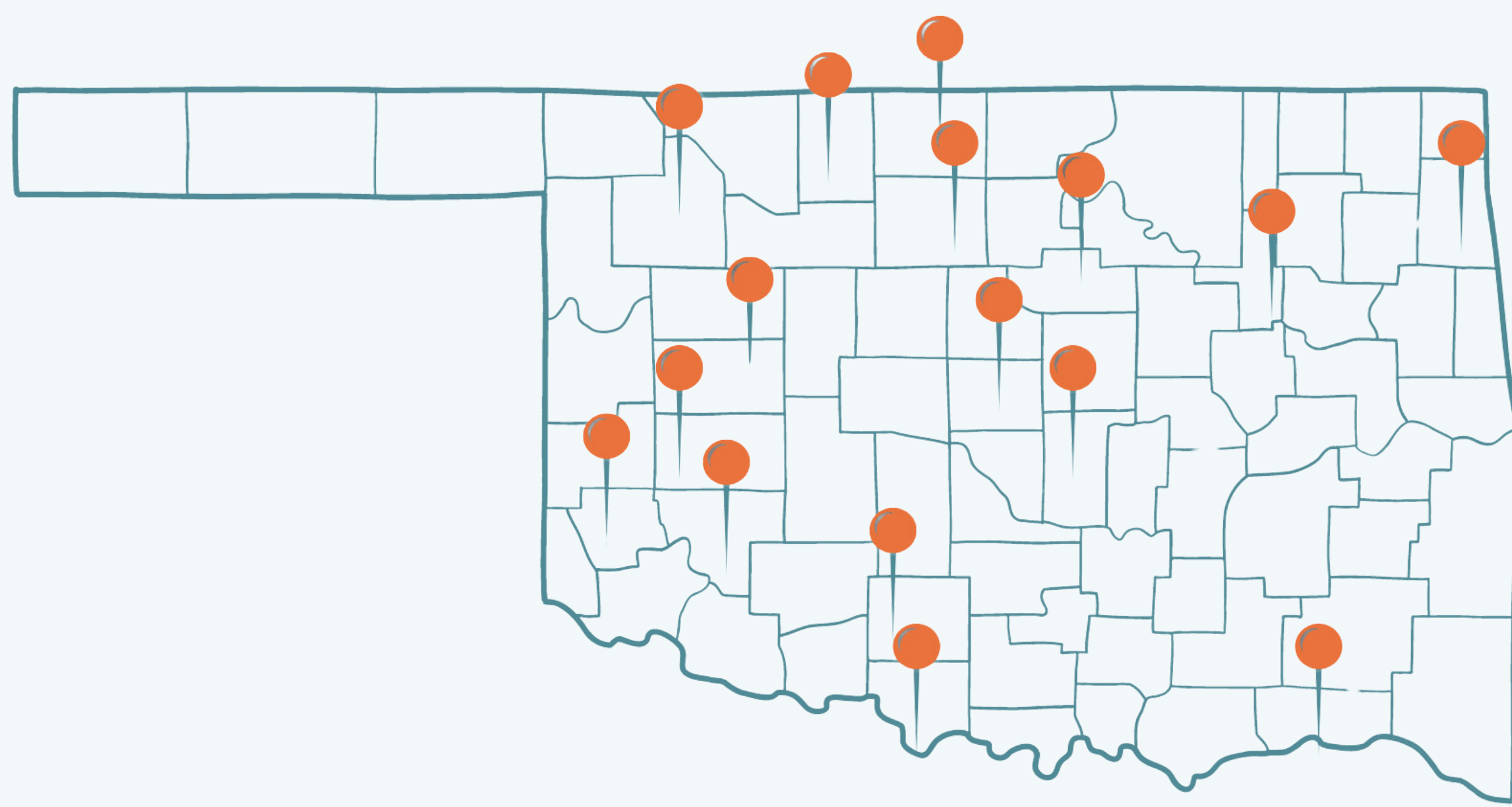




The Potts Family Foundation (PFF) was awarded American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding through the Oklahoma State Department of Health (OSDH) to build community capacity to address risks to early childhood development posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. To achieve this, PFF launched the Know and Grow Oklahoma (KGO) initiative, a three-pronged approach to addressing these risks.

