

Community Assessment  
Annual Update 2021

Le Jardin Community Center, Inc.

Early Head Start and Head Start



Prepared by Cathleen L. Armstead, Ph.D.

Sunshine Nonprofit Solutions

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with eligible children; other child development centers; resources that are available in the community; and strengths of the community. In addition, programs must annually review and update the community assessment to reflect any significant changes. In 2020-2021, there were changes to the service area, especially to the economic development of Florida City, and a continued exacerbation of lack of social services in the Naranja area. Most importantly, the COVID-19 pandemic impacted our communities in unprecedented ways. As a global pandemic, the reach of the virus was worldwide, and no aspect of society was left unscathed: from health, illness, and death to the state of children and orphans; from economies, industries, and poverty rates to individual resilience; and from educational changes to government responses that will have far-reaching impacts for the next century.

This community assessment discusses a pre-COVID-19 community that was already economically stressed, the changes to the service area occurring prior to COVID-19, and the impact of COVID-19 on our society. The data is presented through a COVID-19 lens in the discussion that follows. Still, much of the data is not yet fully realized.

## Data and Data Sources

Much of the most recent data is available at the county level, although it is possible



to extrapolate from existing trends to describe Le Jardin's service area. Statewide data are provided where available as a benchmark by which to compare local data and represent the most recent information available. Nationwide data are also provided in comparison charts.

Data were derived from the American Community Survey (ACS 2016-2019, 3-year estimates) and the Statistical Atlas (2019 data). In addition, the United Way published *ALICE in Florida: A Financial Hardship Study* in 2020, which contains both pre- and post-COVID-19 data.

A variety of existing secondary data sources were reviewed to assess community needs, strengths, and resources, with a focus on the impact of COVID-19. The first data sets create a detailed picture of the community in 2019-2020, prior to the onset of COVID-19. The second data set examines the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Given the global nature of the pandemic and Miami's status as a world trade and financial center, COVID-19 has had particularly devastating impacts on Miami-Dade County.

Data used to describe the impact of COVID-19 in the world, nation, and state include reports and statistics from the following sources: 1) the Brookings Institute of Global and Economy and Development; 2) Feeding America 2021; 3) the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities; 3) the St. Louis Federal Reserve Bank; 4) the Centers for Disease Prevention and Control; 5) the World Health Organization; and 6) Johns Hopkins University. Real-time poverty estimates for each state can be found at the Lab for Economic Opportunities working with the University of Chicago: Harris Public Policy<sup>1</sup>. Further, information on the impact of COVID-19 upon children was found at the Annie E. Casey Kids Count Database, updated as of June 2021, with data at the city level for Miami, Florida.

Data to describe the impact on Miami-Dade County relies heavily on the Jorge M. Perez Metropolitan Center at Florida International University and on the 2020 Community Health Needs Assessment for Miami-Dade County, Florida, sponsored by the University of Miami Health System and Jackson Health System in collaboration with Nicklaus Children's Hospital. The COVID-19 website of the United States Census Bureau was used for up-to-date data at the state and county level.

In addition to poverty, unemployment, food hardships, housing worries, and health concerns, the wider impacts of COVID-19 were determined through other sources. Important aspects of this data include weekly business formation statistics, changes in business conditions for small businesses, changes in monthly state sales taxes, and

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<sup>1</sup> Lab for Economic Opportunities at the University of Notre Dame working with the University of Chicago Harris Public Policy at [monthly\\_poverty\\_rates\\_updated\\_thru\\_mar\\_2021.pdf \(uchicago.edu\)](https://www.laeo.org/research/monthly-poverty-rates-updated-thru-mar-2021.pdf)

monthly state retail sales data. Data on educational changes, hospital capacity, first responders' mental health, and the number of disrupted families are also included in this analysis.

An important measure, Community Resilience Estimates, assesses the capacity of individuals and households within a community to absorb, endure, and recover from the health, social, and economic impacts of a disaster. On a scale of zero to one, with one being the least resilient, Miami-Dade County measures a .82—reflecting the difficulties Miami-Dade County and the communities in the Le Jardin service area will continue to face.

Finally, the new Delta variant, responsible for a 134 percent increase in COVID-19 cases from the last week in July through the first week in August 2021, signals a growing concern for the physical, mental, and economic health of Miami-Dade County. It is important to note that deaths, which typically lag fourteen days beyond the number of cases, have not yet increased at that level. It is also important to note that 99 percent of the deaths during that period occurred in unvaccinated individuals.

While this assessment is quite comprehensive, it cannot measure all possible aspects of the community, nor does it represent all possible populations of interest. These information gaps are potentially significant and may in some ways limit the ability to understand community needs. Certain population groups—such as those who are homeless, institutionalized, or speak a language other than English or Spanish—are difficult to enumerate in official data. Other population groups, such as expectant women, undocumented residents, and immigrants, might not be readily identifiable.

# Geography

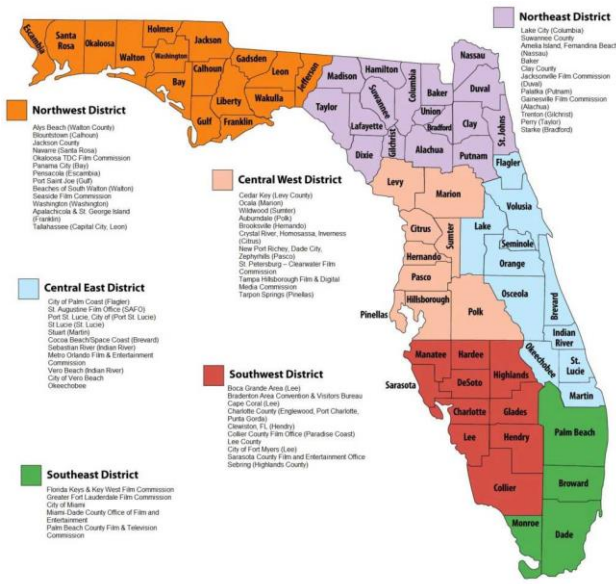


Figure 1: Map of Florida

Florida is in the southeastern region of the United States, bordered by Alabama, Georgia, the Atlantic Ocean, and the Gulf of Mexico. The state has the longest coastline in the contiguous United States. Florida is divided into 67 counties, the most populous of which is Miami-Dade County.

Miami-Dade County encompasses more than 2,000 square miles (larger than the states of Rhode Island and Delaware), with 2,716,940 residents. Miami-Dade

County is a minority-majority county. Non-Hispanic Whites comprise 12.9 percent of the county’s population, Hispanics 69.4 percent, African Americans 17.7 percent, Asians 3 percent, and multi-racial individuals 1.3 percent.

## Le Jardin Service Area

Le Jardin’s service area incorporates the following municipalities and unincorporated areas: Florida City, Homestead, Princeton, and Naranja. Even prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Le Jardin Community Center service area was characterized by a low-income population, high unemployment rates, low educational attainment, and a severe housing burden. As a low-income community, it is plagued by social ills, including high crime rates.



There is a substantial immigrant population in the service area with corresponding linguistic isolation. Educational attainment in the service area is low, and unemployment is higher than the county average; the need for education, job training, and employment services is significant. Public transportation is available (through a bus system and the Homestead Trolley), but routes are limited and wait times are long—most families rely on at least one vehicle.



Figure 2: Map of Le Jardin Service Area

Particularly notable is that there are four “Qualified Opportunity Zones,” as identified by the U.S. Department of Treasury, that are part of Le Jardin’s service area. There is also a Qualified Opportunity Zone in Florida City. The demographic and poverty data in this area illustrate the high need for Head Start and Early Head Start services. Data further demonstrate that Le Jardin is in the neediest neighborhoods within the communities of Florida City and Homestead, and there are similar needs in Leisure City and Naranja.

Florida City is experiencing enormous development of high-density, low-income housing units. Over 100 acres were sold during the past two years with the explicit purpose of building multi-family units. The proposed density of 14.2 units per acre is almost twice the national average of 7 units per acre.<sup>2</sup>

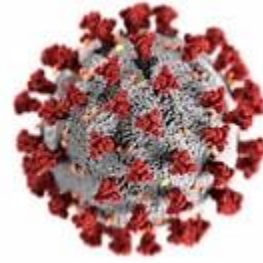
Just as importantly, the Florida Department of Transportation is seeking to construct a bypass of the turnpike to alleviate traffic. According to the *South Dade News Leader*, this bypass will result in a significant decrease in the patronage of small businesses and services; it is predicted that more than 33 percent of all Florida City businesses will close due to the change in transportation bypassing the city.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Census. 2020. [Understanding Population Density \(census.gov\)](https://www.census.gov)

<sup>3</sup> South Dade Newsleader. 2020. [Fabric of Florida City is Changing | News | southdadenewsleader.com](https://www.southdadenewsleader.com)

# COVID-19

The pandemic began with the spread of COVID-19, a contagious disease caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2).



Symptoms of COVID-19 include fever, cough, headache, fatigue, breathing difficulties, and the loss of smell and taste. COVID-19 is transmitted when people inhale air contaminated by droplets and small airborne particles. The risk of breathing contaminated air is highest when people are in proximity, particularly indoors.

Preventive measures include physical distancing, quarantining, ventilation of indoor spaces, covering coughs and sneezes, handwashing, and keeping unwashed hands away from the face. The use of face masks or coverings along with a physical distance of 6 feet is very helpful; however, vaccinations are the most powerful preventive medicine available.

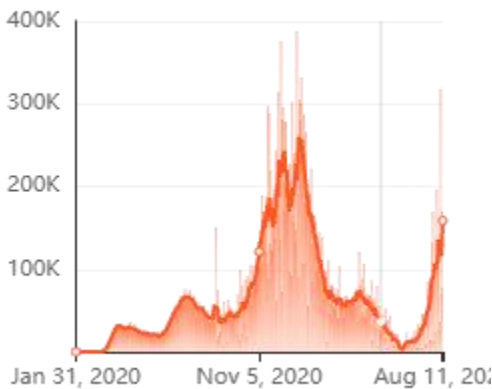


Figure 3: Graphic Illustration of COVID-19 Deaths

As of July, 2021, 201,459,884 cases of COVID-19 have been diagnosed world-wide, with more than four million deaths (4,276,662), while 181,313,834 people have recovered. The United States, despite having a wealthy economy and a stable health infrastructure (hospitals, doctors, potable water) leads the world in the number of cases and deaths; 36,213,653 cases have been diagnosed with more than half a million (631,477) deaths and 29,794,476 recovered

individuals.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Johns Hopkins University of Medicine: Coronavirus Resource Center. [Home - Johns Hopkins Coronavirus Resource Center \(jhu.edu\)](https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/)

Between March 2020 and July 2021, the Florida Department of Health<sup>5</sup> reported 2,283,315 individual cases, 95,210 hospitalizations, and 36,860 deaths among Florida residents. In addition, 43,440 non-residents have also tested positive, and 740 of those individuals have died. Florida has the third highest confirmed case count and the fourth highest death count of the fifty states in the nation. In July 2021, one in every five new COVID-19 cases recorded in the United States occurred in Florida. As of July 31, 2021, Florida recorded 21,683 new cases in one day, the highest at any time since its peak in June 2020. These cases are attributed to the Delta variant of COVID-19. The Delta variant is both more aggressive and more contagious. However, it is important to note that 99 percent of the deaths from the Delta variant occurred in non-vaccinated individuals.

Within Miami-Dade County, at least one in five residents have been infected, for a total of 542,481 reported cases. The Delta variant resulted in an average of 2,226 cases per day reported in Miami-Dade County, a 124 percent increase from the average two weeks prior. Miami-Dade County is at an extremely high risk for unvaccinated people.<sup>6</sup>

Throughout the pandemic, mask mandates and social distancing restrictions have been discouraged and even prohibited by law in the state of Florida, contributing to the high number of cases and resulting deaths. Most of the deaths in summer of 2021 that are recorded are due to the Delta variant; 99 percent of those deaths occurred among non-vaccinated individuals. Currently, while schools from pre-K to college level grapple with the disease, the state of Florida prohibits mask mandates or vaccination mandates.

