



FAMILY VOICES 2025

Family Voices: Complete Stories & Strategic Communication Guide

Mary Downes Consulting LLC
mary@Oramma.org

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Table of Contents	1
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	3
Purpose and Context	3
INTRODUCTION.....	4
Background: Parent Voice as System Change	4
Intended Outcomes at Three Levels.....	4
About the Stories in This Document	4
Document Structure and Navigation	5
Part I: Complete Parent Stories	5
Part II: Strategic Vignette Categorization	5
Ethical Guidelines for Use	6
Looking Ahead.....	6
PART 1: THE COMPLETE STORIES	7
The “New Americans” Interview	7
A Couple’s Experience in the PAC.....	10
Annie’s Experience	13
Jeff: A Veteran PAC Dad.....	16
Haley Through Dan’s Eyes	18
PART II: VIGNETTE CATEGORIZATION ANALYSIS	21
CATEGORY 1: PARENT RECRUITMENT VIGNETTES	21
THE NEW AMERICANS INTERVIEW	21
"Because of Him"	21
"Breaking Isolation"	21
"Building Community One Conversation at a Time"	21
A COUPLE'S EXPERIENCE IN THE PAC	21
"From the Kitchen to the Council"	22
"The Halloween Miracle"	22
"People You Can Call"	22
ANNIE'S EXPERIENCE	22
"It's Just Us and Our Kids".....	22
"Not the Only One".....	22
"Chosen Family"	23
JEFF: A VETERAN PAC DAD	23
"It's the Conversations, Not the Experts".....	23
HALEY THROUGH DAN'S EYES.....	23
"Freedom to Be Herself"	23
CATEGORY 2: FUNDRAISING / DEVELOPMENT VIGNETTES	23

THE NEW AMERICANS INTERVIEW	23
"Learning How to Speak"	23
"The Hidden Talents"	24
"A Bridge for New Families"	24
A COUPLE'S EXPERIENCE IN THE PAC	24
"Coming Out of His Shell"	24
"The Feeling of Being Held"	24
ANNIE'S EXPERIENCE	24
"Not Failing After All"	24
"Sasha Looks Out for My Kids Like Family"	25
"Breaking Generational Rules"	25
JEFF: A VETERAN PAC DAD	25
"Before COVID. And We're Still Here."	25
"My Wife Said That Last Week!"	25
HALEY THROUGH DAN'S EYES	25
"In a Minute"	25
"She's Different Now" (Dan's Perspective)	26
CATEGORY 3: PROGRAM EVALUATION VIGNETTES.....	26
THE NEW AMERICANS INTERVIEW	26
"Learning How to Speak"	26
A COUPLE'S EXPERIENCE IN THE PAC	26
"From the Kitchen to the Council"	26
"Coming Out of His Shell"	26
ANNIE'S EXPERIENCE	27
"Not Failing After All"	27
"People You Can Call"	27
JEFF: A VETERAN PAC DAD	27
"Before COVID. And We're Still Here."	27
"My Wife Said That Last Week!"	27
HALEY THROUGH DAN'S EYES	27
"In a Minute"	27
"She's Different Now" (Dan's Perspective)	28
SUMMARY: VIGNETTE MULTI-USE POTENTIAL	28
STRONG ACROSS ALL THREE CATEGORIES:	28
CONSIDERATIONS FOR USE:	28

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This document serves as both a storytelling resource and strategic communication guide for the Early Childhood Alliance's Parent Voice work. It contains the complete, unabridged stories of five Parent Advisory Council (PAC) families, followed by a detailed analysis that categorizes specific vignettes from these stories into three strategic frameworks: Parent Recruitment, Fundraising/Development, and Program Evaluation.

Purpose and Context

The Early Childhood Alliance's Parent Voice work centers on a fundamental belief: parents are experts in their own lived experiences and essential partners in designing effective early childhood systems. Through the Parent Advisory Council, families move from isolation to community, from silence to leadership, and from being served to co-creating solutions.

These stories—collected through in-depth interviews in late 2024 and early 2025—capture authentic transformation narratives. They document how peer support, deep listening, and leadership development create ripple effects that strengthen not just individual families, but entire communities.

INTRODUCTION

Background: Parent Voice as System Change

The Early Childhood Alliance's Parent Voice work operates from a foundational premise: meaningful system change in early childhood services cannot happen without parents as full partners—not just recipients of services, but co-designers, co-leaders, and change agents.

This approach begins with deep listening to the lived experiences of families, particularly those who have been traditionally excluded from decision-making spaces. The work is grounded in building relationships and trust, recognizing that family voices ALWAYS begin with listening and is grounded in lived experience.

Through the Parent Advisory Council (PAC), parents move through a developmental trajectory built on four key components:

- Learning from Parents: Deep listening and soliciting input through RAPID surveys, community outreach, special events, and storytelling—capturing the authentic lived experiences of families, especially those not already connected
- Peer Support: Parents supporting parents informally and in community settings through Thriving Groups, Kitchen Table Talks, and social media connections that educate and connect families
- Leadership Development: Building skills and experience through fatherhood workshops, one-on-one coaching by ECA staff, and participation in staff meetings and ECA workgroups—creating pathways to professional skills, executive function development, and community organizing
- Co-Design: Parents co-leading the organization and co-designing strategies through the ECA PAC and special parent-designed projects, with their input incorporated into existing programs and used to develop new approaches that influence partner organizations

Intended Outcomes at Three Levels

Individual Parent Level:

- Parents increase skills, confidence, and self-efficacy as community leaders
- Parents increase their social networks and experience reduced isolation

ECA Organizational Level:

- Capturing authentic voices and stories of parents' lived experiences
- PAC increases collective efficacy and confidence as a group
- Parents are co-leading the organization and co-designing strategies

Ecosystem and Long-Term Vision:

- Partner organizations adapt their programs and approaches based on parent input
- Increased funding for parent-centered efforts across the system
- Parents feel and are seen and valued as leaders in the community
- Parents help shape and direct early childhood systems and resources
- Parents are more supported in their parenting, leading to healthier child development
- New, sustained infrastructure for parent leadership in early childhood systems emerges locally

About the Stories in This Document

The stories collected here were gathered through in-depth, conversational interviews conducted in late 2024 and early 2025. Rather than following a rigid questionnaire, the interviews created space for parents to share what mattered most to them, to tell their stories in their own words, and to reflect on how their participation in PAC has shaped their lives and their families.