The first phase of KGO was a process of community discovery. The goal of community discovery was to understand the experiences of families with babies born between mid-2019 and May 2023. Lack of existing, community-level data to inform this understanding was the impetus for the community discovery process. This process equipped communities to enter into spaces to learn from community members and uncover both strengths and challenges of families with young children on the heels of the COVID-19 pandemic.



CCs reported engaging 16 counties across Oklahoma: Alfalfa County, Choctaw County, Custer County, Delaware County, Garfield County, Grant County, Greer County, Jefferson County, Kiowa County, Oklahoma County and surrounding areas, Payne County, Pottawatomie County, Stephens County, Tulsa County and surrounding areas, Washita County, and Woodward County.

INTRODUCTION

Community Contractors (CCs) were asked to facilitate community-based research, gathering data from parents/caregivers and care providers of children born since mid-2019. CCs were asked to answer one, some, or all of the following questions:

- How are children born since mid-2019 and their families doing?
- What are care providers learning about the lives of children born since mid-2019?
- How is our community helping families and children to grow up safe, healthy, and skilled?
- Is our community ready to learn and grow to meet future needs?

OBJECTIVE

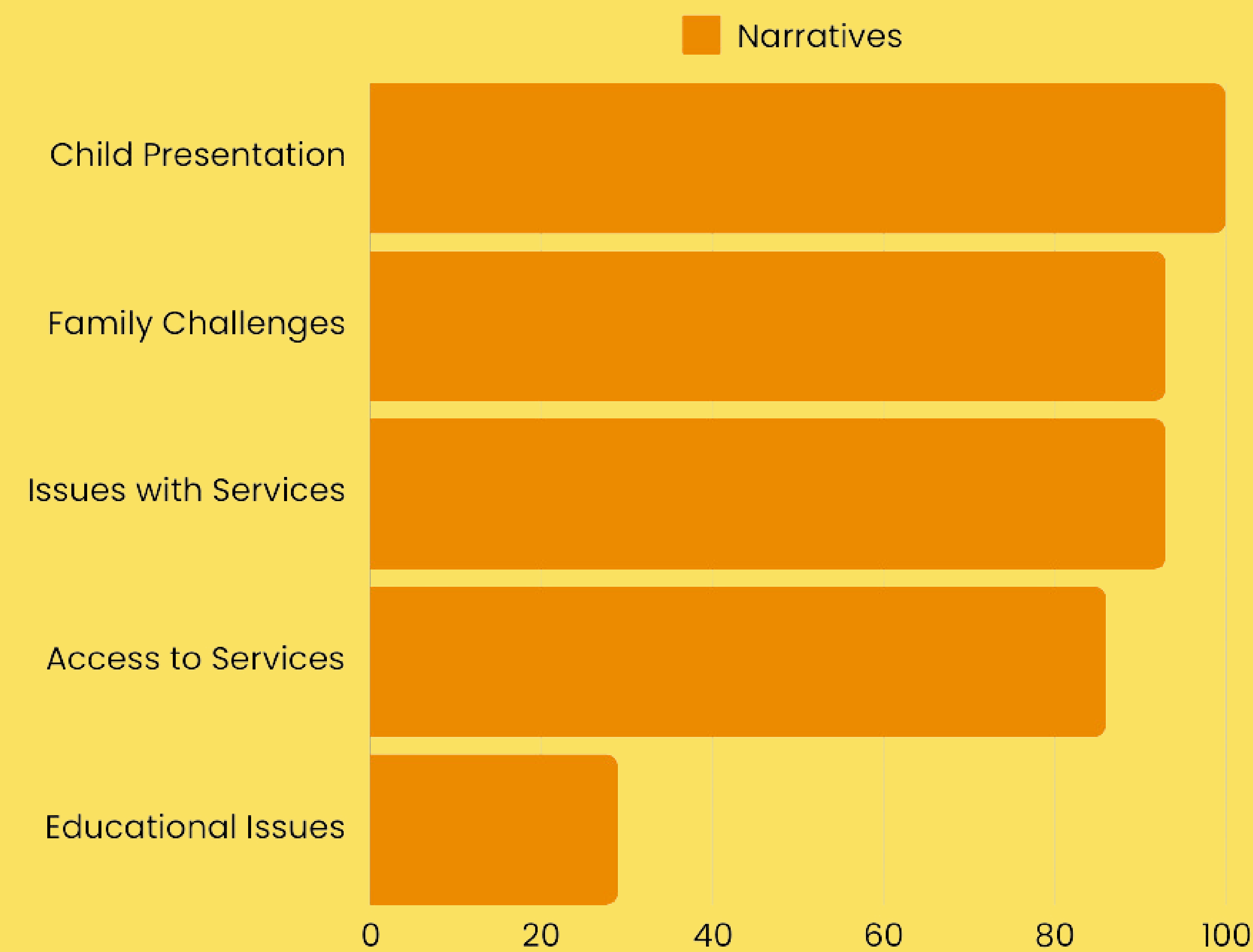
Nationally, evidence indicates children born right before or during the pandemic had very different early experiences coming into this world and may be exhibiting developmental delays. We wanted to see if the same were true for Oklahoma families. The findings from the Discovery Project provide insight into how these Oklahoma families are doing and what services and supports they need, now and in the future.

