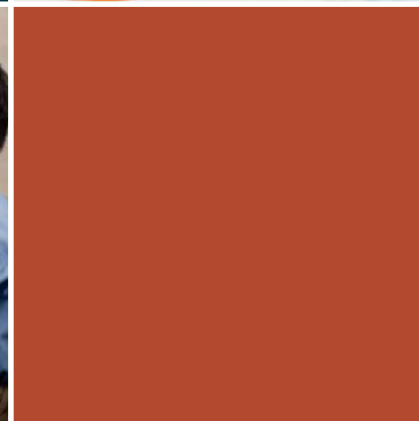
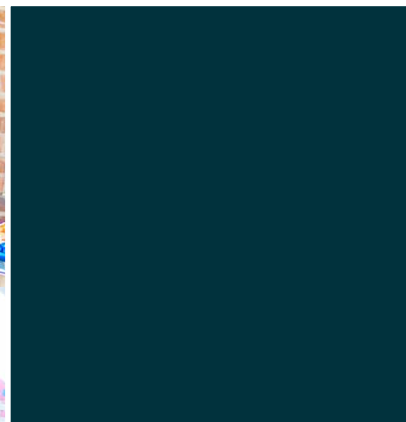




# Strengthening Essential Infrastructure:

## Supporting the Childcare System in Southeast Indianapolis



**I N D I A N A**  
**COMMUNITY ACTION**  
**POVERTY INSTITUTE**  
Research and Public Policy

*Prepared for Southeast Community Services by Indiana Community Action Poverty Institute*

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# Introduction

This project resulted from Southeast Community Services' desire to provide greater support for the childcare system in Twin Aire. The Indiana Community Action Poverty Institute prepared this report and set of recommendations using research literature, quantitative data, and direct engagement with parents, providers, and childcare workers in Southeast Indianapolis.

## About Southeast Community Services

Southeast Community Services (SECS), a Center for Working Families, is a not-for-profit that serves residents in Southeastern Indianapolis, Indiana. In 1972, SECS was formed as a community center. For over 50 years, the center has committed to addressing the diverse needs of residents to help them lead dignified, fulfilling, and self-sufficient lives. Most people who seek services come from within the geographic boundaries of the primary service areas: Washington Street on the North to Thompson Road on the South, and Post Road on the East to I-65 on the West.

SECS believes that everyone is naturally creative, resourceful, and whole and this model defines the services we provide to our neighbors. The staff at SECS offer a wide array of services to help families achieve their goals, including:

- HSE/GED Classes
- Employment Coaching
- English Language Classes
- Pantry & Thrift Store
- Financial Coaching
- Income Support Coaching
- Education Coaching

## The Importance of Childcare in Twin Aire

SECS recognizes that easily-accessible, licensed childcare is essential to both the short- and long-term success of families and communities. Children under the age of 5 make up 8.6% of the Twin Aire population, and one-quarter of households have children. In addition to job creation and entrepreneurship opportunities for neighborhood residents, these family childcare homes expand the early education options for vulnerable children in the community. Neighborhood-based, easily-accessed licensed childcare homes will improve the long-term educational outcomes for these youth.

For all these reasons, SECS seeks to support the expansion of high-quality affordable early learning/childcare opportunities in the Twin Aire neighborhood and the southeast side of Indianapolis more broadly. Recognizing a need to better understand the landscape and how best to support childcare infrastructure, SECS commissioned the Indiana Community Action Poverty Institute to explore the barriers and opportunities using research literature, quantitative data, and direct engagement with parents, providers, and workers in the community.

## About the Indiana Community Action Poverty Institute

The Indiana Community Action Poverty Institute conducts research and promotes public policies to help Hoosiers achieve and maintain financial well-being. The Institute is a program of the Indiana Community Action Association. Community Action Agencies were established through the War on Poverty, serve Hoosiers in all 92 counties, and provide over seventy unique programs and services. The Institute views childcare as one of the foundations needed to achieve financial well-being and advocates for policies to make childcare affordable for parents, to promote financial well-being for workers and providers, and to improve quality so that future generations are prepared to lead healthy, productive lives.



## The National Childcare Landscape in the Wake of COVID-19

While the provision of affordable, accessible childcare has been a challenge for some time, the COVID-19 pandemic further exposed a dual reality: *childcare is essential community infrastructure and without substantial investment, this system will crumble.* COVID-19 also altered the childcare landscape in significant ways. Understanding this new reality, the challenges and opportunities it presents, and what other localities are doing to improve access and quality can help guide the conversation about how best to support a well-functioning childcare system in Twin Aire, Southeast Indianapolis, and beyond.

## Childcare Underpins Successful, Thriving Communities

Parents need accessible, affordable, quality childcare to acquire the skills needed for family-sustaining jobs and to participate in the workforce. In an ever-changing society, it is often required or expected of workers to train and retrain over a career or lifetime.<sup>1</sup> Evidence of a need for workforce training is evident in Indiana: on a recent survey conducted by the Indiana Chamber of Commerce, employers in Indiana report that they are looking for skilled workers but as many as half of applicants for open positions are missing crucial skills and qualifications.<sup>2</sup> Meanwhile, Hoosiers are looking for good jobs with higher wages and benefits. On a recent community needs assessment conducted by the Institute, Hoosiers identified access to good jobs as the top community need in Indiana.<sup>3</sup> However, they also noted that lack of affordable childcare is the biggest barrier to upskilling.<sup>4</sup> Lack of care while pursuing higher education can also increase the need for mental health treatment, food insecurity, and housing challenges.<sup>5</sup>

Childcare is also essential to securing and maintaining employment. Workers – women especially<sup>6</sup> – are more likely to seek employment, stay employed, and hold better jobs when childcare is affordable, available, and high quality.<sup>7</sup> More robust childcare support may also support the transition of more women into typically male-dominated industries, allowing women to earn higher pay.<sup>8</sup> Childcare costs in particular serve as a deterrent to accepting and maintaining employment.<sup>9</sup> Accordingly, access to affordable and accessible childcare shapes the factors parents consider when seeking and accepting a job, with many seeking flexible days and hours or work-from-home options to reduce the need for – and cost of – childcare.<sup>10</sup> In Indiana alone, more than a quarter of women aged 25 to 54 with children under five recently indicated that they are not looking for work because they can't arrange childcare.<sup>11</sup>