The five families featured represent a cross-section of PAC experiences:

- "The New Americans" A mother navigating cultural integration, language learning, and community building while raising young children far from her home country. Her story demonstrates how simple outreach can open doors to belonging.
- "A Couple's Experience" The rare story of both partners actively participating in PAC, moving from informal participation ("shouting from the kitchen") to full engagement. Their story illustrates mutual aid, male engagement, and the creation of chosen family.
- "Annie's Story" A mother of four, including twins and neurodivergent children, who parented in isolation without extended family until finding PAC. Her story captures the relief of discovering "I'm not crazy" and the power of peer understanding.
- "Jeff: A Veteran PAC Dad" A parent whose involvement spans over a decade, remaining engaged even after his children aged out of the program. His story demonstrates long-term civic engagement, peer learning, and the compound effect of sustained participation.
- "Haley Through Dan's Eyes" A spouse's observation of transformation in parenting presence, mindfulness, and confidence. This story captures measurable behavior change (from "in a minute" to immediate response) that directly impacts children.

Together, these stories document experiences across different lengths of engagement, family structures, cultural backgrounds, and entry points into PAC. They illustrate both the diversity of parent experiences and the common threads of isolation-to-belonging, silence-to-voice, and service-recipient-to-co-leader.

Document Structure and Navigation

This document is organized into two main parts, designed to serve different but complementary purposes:

Part I: Complete Parent Stories

The first section presents each family's story in full, preserving narrative flow, emotional depth, and complete context. These are not bullet-pointed summaries but authentic narratives that honor the complexity and humanity of each family's journey.

Each complete story includes both the main narrative and a collection of shorter vignettes with pull quotes—offering flexibility for different communication needs. The complete stories are ideal for situations where you have time, space, and an audience ready for deeper engagement: annual reports, major presentations, Gala programs, or video scripts.

Part II: Strategic Vignette Categorization

The second section provides an analytical framework that reorganizes content from the complete stories into 35 focused vignettes, each categorized by strategic communication purpose (*parent recruitment, fundraising, and evaluation*). This section serves as a practical guide for matching stories to specific audiences and communication goals.

Each vignette is presented with three components:

- Content: A condensed narrative capturing the essence of the moment or transformation

- Quote: The parent's exact words—the most powerful and authentic element
- Reasoning: Strategic guidance explaining why this vignette fits the category and what specific outcomes, themes, or audience needs it addresses

The categorization is strategic guidance, not rigid prescription. Many vignettes serve multiple purposes, and several are identified as particularly versatile across all three categories. Users should adapt and combine vignettes based on specific needs.

Ethical Guidelines for Use

All parent interviews were conducted with informed consent. Parents understood their stories would be used to communicate the value and impact of the Parent Advisory Council. However, responsible use of these stories requires ongoing attention to ethical considerations:

- Confirm permission for specific uses: While parents gave general consent, check back before using stories in media, published materials, or contexts they may not have anticipated
- Respect vulnerability: Parents shared personal struggles— isolation, self-doubt, family challenges. Honor the trust they placed in you by avoiding sensationalism
- Frame as strength narratives: These are stories of resilience, agency, and community-building—not deficit narratives or poverty porn. Parents are protagonists, not victims
- Ensure diverse representation: Don't over-rely on a single parent's story to represent an entire population (immigrants, fathers, parents of children with special needs, etc.)
- Preserve authenticity: Use exact quotes whenever possible. Don't edit parent language to sound more "professional"—their authentic voice is the power
- Protect privacy as needed: Names have been changed or omitted in some cases. Respect these choices and don't identify parents beyond what they've authorized

Looking Ahead

This collection is a living resource. As PAC continues to grow and evolve, new stories will emerge. Plan to refresh this collection regularly, capturing current experiences while maintaining the historical depth that demonstrates sustained impact over time. The stories presented here establish a foundation—both a storytelling approach and a strategic framework—that can guide future documentation of parent voice work.

PART 1: THE COMPLETE STORIES

The “New Americans” Interview

She begins her story the way many newcomers do—by talking about how she learned things not from pamphlets or websites or community events, but through her child. “*Because of him,*” she says with a soft laugh. It was her son’s placement in Head Start that opened a door she never even knew existed.

At first, she and her husband were alone—spending most days at home, navigating the quiet isolation that often comes with parenting a young child in a new country. But the principal at her son’s school did something different. He visited. He talked. He showed genuine interest in how her son was doing. And then a family service worker from Head Start—someone she remembers with warmth in her voice—invited her to a program she had never heard of. A place where parents met, talked, shared, encouraged one another. A place where she could step out of isolation and into community.

She describes that first experience with something close to wonder. Parents gathered in one room, kids cared for in another, and for the first time she could sip a cup of coffee—peacefully—while talking to other adults who understood her world. They could speak openly: about parenting challenges, about stress, about the emotional labor of raising children. “*You feel sad? You share it. You feel stressed? You say it,*” she explains. That openness, she says, was the first real change for her.

Before this group, she rarely had the chance to talk to anyone. Now she was watching, listening, learning how others communicate, how they express themselves, how they solve problems. It wasn’t just about community—it was an informal education on culture, relationships, and confidence. She says she learned mannerisms, learned how to connect, learned how to find her own voice. She began to understand that everyone—not just her—was navigating similar struggles.

Through this program, she forged friendships. She met another mother whose child was in the same class as her son. They would talk and share stories about their children’s progress. She describes these connections as building blocks of community—little pieces that slowly form a sense of belonging. “*We are building the community,*” she says proudly.

