

children of the rainbow

San Diego, CA

Overview

In its two childcare centers, Children of the Rainbow serves children ages 0-12 and their families, most of whom reside in the ethnically and culturally diverse, economically deprived neighborhoods of south central San Diego.

The majority of residents—66%—are Hispanic, 20% are Black, 8% are white, and 6% are Asian. New immigrant families, most from East Africa, are also linked with Children of the Rainbow through the African Alliance. Most families have household incomes of less than 200% of the federal poverty level, and most receive public assistance. About 20% of households have an annual income of less than \$15,000—the neighborhood’s median income of \$18,719 is only 55% of the median income in the surrounding region. Rates of teen pregnancy and open child abuse cases are higher than the regional average, and housing stock is older and deteriorating.

The mission of Children of the Rainbow is to create social change by giving people of all ages the tools they need to transform their destiny and to encourage economic development as a way to build self-reliant communities. One of the primary ways it accomplishes this is by connecting participating families with the Bronze Triangle Community Development Corporation, which offers a series of specialized programs that help them develop financial resources and acquire assets. Children of the Rainbow’s philosophy is built on several key principles, which maintain that all program activities and staff must promote, support, and enhance each child’s

Profile

Staffing

- 85 Teachers / classroom staff
- 8 Administrative staff
- 4 Support staff

Children & Families Served

- 300 children

Budget

- Total: \$2.3 million

Locations

- 2 childcare centers

Services Provided On-Site

- Annual parent–teacher conferences
- Parent advisory council
- Newsletters
- Parenting classes
- Resource lending library
- Resource referrals

Partners

- Boys and Girls Clubs of Greater San Diego
- Bronze Triangle Community Development Corporation

development by:

- Reflecting developmentally appropriate practices
- Recognizing that each child brings to the program his or her own family values and culture
- Working in partnership with each child's parent(s) to promote the growth and development of the child
- Providing administrative leadership based on an action-oriented management approach
- Utilizing all available resources to support each child and his or her family

Children of the Rainbow was founded by Gale Walker, once a welfare mother herself, who motivates staff and families to continue building a community of caring for children that thrives by ensuring family success.

How the Program Builds Protective Factors

Children of the Rainbow builds five key protective factors that reduce child abuse and neglect. Programs, services, and characteristics contributing to each protective factor are listed below:

Parental Resilience

- Educational and Skill-Building Workshops
- Parent Advisory Committee
- Parent Education Meetings
- Parents as Teachers Program

Social Connections

- Bronze Triangle Community Development Corporation
- Educational and Skill-Building Workshops
- Parent Advisory Committee
- Parent Education Meetings
- Parents as Teachers Program
- Referrals

- Greater Golden Hill Community Development Corporation
- Local child protective services
- Local police
- Mosaic Power
- Neighborhood House Association
- San Diego Urban League
- Second Chance
- Union of Pan Asian Communities

Ways of Identifying When Families Are at Risk

- "Everybody knows somebody around here. It's easy to know when something's up."
--staff quote
- Daily awareness among teachers of what is happening with children and families
- Careful observation of children and parents during drop-off and pick-up times
- Quick follow-up with parents regarding late payments, absences, and other signals that they may need assistance
- Detection of unusual behavior among children

Response Protocol

A staff member speaks with a supervisor and other staff who know the family best if he or she observes any of the following:

- A child exhibiting unusual behavior in the classroom, such as trouble sleeping, acting out, or wetting pants—or any other behavior not characteristic of the child
- A child appearing to have cognitive, physical, and/or emotional developmental issues

Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development

- Educational and Skill-Building Workshops
- Parent Education Meetings
- Parents as Teachers Program

Concrete Support in Times of Need

- Bronze Triangle Community Development Corporation
- Family Needs Documentation and Referral Form
- Individualized Parent Meetings
- Referrals

Social and Emotional Competence of Children

- Mental Health Consultation
- Parents as Teachers Program
- Parent Meetings and Workshops

Key Program Features

Bronze Triangle Community Development Corporation

Children of the Rainbow works collaboratively with the Bronze Triangle Community Development Corporation (CDC), which was founded by Children of the Rainbow director Gale Walker, its staff, parents, and other local residents. Through the Bronze Triangle CDC, families work together to build and strengthen their neighborhoods. They become invested in the future of their neighborhoods and empowered to access financial resources and build assets. Through several task forces—which promote business development, home ownership, neighborhood beautification, meeting family needs, and involvement in political action and safety issues—residents collaborate to create more opportunities for economic success and improve their quality of life. Most recently, the CDC has built an all-encompassing family resource center to further meet the needs of the community.