## **Disproportionate Impact of COVID-19: Racial/Ethnic and Minority Communities**

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<sup>5</sup> Florida Department of Health: COVID-19 Response. [Home | Florida Department of Health COVID-19 Outbreak \(floridahealthcovid19.gov\)](https://www.floridahealthcovid19.gov)

<sup>6</sup> *New York Times*. August 14, 2021. "Tracking Coronavirus in Miami-Dade County, Fla." [Miami-Dade County, Florida Covid Case Tracker - The New York Times \(nytimes.com\)](https://www.nytimes.com/2021/08/14/us/health/covid-19-miami-dade-county.html)

Le Jardin's service population is comprised primarily of ethnic minority groups, with a significant proportion of immigrants (both authorized and undocumented). Le Jardin's service area has been decimated by the pandemic, and the need for Head Start/Early Head Start's comprehensive multi-generational services is greater than ever.

COVID-19 has disproportionately impacted ethnic minority and immigration communities across the United States; this disparity is especially visible in Florida and Miami-Dade County. Rates of morbidity and mortality among these communities are significantly higher when compared to non-Hispanic Whites.<sup>7</sup> This is attributed to a complex range of interlinking factors that are structurally embedded in our society: social and economic inequalities, overcrowded housing, types of employment, occupational risk, prevalence of pre-existing health conditions, systemic racism, discrimination, and stigma.<sup>8</sup>

Importantly, COVID-19 has further disproportionately impacted immigrants in southern Miami-Dade in terms of health outcomes, access to health care, living conditions, loss of employment income, and working conditions along with decreased access to educational opportunities for their children. Linguistic barriers, cultural differences, and fear of deportation also contribute to the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on the immigrant community.

African Americans/Blacks, Hispanic/Latinos, Asians or Pacific Islanders, and American Indians and Alaskans Natives all experienced higher hospitalization rates than Whites within age-stratified groups. Hispanic/Latinos had the highest hospitalization rate among 0- to 17-year-olds, 8.7 times higher than Whites. American Indian/Alaskan Natives had the highest hospitalization rate among 18- to 49-year-olds (11.2 times higher than Whites), and Black individuals had the highest hospitalization rate among 50- to 64-year-olds (9.9 times higher than Whites). Among all age groups, Blacks had higher rates of hospitalizations than Whites (7.0 times higher).<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Reyes, Maritza. December 2020. The Disproportional Impact of COVID-19 on African Americans. *Health and Human Rights Journal*. Volume 22. Number 2.

<sup>8</sup> Global Economy and Development at Brookings. June 2021. Social and Economic Impact of Covid-19. [Social-and-economic-impact-COVID.pdf \(brookings.edu\)](#)

<sup>9</sup> The COVID Racial Data Tracker. [The COVID Racial Data Tracker | The COVID Tracking Project](#)

## Population: Growth and Change

Based on the 2010 Census, the total population of Florida was 18,801,310, up 17.6 percent from 15,982,378 in 2000. The United States Census estimates for 2020 indicate that Florida's population will have grown by 14.2 percent, reaching 21,477,737. In comparison, the population of the United States is estimated to have increased by only 6.39 percent.

In Miami-Dade County, the population comprised 2,716,040 residents in 2019. The population in the Le Jardin service area grew, on average, by 18 percent, to more than 150,000 residents in the service area. Although the overall population increased by 6.39 percent in the United States from 2010 to 2019, there are significant differences in the percentages of population increase for different racial and ethnic groups. In Le Jardin's service area and the four cities it encompasses, there were significant decreases in the non-Hispanic White population and corresponding increases in the Hispanic/Latino populations.

Florida continues to comprise a predominantly non-Hispanic White population. More than half of the population (53.2 percent) identifies as non-Hispanic White, a lower percentage than that in the United States as a whole (60.19 percent). In Miami-Dade County, 69.4 percent of the population identifies as Hispanic/Latino. Within Le Jardin's service area, two cities—Homestead and Leisure City—are predominantly Hispanic, at 66.2 percent and 83.7 percent, respectively. However, less than half of the population in Florida City is Hispanic/Latino (46.2 percent), while in Naranja, slightly more than half (56.2 percent) is Hispanic/Latino. The large proportion of Hispanics/Latinos in Miami-Dade County, coupled with a sizable population of African Americans or Blacks (17.7 percent), results in a county with a vastly more diverse population than that of the United States as a whole.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> U.S. Census: American Community Survey 2019 (3-Year Estimates).  
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## Changes in Immigration: COVID-19

Just prior to the COVID-19 crisis, record-high migration to the United States was recorded; immigrants and their native-born children account for one in five individuals.<sup>11</sup> Despite the political rhetoric, the intensive policing of the immigrant community through Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), and the increase in detention centers for immigrants—including unaccompanied children—immigration remained high in South Florida. Further, integration of immigrants had improved in many areas. Immigrants were more successful in finding and keeping jobs over the past five years, accompanied by higher educational outcomes for their children.

With the onset of the global pandemic, the immigration process became one of the most severely affected aspects of the global crisis. The U.S. immigration system is now beset by more restrictions, delays, and chaos. Travel restrictions implemented early in 2020 prohibited entry from China, a ban that was expanded to include Iran and Europe. By mid-March, the U.S. land borders with Mexico and Canada were closed for all but essential travel. Combined with restrictions on deportation flights, tens of thousands of people were in limbo in ICE detention centers, where crowded prison-like conditions left the population vulnerable to the contagious COVID-19 virus.

As a result of the border closure, over 147,000 people have been expelled by the U.S. Border Patrol at the Mexican border without the opportunity to seek asylum. All hearings for asylum seekers in Mexico have been suspended indefinitely. U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services suspended all in-person services at its offices for three months before beginning a gradual reopening.<sup>12</sup> Even when services are fully restored, massive backlogs will create significant delays in the immigration process. It

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<sup>11</sup> The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). October 2020. What is the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on immigrants and their children? <https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/what-is-the-impact-of-the-covid-19-pandemic-on-immigrants-and-their-children-e7cbb7de/>

<sup>12</sup> University of Arizona. Mexican Initiatives. <https://mexico.arizona.edu/revista/how-covid-19-has-impacted-asylum-crisis>

is important to note that most of the immigrants in Le Jardin’s service area are from Mexico, Honduras, and Guatemala.

### **Population Demographics: Gender and Age**

Census data indicate that approximately 49.2 percent of the U.S. population is male and 50.8 percent is female; this is not significantly different for the state of Florida and Miami-Dade County. The percentage of men in Florida and Miami-Dade County is 48.9 percent and 48.5 percent, respectively. Similarly, the percentage of men in Le Jardin’s service area is 48.84 percent. However, there are two key anomalies: 47.9 percent of the population of Naranja is men, a lower percentage than the surrounding area, and 51.07 percent of the population of Leisure City is men, a higher percentage than the surrounding area. The median age for the United States is 37.6 years, but in Florida it is 41.4 years. The median age in Miami-Dade County is 39 years, but the median age for residents in Le Jardin’s service area is significantly lower at 30.1 years.

### **Population Demographics: Race and Ethnicity**

Florida continues to have a predominantly non-Hispanic White population. More than half of the population (53.2 percent) identifies as non-Hispanic White, a lower percentage than that of the United States as a whole (60.19 percent).

There are 5,670,123 Hispanic individuals living in Florida; Hispanics comprise more than one-quarter of the total population of Florida (26 percent). This far exceeds the Hispanic/Latino population in the United States (18.59 percent). The percentage of

The U.S. Census Bureau considers race and ethnicity to be two separate and distinct concepts.

#### *What is ethnicity?*

Ethnicity determines whether a person is of Hispanic origin or not. For this reason, ethnicity is categorized as either Hispanic/Latino or Not Hispanic/Latino. Hispanics may report any race.

#### *What is race?*

The U.S. Census Bureau defines race as a person’s self-identification with one or more social groups. An individual can report as White, Black, or African American, Asian, American Indian, and Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander or some other race. Survey respondents may report multiple races.

Hispanics/Latinos in Miami-Dade County further exceeds this percentage, as 69.4 percent of the County identifies as Hispanic/Latino. Within Le Jardin’s service area, two cities, Homestead and Leisure City, are predominantly Hispanic at 66.2 percent and 83.7 percent, respectively. However, less than half of the population in Florida City is Hispanic/Latino (46.2 percent), while just more than half (56.2 percent) is Hispanic/Latino in Naranja.

The large proportion of Hispanics in Miami-Dade County coupled with a sizable population of Blacks (17.7 percent) results in a county that is significantly more diverse than the United States as a whole.

The racial/ethnic composition of Le Jardin’s service area differs even more from Miami-Dade County. While overall statistical information provides an overview of the area, examining the different cities within the service area illustrates how residents are segregated de facto by race within different communities. While Florida City and Naranja have sizable African American or Black populations, Leisure City and Homestead are predominantly Hispanic.

2019: Population Estimates by Race American Community Survey 2019, 3-Year Estimates						
	United States	Florida	Miami-Dade	Florida City	Homestead	Leisure City
African American or Black	13.4%	16.9%	17.7%	52%	20.10%	13.8%
Non-Hispanic White	59.19%	53.2%	12.9%	3.1%	12.9%	3.6%
Hispanic	16.54%	24.4%	64.4%	41.2%	61.2%	76%
Asian	5.9%	3%	1.6%	1%	1%	1%
Multi-Racial	2.8%	2.2%	1.3%	1%	3.3%	3.1%
Native American	1.3%	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

Table 1: Racial Categories by Location, 2019 Census Data



The United States Census categories do not differentiate between African American or Black and Afro-Caribbean populations. Recent tabulations indicate that Naranja has a sizable population of Afro-Caribbean residents. An estimated 3.5 percent of residents are from Trinidad and Tobago, 5.59 percent are from Haiti, and 4.94 percent are from Jamaica. Afro-Caribbean populations have specific obstacles and hardships, especially immigrants from Haiti. Haitian immigrants and Haitian Americans have come from the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere with few economic or educational assets. There are limited language opportunities for Haitians and Haitian Americans who speak Creole, and there are cultural barriers and knowledge gaps for seeking assistance, which has become especially apparent during the COVID-19 pandemic.

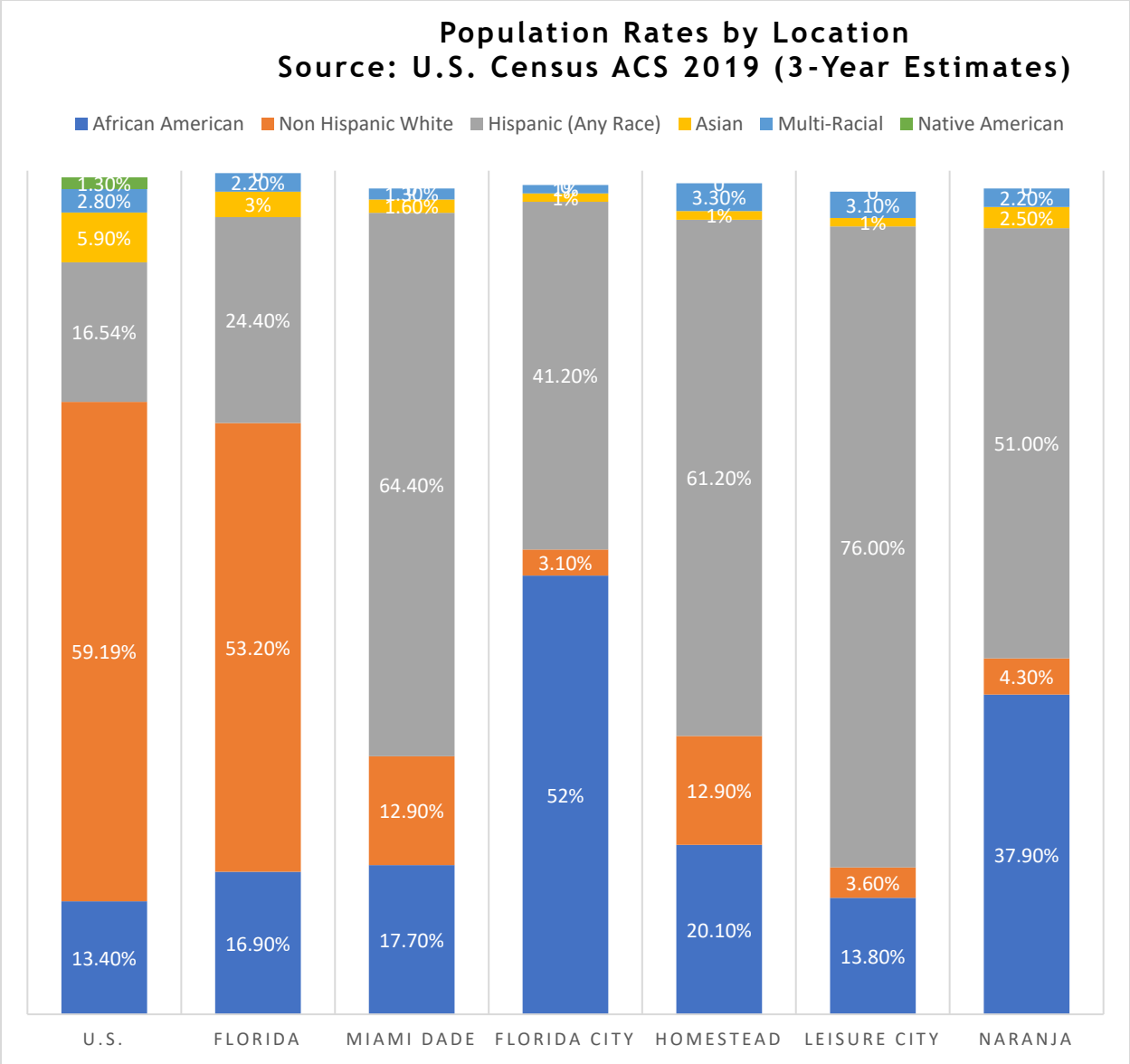


Figure 4: Population Estimates by Race. Source: U.S. Census ACS 2019 (3-Year Estimates)

### Diversity in the Hispanic/Latino Community

The Hispanic/Latino community in the United States has origins primarily in Mexico (64 percent); Puerto Ricans comprise 9.7 percent of the Hispanic population in the United States, and those with Cuban ancestry account for 4 percent of the Hispanic population.

