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# Opportunity to learn

How a Colorado foundation is  
prototyping a new education system

*Alan Gottlieb*

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The Donnell-Kay Foundation launched ReSchool Colorado in early 2013 with the explicit goal of creating a new education system in Colorado. At that time we committed to a process that would engage innovative thought leaders and potential users of the new system purposefully in its design.

Alan Gottlieb's article is a detailed description of one way we have worked in partnership with local communities to explore the possibilities and then test the viability of key concepts that a new system might offer. Those concepts that continue to make it through the various stages of our process will be the anchor pieces in the design of the system itself when it is officially created.

We want to thank Alan Gottlieb for capturing this experience and sharing our story. We'd also like to thank our partners, Boulder Housing Partners and Greater Good Studio, for their openness and willingness to explore new frontiers and for their expertise and authentic connections to community. Lastly, we'd like to thank the families and learners who, by opening their lives to us, granted us this opportunity to learn.

What we are learning is that we don't necessarily need to wait for a new education system in order to see change. Just the process of user-centered design has already started to shift mindsets and practices, resulting in a ReSchooling spark that will only grow in future years as these ideas gel and become more systematic.

We welcome your feedback and invite you to share this story with others in your networks.

Thank you,

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**R**ed Oak Park is a 59-unit public housing development of handsome town homes painted in pastel colors, located a stone's throw from the million-dollar neighborhoods of north Boulder, Colorado. Opened in 2011 on the former site of a dilapidated mobile home park, Red Oak Park blends into the neighborhood almost seamlessly.

Its residents, however, don't fit the Boulder stereotype of young, affluent, Lululemon-clad runners and cyclists. Many are monolingual Spanish-speaking families with young children. All are low-income. And even though the recreational amenities of Boulder surround the community, language and cultural barriers have prevented some of the families from taking advantage of the abundant learning opportunities available to children and adults alike in the broader Boulder community. These activities range from swimming lessons to soccer leagues to baby and toddler programming at the Boulder Public Library.

Cynthia Paola Barron, born and raised in Chihuahua, Mexico, has lived at Red Oak Park with her husband, six-year-old daughter Camila and four-year-old son Victor since the complex opened. When she first came to the U.S. 13 years ago, Paola, as she's commonly known, lived briefly in Utah, then in Denver, before moving to Boulder. In Red Oak Park, she said, "I was very excited by the programs offered and opportunities for my family, many more than I saw in Denver."

The opportunities and programs, however, were exclusively those run by her landlord: Boulder Housing Partners (BHP), the local housing authority. While the parenting classes and other offerings were useful, there was a broader universe of options in and around Boulder and Denver that felt out of reach, because of their cost, and the fact that neither Paola nor her husband speaks much English. But in the summer of 2015 a new world of opportunities opened up for Paola and her family.

They were one of seven BHP families chosen for a test program aimed at learning how families who operate outside the formal system of early childhood education gained access to learning opportunities for their young children. The program provided the families with debit cards they could use, with only the broadest of restrictions, to buy educational materials, enroll their kids in classes, or purchase admission to the zoo, aquarium, museums and other cultural amenities that had previously been out of their financial reach. The program also paired each family with an advocate to help them navigate around language and other barriers.



*Above:* Red Oak Park site of Boulder Housing Partners.

As a result, Paola's family over the summer enjoyed three excursions to Boulder's municipal swimming pools and a trip to Denver's downtown aquarium. Paola was also able to buy a bicycle for Camila and books and school supplies for both children.



*Above:* Paola's daughter Camila and her brother at the Denver Aquarium.

"There were so many things out there to do with our kids that we just didn't know about or couldn't do before," Paola said. "Now we know, and now we will do more of these activities."

Several weeks after the aquarium trip, her daughter wrote her a combination birthday card and thank-you note in Spanish: "Happy birthday Mama, I love you a lot and thank you for taking me to the aquarium."

"That she mentioned it in the birthday card after all that time made me realize what a meaningful experience it had been for her," Paola said, her eyes misting over. "I was surprised by that."

