SDSU
San Diego State University

Center for Excellence in Early Development

Steps to Family Child Care Success

INTERNATIONAL RESCUE COMMITTEE

Year 6: Swahili-Speaking Providers Evaluation Report | July 2026

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Steps to Family Child Care Success

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PRICE PHILANTHROPIES

San Diego Foundation 50 YEARS

Girard Foundation

About IRC

The International Rescue Committee (IRC) has 24 years of experience in refugee and immigrant microenterprise development, and over the last five years, has successfully assisted over 500 refugees and immigrants in establishing, sustaining, or growing their FCC businesses throughout San Diego County. The IRC has built strong and longstanding partnerships with key stakeholders in the FCC licensing realm, including the State of California's Division of Community Care Licensing and the YMCA of San Diego County's Childcare Resource Service. For the past five years, IRC has partnered with Chicano Federation, Horn of Africa and CEED to design and implement the STEPS program.

About CEED

Situated within San Diego State University, the Center for Excellence in Early Education (CEED) is a transdisciplinary, research-based training facility with a holistic approach to supporting early childhood development, mental health, and early childhood education. CEED faculty conduct applied research and engage in evaluation efforts aimed at the identification of promising practices that can be scaled up and shared with the broader research and educational community. For the past five years, CEED has helped design, implement, and evaluate the STEPS program, while also conducting research on the impact of the cultural navigators and the experiences of Somali FCC providers who have participated in the program (Garrity et al., 2024; Garrity & Miller, 2025).

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Introduction

The STEPS program was developed to support family child care (FCC) providers, recognizing their roles as entrepreneurs and small business owners. The program seeks to enhance providers' business practices, thereby promoting business growth, long-term sustainability, and economic stability to the providers and the families and communities they serve.

The STEPS model delivers business support to cohorts of family child care (FCC) providers who share a common primary language and cultural background. The program is implemented by ethnic community-based organizations (ECBOs), which provide culturally and linguistically responsive training that fosters shared learning among providers, as well as individualized coaching to support participants in achieving their business goals. ECBOs employ cultural navigators who reflect the communities they serve and guide participants throughout the program, supporting implementation and successful program completion.

Program implementation consists of a 14-week training series followed by individualized business coaching to address providers' unique business needs. The training series includes core courses on financial literacy, marketing, and recordkeeping. Additional training topics are incorporated based on lessons learned from previous STEPS cohorts and feedback from incoming participants to ensure the curriculum remains responsive to providers' needs. Following completion of the training series, participants are offered business coaching with their cultural navigator, where providers have the opportunity to work on their personal goals for their child care program.

Over the past six years, the STEPS program has served more than 300 family child care (FCC) providers who speak Spanish, Arabic, Somali, and Dari. In March 2025, the International Rescue Committee (IRC) received funding to implement the STEPS model with a cohort of primarily Swahili-speaking FCC providers in San Diego County. IRC adapted and delivered the training series and provided individualized business coaching to participating providers. The Center for Excellence in Early Development (CEED) developed the evaluation plan, designed the data collection process, and prepared the final evaluation report.

The STEPS program has been identified as a supportive precursor to the Shared Service Alliance (SSA), a larger network of local organizations and agencies that offer tiered business supports to both center-based and FCC providers. STEPS as a proven concept builds a foundational knowledge base that lends itself to the highly individualized coaching that SSA coaches provide. Prior to this cohort, neither STEPS nor SSA services were offered for Swahili-speaking providers. IRC has led the charge to support this cultural community, through outreach to the community in San Diego, acquiring the funding to hire a cultural navigator, and by working to create a community Swahili-speaking providers. As a partner in the SSA, IRC has taken the necessary steps to build upon the inaugural cohort to provide the opportunity for providers to move into SSA at the conclusion of the STEPS program.

STEPS Training Topics

Course Name	Description
Orientation – Introduction to Program	Introduction to the STEPS program. Expectations and documents required for participation are reviewed.
Child Development 101 & 102	Review of the importance of developmentally, culturally, and linguistically appropriate practices and an overview of how early childhood experiences affect lifelong health and learning (material covered over two sessions).
Digital Literacy	Introduction to Gmail and how to use Google Drive for their child care business. Computer use including how to use the touchpad, keyboard, shortcuts, locating and using settings, locating apps, email set up, and sending and replying to emails.
Finance 101: Budgeting and Banking & 102: Credit	Overview of business bank accounts and the different features offered. Budgeting process is introduced including how to calculate monthly income and expenses for monitoring purposes. Overview of the US credit system, including what is credit, why it is important, how to access a credit report and the dos and don’ts of the credit system.
Business 101 & 102 (Believe, Practice & Growth)	Review of strong business practices such as SWOT analysis, use of a business plan, SMART goals, Unique Value Proposition, and Elevator Pitch – Ascent Speech.

Course Name	Description
Child Care Provider-Parent Contract/In-Home Child Care Policy	Introduction to components of contracts and policies for child care providers and why both are crucial for protecting the provider and their clients. Providers learn key elements of a strong contract, including hours of operation, payment terms, holidays, and termination clauses. Recommended policies included sick child policies, late pick-up procedures, behavior guidance and emergency protocols.
Child Enrollment	Overview of the child enrollment process in a child care facility, including a review of required documentation for each child's folder. Providers were also introduced to optional forms such as field trip permission slips and other helpful tools to support enrollment and recordkeeping.
Bookkeeping & Effective Practice for Child Care Providers	Introduction to accounting practices specific to FCC providers, including how to categorize financial transactions, the importance of having a financial system, identifying business deductions, claiming expenses and calculating the time-space percentage for tax purposes.
CareConnect	Introduction to CareConnect, a software program and digital app designed to help providers track child attendance, manage payments, and maintain accurate records. Providers learned how to navigate the platform and integrate it into their daily operations for more efficient business management.
Marketing	Introduction to essential marketing strategies, marketing tools and the creation of a marketing plan. Introduction to digital marketing including how to promote provider's business using social media. An understanding of branding basics is reviewed such as choosing consistent colors, logos and messaging. Tips for creating engaging content, use of hashtags and stories to expand reach and increase engagement.
AI Tools – ChatGPT	Introduction to artificial intelligence (AI) with a focus on ChatGPT. Providers explored practical ways to use AI to enhance their business operations, including writing parent communication, creating lesson plans, marketing content, and streamlining administrative tasks.
Tax Ready Business	Introduction of tax practices specific to child care providers, further explanation of the use of an EIN number, accounting methods for tax purposes, forms needed for businesses, and how to select a paid tax preparer.

Program Objectives

Program objectives were created to establish activities and services completed by IRC for program implementation.

The project period for IRC's STEPS cohort was September 2025 to June 2026.

Program Objective	Description	Evidence of Achievement
STEPS Participation	Enroll 20 providers to complete the 14-week STEPS training series and follow-up business coaching.	**20** providers completed the 14-week STEPS training series.
FCC-SASI	Complete the FCC-SASI with providers participating in 1:1 business coaching.	**20** providers completed the FCC-SASI.
STEPS Business Coaching	Assist the providers with 1:1 business coaching.	**20** providers completed 1:1 business coaching.
Provider Business Plans	Complete a business plan with each provider.	**20** providers completed a business plan.
Goals	Support providers with implementing or updating best business practices to improve their child care business	**20** providers updated or implemented a total of **63** business practices.

Evaluation Methodology

CEED created an evaluation plan that included tools for data collection, such as intake forms and surveys, to assess provider expectations and satisfaction. Program implementation tools, such as the Family Child Care Strength and Sustainability Index (FCC-SASI) and Enrollment and Business Practices Log assisted the cultural navigator in documenting business practices implemented and change in enrollment during the program period.

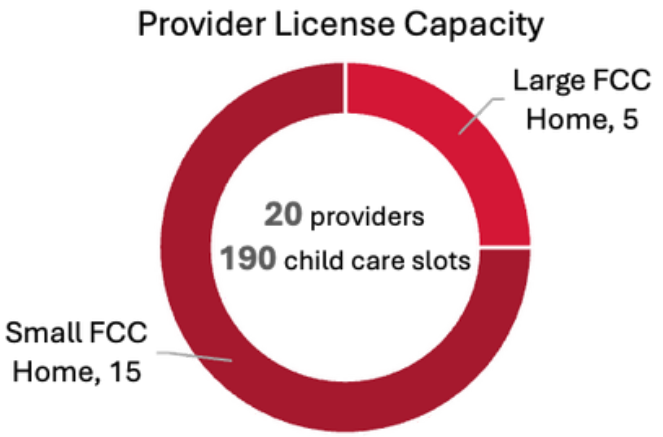
Program Timeline

Phase	Timeline	Activities
Intake & Pre Program Data Collection	Sept - Oct 2025	Pre-program data is collected at the beginning of the program: Intake Survey (demographics) and Provider Pre-survey (needs assessment).
Mid-program Data Analysis	Oct 2025	Provider demographic data and pre-survey was summarized in a mid-program report. Post-training surveys were analyzed weekly for immediate feedback.
Mid-Program Data Collection	Oct 2025-April 2026	Post-training survey and FCC-SASI is completed. Enrollment was captured monthly along with updates on business practices implemented.
End of Program Data Collection	May 2026	Post program data is collected at the end of the program: End of Program Survey and Provider Satisfaction Survey.
Reporting	July 2026	Full data analysis is completed, and report is generated.

Measures

Tool	Timing	Purpose
Baseline & Need Assessment Measures		
Intake Survey	Beginning of program year	Surveys provider demographics and business characteristics.
Provider Pre-Survey (Needs Assessment)	Beginning of program year	Measures the needs, expectations and confidence of the providers prior to program implementation.
Program Implementation Measures		
Family Child Care Strength and Sustainability Index (FCC-SASI)	Beginning of the program year	Measures utilization of best business practices for FCC providers.
Enrollment and Business Practices Log	Monthly	Records provider enrollment, capital funding received and business practices implemented or updated.
End of Training & End of Business Coaching Measures		
Post-Training Surveys	End of training series	Measures provider satisfaction including provider's perception of social support, includes reflective questions on their business practice knowledge and offers an opportunity through open-ended questions to share provider success.
Provider Satisfaction Survey	End of program year	Measures provider's perception of program effectiveness and provider confidence in using business practices.
End of Program Survey (post-program data)	End of program year	Measures any changes in provider business characteristics.

