



Oregon Association of Relief Nurseries, Statewide Program Evaluation Report



Prepared by:
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Pacific Research and Evaluation (PRE) and the Oregon Association of Relief Nurseries (OARN) partnered to conduct a statewide program evaluation, assessing the extent to which the Relief Nursery (RN) model was meeting the outcomes of its logic model, impacting family and child outcomes, and serving to build protective capacity in Oregon families. The study focused on a timeframe of March 2019 through June 2022; it included consideration for how factors such as the pandemic, local natural disasters, and general social upheaval influenced how families engaged with RNs. A Family Input Survey solicited feedback from families who receive RN services. RN Staff Focus Groups provided internal perspectives on services offered to families. Key findings are shared below, organized by two overarching project goals.

GOAL 1: Examine the extent to which the Relief Nursery model is meeting the outcomes of its logic model, impacting family and child outcomes, and serving to build protective capacity in Oregon families.

RNs succeeded in their goal to increase children’s’ abilities to build social and emotional competencies, as well as caregivers’ abilities to support this growth.

- ◆ **Caregivers** most often sought out classroom-based services, home visits, and developmental screenings from RNs.
- ◆ **Caregivers** viewed classrooms as safe spaces for children to develop social skills with peers and adults, with activities effectively supporting socio-emotional development.
- ◆ **Caregivers** used the skills developed through RN resources to support their child(ren) in having positive interactions with others.
- ◆ **Caregivers** used the skills developed through RN services to help their child(ren) understand and manage their emotions.

RNs were effective at building up protective capacities among parents in Oregon.

- ◆ **Caregivers** connected RN services to changes in their own parenting skills. Specifically, they were more aware of their strengths as a parent, their ability to support their child(ren) in times of need, and their knowledge of how to support their child(ren)’s development.

“I would talk to them about what our family has gone through, and they helped provide resources we needed. I am grateful.”

GOAL 2: Increase understanding of the impact of factors such as the pandemic, natural disasters, and social upheaval on Oregon families, and families’ feedback on Relief Nurseries’ response to family need amidst these challenging circumstances.

Caregivers felt that their needs from RNs have remained consistent over the last year, citing minimal changes or impacts from external factors.

- ◆ **Caregivers** valued the ways RNs adhered to health and safety guidelines (e.g., virtual or distanced meetings), though this sometimes resulted in new stressors (e.g., finding alternative childcare when classrooms were closed).
- ◆ **RN staff** sought to anticipate and proactively minimize the impact of the pandemic on families.
- ◆ When thinking about future needs, **caregivers** most anticipate needing continued assistance supporting their child(ren)’s development.
- ◆ **RN staff** observed an uptick in families seeking assistance finding and sustaining employment, affording basic necessities, and locating and securing affordable housing.

Caregivers agreed that RNs successfully adapted their services, strategies, and approaches throughout the last year to meet their needs.

- ◆ **Caregivers** celebrated RN staff for clearly communicating changes to families. **RN staff** confirmed that consistent and persistent communication was the primary strategy used to support families throughout the pandemic.
- ◆ **Caregivers** viewed RNs as being proactive in identifying and supporting their needs during the pandemic.

OARN trainings were viewed as valued resources, which helped RN staff build or deepen their knowledge of various approaches to use with families.

- ◆ **RN staff** also listed each other – collaboration and mentorship among peers – as critical to their personal skills development as they navigated changing family needs amid the pandemic.

RN services and staff were successful in their goals of fostering feelings of connectivity, resilience, and hope among families.

- ◆ **RN staff** expressed deep alignment between stated goals and their personal values, highlighting this as a key reason they stay engaged with this work.
- ◆ **Caregivers** appreciated the strengths-based approach that RNs use and valued the sense of community that RNs can offer for their children, particularly in classroom-based activities.
- ◆ **RN staff** shared that building meaningful relationships with families can be a prolonged experience, though they have identified guiding strategies to help them be successful in these efforts.

*“There were not opportunities to get together with families during the pandemic.
The support from socially distanced meetings and check ins were invaluable.”*

GENERAL THEMES around elements of the RN model that are working well and added opportunities for OARN to consider.

- ◆ **Caregivers** believed RNs to be safe, welcoming environments, and valued the empathetic, flexible approach staff used to provide support.
- ◆ **RN staff** valued the individual agency given to them to manage work/life balance and the friendly, supportive nature staff brought to their work together.
- ◆ **Caregivers** would appreciate if RNs had expanded classroom options. This would both support their child(ren)’s socio-emotional and academic growth, as well as help resolve some childcare support needs.
- ◆ **Caregivers** noted that RN staff turnover can have a negative impact on their children. New staff were not always prepared to support children with added or specific needs, and limited staff sometimes meant those needs were not consistently met. **Caregivers** also shared that the change in staff made it difficult for their child(ren) to develop stable relationships with other adults.
- ◆ Barriers **RN staff** observed, or experienced, in the workplace included financial instability, difficulty with time management, and/or not having enough support with administrative components of the work.

“My family would not be where we are without these programs.”



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