Paola and her family's new experiences came about thanks to a growing effort by a Denver philanthropy to reimagine Colorado's system of schooling from the ground up. While even that basic description of the Donnell-Kay Foundation's ReSchool project sounds audacious and daunting, the people leading it discovered with each small step forward that it was going to be exponentially more complex than they initially imagined.

Each small detail created new variables to consider, a cascading cycle of complexity. Each small piece of a potential new system needed to be conceived, tested, prototyped, adjusted. There would always be new learnings, surprises, unintended consequences.

The vision of ReSchool is by 2030, 50,000 Colorado youth, from babies to adults, will be learning in a new education system. They will be actively pursuing "extraordinary life paths and prepared for each step along the way as powerful contributors to our society."

One key early question was how to engage people who for various reasons had left or never joined the existing public education system.

Early ReSchool research identified three populations in particular that for different reasons are alienated from existing formal education opportunities. One consists of young adults from their teens to early 20s who have either dropped out or need help navigating a different path through to graduation than the current system provides. The second are homeschool families who have a variety of reasons for opting out. The third are families, like Paola's, who rely on family members, friends or neighbors to provide child care for younger than school-age children.

## Research by immersion

**S**o in mid-2014, as part of a preliminary prototyping initiative, Donnell-Kay began looking for a community where it could explore how to engage families who had been using family, friends or neighbors to care for their children, rather than enrolling them in a licensed childcare center or preschool.

ReSchool staff, led by Amy Anderson, Donnell-Kay's senior director, decided to focus on families with children ages zero to five. More than 60 percent of such families in Colorado do not send their children to licensed early childhood centers, which means they must use more informal networks to find care for their children.

"As we began looking at this, immigrant families rose to the top," Anderson said. "Refugees and immigrants had a significantly higher percentage of non-participation than the general population." Choosing a more marginalized group would be an effective way to determine whether a different method of entry might help break down barriers, Anderson and her team decided.

Next, the ReSchool team needed a partner organization and a place to run the prototyping test. They found a willing partner in the local housing authority, which owns and manages Red Oak Park. In almost every way imaginable, Boulder Housing Partners is the antithesis of old-style public housing authorities, which are known for their stultifying bureaucracy, dehumanizing housing projects, and political patronage and corruption.

BHP, as it's widely known, has a mission that goes beyond providing affordable housing in a community known for being unaffordable. In addition to offering subsidized housing to people of cited means, BHP's mission is to "inspire vibrant communities, and create the opportunity for change in people's lives."

BHP also has a long standing interest in the intersections of housing and education policy, and how the two affect one another. In fact, BHP's non-profit foundation, which helps raise money to fund initiatives for residents, has formed partnerships with the local school district, public library system, "I Have a Dream" Foundation of Boulder County, and many other organizations to focus intensively on closing opportunity gaps for children living in Boulder public housing.

So when Donnell-Kay staff approached BHP about working with its residents to expand access to more broadly defined early education opportunities, the organization jumped at the opportunity.

**"As we began looking at this, immigrant families rose to the top," Anderson said. "Refugees and immigrants had a significantly higher percentage of non-participation than the general population."**

“There are a lot of nice synergies between Donnell-Kay and us,” said Karin Stayton, BHP’s family site program manager. “We love the fact that they are looking at the entire system. We work to support our residents in graduating from high school and continuing their education, getting good jobs, having careers, and breaking the cycle of poverty. Starting at the earliest possible age makes a lot of sense to us.”

The next step was for ReSchool to contract with experts in “human-centered design” to design a prototype program to test some as-yet undetermined component of a new

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early-learning system. The most compelling proposal, Anderson said, came from the Chicago-based Greater Good Studio.

