



**ENSURING THE
SUMMER
THRIVE**

*Addressing the Needs of Children, Youth and Families
for Summer Opportunities in Alachua County*



YOUTH DEVELOPMENT
RESEARCH-PRACTICE PARTNERSHIP

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Suggested Citation:
Houchen, D., Wegner, C., Moss, S., Jackson, C., Brown, R., Staples, A., Alonso, J., & Bryant, B. (2021). Ensuring the summer thrive: Addressing the needs of children, youth and families for summer opportunities in Alachua County. Gainesville, FL. Youth Development Research-Practice Partnership.

WHO IS THE YDRPP?



**YOUTH DEVELOPMENT
RESEARCH-PRACTICE PARTNERSHIP**

THE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH-PRACTICE PARTNERSHIP

The Youth Development Research-Practice Partnership (YDRPP) is an interdisciplinary team of researchers and practitioners with expertise in areas related to education, child and youth identity development, health and wellness. We believe that putting research into action can shape outcomes so that every child, adolescent and young adult thrives.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thank you!

Completing this project, in the midst of a turbulent and somber time, with this team of passionate, dedicated experts was a joy and labor of love. Thank you to the parents, community members and child and youth service providers who guided our process and shared their stories, experiences, and aspirations for summer opportunities for the children and youth of this community. We are very grateful to Marnie Wiss, Osprey Editorial Services; Tracy Bachmann, Waymaker Communications; and John Gilreath, Civil Engineer, for their consultation and labor on this project. Each of you donated your time and expertise because you believe in this community and the value of summertime for children and youth. We thank you.

We thank the Children's Trust of Alachua County for trusting us with this important work and continuing to envision a thriving system for children and youth. We thank our families and the community who nourish us and bear the promise of the future with us.

*—Diedre, Christine, Chanae, Sunshine,
Addison, Rahkiah, Julian, and Brittany*

MEET THE YDRPP TEAM



**Brittany Bryant,
Research Assistant**

Brittany is in her final year of a bachelor's program in Family, Youth and Community Sciences at the University of Florida. She also serves as a research assistant with the YDRPP. She hopes, through her work, to create a village for students that can be a foundation for their success. This summer, as a McNair Scholar, she conducted research on Black parent empowerment, engagement and involvement with Drs. Kate Fogarty and Diedre Houchen.



**Rahkiah Brown,
Practitioner-Researcher**

Rahkiah is Manager of Educational Partnerships at United Way of North Central Florida. She believes in equitable systems of learning and care that promote positive youth development and aspires to see all youth and youth professionals thriving within these systems. Rahkiah has worked within the after-school and out-of-school-time community in Gainesville, FL, for 13 years in diverse roles ranging from student counselor to program director supporting both student and staff development. More recently, Rahkiah was selected as a cohort member of the 2020 National Afterschool Association Professional Learning Community for Emerging Leaders of Color, where she and 11 other out-of-school-time leaders from across the United States spent 7 months in an intensive program deepening their equity lens and developing strategies for creating change in their community.



**Diedre Houchen, Ph.D.,
Project Director**

Diedre is a facilitation and equity consultant and social scientist working at the intersection of community, education, and place. Diedre's career and vocation are fueled by a vision of all people, especially those that have been marginalized or excluded, having the right and responsibility to shape the public sphere so that it reflects collective ideals, aims and practices. Diedre began working with youth when she, herself, was a youth of 15 as a day-camp counselor at Camp McConnell's summer program (now known as Cuscowilla). Experiencing the vibrancy, healing potential, and agency of youth spaces, especially through community- and culture-centered youth organizing, kindled her career path as youth worker, advocate, teacher, scholar, analyst, and artist. Diedre is the postdoctoral associate at the UF Center for the Study of Race Relations, co-founder of the Black Parent Support Network and the founder of the YDRPP.



**Chanae Jackson,
Community-Based
Researcher**

Chanae's versatile professional experience, high ethical standards, and collaborative community engagement efforts make her a trusted resource for those she encounters. Chanae's commitment, dedication to collaboration, and entrepreneurial spirit are why her "brand" epitomizes compassion, credibility, and dependability. Chanae attained a bachelor's degree in psychology with a minor in business management from St. Leo University and is currently enrolled in the MBA program there. Upon completion of her MBA degree, she plans to seek a second master's degree from the Department of Family, Youth, and Community Sciences at the University of Florida. She is also certified in Organizational Leadership and Human Resource Management. Chanae has served her community in varied ways. As a co-founder of the Black Parent Support Network and Gainesville Raise Up, her goal is to bring awareness to current social issues, address existing gaps, and work to offer new solutions. Chanae dreams of a world where equity breeds true equality and heals our nation.



**Sunshine Moss, Ph.D.,
Methodologist**

Sunshine is an education consultant who collaborates with families, educators, schools, and community organizations to ensure all children in Alachua County have access to high-quality education. She cultivates partnerships to improve reading outcomes for children with disabilities and from under-resourced neighborhoods in the community. Sunshine holds a doctorate in special education with a minor in research and evaluation methodology. As a researcher, her work focuses on program evaluation and the effective implementation of literacy research and policy. As a teacher educator, Sunshine provides professional development on evidence-based literacy instruction and special education programs. She is a curriculum developer for the UF Literacy Institute and director of the Homeschool Resource Center, where she helps families identify, understand, and meet the unique educational needs of children with disabilities and other learning difficulties.



**Julian Alonso Restrepo,
Graduate Research
Assistant**

Julian, a native of Bogota, Colombia, is the Founding Director of the nonprofit international sport organization Audible Football Camp Corporation (AFC; audiblefootballcamp.org). Since its establishment in 2015, AFC has been dedicated to the grassroots and community-based development of American football outside of the United States. Julian completed his Bachelor of Arts degree in psychology and sociology at West Virginia University. He also holds a Master of Arts degree in sport management from Wingate University in North Carolina along with a graduate certificate in nonprofit management from the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. He is in his third year of a doctoral program in sport management at the University of Florida, mentored by and serving as a graduate research assistant for Dr. Christine Wegner. His research interests include sport for development, sport for social change, community sports, and youth-based sports.



**Addison Staples,
Practitioner-Researcher**

Addison, Executive Director of Aces in Motion, believes that every youth should live in a community that fosters their development (mind, body, and soul), creates opportunity for them to find their passions, and invests in an equitable system that prepares them for work and life. Addison has been working with youth for 20 years in a variety of capacities, including certified professional tennis instructor, collegiate tennis coach and international missions leader, and has also founded and worked for several nonprofit programs in under-resourced communities to improve quality of life and youth outcomes using interventions from the field of sports-based youth & community development. Addison has worked closely with the University of Florida on numerous research projects and partnerships and is an adjunct lecturer.



**Christine Wegner, Ph.D.,
Principal Investigator**

Christine is a lecturer in the Department of Sport Management at the University of Florida. Her goal is to use the power of participatory research and education to contribute to the well-being of our community. She has been an educator in some capacity for 15 years, teaching and/or coaching students aged 7 to adulthood. Her research examines how organizational and program inputs can help bring about positive social outcomes and change. She has worked with several out-of-school-time sport programs, conducting both program evaluations and assessments of capacity-building initiatives.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BACKGROUND AND AIMS

The mission of the Children’s Trust of Alachua County (CTAC) is “to fund and support a coordinated system of community services that allows all youth and their families to thrive.” Out-of-school-time (OST) programming is a critical component of this system. Summer OST programming provides supervision for children when parents are working as well as nurturing environments where children and youth build relationships, explore their interests and further experience what it means to be community citizens. Recognizing the importance of summer programming in community quality of life, the CTAC enlisted the help of the Youth Development Research-Practice Partnership (YDRPP), a collaboration of summer youth program providers, planning and methods researchers, and community activists and organizers housed in the University of Florida’s College of Health and Human Performance, to determine the needs of Alachua County families and identify gaps in the current system of summer programming. The YDRPP thus undertook the present assessment in order to ascertain the following:



What evidence-based attributes should CTAC-funded programs include to support both positive youth development and literacy?



What attributes should a system of CTAC-supported summer programming include in order to best meet the needs of Alachua County youth and families?



What geographical areas of the county are most in need of CTAC-funded programs?



What support could the CTAC offer to existing providers of summer programming that would help them more effectively meet the needs of Alachua County children, youth, and families?

METHODS

The YDRPP constructed a conceptual frame to guide the assessment of community needs, the identification of gaps in the current system of summer programming and the development of recommendations for the CTAC. The conceptual frame is organized to describe evidence-based practices for summer programming rooted in constructs scholars and practitioners identify as salient and effective, including *transformative learning and development*, *equitable systems*, and *thriving*. According to this framework, successful support of an equitable system that encourages transformative learning and development will allow Alachua County children and youth to thrive. This framework can also serve as a starting place for establishing a common language and evidence-based priorities among stakeholders in the summer learning and general OST community.

To identify what geographical areas of the county are most in need of CTAC-funded summer programming and what attributes these programs should have to best meet the needs of county families, the YDRPP conducted parent focus groups. To identify how the CTAC can best support local providers to improve the quality of and access to their programs, the research team surveyed summer-program providers. To further visualize the geographic distribution of existing programs, secondary data collection and GIS mapping of OST programs were also completed. Data collection relied on collaborative, iterative, evidence-based research practices that involved a variety of community stakeholders, families from all geographic areas in the county, and intentional recruitment of participants from traditionally underrepresented populations, including Black and dual-language parents, financially vulnerable families, and the LGBTQ community.

The YDRPP conducted six focus groups via Zoom in November and December of 2020 with a total of 35 parents and caregivers from all geographical regions of the county (using zip codes as a proxy for shared environmental circumstances). Focus group questions were carefully designed to allow parents and caregivers to share a thorough narrative of their lived experiences accessing summer programming for their children. Interested parents were asked to complete a short screening questionnaire regarding gender, race, income, and need for summer programs for children in grades K-8. Parents who did not have a current need for summer programming for their children were excluded. Using qualitative research methods, the research team analyzed the transcripts of all of the focus groups, extracting themes from each and synthesizing those into a summary of findings from across the groups.