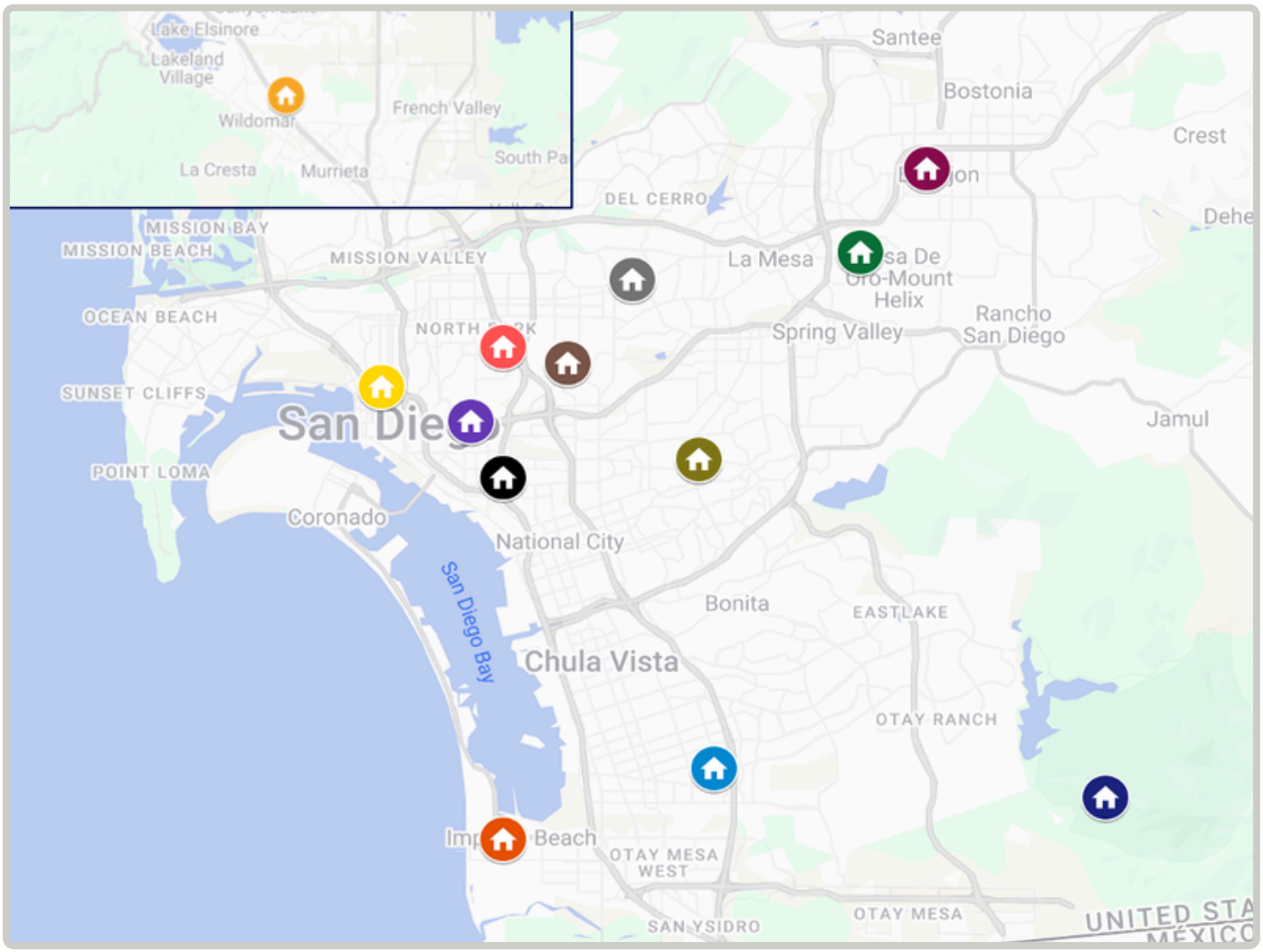
Provider Demographics



Service Region

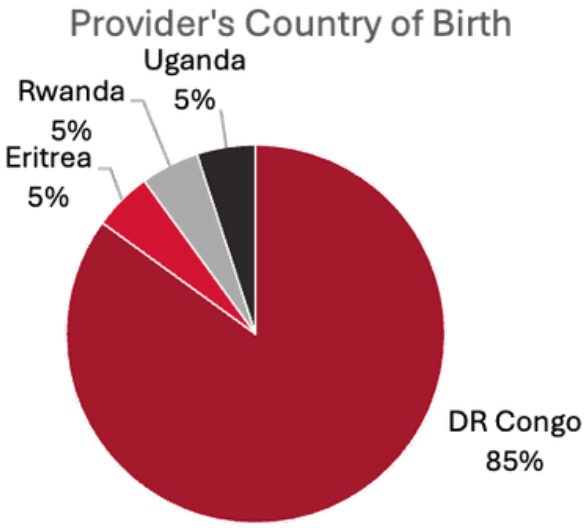
19 providers live in San Diego County and one provider lives in Riverside County.

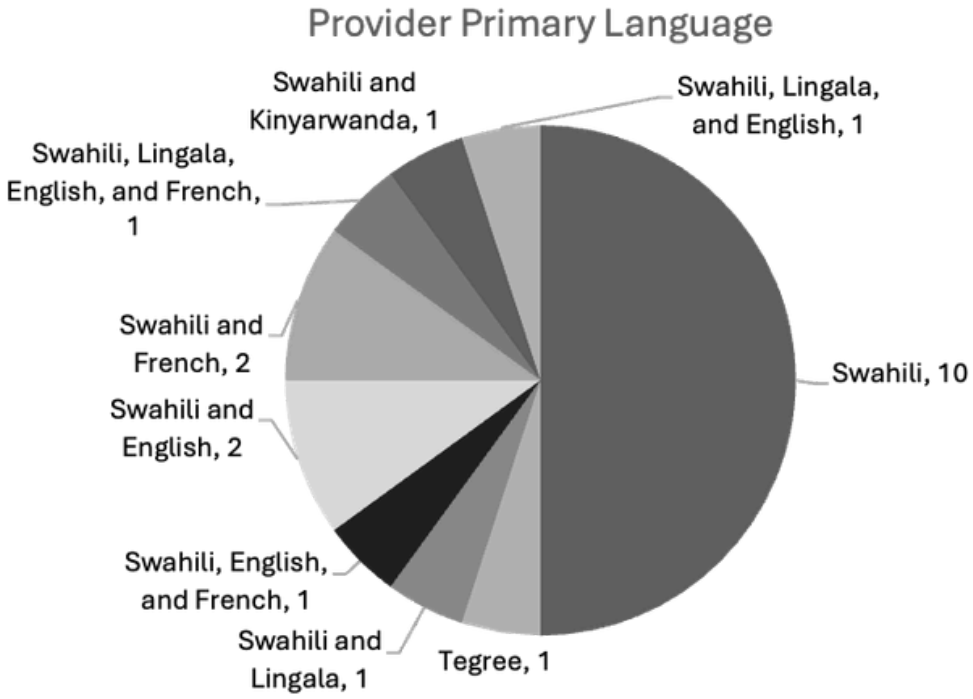
- 4 providers reside in 92115.
- 3 providers reside in 92105.
- 2 providers reside in 92020 and 92114.
- 1 provider resides in 91911, 91932, 91941, 92101, 92102, 92104, 92113, 92154, and 92595.



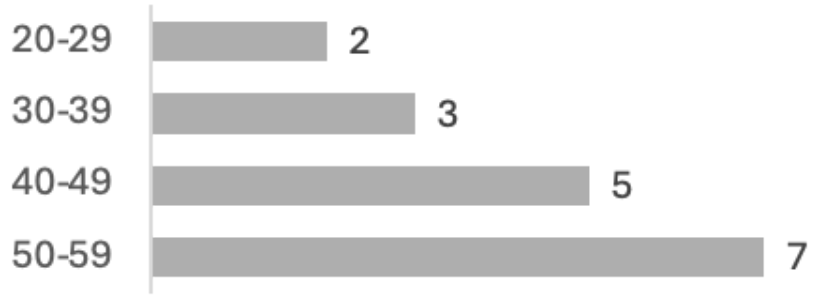
The following charts provide basic demographic data on the providers in the STEPS program. All 20 providers identify as Black, African, or African American. All providers were born in Africa and the majority of providers (85%) were from the Democratic Republic of Congo. Providers were multi-lingual with many providers speaking 2-3 languages. All providers spoke Swahili except one who spoke Tegree. In response to the multi-lingual characteristics of the providers, STEPS courses were taught in English with Swahili translation. IRC program leaders reported that both languages are necessary and aid in comprehension and understanding because some of the terminology cannot be translated.

Provider age ranged from 22 to 63, and 60% (n=12) of providers were ages 40 to 59. Education level ranged from an associate degree to no formal schooling. Half of the providers have a high school diploma, 25% have a middle school diploma, 15% have an associate degree and 10% have had no formal schooling. It might be challenging for providers with no formal schooling or a middle school diploma to access college or university educational opportunities making trainings such as STEPS important to the success of their child care program.

