Autism & Childcare

2022 Oklahoma Needs Assessment

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Speaker Introduction

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AFO Program Areas:

- Advocacy & Awareness
- Early Childhood Development
- Public Health & Safety
- Workforce Development
- Criminal Justice Reform

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The mission of the Autism Foundation of Oklahoma is to improve the lives of Oklahomans with autism and their families.

Thanks to Our Sponsors!

OKLAHOMA PARTNERSHIP FOR SCHOOL READINESS

CHILDREN'S BEHAVIORAL HEALTH PARTNERSHIP OF TULSA

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Thanks to our Partners

- Stakeholders from private and public state institutions
- Childcare providers
- Families and caregivers of children with autism or developmental disabilities

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Learning Objectives

- Describe current literature related to autism and childcare
- List steps for conducting a needs assessment
- Identify the results of Oklahoma Needs Assessment on childcare autism
- Identify potential next steps for other states or organizations

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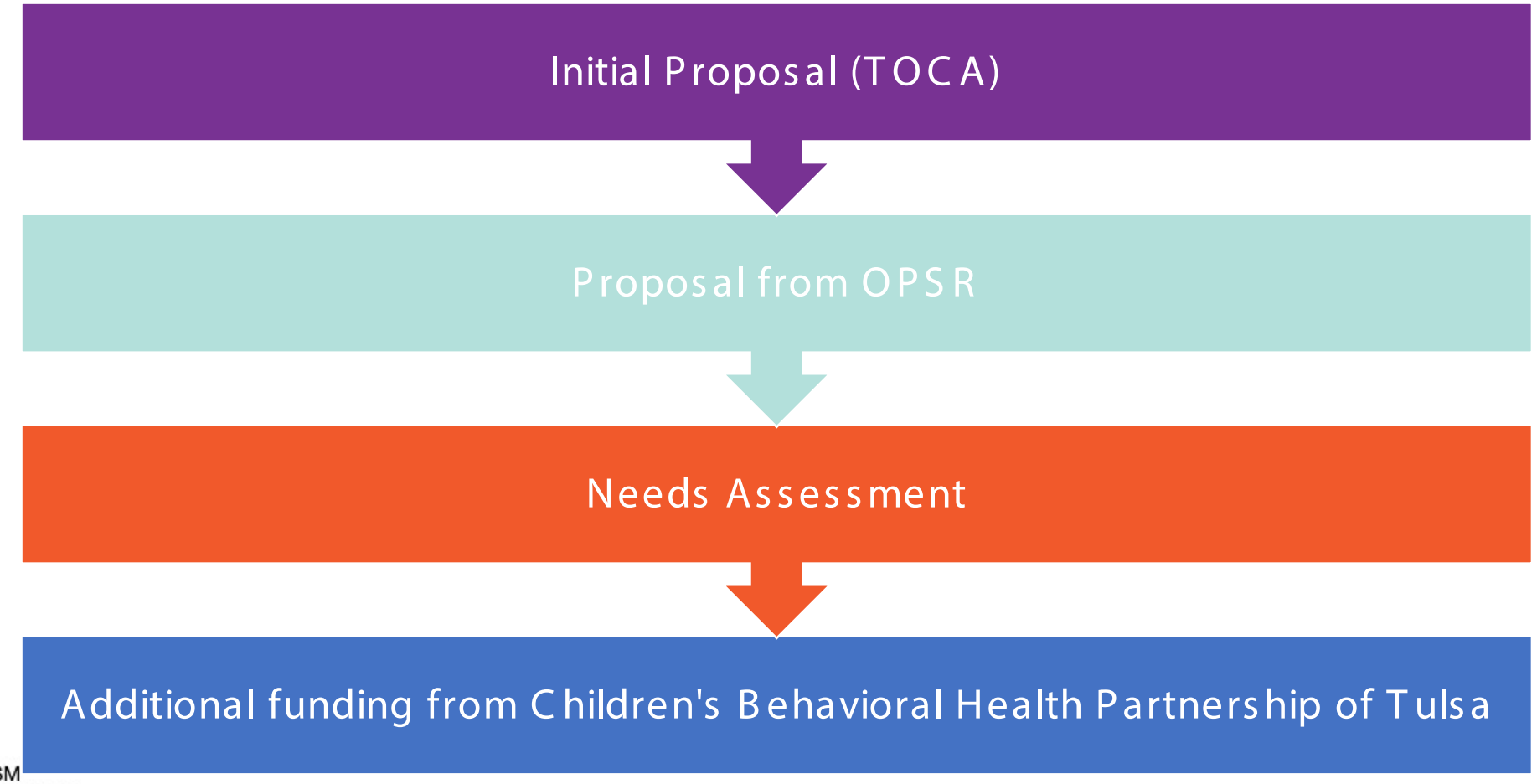
Our Story



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Training Oklahoma Childcare Providers to Support Children with Autism (TOCA)

