CHAPIN HALL

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO
CROWN FAMILY SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK, POLICY, AND PRACTICE
Advancing a More Just and Humane Society

September 2025

HOME VISITING AS A BRIDGE

Supporting Immigrant and Refugee Families Through Transition and Growth

AIMEE HILADO | REIKO KAKUYAMA-VILLABER | MELISSA BOND | CAROLYN PONTING |JON KORFMACHER

Community Partner: Baby TALK
engage • connect • nurture • support

ABOUT THIS REPORT

Recommended Citation

Hilado, A., Kakuyama-Villaber, R., Bond, M. H., Ponting, C., & Korfmacher, J. (2025). *Home visiting as a bridge: Supporting immigrant and refugee families through transition and growth*. Chapin Hall and the University of Chicago Crown Family School of Social Work, Policy, and Practice.

Acknowledgments

Thank you to The University of Chicago and Chapin Hall Joint Research Fund for supporting this work. We also thank Baby TALK, Inc. and our Baby TALK Program Partners: Community Consolidated School District 146, Community Education District 214 Early Childhood Program, C.U. Early Home Visiting Program, Grand Avenue School (Beardstown) Program, Infant Welfare Society of Evanston, RefugeeOne, Ridgeland School District 122 Early Childhood Program, Saint Xavier University Birth to Three Program, and West Chicago District 33 Program. We also acknowledge the team of research assistants who conducted interviews and supported data analysis: Patricia Aguirre, Saria Becharra, Elizabeth Davisson, Maddie Fox, Grace Lee, Shiyu Lin, Samantha Martinez, Elizabeth Sanchez, Yiyao Sun and graphic layout designer, Dominique Paytone.

Disclaimer

This project was funded by the University of Chicago-Chapin Hall Joint Research Fund. The opinions, findings, and recommendations expressed in this publication are solely those of the authors.

Contact

For more information, please contact Aimee Hilado at ahilado@uchicago.edu or Reiko Kakuyama-Villaber at rkakuyama@chapinhall.org.

Partners

Baby TALK
engage • connect • nurture • support
babytalk.org

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO
CROWN FAMILY SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK, POLICY, AND PRACTICE
Advancing a More Just and Humane Society
crownschool.uchicago.edu

REFUGEE WELLNESS LAB
voices.uchicago.edu/refugeewellnesslab

CHAPIN HALL
Chapinhall.org

CHAPIN HALL STATEMENT OF INDEPENDENCE

Chapin Hall is an independent policy research center focused on providing public and private decision-makers with rigorous data analysis and achievable solutions to support them in improving the lives of children, families and communities.

Chapin Hall partners with policymakers, practitioners, and philanthropists at the forefront of research and policy development by applying a unique blend of scientific research, real-world experience, and policy expertise to construct actionable information, practical tools, and, ultimately, positive change for children and families.

Established in 1985, Chapin Hall's areas of research include child welfare systems, community capacity to support children and families, and youth homelessness. For more information about Chapin Hall, visit www.chapinhall.org or @Chapin_Hall.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABOUT THIS REPORT **2**

DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY **4**

FINDINGS **5**

Languages Represented 5
Head of Household Marital Status 5
Head of Household Education Levels 6
Head of Household Range of Income 6
Length of Engagement & Number of Visits 7
Distribution of Developmental Milestones (ASQ:SE-2) 7
ASQ Developmental Screener 7
Families' Greatest Needs 8
Baby TALK Strategies for Engagement 9

FIELD INTERVIEWS **10**

Participant Overview 10
Languages Represented 10
Motivations for Family Participation 11
Family-Centered Approach to Access Supports 12
Building Trust 13
Developing Parents' Capacity 14
Culturally Responsive 14
Sustained Engagement 15
Filling a Social Void 17
A Broader View of Parenting 17
Balancing Loss, Identity, and Hope 18
Building Independence & Belonging 19

CONCLUSION **20**

RESEARCH TEAM

AIMEE HILADO, Ph.D., LCSW,
Co-Principal Investigator,
University of Chicago
Crown Family School

REIKO KAKUYAMA-VILLABER, M.Ed., M.A.,
Co-Principal Investigator,
Chapin Hall

MELISSA BOND, Ph.D.,
Many to Many, LLC

CAROLYN PONTING, Ph.D.,
University of Oregon

JON KORFMACHER, Ph.D.,
Chapin Hall

DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY

Supporting resettled families requires a deep understanding of the immigration journey—before, during, and after resettlement—and how these experiences shape individual, family, and community well-being. Home visiting programs offer a promising way to promote child development and family health by meeting families where they are literally and emotionally, and in ways that account for intergenerational, cultural, and social considerations.[1,2] These programs deliver services in the home, a trusted and familiar space, which helps reduce barriers to access, strengthens engagement, and connects families with vital resources and support systems.[3]

Our project explored the effects of home visiting on immigrant and refugee families broadly, drawing on data from 898 families served between 2021 and 2024, along with interviews from 35 participants, including program leaders, home visitors, and parents served within the Baby TALK network. We examined the implementation of home visiting services, what fosters connection and engagement, and how families experience support during resettlement.