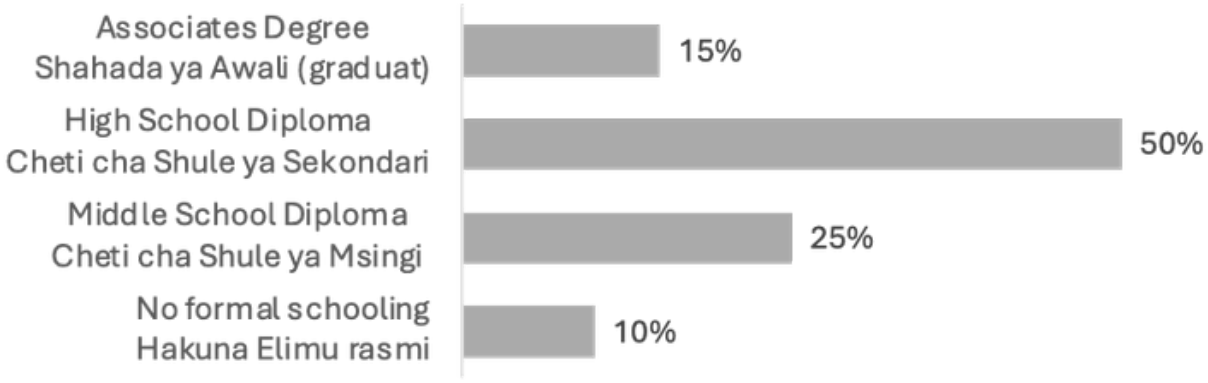




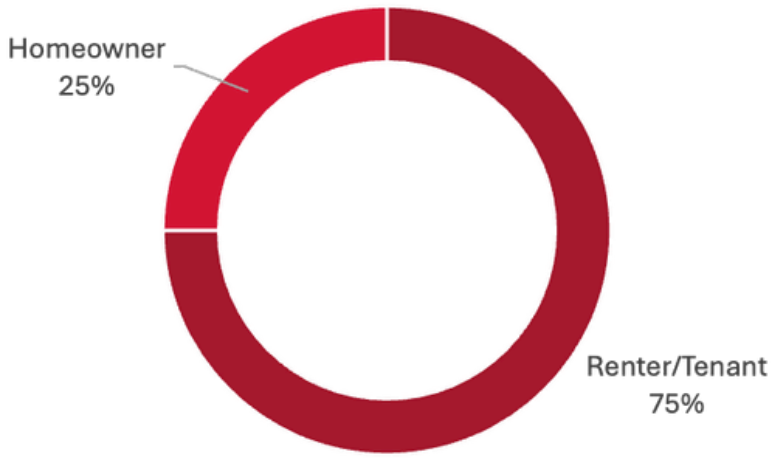
Provider Age Range



Highest Level of Education



Homeowner Status



Provider Business Characteristics: Intake

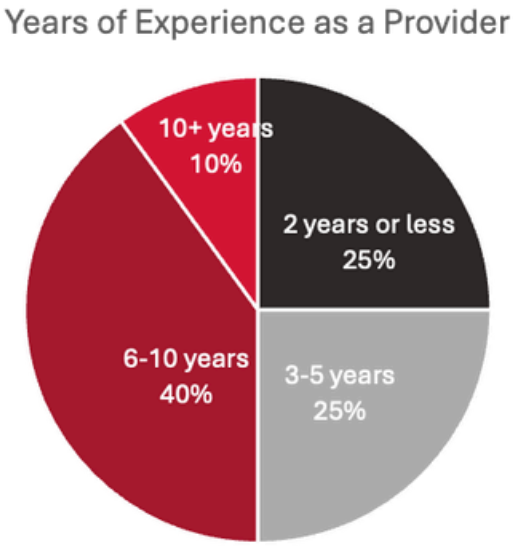
The majority of providers are relatively new FCC providers. Fifty percent of providers have owned their child carebusiness for five years or less. Fifty percent of providers have owned their children care business for six years or more and 10% have owned their business 10 years or more.

Providers report working an average of 45.3 hours per week caring for children and another 7.9 hours per week on their business beyond caring for children. Examples of the work that they do beyond caring for children includes cleaning, preparing learning activities and meals, managing finances, grocery shopping, and sending invoices.

FCC providers often offer care during non-traditional hours to meet the needs of the families they serve. Sixty percent (n=12) of STEPS providers offer care during non-traditional hours. For this report, non-traditional hours were defined as 6:00 p.m. to 7:00 a.m. weekdays and any hours on the weekend.

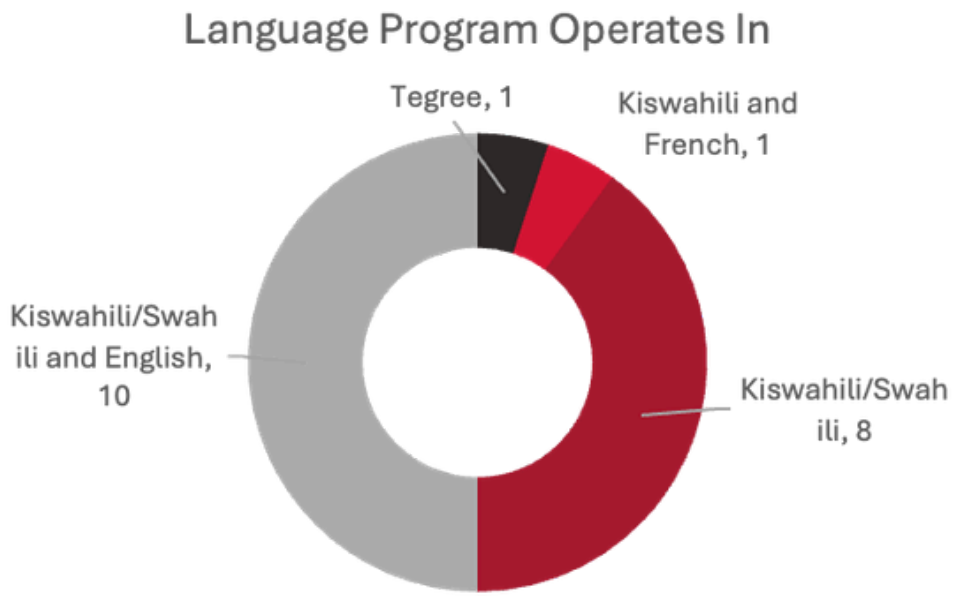
Twelve providers reported that they have volunteer staff who assist with their business. Two providers employ one part-time child care assistant and one provider employs a full-time child care assistant. As the providers grow their child carebusiness by increasing their license capacity to 14 and reaching full enrollment, more providers will need to hire employees to support their growing business.

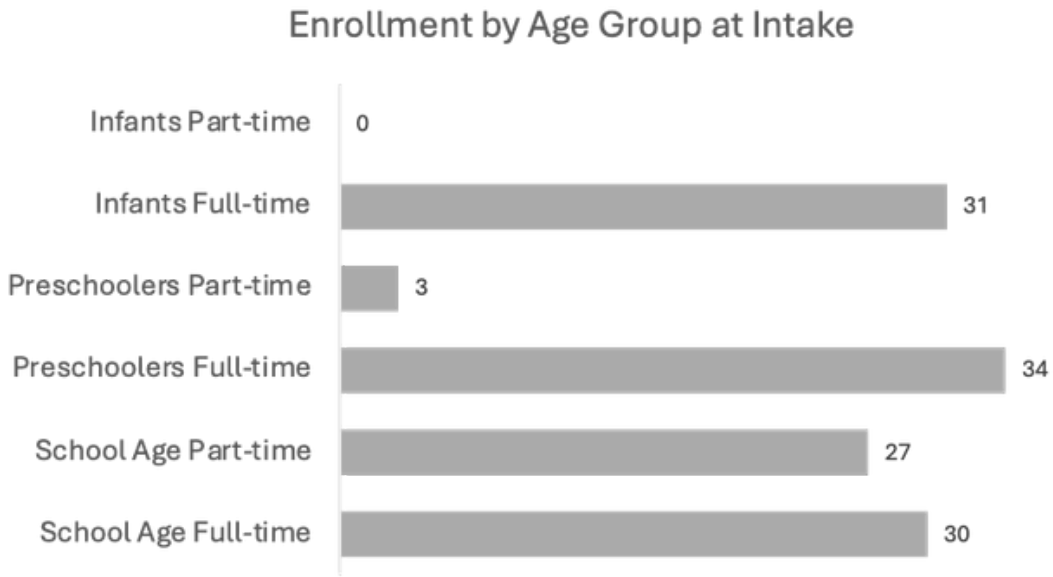




Families often choose FCCs because of their flexibility in their hours of care, however, families also might choose FCCs because the provider shares a language and culture that is similar to their clients. Nineteen providers (95%) offered care in Swahili or Swahili and an additional language. One provider operated their child care in Tegree.

All 20 providers had children enrolled at intake. Enrollment was reported by age category and part-time and full-time status. Seventy-six percent of the children enrolled were in care full-time and 46% of the children enrolled were school-age. Providers also reported the ethnicity and primary language of enrolled children. Overall, 83% of children shared the provider's ethnicity, and 79% shared the provider's primary language.