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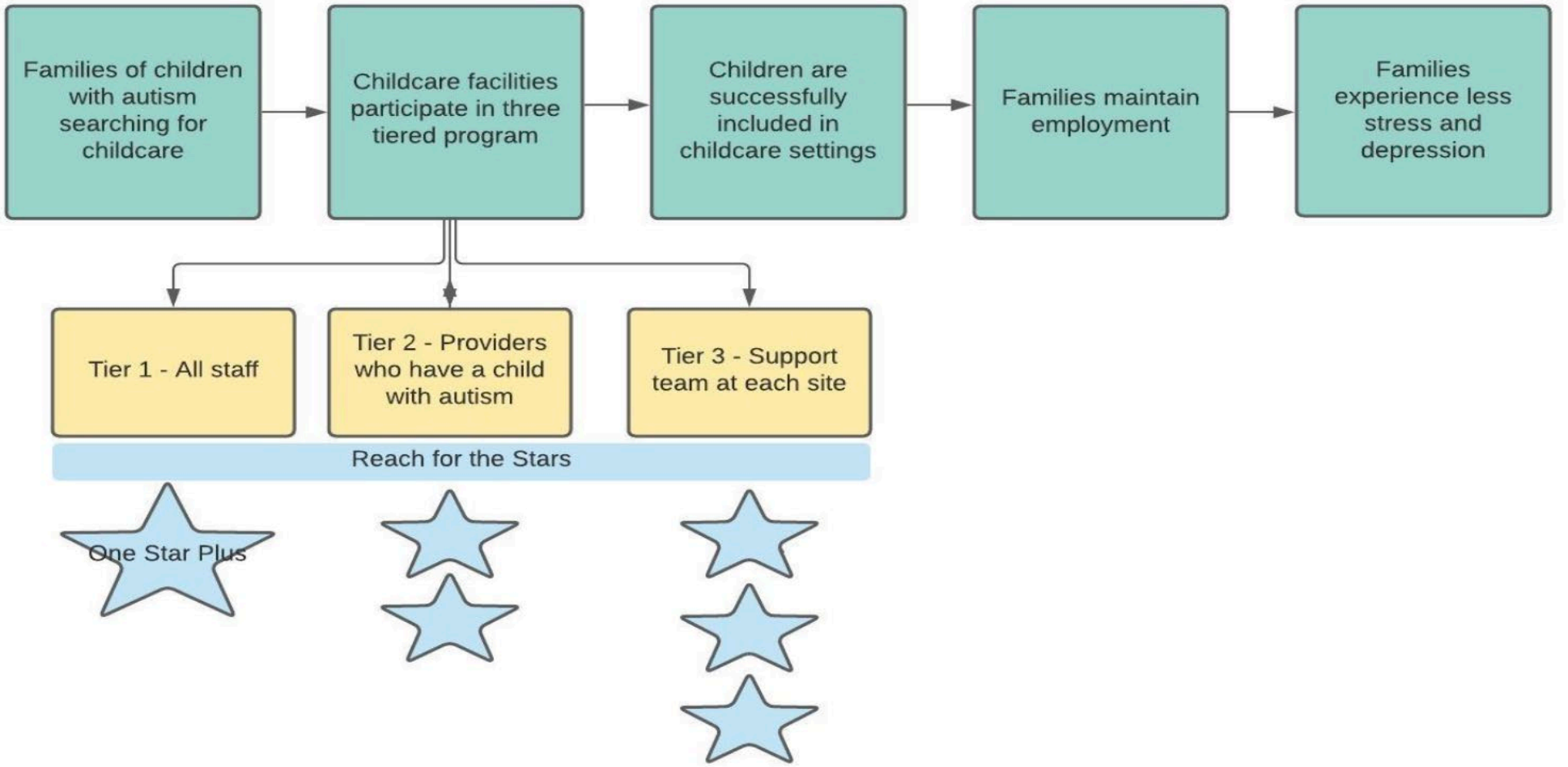
The proposed solution is a three-tiered approach to support childcare centers that would complement the Reach for the Star program. Below is a logic model outlining the collaboration between the two programs.



Overall Program Outcome

Increase access to quality childcare for children with autism and related disorders. Summative and formative data will be collected at each stage to determine effectiveness as well as to make any changes to course format or content.

Training Components

Tier 1 All childcare providers	The purpose of Tier 1 training is to increase the awareness and knowledge of all childcare providers on how to support children with autism and their families. TOCA will initially perform the training live at each site. The training will also be available in an on-demand format. All childcare providers should complete the training in a timely manner.
Tier 2 Childcare providers with a child with autism and families	The purpose of Tier 2 training is to increase the retention of children with autism through successful participation in classroom activities. To do this, childcare providers and families will receive training regarding supporting children with autism in the classroom.
Tier 3 Team at each site	To make TOCA sustainable, it must provide more intensive developmental and autism-specific training to select childcare provider teams to continue the program. Through TOCA, each site will have an onsite team of childcare providers trained in supporting staff on current strategies and information related to autism spectrum disorders.

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Facilitators

The facilitators for the program will be a team who has extensive experience and knowledge on early childhood, representing a variety of disciplines.

Needs Assessment

What is a Needs Assessment?

- Collecting information that provides a complete picture of your community's needs and existing resources

- Helps you identify and prioritize your community's areas of need

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(Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS), 2016)

Needs Assessment

- A needs assessment will provide you with a deeper understanding of:
  - Your community's current Long Term Services & Supports (LTSS) situation and needs
  - Existing strengths and resources within the community
  - Funding priorities for programming
  - The best approaches to developing your program and creating program policies
  - Data to include when writing grant proposals

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(Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS), 2016)

Initial Steps of a Needs Assessment

- Identify initial needs

- Identifying funding assistance and availability
  - Grant funding
  - Stakeholders interest

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2022 Oklahoma Childcare and Autism Needs Assessment

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Why?

- Increased prevalence of children with autism
- Limited options in Oklahoma for childcare and children with autism
- Test our hypothesis and original recommendations

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Why Autism?

- Increased prevalence - approximately 1:44 children
- Occurs in all racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups
- Spectrum of characteristics
- Lifelong developmental disorder, deficits in social communication, and restrictive behaviors/interests
- Difficulty understanding behaviors

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(CDC, 2018)

Oklahoma?

- Approximately 4 million people
- People under age 5 (6.2%), people under 18 (24.1%)
- Median household income $56,956
- White alone (73.2%); Black or African American alone(7.8%); American Indian and Alaskan Native alone (9.7%); Asian alone (2.5%); Hispanic or Latino (11.7)
- With a disability under 65 years of age (11.8%)
- 509 school districts – 415 independent school districts
- Oklahoma State Department of Education and Soonerstart

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Purpose of the Needs Assessment

1. What are the challenges that Oklahoma families face and continue to face in finding and accessing quality childcare for their child(ren) with autism/related developmental disabilities?