- A child with physical problems or inappropriate clothing or personal hygiene
- A child reporting unusual occurrences at home
- A parent appearing unusually stressed, arriving late to drop-off or pick-up times, or seeming excessively worried

If needed, staff further observe the child and document what they see. Together, the team determines a course of action to engage the family. Once the family is engaged, the team of family and staff addresses the cause of concern and finds resources to resolve it.

Child Abuse and Neglect Reporting Protocol

Children of the Rainbow staff follow standard reporting protocol for incidents of child abuse and neglect. Staff serve as advocates and resources for reported families, and no child is excluded from the center because of a report.

Licensing & Accreditation

Department of Social Services

What Parents Say

“This is not just a place to drop off your children.”

“Before, I had no patience with them. I had a lot of stress. I think coming here has helped me have a lot less stress. Now I know they are safe.”

Community Hiring

Many Children of the Rainbow staff are parents of participating children or are community residents. From the beginning, the program has trained and hired neighbors, helping to build financial resources and workforce skills in the community. As a result, staff have strong connections both to the childcare centers and to the other families who use the centers. Participating children and their families have many opportunities to connect with teachers outside of the classroom.

Hiring local residents is particularly advantageous for participating children who belong to ethnic minorities. When staff members can speak the children's language, are part of their home culture, and know their families, a strong, trusting bond develops that is often missing in other childcare settings. The practice also allows immigrant and refugee staff members an immediate opportunity to improve their language and work skills while on the job. Other staff learn that working with colleagues from a diversity of backgrounds helps everyone understand the customs and cultures of the children in their classes. When a cultural clash or misunderstanding occurs, there is always an "expert" just down the hall.

A structured staff development plan is created for each staff member, with incentives to pursue educational and experiential goals that will lead to higher-level employment both inside and outside the childcare center. Staff needs assessment surveys and annual self-reviews, in addition to regular program quality and compliance reviews, offer the staff development committee an opportunity to create an annual plan for staff development based on the changing needs of both staff and the program.

Connections to Community Services

When families enroll or when a family expresses need, staff provide direct referrals for outside services. Children of the Rainbow has established arrangements with several community-based and other social service

"I had lots of problems with my mom. I felt so bad when she left me, but I felt like the people around me here really care about me. I feel really secure."

"I am a single mom, and I always felt very insecure. The staff always answer all my questions. They are my friends. They make me feel like I can do it."

"I have learned so much about my children and myself. I am learning to breathe."

"I came from Africa just two years ago. I have learned there are good people here who are not working just for money. I can trust them."

"I have learned about my child here. My child's love of music and dance was not anything I ever knew before. My life has changed completely."

"I have no one else. They are very flexible and always here for me."

"These teachers are more like friends. It's a reciprocal relationship."

What Teachers Say

"I am on the same side as them."

"Sometimes I feel like I'm running after parents into the parking lot because I'm so excited about what their children are doing, and I want them to know about it. I keep saying, 'and then, you know what she did?' or 'yesterday, we had the best time...'"

organizations, including Boys and Girls Clubs of Greater San Diego, Greater Golden Hill Community Development Corporation, Mosaic Power, the Neighborhood House Association, San Diego Urban League, Second Chance, and the Union of Pan Asian Communities. Through these connections, families can get assistance with food, health care, mental health counseling, job readiness, job training and placement, education, and other needs.

Educational and Skill-Building Workshops

These workshops, held on-site monthly for parents, provide guidance on parent–child communication, parent–teacher communication, parent–child accountability methods, creating a conducive home learning environment, and participating more actively and productively in their children’s school and extra-curricular activities. Additional workshops create opportunities for parents to share knowledge, offer skill-building activities, and encourage personal growth and development. Through the workshops, staff teach parents appropriate ways to discipline their children to prevent abuse and violence. In addition to staff efforts, local domestic violence experts visit Children of the Rainbow sites regularly to provide ongoing violence prevention and education workshops specifically designed for parents.