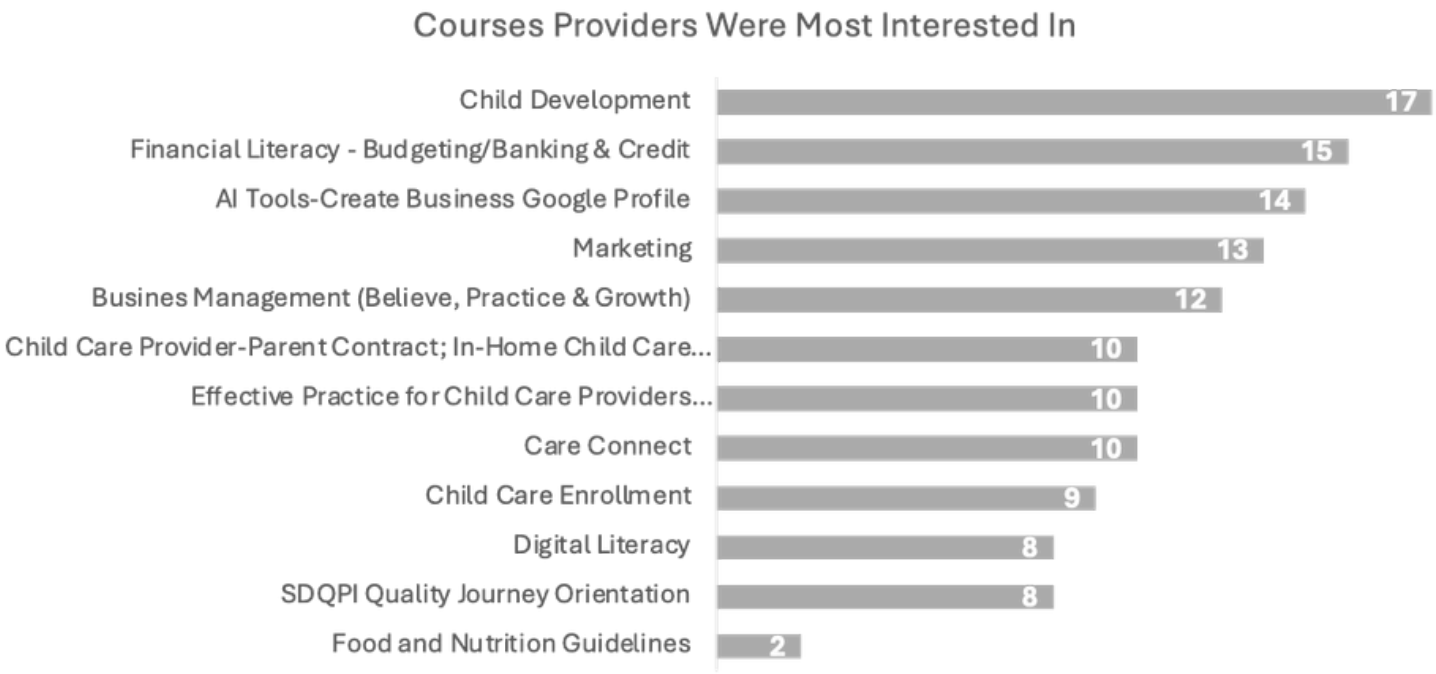


Impact Data

A total of 20 providers were enrolled in the STEPS and completed the 14-week training series and took part in the 1:1 business coaching that was offered. The impact of the training series was measured using post-training surveys and provider satisfaction surveys. The impact of the business coaching was measured using the qualitative data in the enrollment and business practices log and the FCC-SASI. The overall impact of the program was measured using a needs assessment survey, post-training surveys, provider satisfaction surveys and by comparing pre-program and post-program data.

Needs Assessment

Providers completed a pre-survey to understand their expectations of the STEPS program and the goals they were like to achieve while participating in STEPS. Results from the pre-survey were shared the IRC team to help them understand the needs and expectations of the providers.



Provider Goals Before STEPS Program	Responses
Increase enrollment	16
Open a child care center	4
Expand to a larger home or facility	3
Purchase a car or van	2

Provider Expectations of STEPS Program	Responses
Expand and learn about child care business	11
Learn about financial literacy (loans, budgeting, etc.)	6
Increase enrollment	3
Help accessing business resources	2
Child development	1
Digital literacy	1
Marketing their child care business	1

Training Series

Provider Satisfaction

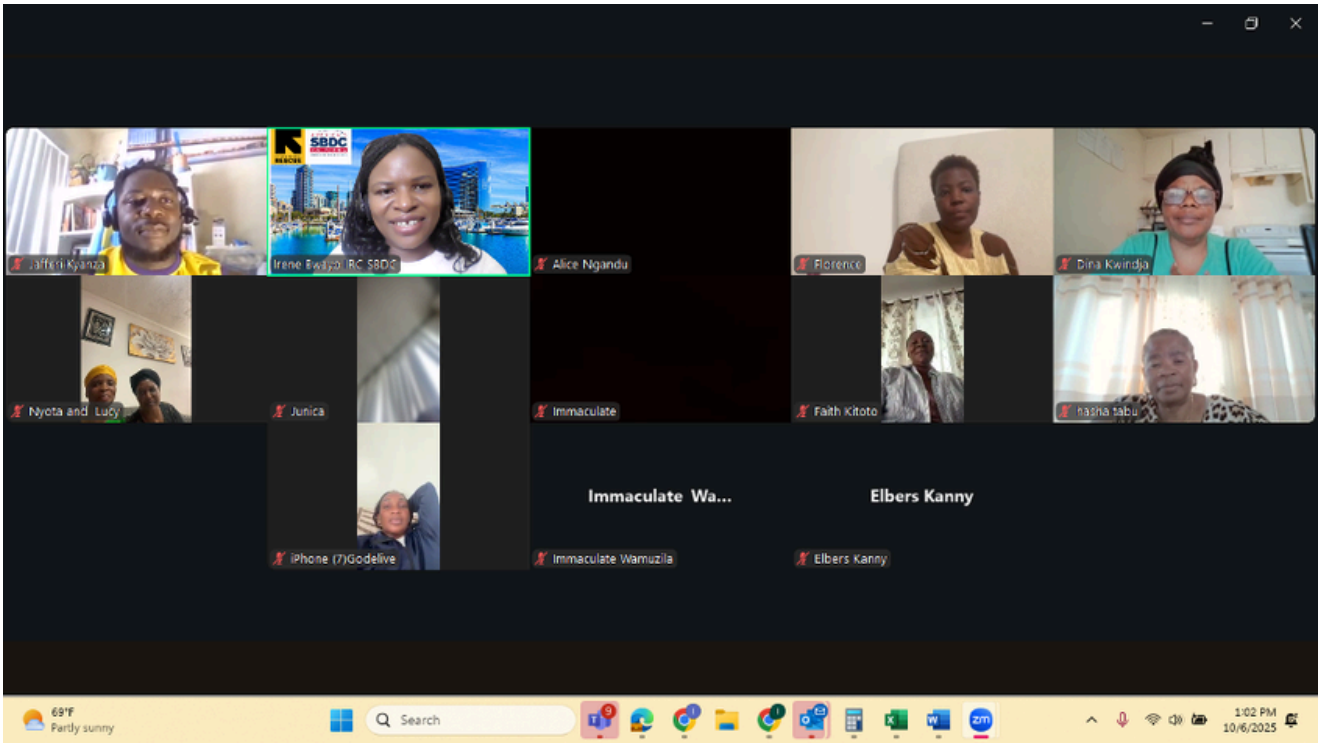
Providers were asked to complete a short survey after the 14-week training series was completed. Providers were asked to rate their satisfaction and the relevance of the course content. Overall, 100% of providers strongly agree or agree with the following statements.



The survey also included several open-ended questions, and many respondents expressed appreciation for the STEPS training series. When asked what they had learned and applied to their family child care (FCC) businesses, providers identified skills directly related to the training content, including creating and managing a Google Business Profile, understanding tax documentation, marketing through social media, maintaining business records, and developing client contracts.

When asked how the program could be improved, most providers indicated that no changes were needed. The only recurring suggestion was to allow more time for each training session. In addition, all 16 providers who responded to the recommendation question indicated that they would recommend the STEPS program to other child care providers, with several noting that the training was both helpful and educational.

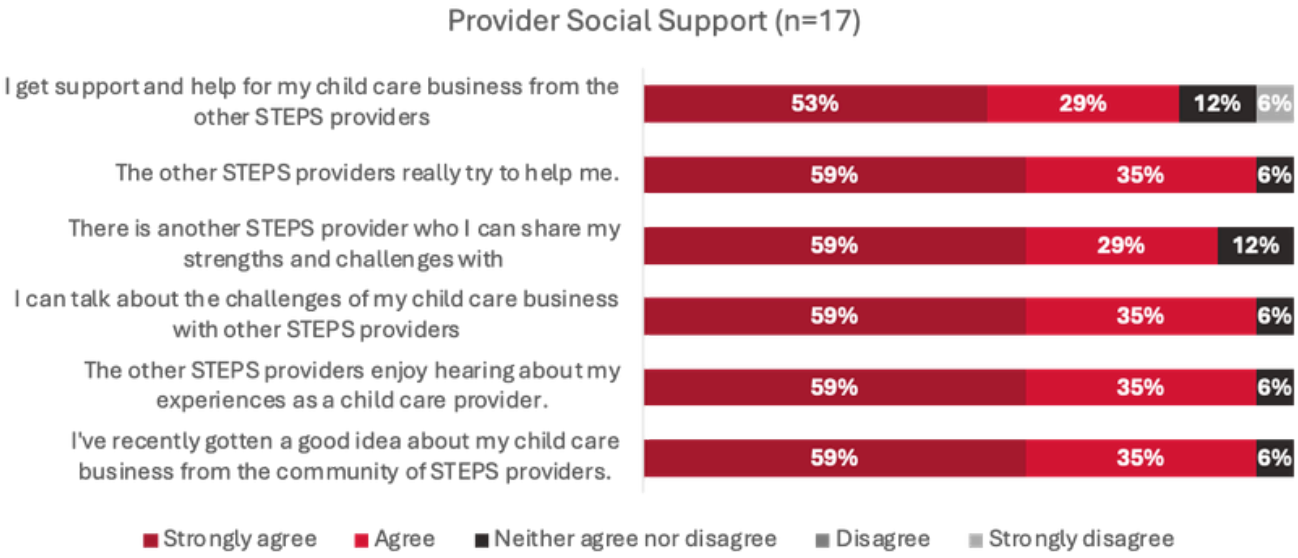
Providers also identified topics for future training and technical assistance. The most frequently requested areas included tax preparation and tax management, child development and child psychology, creating high-quality home child careenvironments and learning materials, digital literacy, CPR certification, and nutrition.



Social Support

Providers were asked to rate six social support statements. The STEPS program follows a cohort-based learning approach in which providers participate in courses alongside peers who share their linguistic, cultural and ethnic backgrounds. Providers were asked to rate the following statements to understand the importance of how social support contributes to learning within cultural communities. On average, 91% of providers strongly agree or agree that social support is beneficial to them as child care provider.

The survey also included an open-ended question about the value of participating in training alongside other family child care providers. All respondents indicated that learning in a cohort was beneficial, citing opportunities to learn from one another's experiences and to recognize shared challenges. As one provider explained, "Yes, because I was able to see that they have the same experiences as me when it comes to dealing with parents and how difficult it is to get them to follow the provider's child care policies."