It is also important to remember the impact of childcare on children. By investing in childcare, societies not only support parents and employers, increasing their tax revenue and reducing spending on safety net programs,<sup>12</sup> but the children served build the skills needed to be our future workers and leaders.<sup>13</sup> Childcare “is a venue to help children develop their social skills, growing bodies, and to begin to acclimate to academic environments.”<sup>14</sup> Quality childcare lays the foundation for future success and earnings,<sup>15</sup> while afterschool and summer programs can also expose youth to future career options and enhance in-school learning.<sup>16</sup>

## Understanding our History: Childcare Policies in the United States

The history of childcare policies in the United States still affects the industry today. While not a childcare policy per se, slavery established a pattern of Black women caring for other women's children that continues today.<sup>17</sup> After slavery ended, African American women continued to be the main childcare workers. This was further instilled in society during the Great Depression when job assistance programs led Black and Latina workers into domestic labor jobs such as housekeeping and childcare. At the same time, these domestic laborers were excluded from labor protections in the National Labor Relations Act, which protected the ability to join a union and collectively bargain, and the Fair Labor Standards Act, which established minimum wage and overtime standards, when they were first passed in the 1930s.<sup>18</sup> While more recent changes to the FLSA now apply minimum wage and overtime protections to most childcare workers, family childcare providers still do not

have protections under NLRA or FLSA because they are considered self-employed.<sup>19</sup>

Beyond domestic care, the late 1800's saw scattered attempts at creating childcare facilities.<sup>20</sup> In the 1930's, when women who did not qualify for mothers' pensions kept bringing children to work with them, free, government-sponsored Emergency Nursery Schools were created to serve working parents.<sup>21</sup> In response to war-time needs for women workers, the Lanham Act of 1943 approved federal funds for childcare, which Truman later cut following the conclusion of World War II. Childcare tax reductions were first enacted in 1954, and in the 1960's, government-sponsored childcare was introduced along with several other policies to reduce the number of Americans receiving welfare benefits. However, even after strong statements of support to Congress in 1969, President Nixon ultimately vetoed the historic investment in childcare in 1971.<sup>22</sup>

“So crucial is the matter of early growth that we must make a national commitment to providing all American children an opportunity for healthful and stimulating development during the first five years of life.”

*President Richard Nixon, two years prior to vetoing a historic federal investment in childcare.*

Instead, the Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit was instituted in 1976 to help families and those who have dependents they care for. Efforts to assist families with childcare expenses continued in 1990 when the Childcare and Development Block Grant was created to assist families with low incomes obtain childcare. That same year, the Child Tax Credit was enacted after it was introduced over 40 years earlier in 1954.<sup>23</sup> In 2014, requirements were created for programs accepting Childcare and Development Fund Assistance involving worker and provider licensing as an effort to improve quality.<sup>24</sup>

In spite of this incremental progress, even pre-pandemic, childcare was a system in distress. Childcare deserts disproportionately affected low- and moderate-income families, Black and Latino families, and rural communities.<sup>25</sup> Families struggled to keep up with childcare costs even as childcare workers disproportionately experienced financial distress and high turnover due to low wages.<sup>26</sup>



## The Effects of COVID-19 on Childcare

COVID-19 disrupted many industries, including childcare. Early on in the pandemic, many childcare facilities closed permanently, including a disproportionate number of minority-owned businesses.<sup>27</sup> In a mid-pandemic national survey of childcare businesses who remained open, nearly half reported dipping into personal savings or taking on debt to keep their programs afloat.<sup>28</sup> At the same time, childcare disruptions underscored the importance of the industry to Hoosiers' ability to work: employees cut hours, took paid or unpaid time off, left the workforce, and/or ceased job search activities – especially mothers.<sup>29</sup>

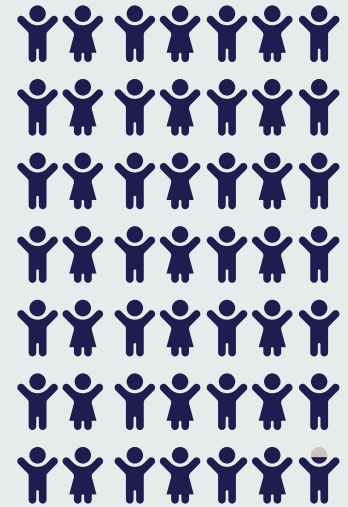
Nationally, Black, Latino, and Asian families experienced the disruptions of childcare closures to a greater extent than White families, and the largest share of closed centers were in densely populated areas. Compared with the pre-pandemic period, early care providers are now less racially diverse and less likely to be mothers of young children: nationally, the share of Black childcare workers dropped by seven percentage points and the share of childcare workers who are mothers of children under age 13 dropped four percentage points.<sup>30</sup>

Efforts to track childcare workers' well-being during COVID-19 found evidence of increased challenges. For example, in Virginia, teachers' real wages declined from 2020 to 2022 due to inflation and many did not have benefits like health insurance or retirement savings options – before or during the pandemic. While concerns about food insecurity among childcare workers temporarily decreased, by 2022, they exceeded pre-COVID levels and rates of depression increased dramatically beginning in 2020 and remain high today.<sup>31</sup>

## Federal, State, and Local Responses

During COVID-19, Congress stepped in with additional resources to help childcare providers. The American Rescue Plan, which passed in 2021, provided states nearly \$40 billion in childcare relief funds. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services estimates that the funding saved the jobs of more than one million early childcare workers. However, on September 30, 2023, that investment ended. As a result, in Indiana:

- 48,701 children are expected to lose care
- 1,014 childcare programs are expected to close.<sup>32</sup>



1 figure = 1,000 children  
expected to lose care

States also used ARPA and other funds to innovate and support childcare providers and workers:

- Vermont authorized \$6 million for quarterly retention bonuses for early childhood educators.
- New Mexico made direct payments to the workforce including a \$3/hour wage increase for all early childhood staff, including non-teaching personnel, in licensed centers and home-based programs.
- North Carolina provided grants to increase funding for compensation with an option to spend it on increased base pay for employees using the agency's model salary scale with equity adjustment for programs with higher proportions of infants and toddlers.
- Washington State and Washington D.C. cover healthcare premiums for employees of licensed childcare facilities.
- Kentucky ensures that all early childhood professionals working in regulated licensed centers or certified family childcare homes are automatically eligible for childcare subsidies.<sup>33</sup>

While study of these specific initiatives will take time, research does suggest that boosting compensation is an essential first step to building an affordable, accessible, and high-quality childcare system. In fact, a recent randomized control trial suggests that early childhood educator bonuses of as little as \$1500 may be sufficient to cut turnover in half.<sup>34</sup>



Southeast Community Services (SECS) contracted with the Indiana Community Action Poverty Institute to engage in study of the current childcare landscape in Southeast Indianapolis. One aim is to learn how community partners like SECS can best support the creation of a robust and high-quality system so that more families, providers, and workers can achieve financial well-being. The Institute conducted the research for this report between June 2023 and October 2023.

