

Nebraska Landscape Assessment:

# Community Conversations

Early Childhood Care and  
Education Systems 2024

# Introduction & Acknowledgements



Nebraska Children and Families Foundation (NCFF)  
215 Centennial Mall South, Suite 200, Lincoln, NE 68508

Lori Nebelsick-Gullett, Ph.D.  
lnebelsick-gullett@nebraskachildren.org  
Chief Scientist Evaluation, Research, & Continuous Improvement

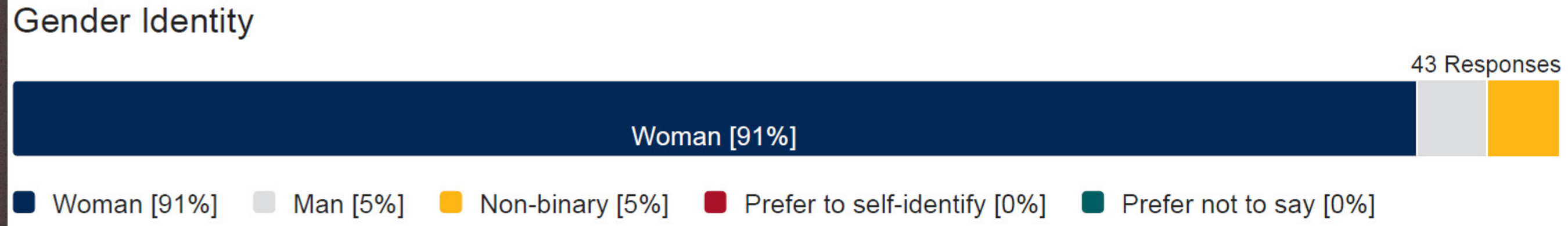
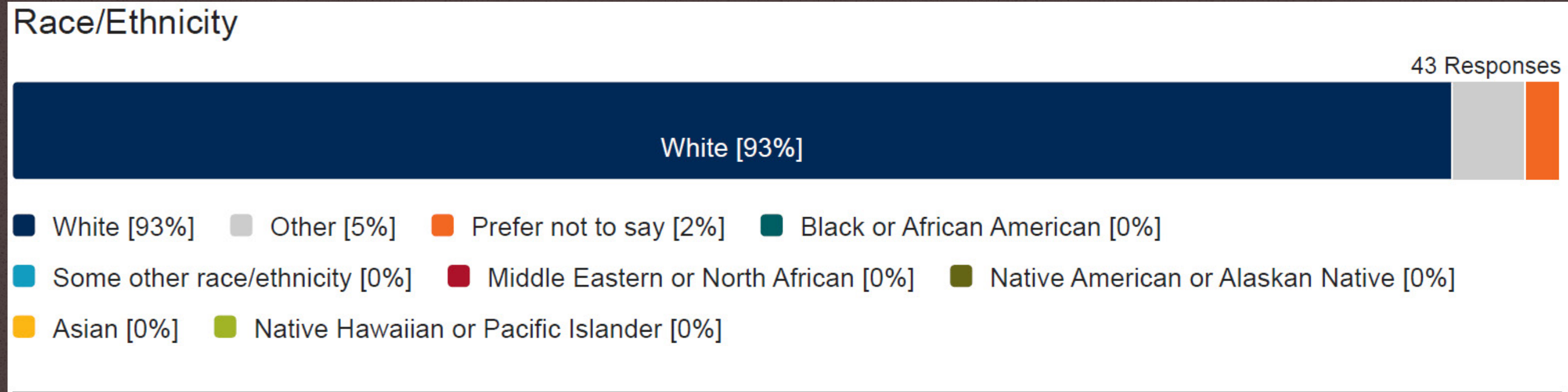
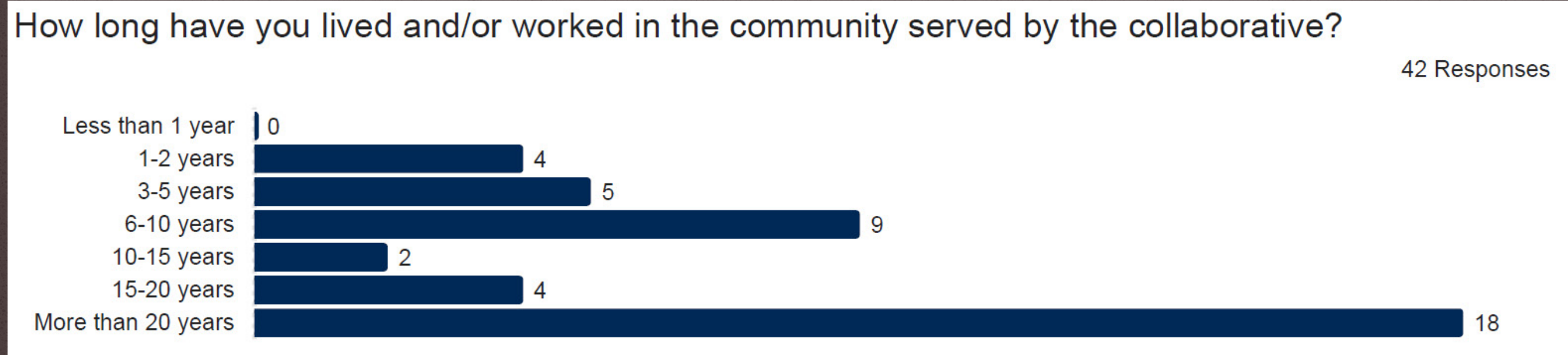