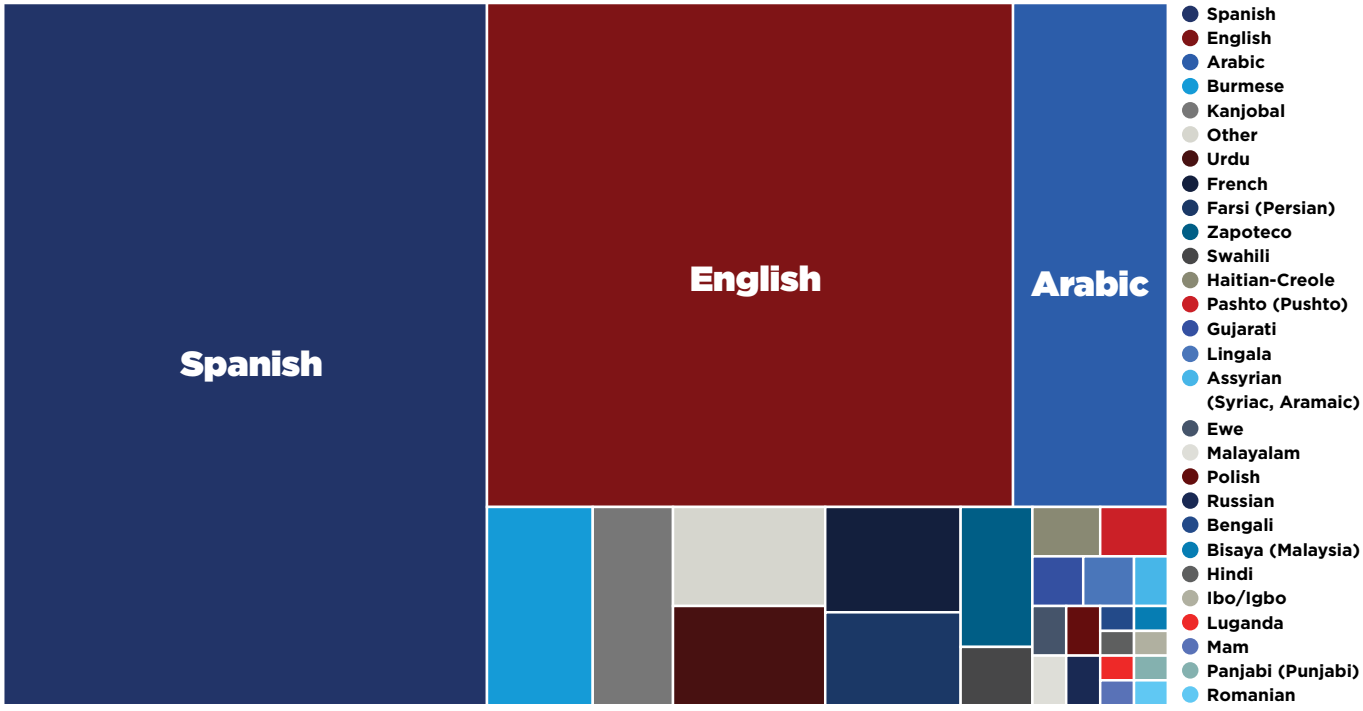
This visual report offers an overview of families served, highlights voices from the field, and shares early insights into the emotional and practical needs of resettled families such as navigating loss, rebuilding belonging, and finding support in unfamiliar systems. These findings can guide future efforts to improve services across early childhood and human service programs working with similarly diverse populations.

We hope the insights shared here will inform practice, research, and policy ultimately supporting more equitable, responsive, and human-centered systems for resettled communities nationwide.

FINDINGS

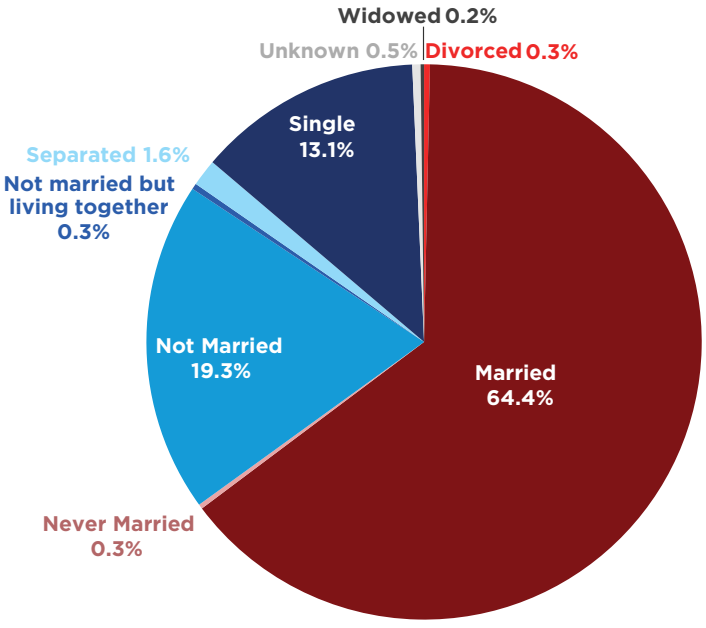
Languages Represented

We gathered data from 898 families from nine home visiting programs across Illinois using the Baby TALK Model. The sample represents 28 languages/dialects, with the majority of families speaking either English or Spanish. Arabic was the third-most-spoken home language.