## Parent, Childcare Provider, and Childcare Worker Interviews

A primary goal of this project was to develop a better understanding of how best to support parents, providers, and workers. To achieve this goal, Institute staff developed semi-structured interview protocols based on a review of literature regarding key issues in childcare from provider, worker, and parent perspectives. We solicited feedback from the Institute's advisory council and from Southeast Community Services on the interview protocols. The interview questions can be found in Appendix 1.

The Institute then recruited parents, providers, and workers through flyers, targeted emails to individuals living in Southeast Indianapolis, social media, and direct calls to providers. We made an intentional effort to recruit Spanish-speaking families and providers, and to interview individuals in center-based, home, and ministry care settings.

Interviews were conducted in person, over the phone, or on Zoom and typically lasted 30 minutes or less. Most were recorded; in cases where a recording was not completed, the interviewer wrote detailed notes to capture the interviewee's responses during or immediately after the interview. All participants were offered a \$25 Visa gift card to thank them for their time.

The research team used NVIVO transcription software to produce a first copy of transcripts, then edited the transcripts by hand to ensure accuracy. Ruth Reyes translated interviews conducted in Spanish to English so that all members of the research team could review them. Three of the four members of the researcher team reviewed the transcripts to identify themes and select illustrative quotes.

## Secondary Data

The Institute also gathered quantitative data related to the need for childcare in the Marion County census tracts that encompass SECS's service area. When the data allowed, the research team used the Census tracts that encompass SECS' primary service area (3551, 3554, 3555, 3556, 3557, 3559, 3571-3574). When this was not possible, we used zip codes 46201 and 46203.

# By the Numbers: Southeast Indy & the Childcare Landscape

There are currently an estimated 27,310 people living in the primary service area, including 1,838 children under 5 and 4,432 school-age children under 14.

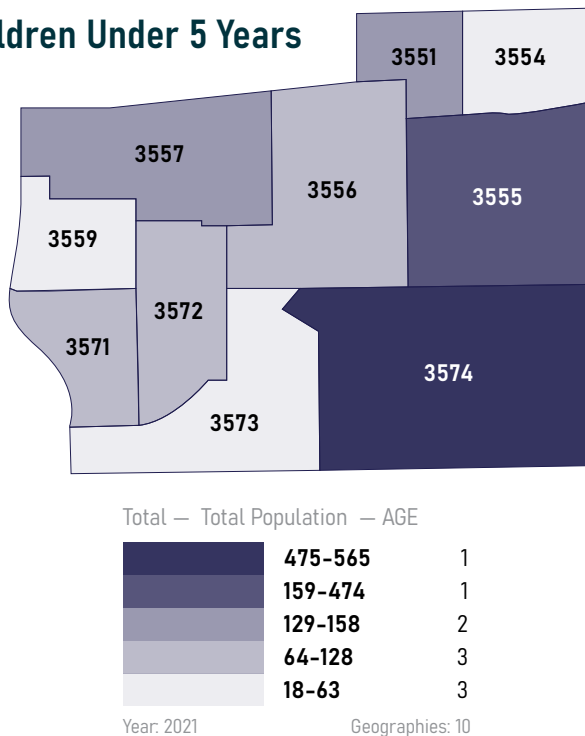
**Table 1. Population in the Primary Service Area by Age**

Age	# in Service Area <sup>35</sup>
Under 5	1,838
5 to 14 Years	4,432
15 to 17 Years	1,058
18 to 24 Years	1,854
25 to 49 Years	9,964
50 to 64 Years	5,149
65 Years and Older	3,015

Source: U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 2017-2021

Many households with children under five are in the eastern part of the service area with the greatest number in the south-east quadrant.

## Children Under 5 Years



Source: U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 2017-2021

At the same time, women who gave birth in the past 12 months were similarly concentrated in the eastern part of the service area. Census tract 3555 was estimated to have the most at 66 recent births, while Census tract 3557, in the northwest corner of the service area, had the second most at 31.

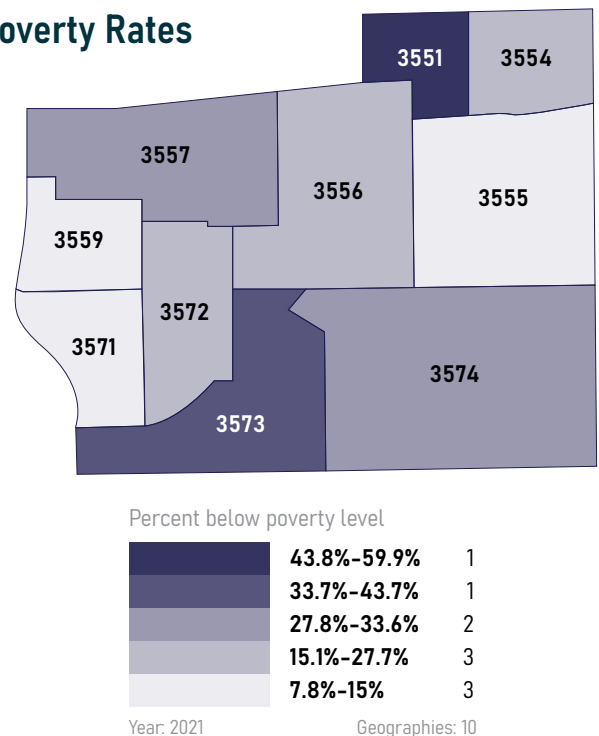
## Languages

According to estimates from the American Community Survey, the vast majority of residents of the service area (90.5%) speak only English, with Spanish as the second most common language. The estimated prevalence of Spanish-speaking residents over the age of five is 9.5% and ranges from 24% in 3556 to 2% in 3574. These estimates likely represent an underestimation of Spanish-speaking residents due to fears among Latinos in the United States about answering U.S. Census Bureau surveys.<sup>36</sup>

## Income and Poverty Rates

The median household incomes in 46201 and 46203 are \$47,656 and \$39,139 respectively. Poverty rates are determined by assessing income against a threshold that is set at three times the cost of a minimum food diet in 1963 adjusted for inflation and family size. While this is an imperfect way to measure the proportion of individuals who struggle,<sup>37</sup> it is commonly used to identify areas of need and to establish eligibility for programs, including childcare vouchers. Estimated poverty rates in the service area range from 7.8% in Census Tract 3559 to 59.9% in Census Tract 3551.

