occurred since the pandemic. Ninety-one percent of knowledge assessment questions were answered correctly and, according to post-assessment scores, knowledge significantly improved following the program. **There was no significant**

difference when comparing post- assessment scores prior to the pandemic and since the pandemic.



Figure 19. Childbirth, Ready Set Go program outcomes

For the Childbirth, Ready Set Go program, prior to the pandemic, 90% of knowledge assessment questions were answered correctly before the program began. Scores significantly improved following the program suggesting knowledge related to childbirth significantly improved. Similarly, pre-assessment scores collected since the pandemic show 89% of Ready Set Go knowledge assessment questions were answered correctly and, according to post-assessment scores, knowledge significantly improved following the program.

There was no significant difference when comparing post- assessment scores prior to the pandemic and since the pandemic.

Friends Survey

The Friends Survey is administered to families during case management to assess the impact Layla’s House programs had on the number of supportive relationships for families, contacts with the community, and parents perceptions of support. The same survey is administered to families before and after case management services. In the year prior to the pandemic, almost all parents reported improvements in supportive relationships, an increase in contacts with the community, and an increase in having someone to talk to (see Figure 20). These improvements were statistically significant when comparing initial Friends Survey scores to follow-up scores. The same trends in improvements were observed since the pandemic. However, **there was no significant difference when comparing Friends Survey scores from one time point to the other** (i.e., prior to and since the pandemic).

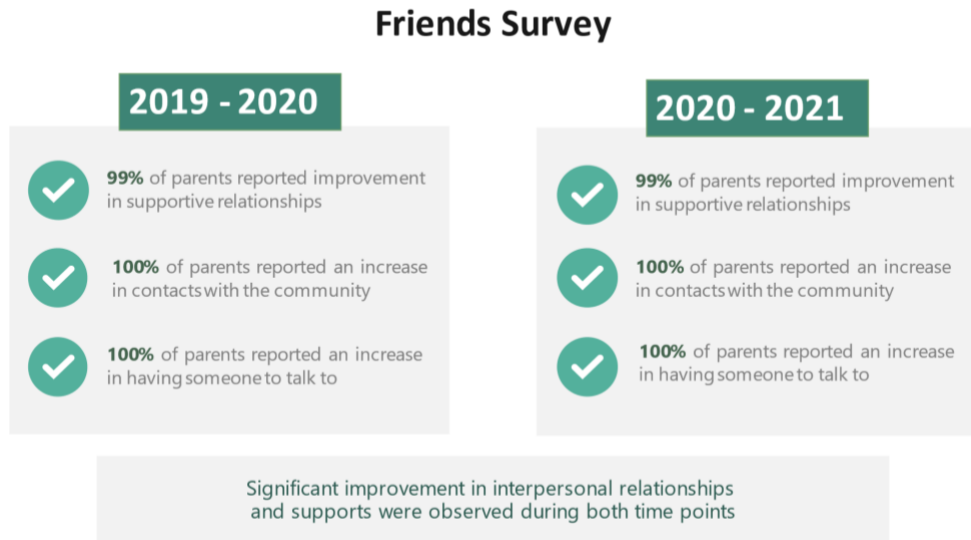


Figure 20. Friends Survey outcomes

Family Supports

Families receiving case management also completed Ecomaps to identify the number and sources of formal and informal supports. Like the Friends Survey, this was administered to families before and after case management services so assess how these supports changed overtime. As shown in Figure 21, before the pandemic, the number of informal supports increased from 2.23 on average to 2.34. This increase of 0.11 additional supports, on average, was not significant. Similarly, since the pandemic, informal supports for families increased from an average of 1.69 prior to case management services to 1.77 at the end of services. Again, this change was not statistically significant. **Change in formal supports for families, however, did improve significantly.** Before the pandemic, formal supports increased from 2.44 on average to 4.91. Since the pandemic, the number of formal supports increased from an average of 2.46 prior to case management services to 4.74 at the end of services. Post-assessment scores were also compared across datasets to determine whether there was a difference in the number of informal and formal supports indicated when families completed case management services. However, no significant difference was observed.

