

Raising of America Partnership

Boulder County



Summary of Focused Conversations with Families

November 2017

About the Raising of America Partnership of Boulder County

The Raising of America Partnership in Boulder County (ROA) fosters inclusion and engagement to create the conditions for young children and their families to reach their full human potential. ROA Boulder County consists of 12 Boulder County organizations, including Head Start, Boulder Chamber of Commerce, City of Longmont, Colorado Statewide Parent Coalition, Community Foundation of Boulder County, Early Childhood Council of Boulder County, Foothills United Way, Sister Carmen Community Center, Wild Plum, YWCA, working together to this end.

Project Summary & Goal

Identifying the concerns, strengths, and recommendations from parents about raising their children in Boulder County was identified as a key action in the 2016 ROA Action Plan. The Raising of America documentary series was used as a tool to spark conversations with families to gather this input.

Methods

ROA video viewings were hosted throughout Boulder County in early 2017. Each viewing started with a 15-minute viewing of the Raising of America documentary, which was followed by a discussion prompted by the following questions that were developed by partnership members:

- How did you feel after watching this video? (one word)
- How do you feel as a parent about raising your kids?
- What is the most difficult part of being a parent?
- What is the best part of being a parent?
- What kind help do you want from others?
- What are three things you could share with your community?
- What message would you like to send to policy makers?
- What kind of actions will build trust for you (e.g. government, agencies, etc.)?

Participants

Nine viewings and focused conversation sessions were conducted in English and Spanish in Boulder County: two in Boulder, three in Lafayette, and four in Longmont. No incentives were given for participation. The participants were parents who are active in the following community groups:

- Sister Carmen (Parents Program, Family Leadership Training Institute, Grupo Latina) (3)
- Boulder Housing Partners (2)
- Boulder County Circles (1)
- Indian Peaks Elementary School, Cafecitos (1)
- Live Well Longmont, Promotoras Program (1)
- Casa Esperanza in Longmont (1)

Key Findings

The following pages outline common themes that were heard throughout all of the focused conversations.

Parent Concerns

Education: Unclear expectations related to responsibility

Across the board, parents expressed a sense of overwhelm and tremendous pressure to fully participate in their own child's education that was primarily due to limited knowledge of resources or information about how to navigate the school system. Most expressed expectations that the education system should take responsibility for the education of their children.

"No time to be in school."

"Control our kids."

"If children are not ready for kindergarten it is [a] state responsibility."

"Teaching them to socialize our children, children do not know how to deal with problems or face other situations, socialize, and adapt."

"Regulations around marijuana or alcohol. The education model does not work for us. It is too simple and they don't give enough education to kids, no homework, no more than just simple tasks."

Education for parents to understand kids. Do not repeat the same pattern of parents: children are more."

"I send my kids to preschool, but I don't feel good about that decision since I do have a lot concerns about the quality of services that my kids get in the school. But because I used Child Care Assistance Program CCAP, I cannot say anything."

"As a mom, I am scared to have my second baby. I don't know how I'm going to support her."

"School system: lunch programs. How can you make kids eat a diet if they are not used to it? There is not a transition program for those kids. Equity?"

"Inequity in schools makes segregation and racism more difficult to handle."

"The school system does not let kids study with structure compared to my country. I am looking for answers why they don't have homework or make them feel they are learning."

"We don't have the time to raise our kids because we have to work, work, work."

Health Care: Difficulty communicating and navigating the health system

Families described difficulties that they experienced when communicating with their health care providers due to system barriers, including language, cultural differences, health beliefs. Parents state that they are struggling to navigate and understand the complex health system.

"Medicaid process is very long; makes us feel we are begging for help."

"Child Health Plus + does not work as well as we want; does not cover anything."

"Some services provided in county area, like speech therapist, physical therapist, etc., don't understand families and their values. We received the information and the treatment in a different way."

"The providers are not ready to listen to us; they don't understand my culture. They speak Spanish but don't know about culture."

"Services in schools or doctor's office could be frustrating and hard for us."

"Medical expenses without health care system to support."

"Health insurance premiums and employment makes it hard, because not all jobs offer that."