## Poverty Rates





## Childcare Costs

Childcare costs depend on a number of factors. These include the age of the child, the type of provider, and the quality of care. Table 2 displays the average costs for different types of providers and age ranges in 46201 and 46203.

**Table 2. Average Yearly Cost of Care by Provider Type, Age, and Zip Code**

	46201	46203
<b>Center</b>		
Infant & Toddler	\$17,888	\$15,167
Preschool	\$11,089	\$12,276
School-Age	\$5,235	\$9,221
<b>Home-Based</b>		
Infant & Toddler	\$8,562	\$9,951
Preschool	\$7,615	\$8,233
School-Age	\$6,771	\$6,173
<b>Ministry</b>		
Infant & Toddler	\$12,154	\$12,496
Preschool	\$9,144	\$11,193
School-Age	\$8,013	\$7,475

Source: Brighter Futures Indiana, 2023

## Common Occupations

The most common occupations in the service area have median wages that make it difficult to afford childcare. Using the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' benchmark that childcare should cost no more than 7% of family income, Table 3 displays the number of hours a worker would need to work per week to make the average annual cost of childcare in Indiana affordable.

**Table 3. Common Occupations in Twin Aire, Median Wages, and Hours per Week Needed to Make Childcare Affordable**

	Estimated # Employed in Service Area	Median Hourly Wage in Indianapolis-Carmel-Anderson Metro	Hours per Week Required to Make Average Annual Cost of Childcare Affordable
Office and administrative support occupations	1394	\$19.26	128
Construction and extraction occupations	1194	\$27.22	91
Material moving occupations	1080	\$18.55	133
Management occupations	949	\$48.27	51
Sales and related occupations	915	\$16.63	149
Food preparation and serving related occupations	912	\$13.18	188

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 2017-2021, Bureau of Labor Statistics May 2022 Metropolitan and Nonmetropolitan Area Occupational Employment and Wage Estimates, Author's calculation based on Brighter Futures Indiana average annual cost of care.

These calculations underscore the importance of subsidies like the Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit and CCDF vouchers. Currently, only families earning below 150% of the federal poverty level are eligible for these child care subsidies. This threshold was increased from 127% of the federal poverty level in 2023.

Meanwhile, childcare workers and preschool teachers in the Indianapolis-Carmel-Anderson metropolitan area earn less than many of the common occupations in the service area.

**Table 4. Childcare Employment and Wages in Indianapolis-Carmel-Anderson, IN**

	2019 Number Employed in Indianapolis-Carmel-Anderson	2022 Number Employed in Indianapolis-Carmel-Anderson	Median Hourly Wage 2019	Median Hourly Wage 2022
Childcare workers	2,590	3,390	\$10.52	\$12.37
Preschool teachers	2,850	2,740	\$12.90	\$14.30
Education and childcare administrators, preschool and day care	350	290	\$19.71	\$22.11

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, May 2019 and May 2022 Metropolitan and Nonmetropolitan Area Occupational Employment and Wage Estimates, Indianapolis-Carmel-Anderson.

## Availability of Childcare

Marion County is fortunate to have done the best in the state in terms of preserving capacity and meeting demand.<sup>38</sup> The licensed childcare facilities in Southeast Indianapolis currently have capacity to serve 3,128 children, although it is important to note that not all providers are able to operate at full capacity due to challenges securing workers. SE Indianapolis gained 376 seats in highly-rated (PTQ 4) childcare settings, and gained 77 seats in terms of capacity overall between February 2020 and September 2023. However, there is evidence of significant shifts in the landscape, as is evident in Table 6. Also, in 46201 and 46203 zip codes, there are an estimated 2,234 children under age 6 and 1,226 school-age children in need of care, still leaving a shortage of 332 seats.

**Table 5. Licensed Childcare “Seats” before COVID-19 and in September 2023**

Zip Code: 46201					
	Unrated	PTQ1	PTQ2	PTQ 3	PTQ 4
Sep 2023	180	220	246	288	481
Feb 2020	252	168	92	472	387
Change	-72	+52	+154	-184	+94
Zip Code: 46203					
	Unrated	PTQ1	PTQ2	PTQ 3	PTQ 4
Sep 2023	376	99	0	679	559
Feb 2020	502	218	103	571	286
Change	-126	-119	-103	+108	+273

Source: Brighter Futures Indiana Data Center 2023

**Table 6. Childcare Program Gains and Losses Feb 2020-Sep 2023**

	Opened	Closed	Net Gain/Loss
46201	15	-14	1
46203	22	-19	3

# Listening to Stakeholders

Policymakers, community-based organization leaders, and advocates are constantly working to understand the needs of their residents. Hearing directly from stakeholders can provide unique insights into the challenges and opportunities to reimagining systems like childcare. Below, we draw key lessons from interviews with providers, parents, and childcare workers in SE Indianapolis and present opportunities to engage based on their feedback.

## Interview Participants

Institute staff engaged in one-on-one interviews with a total of twenty stakeholders. This included eight parents, seven providers, and five childcare workers. Two workers who also identified as parents answered both sets of questions. Providers who also identified as parents were only asked the provider set of questions.

	Male	Female	# Hispanic or Latino	Total
Parents	2	6	2	8
Providers	-	7	2	7
Workers	1	4	2	5

## Key Themes

Stakeholders were quick to share their values, concerns, and ideas for constructing a more robust and beneficial childcare system. We identified several themes that echo what existing research has surfaced as well as some less frequently discussed themes around desired supports and the potential to build capacity.