METHODOLOGY

- CCs were provided with funding and technical support to engage in their own community research projects.
- CCs developed their own strategies and data collection instruments in the form of surveys and focus groups to explore the needs and strengths of families in their communities.
- CCs presented their findings in the form of narrative reports to PFF.
- PFF engaged the OSU Center For Family Resilience to analyze narratives for themes and a final landscape report was developed.

FINDINGS

Community challenges included six subthemes: child presentation (100% of narratives, N=14) such as delayed child development, delayed academic achievement, poor physical health, and poor mental health; family challenges (93% of narratives, N=13) such as lack of access to basic needs, financial issues, inconsistent routines, changes in parenting style, and difficulties with work-life balance; issues with services (93% of narratives, N=13) such as basic needs, childcare, social services, and healthcare; access to services (86% of narratives, N=12) such as financial barriers, social benefits cliff, lack of availability, delays, waitlists, and lack of awareness; family presentation (86% of narratives, N=12) such as poor mental health, unhealthy coping, physical health, and social isolation; and educational issues (29% of narratives, N=4) such as lack of support for children, lack of support for teachers, and teacher-student ratios.



SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS ON CHILDCARE

- Accessing childcare is difficult for families
- Childcare providers reported challenges such as:
 - Lack of supports for children with special needs
 - Lack of supports to address social-emotional education
 - Difficulties with workforce recruitment and retention

CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

Although information was gathered from several different communities using various community-driven approaches in the discovery process, the prevalence of common themes found among parent/caregiver and care provider reports include concerns around child development, mental health and stress, inability to meet basic needs, and increased referrals and waitlists in recent years. Recommendations to begin addressing these concerns include:

QUALITY EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE + EDUCATION:

- Lower teacher-student ratios
- Training recommendations for the childcare workforce
- Opportunities for socialization, identification of and referral for developmental delays
- Trust-building between families and care providers

FAMILY-FOCUSED INITIATIVES:

- Consider the bidirectional effects of parent/caregiver and child health and behavior
- Engage families in the development and execution of future initiatives to ensure family-centeredness

COMMUNITY-ENGAGED INITIATIVES: Foster a collaborative network within communities, involving both families and providers, through:

- Awareness initiatives, education, and outreach for parents
- Training opportunities for providers
- Expansion of social and professional networks to address challenges faced by children and families

THE FULL KNOW & GROW COMMUNITY DISCOVERY REPORT CAN BE FOUND BY SCANNING THIS QR CODE



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