

Acting Boldly in the Face of the COVID-19 Pandemic: Examples from Grassroots Organizations Funded by the Raising Child Care Fund

By Rachel Schumacher, Project Manager, Raising Child Care Fund

Foundations are starting to understand the immediate and longer-term impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the country, and the disproportionate pain being felt by communities of color and those living in under-resourced communities. One area of essential work is receiving more attention now – child care, the critical importance of child care is in the news and on the lips of elected officials. State early childhood advocates are scrambling to articulate the needs in their states to their Congressional delegations. ***Grassroots groups are poised to add numbers and on the ground stories to help this effort, but they are chronically under-funded and need resources to be able to pivot to online strategies to replace their traditional face-to-face work, as well as offer or connect their members to resources.***

The [Raising Child Care Fund \(RCCF\)](#), a project of the [Early Childhood Funders Collaborative](#), works to increase equitable access to high quality child care by lifting the voices of families and the child care workforce and strengthening coalitions with early childhood state advocates. [Grantees](#) in California, Georgia, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, New Mexico, New York, Ohio and Oregon are in their first grant years.

RCCF grantees are demonstrating the role they can play to shine a light on the pain being felt by families and in communities to educate state and national leaders. These on-the-ground voices and stories add to the collective efforts of the field to convince elected officials to take bold action to sustain and rebuild child care in this country to be stronger and more sustainable as the nation recovers. They need support to respond to COVID-19 and support their members. They are:

ADOPTING ON-LINE ORGANIZING STRATEGIES.

- The [Alliance for Quality Education](#) in New York cancelled in-person events scheduled to advocate for state budget investments for early childhood and K-12 education. Instead, they created an online toolkit that facilitated their members to take 3 actions over a 3 hour period to simulate the impact of rally. They reached out to specific leaders in their membership community to recruit others to participate in the online platform, resulting in over 43,300 Twitter impressions in just 3 hours, over 200 uses of the toolkit, and 600 emails to state leaders. They also held online town halls and added over 3,000 people to their mailing list in the last few weeks.

DOCUMENTING AND RESPONDING TO THE IMPACT AMONG THE MOST VULNERABLE FAMILIES

- Most RCCF grantees have conducted online surveys of their members and partners and are creating story banks of the impact of the pandemic on families and the child care workforce, including attention to home-based providers who are often women of color small businesses and/or undocumented.
- [GA9to5](#) is a state chapter of the national 9to5 organization, which has set up an emergency fund to collect donations and redistribute to members in need of funds to cover rent/mortgage, utilities, child care or food and who are not eligible for federal programs, including those who are undocumented.

EXPLAINING THE RIGHTS AND RESOURCES THAT FAMILIES AND CHILD CARE WORKERS CAN ACCESS.

- Grantees are translating and posting materials and holding calls and webinars to make sure families and child care workers are aware of the unemployment, paid leave, and Small Business Supports are available to them. Often materials that come from the national level need to be rewritten to meet the needs of those they represent for step by step explanations.

CONNECTING THE VOICES OF FAMILIES AND CARE WORKERS MOST IMPACTED TO ELECTED OFFICIALS.

- [OLÉ Education Fund](#) in New Mexico organized an online call April 8th with the Secretary of Early Childhood Care and Education and their members to talk about their immediate needs for access to health care, hazard pay, support to pay their staff, and supplies. New Mexico is offering a range of supports for child care including a Governor's order to allow any child care worker that has COVID-19 to be included in the New Mexico Medical Insurance Pool (NMMIP) -- the state's high-risk pool -- and access free health care to help them recover. In May, New Mexico's governor announced a new incentive pay program to award \$700 a month directly to teachers who remain at work in child care for the months of April, May and June.
- [ISALAH](#) in Minnesota worked with other early childhood advocates to generate over 4,000 emails to state legislators to call for help for child care programs, such as the mostly Somali-owned centers that they organize, that have lost families, closed, or are caring for children of essential workers. According to our contacts, some legislators said, "they received more email relating to child care provider relief than any other single issue in the early days of the COVID19 crisis." The state then created a \$30 million Child Care Emergency Relief Grant program on March 26th.
- [Family Forward Oregon](#) has set up easy online ways for their members to educate their Congressional delegation about their needs due to the pandemic, including an online townhall on April 23rd.

WHAT CAN FOUNDATIONS DO?

Federal action is more important than ever as states begin to freeze their budgets and walk back from promises to invest in many services, including early care and education. Foundations that believe amplifying the voices of those most impacted in this crisis could help make child care a national priority in COVID-19 recovery can :

Invest in the Raising Child Care Fund.

We would be able to move funding quickly to our existing grantees or add grantees in states that we were not able to reach due to lack of funds but that scored highly in our review process. Consider making general support grants to groups that work directly with families and child care teachers and workers.

Invest in affiliates of [Community Change](#), [Family Values @ Work](#), [United Parent Leadership Action Network, 9to5](#), and other umbrella groups with state and locally based organizing groups.

Each of these groups can either regrant funding to their affiliates or help point a foundation to organizations in their state to fund directly. They work on issues like child care, paid leave, and economic justice for women, children, and families. For more information about national/umbrella groups focused on organizing around child care issues, you can also contact the [Early Care and Education Organizing Network](#).

To learn more about grassroots organizations and the RCCF, please contact Rachel Schumacher, Project Manager, at raisingchildcare@ecfunders.org.