University of Nebraska Medical Center  
6902 Pine Street, Omaha, NE, 68106

Jolene Johnson, Ed.D.  
jolene.johnson@unmc.edu  
Director, Education and Child Development  
Munroe-Meyer Institute (MMI)

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# Survey Participant Demographics



# Community Strengths<sup>4</sup>

- ★ Participants thought the collaborative nature of individuals and the partnerships among organizations was a major strength within their communities. Many organizations work together to ensure children in the community are learning from the same models.
- ★ There has been an increase in the quality of care provided. They stated that the network of early childhood collaborators such as Rooted in Relationships, Communities for Kids, and the Educational Service Unit's along with the dedication of early childhood educators and growth mindedness of the people in the community had helped to contribute to increases in quality care.
- ★ Increased awareness and support around early childhood care and education in general. The High Plains Early Childhood Collaborative and the PRT has been essential to these efforts bridging gaps in access to informal and formal education opportunities for parents, children and providers.
- ★ Identification of children in need of early intervention services, noting that parents seemed more willing to allow people within their home to help their children. EDN, Sixpence and the public schools have worked diligently in this area.

# Challenges

## Lack of Availability within Early Childhood Care and Education

- Shortage of early childhood care and education options, with many communities losing both in-home and center-based facilities.
- Long waitlists for quality childcare limit parents' choices
- Some providers face physical space constraints that prevent expansion.

## Barriers to Accessing Early Childhood Care and Education

- High cost for those who do not qualify for childcare subsidies
- Lack of transportation
- Need for more childcare options for children with disabilities as well as children in foster care.
- Lack of flexible childcare options for families who work non-traditional hours

## Need for More Licensed Early Childhood Educators

- Need for more early childhood educators. Low pay, lack of benefits, and exhaustion were believed to be contributing factors
- Barriers to opening a licensed home or center or even hiring staff within the field was often overwhelming due to the amount of time to complete required processes/training and money needed to navigate through the regulations. Lack of funding to offset those costs.
- The field was still experiencing burnout and secondary trauma from the COVID-19 pandemic
- Need for more professional development for educators on how to support families and children with special needs.

## Need for More Health Services

- Strained mental health system. Poor behavior, low social-emotional skills, high anxiety and other mental health challenges had increased for children. Mental health issues of parents and early childhood educators had also increased.
- Need for care expanded beyond mental health to health in general and more particularly dental health.
- Stigma related to receiving mental health support.

# Opportunities for Growth

- ✦ Participants described a variety of ways they thought that their communities could continue to support their communities. Necessities such as having available housing, transportation, quality cell service and internet access were pointed out as essential ways that families needed support
- ✦ There's a need to help educate parents on the importance of preschool. Regardless of where families desired to educate (public, private, in-home, home-school), participants felt some families needed to be made aware of the importance of providing preschool as well as how to empower parents in interacting with the school system to help them become more aware of publicly available programs.
- ✦ Participants mentioned the importance of engaging more businesses to support early childhood care and education, either through helping employees directly through benefits or through supporting the administration of childcare (i.e., paying for staff).
- ✦ Finally, participants thought that providing more education and resources to first-time parents would be beneficial.