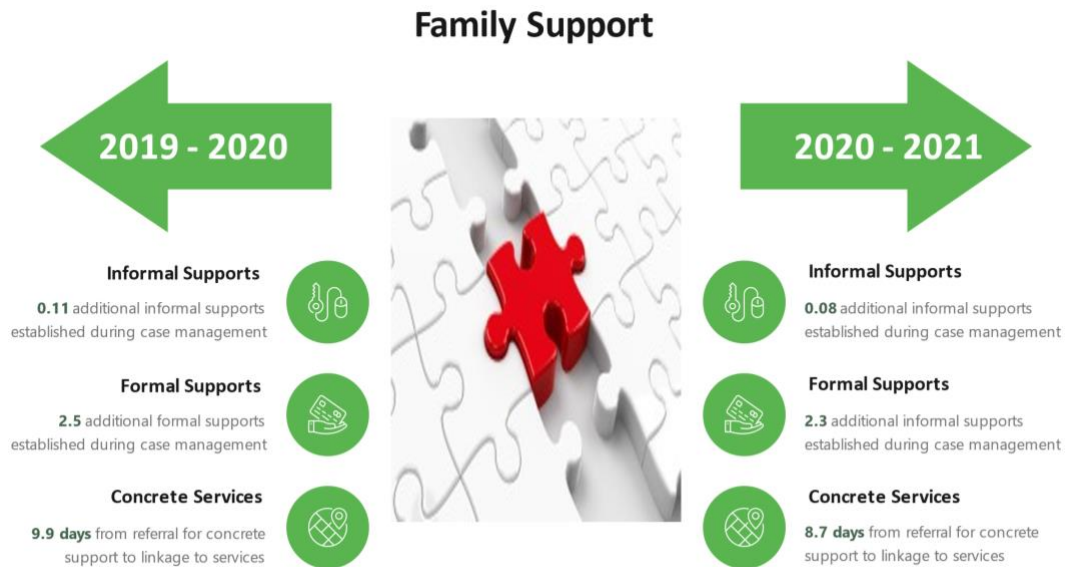


Figure 21. Family support outcomes

Information from Ecomaps was also shared that allowed researchers to assess the length of time between referral to concrete services to families actually connected with those referrals. In the year prior to the pandemic, it took 9.9 days on average for families to connect with referrals for concrete services. **Although it took a shorter amount of time to connect families with services since the pandemic, (i.e., 8.7 days on average) this difference was not significant.**

Summary of Outcomes Study Findings

Overall, families showed favorable outcomes after engaging with Layla's House programs. Improvements in child development were observed, families showed significant knowledge gained following Baby University and Ready Set Grow programs, families reported significant improvement in interpersonal relationships and supports, and there was a significant increase in formal supports for families. The goal of this study, however, was to examine how the pandemic was associated with changes in family outcomes. **When comparing findings from the year prior to the pandemic to a year since the pandemic, no differences were observed.** This suggests the transition to virtual programming and providing virtual supports did not significantly impact families. Layla's House was able to adapt to limitations brought on by the pandemic and continue providing the same services and supports to families, even with significant changes to modes of service delivery. It should be noted, however, that significantly fewer families were engaged in Layla's House programs in the year since the pandemic. It may be that fewer families chose to engage or continued engaging with Layla's House due to the pandemic which would suggest some response bias.

EXPERIENCES WITH VIRTUAL PROGRAMMING

Staff and parents and caregivers who participated in Layla's House programs virtually were asked about their experiences in terms of **benefits and challenges of virtual programming and to what extent it should continue beyond the COVID-19 pandemic**. Parents and caregivers from both Sulphur Springs and outside neighborhoods were included. Programs that were discussed were developmental playgroups and the prenatal class, Baby University. The research team also observed several sessions of these programs to better understand content and interactions.

Changes in Patterns

In general, **staff did not report major differences in programming between Layla's House and other Champions for Children programs**, though not all had direct knowledge of programs at multiple sites. Despite a reported uptick in enrollment when virtual programs started, this spike waned after the initial weeks, and enrollment decreased across all Champions for Children programs throughout the first year of the pandemic.

Staff expressed **some concerns about whether families in Sulphur Springs, as well as in other areas, had adequate internet and technology access**. This was especially concerning for enrolling new families, as recruitment was done primarily through social media during the pandemic, whereas in-person recruitment has previously been crucial for Layla's House. Champions for Children received a grant to provide tablets and hotspots to families with insufficient WiFi or data plans, though they faced challenges in reaching as many families in Sulphur Springs as they hoped: *"...we've gotten some of them out into hands in Sulphur Springs through Layla's House, but I know the need is greater than what we've given out..."* One respondent shared that, in general, the agency has been able to engage families in virtual programs who they already have a relationship with, but recruiting new families has been especially challenging.

Another concern was that some families in Sulphur Springs may have numerous household members and may not have access to a private space, hindering their ability to freely discuss issues or to ask important questions. Additionally, because they may not have the luxury of working remotely, **Sulphur Springs parents and caregivers may not have the ability to be home and engage with their children during virtual playgroups**. One Black staff member suggested that one positive aspect of virtual programs was that it could open up a pathway for racial representation to help Black families who may be otherwise hesitant to come in to programs:

I think the pros could be that we're able to reach a lot more families that look like us, that I may have met on the street and be like, "Hey, you see me? Like, you'll see me on the screen. Like you can sit at home and be

okay. That looks like you, but you don't have to come in if you're nervous about COVID."

Another staff member observed that there seemed to be more people of color participating in virtual programs as well, though it was unclear if this referred specifically to Black participants or not.