This trend is reversed in Florida and Miami-Dade County. Within Florida, the percentage of the population with origins in Mexico is 14 percent; the percentage of

those with Puerto Rican heritage is 21 percent, and Hispanics with Cuban ancestry account for 29 percent. Miami-Dade County has a Hispanic population that is more than half Cuban or Cuban American (54 percent), with 6 percent from Puerto Rico and 14 percent from Mexico. The remaining 21 percent of the Hispanic population is from South America. There is more diversity in the Hispanic population in Le Jardin’s service area. Roughly half of the Hispanic population in the service area (50.7 percent) has Cuban heritage. More than a third (42.7 percent) have origins in Mexico or Central America, with 7 percent originating from South America.

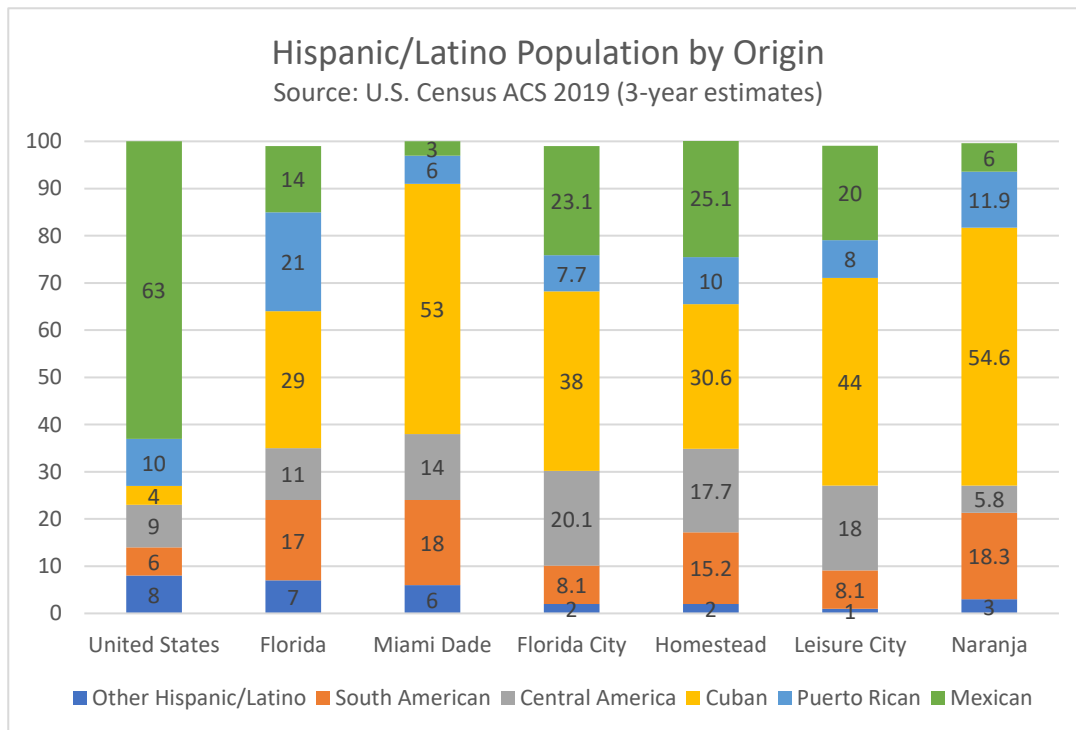


Figure 5: Hispanic and Latino Diversity. Source: U.S. Census ACS 2019 (3-Year Estimates)

# Economy of South Miami-Dade: Industries and Occupations

## Industries

Le Jardin's service area is significantly different from the state of Florida<sup>13</sup> and Miami-Dade County<sup>14</sup> with respect to the occupations in the area. Whereas a third of employees work in management, business, science, and arts occupations throughout the nation, state, and county, only 20 percent of Le Jardin's civilian workforce is employed within this category. Employees in Le Jardin's service are more likely to be employed in service occupations and less likely to be employed in sales and office occupations. More than twice as many employees work in natural resources, construction, and maintenance occupations compared with the nation, state, or county.

Agriculture plays a predominant role in the economy of South Miami-Dade and Le Jardin's service area. Whereas agriculture comprises less than 2 percent of the United States economy, it is 7.4 percent of Le Jardin's service area economy. Retail also plays a larger role in Le Jardin's service area, as does food service and preparation. Conversely, technical, professional, and scientific jobs, along with public administration and financial sector jobs, comprise a much smaller proportion of the economy in Le Jardin's service area than in Miami-Dade County as a whole. The top industries in Le Jardin's service are 1) retail, 2) hospitality, 3) health care and education, and 4) agriculture,<sup>15</sup> which are among the top ten industries significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Bureau of Labor Statistics: Florida: Economy immediately. <https://www.bls.gov/eag/eag.fl.htm>

<sup>14</sup> Bureau of Labor Statistics: Miami: Economy immediately. [https://www.bls.gov/eag/eag.fl\\_miami\\_md.htm](https://www.bls.gov/eag/eag.fl_miami_md.htm)

<sup>15</sup> Statistical Atlas. Florida: Homestead Industries.

<sup>16</sup> Congressional Research Service. COVID-19 and the U.S. Economy. Updated May 11, 2021. <https://crsreports.congress.gov>

### Comparison of Industries by Location U.S. Census ACS 2019 (3-Year Estimates)

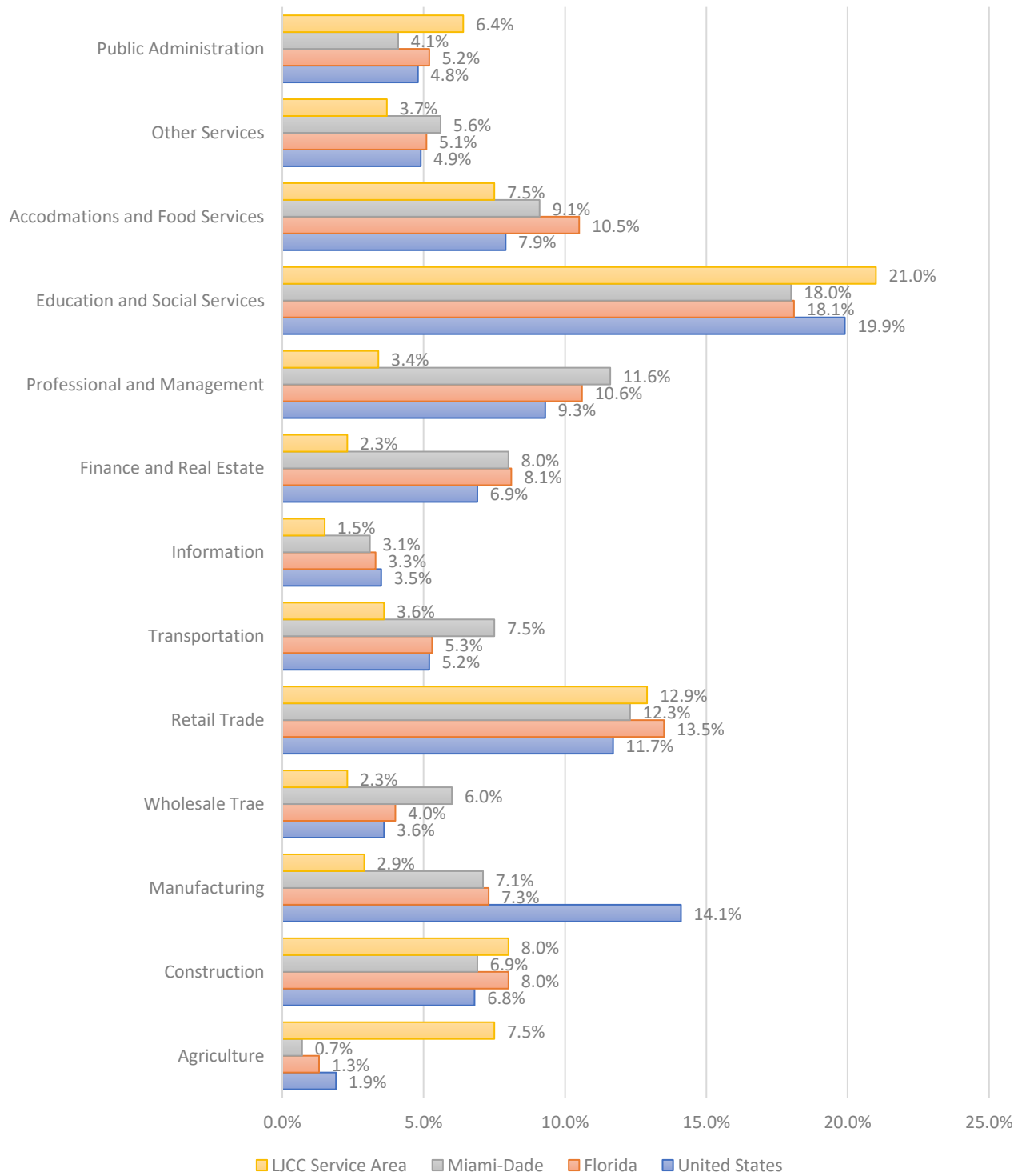


Figure 6: Comparison of Industries by Location. Source: U.S. Census ACS 2019 (3-Year Estimates)

**Agriculture**<sup>17</sup>: Agriculture plays a larger role in the economy within Le Jardin’s service area than it does in Miami-Dade County, Florida, or even the entire nation, with 7.4 percent of Le Jardin workers employed in agriculture. Different types of commodities were impacted differently by the pandemic. Income from fishing tourism and charter boats fell by 49 percent and 51 percent, respectively, although this sector of the economy is expected to recover with the lifting of travel restrictions and relaxation of mask mandates and social distancing, in sharp contrast to other commodities within the agriculture industry.

Commercial fishers reported the largest shift in usual practices. Most seafood is consumed in restaurants, and regulations closed that entire segment of dine-in consumption. Seasonality also impacted how certain agricultural commodities were affected. Within the Le Jardin service area, COVID-19 hit exactly when the region’s crops came into season. March to May is the biggest harvest season for southern Miami-Dade County (Le Jardin’s service area).

The largest impact, measured as the average decrease in sales revenue, was among the horticultural crops—the dominant crops within Le Jardin’s service area. Sales revenue decreased by 46 percent, decimating the agricultural economy of Le Jardin’s service area. Employment fell, as did hours worked, and working conditions for those who remained employed worsened. Sectors that were hit hardest, with unprecedented closures and uncertainty, will remain impacted in the future. Many of the workers in Le Jardin’s service area are Hispanic and/or immigrants—both communities were disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Retail**: The pandemic accelerated the rise of digital trends; the acceleration of such trends will result in permanent and dramatic changes to the retail landscape. This had

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<sup>17</sup> University of Florida: Institute of Food and Agricultural Studies. Florida’s Agriculture and Marine Industries Report Effects of COVID-19. [www.https://blogs.ifas.ufl.edu/news/2020/05/18/floridas-agriculture-marine-industries-report-effects-of-covid-19-restrictions/](https://blogs.ifas.ufl.edu/news/2020/05/18/floridas-agriculture-marine-industries-report-effects-of-covid-19-restrictions/)

drastic impacts on the retail workers within Le Jardin's service area. Close to half of retail workers (43.5 percent) experienced a significant decrease in their hours.