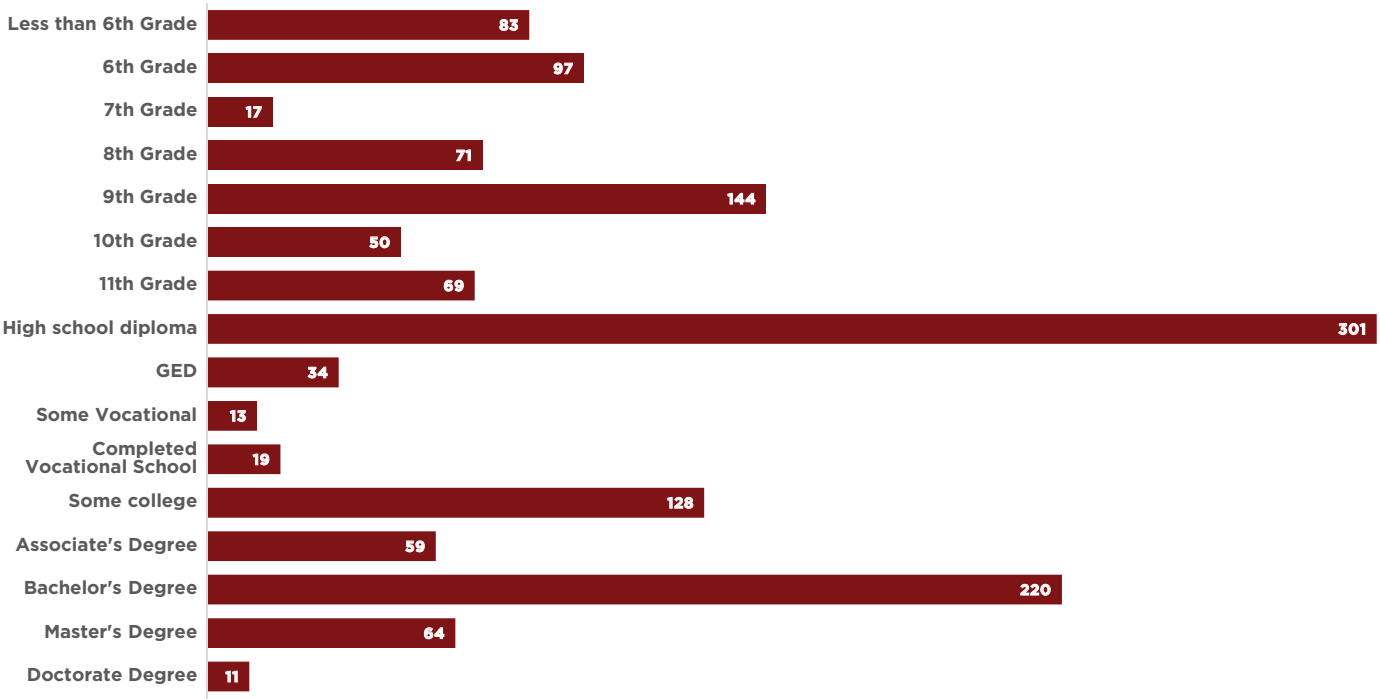
Head of Household Marital Status

The majority of the families in the sample were married, but single parents and unmarried parents were also well represented.



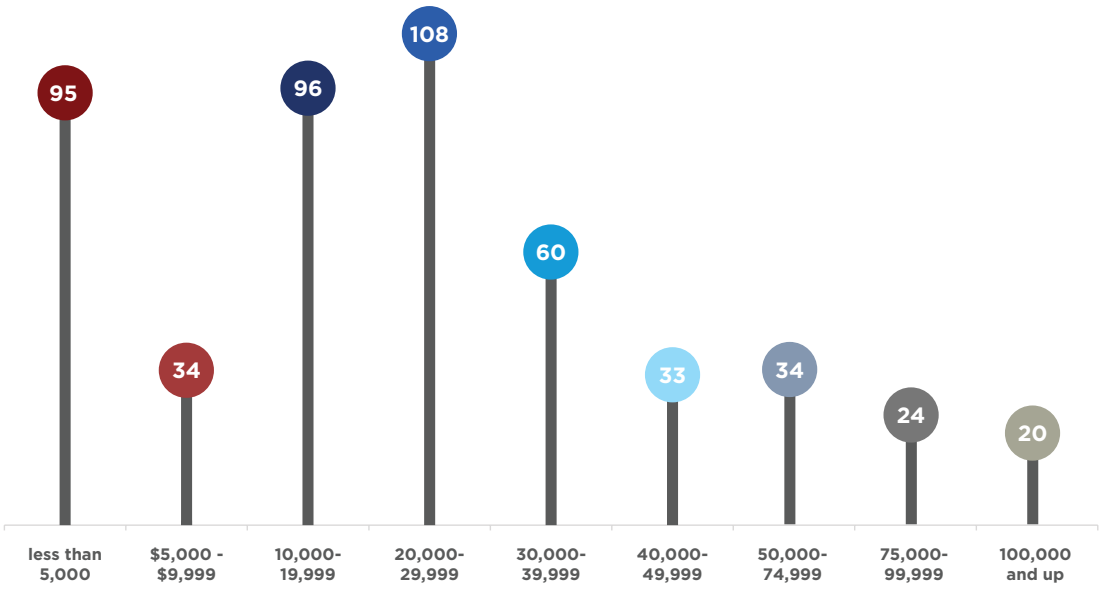
Head of Household Education Levels

This graphic shows the highest level of education attained by the head of household in our sample. Most participants had a high school diploma or less.