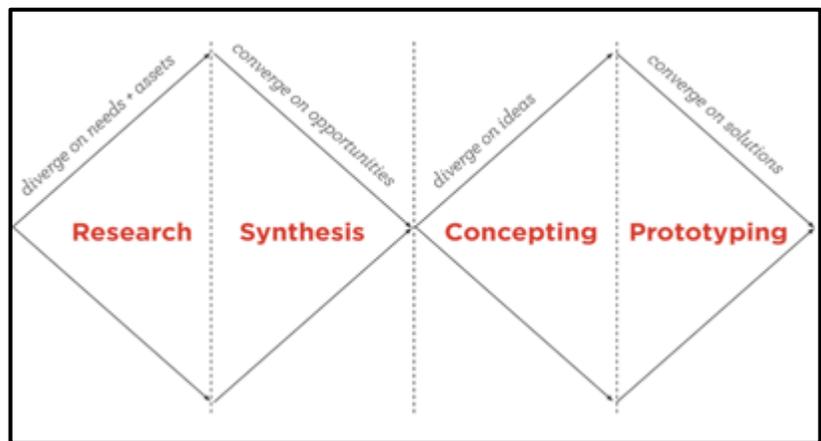
Greater Good Studio is run by the husband-wife team of George and Sara Aye, former corporate design and marketing specialists who decided after years in the corporate world that they would rather use their skills and experience attacking social

issues than convincing housewives in New Jersey that they needed to use air freshener, as Sara Aye used to do.

Human-centered design employs a five-step process of concrete actions to devise a plan “to get at the root of ambiguous problems and to solve them from an end user’s perspective,” according to materials developed by Greater Good Studio.

The first step is to conduct on-the-ground research to “see people in their context.” The next is to define opportunities based on behavior researchers observed. The next is to generate as many ideas as possible, including “wild ideas.” The next step is to make a prototype, preferably multiple versions, and to iterate those versions quickly. Finally, after testing the prototype, researchers get feedback from the end-users, and encourage those users to modify the model.

Perhaps the best way to understand the work Greater Good Studio did for ReSchool is to think of it this way: You can’t design a prototype to test something unless you have a hypothesis to test. And the best way to develop a hypothesis is to observe in painstaking detail what is happening around you in a limited and finite place and time.



Above: Steps to prototyping, courtesy of Greater Good Studio.

Having decided that they wanted to focus their early efforts on parents using family, friend and neighbor care for their children, ReSchool and Greater Good Studio decided that the next step was finding some young children they could shadow and film for a full day, from the moment they prepared to leave their home in the morning to whenever they returned home after being cared for by someone else.

“There’s often a lot people can’t tell us through their words,” Aye said. “Often people can’t tell us what they need or what they do. We are bad at remembering what we had for breakfast yesterday. We are bad at predicting what we will be doing in the future or what we want a year from now.”

Close observation through the course of a day allowed researchers to understand “behaviors and subtleties of interaction,” Aye said. And videotaping was important because when you’re in a room with someone, “you process just enough to be able to ask the next intelligent question.” Going back later and reviewing the tape allows a researcher to notice patterns and themes, from which stories begin to emerge.

ReSchool and Greater Good Studio worked closely with Adriana Perea, a Boulder Housing Partners resident services coordinator, to find five families willing to have their child shadowed through family, friend, and neighbor care. It took some work to overcome initial reluctance on the part of some families to invite strangers in on such an intimate level.

“It was through this process that we began to understand the greatness of Adriana,” said Colleen Broderick, a former educator in the U.S., Asia, and South America, and now ReSchool’s chief learning designer.

Perea, who started working for BHP shortly before the shadowing began, connects well with the housing authority’s residents, because she shares their background. Born in Chihuahua, Mexico, she moved to Weld County, Colorado with her family as a young girl. She is fluently bilingual, and speaks unaccented English.

Perea works at eight BHP housing sites, so it didn’t take her long to identify families to participate in the shadowing.

Paola Barron was one of the parents who volunteered to participate. “Not a lot of people wanted to be part of it, with such long home visits,” Paola said. But she thought it sounded interesting and that she might learn something new from participating.



*Above:* BHP resident services coordinator Adriana Perea leads the visual prototyping with advocate Claudia Sanchez.

A small team arrived at each family's home first thing in the morning and observed while the child or children were prepared for the day. They then accompanied the child to the caregiver's home and spent the day there, observing and filming, until a parent or older sibling collected the child and took her or him home. In some cases caregivers came to the family's home and researchers conducted their observations there.

"It was awkward at first, but pretty soon they got used to the camera and didn't even really notice it," Anderson said.

As proponents of human-centered design would have predicted, the shadowing yielded some assumptions-busting revelations.

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"Before I went to shadow, a woman I know said to me, 'what will you do when they plop the kid down in front of the TV?'" Broderick recalled. "But no one did that. They provided great nutrition, the children were well attended to, and they were played with. It was a very different experience than people might have thought."