She believes deeply that more parents should have access to this opportunity. The only reason she found it was because the school reached out directly. Without that, she would still be unaware such a program even existed. She insists the way to reach families is through schools—they are trusted, familiar, and consistent.

Now, she encourages her neighbors to join—even though they sometimes don’t believe her when she tells them how meaningful it has been. She laughs and insists she’s telling the truth: her son benefitted, she benefitted, and others will too. She believes these programs reveal hidden talents in people who may not realize they have them. When people come together, she says, you learn things about yourself you never expected.

Looking toward the future, her hope is simple but clear: she wants the program to grow. To reach more families like hers. To give children more chances to connect through monthly activities. To let parents continue building the bonds that strengthen their confidence and reduce their isolation.

In the end, her story is one of transformation—soft, subtle, and powerful. What began as a school enrollment for her son became a doorway into community, language, learning, connection, and belonging. She found a place where she could speak, listen, be heard—and help others feel heard too.

And in her words, that is everything.

Storytelling Vignettes & Pull Quotes

Vignette 1: “Because of Him”

She often says she found this community *because of her son*. Before he started school, she didn’t know programs like this even existed. But once the Head Start principal visited her home and a family worker invited her in, things changed. Suddenly, she was no longer alone—she had a place to talk, to ask questions, to learn from others. “*Because of him, I came to know all this,*” she says. Her child opened a door not just to education, but to connection, belonging, and confidence.

Quote: “Only through my son’s school did I learn about this. Otherwise I would never know. It opened a whole world for me.”

Vignette 3: Learning How to Speak

As a new American mother, she often felt unsure—unsure what to say, how to say it, how to connect.

But in this group, she watched other parents, listened to how they shared their stories, and began to learn the rhythms of American communication.

She discovered that her voice had a place here too.

Quote

“I am learning how to talk to people... how to connect, how to express myself. Before, I didn’t know these things. Now I feel more confident.”

Vignette 4: Breaking Isolation

Life before joining the group was quiet—too quiet. Days spent mostly at home, speaking only to family, made her feel cut off from the world around her.

Joining the parent group changed that.

She found people with similar struggles and similar dreams, and the isolation she carried began to dissolve.

Quote: “Before this, I was always inside the house. But when we started talking together, I felt less alone. I realized other parents feel the same things I feel.”

Vignette 5: Building Community One Conversation at a Time

When she talks about the group (PAC), she always comes back to community. She describes how parents meet, share stories, exchange encouragement, and begin to feel like they belong. For her, community isn’t abstract—it’s built through small acts of connection.

Quote: “We are building community... just by talking, by sitting together, by learning from each other.”

Vignette 6: The Hidden Talents

She believes every parent has hidden gifts they haven’t had the chance to discover. These programs help bring those talents forward—through conversation, encouragement, and exposure to new ideas. She wants more people to experience that.

Quote: “Maybe you have a hidden talent inside you. When someone says, ‘I am doing this—are you interested?’ you realize you can do more than you knew.”

Vignette 7: A Bridge for New Families

For families who are new to the country or to the community, finding support can feel overwhelming. But she believes schools can be the bridge—just as they were for her.

She hopes more families will be reached, more parents welcomed in, more conversations started.

Quote: “Parents will join only if they know. Schools are the way. If the school shares it, parents will come. That is how we found this.”

Vignette 8: What She Wants for the Future

Her wishes are simple:

More families included.

More programs for children.

More chances to build relationships that feel safe and supportive.

Quote: “They are doing an amazing job. I want this program to reach many more people so they can have the opportunities that I had.”

A Couple's Experience in the PAC

When they tell their story, it starts with laughter—easy, familiar, couple-style laughter—the kind that says, we've been doing this together for a while.

She joined the Parent Advisory Council first. For years, she attended meetings from the kitchen table, phone propped up while she cooked or supervised bedtime. He wasn't "officially" on the PAC then, but he was always close by—shouting thoughts from the other room, chiming in with opinions, or offering a comment that everyone on the call could hear anyway.

Eventually, she teased him:

If you're going to give input from the kitchen, you might as well join.

She bribed him with a gift card once. He didn't even need it. He started showing up—sometimes while working on cars, sometimes from work, sometimes sitting beside her. And before long, he wasn't just attending. He was part of it.

But for both of them, the deepest shift wasn't about meetings or agendas. It was about what the PAC gave them that they didn't know they needed: a community they could trust.

They talk about the PAC members like family—people who share personal stories, people who show up without hesitation, people who call each other outside the meetings just to check in.

She says she doesn't really have anyone outside the PAC she can call like that. He agrees, nodding quietly.

Then they tell a story that perfectly captures what this council has become:

One Halloween, her friend April needed a costume for Lila. It was the last thing on her long parent to-do list. She was exhausted. At her wits' end. Everyone knows that feeling.

But PAC families don't let each other drown in last-minute stress.

She found a costume—one her own daughter had grown out of—and came up with a plan. She couldn't drive it over. She wasn't leaving the house again. But she remembered: My niece Ubers things to my nephew in college... why can't I Uber this?

She had a coupon. The delivery was free. Within 20 minutes, Princess Lila had her costume, perfectly sized, perfectly timed, perfectly magical.

They aren't talking about programs or policies when they tell this story. They're talking about kinship. About mutual aid. About love.

When asked how the PAC changed them, he says,

"I don't really like talking to people. But this? This helped me come out of my shell." She says that in the PAC, she feels safe to share things she wouldn't tell anyone else.

Together they say the same thing in different ways:
The PAC didn't just connect them to other parents—it gave them people who feel like extended family.

Storytelling Vignettes + Pull Quotes

Vignette 1: “From the Kitchen to the Council”

Before he officially joined, he was the invisible member—calling out opinions from the kitchen while she attended PAC meetings.

Eventually she said, “If you're going to talk anyway, you might as well join.”

He laughed, joined the next call, and hasn't missed a meeting since.

Quote: “He used to give his opinions from the kitchen—now he's in the meeting, camera on, talking right with us.”