Head of Household Range of Income

Family income ranged from those with less than $5,000 to over $100,000 annually.



Length of Engagement & Number of Visits

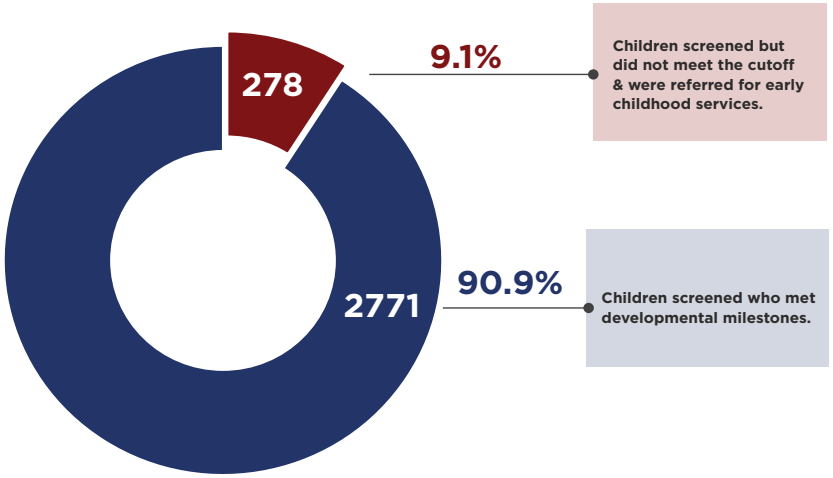
Many families participated in home visiting services over several years, often enrolling multiple children at once. In some cases, a newborn would begin receiving services just as an older sibling completed the program.

Average length of engagement: 28 months

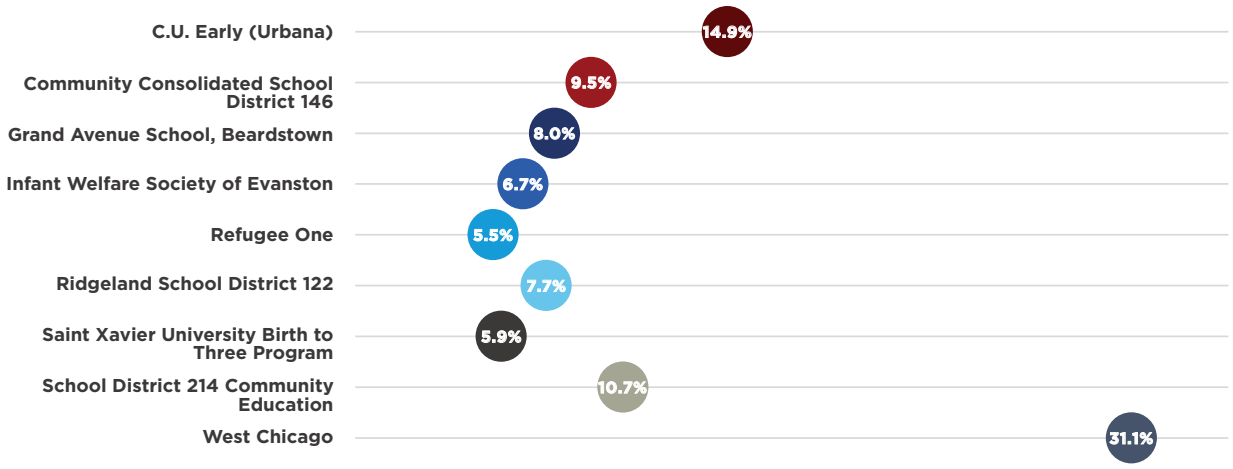
Average number of home visits (personal and group encounters): 46

Distribution of Developmental Milestones (ASQ:SE-2)

Children enrolled in Baby TALK home visiting programs received regular developmental screenings using the Ages and Stages Questionnaire, Third Edition (ASQ-3)[4] and the Ages and Stages Questionnaire: Social-Emotional, Second Edition (ASQ:SE-2).[5] Routine and ongoing screening allowed home visitors to monitor children's progress toward developmental milestones and to promptly identify the need for referrals to additional support services when concerns emerged.