Still, Aye said, in some care situations, children got little if any opportunity to explore anything outside the caregiver's home. "Kids often did not leave the house all day. I remember thinking at one point, 'it's a beautiful day, at least open the window!'"

But it wasn't necessarily that simple, Anderson said. "Most of them [this community of people] are very isolated. Their entire community is the family or maybe the people living in that housing complex. Many are not accessing opportunities except those that are right in front of their faces."

Researchers also learned that family, friend and neighbor care is, as Aye put it, "a favor not a job." The providers, she said, "did not see themselves as caregivers or teachers. It is not their identity. 'I'm a grandma watching my grandkids,' or 'I watch my neighbor's kids once in a while,' was how they referred to what they were doing."

In every case, Aye said, the caregivers had higher aspirations for their futures than taking care of other people's children.

Often their first hope was to further their own education, or to learn English as a first step toward developing a skill that would lead to a steady job paying a decent wage.

The informality of this arrangement also meant that payments to caregivers were sporadic at best, and often not made regularly or the amount agreed upon in advance. This added to the sense that the arrangement was stopgap and impermanent.

## First a concept, then a prototype

**A**rmed with this abundance of information, ReSchool and Greater Good Studio convened a group of early childhood education experts and providers and the families that had been shadowed to evaluate their learnings from the shadowing experience. From this full day convening, they came up with a voluminous list of possible components of a new system of care for very young children.

“The parents began to feel that they were real participants in building this program,” BHP’s Perea said. “Their ideas were respected and written down, and even chosen for the project.”

The group whittled the list down to what they considered the strongest concepts and shared them with small groups of parents and caregivers. *[See sidebar for full list.]*

What emerged from this process was a plan to test a few of these concepts simultaneously over the summer of 2015: the learner advocate system, the pre-loaded debit cards, and information, in booklet rather than digital form, for parents on a range of local learning activities and opportunities for their children.

“I was surprised when they chose the debit cards,” Paola said. “That was the last option I thought they’d choose. Giving us money to buy stuff for our kids or take a trip to the aquarium?” She shook her head and smiled.

Perea convinced the five families that had been shadowed in the fall, along with two others, to take part in what was now being called the Learning Opportunities prototype. She also identified two leaders in the BHP resident community, Claudia Sanchez and Cristina Sanchez (they are not related), and recruited them to join her in the role of learner advocates. Both, like Perea, are native Spanish speakers. Claudia speaks good English, and

### Concepts for Early Learners

- ◆ A system of learner advocates who would help families navigate the educational ecosystem to find the best opportunities for their children.
- ◆ A ReSchool digital platform, which would help parents connect with local resources and track progress toward goals each family has set with its advocate.
- ◆ A progress portfolio that outlines the typical stages of child development and would allow families to track and record their children’s progress.
- ◆ A caregiver directory on a mobile website, sorted locally and including the names of parents in the neighborhood that have worked with each provider.
- ◆ A ReSchool backpack for each child, loaded with age-specific educational materials, which could be swapped out weekly.
- ◆ A mobile education station (learning bus) that would provide a rotating library of education materials for children and adults.
- ◆ A texting service that would provide immediate tips to parents on a range of topics related to early learning, available in multiple languages.
- ◆ A weekly field trip service that would provide door-to-door service for enrolled families.
- ◆ A monthly pre-loaded debit card for families to use for educational supplies or activities.

works for ELPASO (Engaged Latino Parents Advancing School Outcomes), a grassroots program run by the Community Foundation serving Boulder County that connects parents to early childhood and family resources. Cristina is a monolingual Spanish-speaker.

Before launching into the prototype, however, ReSchool and Greater Good Studio decided to conduct what is called in the design world a visual prototype, using a different set of families than those who would receive debit cards as part of the actual prototype.

Rebecca Kisner, the third key member of the ReSchool team (her job title is strategy associate), described the visual prototype as a way to peer-review a prototype concept

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before introducing it to the consumers who would actually test it. The idea is to learn what type of information would be helpful to the families participating in the actual prototype without tainting them with advance knowledge.