Challenges

Aside from typical technological challenges (e.g., adapting to the online programs, videos freezing, inconsistent internet coverage), **a primary concern among staff and parents/caregivers was related to engaging children virtually in programs**. Many parents and caregivers shared that their children were still getting acclimated to tablets and laptops and they were unable to maintain their attention for very long, especially with toys and other distractions at home. Staff were in agreement, adding that it was strange to be encouraging screen time, when they would typically advise that it is developmentally inappropriate for young children (especially two and younger) to interact with technological devices too much. One staff interviewee expanded on ways that virtual playgroups complicated their program model and their focus on parents:

We're there to engage the parent and have the parent teach and engage with their child. So our audience is really the parent and when the parent is not giving us their 100 percent attention and they're trying to multitask, or I see them walking around trying to prepare food or trying to clean, and they really left the child in front of the screen, it's really not beneficial to what we're trying to do.

Both parents and staff pointed out that relating ideas was more difficult virtually, social interaction was not really replicable online, and children's ability to have sensorial engagement with their environment was stifled. One parent commented, *"...[my son] likes to be around other children. Um, even if he [isn't] playing with them because he doesn't really know how to play with other children, but he likes to be around them and watch them."* A staff member also discussed a difference in the energy of the groups and difficulties trying to maintain enthusiasm: *"I missed being able to feed off their interaction when they're jumping around, when I'm doing the songs. But now you gotta do it virtually and you gotta bring that same enthusiasm on a screen where it's really just a computer screen looking at you."* Finally, staff respondents shared that in-person engagement is especially important for fostering relationships and building trust.

Benefits

Despite some of the challenges noted above, **both parents/caregivers and staff identified several benefits to virtual programming**. Parent and caregiver feedback revolved largely around how virtual programming was convenient and allowed them to stay safe. Many parents simply said it was "better than nothing," and they were glad to still have some kind of continuation of programs and a

sense of support, even if interactions weren't the same. Others appreciated the comfort of being at home and not having to drive to Layla's House, which for some was a 30- or 45-minute trip one way. One parent suggested that learning about virtual interactions was important for her child because it is "how the world is now working." One participant shared that virtual programming allowed her to finally be able to attend play groups, as she previously couldn't because of her work schedule. It was also noted that the smaller class sizes in some groups allowed the facilitator to tailor the groups to children who were present. Participants who were enrolled in Baby University appreciated the flexibility of the online format, and one found it "way more convenient" to be able to participate from home.

Staff interviewees described benefits related to **improving accessibility for some families, staying safe while working from home (temporarily), and generally being able to maintain contact with families**. One interviewee pointed out that families with special needs or medical needs have been able to engage online a little easier, in part because they didn't have to worry about transportation. This includes children, as well as pregnant women who are already navigating numerous prenatal care appointments or who may be on bed rest. Removal of the transportation barrier also allowed for increased engagement from areas further away, like South County, and may have alleviated challenges for families with several children on different schedules. One interviewee shared that some types of engagement were actually easier, like accessing online read-along books and showing materials like videos and presentations on screen where everyone can see them more directly. It was also reported that staff noticed more engagement and higher attendance with Baby University participants, perhaps because they felt less inhibited in engaging in discussion and asking questions virtually.

Post-Pandemic Opportunities

Participants had varying viewpoints about the extent to which virtual programs should continue beyond the pandemic. There was wide agreement among parents and staff that the primary format of playgroups should be in-person, largely because participants believed it was developmentally inappropriate for children to interact with others via technology, because hands-on engagement was crucial, and because it was unhealthy for children to go extended periods of time without being around other children. These sentiments were tempered by the belief by some parents that there was very little risk of serious illness from coronavirus to young children in the first place. Staff acknowledged parents' frustrations with the in-person restrictions, and were also eager to be able to interact with children in-person, as long as risk could be adequately mitigated. On the other hand, **several parents and caregivers said they would continue participating in virtual programming if it was offered** because it gave them more flexibility and eliminated their transportation burden. Across the board,

respondents said they would like to see Baby University continue virtually given the increase in engagement that was observed during the pandemic.

Both staff and parents explored the idea of a hybrid model for programming that would allow both in-person and remote options. One participant suggested this would be especially useful in cases where children were sick so that parents still had an option and didn't feel swayed to bring their child in sick to a group due to disappointment about missing out. Staff emphasized that they would likely not have a dual mode group, where an in-person group was also video conferenced to others, though depending on capacity, it could be an option to offer separate in-person and remote options at the same time. Another consideration was to have a multi-week class where some weeks were virtual and some were in-person, both as a way to mitigate against risk, depending on COVID's long-term trajectory, or to reduce other barriers such as transportation. Ultimately, however, these model changes will depend on staff capacity, community needs, and funding flexibility.