To collect information about the existing ecosystem of summer programs in Alachua County, the YDRPP used a collaborative, iterative process to develop an electronic survey to administer to child and youth service providers. As no central repository of information about summer programs in the county exists from which to build a list of providers to approach for the survey, the team created

a secondary spreadsheet with data collected from information hubs (organizations that compile data for the public, including the Fun4GatorKids Website and the BOOST Alliance) and funding organizations (the United Way, CTAC, and the Community Foundation) on school-year OST providers, summer-program providers, and other youth-service organizations. The survey had several aims: 1) gather data regarding the locations, foci, and capacities of summer programs to enable an analysis of geographic, demographic, and content-area gaps; 2) understand the challenges providers face to deliver high-quality summer programs and what they need to increase capacity and inclusivity; and 3) identify the barriers providers face in applying for, receiving, and maintaining funding via the CTAC Request for Proposal (RFP) process.

A total of 51 providers who plan to offer Summer 2021 services completed the survey. The programs are predominantly located in Gainesville, and the majority serve mainly Black and Brown youth and those from families with lower socioeconomic status.

To create a more complete picture of the geographic distribution of youth programming throughout Alachua County, the YDRPP consulted with John Gilreath, a community-centered civil engineer, to analyze data from the secondary spreadsheet and provider survey using geographic information systems (GIS) mapping.

PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH PROCESS

6

FOCUS GROUPS

6 focus groups were conducted via Zoom in November and December of 2020.

35

PARENTS

35 parents and caregivers from all geographical regions of the county participated.

51

PROVIDERS

51 providers who plan to offer Summer 2021 services completed the survey.

FINDINGS

The primary findings to emerge from the triangulation of the data from parent focus groups, provider survey, and GIS mapping were as follows:

THERE IS NO CENTRALIZED SOURCE OF INFORMATION for either parents or funders regarding summer programming for children and youth in grades K-8. Both parents and providers expressed a need for such a source.

FAMILIES IDENTIFIED A LACK OF SYNCHRONIZATION between what they need and what programs offer.

ACROSS INCOME LEVELS, FAMILIES IDENTIFIED THE PROCESS of locating affordable quality summer programming as a major stressor.

FAMILIES WANT SUMMER PROGRAMS to offer environments where their children are safe, supervised, and cared for.

FAMILIES WANT STRUCTURED ENVIRONMENTS where their children enjoy learning.

ISSUES OF EQUITY PERMEATE FAMILIES' CONCERNS, with children with disabilities, children of color, and children in rural areas being in particular need of additional support.

PROVIDERS OVERWHELMINGLY STATED THAT FUNDING FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND PERSONNEL SUPPORT would be the most effective form of support for improving program quality.

PROVIDERS FURTHER SUGGESTED THAT FUNDING FOR ADDITIONAL MATERIALS OR STAFF OR THE PROVISION OF SPACE would allow them to increase their capacity (number of participants).

THE MAJORITY OF PROVIDERS DO NOT CURRENTLY PROVIDE ACTIVITIES OR ACCOMMODATION for children and youth with disabilities.

PROVIDERS WANT A SIMPLIFIED, MORE TRANSPARENT RFP PROCESS with one-on-one support for preparing for and completing proposal submission as well as completing the necessary reporting once they have received funding. This need is particularly urgent for smaller organizations.

RECOMMENDATIONS



The recommendations for the CTAC provided below are based on the conceptual frame and the findings of the parent focus groups and provider survey. They are organized by the specific aims of this needs assessment.

What evidence-based attributes should CTAC-funded programs include to support both positive youth development and literacy?

An important step in building a sustainable, equitable system of quality summer programming is to integrate the disparate visions of a variety of stakeholders into a shared vision for the community as a whole.

- ➔ The CTAC should construct a guiding evidence-based conceptual frame, using the frame provided in this report as a starting place, that specifies summer programming goals, standards, characteristics, attributes, and systemwide outcomes. Stakeholders, especially youth and vulnerable members of the community as well as families from diverse socio-economic and racial backgrounds and geographic areas, should be invited to participate in creating and adopting this framework.
- ➔ The CTAC should partner with literacy experts and interventionists in Alachua County to prepare providers to incorporate evidence-based literacy practices into a range of summer programming opportunities.



Partnering with literacy experts and interventionists will better prepare providers to incorporate evidence-based literacy practices into a range of summer programming opportunities.



What attributes should a system of CTAC-supported summer programming include in order to best meet the needs of Alachua County youth and families?

Families and providers report facing systemic challenges related to accessibility, affordability, and inclusivity across summer programming. Each of these factors impacts the ability to create an equitable system of summer programming for Alachua County.

- The CTAC should subsidize registration and other attendance fees for parents according to families' income levels and size. This subsidy could take the form of a sliding-scale for fees that takes into account family income, size, and number of siblings attending a particular program.
- In addition, the CTAC should create funding structures specifically designed for families with the lowest incomes, including developing a cadre of free, fully subsidized summer programs across Alachua County.
- The CTAC should support the expansion of existing organizations' services to accommodate more children per site and recruit new youth organizations to provide summer programming for children in underserved areas of the county.
- The CTAC should partner with organizations with expertise in working with children with disabilities to guide training, professional development, and infrastructure development to augment program staffs' capacity and adeptness with serving diverse children and youth and should provide funds to help providers adapt their infrastructure, environment, materials, and supplies to create more diverse and inclusive summer programs.
- The CTAC should offer professional development opportunities for administration and staff of child- and youth-serving organizations. Through these offerings, the CTAC could increase various organizations' capacities to provide a range of developmental and learning supports. Direct-service and administrative staff and volunteers should be paid for their participation in these opportunities.



What geographical areas of the county are most in need of CTAC-funded programs?

No agency in Alachua County is tasked with maintaining a comprehensive database of summer-programming services. Without these data, it is difficult to draw conclusions related to the geographic distribution of summer programs or the relationships between that distribution and demographic factors such as population density, income distribution, family size and transportation.

- The CTAC should collect data on child and youth services across the county, including age range served, activities provided, fees, capacity and location. The Trust should use this database to determine gaps in services and inform decisions about funding and other support.
- The CTAC should further use this database to provide a public-facing information hub for families seeking summer programming for their children. This hub should provide information on registration processes and fees, location, age range served, activities and other relevant details.



What support could the CTAC offer to existing providers of summer programming that would help them more effectively meet the needs of Alachua County children, youth and families?

Providers of child and youth summer programming identified a number of challenges that limit their ability to acquire funding to improve and expand their services and expressed the need for clear communication and scaffolded support regarding the processes of grant seeking, application, administration and evaluation.

- ➔ The CTAC should provide clear and sufficient information about the RFP process and application in a timely manner. Specifically, the Trust should consider offering a single internal point of contact regarding the RFP for providers and creating an easy-to-use, accessible submission process that provides adequate time between the notification of funding availability and the deadline for submission.
- ➔ The CTAC should ensure that funding criteria are explicit and the process is transparent, fair, and clearly organized. We suggest organizing the RFP around a conceptual frame for summer programming, as discussed above, both to better target funding to meet particular needs and to create a shared vocabulary about program attributes. In addition, the Trust should provide rubrics that define and elucidate the scoring process.
- ➔ The CTAC should provide technical assistance and grant education for providers to help them navigate the process, identify qualified budget items for grant funds and learn to create budget outlines that facilitate the writing of proposals that accurately reflect programming and help to clarify which funding opportunities are most appropriate.

CONCLUSION

This assessment of the summer-programming needs of children, families and providers in Alachua County makes clear there is much work to be done to fulfill the CTAC's mission. Following the recommendations provided in this report will require long-range strategizing and a long-term investment of time. In the short term, the CTAC can begin to address the findings in this report by funding increased access to affordable summer programs for Alachua County residents. Ultimately, building an equitable, accessible, affordable, inclusive system of summer programming that supports transformative learning and development will significantly contribute to the ability of children, youth and families in our community to thrive.

WHY CONDUCT A SUMMER NEEDS ASSESSMENT FOR ALACHUA COUNTY?

QUALITY OUT-OF-SCHOOL TIME HELPS CHILDREN THRIVE

Children and youth need support outside of the classroom to maximize their quality of life and optimize their ability to function in society. One potential source of such support is out-of-school-time (OST) programming, or the delivery of services during the hours in which school-age children are not in school. During OST, children can be engaged in learning experiences other than those mandated by the national and state curricula and programming accountability is not tied to high-stakes testing. In particular, OST programming during the summer offers children, youth, and communities the opportunity to engage in supplemental learning and growth over an extended period, especially in areas that are not the focus during the school year. The disruption in learning caused by COVID-19 over the last 10 months has heightened the importance of summer programs for 2021, particularly given the widespread lack of programming in 2020.

Recognizing the importance of summer programming to child and youth development, the Children's Trust of Alachua County (CTAC) aims to support a countywide system that makes such programming available to all families. However, the absence of both a robust central repository of data describing the county's current OST summer programming landscape—i.e., the types and capacity of programming currently available—and knowledge about the specific needs of Alachua County children and youth, families and providers inhibits the CTAC's ability to make funding decisions that align with the Trust's vision to facilitate equitable access and opportunities for all children and families in Alachua County to ensure that every child reaches their maximum potential.

In order to better understand the current landscape of and needs for summer programming in the county, the CTAC enlisted the help of the Youth Development Research Practice Partnership (YDRPP), a collaboration of summer youth program providers, planning and methods researchers, and community organizers housed in the College of Health and Human Performance at the University of Florida.

The YDRPP undertook the present assessment related to K-8 summer programming in order to ascertain the following:

- What evidence-based attributes should CTAC-funded programs include to support both positive youth development and literacy?
- What attributes should a system of CTAC-supported summer programming include in order to best meet the needs of Alachua County youth and families?
- What geographical areas of the county are most in need of CTAC-funded programs?
- What support could the CTAC offer to existing providers of summer programming that would help them more effectively meet the needs of Alachua County children, youth, and families?

Out-of-school-time programming during the summer offers children, youth, and communities the opportunity to engage in supplemental learning and growth over an extended period, especially in areas that are not the focus during the school year.



FRAMING SUMMER OPPORTUNITY

DRAWING ON RESEARCH TO SUPPORT PROGRAMMING THAT HELPS CHILDREN AND YOUTH THRIVE

A robust, accessible system of structured and safe summer programming is foundational to a community's well-being. Such a system enables children, youth, and their families to thrive by providing supervision for children when parents are working as well as nurturing environments where children and youth build relationships, explore their interests and further experience what it means to be community citizens. With the spectrum of potential summer learning opportunities comprising a vast array of activities—from family trips to solo explorations of backyards, twilight campfires at overnight camps, and days filled with group activities at the neighborhood camp—determining the most effective strategy for meeting the learning and developmental needs of children and youth ages 6-18 years¹ can be challenging.

