

The Oregon Child Care Alliance centers providers and their perspectives in its design, implementation and improvement.

Child care providers were integral members of the co-design team that developed the initial Alliance plan and are valued participants in the Alliance's ongoing advisory committee. Alliance coaches meet regularly with participating providers and amplify their voices by sharing their strengths and needs back to the Alliance team. Participating providers also have opportunities to share their insights and feedback through the ongoing Alliance evaluation.

This report summarizes key themes and insights from conversational interviews with 18 Alliance providers.

During these conversations, providers shared how they got started in child care, their business goals and strengths, and their experiences with the Oregon Child Care Alliance. All quotes are shared with permission.

“

I'm proud that I [started my business]. It's a lot to go out on your own and try something different. I'm proud that I can be part of the community and give back. I'm just happy to be doing something that I find a lot of joy in.

”



Oregon Child Care Alliance Provider Voices

Providers are benefiting from participation in the Alliance in meaningful ways.

The Alliance helps providers take important steps to stabilize and strengthen their businesses.

Participating providers are:

- **Gaining knowledge about their own businesses and how to manage them**
- **Strengthening their business policies and practices**
- **Seeing increased interest and enrollment from families**
- **Building capacity to expand or participate in other programs**
- **Gaining comfort with technology and technical skills**

Providers feel supported, confident, empowered and more professional as a result of participating in the Alliance.

Providers credit their coaches and peers with helping them **feel less isolated**, and the Alliance's training and tools with **validating, legitimizing and professionalizing their work**.

As a result, **providers are identifying as business owners, and recognizing the importance of their work and the value of their businesses to their families and children.**

Some describe how their business goals are evolving because of the confidence and understanding they are gaining through the Alliance. And others describe ways in which the Alliance is **empowering** them, helping them to dream big about their growth or to advocate for themselves and their peers.

“

I didn't realize how much there is to know... like I didn't realize I could ask people to pay me the month ahead. Now I can stand behind that and tell parents this is my policy, and it isn't out of nowhere.

”

“

There's a whole group of people who are ready to support you. I didn't feel like I was floating out here. Everyone has been welcoming and kind and wanting to help in any way.

”

“

Nunca pensé en tener yo un negocio pero estoy aprendiendo a ordenarme y tener Excel, ir bajando mis gastos.

*I never thought about having a business, but I am learning to organize myself and use Excel, and to lower my expenses.
(Trans.)*

”

Oregon Child Care Alliance Provider Voices

Alliance providers have diverse backgrounds. Many have great expertise in providing high-quality child care but little formal business training.

Some Alliance providers began their child care businesses to care for their own children or grandchildren. Others were formally educated in early childhood or opened their businesses after working in other child care settings. Given these diverse experiences, Alliance coaches must provide individualized, relationship-based, culturally-responsive support to meet providers where they are and help them move toward their individual goals.

“

En México terminé mi licenciatura en preescolar más no me titulé, hice mis cuatro años de universidad, después cuando me vine salí embarazada, me dediqué a la casa. Cuando me alivié de mi tercer bebé, una niña, fui a aplicar a un Head Start para ver si me la cuidaban pero descubrí que podía aplicar para trabajar ahí, duré cuatro años trabajando ahí, hasta que me decidí a hacer mi propio negocio

In Mexico I finished my degree in preschool but I did not graduate. I did my four years of university, then when I came to the U.S., I got pregnant and then got focused on my house. When my third baby, a girl, was born, I applied to a Head Start program to see if they would take care of my baby, but I discovered that I could apply to work there. I worked there for four years, until I decided to start my own business. (Trans.)

”

Alliance providers have strengths including creativity, patience, persistence and motivation.

Providers more easily identify their strengths as child care providers than as business owners. Providers describe themselves as patient, empathetic, persistent, organized, flexible, creative, kind but firm and consistent. They also see themselves as skilled at planning how to support children and are talented multitaskers.

When pressed to talk about themselves as business owners, some providers recognize that these skills could apply to managing their business as well, but most have trouble naming their business management strengths. There is an opportunity for coaches to help providers name, value and leverage their strengths as business owners.