Training Completion Celebration

At the conclusion of the 14-week training series, IRC hosted a graduation celebration to recognize providers for their commitment and successful completion of the program. During the event, participants received certificates of completion, shared a potluck meal, and celebrated their accomplishments as a cohort. The graduation also provided an opportunity for providers to reflect on what they learned through the STEPS program and offer feedback on the types of one-on-one assistance that would best support the continued growth and success of their child care businesses.

Provider feedback included the following:

- **Child care policies and contracts**: Multiple providers identified the Child Care Provider–Parent Contract and In-home Child Care Policy training as one of the most valuable sessions. They reported that it helped them think about adding clear expectations and professional boundaries with families to their client contracts.

- **CACFP participation**: Several providers expressed interest in participating in CACFP; however, they also reported that traditional African dishes do not meet the the program's menu requirements. The Swahili providers do not participate in CACFP because the nutrition guidelines do not include traditional African foods.

- **Business insurance:** One provider requested additional information on business insurance, including the types of coverage FCC providers should maintain to reduce their financial and legal risk.

- **Home environment:** One provider requested a home visit to review her child care learning environment, to assist with required postings, and to help ensure her child enrollment records are in order

- **Housing**: Multiple providers described difficulties securing rentals once landlords learn they operate a child care business.

- **Child development:** Providers enjoyed the Child Development training and requested an additional training on how to choose age-appropriate toys. Dr. Garrity agreed to provide a follow-up training.

- **Cohort/peer support:** Providers expressed the need to meet regularly with the group formed through the STEPS training. The providers want to continue to share challenges, exchange ideas, and offer support to one another. Before the celebration concluded, the group selected a leader to organize future meetings and participants exchanged contact information.

Bonus Training

In March, Dr. Garrity provided a workshop on child development and age-appropriate toys. The workshop was held on Zoom and was translated by IRC staff. Approximately 15 providers attended. The training covered the importance of play, and an overview of toys that supported the developmental stages of infancy, toddlerhood, and preschool. Participants shared their concerns about screen time, and struggles with parents who bring their children to the FCC home with Ipads.



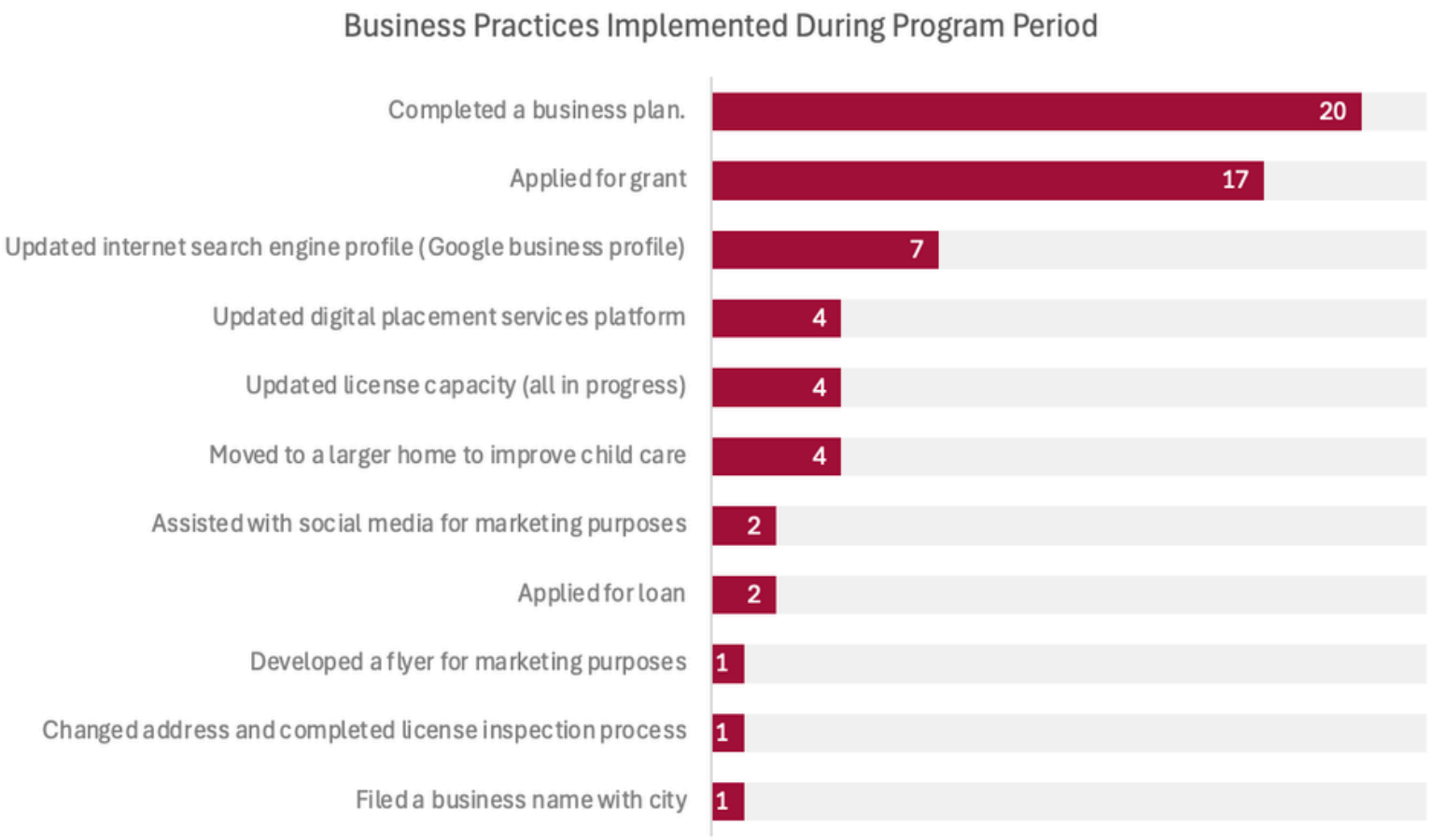


Business Practices

After the training series, all 20 providers participated in 1:1 business coaching. The cultural navigator completed the FCC-SASI with each provider to assess provider business needs. The results of the SASI were shared with the cultural navigator, and based on the needs of each provider, the IRC cultural navigator then worked with the providers to complete personalized business goals by implementing or updating their business practices. The details of the goals were recorded in IRC's internal customer relationship management (CRM) system and were noted in a monthly spreadsheet used to also track enrollment.

Providers updated or implemented a total of 63 business practices. All 20 providers wrote a new business plan, and 17 providers used the business plan to apply for the San Diego Foundation Early Childhood Grant. Seven providers updated their Google Business Profile and four providers moved to a larger home and are in the process of updating their license to serve 14 children (large license).

The chart below displays the number of providers that implemented FCC-SASI business practices during the program period.



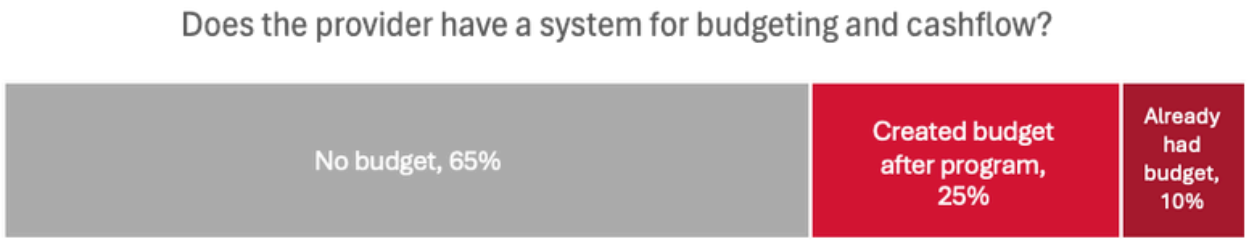
Providers were given the opportunity to apply for a grant that was sponsored by the San Diego Foundation. The the San Diego Foundation Early Childhood Grant is an agreement with IRC to empower female family child care providers through technical and financial support to help them grow their business. Providers were eligible to apply for up to $3500 for their child care business, and the intended use of the funds was detailed in their business plans.

Seventeen providers qualified and applied for the grant with the assistance of the IRC cultural navigator. At the time of reporting, most providers had already received their grant funding, while others had been approved but were still awaiting disbursement. The table below displays the purpose of the funding, number of providers funded and the total amount funded.

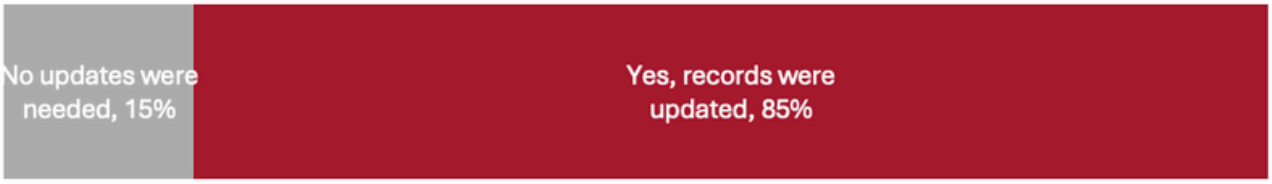
Two providers also went through the process to apply for IRC's Center for Economic Opportunity loan program. One provider received approval for a loan for $50,000. Another provider applied for a $20,000 loan, but was denied funding. Further discussions with the IRC team revealed that the provider was denied the loan due to a lack of personal budgeting. The provider was counseled on the importance of budgeting and was encouraged to reapply in two months time.