In order to identify evidence-based attributes that CTAC-funded programs should include to support both positive youth development and literacy, the YDRPP constructed a conceptual frame to guide this assessment (see Summer Learning Conceptual Frame on page 13). A conceptual frame is a visual representation of the relationships among the ideas, approaches, and theories relevant to the topic being explored. Conceptual frames thus have the potential to create a shared language that enables dialogue among practitioners, scholars, policy makers, families, and community members. The present conceptual frame draws from scholarship on child and adolescent development, OST programming, summer academic learning, and equitable system development to provide an overarching, evidence-

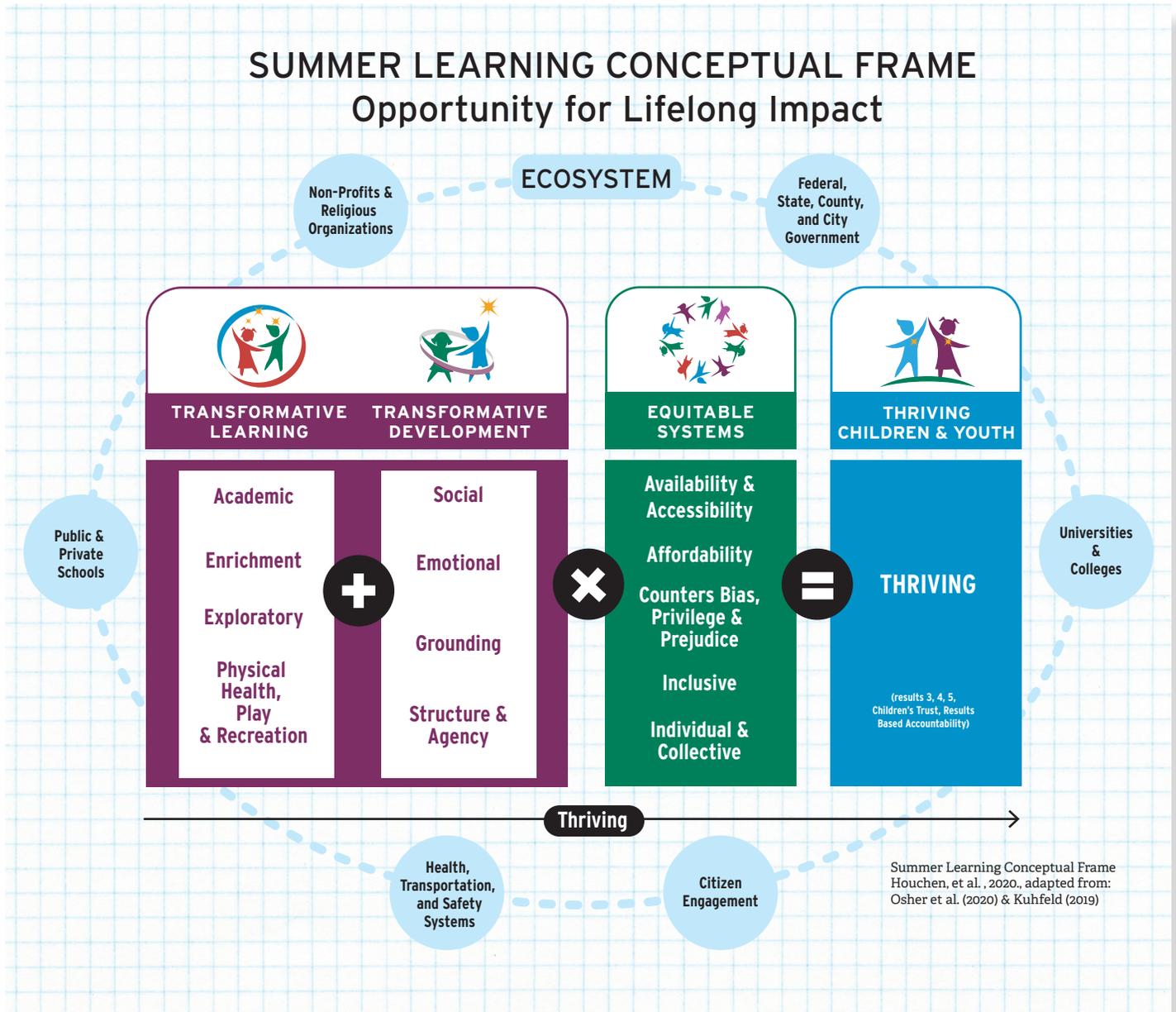
based framework for understanding and supporting summer programming in a particular community. It is organized around constructs scholars and practitioners have identified to be both salient and effective, namely, *transformative learning and development, equitable systems, and thriving*. According to this framework, supporting an equitable summer programming system that encourages transformative learning and development will allow Alachua County children and youth to thrive. We revisit this conceptual frame in our recommendations as a model for the CTAC's future work.



Robust, accessible, structured, and safe summer programming enables children, youth and their families to thrive all year-round.

¹We note that both summer and other out-of-school-time (OST) programs often include children as young as 5 years old.

FIGURE 1





For children and youth, every experience presents an opportunity to learn and develop. Adults who support children and youth within an ecosystem of families, kinship networks, youth-serving and civic organizations, and community groups have the responsibility and opportunity to shape what children and youth are exposed to and ultimately learn through the range of positive experiences we provide.² Summertime presents an opportunity for children and youth to optimize their learning, develop social and emotional competencies and strengthen a positive sense of identity in relationship to the world that surrounds them. Given the absence of formal school schedules and assessment measures, providers of summer learning programs have the opportunity to structure this learning in innovative, fun, and exciting ways. However, positive growth and development require an intentional framework that draws on cognitive and social science as well as evidence-based practices related to organizational development and system building.

Ecosystems that are intentionally constructed to build and optimize children and youth's cognitive, social, and emotional competencies and to enhance their ability to make meaning of experiences have the potential to transform how children and youth interact with the world. This section draws on research and scholarship to discuss the types of experiences that might accomplish these goals for the Alachua County community. These experiences would ideally be available in various forms across diverse individual summer programs that, combined, would provide a breadth of opportunities available to all children and youth progressively as they age and cumulatively as experiences repeat over time.

ACADEMIC



The evidence from studies related to children and youth's academic progress suggests that summer learning loss is a complex, yet not inevitable, phenomenon. Although the typical student demonstrates a loss of 1 to 2 months of academic knowledge in reading and a loss of 1 to 3 months of academic knowledge in math, there is wide variation

regarding how children fare across grade level, course, and demographic. Recent research suggests that the strongest predictor of whether a student experiences learning losses is the size of the academic gain made in the previous year. In short, the more children learn in one academic year, the more likely they are to lose ground over the summer. Children who attend higher-poverty schools are especially vulnerable to summer learning loss.

Academic summer programs provide children and youth with experiences designed to improve their success in school, as evaluated by standardized achievement tests. Programs that support students' success in school most often are organized by grade level, target specific subject areas (e.g., reading, mathematics, science), and have a set curriculum. Some summer academic learning programs, particularly those provided by school districts, are specifically designed to provide opportunities for remediation of academic skills from the prior year. These programs may be voluntary or mandatory. Other programs provide a structured academic experience that supports a wide range of school-related subjects and skills.

One area of need in many communities, including Alachua County, is academic literacy support. In addition, a regression in reading skill during the summer is a concern for many children. Literacy-based academic summer programs are one way that communities provide critical support for children and youth who struggle to read. Programs can range in intensity and duration depending upon the needs of the student. The most effective summer literacy programs provide intensive, explicit one-on-one or small-group instruction designed to meet the learner's individual needs. They typically have highly trained staff and utilize assessments to drive instruction. Summer literacy programs that use evidence-based practices offer students, particularly those with disabilities and/or from families with lower incomes, a unique opportunity to receive the targeted instructional support they need to become fluent readers—support they may not have received on a regular basis during the school year.

Community-based literacy learning programs that are located outside of schools provide a rich opportunity to meet children's needs in a way that encourages engagement with the broader community, builds on each child's strengths, and situates literacy as a matter of civic importance. In addition to the instructional practices mentioned above, evidence-based practices for these programs include providing children with authentic opportunities to read and write (e.g., drama, dance, music, singing, poetry), supporting the development of positive identity related to literacy, and utilizing innovative instructional approaches that teach children, not only how to read, but also how to use literacy as a tool for democracy and civic engagement. Community-based programs are uniquely situated to provide rich and practical multigenerational and interdisciplinary literacy opportunities beyond what is typically available in schools.

² The term *children and youth* is used throughout this report to denote the population of Alachua County residents aged 6-18 years, to whom this report applies. Childhood is typically used to describe the developmental phase that occurs between the ages of 3 and 10, and youth, or adolescence, is typically used to describe the phase that occurs between the ages of 11 to 17.

ENRICHMENT



Enrichment activities and programming broaden children and youth's knowledge of the world across many facets. They can include science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics (STEAM) education; music and fine arts education; foreign-language education; environmental education; career counseling; and volunteer and community-involvement opportunities. Enrichment opportunities allow children and youth to learn broadly and build background knowledge. The inclusion of enrichment opportunities in OST in general, and in summer programs more specifically, is particularly vital to support learning and development in children and youth from economically marginalized families.

The building of background knowledge is essential for the development of literacy. Adequate background knowledge related to the subject of a reading or writing assignment is necessary for children and youth to be able to choose among multiple meanings of words, make inferences, take in and make sense of new information, and remember the material. Essentially, the more background knowledge a student has, the easier it is for them to read, understand, and retain new material. Research suggests that the association between socioeconomic status and differences in vocabulary and comprehension could be related to differences in background knowledge. During fall, winter and spring, children spend most of their days within the confines of school. Summer programs that offer community-based enrichment opportunities allow children to acquire critical background knowledge that enhances their literacy skills and overall development trajectory.

EXPLORATORY



Exploratory learning, in the present context, denotes learning achieved through intensive exploration of one or more subjects. This type of learning is premised on the idea that experience is the most meaningful source of

learning and development. Exploratory programs offer children and youth the opportunity to engage in active inquiry, decision making, and problem solving. The activities involve ongoing transactions between an individual and their environment. Programs that provide a meaningful space for deep learning foster development and help children acquire knowledge and skills that are transferable to other aspects of their lives. OST, particularly in the summer, offers a unique opportunity to target a particular area of knowledge and immerse participants in an experiential space of deep exploration.