**Hospitality:** Hospitality, a major industry within Miami-Dade County and by extension in Le Jardin's service area, has incurred severe losses. According to the Jorge Mendez Center, the total economic impact of COVID-19 includes \$3.36 billion in hotel and restaurant sales revenue losses, resulting in a loss of \$111.1 million in state taxes. The loss of hotel and restaurant sales resulted in indirect losses of \$664.7 million on raw materials, most notably agriculture.

**Healthcare:** Hospitals and healthcare facilities are facing catastrophic financial challenges related to the COVID-19 pandemic. The American Hospital Association estimates a financial impact of \$202.6 billion in lost revenue for America's hospitals and healthcare systems, or an average of \$50.7 billion per month. Overall, a lack of preparedness was a major contributor to the struggles experienced by healthcare facilities around the world. Items such as personal protective equipment (PPE) for healthcare workers, hospital equipment, and sanitizing supplies were in short supply.<sup>18</sup>

Doctors, nurses, and other healthcare professionals worked hard to treat patients arriving in unprecedented numbers and often separated from their families. Among the millions of lives lost, many are healthcare workers who played crucial roles. COVID-19 has impacted both the physical and mental health of healthcare workers.

The loss of revenue in the healthcare industry is not expected to recover in this decade and will impact Le Jardin healthcare workers with threatened loss of employment and income. At the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, Homestead Hospital exceeded its capacity for intensive care and hospital beds. As of July 2021,

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<sup>18</sup> American Hospital Association. Hospitals and Health Systems Face Unprecedented Financial Pressures due to COVID-19. <https://www.aha.org/system/files/media/file/2020/05/aha-covid19-financial-impact-0520-FINAL.pdf>

Homestead Hospital is at 98 percent capacity, with the rise in the aggressive and contagious Delta variant.

**Education.** The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on education for children, families, and teachers is discussed elsewhere. This section focuses on the economic impact of COVID-19 on the education industry—one of the top ten employers in the Le Jardin service area *and* one of the top ten industries significantly impacted by the pandemic.

**Early Childhood:** In April of 2020, at the beginning of the pandemic, 185 out of 1,343 licensed early childhood centers were operating at full capacity—just 14 percent—in Miami-Dade County.<sup>19</sup> The federal government has invested in early childhood care since the onset of the pandemic. The initial Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act provided \$380 billion to small businesses, which impacted many early childhood centers. The Paycheck Protection Program and Healthcare Enhancement Act provided an additional \$383 billion in economic support for small businesses. It is worth noting that while this support benefited many early childhood centers, the funds were depleted rapidly.

It was not until the American Rescue Plan, the American Jobs Plan, and the American Families Plan was enacted on March 11, 2021, that the childcare industry experienced significant relief. The release of \$39 billion in childcare relief funds provided relief for childcare providers and support for families that need help affording childcare. Still, many childcare providers face the possibility of permanent closure due to decreased enrollment and higher costs of mitigating the spread of coronavirus. Childcare offers families the dual benefit of early childhood education for young children and support for working parents. As many mothers have been forced out of the workforce in the wake

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<sup>19</sup> Florida: The Office of Early Learning – COVID-19 Resources. <http://www.floridaearlylearning.com/covid-19-resources>



of the COVID-19 health emergency, childcare is a critical aspect of our economic recovery.<sup>20</sup>

This legislation represents the single largest investment in childcare in our nation's history. Funds will support stabilization grants for childcare providers to cover their operating expenses as they face less revenue and higher costs during the pandemic. In addition, states, tribes, and territories have the flexibility to fund childcare assistance for low-income families and essential workers and make the quality investments needed to address recovery from the pandemic.

With over 50 percent of early childhood centers closed or operating on reduced hours, significant investment within the childcare industry is clearly needed. Estimates still indicate that 18 percent of closed early childhood centers will be closed permanently. In a nation where only 65 percent of children who need care are enrolled in an early childhood development center, the decrease of 18 percent of early childhood centers is devastating. Most early childcare workers (teachers, cooks, paraprofessionals) are women, particularly women of color. This is especially true in Le Jardin's service area, where the vast majority (over 90 percent) of frontline workers (teachers, cooks, paraprofessionals) are women, often women of color.

The Paycheck Protection Program and Healthcare Enhancement Act (April 2020) provided some relief, as did the expanded unemployment benefits. However, within Florida, the technological infrastructure for distributing unemployment benefits was antiquated and could not handle the volume of claims. Furthermore, many benefits expired in October 2020 and were not extended until December 2020. Lags and lapses due to insufficient technology and

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<sup>20</sup> U.S. Chamber of Commerce. COVID-19 and Impact on Childcare: Education and Workforce Report. <https://www.uschamberfoundation.org/reports/covid-19-impact-childcare>

legislative actions resulted in significant income loss for early childcare workers.

**Public Education (K-12).** The economic impact on K-12 public education has been offset by federal relief. The Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ESSER) provided \$1.5 billion dollars to Miami-Dade County Public Schools. The bulk of the funding is appropriated for K-12 paraprofessionals and tutors, expansions of afterschool programs, instructional materials, and expanded hours. Other significant investments include indoor air quality and building envelope improvements, enhanced cleaning materials and processes, implementation of healthcare hubs and mental wellness programs for both staff and students and expanded hours and wages for custodial staff. Federal funds will need to be expended within two years, at which time public schools are fully dependent on state funding.<sup>21</sup>

## **State Revenue<sup>22</sup>**

COVID-19 has triggered a severe state budget crisis. State revenues have declined precipitously, and costs are rising sharply, with many businesses closed or operating at reduced hours and millions of people recently unemployed. Due to the economy's rapid decline and uncertainty about its future or the possibility of federal aid, official state revenue projections likely do not yet fully reflect the unprecedented fiscal impact of the coronavirus pandemic.

Estimates show substantial shortfalls. States' revenue projections show some of the damage the pandemic-induced downturn has caused to state budgets, though they do not show states' increased costs from fighting the virus and from rising demand for state services. There is considerable uncertainty about the course of the economy

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<sup>21</sup> M-DCPS COVID Relief Emergency Funds Spending Plan. <https://covidrelief.dadeschools.net/>

<sup>22</sup> Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. State Budget Watch: States Grappling with Hit to Tax Collections. Updated November 6, 2020. <https://www.cbpp.org/research/state-budget-and-tax/states-grappling-with-hit-to-tax-collections>

over the next year. If the federal government fails to provide additional fiscal stimulus, the chance that the economy could turn down again increases; another resurgence of the virus would further dampen growth. In addition, gas taxes, vehicle registration fees, and other revenues that are deposited into separate funds (like transportation funds) are also declining.

States faced an immediate crisis in fiscal year 2020 as the pandemic took a toll on revenues. State tax collections for March through August 2020 were 6.4 percent less than in the same months of 2019. States still face large budget shortfalls and uncertainty as COVID-19 cases continue to climb and much of the federal assistance to workers and businesses has ended and may not be extended. States are drawing on their rainy-day funds and other budget reserves to address these shortfalls, but, as in the last recession, those reserves will be far from adequate.

States will worsen the recession if they respond to this fiscal crisis by laying off employees, scaling back government contracts for businesses, and cutting public services and other forms of spending. Damaging cuts have already begun. Florida's governor vetoed \$1 billion in spending that lawmakers had approved before the crisis and ordered agencies to look for 8.5 percent more in possible cuts for fiscal year 2021. The state also cut money for community colleges and services related to behavioral health, including opioid and other substance use treatment services, crisis intervention services, and services for people experiencing homelessness.

## Economic, Health, and Social Indicators of the Population

### Unemployment

COVID-19 and the subsequent public health crisis have led to precipitous increases in unemployment and underemployment since March 2020. Nationally, the unemployment rate reached a peak of 14.7 percent in April 2020 and decreased to 6.1 percent of the labor force in April 2021. When accounting for discouraged workers and those working part-time for economic reasons, the rate follows a similar pattern, with

a high of 22.8 percent in April 2020 and falling each subsequent month, reaching 10.4 percent in April 2021.

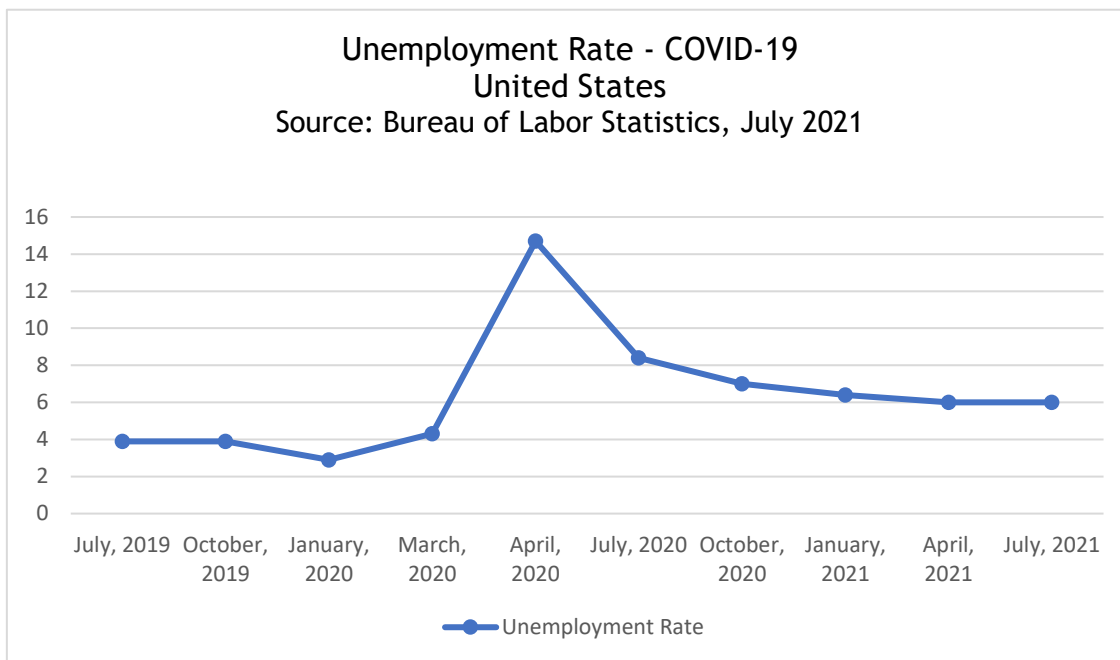


Figure 7: US. Unemployment Rate: COVID-19

These figures do not capture the full effects of the pandemic on the labor force. Caregivers, primarily women, have been exiting the labor force at high rates due to childcare needs, especially given the closures of early childhood centers and the fact that many schools are now virtual.

Although employment rates have begun to recover from April 2020 lows, concerns still exist about significant permanent job losses in the economy. When the public health crisis began, many workers were laid off on temporary furlough, but since then, many of these temporary job losses have become permanent. One indicator that these job losses may be permanent is the number of individuals who have been unemployed for more than 14 weeks. Over half of the unemployed individuals have been unemployed for longer than 14 weeks. By April 2021, the percentage of unemployed individuals who had been unemployed for 27 work weeks was 43 percent, up from 19.2 percent for the same time prior to the pandemic.