2. What barriers do childcare providers in Oklahoma face in supporting children with autism/related developmental disabilities?

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Steps for Needs Assessment

1. Literature review
2. Collected information on current Oklahoma resources
3. Performed stakeholder interviews
4. Childcare provider and caregiver surveys
5. Synthesized the data for next steps

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1. Literature Review

Autism and Family Stress

- 39% report that childcare significantly impacted their employment decision
- Substantial concerns juggling work and family life
- Problems with referrals, care coordination, and accessing services compared to other families
- Higher levels of harmful psychological and emotional consequences and substantial financial and employment loss/reduction

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(Montes & Halterman 2008)
(Houser, McCarth, Lawer, & Mandell 2014)
(Sringivasan, Ekbladh, Freedman, & Bhat, 2021)

Oklahoma Statewide Plan (OAN, 2016)

- 42% of Oklahoma families do not have full-time, part-time, or occasional childcare arrangements
- 72% report they rely on relatives for childcare
- Over ⅓ reported they have had to quit a job due to childcare

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Importance of Quality Childcare

- Supports long-term outcomes for families and children

- High-quality childcare allows families to reap the financial benefits of employment, self-satisfaction, access to health insurance, and social networking

- Paid work can also act as a resource for families to gain support, sources of information, and reprieve

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(Lien, Lashewicz, Mitchell, & Boettcher, 2021)

2. Collected information on current Oklahoma resources

Oklahoma Resources

- Oklahoma Department of Human Services
- Oklahoma Childcare Resource and Referral Association
- Oklahoma's TIC-TOC training
- Unique Environments
- Warmline
- OCCRRA (just merged with OPSR)
- Oklahoma State Department of Education
- Soonerstart

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3. Stakeholder Interviews

Stakeholder Interviews

- Conducted zoom interviews with the following organizations, each lasting approximately 30 minutes
  - Oklahoma State Department of Education
  - Oklahoma School Readiness
  - A family member from the Autism Foundation of Oklahoma
  - Department of Human Services – Child Services Division
  - Oklahoma Childcare Resource and Referral Association
  - OK Early Ed
  - OKDHS Subsidies
  - Oklahoma Childcare Warmline
  - Head Start

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Questions for Providers

- Describe your role and your organization's role in early childcare? Whom do you serve?
- Impact of your services - number of families/children you currently serve/ providers, etc.
- What do you feel your organization does well at in supporting children with autism?
- What areas do you feel your organization needs more support?

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Questions for Providers, Cont'd

- Tell us your experience supporting children and families with autism and other developmental disabilities (suspected autism) - training, barriers, and resources you access for additional support.

- If there was one thing we could do differently to support your organization regarding autism better, what would that be?

- Would you be willing to share a survey with your team? If so, what is the best way to do this?

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Questions for Families

- Have you accessed childcare for your child with autism? If so, what type? What was helpful? What were the barriers?
- Why were you accessing childcare? What did childcare enable you to do? If not, why not?
- Tell us about your experience with accessing childcare.

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Stakeholder Interview Themes

- Need for more access to hands-on coaching and modeling of autism-specific strategies for childcare providers
- Childcare providers feel they need more access to training specific to supporting children with autism.
- Childcare providers would like a support network for childcare centers/providers who support children with autism.

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Stakeholder Interview Themes, Cont'd

- Higher financial incentives would help childcare providers to support children with autism better.

- Both feel there needs to be a better way to collaborate between school and childcare to support school-aged children with autism better.

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4. Childcare Providers and Caregiver Surveys

Sample Size

Childcare Providers

- 171 completed the survey (10% margin of error, 90% confidence interval - target was 97)

Caregivers

- 114 completed the survey (10% margin of error, 90% confidence interval – the target was 97)

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Childcare Provider Data

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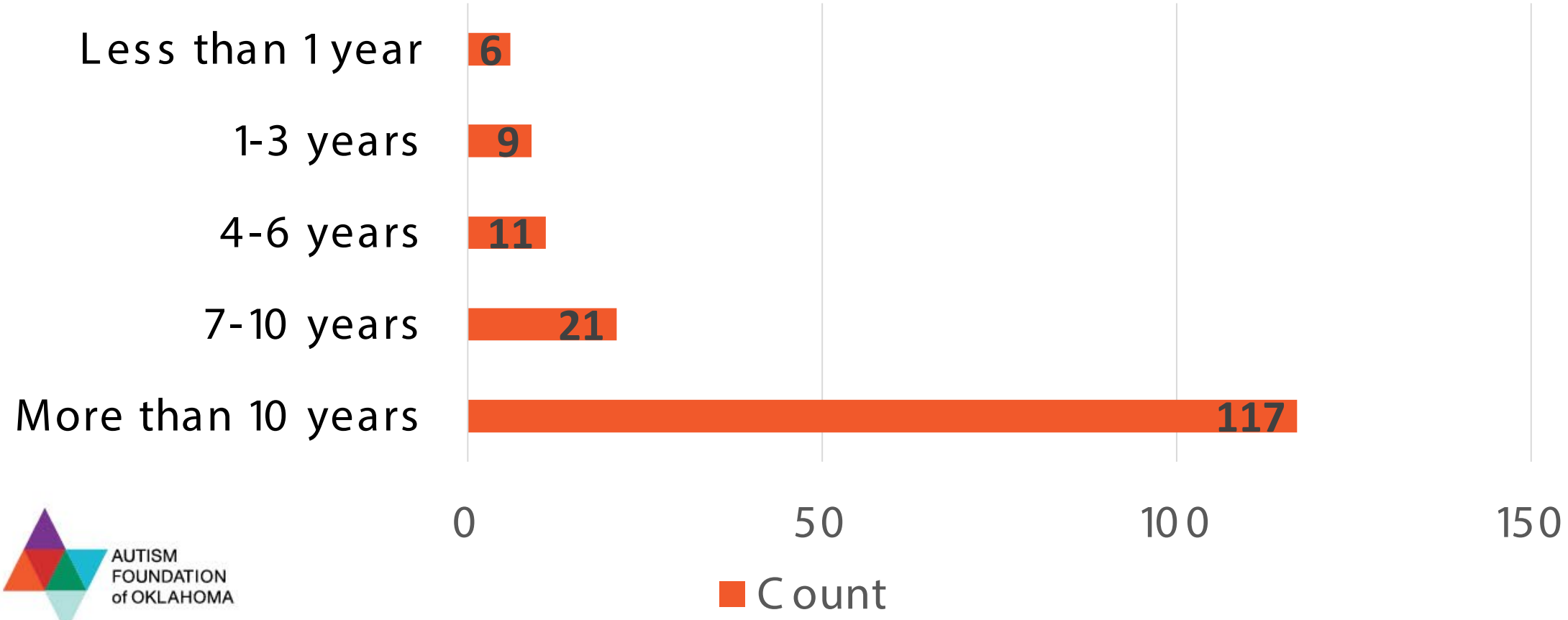
Number of Years as Childcare Provider