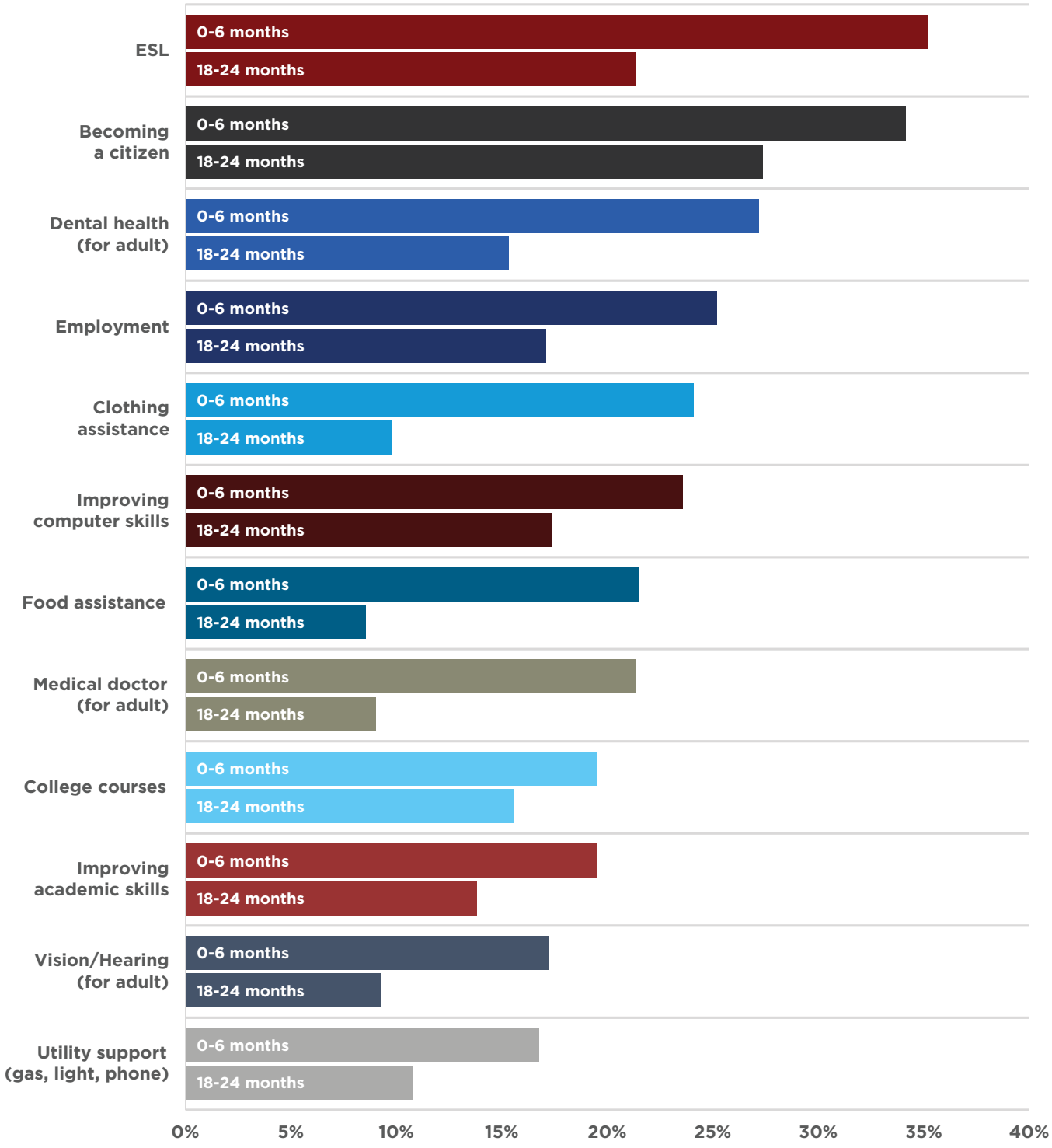
ASQ Developmental Screener



Using the ASQ Screener (ASQ-3 and ASQ:SE-2), 1,501 children were screened for developmental progress. The figure above highlights the varying rates of children recommended for additional monitoring. Early and proactive identification of developmental needs is critical for providing timely support and helping children maintain a healthy developmental trajectory.

Families' Greatest Needs

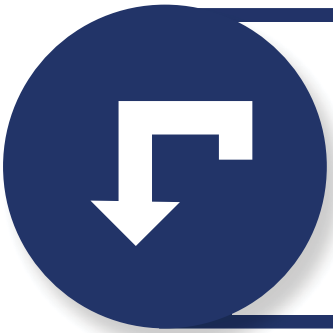
The resources resettled families prioritized shifted over time. In the first six months of enrollment, access to basic needs (such as food, clothing, and medical contacts) was critical. By 18–24 months, these needs decreased, while English language training and immigration support remained top priorities. This shift reflects home visiting's core role in connecting families to essential resources early in the program.



Baby TALK Strategies for Engagement

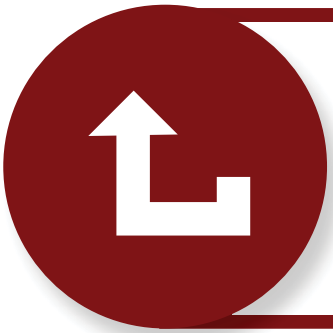
Methods: Home visiting data from 898 families (34,071 visits total) were examined to understand the effects of using ten distinct Baby TALK engagement strategies on family participation over a three-year service period. Using a time-to-event model[6], the results suggest specific strategies promote, limit, or had neutral/no effect on retention in the program.

Statistically significant predictors of retention in home visiting services over the course of a 36-month service period.



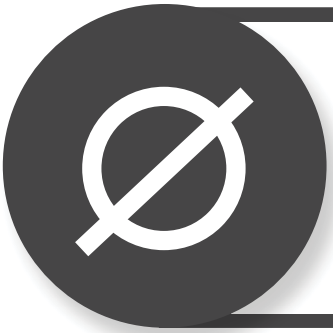
Use of the following Baby TALK strategies[7] reduced the likelihood of families exiting the program.

- Beginning sessions with the prompt "tell me about your baby."
- Focusing on family functioning and well-being.
- Acknowledging predictable touchpoints[8] with families.
- Using objective language during sessions.



Use the following Baby TALK strategies increased the likelihood of families exiting the program.

- Focusing on meaning making during sessions (i.e., asking the caregiver to describe their understanding of observed behavior.)
- Narrating behaviors for the child during play sessions.



The following Baby TALK strategies had no significant effects on program retention or attrition.