DISCUSSION

SITUATING BARRIERS

Barriers faced by Layla's House are common in programs and agencies across the US serving under resourced areas that are disproportionately Black, Hispanic, and Native American. **Perceptions of irrelevance, misalignment with beliefs or needs, and structural factors such as work schedule conflicts, transportation, safety, and walkability are frequently reported barriers to participation in early childhood and parenting programs in such areas** (Dawson-McClure et al., 2017; Lee et al., 2006;). These same challenges were conveyed through interviews with Sulphur Springs families and Champions for Children/Layla's House staff. For instance, some families expressed unfamiliarity and dissonance with programs geared towards parent/child bonding and felt this was something that was taken care of at home. It was also evident from staff descriptions that some Black families from the neighborhood felt a sort of cultural clash between their own expectations of children's behaviors and what they perceived as unstructured play and permissive behaviors encouraged for children at Layla's House, sometimes throwing their parenting style into sharp relief in front of others. Similarly, several parents and caregivers' ideology that other adults in the community—especially from child serving institutions—should act as caregivers to all children highlights some discrepancies with the programming model at Layla's House, where programs are geared towards parents and caregivers and not only children, a model Sulphur Springs families were more familiar with through other programs like Head Start.

Families' descriptions of their community and their experiences reveal other implicit factors that may contribute to concerns about being judged by institutions. For instance, many Sulphur Springs interviewees reported that the people responsible for disarray in the neighborhood did not work, so when some families emphasized that they did work, they may have been pushing back against stereotypes that people in low-income minority neighborhoods are lazy. Furthermore, there were many instances in which Sulphur Springs interviewees seemed to be "on defense" when asked questions about race (even just describing the racial makeup of the neighborhood), and most emphasized that they did not see race. These respondents seemed to have an awareness that negative perceptions of high crime neighborhoods like Sulphur Springs are often tied to racial stereotypes, particularly among institutions that serve high risk communities. Not knowing exactly what Layla's House is may make it safer to assume it is a similar type of institution that should be avoided.

The concept of universal programming may also present challenges in a neighborhood that is not typically a place where outsiders come in. It was clear from interviews that families in Sulphur Springs often stuck to one part of the neighborhood and interacted largely with family. Many Black families in the neighborhood may not be engaging a lot with non-Black people, so when they are introduced to others in the programs from

outside neighborhoods or from other races/ethnicities, it may highlight differences, exacerbate tensions, and confirm the belief that Layla's House is not designed for them. Additionally, Lee et al. (2006) point out that, *"Families invited to participate in universal prevention programs are not typically seeking help for their child nor aware of the risks to their children..."* providing an additional reason that families may have misunderstandings about the value of Layla's House programs; the potential risks that Layla's House sees for all children may differ from the risks Sulphur Springs families are concerned about.

One challenge common to similar types of early childhood prevention programs is with ensuring quality staff engagement with families (Spoth et al., 1996; Spoth et al., 1999). It has been widely noted that program staff's ability to connect with and build relationships with participants is a predictor of success (Orrell et al., 1999). However, **rather than being a barrier, staff engagement with the community seemed to be a key strength of Layla's House**, as families who were in programs consistently reported that staff were crucial to their participation, and across all parent/caregiver interviewees, only positive remarks were made about staff.

DRAWING FROM LESSONS LEARNED

Layla's House has implemented many different strategies that have led to improved engagement or incorporated community feedback into program development. These include hosting community events, having open communication and visit policies (in safe ways), following up with participants who have not recently engaged in programs, and integrating incentives and concrete needs into programs to offset the burdens and stressors many families face. These strategies are supported by existing research on program engagement in disadvantaged communities (Henggeler et al., 1996). Other insights include complementing site-based programs with in-home visits, even if only as an initial strategy for improving engagement and building rapport (Dishion et al., 2008; Shepard et al., 2012). This approach would also improve convenience to families who lack transportation, and it may help reduce stigma associated with seeking support. Another strategy involves provision of a personalized "engagement package" that includes flyers, testimonials, and parent quotes in addition to an introductory call (Winslow et al., 2016). Of course, a major challenge is being able to sustainably incorporate engagement efforts since they are not considered "outcomes" that are assessed (or funded). Therefore, changes at the policy and funding level may be warranted to improve understanding of what "successful service" looks like in communities where engagement is difficult.

ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS ON STAFF

Our study occurred during a period when there was heightened attention to racial injustice, including structural violence and systemic abuse of power that disproportionately affects Black people. This coincided with increased incidents of violence in the Sulphur Springs neighborhood, one of which was a shooting that a staff

member witness from the security camera. This was only months after the murder of George Floyd, one of many instances of racial violence that had an immeasurable impact on Black communities. Black staff in particular were clearly grappling with concerns about safety at many levels. Several staff we interviewed left their positions during our study, some of whom had been well-known to families and who were instrumental in developing Layla's House programs and services. While we can't know whether their reasons were related to increased awareness of racial injustice, a decreased sense of safety, or concerns over security related to the pandemic, there were strands of these themes woven into interviews and observations, and it would otherwise be atypical for quite so many staff from one program to leave in such a short period of time.