Vignette 2: Coming Out of His Shell

He's the quiet one, the one who doesn't usually talk to people. But the PAC gave him a space where **he felt comfortable—safe, even—to show up, be honest, and belong.**

Quote: “I don't like speaking to people... but this, this brought me out of my shell.”

Vignette 3: Women's Secret Sauce

When asked what made him join, the group laughed about how rare it is for men to openly share and be vulnerable.

But that's the magic of the PAC: its atmosphere invites honesty—even from those who weren't planning to talk.

Quote: “We know how hard it is to get a man to open up, but something about this group... it just works.”

Vignette 4: The Halloween Miracle

April needed a costume for little Lila—last minute, overwhelmed, and out of time. Without hesitating, she found one, arranged an Uber delivery (free with a coupon!), and had it on Lila’s doorstep in minutes.
Pure PAC magic: shared resources, shared care, shared joy.

Quote: “It cost nobody anything. And Lila was SO happy. That’s what this group does for each other.”

Vignette 5: Trust Without Judgment

What they value most about the PAC is the safety of it—a place where you can share personal struggles without fear it’ll travel outside the room.

Quote: “We share so many personal things... and you know nobody will repeat it unless you say they can.”

Vignette 6: People You Can Call

She doesn’t hesitate:
There are very few people in her life she can call in a moment of need.
But PAC parents?
Those are her people.
She can call April. April can call her. No hesitation.

Quote: “I don’t think I have anybody outside the PAC I can call like that... but April can call me and I can call her. It’s family.”

Vignette 7: The Feeling of Being Held

For both of them, the PAC isn’t about meetings—it’s about knowing someone has your back. Someone who’s been through something similar. Someone who gets it.

Quote: “You’ve been through something, they’ve been through something... and suddenly you realize you’re not doing this alone.”

Annie's Experience

When Annie talks about her journey as a parent, the first shift she names is confidence. Not the loud kind. Not surface-level confidence. But the deep, steady kind that lets a parent breathe again.

For a long time, Annie felt like she was parenting inside a bubble—isolated, overwhelmed, and convinced every challenge was somehow her fault. She didn't have family nearby. She didn't have a support system. It was just her, her husband stationed in Arizona, and their children.

"It's just us and our kids," she says. And you can hear how much weight that sentence holds.

Her story includes twins who arrived when she wasn't expecting children yet. It includes early developmental evaluations, an autism diagnosis for her son, and the complicated emotional swirl of raising four children, all with different needs. She spent years feeling like she was always behind. Always improvising. Always failing.

"For so long, I thought everything I did was failing," she admits.

But the pandemic changed her. When the world paused, she finally had time to parent without distraction or guilt. And when she joined the PAC, she found something she'd never had before:

A community made of parents who understand.

She learned she wasn't alone in making separate meals, navigating sensory needs, managing picky eaters, or raising neurodivergent kids. She learned she wasn't crazy. She wasn't failing. She wasn't the only one.

One of the most profound relationships she formed was with Sasha—a younger mom who, unexpectedly, became one of the strongest supports in her life. Sasha calls from thrift stores. Sends texts about clothes, shoes, Halloween costumes. Spots things that Annie's kids might need before Annie even knows she needs them.

"She's always looking out for me," Annie says softly. "And I've never had that before."

It doesn't matter that Sasha is younger. It doesn't matter that their life paths were different. Their bond is built on shared parenthood, lived experience, and mutual care.

She describes the PAC not just as a group, but as family—the kind you choose, earn, and grow with.

The kind that comes with inside jokes, group chats, unspoken understanding, and kids who know each other by name.

What Annie wants most is simple:

More parents.

More support.

Less judgment.

She wants a world where parents can be honest without fear.

Where ADHD doesn't isolate you.

Where neurodiversity isn't shamed.

Where you aren't compared to outdated generational norms.

She says she grew up in a world where feelings were masked and children were forced to eat what was put in front of them—no matter what. She refuses to repeat that. She's building a different childhood for her kids.

By the end, Annie summarizes it all in one sentence:

"These people... it's not my mom or my sister. But it's still family."

And that is the heart of her story.

Vignettes & Pull Quotes

Vignette 1: "Not Failing After All"

PAC helped Annie realize her struggles were not evidence of failure—just motherhood.

Quote: "For so long, I thought everything I did was failing."

Vignette 2: "It's Just Us and Our Kids"

With no family locally, Annie parented almost entirely alone until she found the PAC.

Quote: "I don't have family or friends here. It's just us and our kids."

Vignette 3: "Sasha Looks Out for My Kids Like Family"

Sasha constantly checks in, spots clothes and deals, and treats Annie's kids like her own.

Quote: "She's always looking out for me. I've never had that before."

Vignette 4: "COVID Let Me Finally Parent Fully"

The pandemic forced life to pause—creating space to see her children more clearly.

Quote: “COVID changed everything. I could finally focus on being a parent.”

Vignette 5: “Not the Only One”

PAC helped her see she wasn’t alone in sensory needs, picky eating, or raising kids with differences.

Quote: “I don’t feel so crazy and alone anymore.”

Vignette 6: “More Support, Less Judgment”

Annie wants a culture shift—toward compassion.

Quote: “Parents need more support, not judgment.”

Vignette 7: “Breaking Generational Rules”

She refuses to raise her kids with the same rigid norms she grew up with.

Quote: “We were forced to eat things... to mask everything. I’m not doing that. This world is different.”

Vignette 8: “Chosen Family”

It’s the children knowing each other... the regular contact... the group chat. That’s what makes it family.

Quote: “It’s not my sister or my mom. But it’s still family.”

Jeff: A Veteran PAC Dad

Jeff laughs when he tries to remember when he first joined the PAC.

“It’s been so long,” he says, shaking his head. “Before COVID. Our kids have even aged out... but they still won’t get rid of us.”

His oldest is fourteen now, the youngest turning ten. Most parents rotate through the PAC as their children move through the program, but Jeff? He stayed. And the PAC kept him—because of the steady calm he brings, because of his voice, and because he has become part of the foundation.