### ‘Double the Money’: Childcare Supports the Ability to Learn and Earn

#### In their own words:

- “When we don’t have childcare, one of us has to take time to watch the kids so that the other can go to work. So instead of us making double the money, we would actually be suppressing our income tremendously because somebody’s got to be here.” Nina, mother of three.
- “I’m able to go to school and do my studies...and I would not be able to work as much as I do if I didn’t have childcare.” Georgia, mother of two.
- “[Access to childcare] affects me in a very positive way. I mean, even though it is heavy on my budget, at least I have a budget. I wouldn’t have a budget if I didn’t have a job.” Sheila, mother of two school-age children.
- “Sometimes we have open positions in different classes, but [the parents] come and...when they get to the application they don’t qualify for [CCDF]. I imagine it gives them a lot of frustration, because to be able to work and support their children, they must...get childcare for their children. I think...the laws should change to increase the parents’ income [eligibility] so that everyone has access to childcare.” Diana, a Spanish-speaking childcare provider.
- Jessica and Tina both started childcare facilities during COVID-19 so that other friends and family members could continue working.

Consistent with the existing research on childcare, parents and providers both expressed that having access to a safe, reliable place for their children allowed them to further their education and work. As Sheila’s quote reflects, the ability to earn was in some cases essential to meeting the family’s basic needs. Diana raised concerns, however, about parents whose income puts them just above the threshold for support and the difficult choices they must face.

## 'You just close your eyes and pay it': Affordability and the CCDF 'blessing'

### In their own words:

- "[The payment] was a little bit of a shock. And it's a little stressful at first, but it is okay if it comes out once a week. I will make it work." Gloria, mother of two.
- "You just close your eyes and pay it." Daniel, parent and childcare worker.
- "That voucher helps out a whole lot...to be able to focus on other bills and other things that we can provide for the kids, versus having to pay. Those fees are like \$390 apiece! I think the younger they are, the higher it is to watch them, so...CCDF is a blessing." Nina, mother of three.
- "I pay \$81 a week to the daycare facility and CCDF pays the rest. It's steep for my budget, because CCDF goes off my pre-tax [income]. I have benefits taken out... I have to pay for groceries out of pocket, and...the other things that make up a household like car insurance. [I wish they would] consider the other bills that families have." Sheila, mother of two.

Again, consistent with other research, families find the cost of childcare burdensome – even those receiving CCDF vouchers. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) considers 'affordable' childcare to be care that consumes no more than 7% of a family's income. According to the September 2023 CCDF Report, 23.2 % of families using CCDF in Indiana had copayments, at an average of 8.9 % of their income and 31.5 % of families had overages at an average of 17.2 % of income.<sup>39</sup> For families without CCDF vouchers, the costs are even higher.

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## Parents Experience Accessibility Challenges

### In their own words:

- "A lot of childcare places around here have really long waiting lists...especially for the children that we have. I had to claim two personal days a week. And I need to get a new ride so that I can take my kids to daycare." Nina, whose parents previously helped with childcare.
- "One time I arrived late, about 10 minutes after nine, and they still didn't let her in." Charisa, mother of a preschooler.
- "My direct community where I live...there are not a lot of quality care places. Not a lot of options. But where they go...is outside of my residential community." Sheila, mother of two.

Several dimensions of accessibility surfaced as concerns. These included long waiting lists for childcare, transportation challenges, lack of quality facilities close to home, and lack of flexibility in terms of scheduling. Accessibility is also a top priority among parents across the nation. For example, in a survey of Tennessee parents, accessibility was prioritized over affordability and quality, with convenient location and open slots topping the list of accessibility desires.<sup>40</sup>

## 'That's Just What I Like': Parents Seek Safety, Warmth, and Alignment of Values

### In their own words:

- "I was comfortable in, like, a small, close knit, more family-orientated situation. [My provider] also shares a lot of my values and my parenting styles. They play outside, and they get dirty. And that's just what I like." Gloria, who is paying \$60 a month over and above CCDF to have a childcare situation she feels comfortable with.
- "I was raised Christian, so my daycare is Christian. They have the same beliefs as I do." Sheila, mother of two.
- "This community is really missing 'quality' daycare. We have parents coming here with awful stories on how their kids are being treated." Tina, who started a childcare business during the pandemic and quickly filled all her open seats.

Parents appear to seek out childcare settings based not only on proximity and cost, but safety and support for things they value, whether that is a particular style of play or discipline, a religious orientation, or a spoken language. This is consistent with national patterns indicating that the program characteristics most commonly reviewed by parents include safety and child-teacher interactions.<sup>41</sup> Remaining mindful that childcare choices are made based on a wide array of factors is important to understanding how best to support families.

## Reliability and Warmth First, Education and Credentials Second

### In their own words:

- "To be able to take care of children, a person has to become a very patient observer. So, when dealing with children, a person has to be able to handle that. So, I would like them to know it takes patience." Lula, a church-based childcare provider.
- Pamela runs a center-based childcare facility that serves 30 children and says that finding dependable staff has been her biggest challenge. She prioritized finding people who were "reliable and passionate" first and educated second, because she could create those training opportunities.
- "The only thing that childcare lacks is funding. We have plenty of amazingly intelligent people that care deeply about the future of our country and the current state of our country that we should be doing this." Sharon, a home-based childcare provider.

Providers and parents seemed to agree that education and training of childcare staff came second to reliability and warmth. And in fact, efforts to increase the skills and credentials of childcare workers have fallen short when they do not boost the stability of the workforce. In Louisiana, for example, a free credential program for childcare workers saw significant attrition, with less than one third of those who enrolled completing the credential program.<sup>42</sup>

## 'They are Good Learning Experiences': Parents Appreciate Childcare that Supports Learning

### In their own words:

- "She's learning a lot early. She knows her letters, her days of the week already and she's only 3." Charisa, mother of a preschooler.
- "She also demonstrates the learning back at home. And they're around like, you know, kids of their age or they're learning things that they should be able to take on in the later stages as they get older." Nina, whose children attend a ministry-based childcare.
- "I like how they assist my son with his homework. And the activities that they do, they are good learning experiences." Jamie, parent of one whose child attends center-based care.
- "Even during the summertime, it works phenomenally because I have somewhere for my children to go. And that they're not just at home, you know, experiencing the summer slide. So, I mean, during the summertime, they get to go to daycare and still be fed educational things, even though they're not in school. So it's kind of like their education kind of gets a boost in a sense." Sheila, mother of two.