Oregon Child Care Alliance Provider Voices

Alliance coaches play a vital role in supporting providers

Providers share enthusiastic gratitude for their Alliance coaches, appreciating their reliability, caring, encouragement, understanding, patience and hard work. Provider descriptions of their experiences demonstrate that coaches are building strong, trusting relationships with providers and how important this is to their sense of support, confidence and progress. This underscores the vital role that coaches play within the Alliance model.

“

[My coach] is great. She's been wonderful and just checking in to make sure we're doing alright. The accountability has been good for me. She gives us lots of praise and is always filling our cups. She says she's so proud of everyone, that we're amazing, strong women.

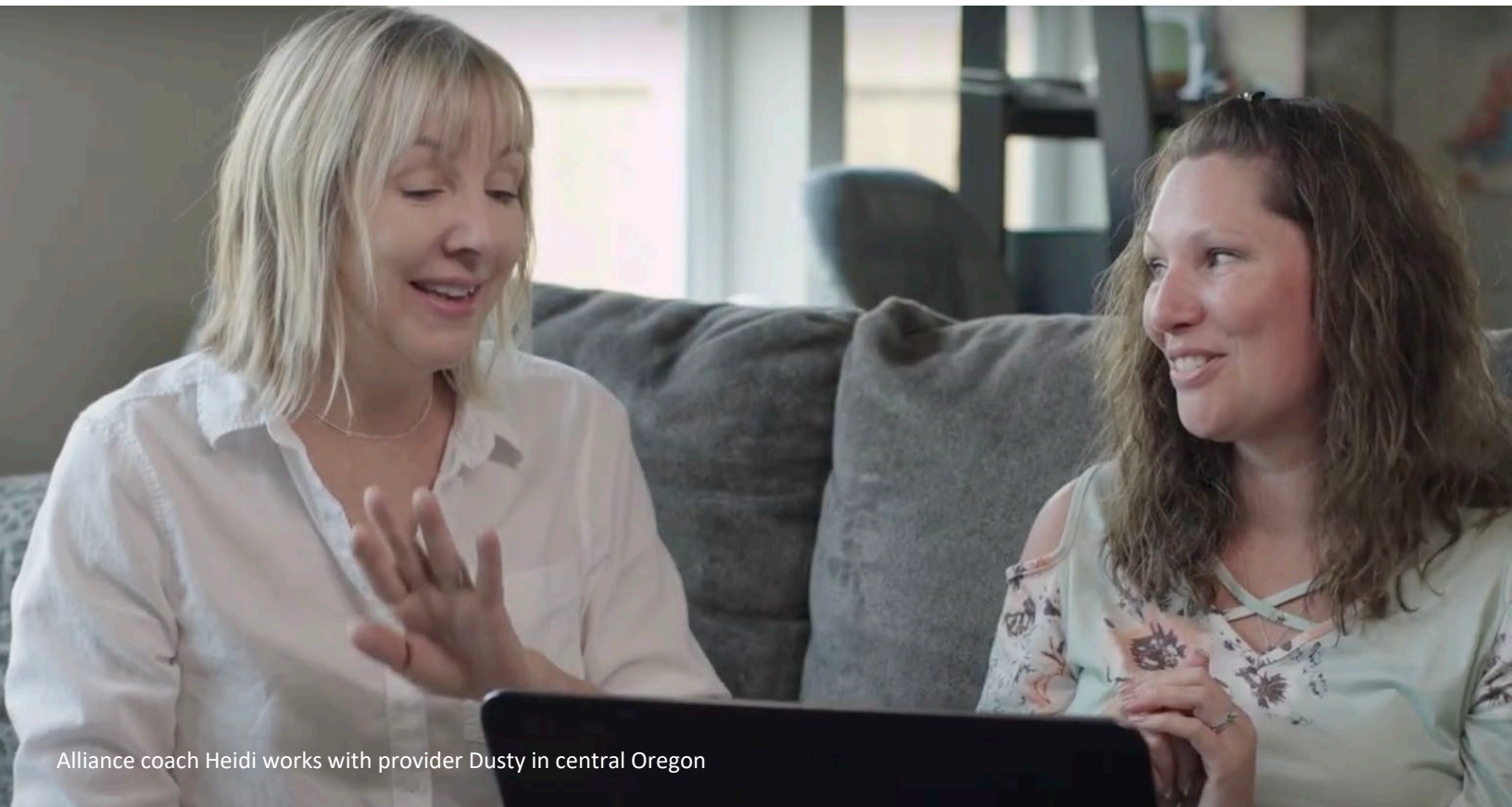
”

“

Yo le digo que ella es mi angel porque me dice lo que las otras personas que me prepararon para tener mi negocio no me dijeron.