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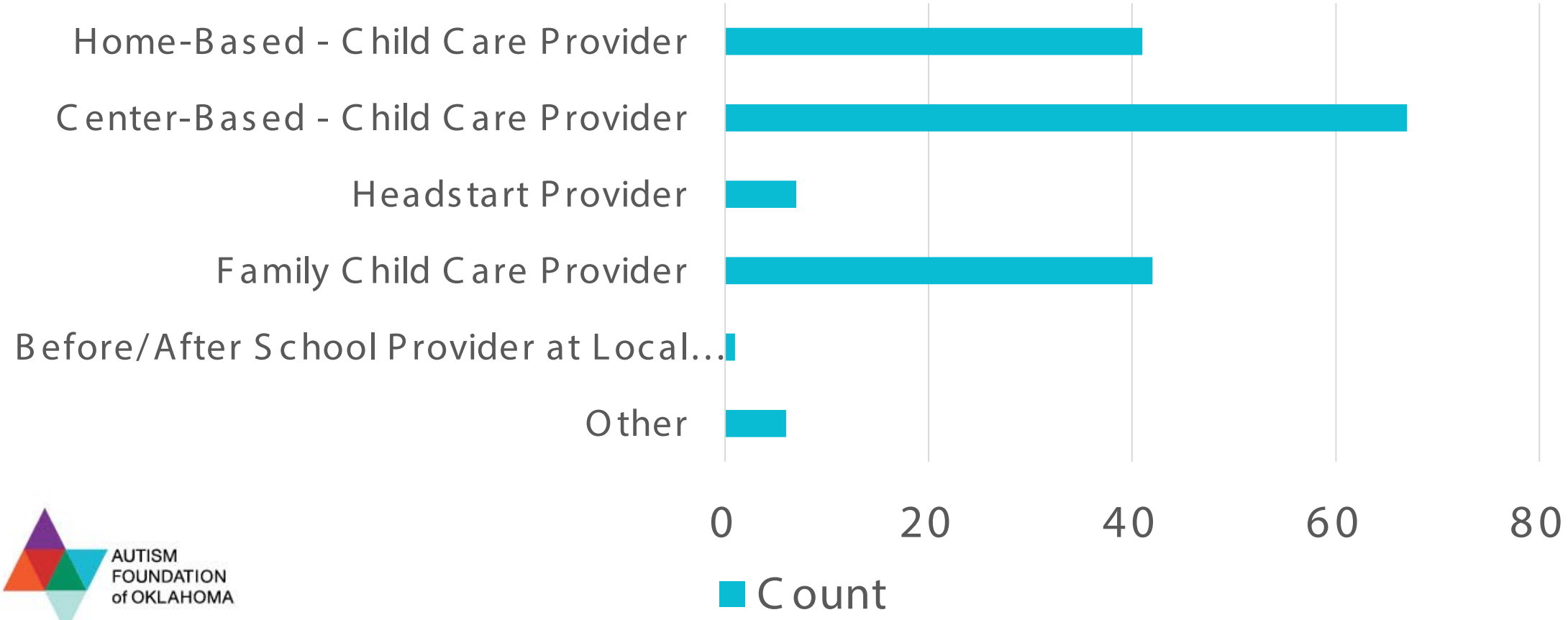
Type of Childcare Program Currently Work in or Have in the Past