While not always the top priority of parents, many interviewees spoke highly of the learning opportunities their childcare presented. Parents of younger children seemed enthusiastic about efforts to teach pre-reading and math skills, and those with children in aftercare appreciated childcare workers who ensured that classroom learning was supplemented at the afterschool or summer program.

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## Desires for Improved Materials & Facilities

### In their own words:

- "What I would love is if it was a little more updated and, you know, just newer. Newer and cleaner...[with] arts and crafts, you know, and if there could be bigger arts and crafts or a trampoline, a swimming pool, things like that." Gloria, parent of two children in home day care.
- "[My main wish is] material equipment for children. Well, I see a lot of things that I wish I could provide them. I see that other places have." Esther, a Spanish-speaking home care provider.
- "I think they need more ideas. Like, it's kind of getting very repetitive. They need more materials too...nobody's satisfied with the basic ones." Daniel, an afterschool childcare worker and parent.
- "If I'm bored, they're bored." Jessica, who launched a childcare business during COVID-19 to care for her children and others.
- "I would wish they would have all the supplies without me having to buy or anything." Melody, a childcare worker with six years of experience.

Parents, providers, and workers all expressed a desire to update or increase access to high-quality materials and activities provided in childcare settings. Consumables (like art supplies), big ticket items (outdoor equipment), and technology (devices) emerged as suggestions. Interestingly, responses seemed to indicate that this was not only important to parent and child satisfaction with the provider, but also provider and worker satisfaction on the job, as boredom and repetitiveness surfaced as concerns.

## Support to Incorporate Spanish Language and Culture

### In their own words:

- “The person who helps me, for example, does not [speak Spanish]...he speaks English. So, more education in Spanish, and having more access to things in Spanish would be much better.” Esther, a Spanish-speaking home care provider.
- “I think it would be critical for the children to learn another language. They grow up and learn so much English that their first language - Spanish or another language - can be secondary.” Camila, a childcare worker with a degree in psychology who recently immigrated to the United States.

Among Spanish-speaking parents and providers in particular, a desire emerged to see childcare as a place where language learning could be supported and bilingual materials offered. Spanish-speaking providers also expressed appreciation for classes, licensing materials, and educational materials offered in Spanish.

## Parents Worry about Parent-Child Closeness and Desire Strong Parent-Provider Communication

### In their own words:

- Chris shared concerns that his relationships with his children are not as close now that they are in childcare all day.
- “I do a lot of weekend stuff and bonding time and love to balance it off.” Daniel, father of one with another on the way, shared.
- “[I would like] more communication between me and the teacher instead of just me and the director of the childcare.” Nina, whose children attend ministry-based childcare.
- “So it’s mostly just kind of showing the parent that their kid is safe rather than feeling unsafe or having the fear that they’re going to neglect their child in any type of way. So honestly, having meetings with the parents...would help.” Georgiana, a childcare worker.

Parents sometimes expressed concern that having their child or children in childcare lessens the bond between them. Some attempt to make up for this with quality time at home, and some parents wanted to see more communication with the workers to facilitate connection and understanding of their children’s day-to-day experiences. Jessica, a childcare provider reported using a video tool to allow parents to see what their children are doing during the day.

## Providers See Family Needs and Want to Provide Comprehensive Support

### In their own words:

- Jessica, who started a childcare during COVID-19, aims to create a “nurturing environment” with a “pro-care system” where families feel like her family. She shared an example of helping a family purchase a stove after learning they only had a microwave at home.
- “I mean, little children just need someone to go to that understands them. And of course, I’m always there to comfort them.” Lula, a center-based childcare provider.
- “We would hope that we could offer dance classes and creative movement and ways for the community to connect over studying and coffee. We would love to have like a coffee shop and a farm to table...and we could definitely offer a way for the food desert in our area to not be such a desert. We could be offering fresh food. We could be having a pantry. We could have lots of different things to make our childcare more comprehensive for the community that we serve.” Sharon, a home-based childcare provider who started her business when she couldn’t find childcare herself.
- “It does kind of affect you to see how much some of these kids are very traumatized coming from some of these families that are also impacted. Some of the kids that come, we’re kind of like their only solution and like, they get fed here and everything like that.” Georgiana, a veteran childcare worker.

Providers are in intimate relationships with and have unique insight into the needs of families. Some, like Jessica, reported assisting “the whole family” with needs like food or appliances. Others would like to provide more support in response to the needs and/or “trauma” they witness, but seem less well-equipped to do so.

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## Providers are Eager to Grow their Childcare Businesses

### In their own words:

- “We’re going to have to open a third one.” Jessica, a provider who has a waiting list for her first and second childcare facilities.
- “I would like to have a big building where there were many children and I could give work to other people to help me take care of them.” Diana, a Spanish-speaking home care provider currently serving eight children.
- “I have two small children and I saw myself in that complicated position with appointments when looking for a job or with my children’s appointments. I needed something to accommodate my schedule. I started taking care of children as a kind of informal [job] until I decided to take more classes and courses and to apply for my license, to make it a little more formal and be a little more ready to take care of the children.” Esther, a Spanish-speaking home care provider.
- “I could have two class, two homes on my property, but there’s no funding to build that space for me to serve that many children.” Sharon, a 14-year home-based childcare provider.
- “[My dream facility] would be bigger, that’s for sure.” Georgiana, a veteran childcare worker in a center.

Several of the providers we interviewed had an appetite to grow, but needed more space (and sometimes more staff) to do so. Making the leap from informally offering care to licensing, or to expanding to a large center-based space or second location, however, requires a significant investment.