In Florida, the non-seasonally adjusted unemployment rate peaked in May 2020, reaching 14.3 percent. Statistically, counting Florida residents who are not able to look for work due to COVID-19, the unemployment rate would have been 21.7 percent during May 2020. The estimated unemployment rate in February 2021 dropped to 7.4 percent—notably, this was twice the unemployment rate prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. The advent of the Delta variant coupled with uncertainty of the future is driving up the unemployment rate again. During June of 2021, 12 percent of adults in Florida indicated that they had lost employment, compared to 17 percent of adults in the nation. However, this differed markedly for households with children. Within the state of Florida, 28 percent of households with children lost employment income during the June of 2021, compared to the nationwide rate of 22 percent.<sup>23</sup> In Miami-Dade County, 24.9 percent of households had a member of the household who had lost a job due to COVID; moreover, 38.9 percent lost employment income. In Le Jardin’s service area, the numbers are even more stark: while 20.2 percent of households experienced a job loss, 43.8 percent lost household wages. It is estimated that almost three-quarters of the population has a significantly reduced income in Le Jardin’s service area, with just 23 percent retaining all or most of their pre-pandemic income.<sup>24</sup>

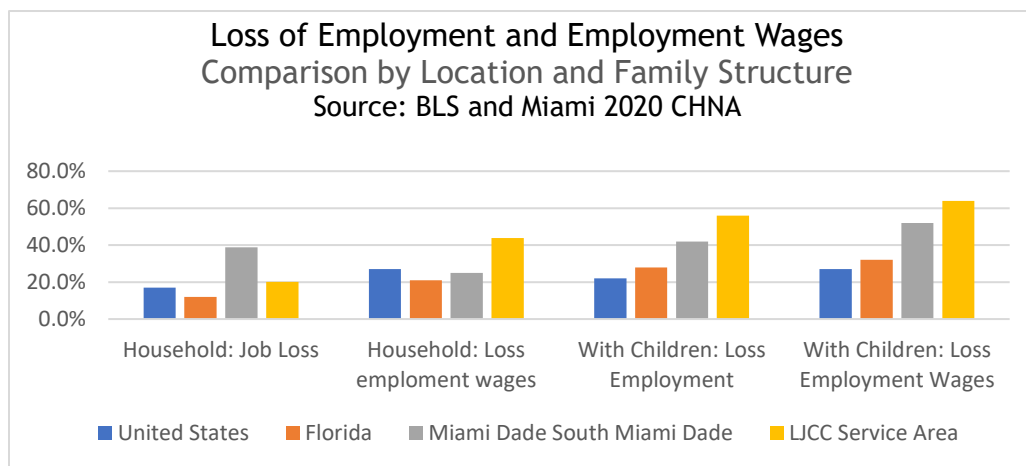


Figure 8: Loss of Employment and Loss of Employment Wages: COVID-19

<sup>23</sup> U.S. Department of Labor. Bureau of Labor Statistics. News Release Updated August 6, 2021. <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/empsit.pdf>

<sup>24</sup> University of Miami Health System and Jackson Health System, in Collaboration with Nicklaus Children’s Hospital. 2020 Community Health Needs Assessment.

The coronavirus pandemic has taken a significant toll on the U.S. labor market. Since the start of the pandemic, more than 115 million new claims for unemployment insurance have been filed, and although the number of claims has fallen, new weekly claims remain well above the pre-pandemic rate. As of the end of June 2021, more than 9 million individuals are officially unemployed, and millions of other former workers are still without jobs.

## **Federal Response**

The government response to the global economic and health crisis has been sporadic. Early in the pandemic, the federal government offered a generous relief package that included large, one-time stimulus payments to households and greatly expanded unemployment insurance benefits. After many of these benefits expired (October 2020), the federal government passed another relief package in December 2020 that provided additional, although smaller, stimulus payments and partially extended some of the other benefits. The most recent relief package, the American Families Plan, the American Jobs Plan, and the American Rescue Plan, enacted in March 2021, includes more generous one-time stimulus payments and additional expansion of unemployment insurance benefits, as well as a significant increase in the child tax credit and a large investment in early childhood care.<sup>25</sup>

## **Income and Poverty**

The most recent estimates indicate that the poverty rate for June 2021 was 11 percent, which is unchanged from the prior month, although it is still slightly higher than the poverty rate prior to the pandemic. In January 2020, the poverty rate stood at 10.7 percent. The poverty rate has held steady, as many individuals continue to receive stimulus income and supplements to unemployment insurance under the American Rescue Plan.<sup>26</sup> However, the poverty rate for Black individuals remains high,

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<sup>25</sup> Poverty and Social Policy Fact Sheet. April 28, 2021. The Potential Poverty Reduction Effect of the American Families Plan. <https://www.povertycenter.columbia.edu/publication>

<sup>26</sup> Wilson Sheehan Lab for Economic Opportunities at Notre dame. The University of Chicago: Harris Public Policy Real Time Poverty Estimates During the COVID-19 Pandemic Through June 2021.

at over 22 percent. This rate is 4 percentage points higher than the pre-pandemic rate for this population.

During the last six months of 2020, poverty rose sharply as some of parts of the initial government relief plan expired. Poverty rates increased by 2 percentage points, from 9.4 per in June to 11.4 per in December, adding 6.7 million people to the ranks of the poor. Poverty rose each month between June and November.<sup>27</sup>

The increase in poverty in the latter half of 2020 was more noticeable for Blacks,<sup>28</sup> children<sup>29</sup>, and those with less than a high school education. For Blacks, poverty rose by 2.9 percentage points between June and December. Poverty also rose noticeably for those with a high school education or less, from 16.7 percent in June to 21.7 percent in December.

The American Rescue Plan provided additional stimulus payments of up to \$1400 per person as well as an extension of the \$300 pandemic unemployment insurance compensation. Thus, although poverty rates are high—more than twice as high as pre-pandemic levels—government relief has staved off the worst. Still, Le Jardin’s service area is particularly impacted.

## **Le Jardin Service Area: Poverty**

Le Jardin’s service area, in the southernmost part of Miami-Dade County, is significantly different from the United States, Florida, and even from the rest of Miami-Dade County, in terms of demographics, economic opportunities, educational opportunities, and industry trends. Nowhere is this more apparent than in income and

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<http://povertymeasurement.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Real-time-Poverty-Estimates-through-June-2021-Updated-July-15-2021.pdf>

<sup>27</sup> Wilson Sheehan Lab for Economic Opportunities at Notre dame. The University of Chicago: Harris Public Policy Real Time Poverty Estimates During the COVID-19 Pandemic Through June 2021.

<http://povertymeasurement.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Real-time-Poverty-Estimates-through-June-2021-Updated-July-15-2021.pdf>

<sup>28</sup>Reyes, Maritza Vasquez. The Disproportional Impact of COVID-19 on African Americans. Health and Human Rights Journal. December 2020. Vol 22. Issue 2.

<sup>29</sup> Annie E. Casey Foundation. 2021: Kids Count Data Book. State Trends in Child Well-Being. <https://www.aecf.org/resources/2021-kids-count-data-book>

poverty rates. Within the service area, there are four cities (Homestead, Florida City, Naranja, and Leisure City) with significantly lower median incomes than those of the United States, the state of Florida, and Miami-Dade County. It is worth noting that Florida City and Homestead were among the poorest zip codes in Miami-Dade County even before the pandemic.

Le Jardin’s service area encompasses four Qualified Opportunity Zones (QOZs): 1) 12086011001 (110.01); 12086011101 (111.01); 12068011300 (113.00); and 12086011403 (114.03). Furthermore, two census tracts border these QOZs. These census tracts, 1208601103 (111.03) and 12086011202 (112.02), have similar economic characteristics but have not been designated by the state as QOZs. Still, the depiction of the economic outlook is very different for these census tracts, illustrating how pockets of “deep poverty” exist within the relatively poor communities served by Le Jardin. Income statistics for 2020 will not be available until September 2021. However, the data illustrate the poverty of the service area, particularly the QOZs.

Median Income in 2019 (Inflation Adjusted) Source: U.S. Census ACS 2019 (3-Year Estimates)		
Location	Median Income	Opportunity Zone
United States	\$ 59,039.00	
Florida	\$ 53,260.00	
Miami-Dade County	\$ 48,982.00	
Florida City	\$ 35,794.00	
Homestead	\$ 43,568.00	
Leisure City	\$ 45,270.00	
Naranja	\$ 39,860.00	
Census Tract 110.01	\$ 24,089.50	Yes
Census Tract 111.01	\$ 28,403.56	Yes
Census Tract 113.00	\$ 20,521.08	Yes
Census Tract 114.03	\$ 20,521.08	Yes
Census Tract 111.03	\$ 31,221.01	No
Census Tract 112.02	\$ 29,660.49	No

Table 2: Median Income by Location and QOZ

COVID-19 has had a strong negative impact on the median incomes of these communities. This impact has not been fully documented. Surveys from local non-profit organizations such as Centro Campesino, reports from the *Miami Herald*, and



official information from Miami-Dade County (Miami Matters) estimate that 33 percent of all households in the southernmost part of Miami-Dade County have lost all income, while only 21 percent of households have retained their pre-COVID-19 incomes.

Restaurants and hotels cannot afford to purchase food, and the need for agricultural workers has decreased. Tourism, restaurants, and grocery stores all have limited hours and social distancing restrictions. Many restaurants are closing permanently. Retail stores are open limited hours and have fewer customers and decreased sales. Finally, the dramatic increase in unemployment, complicated by the difficulties of the Florida unemployment administrative systems, has greatly reduced economic activity.

The poverty rate declined in Florida between 2014 and 2018. Still, the overall poverty rate for Florida was 13.6 percent, while the poverty rate for children under the age of 5 was 19.7 percent. The poverty rate of Miami-Dade County was 16 percent; for children below the age of five, the poverty rate was 24.2 percent.

Prior to the impact of COVID-19, Le Jardin's service areas had poverty rates that were almost three times as high as the national poverty rate and twice as high as the rate in Miami-Dade County, both in overall terms and for children under the age of five. Within Homestead, the poverty rate was 24.6 percent; in Naranja it was 31.2 percent; in Leisure City, 31.9 percent; and in Florida City, 38.3 percent. The impact of COVID-19 on poverty, despite federal assistance, was startling. Furthermore, poverty rates for the different ethnic and racial groups document the disproportionate impact of COVID-19.

Current Poverty Rates by Ethnicity and Location					
Source: U.S. Census Bureau: COVID-19 Household Pulse Survey					
	Pre-COVID Poverty Rate	Current Overall Poverty Rate	White	Black	Hispanic
Florida	13.6%	14.7%	10.9%	19.8%	15.7%
Miami-Dade	16%	16.6%	14.2%	22.1%	15.35%
Homestead	24.6%	31.6%	10.8%	27.9%	21.5%
Florida City	38.3%	43.7%	19.3%	35.7%	22.7%
Naranja	31.2%	35.7%	20.1%	37.5%	23.1%
Leisure City	31.9%	33.9%	19.1%	33.5%	24.2%

Table 3: Pre-COVID and Current Poverty Rates by Ethnicity and Location

The overall poverty rate for children under five was significantly higher than for other ages in all areas prior to COVID-19—within the nation, Florida, Miami-Dade County, and the four cities that comprise Le Jardin’s service area. The poverty rate for children below the age of five (pre-COVID) in Le Jardin’s service area was as follows: more than a third of children under five in Homestead fell below the poverty guidelines (36.03 percent), while in Leisure City and Naranja, one-third of children under the age of five were below poverty (33.7 percent and 33.9 percent, respectively). Close to half of all children in Florida City were poor (43.3 percent).

Current Poverty Rates for Children Under 5			
Source: U.S. Census Bureau: COVID-19 Household Pulse Survey			
	Overall Poverty Rate	Pre-COVID Poverty Rate Children Under 5	Current Poverty Rate: Children Under 5
Florida	14.7%	19.7%	29.8%
Miami-Dade	16.6%	24.7%	34.1%
Homestead	31.6%	36%	50.3%
Florida City	43.7%	43.3%	51.2%
Naranja	35.7%	33.7%	37.4%
Leisure City	33.9%	33.9%	38.2%

Table 4: Pre-COVID and Current Poverty Rates: Children Under 5

The current rates of poverty for children under five years old is alarming. Long-term poverty impacts children by stunting physical growth and development, hindering social and emotional development, shortening life spans, increasing the likelihood a child will have a chronic health condition, creating and widening achievement gaps, increasing parental stress, and impairing parenting practices. In addition, poverty is often accompanied by hunger, food insecurity, neglect, and family instability.

**Education**

In the United States, 90 percent of adults over the age of 25 have at a minimum a high school diploma; in Florida, 88 percent of adults have a high school diploma, an increase of eight percentage points from 2010. A smaller percentage of adults in Miami-Dade County, 81.5 percent, have a high school diploma, with an even smaller proportion in Le Jardin’s service area at 67.79 percent.

Additionally, Miami-Dade County has nearly twice the percentage of adults with less than a high school education (9.9 percent compared to 5.3 percent in the state). The percentage of adults with less than a high school education in Le Jardin’s service area is nearly double that of the county and triple that of Florida.

COVID-19 has disproportionately impacted individuals who have lower educational outcomes. The percentage of adults with less than a high school education is approximately 16 percent in the Le Jardin service area. Education and poverty are closely related as illustrated in the table below.