"I don't like the services in hospital – Longmont hospital. I don't feel welcome at all when I have my kids. I am afraid to ask what is next for my kids."

"Longmont Clinic does not provide good services. I was not able to see a doctor in months, and when I was there, they said I was ok and my kids are ok, but we were not ok."

"Doctor appointments are so short. I am not able to get all of my questions answered. If doctors, hospitals, clinics don't provide services in Spanish, I won't come back for more services."

Financial: Difficulty affording housing, child care, healthy food

Parents expressed difficulty in finding affordable and stable housing, high-quality child care, healthy food Families mentioned they are considering moving out of Boulder County due to the cost of living.

"Now they are asking for so many documents and proof that you are real and don't want to take advantage of the government. [It] makes me feel bad."

"You pay your rent, your daycare, your expenses, but you are not making your way out of welfare. How can you do it?"

"How am I going to provide food to my kids?"

"The cost of housing is rising every year. It is hard to afford it."

"No affordable housing system available."

"There is not assistance for those who are in the middle class."

"We have considered moving out the county..... My husband's job does not pay well for all the expenses we have like housing, food, clothes, toys, extra for the kids and others. I have been working a little bit but I do have my kids to take care of"

Resources: Difficulty finding and using resources

Participants said that accessing resources is confusing, including understanding how to gain access, where and when the resource is available, and if the resource applies to their situation. In addition, parents mentioned that even after identifying a resource, the wait for the service or the hours available may not match the more immediate needs of the parent.

"No opportunity available and no opportunity taken by parents."

"Not able to talk to someone about parenting issues."

"I have kids from different ages, and I cannot coordinate activities for them. Outdoors is hard since I don't a car."

"It [using resources] needs more people to care for others."

"There is not a child care for emergency situations."

"Child care for night shifts or special needs [is needed]."

"That is my life since my kids were born [the system against of me]."

"We don't enjoy our kids growing because we have to work."

"We are lost [in this system]."

"No promises should be made if there is no intention to make changes."

Stigma: Parents feel labeled and marginalized

Parents identified stigma as a large component of their daily experience. Minority groups and white people with low income described experiencing stigma and being labeled as people that "only demand" but have not contributed to their community. Many parents expressed their belief that changes will not happen for their children because they encounter inequity, isolation, marginalization, segregation, and racism.

"Hard to be [a] parent and minority – you see differences with other kids in school (e.g. clothes, school supplies, vacations, etc.)."

"Hate and racism in schools."

"You become a person in paper: Medicaid, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program SNAP, other services."

"Being a single mom is hard because the system does not help at all."

"Yes, less stigma for white people who are not getting their way out. We are not lazy. We are just looking for an opportunity to get better. We don't like to be like this. We are ready to be on our own; we just need help for now."

"Stigma for people who want help."

"I see and experience racism in the community plus segregation of minority groups."

"Inequity in schools makes segregation and racism more difficult to handle."

"The messages in schools do not talk about equality and creates inequity instead."

"I would be willing to file a case of racism, but I don't believe people will do something."

"The government is always busy for us when we need them the most."

"I do have stress: no support from family or neighbors, inconsistent in what I want to do with my kids. I know it is not ok, but I pass this stress on my children."

Cultural Understanding: Lack of understanding of diverse cultural backgrounds

Parents brought up the concern of not being heard, understood, or involved in the community due to their cultural background. To build a good and respectful community, parents suggest there must be strong communication and involvement from all community members, including those with diverse cultural backgrounds.

"My kids go to a good school, but I am not feeling included in their educational process."

"It took me time to understand how the school works. People were very helpful and nice, but when they are not there, I feel isolated and alone."

"There is a lack of cultural background and understanding about Latino clients. I don't feel they are listening to us."

“The providers are not ready to listen to us; they don't understand my culture. They speak Spanish but don't know about culture.”

“The community doesn't understand newcomers – new people who want to establish a relationship and grow in this county. There is still a lot of racism.”

“They don't understand my kids and the way I am raising them. It is not me feeling accepted, it is them accepting me.”

“I feel there is not a sense of community for immigrants.”

“As a parent, I feel isolated in the community. I don't see understanding of being bicultural.”