## Making Childcare Work a Family- Sustaining Career

### In their own words:

- “[A challenge is] paying my staff what they deserve.” Jessica, who started her childcare business during COVID.
- “My children...have seen me with hours upon hours of lack of sleep over this job. They have seen me not be able to pay bills because of this job. They have seen me cry because of this job... not having enough money to support ourselves, and not being able to send my children to college and not being able to give my children the home that they deserve. It makes me have to go to food pantries to get to make sure that there is enough food. To get someone that with any type of education at all in this field, you have to be able to pay a minimum of \$16 an hour. And in order to have enough staff for everybody to have a work life balance, you need three people because if we’re all three parents, all three have things that we need to do with our own children.” Sharon, a home-based childcare provider who recently let go of staff due to financial difficulties.
- “[Professional development] opportunities, I would say I had plenty. It was more financially. That was the struggle. I do live with other people, so it’s not so much struggling with bills or anything like that. If I were living on my own now, it would be a completely different story. The money would be an issue.” Georgiana, a childcare worker who started in the field at age 16.
- “They wanted me to go to school and better myself and then I did that and they’re still paying me low wages. I just don’t think that is fair. If I had paid benefits, then it would help me with insurance and dental, and with my 401k, which could help me save for my retirement. It would help me be able to feel safe and secure with getting days off when I’m sick or my child’s sick and not have to have a whole panic attack because how am I going to pay my rent or my bills? Because I’ve missed a couple of days because me or my children were sick.” Rhonda, a childcare worker.
- “I just pinch here and pinch there.” Esther, a childcare provider.

Consistent with national trends, many of the childcare providers and workers we spoke to struggled to make a decent living on this career path. Tight margins for providers created financial pressures, even as providers could not afford to pay staff what they deserved, either. Work-life balance received mixed reviews; some went into childcare because they lacked options for their own children, but taking paid sick days or dealing with lack of staff proves difficult.



## Toward a More Robust Childcare System

Parents and providers identified ways in which community partners can support a thriving childcare system. These include direct supports a community-based agency or funder could offer, as well as advocacy toward policy change

### Direct Support

- **Provide Navigation**
  - While Childcare Resource and Referral Agencies are available to help families locate childcare, parents more often turn to people close to them to help make decisions about childcare.<sup>43</sup> Community-based organizations can be a partner in supporting families with navigation.
- **Use Childcare Providers to Reach Families in Need**
  - Providers know their families well and have a finger on the pulse of their needs. These close relationships make childcare homes and centers a potential site for intervention to support health and financial well-being. Initiatives aimed at health promotion through childcare sites have found this to be an effective, low-barrier strategy.<sup>44</sup>
- **Increase Affordability**
  - Families that do not qualify for CCDF and families that qualify but pay copayments or overages may struggle financially. Community partners could offer cash assistance to parents of young children to allow for greater choice and flexibility as well as increased ability to meet basic needs.
  - Programs that provide tax assistance can ensure that families adjust their withholdings to account for the Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit they will receive.
- **Offer Materials/A Provider Store**
  - Providers, parents and workers all expressed a desire for new materials. Community partners could offer a 'start-up bundle' to new providers and/or a lending library or store with materials. Research studies routinely find that caregivers would be grateful to receive safety equipment (first aid kits, fire extinguishers) and consumable materials (art supplies, books, toys).<sup>45</sup>
  - Partners could attract childcare providers to professional development sessions by offering materials they can use in their classrooms.
- **Reduce Overhead and Increase Wages & Benefits**
  - Strategies that reduce overhead for providers or increase pay and benefits so that they can attract and retain workers would be enormously helpful. Turnover in early care and education is more common among those earning the lowest wages. Quarterly retention bonuses, direct supplemental payments to workers, grants to providers to use for increased base pay, coverage of health care premiums, and automatic eligibility of childcare workers for childcare subsidies are promising approaches that have been tried in other places.
- **Support Tools to Increase Family-Child Connection**
  - Parents expressed concerns about feeling connected to their children. Helping childcare providers use tools like the video connection or end-of-day communications would allow parents to stay updated on what their children are doing.

- **Help Providers Secure or Upgrade Space**
  - Providers looking to grow most often needed help with space. Community partners could work with providers on securing larger spaces, adding second locations, and/or fixing up the spaces they currently have.
- **Provide Support to Both Parents and Providers for Language & Cultural Learning**
  - Speaking two languages is an asset and can be supported by connecting parents to bilingual childcare programs as well as providing materials and offering professional development to providers who wish to offer bilingual programming.
- **Provide Compensated or Embedded Professional Development**
  - Compensating workers for professional development time, embedding it into the work day, offering incentives for completion, and covering childcare or transportation costs to support education and training might prove more effective than offering free or low-cost professional development alone.
- **Host an On-Call Substitute**
  - Providers and workers need time off, sometimes unexpectedly. Hosting or otherwise supporting a trained, on-call childcare substitute position that multiple providers could access might help providers maintain capacity, relieve stress, and promote work-life balance. This individual might also be able to provide technical support during days on site.

## Advocacy

Community-based organizations and funders can also contribute to systems-level change by raising their voices in coalition with providers, parents, and workers.

- **Investment**
  - Childcare providers need increased investment to increase capacity, boost wages, and make ends meet themselves.
- **Eligibility**
  - Affordability is a concern for families across many income levels. Advocating for increased eligibility for CCDF and/or child and dependent care tax credits or other subsidies would support employment, upskilling, and economic growth.

## Conclusion

Dedicated providers, workers, and parents are doing their best to achieve financial well-being through service to their neighbors. They all could benefit from added support to ensure that the existing childcare infrastructure can effectively serve its vital role in the community and that new providers can address childcare needs. Community partners like Southeast Community Services can draw from the lessons learned in this landscape analysis to strengthen the existing system and encourage growth. SECS can and should also join the chorus of voices advocating for the policy support required to fully acknowledge and address the essential role childcare plays in our cities, state, and nation.



# Appendix 1: Interview Questions

## Parents

To start, in your own words, could you tell me a little about your current childcare situation?

Prompt for: \_\_\_\_\_

# Children: \_\_\_\_\_

Ages: \_\_\_\_\_

Type(s) of Care: \_\_\_\_\_

## Quality

What do you love about your current childcare?

What would improve the quality of your child's care?

Tell me a little about the quality of:

- Teachers/workers
- Building/space
- Activities
- Materials
- Developmental screening processes
- Food safety / healthy meals
- Availability
- [For older kids:]Communication with your child's school/ teacher/homework help

### *If they are seeking childcare:*

If you could imagine the perfect childcare, what would it be like?

- Teachers/workers
- Building/space
- Activities
- Materials
- Availability
- Closeness to home

## Cost & Cost-Savings Strategies

How much do you expect to pay / do you pay for childcare?

How does that impact your household budget?

Did you apply for / do you receive CCDF (childcare vouchers)?

If yes:

- Tell me about the application process.
- Do you feel your portion is fair? Why or why not?
- What else would improve the CCDF program?