Poverty Rate by Educational Attainment				
Location: Florida, Miami-Dade County & Le Jardin Service Area				
Source: Current Population Survey, 2020				
	Less Than High School	High School Diploma	Some College	College Degree
<b>Florida</b>	23.4%	13.4%	9.2%	5.2%
<b>Miami-Dade County</b>	25.2%	16.3%	11.8%	7.6%
<b>Homestead</b>	26.2%	13.4%	10.3%	8.6%
<b>Florida City</b>	29.7%	16.8%	13.3%	9%

Naranja	18.5%	22.7%	21%	9.2%
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Table 5: Poverty Rate by Educational Attainment and Location

## Language and Linguistic Characteristics

The relationship between poverty and linguistic isolation is clear within the United States, the state of Florida, Miami-Dade County, and Le Jardin’s service area. Households that are linguistically isolated—defined as households where all persons over the age of 14 have limited English proficiency—are more likely to be poor. Moreover, the newer generation of immigrants are arriving from Central America (most notably Guatemala and Honduras) and do not speak either English or Spanish, which presents a linguistic barrier when seeking healthcare, education, and other social services.

## Rental Costs and Rent Burden

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, rental affordability was a critical issue in Miami-Dade County and particularly in Le Jardin’s service area. In Florida, Miami-Dade, and Le Jardin’s service area, wages have not kept up with increasing housing costs, and Miami-Dade County is one of the most rent-burdened areas in the United States. Data from the American Community Survey indicates that severe rental burdens disproportionately impact poor families. Families with incomes that are less than 50 percent of the area median income typically spend 50 percent of their income on housing, reside in substandard conditions, or both. Renters in the lower 20 percent of the population based on income account for 67 percent of the severely rent-burdened families.<sup>30</sup>

While 12.2 percent of Florida residents lived in substandard, unsafe, or unhealthy living conditions, 18.5 percent of Miami-Dade residents lived in substandard, unsafe,

<sup>30</sup> U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics: The Effects of Rent Burden on Low-Income Families. <https://www.bls.gov/opub/mlr/2018/beyond-bls/the-effects-of-the-rent-burden-on-low-income-families.htm>

or unhealthy conditions; this increased by 1 percent (19.5 percent) for residents in Le Jardin's service area.<sup>31</sup>

During the pandemic, almost a third of residents (33 percent) fell behind on their rent; some residents are more than two months (14 percent) in arrears with their mortgage or rent. Again, rent insecurity disproportionately impacts Blacks and Hispanics, with 39 percent and 36 percent behind on their rent, respectively, as of July 2021. This compares to 30 percent of Whites who are behind on their rent. Almost half of all residents (45.9 percent) in Le Jardin's service area worried about missing rent or utility bill payments.

The latest Centers for Disease Control and Prevents (CDC) COVID-19-related moratorium expired on July 31, 2021, amid some confusion. With Delta variant infections surging around the country, the Biden administration called on congressional leaders to extend the moratorium. On August 3, the CDC issued new guidelines through October 3, which included a provision that the moratorium can end early in locations where COVID-19 transmission drops.<sup>32</sup>

Legal aid officials in Florida, one of the nation's top pandemic hotspots, will delay an expected backlog of eviction cases. Legal services programs across the state are preparing for a massive wave of eviction cases. The importance of safe places remains critical for the safety of individuals and the community. Federal rental assistance remains an under-utilized resource; only 2 percent of federal rental assistance money allocated for Florida was used.

## **Public Housing**

Public housing and housing assistance are scarce in the Le Jardin service area. There are different types of housing assistance: Section 8 housing, Housing and Urban

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<sup>31</sup> University of Miami Health System and Jackson Health System. In Collaboration with Nicklaus Children's Hospital. 2020 Community Health Needs Assessment Miami-Dade County, Florida.

<sup>32</sup> National Low Income Housing Coalition: National Eviction Moratorium. <https://nlihc.org/coronavirus-and-housing-homelessness/national-eviction-moratorium>

Development (HUD), Low Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC), and non-profit sector housing and housing assistance. Section 8 housing provides a voucher to the renter, who must live within a certain area; the landlord contracts with the Housing Authority to provide housing to low-income families. In HUD housing and in public housing, the Housing Authority is the landlord.

## **Homelessness**

Within the Le Jardin service area, there are approximately 145 unsheltered individuals. However, the number of families sharing a house with other families due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or similar reasons is more common but much more difficult to count. For immigrant families and for non-English-speaking families, as well as for poor families, “doubling up” provides both economic and social support.

## **Internet Access**

Residents of Florida and Miami-Dade County have widespread availability to computers and particularly to broadband access. According to data collected from Broadbandnow, there are over 200 internet providers in Florida, and only 5 percent of the population does not have access to a wired connection capable of 25 mbps download speeds. Within Le Jardin’s service area, there are four major internet providers. Despite widespread access to the internet, more than a quarter of all households in Le Jardin’s service area do not have an internet subscription. This differs by location; within Florida City and Naranja, almost a third of the households do not have an internet connection, while only 15 percent of the households in Leisure City do not have an internet connection.

The COVID-19 pandemic is highlighting the deepening digital divide affecting students in America. Analysis from the Pew Research Center shows that nearly 25 percent of Hispanic children live in households without high-speed internet, and 18 percent of Hispanic teenagers do not have access to a home computer at all. COVID-19 has exposed vast disparities regarding not only the availability of learning materials in

low-income communities but also access to technology for children under five years of age.

Schools, including preschools, elementary schools, middle schools, high schools, colleges, and universities, pivoted quickly to provide virtual classes, with limited success. Teachers were not adequately trained nor provided with the extensive resources needed for effective online, synchronous training. Furthermore, students had limited access to the technology needed for online learning, which includes not only computers but also microphones and web cameras. Again, with 25 percent of households without internet, virtual learning was impossible, and the digital divide only accelerated the academic achievement gap between wealthy students and poor students, and again disproportionately impacted students of color. Additionally, students who lived in crowded housing often did not have the space for online learning.

## **Transportation**

The average commute within the United States is less than half an hour (26 minutes); similarly, it is 26.3 minutes in Florida. However, 2.34 percent of Floridians have a “super-commute,” defined as one that is longer than 90 minutes. In Miami-Dade County, the average commute time is 31.9 minutes, but 3.37 percent of the population has a super-commute. The commutes are longer in Le Jardin’s service area, and the number of super-commuters is double that of the county.

Public transportation presents challenges in south Miami-Dade. Some public buses have wait times that average more than 30 minutes, according to Miami-Dade Transit Mobile Services. There is also a metro-rail in Miami-Dade County, but the train runs 34 miles north of Le Jardin’s service area. Only Homestead is a city large enough for a trolley.

Public transportation is not only unreliable; it now poses a health threat due to the pandemic. Moreover, day workers and agricultural workers often rely on employer transportation with crowded commuting conditions.

## Food Insecurity and Food Hardship

Food hardship spiked due to the pandemic and remained high through late March 2021, according to U.S. Census Bureau data. Eighteen million adults (8.8 percent) reported that their household sometimes or often did not get enough to eat in the last seven days. Hardship by this measure remained well above pre-pandemic levels over the summer and rose again in the fall. Food hardship began to decline in early 2021 as assistance from the relief package enacted in late December and from March's American Rescue plan began reaching low-income households. By way of comparison, 3.4 percent of adults experienced food hardship throughout 2019.

Food hardship is especially high among Black and Hispanic households. This disparity reflects both long-standing inequities across society and the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on these households. In March 2021, Black and Hispanic adults were more than twice as likely as Whites to report that their households did not have enough to eat in the last seven days (16 percent each, compared to 6 percent of White adults).<sup>33</sup>

Feeding America<sup>34</sup> projects that 42 million people (one in eight), including 13 million children (one in six), will experience food insecurity in 2021. Significant racial disparities in food insecurity that existed before COVID-19 were exacerbated by the pandemic. Feeding America projects that 21 percent of Black individuals (one in five) may experience food insecurity, while 15.8 percent of Hispanic individuals (one in six) will experience food insecurity. However, within Miami-Dade County, 32.3 percent of residents were worried about food and indicated they sometimes did not have enough to eat in the past seven days. In Le Jardin's service area, 34.1 percent of families were food insecure.

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<sup>33</sup> Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. Number of Families Struggling to Afford Food Rose Steeply in Pandemic and Remains High, Especially Among Children and Households of Color. <https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/number-of-families-struggling-to-afford-food-rose-steeply-in-pandemic-and>



## Food Deserts

The USDA, the U.S. Treasury Department, and Health and Human Services define a food desert as a census tract with a substantial share of residents who live in low-income areas that have low levels of access to a grocery store or a healthy, affordable retail outlet. Census tracts qualify as food deserts if they meet low-income and low-access thresholds. The Food Access Research Atlas provides a visual depiction of the food desert within Le Jardin’s service area. The map areas shaded in green are low-income census tracts where a significant number or share of residents live more than a mile from the nearest grocery store or market.

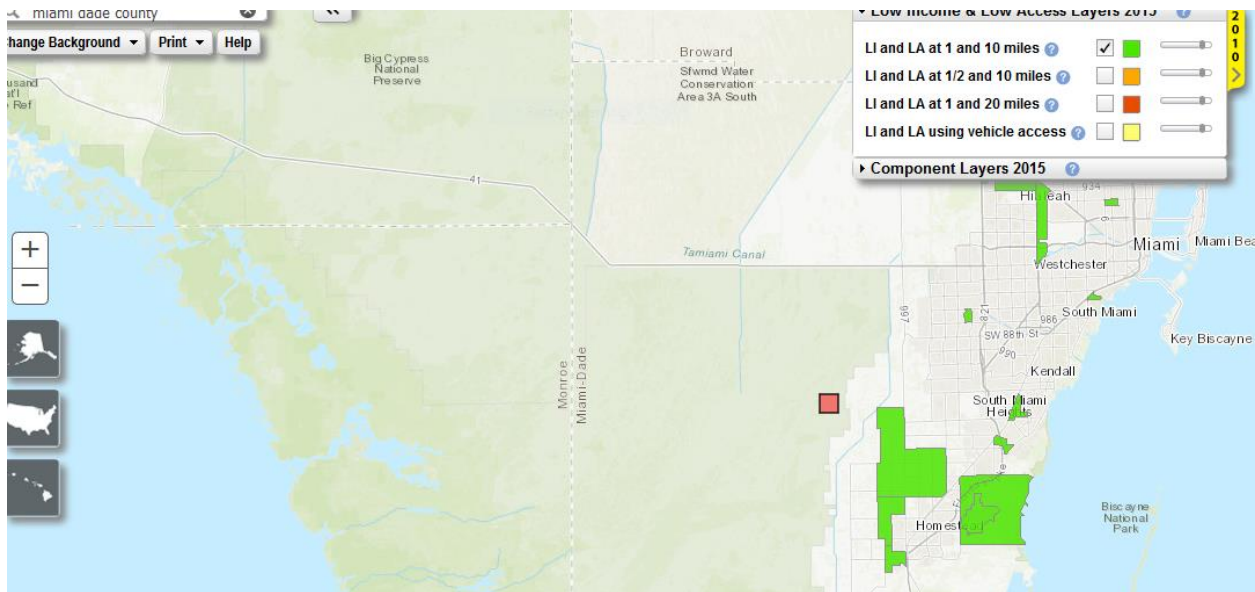


Figure 9: Map of Food Deserts in Le Jardin Service Area

## Child Welfare

### Child Abuse and Neglect

Disasters are one-time or ongoing events of human or natural causes that lead groups of people to experience stressors, including the threat of death, bereavement, disrupted social support systems, and insecurity of basic human needs such as food, water, housing, and access to family members. Such a definition describes what families are experiencing due to the pandemic. Children are often impacted by a

natural disaster - COVID-19 presents similar challenges and it is expected that children are more likely to experience physical and psychological effects during and following the pandemic.

While children are at a lower risk for physical harm from COVID-19 (prior to the Delta variant), the pandemic has had significant effects on their psychological wellbeing due to the uncertainty of how the virus will impact them and their loved ones, along with the changes to daily life.

Children have experienced a range of mental health symptoms related to the loss of family or friends, school closures, cancellation of extracurricular activities, and social distancing.

Importantly, the COVID-19 pandemic led to an increase in risk factors associated with parental burnout. An important aspect of parental burnout is the imbalance between parental expectations and the means and availability of resources. Factors that contribute to parental burnout include parental unemployment, financial insecurity, low levels of social support from families and friends, and a lack of leisure time. These conditions have increased significantly as a result of sheltering in place, social distancing, and the social and political complications of masking.