Greater Good’s Sara Aye described the reason for using different families as preventing the prototype families “from learning the punch line ahead of time.”

Constructing a prototype is such a complex undertaking, she said, that certain concepts have to be refined ahead of time. The prototype’s authors knew they wanted to produce an “opportunities booklet” for the families. But how could they build a resource that contained sufficient information without overwhelming the families with too many pages and too much information? The best way, they decided, was to call in the visual prototype families to see what they felt was important.

“Did they need to know details like if a certain program opportunity had parking? Do they need to know if someone on the staff at that opportunity speaks Spanish?”

The two-hour visual prototyping session took place on a late June evening in the Red Oak Park community center, in an airy room flooded with natural light and festooned with flip chart paper. Four young mothers and one father with children ages 0 to 5 participated. Their children played in an adjacent room with a childcare worker during the session.

Facilitators handed out index cards that listed a variety of activities for children available in the Boulder area. They asked the families to sort the cards into two piles, one for activities they’d like their children to participate in, and the other for activities that didn’t interest them. The options included world dance classes, a community concert, swim lessons, day camps for sports and Legos, and learning materials including digital apps, among others. Then each family had to narrow their list down to their favorites.

Swimming lessons was one popular choice among the parents. “I didn’t learn as a child and still can’t swim, and for that reason I would like my children to learn,” said Abdiel, the one father in the room.

Also high on people’s lists were learning materials and world dance.

Finally, each family had to choose one activity that was their favorite among their choices. The most popular was swimming lessons — chosen by three families followed by day camp, which two families selected.



*Above:* Families participate in the visual prototype at BHP’s Red Oak Park community center.

Although the families in the visual prototyping exercise weren’t given debit cards to pay for these activities, the ReSchool team handed out detailed, printed information about how and where families could gain access to their chosen activities.

As it turned out, Perea said, BHP had a longstanding arrangement with Boulder Parks and Recreation department to provide deep discounts to low-income BHP residents. Several of the visual prototype families were able to take advantage of the discount to enroll their children in swim lessons. “And once they did it, news about the discount spread really fast through our communities,” she said. “A lot of people are using the discount now. They just didn’t know about it before.”

The last section of the activity consisted of discussing barriers to participation. Some of the barriers parents described were what you might expect: non-English speaking parents and non-Spanish speaking staff at programs they were interested in; cost; transportation.

But there were some surprises as well. Most notably, some parents were reluctant to leave their children in the care of a program not run by someone they knew well. Where

middle-class Anglo parents are often eager for a chance to leave their children in the hands of a program to free up some precious time, several of the mothers in the visual prototype said they would rather stay and watch their children take part in the swim lesson or other chosen activity.

## The visual becomes the usable

A few days after the visual prototyping activity, the ReSchool team, joined by Karin Stayton and Adriana Perea from BHP as well as University of Colorado student Chris Klene, who was serving a summer internship with BHP through the Public Interest Internship Program (PIIE), debriefed the experience during a two-hour Google Hangout call with Sara and George Aye and Annemarie Spitz, a Greater Good Studio design researcher.

ReSchool's Anderson said she sensed from the families an eagerness to explore new learning opportunities with their children. But she stressed that the language barrier seemed significant. Klene, who had researched the activities presented to the families, said several websites didn't indicate whether anyone on the staff spoke Spanish. He said he'd go back and confirm with those organizations.

"Making these calls sends a great message to those organizations," Stayton said. "If they aren't offering programs in Spanish they need to think about that."

This led to a conversation about the importance of having bilingual advocates. Claudia Sanchez, one of the advocates, speaks good English, but told ReSchool staff that even so, she worries that her comprehension is imperfect and she will miss details when discussing in English something as important as a program for her children.

The central importance of the advocate role emerged during this conversation. There was a fundamental tension between wanting the advocates to be an active part of the prototype but also understand its larger goals.

"It's a tough balance because they are the director of the scene and also acting in it," Sara Aye said. "You want them to be researchers. You want them to know what we want to learn from this test. We're also asking them to be self-aware, which is tough to do when you're right in the middle of something."



*Above:* Advocate Cristina Sanchez (with her daughter) prepares for a home visit at BHP's Glen Willow site.