Summer literacy programs that use evidence-based practices offer students, particularly those with disabilities and/or from families with lower incomes, a unique opportunity to receive the targeted instructional support they need to become fluent readers—support they may not have received on a regular basis during the school year.

PHYSICAL HEALTH, PLAY, AND RECREATION



Physical health, play, and recreation are related concepts involving the engagement of children and youth's active dimension and bodies in the service of joy and fun, physical activity, and health. Studies have found that

children and youth tend to gain weight at a higher rate over the summer due to seasonal differences in access to school-based nutrition and physical activity. In addition to its well-known health benefits, physical activity has also been found to positively impact the physical, psychosocial, and psychological well-being and development of children and youth. Yet despite the beneficial contributions of sport and physical activity to health and development, access to and opportunities for participation in such activities are not evenly distributed among all subpopulations of children and youth. Children from low-income communities are physically active at nearly half the rate of children from wealthier areas, girls are less physically active than boys, African American and Hispanic youth are less likely than their peers in other racial and ethnic groups to be physically active, and children and youth with disabilities are 4.5 times less active than their peers.

OST programs that target physical activity and sport can mitigate discrepancies in access and opportunity while providing structure, programming, and environments that facilitate learning and life skills. Along with improvements in health and development and enhancement of life skills, such programs afford children and youth opportunities to learn about themselves and their relationships with peers and engage in their community.

SOCIAL



Social learning, or learning about how to interact with other people, is a core component of child and youth development. Social competencies include the abilities to care and show empathy, cooperate, resolve conflict, and contribute to the group. These competencies are inextricably linked to children and youth's cognitive and mental development. Children and youth learn with and from each other and with and from the adults who support them. But in order to learn and develop, children need to experience physical, emotional, and intellectual safety. In summer programs, adults create and maintain the conditions necessary for social learning, and their support and modeling as well as their relationships with and connectedness to participating children and youth are crucial for healthy social learning to occur.

EMOTIONAL



Emotional development is related to children and youth's emotional responses to people, things, or situations. As with social competencies, children and youth develop emotional competencies individually and in community with others. Components of emotional development include self-awareness, motivation, self-efficacy and a sense of confidence and competence in a group or social context. Emotional development is also associated with a child or youth's metacognition and their ability to set goals and exhibit personal responsibility. Summer programs that provide children and youth with ample opportunity to develop confidence and motivation and allow for the opportunity to set goals and exhibit competence within the structured activities support children and youth's healthy emotional development. Adults who serve in leadership roles become powerful models and instructors of emotional skill development for children and youth.

GROUNDING



As children move into adolescence (around 10 years old), developing a sense of who they are, known as grounding, becomes an important developmental task. Grounding is related to children and youth's sense of identity, meaning and purpose and of their role in the larger community. During this period of development, children and youth consolidate "attitudes, ideological and cultural beliefs, values, career goals, and life aspirations" (Osher et al., 2020, p. 13). They begin to shape a sense of meaning and purpose regarding their relation to and place in the world that includes their career, vocational, civic, and religious/spiritual aspirations. Positive identity development is particularly beneficial for children and youth from minoritized racial groups. For children of color, a positive racial identity buffers against prevalent stereotypical images, messages and oppression related their racial group. Further, a positive racial identity has been found to positively impact the academic and socio-emotional well-being of children of color. Summer programming that supports healthy grounding in sexuality and gender, racial, ethnic,



Children thrive through the range of positive experiences provided to them.

cultural, religious, and disability-related identities helps children and youth learn to see themselves as positive actors who contribute to a world that is ever changing, thus enhancing their ability to thrive and flourish.

STRUCTURE AND AGENCY



Children and youth benefit from age-appropriate opportunities to experience intentional structures designed for learning and development as well as those that foster individual and collective agency. Structure is an intentional arrangement of experiences and opportunities. Agency is the capacity to exert one's power to meet life's demands and challenges.

Summer programs construct, refine, and maintain daily, weekly, and summer-long structures that support children and families as they prepare for each day's engagement and as children transition through the daily schedule. The structure of a summer program includes the management and allotment of staff; daily, weekly, and seasonal schedules; the schedule of daily activities; the overall program components and the rationale underlying these choices. An organized structure allows children and youth to expect and process each activity, which may allow them to engage in that activity more fully. Structure also allows families to properly prepare for the activities and events of the program.

Within these organized structures, effective summer programs can also provide supportive environments for children and youth to exercise choice and develop decision-making skills. In such environments, participants develop a sense of agency as they partake in activities, explore, learn, and contribute to the collective experience. Youth, in particular, benefit from opportunities for taking on leadership roles and collaborating in program design, planning, and decision-making.



EQUITABLE SYSTEMS

AVAILABILITY AND ACCESSIBILITY



One measure of the effectiveness of a system designed to support children and youth is the degree to which it affords equitable access to programming along the continuum of human ability and experience. Factors such as hours

of operation, fees, transportation, accommodations, and food availability influence the degree to which summer programs are accessible to particular children and families.

Research indicates that children from economically disadvantaged families and higher-poverty communities lack access to summer programs that are both affordable and effective. Residents of rural communities face additional barriers related to transportation to and from summer programs. They often live in communities with limited or no public transportation, and their transportation costs tend to be higher than those for urban residents. Families with a disabled child also struggle with access to OST programs, finding themselves limited primarily to programs that serve only disabled participants.

Accessible programs are engaging for children and youth and meet the needs of families in the community. Strategies for increasing accessibility include ensuring programming hours that are adequate to meet the needs of working parents/caregivers (full-day and flexible program hours), offering transportation and meal services to participants, and creating inclusive environments that support the needs of children and youth across a broad range of abilities and racial, gender, sexual, religious, and cultural identities.

A final, foundational factor of a system's accessibility is public awareness of the summer programs available. Information about summer offerings should be provided to families in easy-to-read formats and be disseminated using familiar, routine channels of communication.

AFFORDABILITY



The affordability of summer programs is, of course, closely correlated with what families are able to pay for summer programming. Cost is the most common challenge parents face in securing summer care. Given the range of family size and income levels across Alachua County, a systemwide structure that supports affordable summer programs for all is imperative if CTAC is to fulfill its mission of encouraging all children and youth and their families to thrive. Such a structure is especially critical for children from low-income families who might not otherwise have access to educational resources throughout the summer months and for children who struggle academically and would benefit from additional time to master academic content.

COUNTERS BIAS, PRIVILEGE AND PREJUDICE



Unfortunately, bias, prejudice, racism and privilege are endemic to modern life and institutions. Bias, privilege and prejudice occur in accordance with social identity such as race/ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and disability and with economic background. Community members with nondominant social identities/locations often encounter oppressive systems and mechanisms of control that limit their ability to achieve social mobility or voice their own reality. Countering systemic bias, prejudice, racism, and privilege to produce a community in which all residents can thrive requires historical awareness and a commitment to effecting long-term change. Such change must involve intentionally addressing oppressive conditions and building individual and community assets to create conditions that support overall well-being. To be successful, any effort to change a system in this way must create environments where people are meaningfully involved in developing and implementing the institutional policies and practices that impact their lives. Countering bias, privilege and prejudice in youth summer programming, then, means repairing and establishing systems to ensure fairness, inclusiveness, and support for all members of the community. An equitable system eliminates formal and informal barriers to access, participation and inclusion; precludes the lowering of expectations and standards of practice for youth and families from minoritized social, cultural and racial groups; and actively supports those children and families who need it most.



INDIVIDUAL/COLLECTIVE

Children and youth develop both individually and collectively. Adults who support children and youth have enormous potential to positively shape their development by intentionally creating an equitable, diverse ecosystem that provides a variety of opportunities for them to learn and grow as individuals while contributing to the collective whole. Summer programs should model warm, caring, culturally inclusive communities of practice that embrace and foster diversity and address individual and collective social challenges. This approach enriches each learner by fostering connections to others and the world.



THRIVING YOUTH AND CHILDREN

All children and youth contain within them the potential to meet physical, emotional, mental, academic, economic and social goals and to flourish as individuals and within community. When children and youth have the support they need to develop and maintain grounding within their identities and take agency over their life choices, they are able to meet these goals and thrive. The concept of thriving is derived from an ecological, systems-based perspective in which communities create the conditions necessary for positive intervention in the lives of children and youth and a process for eliminating or buffering risk through culturally competent, strength-based, trauma-informed processes that supports each child and youth's well-being.



METHODOLOGY

To identify what geographical areas of the county are most in need of CTAC-funded summer programming, what attributes these programs should have to best meet the needs of county families, and how the CTAC can best support local providers to improve the quality of and access to their programs, the YDRPP conducted parent focus groups and surveyed summer-program providers. To further visualize the geographic distribution of existing programs, secondary data collection and GIS mapping of OST programs were also completed. In undertaking these data-collection processes, the YDRPP relied on the following core practices:

Assembly of a core research team whose members held knowledge as summer youth program providers (Dr. Diedre Houchen, Addison Staples, Rahkiah Brown), planning and methods researchers (Drs. Sunshine Moss, Christine Wegner and Diedre Houchen and Julian Alonso), and community organizers (Chanae Jackson, Brittany Bryant); continuous engagement of all team members; and use of consensus in decision making.

Use of iterative participatory processes, including the involvement of select, representative community members, in planning and method checking.

Inclusion of underrepresented populations in research design and participant outreach, including intentional recruitment of participants in all geographic areas, outreach to Black and dual-language parents, financially vulnerable families, and the LGBTQ community.

Participant validation, i.e., providing a summary of findings to focus-group and survey participants and inviting their feedback to ensure that the findings adequately captured their perspectives.

Triangulation of three data sources: parent focus groups, quantitative data from information hubs, and a provider survey.

Iterative dialogue with the CTAC to ensure data would yield usable results.

FOCUS GROUPS

To assess the needs of parent populations across Alachua County, we conducted a series of focus groups designed to allow parents and caregivers to share a thorough narrative of their lived experiences accessing summer programming for their children. During November and December 2020, we conducted six focus groups with a total of 35 parents who represented all of the geographic areas in the county. Parents were offered a \$25 gift certificate to participate in a focus group. All focus groups took place via Zoom.

FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Using best practices drawn from focus-group research, the focus-group protocol was developed using a multi-stage iterative process that included parents, community members, and summer-programming providers. These key stakeholders were asked to generate a list of potential questions and topics important to discuss during the focus groups. The research team reviewed the initial list of over 100 questions to consolidate, eliminate, and clarify questions. After undergoing multiple revisions, the final focus-group protocol consisted of 12 questions exploring families' needs for summer programming, the barriers to participation they encountered, and their vision for quality programming in Alachua County.

RECRUITMENT AND PARTICIPANT SELECTION

Alachua County contains a mixture of rural and urban populations that also vary by income, race, and access to community resources. Using zip codes as a proxy of shared environmental circumstance, we devised a screening method, described below, to ensure that the sample was reflective of Alachua County demographics.

Focus groups were advertised via social media, and participants were recruited electronically via social media, text, email, and personal invitation. Team members used their personal and professional community connections to recruit participants, and the CTAC sent an email to their listserv. We used snowball sampling (i.e., asking currently enrolled participants to recommend other potential participants) to identify individuals and organizations who might have valuable insights.

Families and caregivers interested in participating in the focus groups completed a short electronic demographic questionnaire containing items that asked about gender, race, income, and need for summer programs for children in grades K-8 to determine eligibility. Participants were assigned to specific focus groups based on their zip code. Before each focus group, the team reviewed attendee demographic data and questionnaire responses to ensure representation from each demographic area. Individuals who did not have a current need for summer programs were excluded from participating in the study.

We planned a focus group for Spanish-speaking participants to ensure the needs of the local migrant communities were taken into account. Though we developed parallel recruit-

ment materials that had been translated into Spanish and advertised a focus group for Spanish speakers, no participants registered for this group.

FOCUS GROUP ANALYSIS

We analyzed the de-identified focus group transcripts using a multi-stage thematic coding and qualitative research analysis process. Using the conceptual frame as a guide, two teams of researchers collaboratively identified and interpreted patterns, or themes, within the data, with each team coding half of the total focus group transcripts. In the first step of this process, each team member individually read their assigned transcripts and identified themes according to the conceptual framework and the objectives of the needs assessment. Next, team members compared their individual findings and developed a set of standard codes to identify parents' perspectives and knowledge. Also, when we found themes among the de-identified parent comments, we matched those with coded demographic data to determine if there were similarities based on income or other characteristics. Each team then synthesized the findings from their assigned focus groups. The two teams then consolidated their syntheses into a final summative synthesis that included data from all focus groups to reflect the variance and similarities across the sample of Alachua County parents.

ALACHUA COUNTY CHILD AND YOUTH SERVICE PROVIDER SURVEY

To identify the needs and capacity of summer programs in Alachua County, we developed and conducted the Alachua County Child and Youth Service Provider Survey. Specifically, the survey was designed to collect data about programming, provider needs and barriers to providing services, provider perspectives on the needs of and barriers encountered by the families they serve, the impact of COVID-19 on program capacity, and providers' experiences and needs regarding submissions in response to requests for proposal (RFPs) for the CTAC and other grant-making organizations.

INSTRUMENT DEVELOPMENT

We employed a multi-stage, iterative process reflective of best practices in survey development to create the electronic survey used for this research. The full research team participated in generating a list of potential questions based on the scope of work (SOW) described in the CTAC/YDRPP contract. The lead methodologist consolidated and reworded items to create an initial draft of the survey. A panel whose members had expertise in youth programming and an awareness of community needs reviewed this draft. Based on their feedback, the lead methodologist and another member of the research team with expertise in survey design eliminated, consolidated, reworded, and incorporated new items into a second draft of the survey. The survey design team conducted two more rounds of content and methodological review to ensure the survey sufficiently sampled the content from the SOW. We added additional items to the survey related to the needs of

children with disabilities based on findings from the parent focus groups, which ran concurrently with survey development. After we entered the survey questions into Qualtrics, the software used to administer the survey, two summer-program providers participated in cognitive interviews while completing the survey with the lead methodologist to ensure that the survey questions utilized language and structure that would be familiar to respondents. Changes were made to the wording of several items based on these interviews. In addition, a skip logic was inserted to provide a different format for the questions for secondary providers (those who offer services to children as a part of programs run by other providers).

SURVEY SAMPLING

Dr. Diedre Houchen emailed an invitation to participate in the survey to all known summer-program providers in the county. The provider list was developed using databases from several community organizations, including the CTAC, the United Way and the Fun4GatorKids website, as well as recommendations from providers and community members (i.e., snowball sampling). Several organizations also sent invitations to their provider mailing lists. Survey respondents did not receive compensation for participation. During the week the survey was open, 117 organizations completed some portion of the survey. Data from 52 surveys were removed because less than 75% of the survey had been completed and key data were missing. Data from an additional 14 were removed because the providers did not serve students in the target population (K-8th grade), did not reply to questions about ages served, did not serve students during summer months (June, July, August), or did not plan to serve students in summer 2021.

SURVEY ANALYSIS

We utilized Excel and SPSS software to analyze all quantitative responses and create descriptive statistics to summarize results. Respondents were grouped by overall capacity, cost, length of programming, and participant demographics to explore patterns across programs. A primary coder performed content analyses for open-ended survey questions, and two additional research team members reviewed these analyses.

SECONDARY DATA COLLECTION AND GIS MAPPING

Finally, we created a geographic visual representation of OST providers and available programming in Alachua County using the aforementioned database containing school-year OST providers, summer providers, and secondary youth service organizations. As described above, data were initially collected from information provided by youth service providers, information hubs (organizations that compile data for the public, including the Fun4GatorKids website and the BOOST Alliance), and funding organizations (the United Way, CTAC, the Community Foundation), with missing data gathered using organizational websites, responses from the provider surveys, and research team members' knowledge of the community. We consulted with a community-centered civil engineer to analyze these data using geographic information system (GIS) mapping, a tool often used to conduct geographic-based analyses of planning and maintenance of community infrastructure such as zoning, future land use, historic district preservation, and, in this case, youth programming.

“Something that we were robbed of as kids is learning the political issues in our local community, knowing how to properly vote, knowing how to watch and see what’s going on, and different things like that. We became full adults and know nothing about that. So, teaching and educating children on that, to me, would be very important as well.”

FINDINGS FROM THE PARENT FOCUS GROUPS AND PROVIDER SURVEY

WHAT DO FAMILIES AND SUMMER SERVICE PROVIDERS NEED?

FINDINGS FROM THE PARENT FOCUS GROUPS

In the analyses of the parent focus groups, four broad areas of concern regarding summer programming emerged: caring, safety and supervision; affordability; better synchronization between families' needs and summer-program offerings; and structures that encourage engagement in learning. The issue of equity permeated all of these areas.

FAMILIES WANT SUMMER PROGRAMS IN WHICH THEIR CHILDREN ARE CARED FOR, SUPERVISED, AND SAFE

Parents expressed the need to trust that their children are well cared for, supervised, and safe in their summer-program environment. Some parents described encountering challenges in finding such environments, including experiencing environments in which staff are not actively engaged with their children and provide inadequate supervision. They asserted that several Alachua County programs rely on college students who seemed to be untrained volunteers, which made them question the quality and safety of the programs. Parents emphasized the importance of the presence of qualified, trained staff at summer programs.

Parents with children who have disabilities or special needs noted the absolute lack of quality programming in which staff is trained to create inclusive environments for children with physical, intellectual, learning or neurological disabilities or differences in Alachua County. These parents expressed stress, frustration, and sadness at this deficiency and stressed that they had no options for summer programs at all.

FAMILIES NEED AN AFFORDABLE SYSTEM OF SUMMER PROGRAMS

Parents across almost all of the income brackets included in the focus groups expressed that affordability of summer programs was a concern. Families with lower incomes (up to \$34,999/year)³, as described in the demographic questionnaire used for the focus-group screening process, have been limited to participating almost exclusively in a handful of summer programs that are free or provide scholarships. The stock of free/reduced-cost programs is minimal, with spaces often filling up on the first day of open enrollment. The imbalance between the need for and availability of slots in free/reduced summer programs creates an enormous

"It's a stressful time. I have to map out. I have to try to get on websites and start checking them as early as February to see when they're going to post dates, weeks, tuition, and sign-up registration dates. I know that some of the camps if you don't register within the first couple of hours of opening registration, it's immediately filled up, with a waitlist."

stressor for low-income and working-class families during the spring enrollment season. For families with both lower incomes and multiple children, this stressor is significantly exacerbated.

Families with middle-level income (\$35,000-74,999/year) also struggle to pay for the fee-based programs available, especially multi-child families. These families opt into both free/reduced-cost programs and fee-based programs. As with lower-income families, these parents report that challenges regarding the availability of programs, including programs that fill quickly and routine waitlists, make for a stressful spring enrollment season.

Though higher-income families (\$75,000/year and up) can afford to participate in a larger stock of programs, parents report that they often find the quality of programs does not match the cost. They therefore opt to participate in more cost-conscious programs.

Families with lower- and middle-level incomes also experience financial stress related to the fee structure for summer programs. The requirement to pay for the entire summer up-front creates a financial barrier that affects their quality of life and impacts their ability to access summer programs. This stress is compounded for families who have multiple children, especially when they cannot access discounts for additional children. Field-trip costs that are not included in the program fees also exacerbate families' financial stress during the summer.

³ <http://bit.ly/2Y7uuEL>

FAMILIES NEED BETTER SYNCHRONIZATION BETWEEN WHAT THEY NEED AND WHAT PROGRAMS OFFER

Parents reported that many programs appear to be designed according to what works for the program rather than to what families need. Summer does not bring the change in schedules for most parents and caregivers that it does for children. Thus, families need full-time, full-summer programming, often with extended hours. Other parents expressed the desire for some flexibility—part-day/full-day programming options and the ability to pay week-to-week rather than for a whole summer. Participants consistently noted that Alachua County summer programming is limited, as evidenced by the amount of programs that fill to capacity and/or maintain waitlists.

Even with the challenges introduced by the COVID-19 pandemic, most parents and caregivers are currently working and plan to continue to work throughout the summer. The potential that programs will have lower capacity next summer because of the pandemic is thus concerning, particularly for those parents who already had difficulty finding available programs.

FAMILIES WANT STRUCTURED ENVIRONMENTS WHERE THEIR CHILDREN ENJOY LEARNING

Parents expressed the desire for structured summer programming, meaning that the programs' offerings are based on an intentional design, with staff executing this plan. Some noted challenges in finding such programs in prior summers.