Capital Funding		
San Diego Foundation Early Childhood Grant (distributed by IRC) (*a small number of grants were approved and are awaiting paperwork before being fully funded)		
Purpose of Funding	**Number Funded**	**Total Funded**
Relocate to larger home to expand child care	4	$9,500
Home improvement (i.e. playsets, furniture)	5	$9,500
Age-appropriate toys	5	$3,700
Enhance child care business	3	$3,160
Total	**17**	**$25,860**
IRC's Center for Economic Opportunities Loan		
Maintain provider workspace & purchase equipment to attract additional families (approved and funding is being processed).	1	$50,000

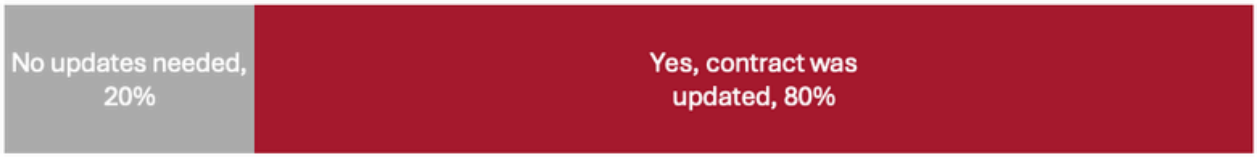
The STEPS program introduces best business practices during training and reinforces implementation through individualized follow-up coaching. Business practice updates made during coaching, were documented in IRC's internal client tracking system and monthly enrollment spreadsheets, though some providers implemented changes without additional coaching. At the end of the program, providers reported whether they had implemented five common child care business practices based on what they learned in STEPS. As shown below, most providers reported updating their child enrollment records and provider–parent contracts, as well as implementing new marketing strategies.



Did the provider update their child enrollment records based on what they learned in the STEPS program?



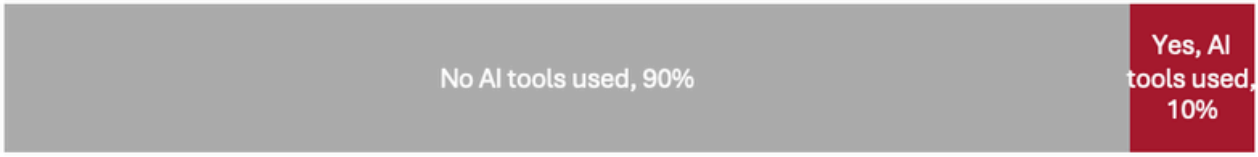
Did the provider create or update their provider/parent contract based on what they learned in the STEPS program?



Did the provider start marketing their business based on what they learned in the STEPS program?



Did the provider utilize the AI tools taught to them in the STEPS program?



Provider Business Characteristics: End of the Program

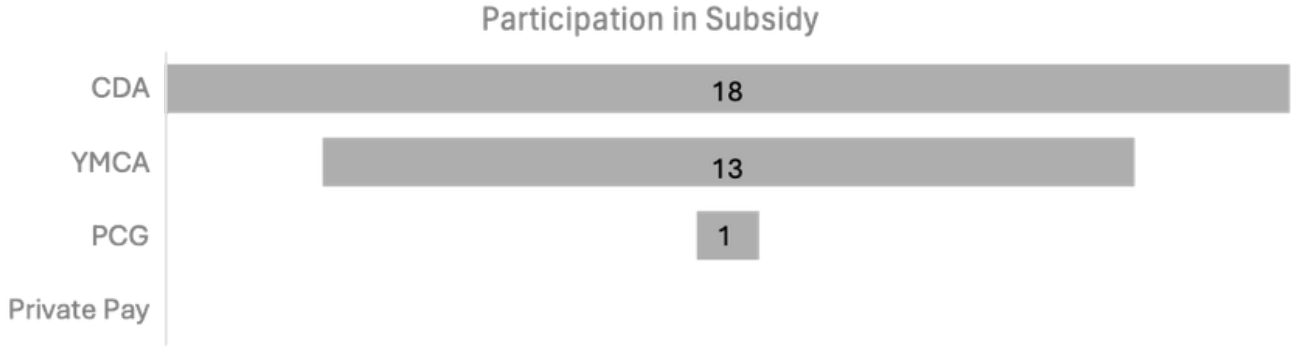
Financial Characteristics

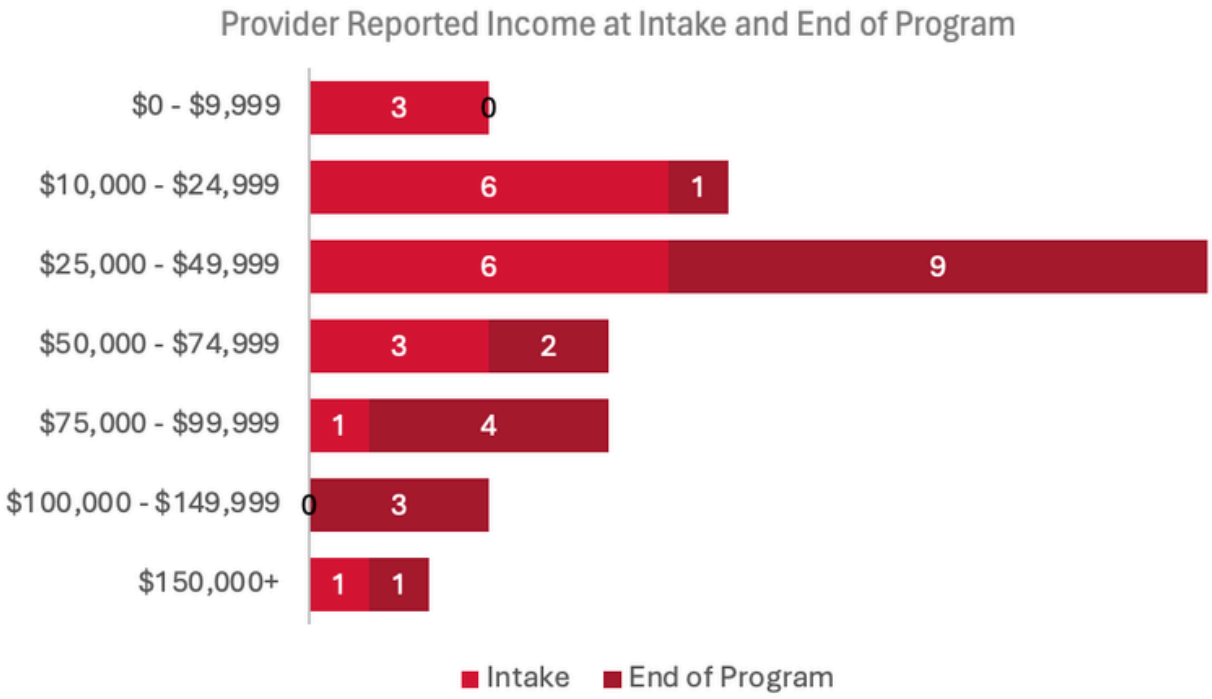
Provider business characteristics were collected at intake and at the end of the program and were compared to assess changes in business practices and operations. At intake, 18 providers participated in the local subsidy programs and one provider accepted private pay. By the end of the program, 19 providers reported that they participated in the local subsidy programs and none reported accepting private-pay families.

All 20 providers reported that they filed taxes in 2024 and again in 2025. In 2024, all providers filed as a sole proprietorship. In 2025, 17 filed as a sole proprietorship, 1 as an S Corporation and 2 were unsure of their filing status.

Providers also reported their annual income range at intake and program completion. The number of providers reporting annual earnings exceeding $75,000 increased from two at intake to eight at program completion. Conversely, the number reporting annual earnings below $25,000 decreased from nine to one over the same period.

Provider participation in programs and networks for FCC providers offer support, resources and can be important for income generation. The California Adult Child Food Program (CACFP) is a reimbursement program for the cost of food served to children. The San Diego Quality Preschool Initiative (SDQPI) is the local Quality Rating Improvement System (QRIS) that helps providers develop their programs to meet early childhood education standards. The local union provides resources to keep providers informed of policy initiatives and child care provider advocacy efforts. No providers participated in CACFP or SDQPI. Eight providers were members of the local union and one of those members joined after joining the STEPS program.