When he reflects on what’s changed, it isn’t a single dramatic shift—it’s something more subtle, more human: ideas.

Resources help, of course, but what mattered most was hearing how other parents solved the same everyday challenges he faced.

Sometimes, he says, his wife would tell him something—wise, practical, helpful—and it just wouldn’t land. But then another PAC parent would say the same thing in a different voice, and suddenly it clicked.

He laughs again, “My wife always says, ‘I literally said that last week.’”

And he shrugs, smiling, because that’s marriage, and parenthood, and being part of a community of people figuring it out together.

What Jeff values most isn’t the experts, or the guest speakers, or the structured talking points. It’s the conversations. The week-to-week wisdom-sharing, the unexpected insights, the simple line someone offers that doesn’t matter in the moment... but becomes lifesaving a week later.

Sometimes he doesn’t even realize he needed something until he hears another parent say it. And then suddenly, it’s exactly what he needed.

Jeff also carries the perspective of someone who’s been in parent programs before—he was part of Head Start years before joining the PAC. He’s seen how powerful parent-centered communities can be when they’re done right.

Looking ahead, he wants the PAC to be even more diverse—more parents, more perspectives, more cultures, more lived experiences.

He imagines a community with layers: cross-cultural, multi-ethnic, multi-generational. A place where every parent sees someone who looks like them... and someone who doesn’t, but who understands them anyway.

When the conversation ends, Jeff laughs again and asks, “Am I done? Or are you going to record me later?”

He opens the whole interview with humor and ends it the same way—a veteran parent advisor who shows the heart of the PAC simply by being himself.

Vignettes & Pull Quotes for Jeff

Vignette 1: “Before COVID. And We’re Still Here.”

Jeff smiles as he talks about how long he’s been part of the PAC. His kids have aged out, but he hasn’t. The PAC keeps holding onto him because he has become part of its history and heartbeat.

Quote: “Our kids aged out... but they don’t want to get rid of us yet.”

Vignette 2: “Sometimes You Don’t Know You Need It... Until You Hear It”

Jeff explains that the real value of the PAC isn’t fancy experts—it’s hearing other parents share their ideas, strategies, and struggles.

Quote: “I might not think I need that right then... but the next week, it’s exactly what I needed.”

Vignette 3: “My Wife Said That Last Week!”

PAC conversations make advice easier to hear. Jeff jokes that sometimes another parent needs to say the same thing his wife already said in order for it to click.

Quote: “My wife’s like, ‘I literally said that last week!’ Not the same way!”

Vignette 4: “It’s the Conversations, Not the Experts”

Jeff values the back-and-forth between parents more than presentations or formal talks.

Quote: “It’s the conversations. That’s what makes the difference.”

Vignette 5: “A Vision of More Cultures, More Voices”

Looking forward, Jeff wants the PAC to expand—bringing in more families from more cultures and lived experiences.

Quote: “I want more people from different walks—more diversity, more cross-culture.”

Vignette 6: “Head Start to Here—The Long Arc of Engagement”

Jeff casually mentions he was part of Head Start “way back.” He is the definition of a long-term system-engaged parent.

Quote: “I was in Head Start way back. Been doing this a long time.”

Haley Through Dan's Eyes

When Dan talks about Haley, he begins with honesty:

"I don't always understand," he says with a half-laugh. "But that's because I don't pay attention the way she does."

He isn't criticizing himself—just telling the truth. Haley sees things he misses. She notices details, emotions, opportunities to connect. And he's watched something shift in her since she became part of the PAC.

For years, Haley carried things she wanted to do—ideas, practices, ways she wanted to parent—but never had the chance to try. Life was too full. Too many demands. Too many routines that left no space for something new.

But the PAC gave her something she didn't know she needed: permission and space to do what she had always intended.

She talks about feeling freer now. Not because Dan was holding her back—not at all—but because she finally has her own world, her own community, her own voice. The PAC didn't replace anything at home. It expanded it.

She learned things that made her see her children differently. She learned about presence, about time, about how parenting moments are temporary and irreplaceable. At home, she began thinking of what she learned in PAC meetings—less about tasks, more about connection.

She used to say "in a minute"—to everything.

Her kids would ask her to read a book, or play, or listen to a story, and she'd reflexively respond: in a minute.

But that minute often turned into an hour. Or never.

She's not proud of that part. She's just honest.

The PAC helped her pause.

Helped her see the urgency inside those tiny requests.

Helped her understand how fast childhood moves.

Now, when her daughter asks, "Mom, can I read this to you?"

Haley tries to stop and make it happen right then, even if it's inconvenient.

Because she sees it now—the fleeting nature of these moments.

She also talks about ignoring the voices who tell her she's "doing too much," who try to make her feel guilty for wanting her kids to be happy, secure, and engaged.

"I want them to be happy," she says, "and that's okay."

Dan has noticed everything.

He trusts the PAC because he sees what it's done for Haley.

He sees how she carries herself differently, how she sees her children differently, how she slows down and notices the world in a way most people never do.

“She’s way different than when she first started,” he says.
Different in the best way.

And the PAC didn’t just give Haley something—it gave him something too: the chance to witness her becoming the parent she always wanted to be.

Vignettes + Pull Quotes

Vignette 1: “In a Minute”

Haley realized that saying “in a minute” often meant never.
Now she stops and responds to her kids’ requests in real time.

Quote: “When they say, ‘Mom, read this to me,’ I try to do it right then so I don’t forget.”

Vignette 2: “Freedom to Be Herself”

Joining the PAC gave Haley a sense of independence—her own space, her own growth, her own community.

Quote: “I feel freer... I have my own things now.”

Vignette 3: “Precious and Temporary”

Haley now sees how fleeting childhood really is.
Those small moments are everything.

Quote: “I’m realizing their moments are precious... and temporary.”

Vignette 4: “I Want Them to Be Happy”

Haley talks openly about tuning out the voices that tell her she’s “doing too much.”
She wants joy for her kids—and that’s valid.

Quote: “People tell me I’m doing too much... but I want them to be happy.”