Parents want children to learn over the summer. Most want their children to learn within a structure that offers topic- or content-related exploratory experiences, for example, exploration in science, art, athletics, or nature. Though most parents expressed a desire for something "different" than what their children get during the school year, a smaller core of parents wants or needs the same kind of academic structure that children experience during the school year. These parents expressed concern for their children's underperformance on state academic assessments, and their children are already participating in school-based remediation programs.

"I was flat out told that my daughter would not be able to participate in those because of her special needs. And she would need an aide, she doesn't have medical needs per se, but she's very hyperactive and has autism and needs someone watching her. She can't be in a herd of 30 independent children or hundreds of independent children. She's not independent, unfortunately. And she's a joy and fun and everyone loves her, when she is included, but she's not included in a lot of things."

Families also want their children's educational experience over the summer to include "socio-emotional development" or "social skills." They want their children to have choice, agency, and options and the opportunities to build strong peer and adult relationships, engage in exploration and exposure to new experiences, and play. Many parents specifically want their children to have the opportunity to be outdoors and to participate in field trips.

Fundamentally, quality programming does not need to have infinite options, yet it should afford children the opportunity to explore in a few different ways. Staff need to be qualified to incorporate learning into a model that balances children's developmental and cognitive needs in creative ways.

EQUITY PERMEATES ALL OF THESE ISSUES

While the issues discussed above were relatively universal among focus-group participants, analyses of parents' descriptions of their families' lived experiences revealed that inequities in access to programs and nuanced yet troubling social experiences, both of which manifested along the distinctions of race, class, ability, and other vulnerabilities, permeate the system of summer programming in Alachua County, making these issues even more salient for many populations in our community.

Many families expressed the concern that if their children don't "fit" in a particular program, they might have to choose between leaving the program or continuing to feel uncomfortable. This concern was particularly pointed regarding children of color participating in predominantly White programs, children from families with lower socioeconomic status, and children with disabilities. Black families find it more difficult to access information about summer programs. Furthermore, Black parents felt that staff in some programs were not culturally responsive/competent. Their children have felt out of place or have been treated differently than their White peers.

As discussed above, children with disabilities have had the fewest options for summer programming. Programs for typically developing children have not adequately accommodated the children with disabilities whom they serve or could be serving.

Participants in rural parts of the community reported having less access to summer programming than their urban and suburban counterparts. They were less likely to know what kind of programming was available. Transportation was also a larger issue for this group. Parents from rural areas expressed a desire for programming that was close by to eliminate the need to arrange transportation to take their children across the county and back to access summer programming.



“I’ve had three children requiring this service at the same time. I cannot afford over a \$75 fee per child per week on my end. It’s interesting that the statement was made that the more expensive care doesn’t necessarily mean better care. I haven’t had the opportunity to even experience that.”

ASPIRATIONAL DISPARITY

There was a marked difference, associated with family income, in the degree to which parents expressed a vision of a more useful and satisfying system of summer programming. For example, most families with lower incomes did not mention transportation as a hardship within the focus groups until they were directly asked about it or another participant brought it up first. When asked why, these parents noted that the lack of transportation was so routine and had become such an entrenched part of their lives, they did not assume it could be altered. However, once the issue of transportation had been broached, they acknowledged that access to programs more proximal to where they lived or worked would be part of their ideal vision.

Parents with higher family incomes appeared to have an easier time thinking beyond practical issues like transportation to express aspirations about the quality of the programs. They also expressed the desire to have their

children be around children who were culturally different. For example, White parents wanted more African American children to attend the summer programs their children attended.

In sum, the focus groups revealed that, first and foremost, parents believe that all children should have access to “good” programs. However, while access is necessary, it is not sufficient. Alachua County families need summer programs to establish inclusive practices that consider individual differences among the children and families they serve.

FINDINGS FROM THE PROVIDER SURVEY

A total of 51 providers completed the survey, 42 of whom identified as primary providers, eight who identified as secondary providers (providing additional services to children enrolled in programs with primary providers), and one who did not answer this question. This number of respondents is significant to note, as the responses may not be representative of all providers.

PRIMARY PROVIDERS

A primary provider is defined as the organization that has foremost responsibility for the safety and supervision of the children in attendance.

Primary providers were asked about what a “typical” summer looks like for them. The following highlights are meant to provide a picture of the type of organizations that filled out the survey.

- There was a wide range of overall capacity, ranging from six to 1000 participants. The median overall capacity was 60. Just over half of the providers ($n = 22$) reported that they usually have a waitlist, but smaller programs were no more likely to report having a waitlist than larger programs. Only five of the programs have multiple summer sessions.
- More than half ($n = 25$) of the providers offer programming for > 5 hours a day, with 20 of these offering programming for > 8 hours a day.
- Just under half ($n = 20$) of the providers offer > 8 weeks of summer programming, with 10 of these offering > 10 weeks.
- Providers were asked to select the main focus of the activities they offer (respondents could choose more than one). Table 1 provides a summary of their responses. Notably, of the 21 providers who identified academic/tutoring instruction as a primary activity, 11 use certified teachers to provide that instruction.

Table 1

Main Focus of Activities	# of Providers
Socio-emotional learning	23
Academic/tutoring instruction	21
Music, art, or other fine arts	19
STEM	16
Athletics/recreation	15
Mentoring	14
Culturally responsive/culture-centered enrichment	14
Caring relationships with adults and peers	12
Mental health	9
Job training/career focus	9
Specialized support for children with disabilities	4

- A total of 23 providers said they offer at least one meal to their participants, with 16 offering breakfast, 20 offering lunch, and two offering dinner.
- 15 offer a sibling discount.
- 12 offer discounted rates for pre-paying.
- More than a third ($n = 13$) do not charge a fee.
- Almost half ($n = 19$) of the programs reported that > 90% of their participants typically have household incomes at least 200% below the federal poverty level.
- 23 of the programs reported that a majority of the children who participate are Black and/or Hispanic/Latinx.

Of note, provider reports of the demographic characteristics of the children and families they serve suggest that, while responding organizations might not be representative of the providers in Alachua County as a whole, they do appear to represent the types of organizations that could benefit most from CTAC support.

“If your child doesn’t fit the mold, if they can’t stay on the straight and narrow, and if they’re not part of the mass group of children that fit into this basic expectation we have, then they can’t go to this camp.”

SECONDARY PROVIDERS

Secondary providers are those who partner with primary providers to offer additional services to program participants, either at the site where primary services are delivered or at the secondary provider's location.

- Among the eight secondary providers who completed the survey, youth contact time ranged from 1 hour per program to 6-12 hours per week.
- Personnel experience and credentials ranged from college student intern to 30 years of professional experience.

PROGRAMMING NEEDS AND BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATION

Providers were asked to select what they perceived to be their participants' greatest needs related to summer programming and then to rank those needs by priority. Table 2 shows the number of providers who selected each participant need. The need for financial support was identified most frequently, with 65% of providers selecting it. Next was educational programming, with 55% of providers identifying it as a need and a majority of these (53%) ranking it first.

Table 2

Participant Need	# of Providers
Financial support	33
Educational programming	28
Transportation	25
Mental health/counseling	19
Family programs	18
Food	16
Housing	10
Disability support	9

Providers were also asked to identify the most significant barriers to youth participating in their summer program and then to rank those barriers by priority. Table 3 shows the number of providers that selected each item as a barrier to participation in their program. Notably, out of the 18 programs that selected *registration cost* as a barrier to participation, half ranked it first.

Table 3

Barrier to Participation	# of Providers
Transportation	21
Cost of registration	18
Capacity (too full)	14
Requirement of early sign-up	8
Location of program	7
Doesn't serve meals	5
Doesn't accommodate disability	2

CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

Based on input from the focus groups, we included several questions in the provider survey about accommodations and activities related to children with disabilities. Only four of the 51 provider respondents identified *specialized support for children with disabilities* as a program focus; 11 (including those four) said that they offer accommodations for children with disabilities. Interestingly, as shown in Tables 2 and 3, while nine providers felt that *disability support* was one of their participants' greatest needs, only two (out of the nine) identified lack of accommodation as a barrier to participation.

PERSONNEL AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

A total of 13 primary providers identified *finding qualified personnel* as one of their greatest challenges. When asked to identify specific needs, providers consistently expressed that hiring and retaining qualified adult employees is challenging. In addition, our community has a lack of qualified youth who are able to work within the financial and scheduling constraints of OST/summer programming.

Regulatory health and safety requirements and mandatory licensures and certifications often do not correlate with staff pay due to limited program budgets. Certified staff want to be appropriately compensated for meeting the multitude of job qualifications. In addition, some staff positions are funded by grants and are thus only guaranteed for one summer or fiscal year. It is challenging for providers to fill positions when they cannot ensure job security for more than one year. Recruitment and retention of qualified personnel is also an equity issue. Providers of summer programs in rural communities face a more significant challenge because the smaller populations of the surrounding communities further diminish the available pool of applicants.

A total of 14 providers identified *professional development* as one of their top three programming needs. Respondents reported that opportunities for staff professional development were difficult, if not impossible, to arrange. Many programs provide care for children and youth Monday-Friday for 11 hours/day, leaving no time for staff to participate in training or educational opportunities. In addition, there is usually no gap between the conclusion of the academic school year and the commencement of summer programming. This schedule leaves minimal time for staff onboarding because most of the staff who meet the Department of Children and Families safety requirements either work for the school district or are college students who are not available until their school breaks for the summer. On top of these challenges, small program budgets inhibit providers from hiring additional part- and full-time staff.



Providers expressed the desire for more time to adequately onboard new staff and acclimate them to the program. They also would like to offer additional professional development for administrators and directors and both skilled and unskilled staff. In addition, they aspire to train staff in trauma-informed care, cultural awareness, mental-health first aid, social-emotional learning, STEAM, and classroom management and the ways in which it should differ for summer programming compared with during the traditional school year.

- When asked how, if any, the CTAC could help improve the quality of summer programs, providers overwhelmingly stated that funding for professional development or personnel support would benefit them most.

COVID-19 CONSIDERATIONS

A total of 20 primary providers suggested that they will have reduced capacity in 2021 due to COVID-19. Currently, those organizations combined have a total capacity of 1,761 participants; six of them currently provide all-day, all-summer programming; and 22 usually have a waitlist.

The pandemic has also exacerbated challenges related to staff recruitment and retention. Programs will need contingency plans to accommodate the absence of staff members due to COVID-19.

