



# Impacts of COVID-19 on Child Care

## Interviews with Mothers from the Burns Paiute Tribe

In November and December 2020, two interviews were conducted with mothers from the Burns Paiute Tribe in Harney County, Oregon. These interviews were part of a series of interviews and listening sessions funded by the Preschool Development Grant as an expansion of the 2019 statewide early learning needs assessment. The interviews were co-designed, organized, and facilitated by Portland State University and OSLC Developments, Inc., in partnership with the Burns Paiute Education Program.

The goal of the interviews was to better understand the early learning needs and child care experiences of American Indian/Native American families during the COVID-19 pandemic; the families included here represent the Burns Paiute Tribe, Te-Moak Tribe of Western Shoshone, and Pit River Tribe. Ultimately, interviews will inform the development of the state's early learning plan. Two mothers were interviewed who had two to five children total, with at least 1 school-aged child and one to two children who were not yet in kindergarten. Both mothers were caring for two children, one under 1 year of age and one preschooler. In both of these families, the babies had never had any child care outside of their mothers and the oldest child is currently attending preschool.

Both mothers expressed that the health of their children was their primary concern in thinking about sending their children to child care during the COVID-19 pandemic. One mother was particularly cautious, having a child with respiratory issues.

*"I personally feel like I have a whole different perspective because my four-year-old, when he was a baby he got sick a lot, and we ended up in the hospital all the time because of a common cold because his lungs couldn't handle it. So now, it's hard for me to want to let him go places that I think there's too many people or too many people have been through, like the regular store. So, I have more precautions I feel like than other parents."*

Because of their concerns related to COVID-19 exposure and the ages of their youngest children, neither mother planned to look for child care for those children anytime soon. Both mothers reported having family members available to help with child care if needed. While these mothers expressed being able to manage their child care needs, a mother pointed out the challenge of balancing child care, household, and work responsibilities.

*“Usually me and dad switch off and on. He’ll watch them or I’ll watch them. So we get stuff done, but it affects his working too because he will have to stay home and watch the kids so I could go to my appointment instead of him going to work.”*

Mother concerns about their children’s learning and development during COVID-19 related to emotional well-being. One mother expressed general concern about her child’s first school experience being associated with starting preschool during the pandemic, and the other mother explained her worry about how her child’s confusion and fear about what is and is not safe could have ongoing impacts on her child.

*“I’m not sure if he’s going to get scared to go see people after this, or if he was going to always have caution. You know, if he’s just going to always remember, hey, it’s COVID we can’t do that stuff. You know because it’s been a good full year that he’s been trying to learn the rules.”*

Although this mother did not identify specific supports received or desired around that concern, she did indicate that the financial support that she has received from the Burns Paiute Tribe thus far has been helpful for her family overall.

Both mothers emphasized the importance of cultural traditions in their families, though neither identified ways that child care providers currently recognize or practice their children’s cultures. One mother did note that prior to the pandemic, she went to the preschool to share some of her family’s traditions with the class. COVID-19 restrictions related to who can go into the preschool prevented any similar opportunities since March 2020. Neither mother identified any experiences with discrimination in finding child care, which one mother attributed to the Burns Paiute Tribe collaboration with Harney County preschools.

*“The Burns Paiute Tribe has an education program that works with the Harney County preschool here in Burns to enlist tribal members in preschool.”*

The mothers did not report having an opportunity to provide feedback related COVID-19 protocols, though one mother said that she was able to have her questions answered during an enrollment meeting. One mother noted the change in her involvement at the preschool, as she previously had been able to visit the preschool regularly and interact with teachers and staff more prior to the pandemic. While the reduction in interaction was a disappointment for this mother, she also expressed that this policy helped to reassure her that the preschool was taking necessary precautions to minimize the risk of spreading COVID-19.

## Acknowledgments

---

*Funding for this work was provided by the Oregon Early Learning Division as part of the Preschool Development Grant. We would like to thank staff from the Burns Paiute Education Program for agreeing to work with us to create an opportunity to hear from families. We are especially grateful to the families who took the time to share their experiences, needs, and hopes with us.*

*These briefs were developed by the Center for the Improvement of Child and Family Services at Portland State University and OSLC Developments, Inc. Research funded by a federal Preschool Development Grant to the Oregon Early Learning Division. For more information, contact Beth L. Green, Ph.D., [beth.green@pdx.edu](mailto:beth.green@pdx.edu).*