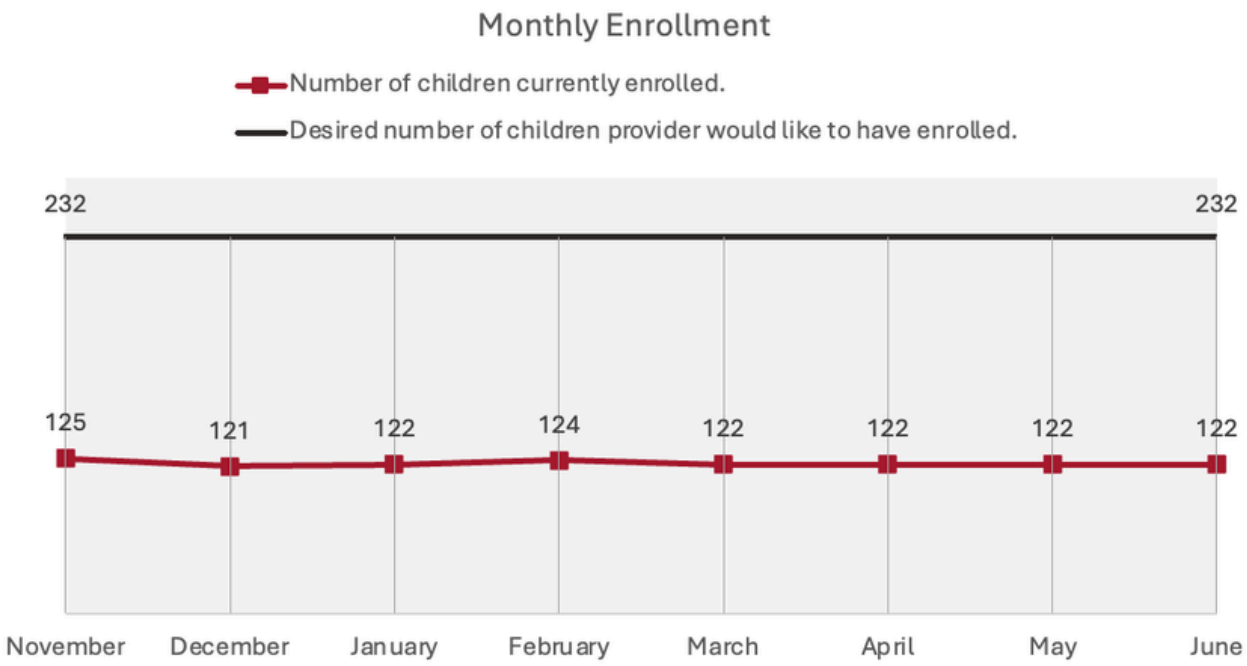


Enrollment

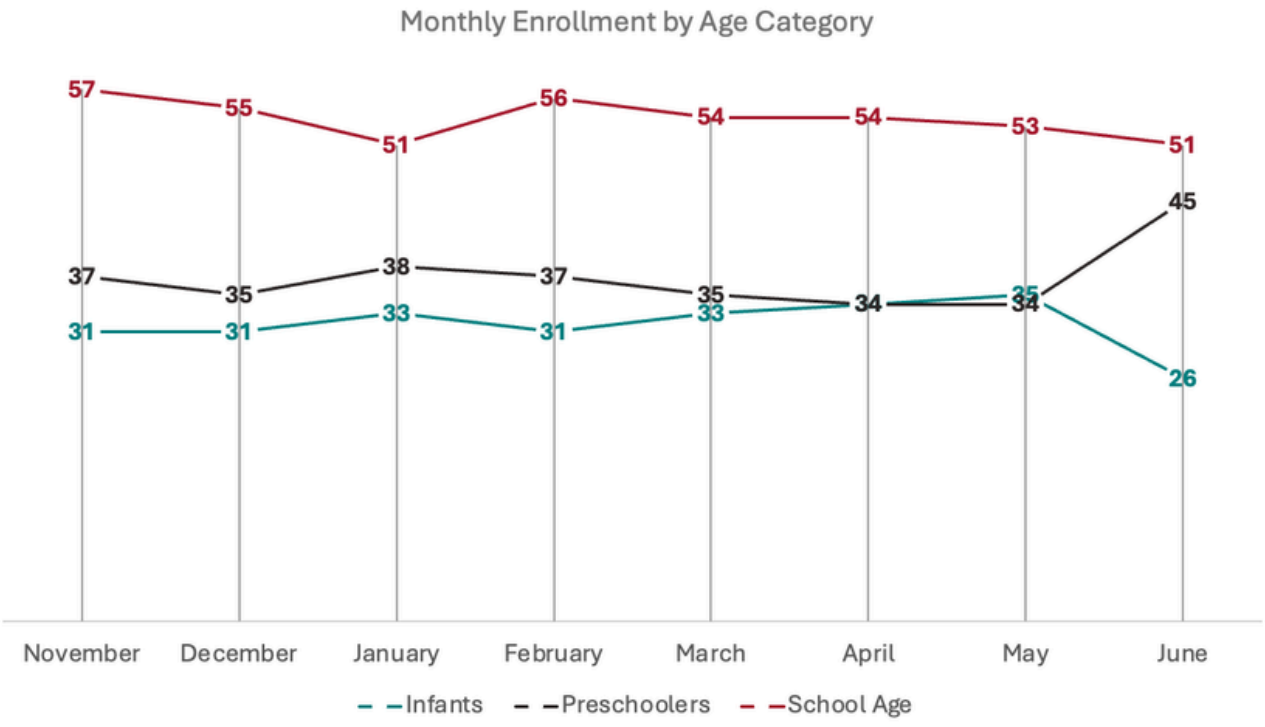
Provider enrollment was measured monthly throughout the program. At intake, all 20 providers had children enrolled in their child care program and by the end of the program, 19 providers had children enrolled. One provider moved to a new location and were waiting for licensing inspections before they could enroll or re-enroll families.

From November 2025 June 2026, enrollment was stable with very little variation from month to month. Overall, 75% (n=15) of providers increased or sustained their enrollment and 25% (n=5) experienced a decline. Providers enrolled more preschool-aged children over the project period, while enrollment of infants and school-age children declined. When enrollment was further examined by age group and full-time versus part-time status, seasonal fluctuations were evident, particularly during the winter holiday period and at the beginning of summer break. By the end of the program, providers had filled 53% of their licensed child care capacity, indicating substantial room for future enrollment growth.

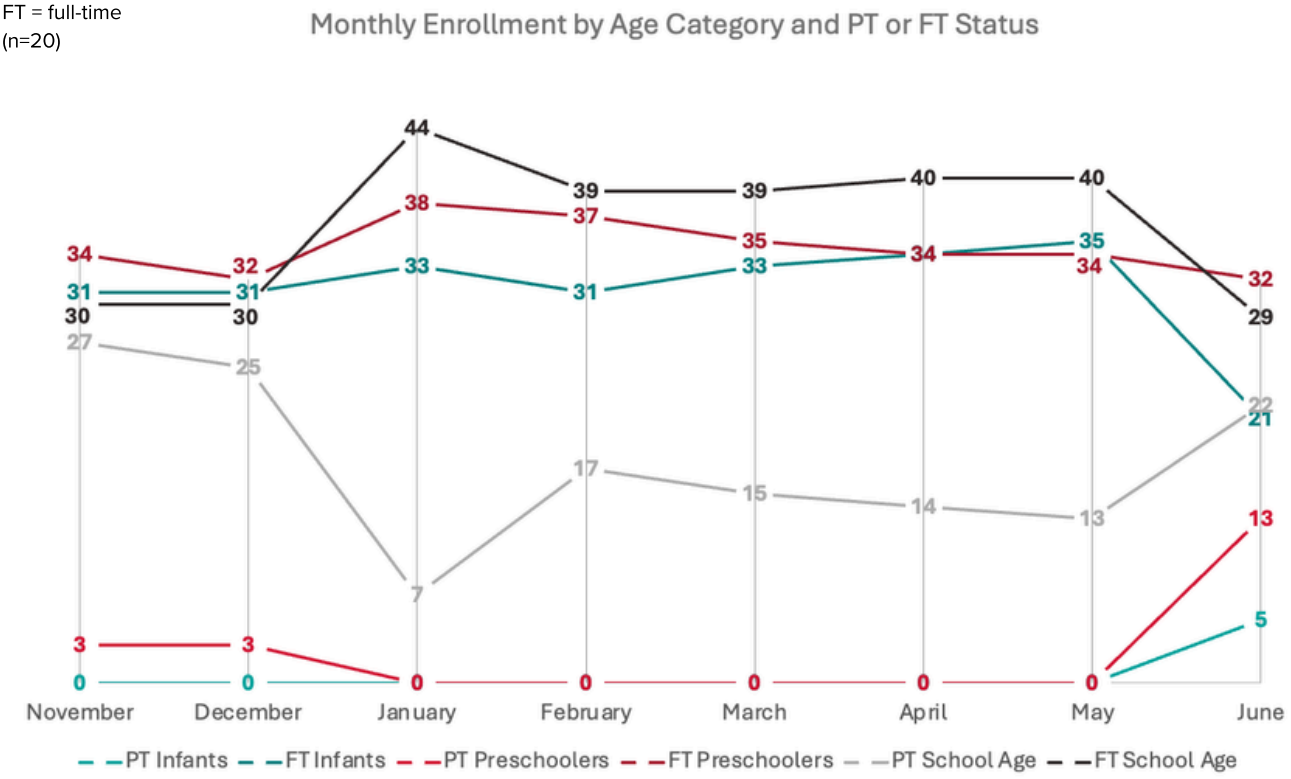
To understand the impact of enrollment on provider income, the average monthly tuition income was calculated at intake and at the end of the program using the maximum subsidy reimbursement rate for FCCs in San Diego County. Based on enrollment at intake, the average monthly tuition for providers is $5,193.91 and average monthly tuition based on enrollment at the end of the program is $4,936.56. The change in enrollment from intake to the end of program equated to a decrease in average monthly tuition income of $257.35.


Monthly Enrollment
Number of children currently enrolled.
Desired number of children provider would like to have enrolled.
232
232
125
121
122
124
122
122
122
122
November
December
January
February
March
April
May
June

n=20


Monthly Enrollment by Age Category
57
55
51
56
54
54
53
51
37
35
38
37
35
34
34
45
31
31
33
31
33
35
26
November
December
January
February
March
April
May
June
Infants
Preschoolers
School Age

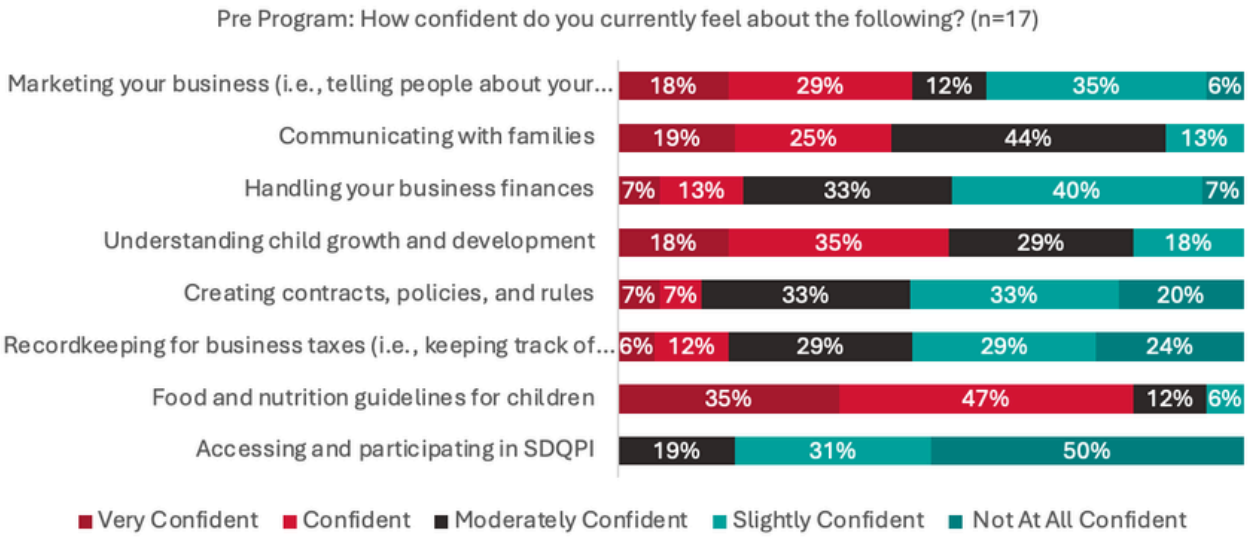
PT = part-time
FT = full-time
(n=20)