- Focusing on child mastery or parent mastery.
- Prioritize engagement by valuing caregivers' and children's efforts over the end goal.
- Use the pivot strategy: address a caregiver's concern, then link it to the child's development or behavior.

Our study provided a window into what strategies impact retention and attrition rates among resettled families. Overall, more than 1/3 of families enrolled in Baby TALK Home Visiting programs continued to engage in home visits for more than 3 years. Larger families and families with younger children were less likely to discontinue services and overall, programs had **very slow** exit rates (average length of program engagement: 28 months) across families served.

FIELD INTERVIEWS

Participant Overview

We invited program directors, home visitors, and parents across five Baby TALK home visiting programs to discuss various topics to better understand the experiences of immigrant and refugee families served in Illinois programs. The research team analyzed interview data from 35 participants to summarize key themes and messages about families in our study.

5 Program Directors

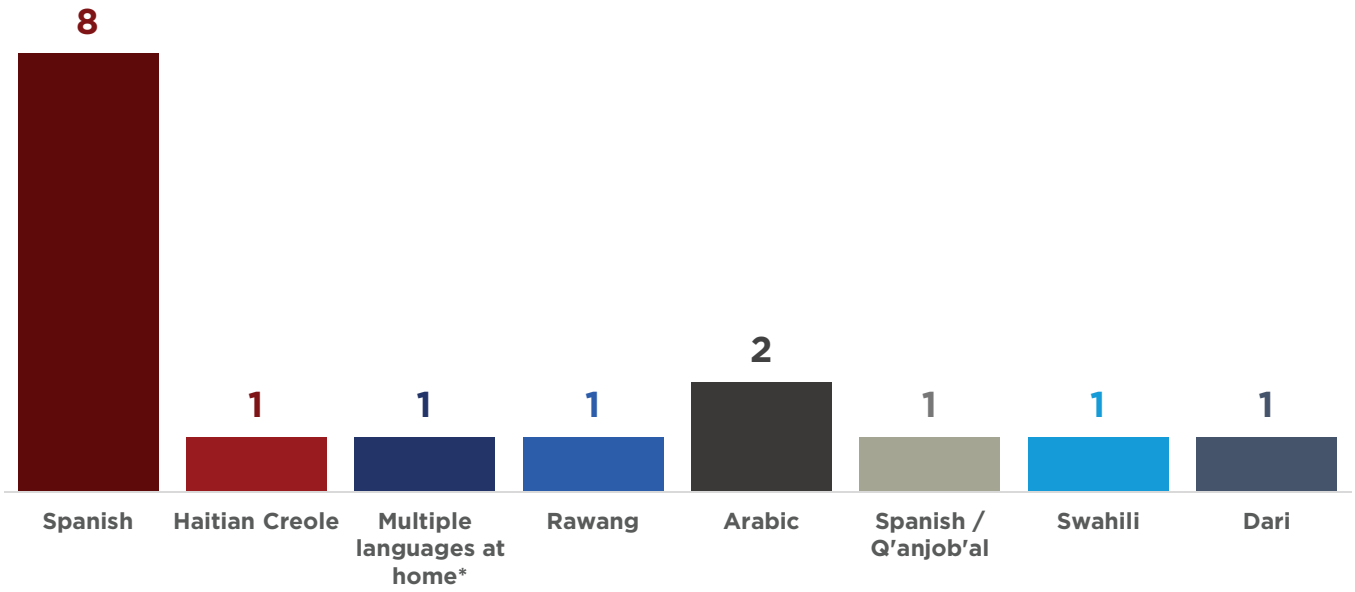
14 Home Visitors

16 Parents

8 Languages Represented

Languages Represented

Eight languages were spoken at home among the 16 parents interviewed.



*including Luganda; English (Official language)

Motivations for Family Participation

Home visitors become trusted partners in family growth and empowerment.

As one Baby Talk home visitor said, "Parents come to BT program for many different reasons, motivations, hopes" to seek ways to support their children and families. During the interviews, many parents expressed their sense of family responsibility. Families are drawn to the Baby TALK because they see it as in some way helping move toward the hopes and dreams they have for their children—to be happy, respectful, independent, and maintain cultural values. With their home visitors, parents seek ways to support their children's physical and emotional health and to respond to needs for healthy physical, cognitive, social, and emotional development.

Parents also expressed their hopes to expand their own knowledge and develop skills necessary to navigate resources and become self-sufficient in their new community, which can further lead to a more active parental role in making informed decisions and supporting their families.

> **"My priority is that they feel that the home we are building for them is a safe place. I think it's my priority that they know that their mom and dad are doing well, they are not doing bad, everything we do for them is, is with a lot of love and for them to be, well, happy children. [...] And my priority is to protect them, to protect my children and to give them and teach them the tools so that they can get ahead." *(Parent, Mexico)***

> **"We are there to support the families, to learn how to navigate in this culture, country. You know, that those families want the best for their children. They are trying hard to live here. It's not easy to speak a second language." *(Home Visitor)***

> **"And I think that I've seen, you know, just very dedicated parents, it's very hardworking, you know, really willing to, you know adjusting with a lot." *(Program Director)***

Family-Centered Approach to Access Supports

Embedding a family-centered approach, the Baby TALK program provides families with resources and space that foster a sense of agency in raising their children.

To many immigrant and refugee families, home visiting becomes an integral social support as they become established in their new communities. Home visitors meet families where they are, guiding and scaffolding them by responding to their needs and providing a range of supports for promoting their children's health and family well-being.