“How the services [are] for Latinos are good, but the customer services are terrible for Latinos. When you go to government agencies for help, Latino front desk does not want to talk in Spanish. They make us beg for translation.”

Cultural Expectations: Need for cultural understanding and empathy

Parents expressed that they would like to see understanding and empathy from their services providers regarding their culture. They stated they would like to have tools, services, or interventions related to their approach to parenting on important topics, such as drugs, sex, etc.

“My kids are growing and need more, but I am not sure how to start the conversation around drugs and other things.” Note: sex was mentioned once but in a very low voice.

“We need to encourage parents to access services, but also to make providers in the schools and hospital be more understanding to my culture.”

“There is a lack of cultural background and understanding about Latino clients. I don't feel they are listening to us.”

“Services in schools or doctor's office could be frustrating and hard for us.”

“Change the school system and the medical services. I don't feel safe going to the doctor after my baby was born. Nobody listened, and nobody cared how my body is changing. I feel on the other side of the bridge.”

“This is not the United States that I was expecting from what people talk about in my country.”

Parent Strengths

Resilience: Cultural beliefs and identity provides resiliency

Parents described feeling empowered by the support of family, community members, and partners, as well as their personal experiences. Parents described being resilient due to their cultural beliefs and understanding of their own identity. Some parents who immigrated to Boulder County said they felt more protected within the boundaries of Boulder County.

“It took me time to understand how the school works. People were very helpful and nice, but when they are not here I feel alone.”

“Everyone needs to know that immigrants are human beings, and we are looking out for our kids.”

“Everybody needs to know we have our culture and we/they need to understand that.”

“We can show ‘yes, we can do it.’ We can learn English and move forward.”

Connections and Resources: Strong connections and resources help families thrive

Families shared that they have developed strong feelings of gratitude to community organizations and some county services because they feel the support around them. Parents stated they recognize that Boulder County offers opportunities, especially for their kids. Parents in Boulder County rely on extended family, friends, and resources they are connected with to continue to thrive.

“When there is support we feel good to raise our kids.”

“[We are] luckier to be in Boulder County compare other counties; however, I still struggle with life-work balance. My kids are the best, but I cannot afford daycare.”

“I like to live here in Casa Esperanza. I feel the support from organizations here.”

“Compared to other states, here is amazing. My kids are in a program for their homework. I feel support.”

“Boulder Housing Partners is always there for us and for the kids.”

“My family and I have more resources in the county than my relatives in other states.”

“The CIRCLES is the biggest community.”

“Health services are better than other cities that I have been in; however, they are still missing the customer service.”

“Boulder County protects more children, green areas, compared with Mexico and poverty.”

“The best part [is] I have access to good resources for children; more than other relatives in other counties.”

“Free community events, stuff...there is always something to do.”

Opportunities: Engaging with the community feels like the right path

Parents described feeling that Boulder County is on a good path to building strong community engagement and that this is an opportunity to know more about minority groups, culture perspectives, and how to build community capacity. Parents are eager for the opportunities ahead.

“Everyone needs to know we have our own culture, and they have to respect that.”

“Listening to the community; more meetings like ROA in Lafayette.”

“Talk to politicians and local representatives about the needs in the community.”

“Let immigrants parents to develop their parenting skills, maybe we can learn from them too. I would like to spend more time with others that think and do things different than me.”

“Help parents to understand the process and system to live here in United States.”

“How proud I am of having my kid’s success in school.”

“Community engagement – bring me to the table, talk to me, and find out how I can help you.”

Parent Recommendations

Workplace Policies: Desire for family-friendly workplaces

Parents expressed concerns about the benefits that they receive after having a family. They said they felt financial stress from an increased cost of living in the county and feel they need good, secure wages. Other areas for policy included breastfeeding, personal and professional development, flexible hours, and paid leave.

“Breastfeeding and maternity leave...I wish I had it when I had my kids.”

“Reduce the hours – very long; my baby cried so much all day, and I feel guilty for working, but I have to work.”

“My husband works and I stay at home and help the kids, but the kiddos classes are hard for me to understand. I have the ‘I have a dream’ program for him.”

“I would like...business that provides time for the family.”