STUDY LIMITATIONS

Conducting a study during a pandemic has many challenges to begin with, not the least of which is asking for staff members' time when they are already navigating a public health crisis that significantly impacts their daily operations. While this offers many important opportunities to observe how adaptations are unfolding, it also meant that **we needed to be cognizant about staff's need to prioritize their primary responsibilities**. Key contacts who helped coordinate data were incredibly gracious with their time and were responsive to our requests. However, under ordinary circumstances, we might have spent more time further investigating what types of data are available for analysis or pursuing other participant recruitment options, but given the reduced bandwidth of staff to accommodate a study in the middle of a pandemic, we did not pursue every avenue that might have been fruitful. Two areas this may have impacted our findings is with the outcomes analysis and the parent interviews. To understand outcomes more comprehensively, we would have liked to spend more time in the office trying to understand what data was available or possibly reviewing hard copies of assessments or other data that could help fill in some of the gaps we noticed in our analyses. Additionally, we hoped to interview more Latinx families from Sulphur Springs because several staff and parents spoke to tensions between Spanish-speaking families and Black families. However, our attempts to identify these parents fell short. In both cases we considered the timeframe and staff capacity and made the decision to utilize the data we already had access to.

The **limitations of studying family engagement without being able to engage with families in person** became very clear. Staff, especially, shared how important it was for them to be visible in Sulphur Springs and how recruitment for programs happens primarily through in-person contact in the neighborhood. The same can be said for recruiting participants for a study; we relied heavily on Layla's House and other community agencies for recruitment and after numerous attempts and an extension of our timeframe, we reached an adequate sample of Black parents and caregivers in Sulphur Springs, though not as many as we would have liked. Agencies' inability to host community events was hampered, and during our recruitment stage, we had strict

university guidance on not engaging with participants in-person, as an ethical issue to ensure researchers don't contribute to COVID-19 transmission. These factors may have inhibited our ability to reach more participants in the neighborhood.

Analysis of family and household characteristics and assessment data presented some challenges. The evaluation team received de-identified data on families engaged with Layla's House and the data did not include unique identifiers or information that indicated family members. For instance, although the datasets included information on parents and children involved in programs, it was not possible to know which parents and children made up families. As a result, we were unable to identify the number of family units involved with Layla's House. Perhaps more problematic was the inability to match parents within the same family to reduce duplication of household characteristics. It is likely that household characteristics are inflated due to the inability to weed out data of parents living in the same household.

Also, many family members included in the 2019/2020 dataset were also represented in the 2020/2021 dataset. Without individual identifiers, it was not possible to know who these family members were with certainty. In some cases, the study team was able to match family members across datasets who had the same birthday, sex, race, and ethnicity. Matching based on zip code and number of adults or children in the home was less reliable since this can change within a year. **The inability to match family members across datasets made it difficult to conduct appropriate data analysis.** For instance, the assumption of independence could not be met for independent samples t-tests. However, the sample size of families who could be matched across datasets was too small to include in any analysis. The decision was made to assess mean comparison via independent t-test despite the limitations since use of paired t-tests would not render enough power for statistical analyses.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations have been culled from analyses and observations made by the research team, as well as input from staff and parents during interviews and research literature. Recommendations are organized into three main areas where

ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY AND ENVIRONMENT

- ➔ Continue work with DEI quality circle and use a pathway to bridge professional development related to racial equity (one effort could be identifying a workshop, training, or webinar on understanding trauma in Black families, see Appendix E)
- ➔ Center some initiatives on engaging/serving/representing Black families so that outcomes and funding can be better tied to this component

- ➔ Detail work that goes into engagement and explore sources of funding for this
- ➔ Consider structural changes at the leadership level that will allow Layla's House leadership to have more of an equal partnership in administration OR make efforts to ensure that there is at least one person overseeing Layla's House that is racially representative of staff (also consider assessments towards this end such as a [CLC Assessment](#))
- ➔ Mentor Layla's House staff for leadership roles in order to ensure experiences are represented at the administrative level
- ➔ Ensure that the Board of Directors includes community members who can adequately understand and represent the needs of Sulphur Springs families
- ➔ Discuss with funding partners ways that funding could better address concrete needs, knowing this improves engagement with services
- ➔ Integrate racial equity lens and assess characteristics such as race and ethnicity in program outcomes to understand disparities and better address them

PROGRAMMING

- ➔ Consider connecting programs to concepts Sulphur Springs families have shown interest in, such as *education*, *readiness*, and *success*
- ➔ Explore ways of showing how programs/services may help alleviate stressors families face (e.g., how can understanding child development improve mental wellbeing or how can bonding improve children's behavior)
- ➔ Build on success of events and partnerships with community (e.g., book event in partnership with libraries, having zoo come with animals and raffle season passes, add more developmental or bonding activities)
- ➔ Develop pathways for preventing ongoing involvement with child welfare by strengthening partnerships with DCF (e.g., possibly developing something like a Parenting 101 class that the department recognizes)
- ➔ Consider developing video tutorials for developmental activities that parents can engage with if they're not able to attend play groups
- ➔ Consider other types of events like "pop ups" or block parties that aren't as large and can be done more regularly (e.g., free lunch play date and activities in the park)
- ➔ Explore transportation options that may help alleviate barriers to transportation and poor walkability (e.g., partnering with agencies that have vans/buses to transport families to Layla's House events)