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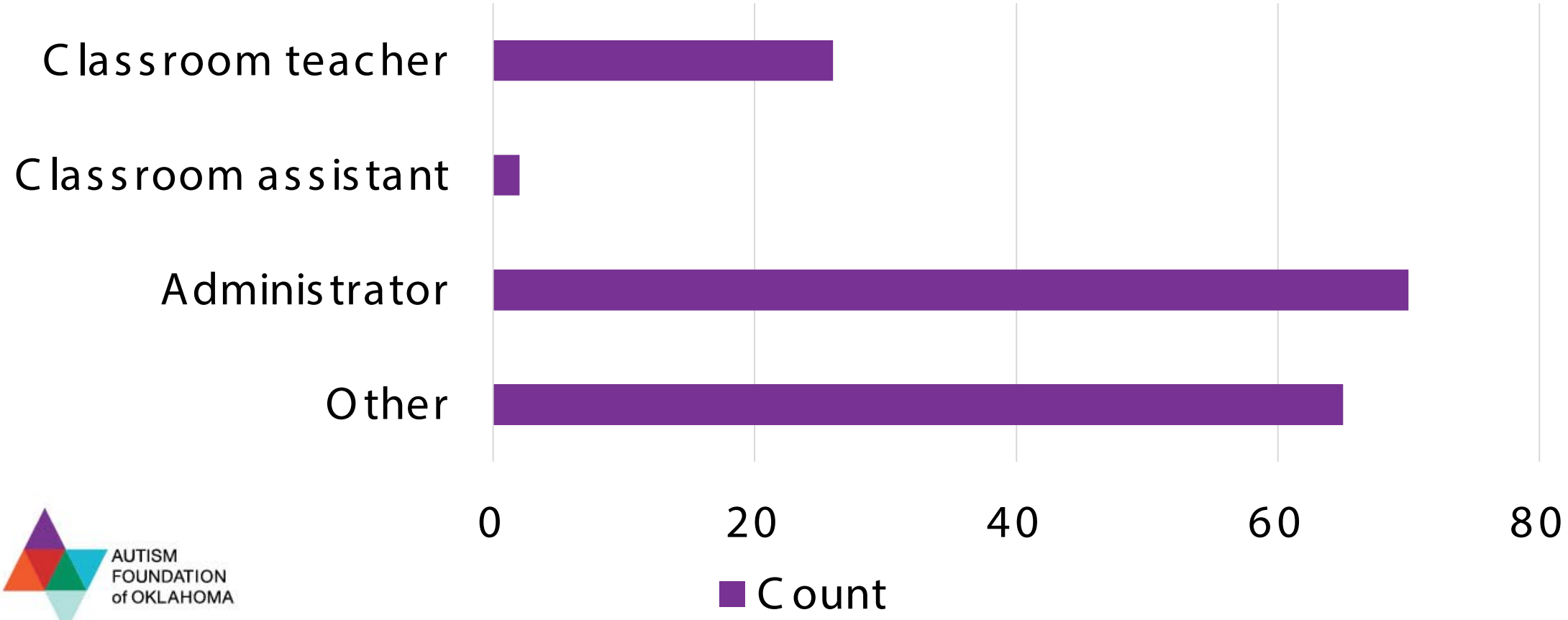
Role of Childcare Providers



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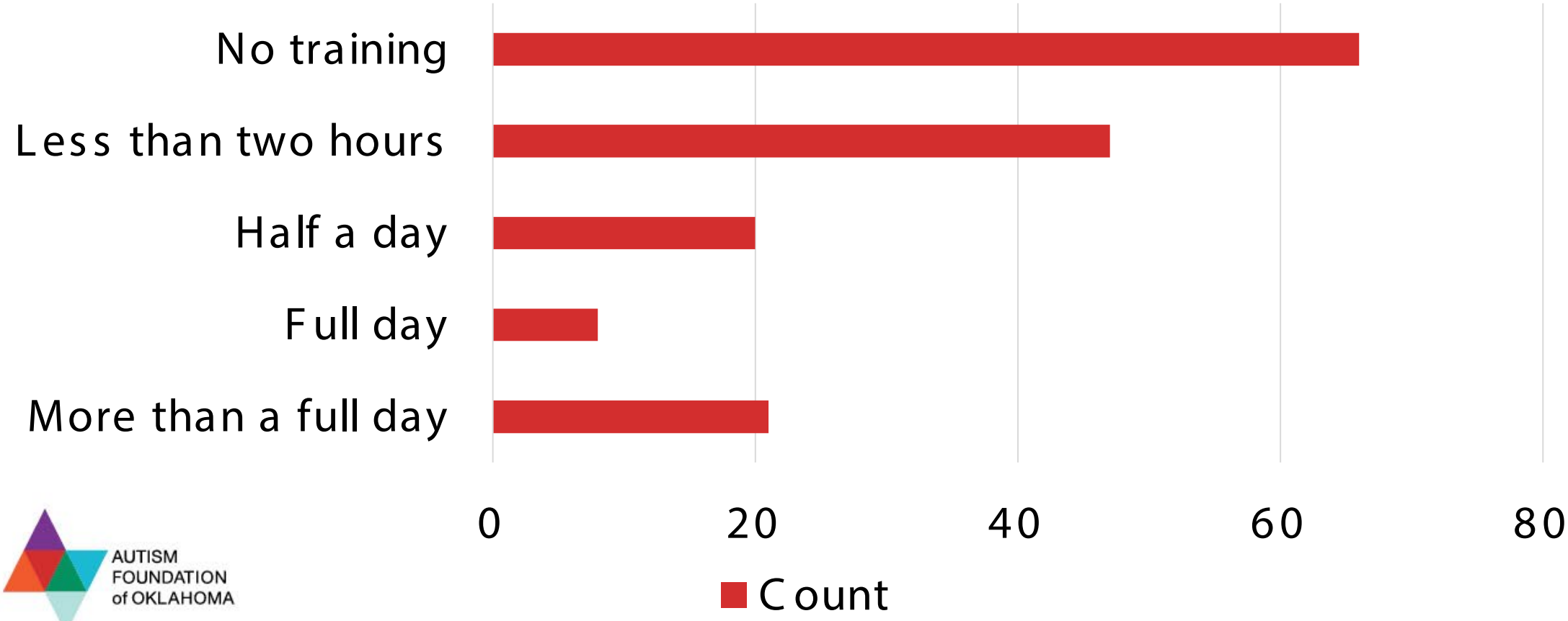
Autism Specific Training



