MAINE STATE PARENT AMBASSADORS





MSPA is a leadership and advocacy program for parents with a child eight (8) or under living in Maine. The goal is to develop parent leaders and empower parents to advocate for themselves and their children. Participants attend a ten (10) month cohort style training program, with networking, advocacy and development opportunities at the local, state and national levels. Graduates of the MSPA program obtain a parent ambassador micro-credential through St Joseph's College. In 2024, Core program cohort members participated in over 150 hours of training, conference attendance, community of practice, advocacy activities, and community events during the 10 month intensive training.

Highlights from the 2024–25 Core program include passage of the lived experience bill, media interviews and op-eds, formation of the Maine dadvocates group, and alumni leadership in the Children's Cabinet, CEFAM, and UPLAN. The core program demonstrated the transformative power of parent leadership. Through training, advocacy, and community-building, the MSPA Program continues to elevate family voices and create lasting change in Maine.

Maine's PDG Plan included partent partnership activities specific to underserved communities. In 2023, OCFS contracted with Portland Empowered to host three shared space cafes. These cafes were held in Biddeford, Portland and Lewiston aimed at understanding the opportunities and challenges for immigrant families as it related to community engagement, child care and school readiness. The café events were hosted round table style in home languages of French, Portuguese and Somali with interpreters into English for the note takers.



Themes from Shared Space Café participants:

1. Cultural differences in parenting and discipline create strain to acclimate to systems
2. Communication Barriers highlight need for cultural bridging
"No communication = No understanding"
3. Childcare access and financial strain a core stressor for families
4. Role of mothers culturally are at the center of family dynamics
5. Beliefs about Early Childhood development from different cultures range widely causing conflict and mistrust with early intervention systems

From the three cafe's feedback, OCFS worked with Portland Empowered and Maine State Parent Ambassadors to develop a six-session parent leadership training program that was culturally responsive, and a universally designed, trusted messenger model (also sometimes referred to as train the trainer). The goal of the pilot was to empower and train individuals in diverse communities to support information sharing to their own local community 12 Immigrant parents with children 0-8 participated in cohort one of the Parent Leadership Pilot.

The pilot was co-facilitated by MSPA and Portland Empowered with guest speakers on topics. Topics included Child Welfare, Child Development, transitions to school, Help Me Grow, Developmental Screenings and advocacy for their children. Of the 12 parent leaders, five continued on to host two community meetings supported by the facilitators of the pilot training

Impact of Parent Leadershiop Pilot:

- Participants felt **more confident** and **better prepared** to support others.
- Emphasis on **networking, community belonging**, and **responsibility to share knowledg**e.
- Desire for **Expanded roles** for participants, including **advocacy training**

Suggestions to make a stronger program:

- Keep **small class sizes, child care** and **financial stipends**
- Add content on **domestic violence, child abuse** and **facilitation skills**
- Offer **multilingual facilitation** or **interpreters** for more in-depth discussions on the topics

