MARYLAND FAMILY NETWORK

Early Childhood Investigations Webinars

**The Child Care Data Gap Challenge:
Transforming Vacancy Data
from Manual to Real-Time**

Laura Weeldreyer, Executive Director

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## Maryland Family Network

**Maryland Family Network (MFN)** is a non-profit organization dedicated to improving the lives of very young children and those who care for them.

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MFN's mission is to ensure that every child has a strong family, quality early learning environment, and a champion for their interests.

**www.marylandfamilynetwork.org**

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## Laura Weeldreyer- Executive Director

Laura started her career as a pre-k teacher in New Orleans. She went on to spend 25 years working on public school reform from various perches: teacher, community organizer, advocate, central office staff member, and state school board member. In 2019, Laura returned to her early childhood roots and became the executive director of the Maryland Family Network, the state's leading early childhood organization.

Laura has lived and worked in Baltimore for 25 years and is the mother of three young adults. Laura received her BA from University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and a Masters in Public Administration from the University of Baltimore.

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# POLL 1

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## Background on LOCATE

- Founded in the early 1980s to assist Baltimore families with child care searches
- Mid-1980s, Maryland's Department of Human Resources contracted LOCATE to manage the statewide database
- LOCATE's core services include:
  - Ongoing data collection from child care providers and families
  - Impact on child care reimbursement rates and provider compensation
  - Dedicated referral service to help families find high quality, licensed child care that meets their needs

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## Why Vacancy Data?

It was the most important data for families that we didn't have
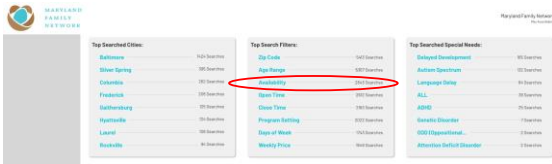


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## Vacancy Data Affects Everyone

**Families**
can't find spots for their children

**Providers**
operate under capacity, losing revenue

**Government agencies and advocacy groups**
can't accurately allocate resources

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## The Data Collection Challenge

**Maintaining accurate, up-to-date vacancy data from child care providers is difficult**

- Only 7.3% of providers had ever updated their vacancy data
- Providers had to log in to submit new vacancies
- MFN had to call for updates and manually enter data

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## Rethinking Data Collection

**1.**

More frequent

= Newer data

**2.**

Narrower focus

= Only ask vacancy

**3.**

No barrier
(log in/calling)

= Higher response

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## The Ideal Provider's Experience

- No logging in or calling back required- should take providers **< 20 seconds to submit information**
  - The link to every provider has to be unique so providers only update their program
  - Avoid redundancy- MFN only asked for age groups that specific provider was licensed for
- The email was sent under MFN, an organization with whom the providers were familiar

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## The Technical Details- Email Validation

- Provider emails had to be **validated first** to ensure deliverability (the rate of an email gets delivered to intended inbox)
  - More than 800 emails were originally removed from a list of 6,200 providers because they bounced back
  - If too many emails bounce back, the email campaign will get blocked

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## The Technical Details: Optimizing Delivery

- Optimized **Day, Time, and Messaging**
  - Text was considered, but email was cheaper to pilot
  - First month involved creating random groups of providers (including both home and center-based) to test for optimal day of the week, time of the day, and messaging
  - MFN tracked email open rates and data submission rates per group

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## The Emails Provider Receive



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## The Results from the First Real-Time, Automated Vacancy Campaign

| | Before Campaign | After Campaign |
|---|---|---|
| % of Providers Submitting Vacancy Data | 7% | 20% *9% within two hours! |
| Number of Vacancies in State (First Campaign) | 1,953 | 3,578 |
| Vacancy Data Age | 6+ Months | <30 days |
| Data Collection Method | Manual | Automated Email |
| Email Open Rate | N/A | 50% |

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## How MFN Used the Data

Integrated into LOCATE: the public child care search for Maryland. Families can easily filter for programs with availability.



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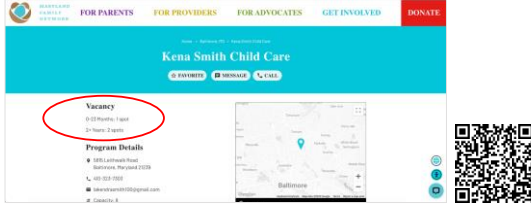
## Unique Page for Every Program

Every program has an individual page on LOCATE, which lets families see more details. Vacancy is reported on by age group.



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## Future Plans

| Consider **more frequent** outreach- biweekly vs monthly | Collect **data from CCMS:** Increase response rates from CCMS- using providers | Use same approach for **other data:** Desired Capacity vs Licensed, Pricing | Integrate data into **Call Referral** database and **Child Care Desert maps** |
|---|---|---|---|

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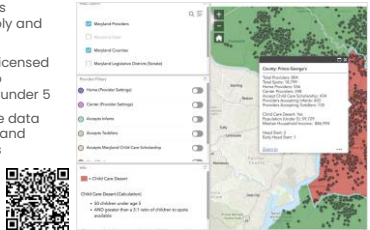
## Advocacy Implications

- Child care desert maps identify real-time supply and demand gaps
- Currently comparing Licensed Capacity compared to Population of Children under 5
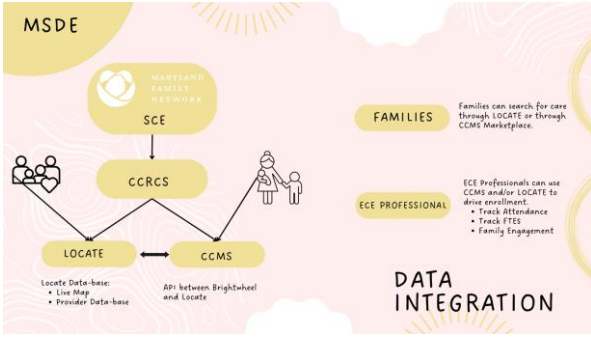- MFN's maps aggregate data by County, Legislative, and Congressional Districts



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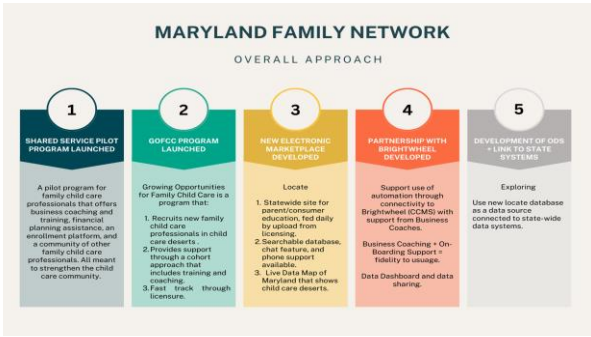


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# POLL 2

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**Thank you!**

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