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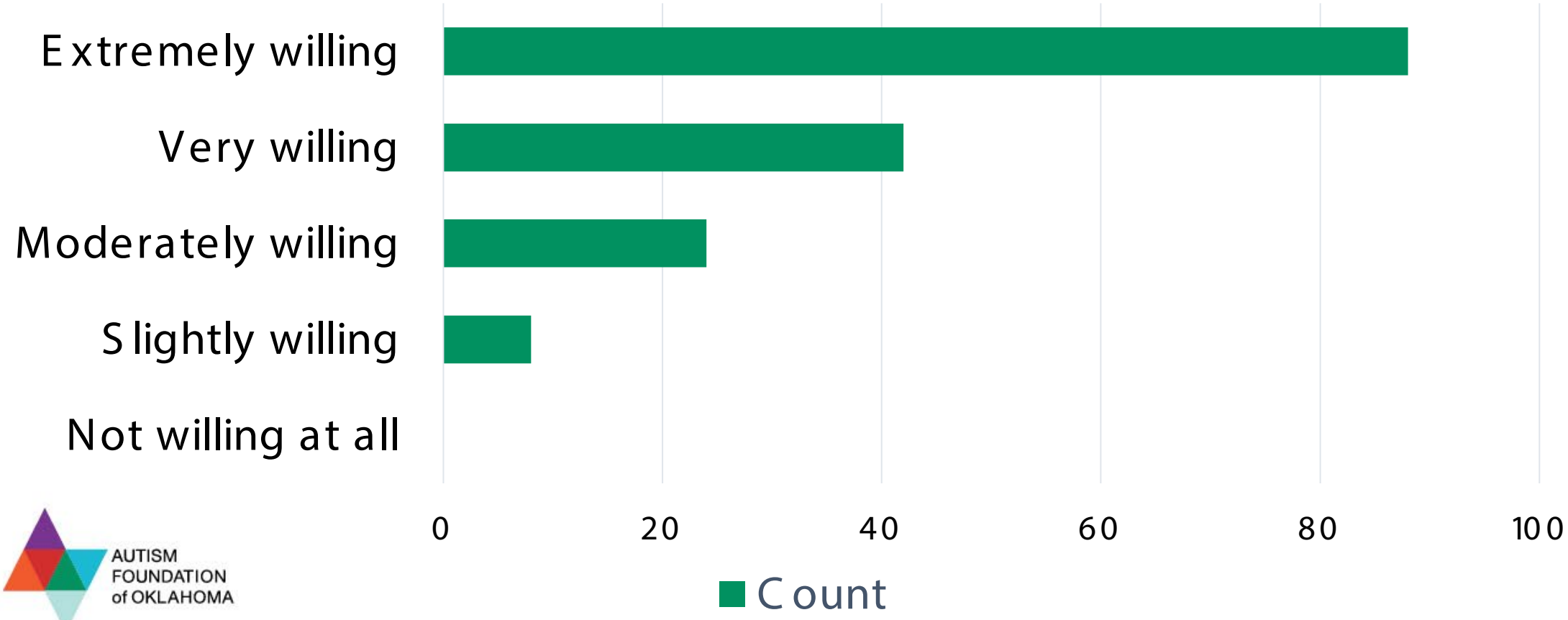
Willingness to Support Children with Autism



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Top Three Barriers

1. Limited training
2. Not enough staff
3. Difficulty supporting due to challenging behavior

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Training Topic Priorities (1=Most Important)

1. Strategies and supports to help children with autism succeed in Childcare environments.
2. Understanding and addressing behaviors (tied with #1)
3. Setting up a Childcare environment for success
4. Signs of autism in young children
5. Resources to share with families
6. Talking to families about their child's development
7. Common characteristics of children with autism

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What Would Childcare Providers Benefit From?

1. In-person training
2. In-person consultation from an autism expert
3. Access to autism experts where they can ask questions and share resources.

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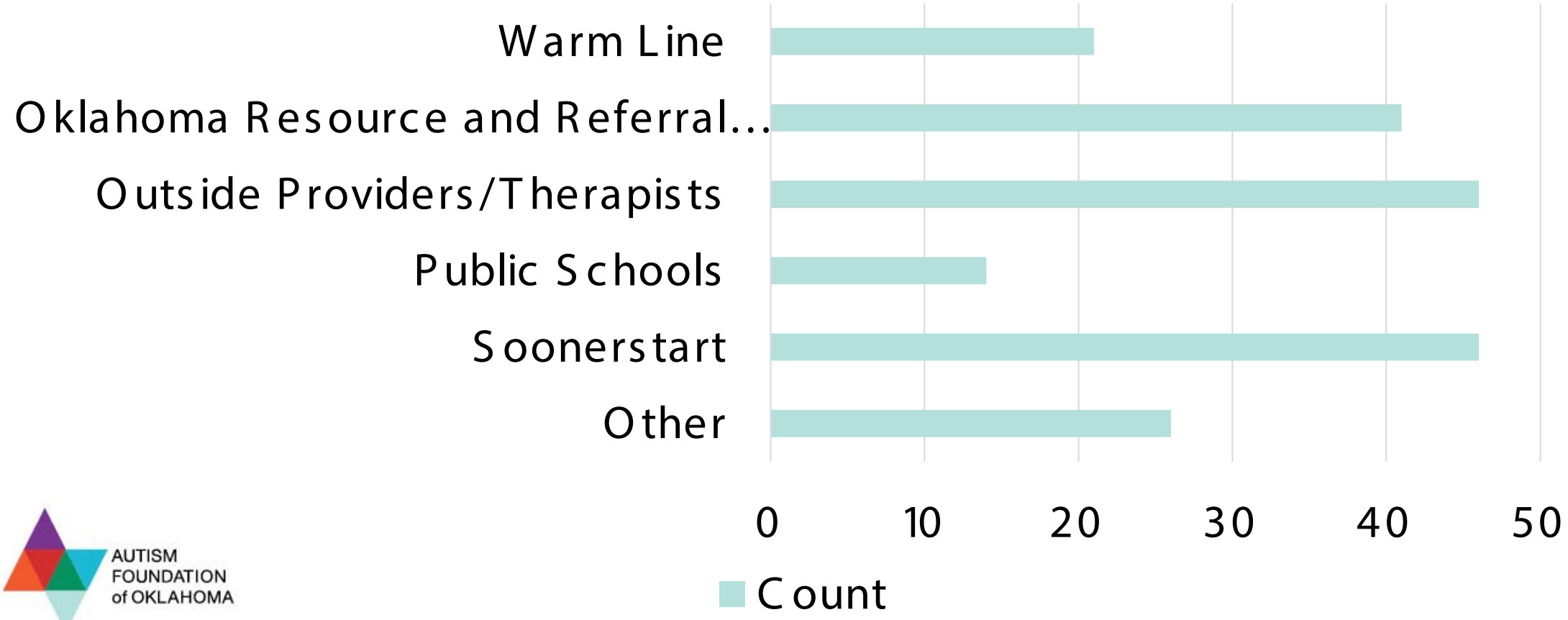
Resources Accessed