- ➔ Explore in-home components that may improve engagement and build rapport (e.g., introductory sessions in the home or further developing PAT at Layla's House)

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

- ➔ Continue providing services to parents that help alleviate stressors, including providing concrete needs or having more direct access to concrete needs like food and daycare (one staff member said they'd love to see a "store" where participants have an access card to get needed items like food and clothing)
- ➔ Develop and distribute targeted informational packets for Sulphur Springs families
- ➔ Consider "feel good" programming like monthly "Mommy and me" pampering sessions or special Dad or Grandparent days to promote bonding
- ➔ Consider ways to engage trusted messengers/community liaisons such as hosting workshops
- ➔ Look to models such as [community health workers](#) or [peer specialists](#) with relevant lived experience as a potential way to improve community engagement
- ➔ Consider ways to address community needs in a forum like a town hall, partnering with other agencies who can address concrete needs
- ➔ Create a virtual campaign with a prize for the most referrals that links people to social media pages
- ➔ Build on initial steps with parent advisory committee to continue seeking insights in developing culturally responsive programs, involving parents and, when appropriate, children from the community

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APPENDIX A: PARENT/CAREGIVER INTERVIEW GUIDE (LAYLA'S HOUSE PARTICIPANTS)

Participant ID:	Interview Date:
Interviewer:	Program Type: In-Person Virtual £ Both
Program(s) Attended:	Baby University Baby and Me Growing Together

Introduction

Thank you for taking the time to talk with us and share your experiences. We are interested in learning more about what makes parents and caregivers with infants and young children interested in taking part in parent education and early childhood programs. We think this interview will take about an hour, and with your permission, we'd like to record the interview so that we can better focus on what you're saying. Please let me know if you'd like to take a break or stop at any point. Do you have any questions before we get started?

Family Background/Neighborhood

1. Can you tell me a little about your household (who lives in your house, how many children you have and their ages)?
2. What kind of support do you have for raising children (family, friends, childcare)?
3. What area of town or neighborhood do you live in?
4. How would you describe your neighborhood?
 - a. In terms of race/ethnicity?
 - b. In terms of how much income families seem to have?
 - c. In terms of how long people live in the neighborhood?
5. When you think of the word "community," what does that mean to you?
 - a. In terms of people and relationships?
 - b. In terms of places and institutions?
6. What kinds of resources or supports are there in your community for raising young children?
 - a. Probe: What special programs or resources for families, if any, are you aware of in your area? (e.g., childcare, financial help, medical or school programs, etc.)
 - b. Probe: In what ways do you see your community's needs being met by programs and resources?
7. How safe do you feel in your community, for yourself and your family?
 - a. Are there any programs or services that help make you feel safe in your neighborhood?
 - b. (If they don't feel safe) What do you think it takes for families to feel safe in their neighborhoods?
8. When thinking about taking part in parent education or child development programs, how important are each of the following things?
 - a. Cost

- b. Accessibility (how easy or hard it is to get to or connect to programs or services)
- c. Availability of programs or scheduling
- d. Feeling that your cultural identity or values are reflected
- e. Other participants (being able to make connections)

Layla's House

9. How did you hear about Layla's House programs?
10. What program(s) have you been involved in at Layla's House?
 - a. How long did you participate in programs?
11. Have you been to any other programs for parent education or child development?
12. What made you interested in participating in programs at Layla's House?
13. What has your experience been like in the program(s)?
14. When you started coming to Layla's House, how well did you feel that the program was a fit for you?
 - a. Was there anything about the program(s) that was different than what you expected?
15. To what extent have you connected with other parents or caregivers in the program(s)?
16. How important is your cultural or racial identity when thinking about what kinds of programs you and your family take part in?
17. How has the information you've learned matched with your ideas about parenting or raising children?
 - a. Was there any part of the program(s) that you disagreed with or felt wasn't right for you and your family?
 - b. What information or ideas did you feel were the most important in the programs you attended?
18. How likely are you to continue participating in Layla's House programs? Why or why not?

Participants who have attended virtual programs

19. What was it like to start virtual programs through Layla's House?
20. Can you tell me about any challenges you had connecting to programs virtually (e.g., internet access, devices)?
21. How have the virtual programs fit with your daily life and routine (e.g., work, childcare responsibilities)?
22. What are some challenges to having virtual programs through Layla's House?
23. What are some benefits to having virtual programs through Layla's House?
24. What do you think about the idea of Layla's House or similar agencies continuing to have virtual programs, even after the pandemic is over?

Recommendations

25. If you could wave a magic wand and have all the support you needed for raising your children, what would that look like?
26. When you think of what you need for you and your family to be “doing well” and living your ideal life, what does that look like?
- a. (If aware of Layla’s House programs) In what ways do you see Layla’s House as helping with that vision?