If no:

- Did you ever consider CCDF as a source of support?
- Are there other sources or strategies you use to make childcare more affordable?

## Effects on other areas

How does childcare or lack of childcare affect your ability to work or attend school/training?

- Can you share a specific example?

How does childcare or lack of childcare affect your relationship with your child?

- Can you share a specific example?

How does childcare or lack of childcare affect your health/mental health?

## Big picture:

What would you want policymakers or community leaders to know about childcare in your community?

If you had a genie that could solve your childcare challenges, what would that look like?

## CONCLUSION:

Thank you so much for sharing your story and your thoughts with me today. Is there anything else you think I should know about this topic?

## Childcare Providers

To start, in your own words, could you tell me the story of how you came to be a childcare provider / in a management position?

### Supports to Be Excellent:

What makes your childcare excellent?

Are there ways you hope to improve in the future? What are they?

What are some of barriers to providing excellent care?

[If needed, prompt for:]

- Teachers
- Materials
- Activities
- Space
- Parent relationships

Have you ever run into challenges with inspections, licensing or Paths to Quality? Can you tell me about those?

If you could ask for one thing that would make it easier to provide excellent care, what would it be?

### A Job Where You Can Support Yourself & Family:

Is this a job where you can balance work and family? Why or why not?

What do you love about this job?

Have you ever wanted to quit? What made you want to quit?

How does this job affect your household budget?

How does this job affect your relationships?

How does this job affect your mental/physical health?

### Big Picture:

What would you like policymakers and other community leaders to know about running a childcare program?

If you could wave a magic wand and fix one thing to make this job easier what would you wish for?

### Specifics:

Type of childcare: \_\_\_\_\_

Number of children served: \_\_\_\_\_

Age range of children served: \_\_\_\_\_

Years this childcare has been in business: \_\_\_\_\_

### CONCLUSION:

Thank you so much for sharing your story and your thoughts with me today. Is there anything else you think I should know about this topic?

## Childcare Workers

To start, in your own words, could you tell me the story of how you became a childcare worker?

### Supports to Be Excellent:

What education opportunities do you have? How have they helped? How could they be better?

How does your manager or supervisor support you in being an excellent childcare worker? What could they do better?

Are there other supports you can imagine that would help you be a better care provider?

### A Job Where You Can Support Yourself & Family:

Would you be willing to share what your hourly pay is and what benefits do you have?

How does your job affect work-family balance?

How does the job affect your household budget?

How does the job affect your relationships?

How does the job affect your mental/physical health?

### What Would Make the Job Easier or More Meaningful?

Have you ever wanted to quit? What made you want to quit?

What was one of your best days on the job and what happened that day?

#### *If not covered:*

- Have you ever experienced working short-handed in your position? [What impact has that had]
- Have you ever experienced parents bringing their children to daycare sick? [What impact has that had]

### The Big Picture:

It takes devoted individuals to work in a daycare setting. Can you please tell me what makes you feel devoted to the work you do?

What would you like policymakers to know about in order for you to feel much needed and appreciated in your field of work?

Are there other solutions you can imagine that would make things better?

If you could have a private genie that could help you solve the problems that exist for you while on your job what would you ask for?

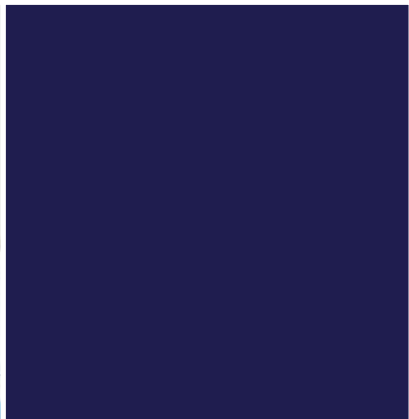
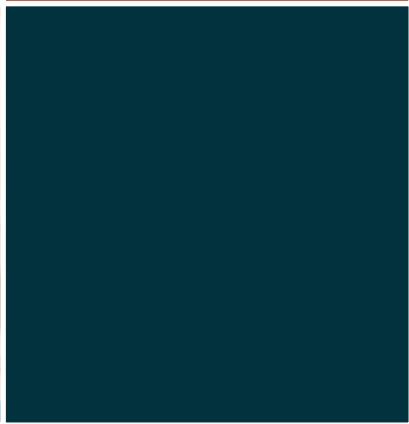
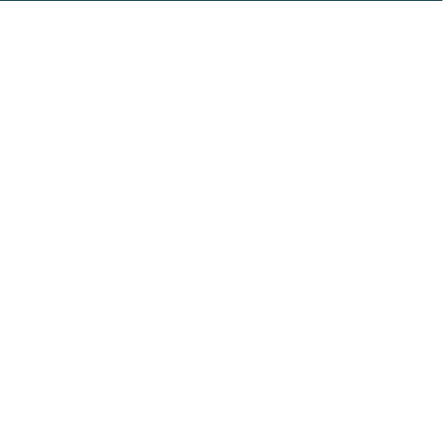
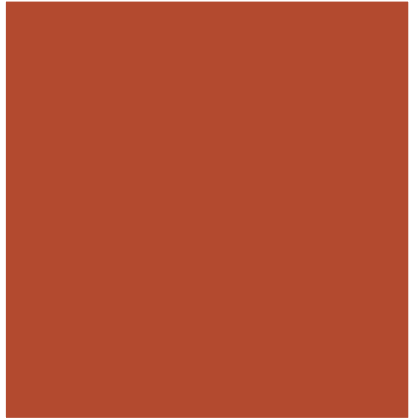
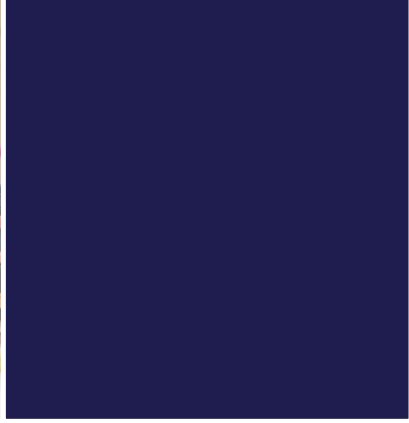
### CONCLUSION:

Thank you so much for sharing your story and your thoughts with me today. Is there anything else you think I should know about this topic?

## Appendix 2: Resources

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