Home visiting first prioritizes stabilizing families and helping them better integrate into their communities through resource sharing. Parents and home visitors work together in the areas of nurturing child development (physical, social, emotional, cognitive), fostering parent-child connection, understanding and accessing community resources and services, promoting parent mental health, and identifying opportunities to connect with other families in the community.

> **"The home visitor has helped me get everything I have needed: material to work with my kids at home, where to look for it, where to get food, everything, honestly."*(Parent,Mexico)***

> **"[Home visitors] help you with parenting your children cognitively, emotionally, and everything. [They are] very good because they teach you how to connect with your children."**
> ***(Parent, Mexico)***

> **"[My home visitor] provides different materials for you to engage a child and go through that milestone. That's really what I love. [...] It gave me a relief. Maybe if I didn't know I would like be worried all the time. Anxiety, and then it also [affects] him." *(Parent, Uganda)***

Building Trust

Home visitors become trusted sources of support.

While the process of supporting immigrant and refugee families varies from one family to another, home visitors prioritize relationship-based approaches that foster parents' agency and capacity building.

For many families, home visitors are trusted sources of consistent support, helping them access resources and strengthen their parental capacities. Home visitors respond to families' needs and concerns and build trusting relationships with parents and children.

> **"I trust [my home visitor] with things and if I am dealing with something, [I say] "Look at him" and she helps me, or [I ask] "What do I do?" and she helps me also." *(Parent, Guatemala)***

> **"I most like when there are people, a real human being is with me, listening to me or accompanying me because the papers, I do read those and everything and I try to practice them but I feel like support, their voice, their ear, are so much more powerful than the papers." *(Parent, Honduras)***

> **And knowing, facing a new country, the fact of being a mother for the first time on my own. So I've felt a lot of support with the visits.**
> ***(Parent, Cuba)***

> **"I had a mom, she texted me. She's like, 'I feel like I'm truly being seen.' And I was like, this is the best text I could ever get, because this is what I'm here to do like I want you to feel like somebody."**
> ***(Home Visitor)***

Developing Parents' Capacity

Parents expressed how the program has helped them expand their knowledge about child development and take the active roles in advocating for their child's growth. Home visitors described how they seek to support parents' mastery in raising their children through mutual/reciprocal relationships and family-centered practices.

> **"I really like the program because it gives me ideas, like how to teach my son to use his hands, how he can feed himself independently."**
> ***(Parent, Mexico)***

> **"So they're always so grateful and so thankful and ready to learn like they're always ready to learn and ready to share and I'm always ready to learn from them like they teach me so much."**
> ***(Home Visitor)***

Culturally Responsive

Culture can affect parenting. Trauma and hardships that each family might have faced, and still faces, can also shape their engagement in home visiting and other community support programs. Setting goals together with families based on their needs and hopes requires home visitors to be open to families' unique values and beliefs, recognize their potential biases, and look beyond differences to work with the families.

> **"I do put all of my biases to the side before I walk into a home. You know, I put a put aside how I grew up. I just wanna be there with them in the moment."** ***(Home Visitor)***

> **"[I have] families where it's not necessarily play per se, but development with those engagements with their children, with like tummy time that they don't want to put their child on the floor. "So, we look at different ways. You can get tummy time without being on the floor like laying back and having the baby on your chest, or, you know, being on the sofa or the bed, or different ways to do those strategies and those interactions without dishonoring culturally where they're at. "*(Home Visitor)***

Sustained Engagement

Parents experience relationship-centered supports via home visiting to meet their material and emotional needs, which keeps them engaged in the Baby TALK program.

Parents shared various reasons for appreciating and continuing to participate in the home visiting program. Parents value having someone to show up consistently and provide guidance to support their children's development. Home visitors provide parents with both material and emotional support while helping parents build knowledge as they navigate unfamiliar systems. These supports have become key drivers for parents' engagement in home visits, fostering a sense of empowerment and supporting their integration into the new community.

“[Home visits] gives me like a wake-up call [...] As a parent, you may be taken over by your, you know, own daily things and then forget about the child.” *(Parent, Uganda)*

“I think that [parents] are very interested in their children learning. That they also interact with their children. [All] my 12 families always open their doors to me every week.” *(Home Visitor)*

“Well, one of the reasons I’m in this program is because, as I said before, I’ve learned a lot. [My home visitor] tells us what goals you have now for your family or what goals you have personally with the children. And that gives me like a... It’s the goal. It’s like getting to a place. If maybe if I didn’t have it, if I wasn’t in the program, I wouldn’t make those goals. Like OK I know, a goal, this is the goal as a family is to be much more active. So that gives me like the desire and challenges me to do it.” *(Parent, Mexico)*

“I feel committed because, it’s the same as... like at the beginning, like there are stages. I learn depending on the stage of the child. So, it’s a commitment as much for the participants as it is for the visitors. It’s their time. It’s as much theirs as it is ours, or mine, as a mom. And so, I take it seriously and I take it as a commitment because they are giving their time and I see that they are committed to their work.” *(Parent, Mexico)*

“It’s very satisfying, because it’s like a support that I feel being a new mother. And knowing, facing a new country, the fact of being a mother for the first time on my own. So I’ve felt a lot of support with the visits and with the help that I - because any doubts that I have I know I can get help.” *(Parent, Cuba)*

Filling a Social Void

Parents highlight that leaving their home countries often meaningfully reduced their social support networks. In this context, parents were especially grateful for the support that home visitors provided in the areas of child development or maternal mental health.

