



# BRIGHT SPOT: Colorado Statewide Parent Coalition

Building a grassroots FFN movement for  
community empowerment and wellbeing

Serving FFNs since: **1980**  
Area served: **statewide**

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## Origin story

The Colorado Statewide Parent Coalition (CSPC) was founded in 1980 with a clear mission: support Latine<sup>1</sup> families to advocate for their children’s education and ensure access to a quality education from the start. Initially, the organization focused its efforts on civil rights advocacy of Latine students and their families. However, CSPC quickly identified another critical need: Latine students needed intervention before kindergarten in order to close the educational gap early on. Evidence shows that if a child does not possess key skills, such as letter and sound recognition, before their first year of school, it can have lasting negative effects on reading comprehension. Identifying these deficits in third grade, when students transition from “learning to read”<sup>2</sup> to “reading to learn,” left little opportunity for Latine children to catch up.

In 2000, CSPC began researching early childhood conditions in Latine communities in the Denver metro area. The results were revealing: most of these children did not attend formal childcare centers, but were cared for by family members, neighbors, or friends, a practice especially

<sup>1</sup> CSPC uses the term Latine to encompass Spanish-speaking cultures from Mexico, Central and South America.

<sup>2</sup> Carroll, 1997



Now everyone  
knows the FFN  
model, but it started  
here, within the  
coalition.



**Lorena Garcia**  
Executive Director

common and preferred in historically marginalized communities. This finding led to the first formal definition of Family, Friend, and Neighbor (FFN) care, which would eventually become a term used throughout the country to align advocacy efforts around supporting license-exempt child care.

### **PASO: a catalyst for personal, professional and community transformation**

In 2006, CSPC created the Providers Advancing School Outcomes (PASO) program to train and certify FFN caregivers in child development, school readiness, and effective parenting. The program involves 120 hours of training spread over 15 weeks of intensive sessions. FFNs acquire tools to strengthen children’s cognitive and emotional development through age-appropriate toy selection, intentional language use, singing, and forming meaningful bonds with the children. PASO also includes CPR and emergency preparedness training, ensuring that caregivers can provide both a safe and nurturing care environment.

**The impact of PASO in the FFN community has been profound.** Isabel Osornio, a program facilitator, has graduated over 100 FFNs. She says, “At first, many arrive with low confidence, doubtful, but by the end of the program, they recognize their worth and understand that the love they’ve provided can be paired with solid knowledge.”

**“After PASO, I’m no longer just a babysitter. Now I have a professional certification, a solid in-home curriculum, and the recognition of being a child care professional.”**

– Mrs. Ramírez, PASO graduate

Upon completion of PASO, caregivers can continue with PASO Academy, a program focused on equitable and accessible care for children with disabilities. FFNs can also receive support to pursue their Child Development Associate (CDA) credential, a nationally-recognized professional certification in early childhood education. And for many FFNs, PASO training is a stepping stone toward participation in community organizing spaces designed to drive structural changes in the child care system.

#### **PASO program highlights:**

- ▶ Two 4-hour meetings for 15 weeks
- ▶ 120 hours total
- ▶ Offered in Spanish (and English)
- ▶ Includes mentoring and home visits
- ▶ CPR training
- ▶ Prep for CDA certification



## Visionary leadership: Lorena Garcia and the expansion of impact

Since 2018, Lorena Garcia has led CSPC as executive director. In 2023, she was elected as a state representative for District 35 in Colorado. This dual role has made it possible to accelerate implementation of CSPC’s transformative vision. In 2019, she pushed the organization to reimagine its strategy: “The coalition started as a space to educate Latine families,” she said, “but I wondered: how can we leverage the wealth of experiences of these women to achieve systemic change?” Under Lorena’s leadership, CSPC has expanded its efforts to include programming that empowers FFNs to become agents of change in their communities. With the creation of the Policy and Advocacy Department in 2022, CSPC formalized its various organizing efforts (detailed below), which have already led to tangible policy wins. This approach has positioned the coalition as a driving force for systemic change that ensures better opportunities for FFN caregivers and the families they support.

## Community organizing and the struggle for systemic change

CSPC operates with the firm belief that those who suffer the consequences of an unjust system must be the ones to educate and transform it. Some caregivers choose to join the *Grupos de Lucha*, where they learn about the legal frameworks that regulate their work, and where they develop their skills as presenters to visit other FFN communities in the state. At these gatherings, FFNs find inspiration in a shared identity and collective civic action.

**“FFNs can participate according to their interests and abilities, but we always encourage them to go further.”**

—Angélica Prisciliano,  
former Director of Policy and Advocacy



Other FFNs join *Grupo Voz*, a group open to all—FFN and otherwise—who want to take their activism up a notch. In this group, participants develop advocacy skills and present public testimony directly to legislators. CSPC helps FFNs in the group overcome their fears and insecurities, and makes sure they know that they deserve their seat at the table.