Vignette 5: “She’s Different Now” (Dan’s Perspective)

Dan has seen a transformation since Haley joined the PAC.

Quote: “She’s way different than when she first started.”

Vignette 6: “Seeing What I Miss”

Dan admits Haley pays attention in ways he doesn't.

Quote: "I don't understand sometimes... because I don't pay attention the way she does."

Vignette 7: "Trying Things She Never Could Before"

Haley describes PAC as giving her the chance to try things she always wanted but never had the space for.

Quote: "There were things I always wanted to do... but I never got the chance."

PART II: VIGNETTE CATEGORIZATION ANALYSIS

Stories-Gala 2025

This document categorizes vignettes from parent stories into three strategic areas (parent recruitment, fundraising, development, and evaluation), with reasoning for each placement. Note that some vignettes may serve multiple purposes and could be effectively used in more than one category.

CATEGORY 1: PARENT RECRUITMENT VIGNETTES

Goal: Help parents see themselves here. Highlight warmth, connection, belonging, and practical support.

THE NEW AMERICANS INTERVIEW

"Because of Him"

She often says she found this community because of her son. Before he started school, she didn't know programs like this even existed. But once the Head Start principal visited her home and a family worker invited her in, things changed.

Quote: "Only through my son's school did I learn about this. Otherwise I would never know. It opened a whole world for me."

This vignette is perfect for recruitment because it demonstrates the accessibility barrier many parents face ("I would never know") and shows how simple outreach can change everything. It speaks directly to parents who feel disconnected and helps them understand they're not alone in not knowing about resources. The warmth of the principal visiting and the personal invitation creates a welcoming image.

"Breaking Isolation"

Life before joining the group was quiet—too quiet. Days spent mostly at home, speaking only to family, made her feel cut off from the world around her. Joining the parent group changed that. She found people with similar struggles and similar dreams, and the isolation she carried began to dissolve.

Quote: "Before this, I was always inside the house. But when we started talking together, I felt less alone. I realized other parents feel the same things I feel."

This speaks directly to the emotional experience many isolated parents live with daily. The "you're not alone" message is central to recruitment—it helps prospective parents see themselves in the story and imagine their own isolation ending. The simplicity and honesty make it highly relatable.

"Building Community One Conversation at a Time"

When she talks about the group (PAC), she always comes back to community. She describes how parents meet, share stories, exchange encouragement, and begin to feel like they belong. For her, community isn't abstract—it's built through small acts of connection.

Quote: "We are building community... just by talking, by sitting together, by learning from each other."

This is recruitment gold because it demystifies what participation looks like. Parents don't need special skills or credentials—just the willingness to talk and sit together. The emphasis on "building" suggests that newcomers contribute to something larger, making them feel valued from the start.

A COUPLE'S EXPERIENCE IN THE PAC

"From the Kitchen to the Council"

Before he officially joined, he was the invisible member—calling out opinions from the kitchen while she attended PAC meetings. Eventually she said, "If you're going to talk anyway, you might as well join." He laughed, joined the next call, and hasn't missed a meeting since.

Quote: *"He used to give his opinions from the kitchen—now he's in the meeting, camera on, talking right with us."*

This vignette is brilliant for recruitment because it shows how accessible and low-pressure participation can be. It normalizes hesitation and demonstrates that you can join on your own terms. The humor and relatability ("shouting from the kitchen") will resonate with many families, especially fathers who might feel unsure about joining "parenting groups."

"The Halloween Miracle"

Annie needed a costume for little Lila—last minute, overwhelmed, and out of time. Without hesitating, she found one, through her friend from PAC who arranged an Uber delivery (free with a coupon!), and had it on Lila's doorstep in minutes. Pure PAC magic: shared resources, shared care, shared joy.

Quote: *"It cost nobody anything. And Lila was SO happy. That's what this group does for each other."*

This is practical support in action. It's specific, concrete, and memorable. Prospective parents can immediately understand the tangible benefit: when life gets overwhelming, you'll have people who help. The fact that it was free and creative makes it even more appealing to families facing financial constraints.

"People You Can Call"

She doesn't hesitate: There are very few people in her life she can call in a moment of need. But PAC parents? Those are her people. She can call April. April can call her. No hesitation.

Quote: *"I don't think I have anybody outside the PAC I can call like that... but April can call me and I can call her. It's family."*

This vignette addresses the deep need for belonging and practical support. Many parents feel socially isolated and desperately need "people they can call." This speaks to the warmth and real friendship that develops, not just formal support structures. The word "family" is powerful for recruitment.

ANNIE'S EXPERIENCE

"It's Just Us and Our Kids"

With no family locally, Annie parented almost entirely alone until she found the PAC.

Quote: *"I don't have family or friends here. It's just us and our kids."*

This sentence will resonate deeply with parents who feel isolated, especially military families, transplants, or those estranged from family. It validates their experience and implicitly promises that the PAC can fill that void. Extremely powerful for recruitment because it names the exact pain point many families experience.

"Not the Only One"

PAC helped her see she wasn't alone in sensory needs, picky eating, or raising kids with differences.

Quote: *"I don't feel so crazy and alone anymore."*

This is essential for recruiting parents of children with special needs, neurodivergent children, or any family facing challenges that feel isolating. The phrase "I thought I was crazy" is something countless parents think but rarely say aloud. This vignette offers immediate emotional relief and belonging.

"Chosen Family"

It's the children knowing each other... the regular contact... the group chat. That's what makes it family.

Quote: *"It's not my sister or my mom. But it's still family."*

The concept of "chosen family" is deeply appealing to parents who lack traditional family support. It reframes the PAC not as a program, but as an authentic relationship structure. This helps parents envision deep, lasting connections rather than transactional support.

JEFF: A VETERAN PAC DAD

"It's the Conversations, Not the Experts"

Jeff values the back-and-forth between parents more than presentations or formal talks.

Quote: *"It's the conversations. That's what makes the difference."*

This helps prospective parents understand that they don't need to be intimidated by "expert-led" programming. The value comes from peer connection, which anyone can access. It lowers the barrier to entry and emphasizes that all parents have wisdom to share.

