



**United Communities of Laos
Community-Led Data Project**

**Listening Session Results
Spring 2025**

Contents

Introduction and Process

Listening Session Participants

Khmu Community Results

Reflection Questions

Introduction and Process



United Communities of Laos (UCL)



UCL exists to enrich and empower the ethnic groups of Laos in Washington State by providing social, cultural, and educational services.

Our communities are multigenerational households with grandparents raising children and adults working to provide financial stability.

In King County alone, there are roughly 12,000 Lao, Khmu, and Hmong people and the average is 8 people per family.

Most of our focus populations are currently located in the South Seattle, Renton, and Kent Areas.

United Communities of Laos Community Led Data Project

In 2023, UCL was awarded a grant from King County's Best Starts for Kids program to engage in a community-led data project to learn:

How can we better understand family protective factors in the Lao, Khmu, and Hmong Communities in King County?



Community-Led Data Project Survey and Listening Session Process

- The United Communities of Laos work group created a community survey and held listening sessions with support from the UCL leadership team.
- The survey's goals were to understand more about community strengths, needs, and desired programs, including a shared Cultural Center. The survey was shared with nearly 180 people.
- Listening sessions focused on families and raising children. They were held in 2023-2024 and included 110 people across all the cultural groups.

Listening Session Participants



Listening Sessions were held with all 3 UCL Communities

Listening Session questions included:

- Parenting and child growing, including how cultural values inform parenting, family strength, and working with mainstream providers.
- Changes in knowledge of parenting and child growth.
- Changes in how communities offer social support.
- Changes in relationships with mainstream services.

Each community held sessions with the following groups:

- Pregnant women and partners
- Families with young children
- Elders
- Family members

Listening Session Results





Hmong Community Sessions

The Hmong Community Sessions were held in 2024 and included ten (10) individuals in each of the four (4) groups:

- Pregnant women and partners
- Families with young children
- Elders
- Family members

What does parenting and child growing mean to you? What does it look like to raise children?

Hmong families with young children see parenting as **helping children discover who they are**, balancing **safety** needs and **working in community**.

Pregnant women and their partners said **multi-generational housing** can preserve both Hmong and American cultures and that **mental health needs** are important.

Elders emphasized that for prior generations, parenting meant traditional gender roles and minimal resources.

Family members shared a range of perspectives, including **value for outside time**, **safety**, and **preserving Hmong culture**.

How do cultural values inform parenting?

Raising children

- Pregnant women and partners and families with young children value **actively teaching Hmong culture** and **prioritizing family and Clan**.
- Elders talked about how mothers focus on the inside of the home and fathers focus on money. They also emphasized **preserving Hmong culture**.
- Family members said that shifts in cultural values impact younger siblings more than other siblings. There may be some support for **traditional gender roles**, while also efforts to **make things more equal**. **Respect for elders** is important.

Working together with family and community to raise children

- Pregnant women and partners and families with young children both value **community celebrations**, in part because they help bring everyone together to put them on.
- Families with young children may adapt traditional culture to **focus more on individual needs** than just collective.
- Elders and Pregnant women and partners both mentioned the **importance of extended families**.
- Family members mentioned **adapting traditional ways to fit a new culture, preserving both**.

How do your cultural values inform how families stay strong or healthy during challenging times?

- Pregnant women and partners mentioned **offering hospitality** and **showing up for friends and family**, as well as new values around **staying open in communication** with children and others.
- Families with young children **maintain family connections** and **practice religion/spirituality**.
- Elders felt **traditional gender roles** may have made the **transition to the US smoother**.
- Family members rely on their **family for support**. They find **younger parents more adaptable**, while noting that men may be struggling to identify how to **support given changing gender roles**.

Have you seen changes in knowledge of parenting and child growth in our community?

- Pregnant women and partners said that **parents try to treat children equally, regardless of birth order, with reduced emphasis on early marriage and increased openness between parents and children.**
- Families with young children see changes like **allowing children to have more choice** and **older generations becoming more introspective** based on access to the internet and hearing other peoples' stories.
- Elders said that **parents trust daughters more** and **mothers have increased capacity.**
- Family members see changes in **less physical punishment** and **older generations being more open to changing.**

Working with mainstream doctors, service providers, childcare providers, etc.

How do cultural values influence working with mainstream providers?

- Pregnant women and partners said they **prefer holistic approaches** and may be **skeptical of American childcare**.
- Families with young children place a strong **value on traditional approaches**, paired with an appreciation for **American mental health services and disability supports**.
- Elders said there can be **trust and communication barriers** based on language and cultural gaps with medical providers. The **WIC program and American sponsors** helped make the transition better.
- Family members said there is **less fear around going to the doctor** now and **more interest in college**.