The ReSchool staff was working with the advocates to create an advocate field guide that, along with a bilingual opportunities booklet, would be finalized before the prototype launched later in July.

Since the actual “learning opportunities” prototype was poised to begin with a couple of weeks, the call also focused on the logistics of distributing loaded debit cards to the families. How much would each family receive? Would it be a set amount per eligible child, or would that become too expensive and provide sums that were too large for families with several children?

And would the families hold the cards or would they be in possession of the advocates? Would there be restrictions about what they could spend the money on? Communicating trust and building a sense of agency among the families were two important components of the prototype, but still, this was a thorny issue to hash out.

“There are potentially rich learnings here around using a debit card and how purchases get made,” Sara Aye said. ‘Do they do it by phone, in person?’ She also said trusting the families was important to the prototype’s success. “Someone trusted me with money — cool. And now I get to spend it on my kids — cool.”

In the end, the group decided to give each family \$200, plus \$50 for each additional child, but then worried that the money might become the driver. What if some activities that interested a family most were free, but they opted for activities that had a price tag because they had the money to spend? Or what if instead of picking activities that cost too much, some frugal families underspent? What if a family spent money on something that really didn’t seem to fit the definition of a learning opportunity?

Any and all of those possible scenarios would yield valuable information.

The actual prototype got off to a later start than planned because of hang-ups with the bank distributing the debit cards. It was mid-July before families had the loaded cards with working PINs in their possession, and Boulder schools were going back into session on August 20. Although most of the children in the families were younger than school age, and that was the focus of the prototype, ReSchool wanted family outing opportunities to be available to older siblings as well, and that was going to get tougher once school started.

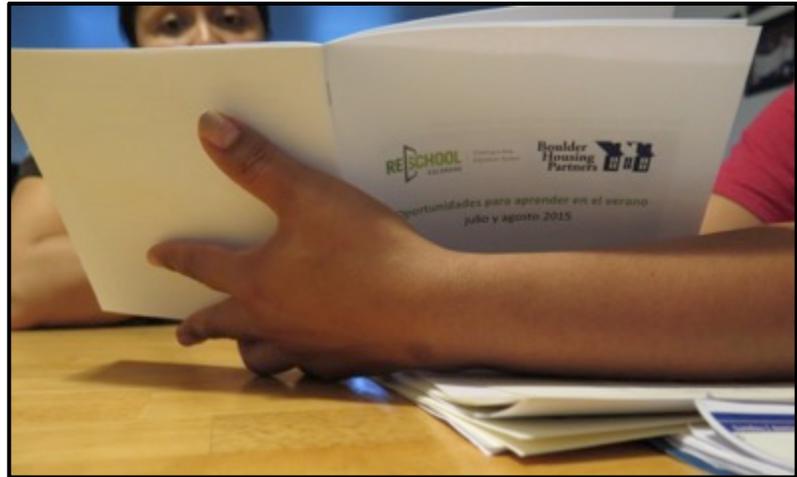
Once families had their cards in hand, some moved quickly to sign their children up for activities. Paola immediately got her kids to a Boulder municipal swimming pool, as did another mother, Diana, and her husband. Families purchased trips to the aquarium, the zoo and the Butterfly Pavilion. They bought school supplies, backpacks for their children to wear to school, water bottles. One mom, Maria, bought a bicycle for one child and a table where her children could sit to do their homework. Another, Berenice, enrolled her six-year-old son in a soccer camp.

An interesting question going forward, ReSchool team members said, is whether Boulder’s recreational systems can keep up with demand if a larger-scale learning opportunities program floods swimming classes with low-income registrants.

“Could we advocate that they open more space?” Anderson asked. “Boulder says it’s interested in promoting diversity in its programs. We shouldn’t give up if they’re full.”

Broderick also said she’d like to learn more about why swimming in particular was so popular among the prototype program’s families.

“Part of it is a level of comfort if a lot of them are signing up for the same thing,” she said. “But what’s the next thing families are going to get excited about?”



*Above:* An advocate and parent look at the learning opportunities booklet together during a home visit.

While matters seemed to be progressing smoothly overall, the prototyping raised some issues — which is precisely the point. The opportunities booklet, for example, described some activities as having online registration, but then failed to provide a website address or phone number. This required advocates to take the extra step of tracking down that information.