Lastly, CSPC convenes the FFN Strategic Action Network, an online platform for collective leadership where FFNs guide the priorities and decisions of the group. Here, FFNs identify pressing needs and concerns, and seek solutions from other stakeholders in the network. All meetings are conducted with simultaneous interpretation in Arabic, Dari, English, and Spanish.

Thus, step by step, FFNs working with the Colorado Statewide Parent Coalition not only learn valuable child care skills, but also to organize, elevate their voices, and transform the system from within.

## The power of *acompañamiento*

***acompañamiento***—the practice rooted in Latino culture of walking alongside someone, symbolically taking their hand to help them reach their goal.

Many caregivers have gone through a process of empowerment within CSPC, inspired and supported by a network of women who walk together, encourage each other, and open doors for one another. Mrs. Cerezo, for example, recalls how Eloína, a former facilitator of the PASO program, was the one who encouraged her to give her first public testimony—a moment that changed the course of her involvement: “Eloína’s invitation opened the door for more opportunities to be involved in policy making,” Mrs. Cerezo asserts. Mrs. Vázquez, tells how she went from avoiding public speaking out of fear to speaking at the state capitol, thanks to the encouragement of her peers.

This process of empowerment benefits not only the personal and professional development of FFNs, but also the political system itself. As caregivers learn to engage with legislators, they also educate the system on the value of their work and the urgent need for policy change.

A recent example of this impact was the approval of Caring Economy Tax Credit (HB24-1312) in 2024. This refundable \$1,200 credit will be available to qualifying FFNs for five years starting in 2025. This achievement was the result of a strong, well-organized community process. Months in advance, the Grupo de Lucha Educating and Empowering Committee was meeting every two weeks to prepare FFN advocates to raise awareness about the initiative throughout the state. They held community presentations in multiple formats and in multiple languages to share information through local networks and ensure that every

caregiver understood how the proposal would benefit them. Meanwhile, the *Grupo Voz* worked in parallel to prepare FFNs to testify in front of legislators. In each session, participants practiced their speeches, refined their messages, and received emotional and technical support from CSPC to speak with confidence and conviction.

This combination of grassroots organizing, political training, and direct testimony was key to convincing decision makers. The proposal went from being an idea to becoming a law that, for the first time, recognized the economic value of FFN caregivers’ work.



## Healing and social justice: the heart of the CSPC model

Beyond political advocacy, CSPC understands that social transformation also requires personal and collective healing. Inspired by Ginwright's (2018) framework, the CSPC model integrates emotional wellbeing with the fight for equity, recognizing that oppressive systems leave deep scars on communities. bell hooks (2000) reinforces this idea, stating that justice can only be achieved when combined with love and radical resistance.

FFNs embody this intersection of healing and activism. In every story they share, in every space they occupy, in every step they take toward recognizing their labor, there is an act of individual and collective healing. By fighting for their rights, they are also rebuilding trust, a sense of community, and the power to imagine a different future. As Angélica, the former director of policy and advocacy, put it: "Nothing would be possible without community participation," emphasizing that true change happens when FFNs themselves lead the transformation of the very systems that impact their lives.



# What makes the Colorado Statewide Parent Coalition a **BRIGHT SPOT?**

All of the work of CSPC seamlessly fits together: from one-on-one support to the achievement of public policy wins, every action is part of a nested model that casts FFN caregivers themselves as the protagonists. Their approach not only listens; it transforms. And it transforms because it listens.

As Lorena Garcia explained during a national call organized by Home Grown, a national organization dedicated to supporting and uplifting home-based childcare, “Everything begins with professional development through the PASO program. Working closely with caregivers allows us to see and understand the real barriers they face. That information is what drives the next steps: organize, act, change.”

“For the first time, we’re seeing that the state is willing to invest in the providers who help keep our most precious treasures—our children—safe and healthy.”

**Lorena Garcia**  
Executive Director

This is how “the beautiful cycle of feedback” works. Each stage of *acompañamiento* provides valuable insight into the structural conditions that limit the well-being and recognition of FFN caregivers. From there, CSPC and the caregivers themselves design strategies to affect change.

The many significant results that CSPC has been able to achieve do not emerge from a charity-based model, but from one that seeks self-sufficiency through systemic transformation. CSPC doesn’t just provide support—it trusts, believes, and acts alongside FFN caregivers. Backed by decades of community-based work and strong political capital, CSPC has driven major reforms: access to licenses for caregivers without Social Security Numbers, the strengthening of organizing networks, and historic state investments. CSPC exemplifies what it means to build a grassroots movement that shifts FFN caregivers from the margins to the center, and exalts caregiving as both personal and powerful.