Have you seen any changes in relationships with mainstream providers?

- Pregnant women and their partners said there may be **more services** and that **parents are more confident advocating for their children**. **Smaller communities may receive less support from mainstream providers**.
- Families with young children see an **increased value for higher education**.
- Elders discussed how **American culture is changing women and families**.
- Family members said that **elders are more likely to go to the doctor** and that **families emphasize school and individual choice for children**.



Have you seen changes in how we offer social support and community?

- Pregnant women and partners said there is more value for extracurricular and sports activities and more acceptance and openness from older generations.
- Families with young children said that technology helps older generations stay connected to family. They experience more support for daughters-in-law and more connection to both father and mother's side of the family.
- Elders said that times are easier for younger generations. There's some sadness at the loss of memories and Hmong culture.
- Family members experience strong Clan support, although also a concern about some loss of culture.

Hmong Listening Session Quotes

“Love accumulates through generations, so we actively connect our children to their extended families.”

“Respecting elders is still a large part of our everyday culture and is primarily passed down in the family through actions and words.”



Khmu Community Sessions

The Khmu Community Sessions were held in 2024 and included ten (10) individuals in each of the four (4) groups:

- Pregnant women and partners
- Families with young children
- Elders
- Family members

What does parenting and child growing mean to you? What does it look like to raise children?

Khmu families with young children, or who were expecting children soon said **financial needs**, **responsibility**, and **love and support** for children were important.

Elders provide **love and support** for both their children and their grandchildren, prioritizing sharing **food**, **language**, and **culture**.

Family members described being **active with parenting**, whether they were aunts, grandparents, or had some other relationship. Some people felt they needed to be strong and serve as good role models. Others emphasize providing **love and support**, particularly for young parents living in a new culture.



How do cultural values inform parenting?

Raising children

- Khmu families with young children, or who were expecting children soon said they **prioritize family** and connections across generations. They also mentioned having high standards and knowledge of culture.
- Elders prioritize **language and food**. One person mentioned singing and dancing. Everyone mentioned time with family and care for family members.
- Family members talked about helping children learn cultural values and traditions and **navigate both American and traditional culture**. Prioritizing childcare assistance is important. Some people mentioned learning from their mothers and from women in the community.

Working together with family and community to raise children

- Families with young children and those who were expecting children soon said that **learning from family and community**, including respecting elders and working with families to raise children is important.
- Elders see **intergenerational connections** as very important, as is providing lots of love and support.
- Family members want to **share cultural knowledge and values** to support children learning both American and traditional culture. They emphasized **maintaining traditional culture**.

How do your cultural values inform how families stay strong or healthy during challenging times?

- Families with young children and those expecting children soon said **they expect to reach out to their family during difficult times** and for families to be together and support each other. One person was concerned about burdening family.
- Elders also agree that people support each other during challenging times.
- Family members agree that **cultural values help families stay strong**. They prioritize supporting individuals and working together to maintain unity.



Have you seen changes in knowledge of parenting and child growth in our community?

- Pregnant women and their partners saw **different types of changes**. Some see changes away from culture and others more towards a mixing of cultures.
- Families with young children said they saw **both negative and positive changes**. Negative changes included losing culture.
- Elders were more positive, saying that **younger parents can access mainstream resources** and use them well and that the **services are more accessible**.
- Family members also saw positive changes around raising children. Some people said there was **more knowledge** for them as grandparents. Other people said there was **more ability to access services** and still others felt there was **more connection between Western and traditional cultures**.

Working with mainstream doctors, service providers, childcare providers, etc.

How do cultural values influence working with mainstream providers?

- Pregnant women and partners said people are often **quiet and listen**, concerned about not fitting in or knowing enough.
- Families with young children talked about **speaking up and being skeptical of mainstream services**. They want to make sure service providers understand their needs and culture.
- **Elders are confident in their cultural knowledge and its value for families**. They are skeptical that mainstream providers value the culture.
- Family members **value mainstream services and support**, appreciating opportunities to learn new things and access new resources. They want those opportunities to align with traditional culture.

Have you seen any changes in relationships with mainstream providers?

- In each group, **some people feel mainstream services are more welcoming** and that they value cultural and traditional perspectives. There may even be mutual exchanges happening between service providers and families.
- Some people mentioned **community members have learned how to navigate mainstream services better**.
- Some people in the families with young children and family member groups felt that **mainstream services are not culturally relevant** at this time.

Have you seen changes in how we offer social support and community?



- Pregnant women and their partners see **community coming together** to share resources.
- Families with young children say that **younger parents need more social support** and help with childcare, with the need for both parents to work outside the home.
- Elders see **younger parents more willing to accept help from outside the family** and learn new ways of doing things.
- Family members said they saw **changes in how they offer social support**, including how parents have more access to resource or how grandparents are changing and know they need to adapt to a new culture.