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Comments from Childcare Providers

- "Need to have quicker access for parents to have their children evaluated since many of them autism centers that are local are booked for month out and sometimes longer"

- "One of the biggest struggles in childcare is parents who do not acknowledge that their child may have autism/developmental delays. It makes it extremely difficult to discuss the possibility with parents or having the right tools to recommend this be explored before the child begins a brick & mortar school."

- "There are not very many sources of practical help for children with delays or autism spectrum behaviors."

Comments from Childcare Providers

- “This is a big issue in childcare, staff issues, finding and a lack of training plague us all. I always think it’s crazy that kids with autism are given tons of extra help in a school setting, but in a childcare setting, they aren’t given the same opportunities. nor are they provided with teachers who are educated on how to care for them properly”

- “The time we asked OKDHS to do training, it consisted of someone coming and reading info they found online. We need real training, real solutions, and real plans. Parents majority of the time, won't listen to "daycare" about delays. It's an ongoing battle: the child is usually expelled due to behavior because we really don't have the necessary tools.”

Caregiver Data

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Childcare Demographics

- 70% White or Caucasian, 24% American Indian/Native American, 7% Black or African, 2% Asian
- 85% 30-49 years of age
- 70% were married
- 86% mothers, 6% father
- 70% have one child with autism, 24% have 2
- Even spread of ages from under three to over 16
- 52% had full-time employment, 14% homemakers, 11% self-employed, 11% part-time

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Childcare Experiences

- 41% indicated they are not currently looking for childcare, but they have in the past.
- 19% reported they are currently looking for childcare
- 11% reported they are not now but have not tried in the past
- 6% currently have childcare but looking for other options
- 16% currently have childcare and not looking for other options.

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Impact on Career

- 47% have been denied childcare because of a diagnosis of autism
- 52% have had to change work schedules
- 52% had to decrease work hours
- 44% stopped working outside the home
- 40% changed the type of work
- 27% lost promotion opportunities

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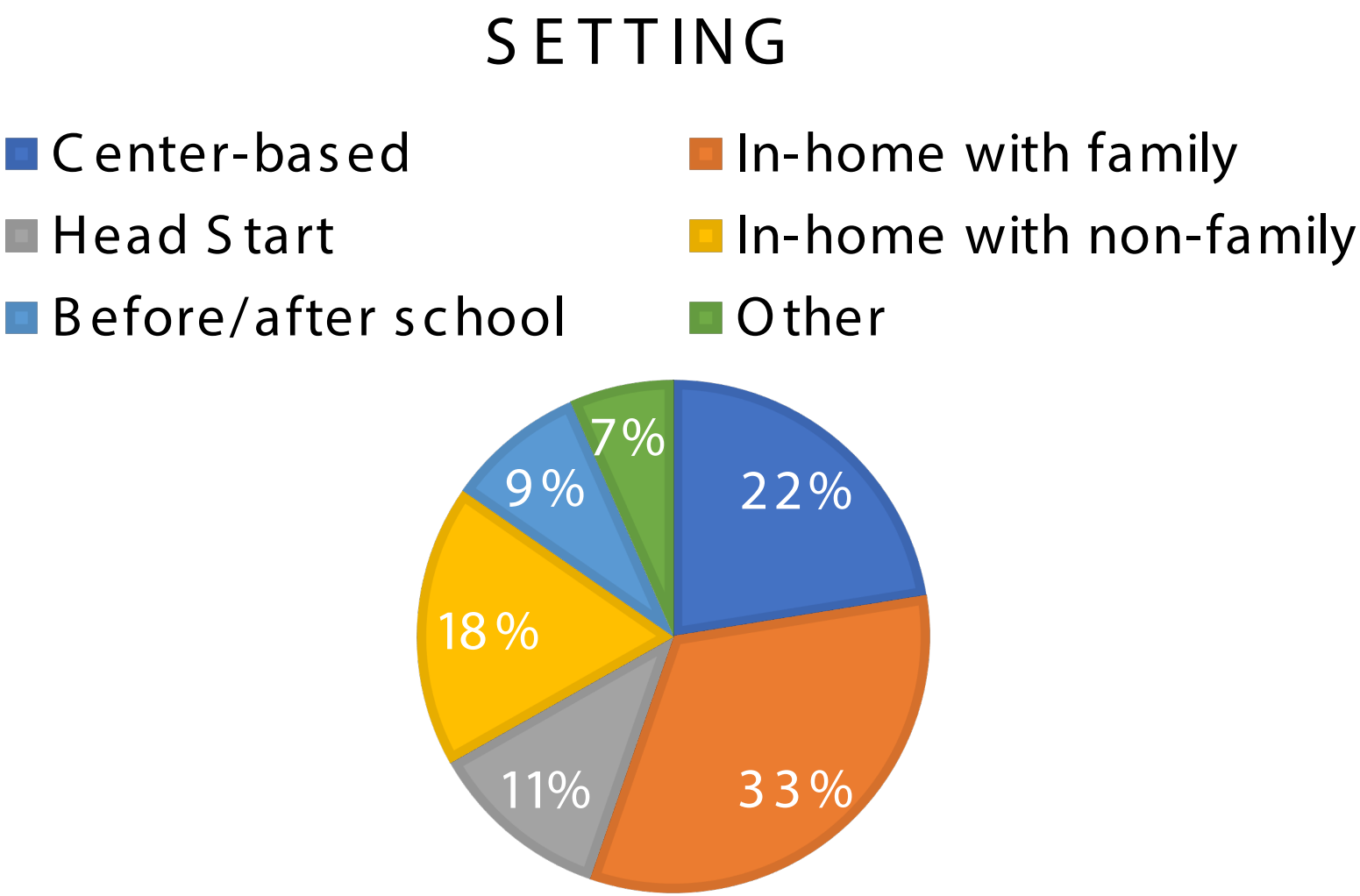
Childcare Settings