HALEY THROUGH DAN'S EYES

"Freedom to Be Herself"

Joining the PAC gave Haley a sense of independence—her own space, her own growth, her own community.

Quote: *"I feel freer... I have my own things now."*

This speaks to parents (especially mothers) who may feel consumed by caregiving and lost in their role. The promise of having "your own space" and identity outside of just being a parent is deeply appealing and addresses a need many parents don't feel comfortable voicing. It positions the PAC as a place for personal growth, not just parenting support.

CATEGORY 2: FUNDRAISING / DEVELOPMENT VIGNETTES

Goal: Demonstrate systemic value, community resilience, mutual aid, and return-on-investment.

THE NEW AMERICANS INTERVIEW

"Learning How to Speak"

As a new American mother, she often felt unsure—unsure what to say, how to say it, how to connect. But in this group, she watched other parents, listened to how they shared their stories, and began to learn the rhythms of American communication. She discovered that her voice had a place here too.

Quote: *"I am learning how to talk to people... how to connect, how to express myself. Before, I didn't know these things. Now I feel more confident."*

This demonstrates clear ROI for funders focused on immigrant integration, workforce development, and community cohesion. The program isn't just providing emotional support—it's building critical communication and social capital that will benefit this parent's long-term economic mobility and civic participation. This is measurable human capital development.

"The Hidden Talents"

She believes every parent has hidden gifts they haven't had the chance to discover. These programs help bring those talents forward—through conversation, encouragement, and exposure to new ideas. She wants more people to experience that.

Quote: *"Maybe you have a hidden talent inside you. When someone says, 'I am doing this—are you interested?' you realize you can do more than you knew."*

This speaks to workforce development and leadership pipeline development—key interests for many funders. The program is identifying and cultivating latent capacity in community members who might otherwise remain disconnected from opportunities. This addresses economic mobility and community resilience.

"A Bridge for New Families"

For families who are new to the country or to the community, finding support can feel overwhelming. But she believes schools can be the bridge—just as they were for her. She hopes more families will be reached, more parents welcomed in, more conversations started.

Quote: *"Parents will join only if they know. Schools are the way. If the school shares it, parents will come. That is how we found this."*

This demonstrates systems-level thinking and scalability—critical for funders. It identifies a replicable strategy (school-based outreach) and addresses a clear gap in service delivery for immigrant families. This shows strategic thinking about how to expand impact efficiently.

A COUPLE'S EXPERIENCE IN THE PAC

"Coming Out of His Shell"

He's the quiet one, the one who doesn't usually talk to people. But the PAC gave him a space where he felt comfortable—safe, even—to show up, be honest, and belong.

Quote: *"I don't like speaking to people... but this, this brought me out of my shell."*

This demonstrates impact on a population (fathers, introverted parents) who are typically hard to engage. It shows the program's ability to create inclusive spaces that change behavior and build social capital among traditionally underserved groups. Funders care about reaching "hard-to-reach" populations.

"The Feeling of Being Held"

For both of them, the PAC isn't about meetings—it's about knowing someone has your back. Someone who's been through something similar. Someone who gets it.

Quote: *"You've been through something, they've been through something... and suddenly you realize you're not doing this alone."*

This demonstrates the mutual aid and community resilience that funders increasingly prioritize. Rather than creating dependency on professional services, the program builds reciprocal support networks that sustain families during crises. This is a cost-effective, community-led approach to resilience.

ANNIE'S EXPERIENCE

"Not Failing After All"

PAC helped Annie realize her struggles were not evidence of failure—just motherhood.

Quote: *"For so long, I thought everything I did was failing."*

This demonstrates mental health impact and addresses parental stress and depression—major public health concerns. By helping parents reframe their experiences, the program prevents more serious mental health crises. This has clear prevention value and long-term cost savings for health systems.

"Sasha Looks Out for My Kids Like Family"

Sasha constantly checks in, spots clothes and deals, and treats Annie's kids like her own.

Quote: *"She's always looking out for me. I've never had that before."*

This shows the mutual aid economy that develops through the program—families sharing resources, reducing economic stress, and creating informal safety nets. Funders interested in economic resilience and anti-poverty strategies will see this as evidence of sustainable community wealth-building.

"Breaking Generational Rules"

She refuses to raise her kids with the same rigid norms she grew up with.

Quote: *"We were forced to eat things... to mask everything. I'm not doing that. This world is different."*

This shows transformative parenting and interrupting intergenerational trauma—a key outcome for funders interested in child development, ACEs prevention, and family wellbeing. Annie is making conscious choices to parent differently, which will affect her children's long-term outcomes.

JEFF: A VETERAN PAC DAD

"Before COVID. And We're Still Here."

Jeff smiles as he talks about how long he's been part of the PAC. His kids have aged out, but he hasn't. The PAC keeps holding onto him because he has become part of its history and heartbeat.

Quote: *"Our kids aged out... but they don't want to get rid of us yet."*

This demonstrates long-term engagement and sustainability—critical metrics for funders. Jeff's continued participation shows the program builds lasting leadership and creates community infrastructure that extends beyond individual program participation. This is evidence of systemic capacity-building.

"My Wife Said That Last Week!"

PAC conversations make advice easier to hear. Jeff jokes that sometimes another parent needs to say the same thing his wife already said in order for it to click.

Quote: *"My wife's like, 'I literally said that last week!' Not the same way!"*

This demonstrates the effectiveness of peer-to-peer learning and the unique value of parent voice. It validates the theory of change that says parents learn best from other parents. Funders investing in parent leadership and peer support models need evidence that this approach works—and this is it.

HALEY THROUGH DAN'S EYES

"In a Minute"

Haley realized that saying "in a minute" often meant never. Now she stops and responds to her kids' requests in real time.

Quote: *"When they say, 'Mom, read this to me,' I try to do it right then so I don't forget."*

This demonstrates measurable behavior change that directly impacts child development. Responsive parenting—answering children's bids for attention—is proven to strengthen attachment and

development. This is exactly the kind of outcome funders interested in early childhood development want to see.