Family Needs Documentation and Referral Form

Children of the Rainbow staff complete a family needs documentation and referral form for the family of every child enrolled in the program. The form is used to identify each family’s health and social service needs, to document direct referrals that are made for outside services, and to record the follow-ups that have occurred. Families receive assistance in accessing health care and insurance for themselves and their children.

Focus on Meeting Family Needs

Designed from the beginning to respond directly to the needs of the families it serves, Children of the Rainbow offers childcare from 5:00 am–1:00 am every

“It’s the spirit of the thing. It’s the people who work here who make the difference.”

“We really get along here. We’re like a family to each other, too.”

“We start with our own life experience when we talk to parents. Life has given most of them a really raw deal. We can validate that experience. Gale validates that experience.”

“There is love in the food. There is always plenty for everyone.”

day to accommodate caregivers' work schedules. It also offers arrangements for respite and weekend care, and fulfills other unusual care requests from families.

The program provides many opportunities for families to get to know one another, work together, and share resources. Potluck dinners, meetings, and workshops of many kinds, as well as informal get-togethers, offer families a chance to create relationships with each other. These mutual assistance networks, in addition to the resources and support offered by the childcare staff, are invaluable to families in times of stress or crisis.

Food is often provided for families, and jazz musicians perform on a monthly basis. Parents are encouraged to have dinner with their children at any time and are invited to a weekly "Friday Night Live" activity with their children from 5:00 pm–7:00 pm. A lending library for parents, which includes parenting videos that don't require extensive reading, is also available.

Individualized Parent Meetings

Center staff hold special meetings with parents whenever they or the parents would like to address an issue or concern. These meeting may cover a variety of issues, including personal needs, referrals, the development of the child (behavioral, social, cognitive, and/or emotional), and/or the special needs of the parent(s), family, or child.

Parent Advisory Committee

The parent advisory committee provides an opportunity for parents to meet quarterly with community stakeholders—giving them a chance to voice their concerns, find out about community events and activities, share information, address community issues, and discuss topics of interest.

Parent Education Meetings

Children of the Rainbow offers a variety of meetings designed around the needs and interests of local

parents. The parent education meetings occur quarterly, are open to all families in the community, and build on the modeling and informal education that takes place daily between teachers and families. The format of the meetings demonstrates to parents that their needs and interests are the program's primary concern and allows them to help set the agenda for learning.

Parents as Teachers Program

Parents of children enrolled at Children of the Rainbow are given the opportunity to participate in this program, which is designed to:

- Give parents timely information on child development
- Involve parents in parent–child activities that encourage language development, intellectual growth, social development, and motor skills
- Strengthen parent–child relationships

The program values the important role parents can play in their child's early education care and enables them to contribute while building their parenting skills and strengthening their relationship with their child.

Social/Emotional Development Facilitation

Children of the Rainbow's program goals help to facilitate each child's social and emotional development. These goals include:

- To meet the mental, physical, and emotional developmental needs of each child by providing developmentally challenging, age-appropriate, and culturally sensitive program curricula and activities
- To provide pleasurable, positive, and culturally appropriate food and eating experiences
- To provide a creative, loving, safe environment with continuity of primary caregiver relationships in which children feel welcome, safe, and stable
- To provide or facilitate ancillary services that address the physical and behavioral health needs of enrolled children

Children are regularly assessed on developmental issues, and the classroom curriculum—based on the Creative Curriculum—is adapted according to the needs of children in each class. Teachers reach out to families and work with them to develop strategies that support their children’s development when they seem to be having a hard time.

Staff are encouraged to begin conversations about discipline with parents, many of whom assume that everyone spansks their children. Teachers employ modeling, praise, coaching, analysis of alternatives, planning, and follow-up to help parents change their strategies. They encourage parents to communicate with and set clear parameters for their children, and suggest “the look” as an appropriate disciplinary method.