> **"You know it's challenging [in the US] ...Being far away, you being far away from your parents. Yeah, you have friends, but I'm a kind of person who doesn't, you know, like share a lot. So, it becomes hard... You know, home visit[ors] also talk about [mental health]. Cause earlier I mentioned, they don't only work with a child. So, at times, yeah, ...you tell her about how you're going through. I think she she's one of the people maybe I've like really shared with. If I'm having difficulty." *(Parent, Uganda)***

A Broader View of Parenting

Parents expressed that the home visiting program gave them a broader set of perspectives about how they might choose to raise their children, including how to understand and respond to common behavior problems and who could be included as a caregiver.

> **"...In my culture they expect... a child who knows how to behave, who is obedient, who doesn't throw tantrums... they are not so permissive with children when it comes to emotions... But I understand that my child is learning and my child is learning to self-regulate and I'm the person that has to help him. And sometimes I can't even regulate myself. So, how can I demand my child to self-regulate?" *(Parent, Mexico)***

> **"Back home, everything falls on women. The woman works and raises children, etc. A father's role is only to work outside the house. But life is about cooperation. Dads should help and cooperate in raising their children... I always tell [their dad]. 'I'm saving you a turn with them'... I tell him it is true that as a mother, my role is to raise the children, but you also have a significant role. He has to help me with the kids. He plays with them." *(Parent, Iraq)***

> **"It's really exciting when you're watching them kind of develop their own parenting style and strategies, and watching them build self-confidence. All of that is really fun and watching them connect, watching them build that deep bond with their child that I know it is going to sustain them and carry them through, and be the best protection for mental health for that child as they get older." *(Home Visitor)***

Balancing Loss, Identity, and Hope

Immigrant and refugee families experience profound and evolving losses as they adapt to life in a new community. The absence of familiar social support networks, cultural disconnection, and shifts in professional identities contribute to feelings of isolation and uncertainty. Additionally, some families find the U.S. less safe and welcoming than expected, further compounding their sense of displacement. Despite these challenges, home visiting provides a consistent space for parents to remain focused on their children's futures and their well-being, envisioning a path that merges their home culture, American culture, and newfound opportunities.

> **"I want them to be good people, too. I don't want them to always be happy because I have gone through that as well. The act of going through sad things makes people stronger, so I don't want their path to be easy. I want them to fall so that they can arrive... I don't know how to express it, but I want them to stumble so that they become strong." *(Parent, Mexico)***

> **"My wish is that they are able to do anything by themselves without support from me. I want them to rely on themselves even when they are young. My hope for them is to fulfill their education and understand and know everything." *(Parent, Iraq)***

Building Independence & Belonging

Home visiting helps families gain self-reliance while strengthening their place in the community.

Families want tools for mobility, self-reliance, and meaningful connections in their new community. They turn to home visiting services to develop the skills needed to navigate education, healthcare, and daily life independently. Communities and specific programs can help newly arriving families feel welcome, which is an essential part of adjustment and continued community-building for new and long-standing immigrant families.

> **"[We must] recognize their value to society and their value to this country and our neighborhood [and] school community… and help them feel welcome." *(Program Director)***

CONCLUSION

Home visiting is more than a service—it's a bridge to belonging.

Home visiting programs can support immigrant and refugee families in many ways. Many parents said that leaving their home countries reduced their social support networks. The programs offer material and emotional supports that ease these families' transition into a new community and a new culture. By responding to families based on their needs and hopes, home visitors can look beyond differences and provide individualized services. Working with home visitors improved families' knowledge of child development, giving parents a broader range of options for how they might raise their children and support their physical and emotional health.

Endnotes

[1] Gonzalez, G., & Patier, C. (2021). The educational consequences of parental immigration detention. *Sociological Perspectives, 64*(2), 301-320. https://doi.org/10.1177/0731121420937743

[2] Hudson, C. C., Adams, S., & Lauderdale, J. (2016). Cultural expressions of intergenerational trauma and mental health nursing implications for US health care delivery following refugee resettlement: an integrative review of the literature. *Journal of Transcultural Nursing, 27*(3), 286-301. https://doi.org/10.1177/1043659615587591

[3] Park, M., Hinkle, L., Habben, K., & Heidorn, E. (2024). *Supporting Immigrant and Refugee Families through Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Services*. Migration Policy Institute.

[4] Squires, J., & Bricker, D. (2009). *Ages & Stages Questionnaires®*, Third Edition (ASQ®-3): A Parent-Completed Child Monitoring System.

[5] Squires, J., Bricker, D., & Twombly, E. (2015). *Ages & Stages Questionnaires®: Social-Emotional*, Second Edition (ASQ®:SE-2): A Parent-Completed Child Monitoring System for Social-Emotional Behaviors.

[6] The time-to-event model controlled for race/ethnicity, average child age, and family size. There was no observed association between race/ethnicity and attrition.

[7] Visit the Baby TALK Learning Institute for more information on the Baby TALK curriculum and relevant training programs. Engagement Strategy definitions and directions for implementation are provided to trainees through the Learning Institute.

[8] Refers to Brazelton's Touchpoints training that is offered to Baby TALK home visitors through the Baby TALK Learning Institute.