Many, if not most, businesses within Le Jardin's service area have been forced to close or significantly reduce their hours of service; many families have experienced layoffs or furloughs, resulting in financial insecurity and uncertainty about future employment. This fiscal impact has occurred just as resources such as free or reduced-price school meals have been limited or even eliminated in some locations. Furthermore, within Florida, inadequate technology and infrastructure has made it difficult to access unemployment insurance benefits or other federal government programs. It is estimated that one in seven households has had difficulty receiving needed benefits. As noted, within Florida, only 2% of federal benefits for rent and mortgage assistance have been utilized.

In addition to the increased levels of unemployment and financial insecurity, the pandemic is a particularly unique disaster with the severe limitation of traditional

support from extended family and friends. Parents had previously relied on support from grandparents or other family members for childcare and help with parenting-related activities. The consequences of social distancing are harsh; many grandparents fall under the category of being at risk for COVID-19, and many have succumbed to the illness or passed away due to age or the presence of underlying conditions. As mentioned, the social and economic conditions have increased the number of COVID-19 cases and deaths among Blacks and Hispanics, the primary populations within Le Jardin's service area.

Parents who experience burnout are more likely to engage in child abuse and neglect. Child abuse and neglect leads to physical injury (bruises, broken bones) as well as psychological problems (post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, depression).

Long-term physical and psychological effects carry into adulthood and impact a variety of life domains. Adults who experience abuse and neglect as children are more likely to experience mental health issues and use drugs, and they are at greater risk of suicide, risky sexual behavior, and sexually transmitted diseases. They are also more likely to have lower levels of education and are at greater risk of economic hardship, experiencing greater levels of unemployment, earning lower levels of income, and having fewer assets. While the effects of abuse and neglect can lead to increased levels of risk for both the short and the long term, the risks are compounded for children who are experiencing the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

COVID-19 has had a major impact on child abuse and neglect and an equally major impact on the number of reported cases, investigations by the child welfare system, and missed abuse cases. Prior to the pandemic, there were slight monthly increases in the number of reports and investigations in Florida. Once the pandemic began, there was a significant decrease, with 3,548 fewer child-reported cases in the Florida system. Nationally, it is estimated that nearly 200,000 children have been missed by investigation and prevention processes since COVID-19 began in March 2020. Closures and stay-at-home orders have sidelined most mandated reporters of abuse, such as

teachers, coaches, clergy members, neighbors, and other family members. Doctors are sometimes the lone lifeline for a child outside of home.

In Miami-Dade County between March 2019 and March 2020, the number of reported child abuse cases averaged 2,261. From April 2020 through July 2021, the number of reported child abuse cases dropped to an average of 1,244. In the first quarter of 2020, the rate of verification of maltreatment stood at 4.46 percent. By March 2021, the rate of verification rose more than double, to 9.2 percent. At the same time, there has been an increase in the number and severity of child injuries caused by family members in emergency rooms and hospitals; some hospitals are reporting that the number of child abuse hospitalizations doubled after March 2020.<sup>35</sup> Compounding the problem, many of the child welfare workers at the Department of Children and Families have been separated from their offices and case backlogs have risen to the 2017-2018 level, with 2.5 percent of the workload over 60 days past due and 11 percent of workers having a caseload of more than 20 investigations, as DCF is experiencing high turn-over in staff coupled with remote work both of which impact the number of caseloads for investigation.

Within Miami-Dade County, the children most likely to be abused are under one year of age. Infants less than a year old comprise 25.5 percent of all children removed from their home to either kinship care or out-of-family care. In contrast, 7.3 percent of children are between one and two years of age, while 4.6 percent are between two and three years of age.

The Le Jardin Community Center, Inc. (LJCC) Early Head Start program provides multiple resources for children who are most at risk. LJCC provides a safe, warm, and nurturing environment, ensuring that children are safe for the better part of the day. As trained mandatory reporters, LJCC's teachers and family workers are a set of eyes that can report suspected maltreatment or neglect to the appropriate agency. LJCC's multiple resources, including a parent curriculum, help to offset parental burnout.

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<sup>35</sup> University of Miami and Jackson Health System in Collaboration with Nicklaus Children's Hospital. 2020 Community Health Needs Assessment, Miami-Dade County, Florida.  
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Furthermore, connecting families to much needed resources can alleviate parental stress.

## **Intimate Partner Violence (Domestic Abuse)**

Intimate partner violence refers to the willful intimidation, physical assault, battery, sexual assault, and other abusive behaviors perpetrated by one intimate partner against another as part of a systematic pattern of exerting power and control. It includes physical violence, sexual violence, threats, and emotional abuse. The frequency and severity of domestic violence can vary dramatically, although it is estimated that between 22 and 25 percent of all women will experience some form of intimate partner violence in their lifetime.

While 38 percent of Florida women and 29 percent of Florida men experience intimate partner violence in their lifetimes, almost half of the men who experience intimate partner violence (42.1 percent) experience such violence from other men. In 2019, 105,298 domestic violence incidents were reported to the police in Florida. In Miami-Dade County, the number of cases reported to the police totaled 7,285, or almost twenty cases a day. In 2019, 221 Floridians were killed in domestic violence incidents—42 percent of these murders involved firearms. According to the Office of the Miami-Dade State Attorney, there were 220 homicide victims in 2019 and 245 in 2020; in both of these years, 44 percent were intimate partner incidents.<sup>36</sup> It is important to note there are many barriers to reporting abuse, including cultural and linguistic differences, legal status, and fear of the perpetrator. Thus, the reported numbers are estimated to be approximately one-third of actual cases.

University of Miami sociologist Dr. Piquero, working in conjunction with other academicians, provided a model for identifying the number of cases, patterns, and modes of intervention.<sup>37</sup> Between January 2019 and September 2020, the trend was

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<sup>36</sup> [Homicide Victims Statistics – Office of Miami-Dade State Attorney Katherine Fernandez Rundle \(miamisao.com\)](https://www.miamisao.com)

<sup>37</sup> Kurland, J; Piquero, A. and Piquero, N. 2021. Miami-Dade: A Case Study of Domestic Violence Arrests During the COVID-19 Pandemic. <https://www.medrxiv.org/content/10.1101/2021.04.20.21255830v1>

relatively stable, from a low of roughly 17 to a high of 22 arrests. When examining the data, it appears that there was a decrease in arrests beginning with the onset of the pandemic. However, this rose throughout the pandemic, a trend observed around the globe. In Miami-Dade County, there were three low spikes in mid-April 2020, followed by a high spike; a pattern that was repeated from May through September of 2020. There were fewer arrests made from March 2020 to December 2020 than in that same period during 2019. At peak points for reported cases, there were then spikes of domestic violence arrests. Thus, it seems the pandemic both increased intimate partner violence and inhibited victims and survivors from seeking help.

The victims and survivors of domestic violence include children exposed to the violence. The unprecedented stress of the COVID-19 pandemic, coupled with social isolation, has drastically raised the risk of intimate partner violence. Reduced access to resources, including lack of employment, strained financial systems, and lack of familial and social support all serve to increase the number of cases of intimate partner violence and increase the severity.

Four Miami-Dade County certified domestic violence shelters (SafeSpace Empowerment Center, SafeSpace Central, SafeSpace South, and SafeSpace North) provide temporary emergency shelter, advocacy, and support services to victims of domestic violence and their dependents. Two Miami-Dade County transitional housing programs (Inn Transition South and Inn Transition North) provide traditional housing, advocacy, and supportive services to victims of domestic violence and their dependents. Several programs coordinate their services with community partners and other agencies.

### **Coordinated Victims Assistance Center (CVAC)**

CVAC is Miami-Dade County's one-stop, non-residential center for victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, dating violence, and human trafficking. The center provides on-site coordinated services in collaboration with community partners, faith-based organizations, universities, nonprofit agencies, and other governmental agencies.

## **Domestic Violence Outreach Units**

This court-based program offers injunctions for protection assistance and representation, advocacy and referrals, emergency financial assistance, crisis counseling, and other services.

The increase and severity of domestic violence is coupled with reduced access to resources and disconnection from social support systems. There are fewer options to find safety or help. Prior to the pandemic, a victim could flee a violent situation, staying with a friend or family member while seeking a protective order or finding a shelter.

However, shelters are closing or under-resourced, with emergency rooms at capacity. Alarming, there are only 163 beds available throughout the county, with 18 cribs and another 60 planned for the end of 2021. The need far exceeds the resources.

## **Foster Care**

Several studies suggest that compared to the general population, former foster children have poorer physical health. Children in foster care may also have mental health problems, anxiety, depressive symptoms, or general mental difficulties. The overall health of children who have been in established care for more than six months is significantly worse than for those living in their own homes.

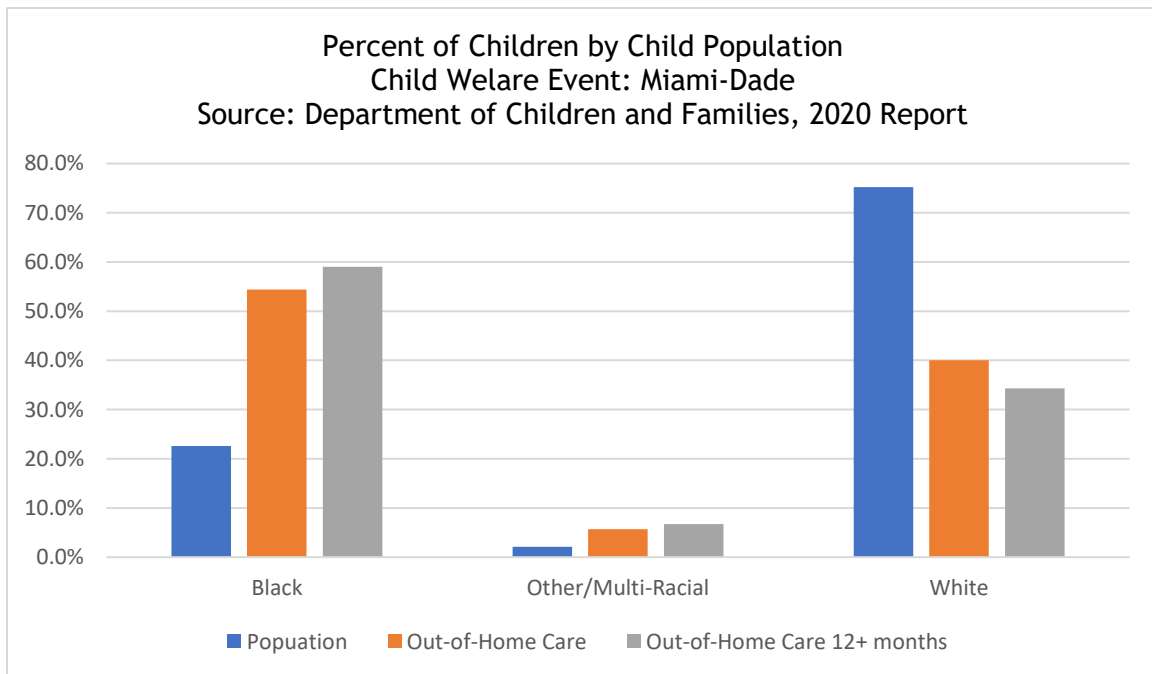
Their poorer mental health is evidenced by the fact that psychiatric referral and use were higher for them than for adoptees or persons in the general population. Children in foster care had lower self-esteem, experienced less happiness, and reported less satisfaction with life than the general population. Individuals from group settings also scored lower on measures of life satisfaction.

When youth enter foster care, they are more likely to be “old” for their grade level (i.e., have been held back one or more years) and to perform worse on standardized assessments than other students their age. The schools that youth in foster care attend are often among the lowest performing. While they are in foster care, youth continue to lag behind their peers academically. Youth in foster care are less likely to graduate from high school than their peers. Although most of the youth in foster care

aspire to attend college, they are less likely than their peers to enroll in college or to earn a college degree if they do enroll.

Problems may exist for former foster children in forming stable cohabiting situations, in parenting, and in establishing integrated social relationships in their community. The risks are heightened if the child enters foster care at an older age, has social or behavioral problems, is placed in a group setting, or has ongoing ambiguous contact with biological parents. Foster children are more likely to have higher numbers of teen pregnancies, more marriages to spouses who failed to provide emotional support, and greater social isolation than the general population.

