

# ECCS Liberty City Focus Group Report

## Miami Children's Initiative



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The Miami Children's Initiative (MCI) report documents key findings from a focus group held with the Liberty City Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems (ECCS) partners. The focus group aimed to gain an understanding of the community of focus, the Liberty City ECCS network, and the strategies established to reach the goals of the project.

### Community of Focus

Liberty City is a small neighborhood nestled in Miami, Florida with community members and agencies dedicated to removing obstacles that may hinder the growth of Liberty City, particularly the development of infants and young children residing in the community. Housing is a pressing issue for the families of Liberty City due to the high levels of poverty. Many families reside in overcrowded public housing units that make it challenging for parents to read to their kids as there is a lack of private areas for the parent and child to interact. In addition to crowded housing, community partners stated that families tend to frequently move within the city. Housing instability may take a toll on both on the child's mental and physical health, as well as the parent's ability to retain enrollment in social service programs.

*"The thought of them being able to read to a child, their home wasn't really ideal for that because if you're there and you're living with a family member and they also have children and their children are playing and they're loud, you don't necessarily feel comfortable speaking up and saying, 'Hey, I want to read over here.'"*

Violence also plays a huge role in the lives of residents of Liberty City. From a previous focus group conducted by MCI, many parents reported that they did not feel safe allowing their child

*"I know parents that will not let their children play outside... because they're afraid they're going to get shot."*

to play outside as a result of the ongoing gang violence. One mother reported buying an excessively large television to keep her children indoors. Community members wish to change this perception. MCI mainly offers programs for children of younger ages but is increasingly offering programs for older kids to prevent violence.

## **ECCS Network**

The Miami Children's Initiative, Early Steps, Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters, Nurse Family Partnerships, Early Learning Coalition, Help Me Grow, Head Start, The Children's Trust, and Federally Qualified Healthcare Centers such as Community Health of South Florida, Inc. and Jessie Trice were among the few community partners mentioned as part of the Liberty City ECCS network.

A strength of Liberty City is the willingness of its community members and agencies to assist in the growth of infants and young children in the community. Though community partners cannot offer time consuming services due to being short staffed, most community partners are enthusiastic and willing to engage in the process towards achieving the goals of ECCS. One stakeholder mentioned the inability to schedule meetings or participation beyond the planning stage to be a foreseeable challenge yet noted that implementing various methods such as subcommittees can increase engagement among community partners. The development of subcommittees will allow for community partners to participate in meetings that best fit the type of service they provide.

*"I think there is certainly willingness. Liberty City kind of ranks very high on that list. People know there's a great deal of need and opportunity here. People are like, "Yes."*

## **Goals and Strategies**

The preliminary goal of Liberty City is data sharing process and system alignment. The ECCS team hopes to gather information by determining the number of children in Liberty City who were developmentally screened via a completed Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ). The team plans to reach out to community partners such as Nurse Family Partnerships and the Early Learning Coalition as well as utilize information from Vital Statistics to determine: the number of children birth through age three in Liberty City, the number of children in childcare services who completed and did not complete an ASQ, and the children who are not receiving childcare services. This strategy will also reduce duplicate ASQ screening data.

Furthermore, Liberty City ECCS aims to improve family engagement to enhance early childhood systems. Community partners noted that Liberty City parents oftentimes felt judged for being recipients of multiple social service initiatives. Due to this perception, parents would not follow-up with agencies. Additionally, while engagement from parents during the planning stage of the ECCS impact project is present, there is an apparent discordance between parents of children in childcare settings and the reporting of their child's behavior. During a previous focus group, parents reported receiving updates of their child's performance only when there was a behavioral problem. Parents indicated feelings of agitation as a result of being asked to be involved in caring of the child solely when there was a behavioral concern. This became such an issue that parents were shocked when asked to name one positive attribute about their child. They continue to say that childcare services neglected to determine the root cause of the behavioral problem and would ask the parents to pick up their child to take them home as a solution. The parents expressed the difficulty of making the decision to pick up their child as it can result in losing their job. A loss of income could snowball into more complex social and financial concerns.

*"Nobody has asked us to tell them what's great and amazing about our child or what's the thing that I really like about being a parent?"*

*They were like, "Our world in Liberty City oftentimes we hear about our kids but it's through this negative lens of what they've done wrong."*

## Next Steps

The team plans to make intentional efforts towards data sharing, system alignment, and family engagement. By ensuring that each step is completed properly, the ECCS Liberty City team can develop and sustain lasting relationships to improve the well-being of children and families in Liberty City.

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