“Better wages...this is enough for me and my family. Boulder is expensive, but it is worth [it]...I am not sure if I will be able to stay very long, but I want the best for my kids.”

“Work/jobs experience. It is hard to find a job, and when you want to keep it, they pay low.”

“Family-friendly policies at work please.”

“There are same opportunities for everybody in the labor force? If there are, I am not there. We ALL do deserve to be hired by good companies.”

“Parental paid leave is a dream in this country. Government doesn’t care if we need it or if we want it...it is all about the business. Employees are not included as beneficiaries.”

“New moms should be allowed to get time off, maternity leave. Parents are not ok with this. We need support and understanding.”

“We don’t have the time to raise our kids because we have to work, work, work.”

Affordable Housing: Desire for increased wages and tiered system for housing

Along with an increase of wages for employees in the county, parents proposed a comprehensive housing system that included a tiered payment system for individuals and families renting a home.

“I know... there are other people experiencing issues on finding houses in the county. My cousin lives in a very small place, and she pays a lot.”

“Reduce the cap on rent based on income.”

“Eliminate housing issues for families who are on the path to be homeless...bring affordable housing to the table.”

“There is a long wait list for Section 8. I don’t think I know a person who is there...I heard it is a good program, but I don’t know more.”

“I have waited more than three months to know if there are apartments available in other buildings. I want a cheaper place, even if it is further from my work or my kids’ school...I cannot afford to pay \$1,200 for a 2-bedroom place...nobody controls that?”

“My house is small, but it is good. I wish I had a bigger place for my three kids (with a patio), but it is still good...I can walk with them to the park if we need it.”

Child Care and Extracurricular Activities: Request for lower cost, better quality care and activities

Parents expressed concern about the cost of child care, extracurricular activities, and summer camps. Parents suggested reduced rates for these opportunities in addition to evaluating the quality of the services provided in childcares in general. Parents also would like to see more public service opportunities (more programs that help families with childcare cost or affordability)

“High costs for child care make my situation even worse. I do have a job with good pay, but I cannot afford to pay over \$1,000 for each kid. There must be a way to fix this. I am not sure if I’m going to see this or my kids will see this change in child care prices.”

“Child care access: I am waiting to get Child Care Assistance Program spots...there are not enough child care services for parents with kids and no money.”

“CCAP is not helpful – too many stipulations for child care, parents, and children. If I failed, I am not able to be back in this service; they are too strict.”

“Child care system: review the monthly tuition and the quality of the services they offer.”

“More opportunities for kids in the summer...resources available for summer activities for kids so they stay out of trouble.”

School Model: Desire for mentoring programs, tailored programs, and funding

Parents said they feel empowered when discussing the changes in education they’d like to see. They are aware of schools facing problems in terms of integrating students of different cultural or socio-economic backgrounds. Parents recommended mentoring programs, tailoring education to fit the need of the student, providing more funding, and supporting teachers as part of needed change.

“I hear there is hate and racism in school. I asked my kids, but they have not said much.”

“Help for my kids in school. Mentoring programs.”

“The school district should be changing curriculum to make it more inclusive and close to the context we live in. The curriculum is feels outside of our reality”

“They [my children] have friends, but they don't do things together after school.”

“We need more teachers with more experience and expertise in teaching different grades and kids.”

“Improve school education, too much racism, no inequality and discrimination, more awareness.”

“As a mom, I struggle in the school system. I don't know what to do and where to go. It should be classes about engaging in BVSD (Boulder Valley School District) we want to be part of.”

“Bring a tailored educational system to those kids who learn differently.”

“It should be more funding for schools, we rely on teachers..... they spend more time with our kids... they raise our kids.”

“Change the school system and the medical services. I don’t feel safe going to the doctor after my baby was born...I feel on the other side of the bridge.”

“Teach how to take [advantage of] those opportunities available for families like mine (e.g. resources, events, trainings, camps, etc.).”

*"Too many classes on how to be a good parent? Education for parents to understand children
Schools are great, but my kids don't feel good sometimes."*

Services: Desire to be treated respectfully when receiving services

Parents explained that the services available are a significant factor in the success of parents. Parents expressed that they have little trust and some insecurity when it comes to services provided by government agencies, hospitals, doctors, or any other providers. Parent recommendations included customer services training for government employees, less paperwork requirements in program enrollments.