Health and safety guidelines have changed significantly in light of the current crisis. Professional development must evolve concurrent with the ever-changing public-health regulations and policies and their ramifications for effective site management and the physical and mental health of staff and youth being served.

ADDITIONAL SUPPORT

Funding was identified as a top-three challenge by 24 providers. Of these, 16 reported that their summer program budgets are typically higher than the revenue they expect to take in from fees. A total of 22 providers reported that public, governmental grants were one of their top sources of funding, while 13 identified grants from private foundations as a principal funding source.

- When asked what, if anything, the CTAC could do to increase the overall capacity of their programs (i.e., the number of children served), several providers suggested that funding for additional materials or staff would allow them to increase their capacity. Others suggested the provision of space would allow for increased capacity.
- Another suggestion, particularly from providers who do not usually have a waitlist, was that the CTAC help provide exposure for their program through advertising or awareness campaigns.

THE RFP PROCESS

Providers were asked about their experiences with grant-funding processes at the CTAC and other funding organizations and what support they needed to be successful in securing external funding.

- 28 of the 51 providers have applied for the CTAC grant in the past, 23 of whom reported that their grants were awarded.
- More than half of the providers ($n = 26$) said that one of the top barriers to their applying for funding is lack of awareness about what funding opportunities exist.
- More than half ($n = 26$) also said they need support from a grant writer or other personnel to apply for funding.

When asked about challenges they encountered with the CTAC's RFP process, providers identified a significant number. The process appeared to be especially daunting for smaller organizations. The most commonly cited challenges include

- Lack of effective communication and limited guidance from the CTAC.
- Too little time between the announcement of the RFP and the submission deadline.
- The RFP is complicated, redundant, or constricting.
- Funding cycle is too short.
- Online uploading process is inefficient.
- Lack of transparency in scoring.

Smaller providers reported that they did not feel supported during CTAC's RFP process and questioned the decision-making. They asserted that across-the-board reductions in funding allocations more negatively impacted smaller programs. A number of respondents expressed concern that the reviewers were not knowledgeable about the RFP. Providers also described difficulty in finding clear answers about when next steps in the application process were required. Additionally, they shared the significant concern that they did not have a proficient understanding of the scoring and that "trying to interpret what scores meant" was problematic.

Many of the providers have not sought grant funding due to a lack of understanding of the grant/RFP process involved. This feedback suggests that it would be beneficial to simplify the RFP process to increase access for smaller organizations, in particular.

Program providers identified a number of ways in which the CTAC could support them through the RFP process, including

- Sending an email to providers in the CTAC database before the release of an RFP to announce the dates on which the RFP will be posted and applications will be due. The email should include enough details to afford program providers the opportunity to meet internally, plan, and collaborate with partners in preparation for the RFP process.
- Making technical assistance available on the overall RFP process, navigation through the process, budgets, proposal preparation, and funding determinations.

Providers offered two suggestions they thought could potentially impact the number of youth served: first, to create a 3-year funding cycle to offer stability to providers, their employees, and the families they serve, and second, to allow charter schools that serve rural communities and predominantly Black and Brown children to apply for funding to offer summer programming.

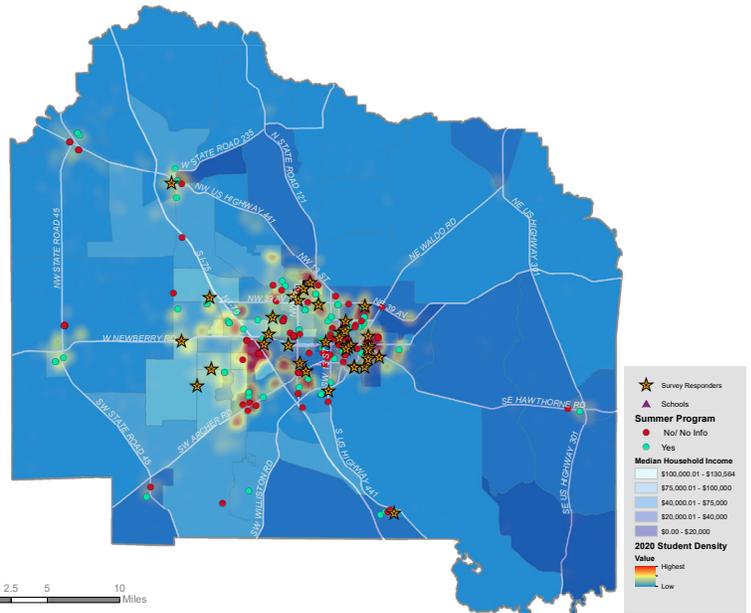
Finally, program providers that were successfully funded faced a new set of challenges. The majority of providers have limited budgets and cannot sustain their programs with funding allocated via reimbursement rather than advancements. They also suggest that the requirements for supporting materials related to the grant-justification process be simplified. In general, providers need support and clarity throughout the funding process to foster capacity building and collaboration between organizations and between child- and youth-serving organizations and the CTAC.

"If you want affordable, you end up with bigger ratios."

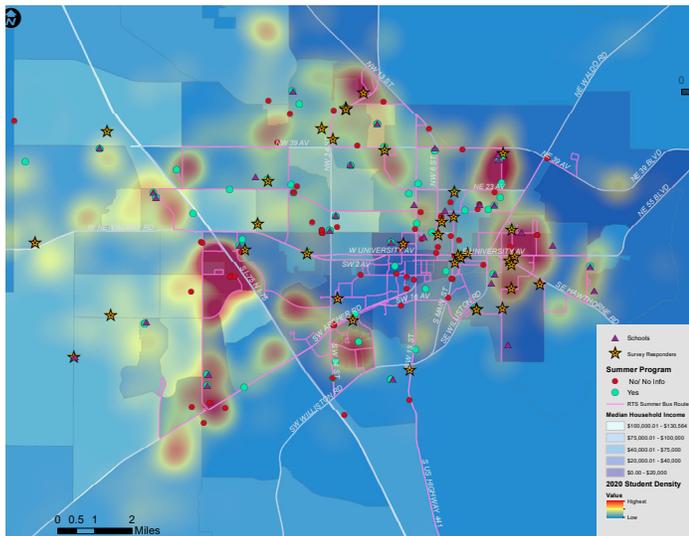
GIS DATA VISUALIZATION

ARE SUMMER PROGRAMS LOCATED WHERE CHILDREN AND YOUTH LIVE?

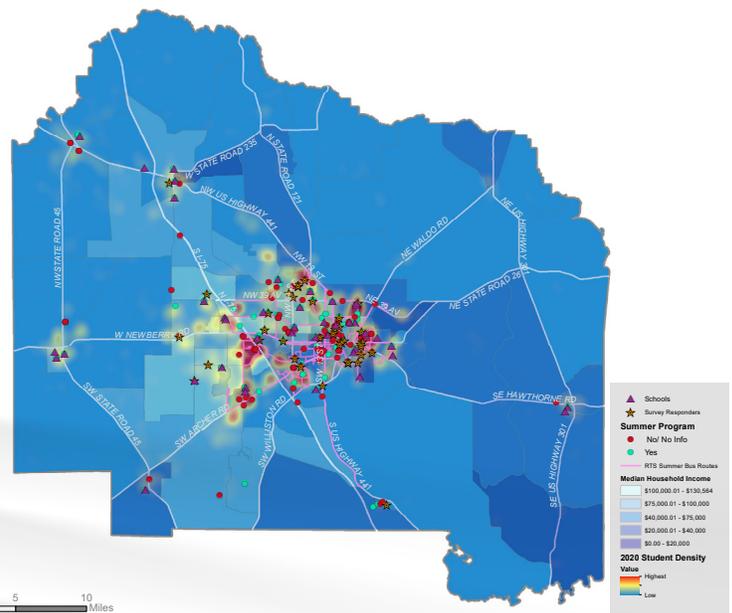
The data visualization provided by the GIS maps indicates that child- and youth-serving organizations are clustered within the city of Gainesville while being sparsely distributed across the rural areas of Alachua County. As Map 1 shows, providers are clustered around areas of dense student population. However, as Map 2 shows, significant areas of high student density within the city of Gainesville have few or no summer programs. Map 3 starkly illustrates that public transportation convenient to summer programs is available nearly exclusively within the city of Gainesville. For the city of Gainesville, this transportation information is also contained within the second map.



Map 1
Alachua County Summer Provider Information



Map 2
City of Gainesville Summer Provider Information



Map 3
Alachua County Summer Provider with Transportation

RECOMMENDATIONS

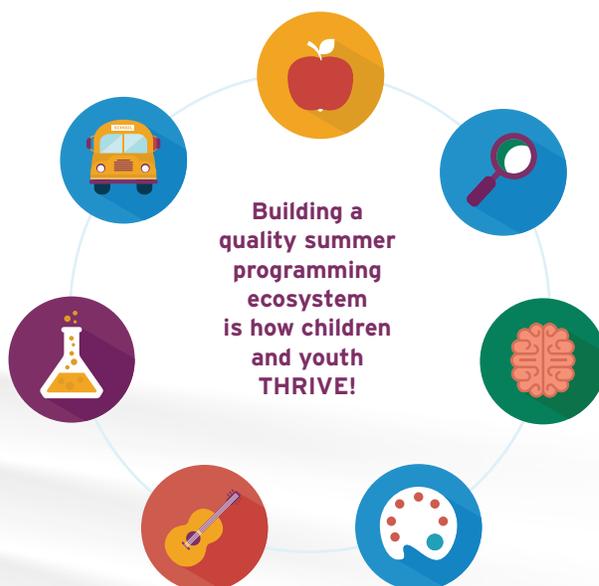
HOW CAN THE CTAC BEST SUPPORT A SYSTEM OF SUMMER PROGRAMMING IN ALACHUA COUNTY?

Building a summer and OST ecosystem that supports the ability of children and youth to thrive requires intentional investment and design across all aspects of the system. As noted in the YDRPP conceptual frame on page 13, such a system must include a range of summer programs that provides a diverse array of activities to foster transformative learning and development within supportive human and built environments. Creating a strong system also requires equitably funding child- and youth-serving organizations and ensuring that the adults who support children and youth counter bias, prejudice, and privilege to create inclusive environments where all children thrive. The recommendations provided below are based on the conceptual frame and the findings of the parent focus groups and provider survey and are organized by the specific aims of this needs assessment: What evidence-based attributes should CTAC-funded programs include to support both positive youth development and literacy? What attributes should a system of CTAC-supported summer programming include in order to best meet the needs of Alachua County youth and families? What geographical areas of the county are most in need of CTAC-funded programs? What support could the CTAC offer to existing providers of summer programming that would help them more effectively meet the needs of Alachua County children, youth, and families?