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Childcare Primary Considerations

1. Teacher training on autism
2. Cost
3. Physical space (cleanliness, supplies)
4. Location
5. Recommendations from others

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Reasons for Successful Experiences

1. Low child-to-teacher ratio
2. A teacher who listened and responded to concerns
3. Training specific to autism
4. Strong administration support
5. Financial assistance from the state

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Top Barriers to Childcare

1. Teachers did not know how to help their children

2. Not enough staff in the classroom to support their child

3. Facilities with openings were unwilling to care for children with special needs

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Changes to Current Childcare Setting

1. Provide the teachers with more training specific to autism
2. Use a curriculum that is more specific to my child with autism
3. Have teachers more sensitive to my child's needs

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Comments from Caregivers

- “It's very difficult to find help for older children, especially for those with severe autism.”
- “I don't currently need childcare, but I hope that more options become available for those who do. There are not enough special needs daycares here in Oklahoma.”
- “Our biggest hurdle is finding care during summer and school breaks”
- “I am afraid to place my son in a childcare or school setting in Oklahoma; I am worried teachers are untrained/unprepared to handle a child with his needs. I am afraid he will have a negative experience in a classroom or daycare setting. I am afraid his needs and disabilities will distract the teacher or caregiver from the other children in his class.”

Comments from Caregivers

- “The need for care for older children is very real. I lost my job due to lack of care for my child when he aged out of the typical "care for" age”
- “I have to find one on one care one my home every year. Every summer, full-time and every day after school. It's outrageously expensive and exhausting for my son to have ZERO options in the community.”
- “In our rural community, there is not many daycares to choose from. They stay booked, so I have always depended on my family or myself.”

Comments from Caregivers

- "Our child was asked to leave a Mother's Day Out program around 2 years old. They were unable to settle our child and said it may be too early for them to start the program. Most of our childcare needs have been part time in the summer or occasional babysitting. It was always important to find someone who was recommended. Looking for a person who was compassionate, willing to follow our instructions and who could be trusted."

- "Making arrangements for families who are not citizens yet, but legal residents being on work visas etc."

- "There is literally 1 daycare for special needs children in the whole city. If your child is not potty trained and older than three, daycares will not take them. This is a huge problem, and the need is enormous. So glad this is being looked into!"

- "It's very difficult to find help for older children, especially those with severe autism"

5. Synthesized the data for the next steps

Major Themes

- Autism Specific Training
- Community of Support
- Autism Consultants
- Awareness of Current Resources in Oklahoma
- Financial Incentives
- Childcare for Older Children

Overall – Findings supported our initial proposal of TOCA!

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Autism Specific Training

- Low cost, high quality, easily accessible
- Specific to childcare providers
- Topics should include
  - Strategies and supports
  - Understanding and addressing challenging behaviors
  - Setting up the childcare environment for success
  - Creating collaborative relationships with families

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Community of Support

- Access to a community of support with other childcare providers

- Place to share ideas and resources

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Autism Consultants

- Access to people with training in supporting children with autism

- Provide hands-on guidance and modeling strategies to support children with autism

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Awareness of Oklahoma Resources

- Central database for childcare providers to access resources
- Resource share opportunity amongst resources
- Materials that represent all resources in Oklahoma

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Financial Incentives

- Support better teacher-child ratio
- Specialized equipment
- Specialized curricula
- Training

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Childcare for Older Students

- Children with more severe autism
- Summer
- Holiday breaks
- Before/after school care

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Limitations

- Diversity of parents who responded
- Surveys primarily completed by administrators
- Small parent representation in stakeholder interviews
- Little representation of rural community
- Limited to English and Spanish language surveys only

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Project Budget and Funding

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Next Steps

What's Next?

- Search for more funding opportunities for TOCA
- Create more awareness-level training on autism-specific to childcare providers
- Start identifying potential consultants across the state to serve as consultants

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What can you do?

- Contact the Autism Foundation of Oklahoma to utilize any resources from our Needs Assessment.
- Create a needs assessment specific to your communities, small or large scale.
- Start seeking out grant opportunities and recruit a grant writer

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Other Action Steps

- Find resources in your communities that are available to support children with autism.
- Provide childcare settings with training specific to the following: behavioral support, communicating with families, characteristics of autism, and setting up environments for success.
- Create a network for childcare providers to exchange information and resources.

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Presentation Survey

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Contact Information

To find more information on programs and resources available through the foundation, please visit WWW.AutismFoundationOk.ORG

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