"Not all services in the county are friendly and welcome to us."

"The school liaison sends me messages about activities after school, but I am not sure if I should send them (my children) or how much will cost. I know there are some programs that don't charge."

"Local government should think about the requirements for Medicaid and other services."

"Better employees working for us in Housing and Human Services. The whole system makes us feel frustrated and needy."

"I would like to have better professionals and services in Medicaid, SNAP, and other services in the county."

"Doctors are not bilingual either; sometimes medical assistances are, but they don't treat you well. We need more doctors besides People's Clinic. BCH (Boulder Community Health) is good but not always."

"Don't make us fill out too many papers for getting services."

"I cannot stand people in the front desk at Social Services. They are not nice, and they always get mad with me for not bringing one thing. I don't believe they want to help."

"If there is something available in terms of benefits for my kids, government employees or any one should say it."

"We need a guide for each stage of the children (development); resources for children with learning disabilities."

"Doctors that accept Medicaid don't make clients welcome. We want to build relationships with them."

"Online classes for those who have busy schedules and they need to fill out forms for assistance."

"Judges should understand the process of custody for children with needs."

Parents specifically requested a support group for pre- and postnatal care, translation services, and more information about health insurance.

"It is important to have classes or [a] support group during pregnancy and after pregnancy, especially for new moms who feel isolated."

"Insurance for everybody."

"Health care system creates anxiety because it takes too long to see a doctor. I can spend two hours for a simple appointment. If I need a lab test or others, it could take days; plus, I don't have a car."

"Please use simple language in the hospital. I don't understand even if I have a translator."

Community misunderstanding: Desire to be part of community conversations

Parents expressed a desire to be listened to more and to have a voice in the community, particularly in conversations about issues they face and how they can move forward together.

"There is still lack of cultural awareness from people here in the county."

"Come and sit with us at community events. Ask us how we feel as Latinos and how we would like to be part of the process."

"Not only Americans can change things; we have power too. Listen to us, and make us part of the process."

"No trust in local government. They make you think that everything is ok in the Latino community, but they never asked. There are no leaders (Latino or minority) in the community supported by the government. You don't build this in a day or a year; this is a constant work. The Latin community is not considered. The community is united, but there is not spokespeople from us. We feel that Latinos are not a priority for anybody."

"We should have community groups – maybe at a neighborhood level – where we can discuss more about issues in the community and not wait until we go to the city."

"Help parents during the first years of our kids. We want to provide everything, but we cannot do it."

"I am married, and people think I don't need help because I have a husband to support me."

"Questions: Could you listen to us more? Could (you) attend a meeting with us in our own place?"

"Engage parents in the conversation. Reach out to those who are not getting the invite to participate in conversations like this."

"Helping parents to empower their children since early ages."

"Parents (being) able to support their kids financially, emotionally, and (with) stability is important for kids."

"Community groups for parents to engage in play dates, share experiences, and learn from facilitators."

Trust: Request for government services to show compassion

Parents expressed there is a lack of trust when it comes to government organizations, including police and public services. Parents voiced the desire for these agencies to increase their level of compassion and understanding.

"Local government should show support and keep compassion."

"I would be willing to file a case of racism, but I don't believe people will do something."

"I don't want to pay others to raise my kids. I would like to do it with support from my community, my work, and local representatives."

"The police department should be more in the picture. They should pay attention to racism cases in our area. Don't put our kids in detention because they are playing basketball on the street."

“Please provide training to people who offer customer service in (government) agencies. Please consider reviewing your policies and what are the best services you can provide.”

“If you come to see me, don't make me promises, tell me how you can help you.”

“There is not trust because we don't see any actions.”

Next Steps

The results of these focused conversations are the first step in engaging with the community and will be used to drive planning and actions. Moving forward, additional opportunities for ROA viewings and focused conversation will be provided throughout the county. Conversations will aim to gather more concise and deeper feedback and recommendations from the community. The conversation findings will continue to be analyzed and evaluated, and the results will be reported at least twice annually.