WHAT EVIDENCE-BASED ATTRIBUTES SHOULD CTAC-FUNDED PROGRAMS INCLUDE TO SUPPORT BOTH POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT AND LITERACY?

Ideas about what constitutes quality summer programming and how this system should be organized vary among youth service providers, funders, parents, and community members in Alachua County. An important step in building a sustainable, equitable system of quality summer programming is to integrate these ideas into a shared vision for the community. If Alachua County were to adopt a conceptual frame that describes the evidence-based attributes that CTAC-funded programs should exhibit, that frame could serve as the basis for, not only an intentional system of funding and support, but also professional development and community education and engagement in the process. Thus, we recommend the CTAC build on the conceptual model provided in this report to develop the foundation for an evidence-based system of summer programming with attributes related to positive child and youth development and learning goals related to broad knowledge acquisition and literacy.

- ✓ *The CTAC should construct a guiding conceptual frame that specifies summer programming goals, standards, characteristics, attributes, and systemwide outcomes. Stakeholders, especially youth and vulnerable members of our community as well as families from diverse socioeconomic and racial backgrounds and geographic areas, should be invited to participate in creating and adopting this framework. Our observation that parents with lower incomes were less likely to express aspirational goals for summer programming suggests that particular consideration should be given to eliciting their vision for this programming.*
- ✓ *In order to build an ecosystem that takes into account Alachua County's needs related to literacy, the CTAC should partner with literacy experts and interventionists to prepare organizations to incorporate evidence-based literacy practices into a range of summer programming opportunities.*



WHAT ATTRIBUTES SHOULD A SYSTEM OF CTAC-SUPPORTED SUMMER PROGRAMMING INCLUDE IN ORDER TO BEST MEET THE NEEDS OF ALACHUA COUNTY YOUTH AND FAMILIES?

Our findings illustrate that families and providers face systemic challenges related to accessibility, affordability, and inclusivity across summer programming. Each of these factors impacts the ability to create an equitable system of summer programming for Alachua County where children and youth thrive.

Families and providers noted that summer programs are often at capacity and maintain waitlists. Summer-program providers noted that their capacity to provide services is limited by budgetary concerns and their ability to raise funds, even if their building capacity might allow for expansion. Parent focus groups combined with our GIS findings also indicate the need for the emergence of new programs in areas of the county that have few or no summer programs. However, the cost associated with acquiring and maintaining buildings and infrastructure to provide these additional summer programs could be prohibitive. We suggest that municipality-owned community centers have the potential to serve as sites for partnership, innovation, and expansion.

Families with low and moderate incomes all struggle to afford summer programming for their children. Reduced-fee and free programs, when available, are in high demand, often filling up quickly.

Parents emphasized a need for inclusive summer programs that provide accommodations for children with disabilities. In Alachua County, the number of summer programs that provide inclusive, accommodation-rich environments for children with disabilities is very limited. This gap is an extraordinary stressor that has ramifications for families' economic and emotional well-being. Providers also noted challenges associated with creating summer programs that are inclusive environments that serve the needs of children with disabilities and other exceptionalities, including those with physical impairments, neurodiversity, vision, hearing, learning, intellectual, and emotional and behavioral disorders. These challenges include finding funding for additional, qualified staff, accommodations to infrastructure, materials and supplies, and professional development.

In addition to issues of accessibility, affordability and inclusivity, parents shared concerns about the experience, commitment and skills of staff at many programs. Providers expressed the desire to increase the levels of professional knowledge and skill of program staff and administrators. However, youth work is too often low-wage, part-time employment, and organizations typically lack the funds and infrastructure to invest deeply in their staff's professional development.

- ✓ *The CTAC should subsidize registration and other attendance fees for parents according to families' income levels and size. This subsidy could take the form of a sliding-scale for fees that takes into account family income, size, and number of siblings attending a particular program.*
- ✓ *In addition, the CTAC should create funding structures specifically designed for families with the lowest incomes, including developing a cadre of free, fully subsidized summer programs across Alachua County.*
- ✓ *The CTAC should support the expansion of existing organizations' services to accommodate more children per site and recruit new youth organizations to provide summer programming for children in underserved areas of the county.*
- ✓ *The CTAC should partner with organizations with expertise in working with children with disabilities to guide training, professional development, and infrastructure development to augment program staffs' capacity and adeptness with serving diverse children and youth and should provide funds to help providers adapt their infrastructure, environment, materials, and supplies to create more diverse, inclusive, culturally competent summer programs.*
- ✓ *Using the conceptual frame discussed in the first set of recommendations above to determine need, the CTAC should offer professional development opportunities for administration and staff of child- and youth-serving organizations. Through these offerings, the CTAC could increase various organizations' capacities to provide a range of equity-based developmental and learning supports across the domains of academic, enrichment and exploratory learning; physical health, play and recreation; and socio-emotional development, grounding, structure and agency.. Direct-service and administrative staff and volunteers should be paid for their participation in these professional development opportunities.*

WHAT GEOGRAPHICAL AREAS OF THE COUNTY ARE MOST IN NEED OF CTAC-FUNDED PROGRAMS?

Though quality summer and OST programming for children and youth ages 6-18 years is an integral part of healthy child and youth development and educational success, we noted a significant challenge with locating data related to these services in Alachua County. No agency in Alachua County is currently tasked with maintaining a comprehensive database of such services. Parents and providers both highlighted the need for more comprehensive information on the ecosystem of organizations that support children and youth in Alachua County. Without this comprehensive data, we can draw few conclusions related to the geographic distribution of summer programs or the relationships between that distribution and demographic factors such as population density, income distribution, family size and transportation. This gap in information combined with the significant challenges families describe in accessing summer programming, particularly in rural and lower-income areas, suggests the need to collect, collate and host these data for internal and public-facing audiences.

- ✓ *The CTAC should collect and collate pertinent data on child and youth services across the county per the results-based accountability framework, including age range served, activities provided, fees, capacity and location. The Trust should use this database to determine gaps in services and inform decisions about funding and other support.*
- ✓ *The CTAC should further use this database to provide a public-facing information hub for families seeking summer programming for their children. This hub should provide information on registration processes and fees, location, age range served, activities and other relevant details.*



Out-of-school-time programming for children and youth ages 6-18 years is an integral part of healthy child and youth development and educational success.

WHAT SUPPORT COULD THE CTAC OFFER TO EXISTING PROVIDERS OF SUMMER PROGRAMMING THAT WOULD HELP THEM MORE EFFECTIVELY MEET THE NEEDS OF ALACHUA COUNTY CHILDREN, YOUTH AND FAMILIES?

Providers of child and youth summer programming identified a number of challenges that limit their ability to acquire funding to improve and expand their services. They expressed the need for clear communication and scaffolded support regarding the processes of grant seeking, application, administration and evaluation. For example, organizations desire adequate notice of the publication of and deadlines for RFPs and more-detailed advance information regarding the funding opportunity.

Smaller organizations, many of which provide crucial support to children and youth in Alachua County, reported having a more difficult time with all aspects of grant seeking and funding than larger ones and might need additional forms of support.

We recommend that the CTAC simplify and streamline the funding process and provide technical and logistical support to programs seeking to obtain or already in receipt of CTAC funding.

- ✔ *The CTAC should provide clear and sufficient information about the request for proposal (RFP) process and application in a timely manner. Specifically, the Trust should consider offering a single point of contact regarding the RFP for providers within the CTAC and creating an easy-to-use, accessible submission process that provides adequate time between the notification of funding availability and the deadline for submission.*
- ✔ *The CTAC should ensure that the funding criteria are explicit and the process is transparent, fair, and clearly organized. We suggest organizing the RFP around a conceptual frame for summer programming, as discussed above, both to better target funding to meet particular needs and to create a shared vocabulary about program attributes. In addition, the Trust should provide rubrics that define and elucidate the scoring process.*
- ✔ *The CTAC should provide technical assistance and grant education for providers to help them navigate through the process, identify qualified budget items for grant funds and learn to create budget outlines that facilitate the writing of proposals that accurately reflect programming and help to clarify which funding opportunities are most appropriate.*



CONCLUSION

With the 2018 referendum that established the Children's Trust of Alachua County, the community committed to funding and supporting a coordinated system of services that enables all youth and their families to thrive. Our assessment of the summer-programming needs of children, families and providers in Alachua County makes clear there is much work to be done to fulfill the CTAC's mission.

The purpose of this assessment was to ascertain what needs of Alachua County families related to summer programming for children and youth in grades K-8 were unmet by the current system. Using a conceptual frame founded in the concepts of transformative learning, transformative development, and equity, the YDRPP gathered information from various stakeholders in the community, including families, program providers, and funders. The frame is intended to describe an intentionally created ecosystem comprising adults who support children and youth along a positive trajectory of learning and development. The frame also provides a common language for all stakeholders to facilitate collaboration in the mission of supporting the development of children and youth. Creating a system that ensures all children are met with enthusiasm and care and provided with opportunities, knowledge, resources and skills is crucial to the development and maintenance of a thriving democracy, society and nation.

Following the recommendations we provide in this report will require long-range strategizing and a long-term investment of time, including a sustained process of study, the setting of specific goals, community engagement, and refinement. We are especially eager to see the engagement of children and youth, themselves, in the process of defining their own support network and future. In the short term, we suggest that the CTAC can begin to address the findings in this report by funding increased access to affordable summer programs for Alachua County residents.

We close this report with the sober reminder that children and youth across the nation are telling us they are not well. The rate of suicide in children and youth ages 10-24 is cause for alarm, as are the disproportionate rate of academic failure among children of color and high rates of child and youth incarceration and criminalization. There is, indeed, much work to be done, both locally and nationwide. We look forward to working in community with the CTAC and other stakeholders across Alachua County to create an ecosystem for our children and youth that invests in their promise and safeguards their future. Building an accessible, affordable, inclusive system of summer programming that supports transformative learning and development will significantly contribute to the ability of families in our community to thrive.



CHILDREN'S TRUST
OF ALACHUA COUNTY



YOUTH DEVELOPMENT
RESEARCH-PRACTICE PARTNERSHIP

Building an accessible, affordable, inclusive system of summer programming that supports transformative learning and development will significantly contribute to the ability of families in our community to thrive.

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