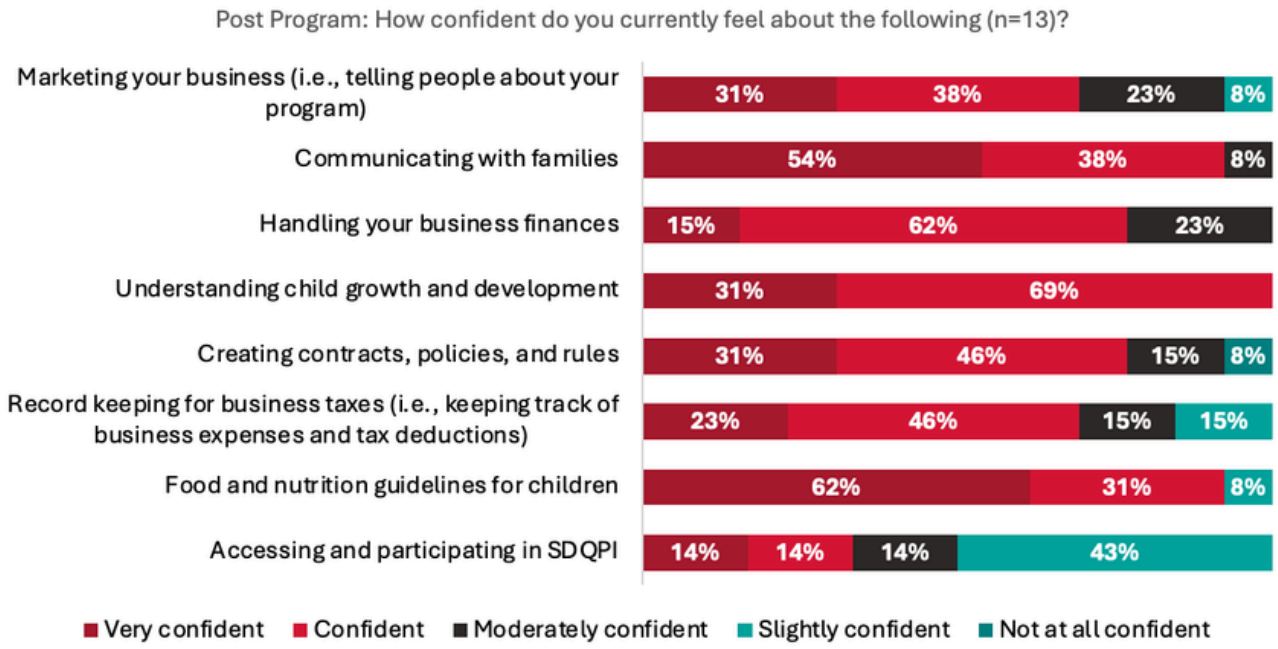


Provider Feedback

Provider Confidence

Providers were asked to rate their confidence in implementing business practices prior to the start of the program in the pre-survey and at the end of the program in a post satisfaction survey. Across all measured business practices, the proportion of providers who reported being "confident" or "very confident" increased by an average of 41 percentage points from the pre- to post-survey.





Provider Satisfaction

The post-program satisfaction survey assessed participants' satisfaction with STEPS and included open-ended questions about their experiences. Overall, providers reported high levels of satisfaction with the program. All respondents agreed or strongly agreed that STEPS helped them save time managing their business, increased their understanding of sound business practices, and improved their business operations.

Open-ended responses reinforced these findings. When asked how STEPS had impacted their business, seven providers described improvements in financial management and their ability to make informed financial decisions. Other commonly reported benefits included improved recordkeeping, stronger provider–parent contracts, and more effective communication with families. As one provider shared:

- *"The training was very important, especially getting training in one's own language. Also, the provider-to-parent contracts were very important to me because during the training, I would just get the children and didn't pay much attention to my responsibilities as a child care provider. I thought that I was watching children from my community, but STEPS taught me how to treat my child care business as a business."*

Providers also identified opportunities for future training and coaching. The most frequently requested topics were English language courses (n = 6), tax preparation and filing (n = 5), digital literacy (n = 5), and financial literacy (n = 4). Participants also expressed interest in more hands-on marketing instruction and suggested that the STEPS program be expanded to serve additional family child care providers.


Provider Satisfaction with STEPS (n=12)
The STEPS program has helped me find ways to reduce my business's expenses.
55%
36%
9%
The STEPS program has helped me increase my business's revenue.
18%
36%
36%
5%
The STEPS program has been helpful in terms of saving me TIME in the management of my business.
45%
55%
The STEPS program activities and resources have been helpful in increasing my understanding of best child care business practices.
45%
55%
The STEPS program has been helpful to my child care program's business operations.
55%
45%
Overall, I feel satisfied with the STEPS program.
50%
33%
8%
8%
Strongly agree
Agree
Neither agree nor disagree
Disagree
Strongly disagree



Conclusions

Key Findings

- 75% of providers increased or sustained their enrollment.
- The drop in enrollment from 125 to 122 children equates to an average estimated monthly tuition decrease of $257.35 (San Diego County maximum subsidy reimbursement rates were used for the calculation).
- 4 providers either completed or are in the process of completing the requirements for obtaining a large license.
- 85% of providers updated their child enrollment records based on what they learned in the STEPS program.
- 80% of providers updated their client contract based on what they learned in the STEPS program.
- All 20 providers completed a business plan and 17 applied for funding up to $3500 to support their child care business. At reporting time, grant approval was still pending, but a total of $25,860 will be awarded.
- All providers strongly agree or agree that the STEPS program saves them time in managing their business, has increased their understanding of best business practices and has helped their program's business operations.
- On average, 91% of providers strongly agree or agree that social support is beneficial to them as child care provider.

Recommendations & Reflections

Data Collection

- Qualtrics was used as the platform for collecting FCC-SASI data and the format used was not conducive to efficient data collection. The evaluator and cultural navigator worked together to complete the data using a spreadsheet-based approach. This iterative process provided valuable insights for refining future implementation. In future STEPS cohorts, the FCC-SASI should used as a spreadsheet-based index of business practices for goal-setting and cultural navigators can also add case notes to track when business practices are updated or implemented.
- The cultural navigator submitted enrollment data monthly, and enrollment for this cohort remained stable throughout the program period. While enrollment can fluctuate seasonally, particularly during holidays and the beginning or end of summer break, these changes can directly affect provider income. Although monthly data collection provides insight into enrollment trends and seasonal variation, quarterly data collection may be sufficient for future cohorts and would reduce the administrative burden on cultural navigators and providers.

- Qualtrics continues to be used to collect and manage intake data, survey data and end of program data. The platform is easy to use and the report feature can help the cultural navigator keep track of completed data. It is recommended that the evaluators continue to use Qualtrics and make further use of the report features.

- Rather than using a separate engagement plan, the cultural navigator documented completed goals and business practices within the monthly enrollment spreadsheet. IRC's internal client tracking system, was referenced when additional detail was needed to clarify completed goals or business practices. For future cohorts, a separate engagement plan may not be necessary, as the SASI can capture and monitor provider goals and progress.

- Twelve providers reported that they have volunteer staff who assist with their child care business. It is likely that many of the volunteer staff are family members such as a spouse or older children. Including a follow-up question in future cohorts to determine whether volunteer staff are family members would provide additional context about the role of family support in helping providers manage and sustain their businesses..

Program Implementation

- Following completion of the training series, the cultural navigator focused on helping providers develop a business plan and complete the application for the San Diego Foundation Early Childhood Grant. A comprehensive business plan provides a foundation for setting future goals and supporting long-term business growth. Findings from this cohort suggest that providers benefit from ongoing business coaching, continued training in their primary language, and access to business resources as they become available. If funding permits, providers should continue receiving business support through the SSA to sustain and strengthen their businesses.

- Providers from the Swahili cohort requested more trainings and continued coaching in digital literacy, financial literacy, and marketing. Post-survey results also indicated that 65% of providers do not have a budget. Future business coaching could include a hands-on training session to help providers build an operating budget that helps the provider understand the financial health of their child care business.

- During post-program data collection, providers were asked to report their weekly tuition rates. Several reported rates were double or triple the subsidy reimbursement rate, suggesting that some responses may have reflected monthly rather than weekly rates or may have been entered incorrectly. When providers were asked to review and correct their responses, many submitted the subsidy reimbursement rate they receive instead of their provider-set tuition rate. These findings indicate some confusion between the tuition rates providers establish for their businesses and the reimbursement rates paid by subsidy contractors. Future cohorts would benefit from training on setting tuition rates, understanding the difference between tuition and subsidy reimbursement rates, maximizing income through copayments, and understanding provider responsibilities related to collecting family fees.

- Child Care Management Systems help providers streamline their business practices. Future STEPS programs should consider requesting funding for CCMS subscriptions that allow the provider to use of features of the software for operating their business. Provider training on how to use CCMS would also benefit the providers.

In sum, evaluation data continues to show the efficacy of the STEPs approach to professional development for refugee family child care providers.

References

Garrity, S., Miller, S. (2025). "We need to try to go higher": An examination of Somali family child care providers' participation in a professional development program in the United States. Journal of Early Childhood Research, 1-18.

Garrity, S., Miller, S., Dunn, C., & Longstreth, S. (2024). “I help them see their potential”: The role of Cultural Navigators in Supporting the Professional Development of Immigrant and Refugee Family Childcare Providers. Early Childhood Education Journal, 1-13.