Also, some of the purchases made by some of the families seemed to stretch the boundaries of learning opportunities. The table Maria bought for her children provided one example.

“They needed a place dedicated to doing their homework,” she said in explaining the purchase. And if this program hadn’t made this possible? “I still would have bought a table, but a smaller one,” she said.

Kisner said she role-played with the advocates to rehearse how to handle such situations. “We wanted to express to the advocates, and have them express to families, that there aren’t really wrong choices,” she said. “Even if a family throws a curveball, we aren’t going to be upset and the advocates shouldn’t be either.”

As the prototype wound down in the last days of August, ReSchool and BHP staffers held a debriefing session with the three advocates at the Red Oak Park community center. The group discussed each family’s purchases in detail, what the highlights for that family were from the advocate’s perspective, and what barriers they encountered.

All seven families felt privileged to have been part of the program, the advocates said.

Most families either enrolled their children in activities they had never experienced before, like swimming lessons, or were able to take family excursions to places like the zoo and aquarium they had never visited.

Overall, the barriers families encountered weren't insurmountable. One family had car trouble, which delayed a zoo expedition. A couple of families wished the program had lasted longer so they had more time to explore different options. One mother seemed to feel uncomfortable with the frequent phone calls and visits from her advocate.

Another mother, Alma, discovered on TV that there was a Thomas the Tank Engine show scheduled in Golden in mid-September. Her son Angel loves the TV program featuring Thomas, so with Perea's help, Alma brought tickets online. But that alone proved a challenge she wouldn't have been able to overcome without a lot of help and handholding.

Other parents found that the hours programs were offered clashed with their long and unpredictable work hours.

The debrief ended with the group reflecting on what worked well and what might need to change if the prototyping were to be repeated in another community. All agreed that the program should start earlier in the summer to give families more time. Too much time, however, could be problematic as well.

"Constraining time forced people to focus, so there is something to be said for that as well," Anderson said.



*Above:* Cristina debriefs the prototyping experience with Alma, one of the mothers, and her son.

As a final wrap-up for the prototype, Annemarie Spitz and Sara Aye from Greater Good Studio flew to Denver from Chicago for a day-long session to summarize key learnings and make decisions about next steps.

“How do we define the goals of this to the ReSchool families?” Spitz asked at one point during the long day. “Is the concept about opportunities or is the forefront goal learning? The two can intersect, but at the outset we thought it would primarily be about learning.”

Kisner said ReSchool staff saw it differently. “We tended in the prototype to lean toward opportunities,” she said. “We wanted to provide access to opportunities and then measure the learning.” In the larger system that will ultimately develop, she said, it will be clear that “the opportunities are about learning.”

BHP’s Stayton said any larger system will have to have as a major component more upfront involvement of community partners and providers of activities and opportunities. “The providers have a responsibility to make things more accessible [to this population],” she said. This includes making sure programs have Spanish-speaking staff, she said. “We’ll never have the kind of access to opportunities we need without involving the providers.”

**A** year after planning began for the prototype, members of the ReSchool team say they have learned a great deal and have a clearer sense of next steps toward piloting a program that includes advocates, comprehensive information about opportunities, and providing debit cards to families to purchase opportunities for their children.

Kisner said one idea is to run a similar program in a rural community to see if and how needs differ. Meanwhile, ReSchool has been running a parallel prototype in Denver with other partners to delve deeper into the learner advocate role, this one working with young adults, ages 13-22.

And Anderson, who has a deep policy background, is working with thought partners to craft a “policy path” to create the beginnings of a new educational system, with learner advocates playing a key role.

In Denver education circles, there has been some questioning about ReSchool, which launched in 2013, and why it’s taking so long. Is this effort going anywhere, or is it pie-in-the-sky? People argue that a new system will be too expensive, that launching it will be impossibly complex.

**“If we coordinate resources differently, the change will happen,” says ReSchool’s Broderick.**

ReSchool’s Broderick has a response at the ready. “If we coordinate resources differently, the change will happen,” she said. “The end state is a little ways out, but the process has lifted up significant things that can be done much sooner.”