Demographic Information

27. Child/Children’s Age(s):
28. Parent/Caregiver Age:
29. What is your marital status?
- a. Single
 - b. Married or in a domestic partnership
 - c. Widowed
 - d. Divorced
 - e. Separated
30. Which of the following best describes your race?
- f. White
 - g. Black or African American
 - h. American Indian or Alaska Native
 - i. Asian
 - j. Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - k. More than one race
 - l. Other
 - m. Prefer not to answer
31. Which of the following best describes your ethnicity?
- n. Hispanic or Latino
 - o. Not Hispanic or Latino
 - p. Other
 - q. Prefer not to answer
32. What is your current employment status?
- r. Employed full-time
 - s. Employed part-time
 - t. Unemployed and currently looking for work
 - u. Unemployed and not currently looking for work
 - v. Student
 - w. Retired
 - x. Stay at home parent
 - y. Self-employed
 - z. Unable to work
33. What is your approximate household income?
- aa. Less than \$20,000
 - bb. \$20,000 to \$34,999
 - cc. \$35,000 to \$49,999

- dd. \$50,000 to \$74,999
- ee. \$75,000 to \$99,999
- ff. Over \$100,000

APPENDIX B: PARENT/CAREGIVER INTERVIEW GUIDE (SULPHUR SPRINGS FAMILIES)

Participant ID:	Interview Date:
Interviewer:	Attended Layla's House Program: £ Yes £ No

Introduction

Thank you for taking the time to talk with us and share your experiences. We are interested in learning more about why families with young children from Sulphur Springs may or may not take part in programs and services at Layla's House. We think this interview will take about an hour, and with your permission, we'd like to record the interview so that we can better focus on what you're saying. Please let me know if you'd like to take a break or stop at any point. Do you have any questions before we get started?

Background/Sulphur Springs Neighborhood

34. Can you tell me a little about your household (who lives in your house, how many children you have)?
35. What kind of support do you have for raising children?
36. How long have you lived in Sulphur Springs neighborhood?
 - a. (if not very long) Where did you live prior to moving here?
37. How would you describe the Sulphur Springs neighborhood?
 - a. In terms of race/ethnicity?
 - b. In terms of how much income families seem to have?
 - c. In terms of how long people live in the neighborhood?
38. When you think of the word "community," what does that mean to you?
 - a. In terms of people and relationships?
 - b. In terms of places and institutions?
39. What kinds of resources or supports are there in your community for raising young children?
 - a. Probe: What special programs or resources for families, if any, are you aware of in Sulphur Springs? (e.g., childcare, financial help, medical or school programs, etc.)
 - b. Probe: In what ways do you see your community's needs being met by programs and resources?
40. How safe do you feel in your community, for yourself and your family?
 - a. Are there any programs or services that help make you feel safe in your neighborhood?
 - b. (If they don't feel safe) What do you think it takes for families to feel safe in their neighborhoods?

Layla's House

41. What do you know about Layla's House?
42. Have you ever attended any programs or had any services through Layla's House? If so, which ones?

(If yes)

- a. What made you want to participate in the programs or services?
- b. What did you like about the program(s)?
- c. What did you dislike about the program(s)?

(If no)

- a. Are there any reasons you have wanted to go to parenting or child development programs but weren't able to? If yes, what are they?
- b. What might make you likely to take part in programs or services at Layla's House?

Other Programs

43. Have you been to any programs for parent education or child development (e.g., play groups, library programs, etc.)?

(If yes)

- a. What made you want to participate in those programs?
- b. What did you like about the programs?
- c. What did you dislike about them?

(If no)

- c. Are there any reasons you have wanted to go to parenting or child development programs but weren't able to? If yes, what are they?

Program Need and Fit

44. When thinking about taking part in parent education or child development programs, how important are each of the following things?

- a. Cost
- b. Accessibility (how easy or hard it is to get to or connect to programs or services)
- c. Availability of programs or scheduling
- d. Feeling that your cultural identity or values are reflected
- e. Other participants (being able to make connections)

Recommendations

45. If you could wave a magic wand and have all the support you needed for raising your children, what would that look like?

46. When you think of what you need for you and your family to be "doing well" and living your ideal life, what does that look like?

- a. (If aware of Layla's House programs) In what ways do you see Layla's House as helping with that vision?