I tell her she's my angel because she tells me what the other people who prepared me to have my business didn't tell me. (Trans.)

”



Alliance coach Heidi works with provider Dusty in central Oregon

Oregon Child Care Alliance Provider Voices

Finding time to work on business management is a big challenge for providers.

Most providers have full schedules and struggle to find time to do the often tedious work of business management. This is one of several reasons that many are not yet regularly using Wonderschool enough to see visible progress in their business finance, enrollment, etc.

Many providers also face barriers related to technology access, skill and comfort.

While many providers are gaining digital literacy and comfort with technology through the Alliance, many still lack the skills, confidence and/or the necessary hardware or software to effectively manage their businesses. Patient coaching, strong bilingual Wonderschool training, and Alliance investment in basic computer instruction are appreciated, but more and ongoing support will likely be needed for at least some providers.

Stabilizing and strengthening child care businesses takes time.

Alliance providers are making impactful changes in how they manage their businesses, but it takes time and ongoing dedication to develop new practices and habits. The rate at which providers make progress in learning about business management, using Wonderschool, and making data-informed business improvements varies greatly. Seeing lasting results of their efforts in the form of measurable financial gains will likely take years rather than months.

“

El mayor reto es el tiempo... No solamente lo digo por mí, cuando tenemos juntas con las demás compañeras, todos dicen lo mismo.

The biggest challenge is time ... Not only do I say it for myself, when we have had gatherings with other colleagues, they all say the same thing. (Trans.)

”

“

[La tecnología] no es lo mío, no sé si es falta de costumbre... Para nosotros es un reto, un dolor de cabeza, un estrés ...

[Technology] is not my thing. I don't know if it's a lack of habit... For us it is a challenge, a headache, a stress (Trans.)

”

“

I didn't have any business training. That's been the biggest turnabout for me – being more business oriented, having Zoom classes and meetings, it was hard to transition into that.

”

Oregon Child Care Alliance Provider Voices

“

El negocio no es de un año, esto está para ver frutos en el tercero, cuarto año ... Pienso yo, el primer año puede haber un poquito pero no es tanto. Hay que ir ahorrando, guardando, pienso que el otro año puede haber un poco más de ingreso.

The business is not about one year, this is to see fruits in the third, fourth year ... I think, the first year there may be a little but it is not so much. You have to save, I think that the next year there may be a little more income. (Trans.)

”

The Alliance team is incorporating provider insights and feedback into short- and long-term planning.

The Alliance is:

- Exploring who is most benefiting the Alliance and how to better communicate with providers about expectations and available supports to help set providers up for success.
- Further tailoring Alliance offerings to meet providers where they are and invest in the right kinds and levels of support (including increased investment in digital literacy and technology support).
- Working with coaches to develop trainings that leverage provider strengths and assets.
- Expanding opportunities for providers to spend time with one another in supportive peer networks, both regionally and Alliance-wide.
- Reconsidering what meaningful progress can look like and centering what matters most to providers (such as business identity development, confidence and sense of support).
- Shifting expectations for how long it might take for providers to stabilize or strengthen their businesses in lasting and measurable ways.

More about this report

A total of 18 child care providers participating in tier 2 of the Oregon Child Care Alliance were interviewed between October 2022 and January 2023. These conversations were intended to:

- Learn more about provider experiences with the Alliance, as well as their strengths, needs, and challenges more generally, and to understand the value that diversity of cultural, linguistic and human capital/strengths bring to the child care ecosystem
- Inform further Alliance implementation/development that is provider-centered and equity-driven
- Help communicate about provider experiences to similarly inform other support systems, structures and programs

This report summarizes what we heard and learned across these conversations. Any quotes included are shared with the permission of providers and kept anonymous to protect provider privacy. More information about participating providers or the questions asked is available upon request.

For more information, contact Kim Leonard, Sr Research & Learning Officer, Oregon Community Foundation – kleonard@oregoncf.org or Lisa Tynan, Alliance Director, Neighborhood House – ltynan@nhpdx.org