In Miami-Dade County during 2019-2020, there were 1,072 verified findings of maltreatment that led to removals and out-of-home care. Furthermore, 589 of these children were in out-of-home care for longer than 12 months. Race and ethnicity play a large part in the removal of children to out-of-home care. Blacks are far more disproportionately represented in the number of verified findings and the number of placements in out-of-home care.





## **Quantity and Quality of Childcare in the Service Area**

Florida was one of the first states in the country to offer free prekindergarten to all four-year-old children. Children must live in Florida and be four years old on or before September 1 of the current school year to be eligible. There is no cost to parents, and the program employs a research-based curriculum for an instructional time of only three hours. In the 2019-2020 program year, 71 percent of four-year-old children attended Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten (VPK). In that year, 171,199 children were served by 6,501 private, public, and charter schools and private childcare centers. The 2020-2021 school year saw tremendous disruptions in all educational settings, but especially in early childhood education centers.

## **Quality of Childcare in Le Jardin Service Area**

According to the Florida Department of Children and Families, there are 481 licensed early childcare facilities in Miami-Dade County that have received Gold Seal certification. Gold Seal certification is a voluntary program indicating quality that requires accreditation from a recognized national or state organization, a curriculum, and developmentally appropriate instructional practices. Of the 481 Gold Seal childcare centers, only 51 (10.6 percent) are in Le Jardin's service area. Four of the Gold Seal providers are Le Jardin centers; thus, there are only 47 high-quality childcare centers for an estimated 17,000 children under the age of five. Moreover, in Naranja, all the early childhood centers that accepted low-income children (children who received a state subsidy) had at least one and sometimes three non-compliant items according to the regulatory agency that inspects these centers.

## **Geographic Location of Eligible Children and Families**

U.S. Census data reveals that in Florida, there are approximately 887,341 children under the age of five with parents in the labor force, indicating a need for early childhood care. In Miami-Dade County, there are 119,791 children under the age of five with parents in the labor force.

Within the service area of Le Jardin, there are approximately 6,248 children under the age of five who live below the poverty level and are thus eligible for Head Start and Early Head Start services. The increase in unemployment and corresponding increase in the proportion of children in poverty within the service area due to COVID-19 has resulted in an estimated 8,126 children in need of Early Head Start and Head Start Services.

Le Jardin Service Area					
Head Start and Early Head Start Eligible Children by Location					
Source: U.S. Census ACS 2019 (3-Year Estimates)					
Ages - Years	Overall Children	Total Children		Children Below Poverty	
	Under 5	Birth to 3	3 To 4	Birth To 3	3 To 4
Florida City	1,238	929	309	631	158
Homestead	7,213	5,410	1,803	2,705	901
Leisure City	2,178	1,632	546	620	208
Naranja	1,663	1,247	416	631	158
<b>Totals</b>	<b>12,292</b>	<b>9,218</b>	<b>3,074</b>	<b>4,418</b>	<b>1,420</b>

Table 6: Age and Income Eligible Children in Le Jardin Service Area: Source U.S. Census: Household Pulse Survey

## Identification of Issues and Recommendations

### Expansion Through the Community

**Issue:** The conditions in Le Jardin’s service area are dire, particularly within the Qualified Opportunity Zones, as outlined in the Community Assessment. High rates of poverty and unemployment, a low median income, and a high rental burden plagued the community before the onset of COVID-19. The impact of COVID-19 has yet to be fully documented, although it is clear from national data that poor communities and neighborhoods with large concentrations of minorities are the hardest hit. As noted, less than a quarter of the population in Le Jardin’s service area (21 percent) retained a pre-COVID income. When federal benefits end, along with the moratorium on evictions, the community will be devastated.

There is a deep and concerning need for comprehensive child and family services throughout the entire area, and Le Jardin—a solid, well-established Head Start/Early Head Start program with an outstanding record of success—could benefit the community immensely.

However, expansion should be strategic. Homestead, where 50 percent of children live in poverty, currently has a significant number of Early Head Start and Head Start

Centers, along with other high-quality early childhood education centers. However, both Florida City and Naranja have high concentrations of children under five living in poverty, which is coupled with a significant lack of early education centers. Further, the conditions in Florida City are expected to worsen with the development of multi-family units and the local turnpike bypass.

LLUNA Investments (<https://floridachildcarebroker.com/buying-a-childcare-center/>) and the Kids Depot Realty (<https://www.kidsdepotrealty.com/>) are two experienced early childhood center real estate specialists who may be positioned to find facilities in Naranja and Florida City.

## **Collaboration and Coordination of Services**

**Issue:** There are many social and economic barriers that parents and families face due to the combination of low wages and a high rental burden, along with a relatively high cost of living. Adults in the area with limited English proficiency, limited education (many with less than a high school diploma), and low skill levels will continue to experience economic challenges. Additionally, there are numerous indicators that confirm the growing economic disparities within Miami-Dade County, particularly between the center of the county and the southernmost areas. Limited access to affordable housing, low wages, and lack of access to or skills for technical jobs are key barriers. The economic disparity is deepened by the many adult minorities in Le Jardin's service area.

It is evident that social service agencies, particularly in light of COVID-19, do not have the resources and service capacity to satisfy the increasing needs of families. Furthermore, services are often fragmented, and the population is often not knowledgeable about the services or resistant to (or fearful of) obtaining them.

Important resources, including federal assistance for rent and mortgage payments, help with immigration and asylum states, and connections to local colleges and universities that have federal money for tuition assistance, are but a few of the resources provided by the federal government's response to COVID-19. As noted,

many of these benefits are underutilized. Le Jardin family workers will need a solid foundation of specific community organizations that provide relief to those impacted by COVID-19. A searchable database for community partners and available services would be an initial step in this process.

Le Jardin, with its solid organization, federal funding, and strong partnerships and relationships with private, nonprofit, and government agencies, is uniquely situated to provide comprehensive services to children and families. The agency can become a key and influential partner to lead the efforts to coordinate a system of services and information within the South Dade community. Further, Le Jardin, with its resource and knowledge base, could provide direction to the community to coordinate a systemic plan involving multiple organizations and addressing multiple problems: the need for transportation alternatives and affordable housing, along with the food deserts and food insecurity throughout the community. It is strongly recommended that Le Jardin establish, expand, and strengthen existing community partnerships.

## Trauma-Informed Care

**Issue:** COVID-19 has had devastating impacts on the health, life expectancy, economy, and personal resources of our nation. Moreover, many of these impacts have disproportionately affected communities of color, women, children, and those with less than a high school education; many residents in Le Jardin's service area fall into one or more of these categories. Resulting stress from food hardships, the inability to pay rent and monthly expenses, the lack of continuous care for children, and uncertainty about the future contribute to a very high proportion (close to 50 percent) of adults who report being very or severely anxious and depressed more than once in the past seven days.

Children are currently impacted by parental stress and are displaying more and more severe challenging behaviors. Furthermore, children who have recently lost one or both parents will be coping with deep and lasting feelings of grief and abandonment.

It is strongly recommended that trauma-informed care be implemented within the entire organization. The recommendation would begin with implementing the Pyramid

Model to fidelity throughout the entire organization. Although this process has begun, a significant investment in teacher training is still required. Further, additional training in trauma-informed care for working with parents is a necessity for both ERSEA and Family Workers. This is a key area for improvement.

## **Incorporating Homeless Children into Le Jardin**

**Issue:** Within Le Jardin’s service area, there is a high rental burden, causing many families to “double-up” to provide both economic and social support. At the same time, Le Jardin does not report serving homeless children. This is in part because families do not define themselves as homeless and resist the label. This is also due to a lack of understanding of the McKinney-Vento definitions, which consider families that share residences as homeless.

**Recommendation:** Le Jardin staff could benefit from an intensive training on the McKinney-Vento Act and questions on the initial application that inquire about the sharing of households. This would allow for better identification of homeless children and could provide a pathway to more targeted services.

## **Linguistic Isolation**

**Situation:** Within Le Jardin’s service area, there are distinct linguistic communities, including communities where most of the residents speak Spanish or an indigenous dialect and communities where most of the residents speak English. In Naranja, particularly, smaller communities that are still linguistically isolated speak predominantly Haitian Creole. Le Jardin’s staff, hired from within these communities, almost always reflect the culture and linguistic characteristics of the community, which is to be highly commended.

Still, there is a great need to ensure that children are bilingual (rather than monolingual). It has been demonstrated that growth in a second language is based upon a strong foundation of the home language. Again, Le Jardin, by hiring from

within the community, ensures that teachers speak the same language as the children.

However, there is still a need to ensure that English is also learned, as primary grades and further education are predominantly in English. Thus, it is incumbent upon Head Start/Early Head Start programs to provide a balance of instruction and care in the home language as well as English.

**Recommendation:** Le Jardin implements a curriculum that has both English and Spanish materials, resources, and activities. Yet, teaching staff need a more thorough grounding in the foundations of dual-language learning that moves beyond English and Spanish. Staff would benefit from knowing how to teach and care for young children regardless of the specific language.

Parents and families will need instruction in English to advance in this society. Although parents and families are encouraged to enroll and participate in English as a Second Language (ESL) classes, it could be beneficial to bring ESL classes to the center. Such resources are available from the public school district and other nonprofit organizations. Such support would have a minimal cost with maximum benefits.

Finally, it would be beneficial if staff were bilingual. Like families, staff are encouraged to enroll and participate in ESL classes, but it could also be beneficial to bring these classes to the program for the staff as well.

## **Staff Turnover**

**Issue:** A recent series of research projects, The Happy Teacher Project: Early Childcare Teachers, coordinated by Dr. Kyoung-Kwan at the University of Oklahoma, documents the turnover rate among early childhood teachers and reasons for this turnover. There is a high national turnover among preschool teachers and early childhood educators, with higher rates of turnover in licensed childcare sites (15 percent) than in state or federally funded programs (13.8 percent). Le Jardin's total

staff turnover, based on PIR data, is 16 percent, higher than the national average for federally funded programs.

Part of the turnover is due to the low wages generally accorded to early childhood staff, with a typical hourly wage of \$11.27 in Miami-Dade for preschool educators and a lower wage for infant-toddler teachers. This is below the national average of \$16.66 as well as the state average of \$13.84 (according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics). Le Jardin's annual salary of \$32,240 for preschool teachers, \$28,528 for teacher assistants, and \$25,314 (delegate) is above the national range, which is to be highly commended.

At the same time, more than 17 percent of Le Jardin's employees are former or current Head Start parents, suggesting that a great deal of loyalty and trust is generated as well as opportunities for parents to grow and advance in the organization.

Dr. Kwan's research among Head Start teachers specifically found that their overall health and wellbeing were negatively impacted: 59 percent of Head Start teachers are obese, with 17 percent overweight; 60 percent are below average in terms of cardiovascular fitness, with 27 percent participating in no exercise. Head Start teachers report stress (40 percent), depression (31 percent), and an intent to leave the job (38 percent). They reported an abundance of headaches (63 percent) and muscular-skeletal pain (73 percent). According to this national study, teachers report feeling a lack of support from management, having no scheduled break time and no place to relax, and a limited amount of individualized attention.

**Recommendation:** A recent analysis from Employee Benefits News finds that it costs a company 33 percent of an employee's wages to replace that employee. One of the findings from the Center for the Study of Child Care Employees is that "turnover begets turnover." Le Jardin could benefit from a systematic attempt to analyze and reduce turnover. Such an analysis would likely result in investments such as more coaches for teachers, more support or even more coaching staff, an emphasis on employee health, and investments in recuperative spaces and time.



Moreover, Le Jardin should invest in recruiting staff without the requisite training and providing this training through Teachstone's Childhood Development Associate four-month program. Future teachers could be hired as teacher aides and trained through this process and be ready to enter the labor force at the same time facilities are finalized. Additionally, there may be funds through CareerSource to provide wages and training for future teachers.

Turnover is not limited to teachers within Le Jardin. Key managerial positions have been filled by staff without the requisite information, knowledge, and experience in component areas. There are significant deficits in component services as well as services that are lacking. A systematic training on the specific components and their inter-connections will need to be undertaken. This systematic training would complement, but not supplant, the management academy. This systematic training would involve weekly individual trainings with component coordinators and managers, coupled with informal weekly meetings with a mentor, and include weekly group meetings of coordinators and managers to learn from each other and prevent working in silos.

Finally, a comprehensive analysis of communication and employee engagement needs to be undertaken to determine areas of improvement in employee recruitment and retention.