Additional Recruitment

47. (if appropriate) Do you know other families in the neighborhood who have young children, who we might be able to talk to? If so, would you mind sharing our contact information with them? [aldavids@usf.edu or 813-974-3739]

Demographic Information

48. Child/Children's Age(s):
49. Parent/Caregiver Age
50. What is your marital status?
- a. Single
 - b. Married or in a domestic partnership
 - c. Widowed
 - d. Divorced
 - e. Separated
51. Which of the following best describes your race?
- a. White
 - b. Black or African American
 - c. American Indian or Alaska Native
 - d. Asian
 - e. Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - f. More than one race
 - g. Other
 - h. Prefer not to answer
52. Which of the following best describes your ethnicity?
- a. Hispanic or Latino
 - b. Not Hispanic or Latino
 - c. Other
 - d. Prefer not to answer
53. What is your current employment status?
- a. Employed full-time
 - b. Employed part-time
 - c. Unemployed and currently looking for work
 - d. Unemployed and not currently looking for work
 - e. Student
 - f. Retired
 - g. Stay at home parent
 - h. Self-employed
 - i. Unable to work
54. What is your approximate household income?
- a. Less than \$20,000
 - b. \$20,000 to \$34,999
 - c. \$35,000 to \$49,999
 - d. \$50,000 to \$74,999
 - e. \$75,000 to \$99,999
 - f. Over \$100,000

APPENDIX C: STAFF INTERVIEW GUIDE

Participant ID:	Interview Date:
Interviewer:	Staff Role:

Introduction

Thank you for taking the time to talk with us and share your experiences. We are interested in learning more about what efforts your agency has made to engage Black families from Sulphur Springs in Layla's House programs and services, what some challenges and successes have been, and how the shift to virtual programming has impacted programming at Layla's House. We think this interview will take about an hour, and with your permission, we'd like to record the interview so that we can better focus on what you're saying. Please let me know if you'd like to take a break or stop at any point. Do you have any questions before we get started?

Role

1. Please tell me what your role is and in what ways you work with Layla's House.
2. How long have you been in your position?
3. What is your background as it relates to your current position (e.g., education, training or certifications, previous work experience)?

Incorporation of Race/Racism in Work

4. To what extent have topics related to race or racism been part of the following?
 - g. Your education?
 - h. Previous work experience?
 - i. Formal training in your current role?
 - j. Informal training, meetings, or initiatives?
5. In what ways has race or racism discussed during individual meetings or group meetings at your agency?
 - k. What issues related to race or racism in your work, if any, do you feel have not been adequately addressed by your agency?
6. How important do you feel it is to understand race and racism in the work your agency does overall? Why?
7. How well do you feel the needs of Black families in Hillsborough County are represented by programs at Champions for Children? (Probe: What are some ways you know this?)
8. To what extent do you consider Champions for Children to be racially diverse? (i.e., is the racial diversity reflective of constituents in Hillsborough County?)
 - a. Among programming staff?
 - b. Among management?
 - c. Among executive administration?

Engagement by Sulphur Springs Families

9. What are some challenges to engagement with Layla's House programs you've observed or been aware of among Black families in Sulphur Springs?
 - a. What are some reasons you think these challenges exist?
10. How well do you feel the needs of Black families in Sulphur Springs (or other areas) are represented by programs at Layla's House? (Probe: What are some ways you know this?)
11. What are some efforts that have been made by Champions or Layla's House to address challenges with engagement by families in Sulphur Springs?
12. How have families in Sulphur Springs been involved in efforts to understand engagement challenges and/or address barriers?
13. What are some ideas you have for better engaging Black families from Sulphur Springs in Layla's House programs or services? (Probe: If there was no limit to resources and funding, what improvements could be made to better engage families?)

Virtual Programming

14. What are some differences in patterns of engagement you've noticed at Layla's House since switching to online programming as a result of COVID-19?
 - a. How is this different or similar to patterns of engagement in virtual programming at Champions for Children overall?
15. What have been some challenges to engaging families in virtual programming at Layla's House?
 - a. What steps have been taken to address some of those challenges?
16. What have been some benefits of using virtual programming at Layla's House?
 - a. For staff?
 - b. For families?
17. In what ways might virtual programming improve or worsen racial inequity in early childhood programs?
18. How might virtual programming be used long-term for programs and services at Layla's House?

Demographic Information

19. Which of the following best describes your race?
 - b. White
 - c. Black or African American
 - d. American Indian or Alaska Native
 - e. Asian
 - f. Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - g. More than one race
 - h. Other
 - i. Prefer not to answer
20. Which of the following best describes your ethnicity?
 - j. Hispanic or Latino
 - k. Not Hispanic or Latino
 - l. Other
 - m. Prefer not to answer

APPENDIX D: PROGRAM OBSERVATION PROTOCOL

Date: 4-16-21	Facilitator: Danielle and Alisha
Program: Music & More	Session #: 3
# of Participants: 7	

Discussion Related To:	Summary and/or Examples
Social Supports	
Community Resources	
Parenting Beliefs/Values	
Engagement with Program (e.g. access, use of information)	

APPENDIX E: SELECT RESOURCES ON TRAUMA IN BLACK FAMILIES

SAMPLE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Addressing Trauma and Its Impact on Black Youth. SafeGuards Trauma Informed Training. <https://www.safeguards-training.net/course/trauma-impact-on-black-youth/>

Working with Black Youth and Families Amidst Racial Trauma. SafeGuards Trauma Informed Training: <https://www.safeguards-training.net/course/working-with-black-youth-and-families-amidst-racial-trauma/>

RESEARCH

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