Khmu Listening Session Quotes

“My culture is about family unity and supporting my own family bring up grand children in our big family. I use language and food to help my grandchildren stay connected with our culture.”

“My cultural values are strong, and I learn to follow my parents on how they raise me, and I will use these values to raise my kids.”



Lao Community Sessions

The Lao Community Sessions were held in 2024 and included 30 individuals in each of the 4 groups:

- Pregnant women and partners
- Families with young children
- Elders
- Family members

What does parenting and child growing mean to you? What does it look like to raise children?

Lao pregnant women and their partners said that raising children means **teaching Lao language, heritage, and culture**, helping children to understand what it means to be **both Lao and American**. It also means providing for children's needs, so they are **healthy and happy**.

Elders emphasized the **responsibility** of parenting being high and that it is **expensive**.

Others said that child raising meant making sure **children's needs are met** and ensuring that **Lao culture and language is known**. One person mentioned teaching right/wrong and choices.



How do cultural values inform parenting?

Raising children

- Pregnant women and partners said that children are taught to **respect elders** and **care for others in their family and community**. Traditional Lao culture revolves around family and **family issues are worked through in the family setting**. One person mentioned “**soft strict**” parenting. Another emphasized attending **church or temple** so children learn morals.
- Elders said that **grandparents need to help with raising children**, with Lao **language, food, and spiritual practices**. This includes respect for siblings, parents, and elders.
- Others also **value traditional Lao culture** and emphasized teaching children respect for others.

Working together with family and community to raise children

- Pregnant women and partners noted that **younger parents take their children to doctors while also participating in spiritual practices**, and elders may rely on traditional medicines and healing. Some parents **prefer family care** to American childcare.
- Others said that **it takes a village** to raise a child and that they wanted their partner to know about Lao culture and raise children the same way together.
- Elders emphasized **showing good example, correcting children** when needed, and **participating in Lao events**.

How do your cultural values inform how families stay strong or healthy during challenging times?



- Pregnant women and their partners **build connections** and **support each other** in big and small challenges, through their **extended family** and the **Lao community across the US**. People stay connected through events like **Lao New Year**.
- Elders mentioned **living together to save money** and having everyone participate in the household, taking care of each other, and **sharing community resources**.
- Others said that cultural values prioritize **supporting family** and **being flexible**, and **to keep trying**.

Have you seen changes in knowledge of parenting and child growth in our community?

- Pregnant women and their partners noted that parents are **more open** and may be **less strict** than in the past. More **women work outside the home**, with **grandparents helping** with childcare.
- Others said that **more families help others** with things like clothes or baby care items.
- Elders said that they try to **adapt in the US** and change how they teach children, for example approving of overnight field trips that are not normally culturally approved. Elders also notice that **families need more help with babysitting** and childcare.

Working with mainstream doctors, service providers, childcare providers, etc.

How do cultural values influence working with mainstream providers?

- Pregnant women and partners mentioned trying to have a **cordial relationship** so they aren't misunderstood, while also tending to be more **skeptical**.
- Adult children or other community members can **help with translation and interpretation for elders**, although more support is needed.
- One person said that cultural values support **finding a balance** between American practices and Lao culture.

Have you seen any changes in relationships with mainstream providers?

- **Language access**, including phone interpretation has improved, although there are gaps in availability and accessibility.
- Some families see **more services available for breastfeeding moms** and **better income opportunities** and **government support**.
- Some schools, hospitals, clinics, and social service agencies provide **culturally appropriate** services.
- One person said there is a need for more maternity time off, higher pay, and more postpartum mental health support.



Have you seen changes in how we offer social support and community?

- Pregnant women and their partners said that **more children are involved in outside activities** like sports, dance, etc. **Parents are also more involved with their kid's education** due to reduced language barriers.
- One person said **this listening session is a great start** to more social support in our community.
- Elders say that **driving helps improve access** to social services and **some people socialize more with mainstream groups** than they did in Laos.

Lao Listening Session Quotes

“Raising children is more difficult in the US than in Laos. We cannot raise our children the same way, like in Laos. We must realize that these are Lao American children and not Lao born children or grown-up Lao children.

“I like the laws in this country. They protect immigrants well. They provide social services, medical, schooling, jobs, and many things. I'm generally happy and indebted to motherland USA.”

Community Reflection Questions

- What surprises you about this data? What do you see that you expected?
- What are the strengths of our community?
- What else do you want to know? What is missing from this data?
- What is your vision? What do you hope for moving forward?
- What is the next step for UCL and our group? What are things to consider for families with young children, especially?

Thank You!



Thank You!