"She's Different Now" (Dan's Perspective)

Dan has seen a transformation since Haley joined the PAC.

Quote: "She's way different than when she first started."

Third-party validation is powerful for funders. Dan's observation confirms that the changes in Haley are visible, sustained, and significant. Partner/spouse testimonials add credibility to self-reported outcomes.

CATEGORY 3: PROGRAM EVALUATION VIGNETTES

Goal: Demonstrate measurable outcomes, behavior change, engagement patterns, and system impact.

THE NEW AMERICANS INTERVIEW

"Learning How to Speak"

As a new American mother, she often felt unsure—unsure what to say, how to say it, how to connect. But in this group, she watched other parents, listened to how they shared their stories, and began to learn the rhythms of American communication. She discovered that her voice had a place here too.

Quote: "I am learning how to talk to people... how to connect, how to express myself. Before, I didn't know these things. Now I feel more confident."

This demonstrates measurable skill development in three areas: communication skills, social confidence, and cultural integration. The clear before/after framing makes this useful for evaluation. Evaluators can measure changes in: self-reported confidence, communication competence, social network size, and civic participation.

A COUPLE'S EXPERIENCE IN THE PAC

"From the Kitchen to the Council"

Before he officially joined, he was the invisible member—calling out opinions from the kitchen while she attended PAC meetings. Eventually she said, "If you're going to talk anyway, you might as well join." He laughed, joined the next call, and hasn't missed a meeting since.

Quote: "He used to give his opinions from the kitchen—now he's in the meeting, camera on, talking right with us."

This demonstrates a measurable behavior change in engagement: from non-participant to consistent participant. Evaluators can track: male participation rates, attendance consistency, progression from passive to active engagement, and retention rates. The "hasn't missed a meeting since" is particularly valuable for retention metrics.

"Coming Out of His Shell"

He's the quiet one, the one who doesn't usually talk to people. But the PAC gave him a space where he felt comfortable—safe, even—to show up, be honest, and belong.

Quote: "I don't like speaking to people... but this, this brought me out of my shell."

This demonstrates measurable change in social confidence and participation. Evaluators can assess: changes in social anxiety, willingness to participate in groups, development of social connections,

and self-reported comfort in social settings. This is particularly valuable for demonstrating impact on hard-to-reach populations.

ANNIE'S EXPERIENCE

"Not Failing After All"

PAC helped Annie realize her struggles were not evidence of failure—just motherhood.

Quote: *"For so long, I thought everything I did was failing."*

This demonstrates significant change in parental self-efficacy and mental health. Evaluators can measure: changes in parental confidence, reduction in negative self-perception, decreased symptoms of depression/anxiety, and improved parenting self-efficacy scores. The clear before/after makes this ideal for demonstrating impact.

"People You Can Call"

She doesn't hesitate: There are very few people in her life she can call in a moment of need. But PAC parents? Those are her people. She can call April. April can call her. No hesitation.

Quote: *"I don't think I have anybody outside the PAC I can call like that... but April can call me and I can call her. It's family."*

This demonstrates measurable reduction in social isolation and expansion of social networks. Evaluators can track: size of support network, frequency of peer contact outside of meetings, reciprocal support behaviors, and reduced social isolation scores. The specificity ("I can call April") shows concrete relationship formation.

JEFF: A VETERAN PAC DAD

"Before COVID. And We're Still Here."

Jeff smiles as he talks about how long he's been part of the PAC. His kids have aged out, but he hasn't. The PAC keeps holding onto him because he has become part of its history and heartbeat.

Quote: *"Our kids aged out... but they don't want to get rid of us yet."*

This demonstrates exceptional retention and long-term engagement—critical program quality metrics. Evaluators can track: length of participation, retention rates, alumni engagement, and leadership pipeline development. Jeff represents multi-year sustained impact.

"My Wife Said That Last Week!"

PAC conversations make advice easier to hear. Jeff jokes that sometimes another parent needs to say the same thing his wife already said in order for it to click.

Quote: *"My wife's like, 'I literally said that last week!' Not the same way!"*

This validates the peer-to-peer learning model and demonstrates why parent voice matters. Evaluators can use this to explain why parent-led programs are effective and why peer education works differently than professional education. This helps demonstrate the unique value proposition of parent leadership programs.

HALEY THROUGH DAN'S EYES

"In a Minute"

Haley realized that saying "in a minute" often meant never. Now she stops and responds to her kids' requests in real time.

Quote: *"When they say, 'Mom, read this to me,' I try to do it right then so I don't forget."*

This demonstrates concrete, measurable behavior change in responsive parenting. Evaluators can measure: frequency of responsive interactions, parent-child engagement quality, and parental attunement. This specific behavioral change can be observed and linked to child development outcomes.

"She's Different Now" (Dan's Perspective)

Dan has seen a transformation since Haley joined the PAC.

Quote: "She's way different than when she first started."

This provides third-party validation of observed behavior change. Evaluators value partner/spouse observations because they reduce social desirability bias. Dan's observation confirms changes are visible, sustained, and significant enough that others notice. This strengthens claims of program impact.

SUMMARY: VIGNETTE MULTI-USE POTENTIAL

Many vignettes serve multiple purposes. Here are examples that work across categories:

STRONG ACROSS ALL THREE CATEGORIES:

- "Learning How to Speak" - Recruitment (welcoming), Fundraising (ROI), Evaluation (measurable change)
- "People You Can Call" - Recruitment (belonging), Fundraising (mutual aid), Evaluation (reduced isolation)
- "From the Kitchen to the Council" - Recruitment (accessible), Fundraising (father engagement), Evaluation (behavior change)

CONSIDERATIONS FOR USE:

- Use recruitment vignettes in materials for prospective participants
- Use fundraising vignettes in grant proposals and donor communications
- Use evaluation vignettes in reports, case studies, and outcome documentation
- Consider that the same story can be framed differently depending on the audience