



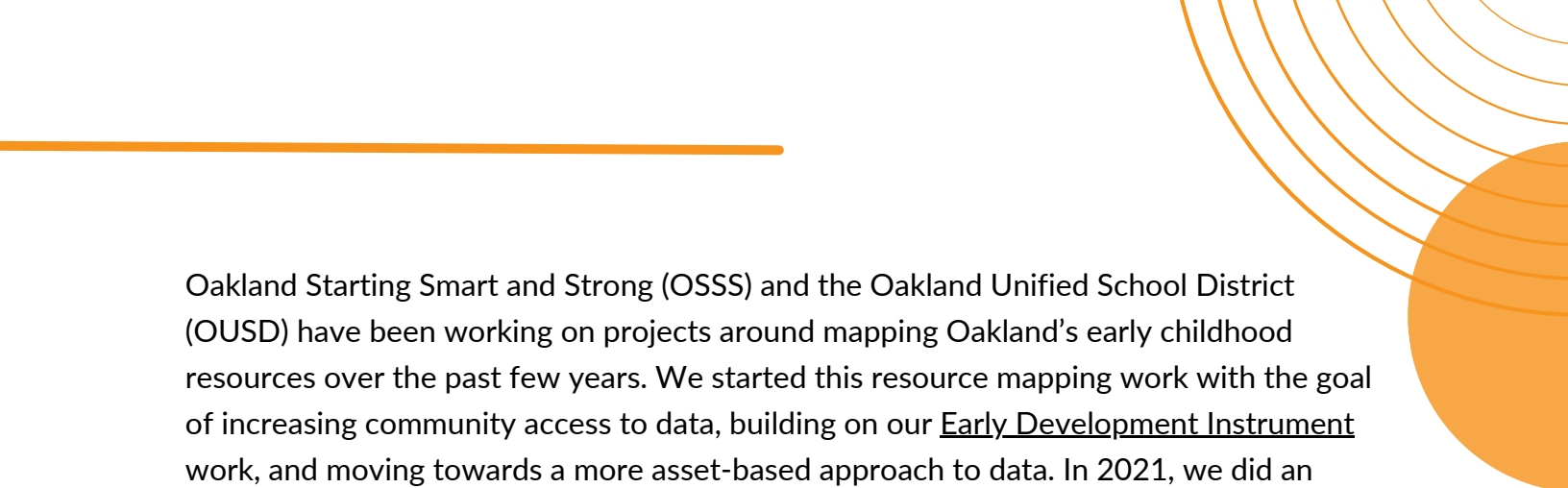
**Oakland Starting
Smart & Strong**

Supporting Family Navigators in Oakland

Considerations and Recommendations for
Improved Service Provision and Advocacy



2022



Oakland Starting Smart and Strong (OSSS) and the Oakland Unified School District (OUSD) have been working on projects around mapping Oakland's early childhood resources over the past few years. We started this resource mapping work with the goal of increasing community access to data, building on our Early Development Instrument work, and moving towards a more asset-based approach to data. In 2021, we did an ECEcosystem Zone Profile Project which resulted in zone/neighborhood profiles that centered parent feedback and perspective. This year, we conducted a project focused on family navigator needs and how to support those needs. Family navigators support families in finding resources to meet their basic needs, moving through public and non-profit social services systems, and addressing barriers families face in service provision.

Initially, we set out to explore how to create a map of early childhood resources to inform parents of early childhood services and resources in their neighborhoods. The focus shifted to navigators as they are in direct contact with parents and connect parents and families with the resources they need. We found that navigators are a critical part of the early childhood ecosystem and have an understanding of many different parent perspectives.

The purpose of the Family Navigator Project was to 1) examine and understand the family navigator role, 2) learn about the navigator experience, 3) identify challenges/benefits and needs related to locating resources for families and 4) develop considerations or practices to address those challenges. Over the course of the project, we interviewed 15 family navigators across seven organizations in Oakland. We also conducted informational interviews with agencies across Oakland, connecting with nine organizations in total:

- Alameda County Social Services Agency
- BANANAS
- Family Resource Navigators (FRN)
- First 5 Alameda County
- Lincoln Mandela Family Resource Center
- Lotus Bloom Family Resource Center
- Oakland Unified School District (OUSD)
- Parent Voices Oakland (PVO)
- Roots Community Health Center

After the interviews, we hosted an interactive workshop for navigators to present preliminary findings from interviews and get additional feedback. Through the interviews and workshop, navigators identified the main types of resources they connect families to and the tools and strategies they currently use to make the connections. The types of resources included: Housing; baby supplies (diapers, wipes, formula, etc.); childcare; healthcare/Medi-Cal; mental health resources; food assistance; early childhood education; domestic violence resources; cash assistance/CalWORKs; foster family resources; school supplies; information on schools from districts. Navigators connect families to those resources and services using the following tools and strategies:

Tools used to locate early childhood resources	Strategies used to locate early childhood resources
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organization level internal resource list • Online resource list/tool (e.g., one degree tool) • Joining listserv to receive monthly/weekly emails with resources/services • County level shared resource lists • Google searches 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Navigators already know places and direct contact from previous knowledge • Weekly internal meetings among navigators • Sending emails to other navigators when seeking or sharing a resource • Attend quarterly Navigator Network meetings to learn about new resources • There is a job role outside of navigator who helps find services



Navigators also shared the following challenges and benefits around tools and strategies used to locate resources for families:

Challenges with tools/strategies used to locate early childhood resources	Benefits of tools/strategies used to locate early childhood resources
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. It's difficult to keep internal lists up to date 2. All resources are not in one place 3. Navigator Network meetings conflict with other meetings 4. It's easy to miss emails if they are not recorded elsewhere 5. It's not useful to have too many tools/lists out there 6. Sometimes there is delayed follow up from Navigator Network meetings 7. Navigators don't have the time to update countywide resource lists along with internal lists 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. It's useful when tools/lists are organized by zip code 2. Internal meetings help navigators strategize and share resources 3. Email blasts are a quick and easy way to share current resources 4. It's useful to have someone outside navigator role to help find resources 5. The events list on Alameda Kids Directory tool has up to date information to share with families 6. Navigators learn about new resources at Navigator Network Meetings 7. Resource lists such as 211 and Alameda Kids are typically up to date

Our key takeaways based on conversations with navigators are that:

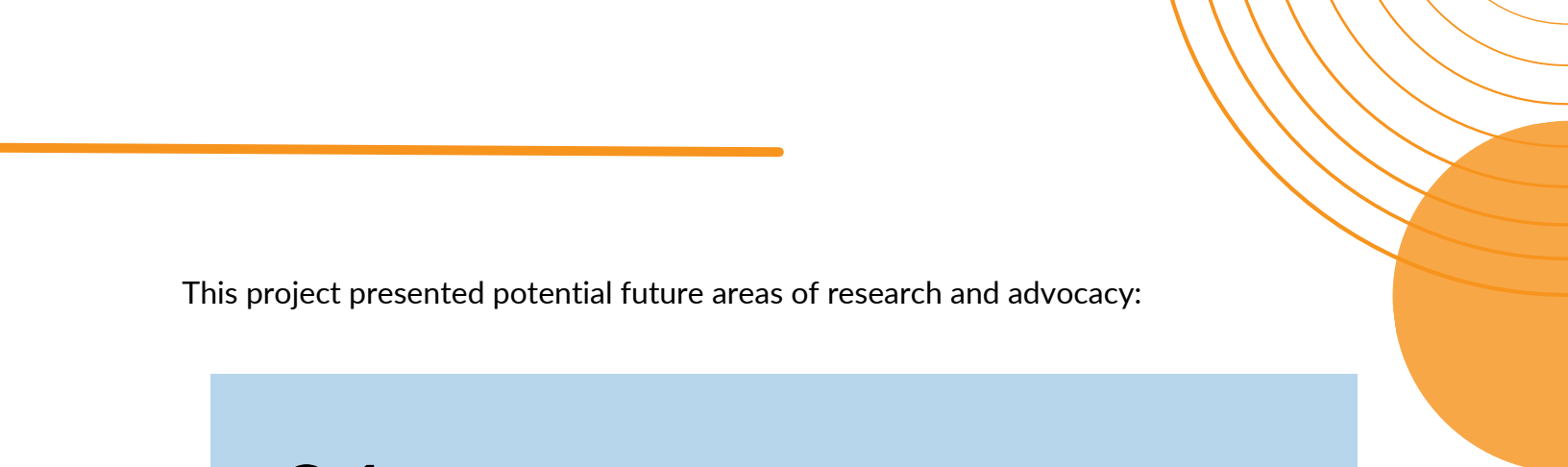
1. Navigators need accurate information on available services and resources that are updated in real time and in one place.
2. Navigators benefit from connecting with one another both at internal staff meetings and at the quarterly Navigator Network meetings convened by Alameda County Social Services Agency and First 5 Alameda County.
3. Navigators often benefit from working alongside a staff person who helps the navigators locate resources for families such as the Community Liaison at First 5 Alameda County or the Outreach Specialist at Roots Community Health Center.

Some navigators had different perspectives on certain topics. On the one hand, some navigators believed that having a separate staff person dedicated to finding resources for navigators would be very useful, especially for newer navigators who are less familiar with systems. On the other hand, some navigators indicated that finding resources is part of a navigator's job and they don't need additional assistance.

Based on our key takeaways, we developed some potential considerations and recommendations:

- There could be a **single tool/website that houses resources and services**. This would be most feasible by making improvements to existing websites/platforms, such as:
 - 211 - information and referral service that connects people to health and human services in their community.
 - Alameda Kids Online Resource Directory - online early childhood resource directory all resources are for children ages birth to 5 years and their families.
 - One Degree - technology driven nonprofit organization that helps individuals and families access the resources they need to improve their lives and achieve social and economic mobility.
 - Unite Us - platform that builds coordinated care networks of health and social service providers.
- Navigators should continue to have **resource and sharing opportunities like the Navigator Network meetings** so they can connect with one another and share information and social service providers.
- Navigators should have **access to support with finding resources if needed**. This could be a shared navigator outreach role that navigator agencies in Oakland could reach out to for help with locating resources.





This project presented potential future areas of research and advocacy:

01 One area is to examine ways to support navigators in advocating for families and address barriers they face and addressing systemic barriers that exist. In our conversations with navigators, we heard about how they often need to advocate for families to get particular services and cases in which they get different information from the state, county, and city agencies.

02 Another related area is how to ensure the family navigator perspective is incorporated into decision making. Throughout the project, there was active participation from navigators, they wanted to provide feedback and share their important perspectives.

03 Finally, it is important to explore how to center the parent perspective and understand and address their challenges and needs around early childhood resources and services.

Thank you to Semhar Gebrekristos for leading the project and writing this report in Winter/Spring 2022, to the interviewees and Family Navigators who shared their experiences, and to OSSS Lead Planning Team, the Oakland Family Resource Center Network, and to Alameda County's Navigator Network for their interest and support. To learn more about supporting family navigators, contact Dr. Trisha Barua, OSSS Policy Analyst, at trisha@oaklandsmartandstrong.org.

Questions & Information

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