



# Family Resource Centers: The Value to Our Communities

December 2022

## The Impact of Unhealthy Families

Multiple studies have revealed the significance of families and their crucial role in the health of our communities and, hence, our society. Healthy families are the foundation for providing children a strong sense of safety, love, support, stability, and the tools for positive generational impact. However, when families experience struggles due to traumatic events, when dysfunctional dynamics arise and the family becomes a toxic environment, the cascading effects reverberate through our communities. Per numerous U.S. Department of Human Services reports, when communities focus on family health, there are steep declines in crime, mental health cognitive deficits, substance abuse, educational inequality, child developmental delays, and cultural and societal stresses. As a result, there are fewer negative economic impacts on society. Ultimately, it is a moral directive to assist families with children toward a healthy home life and provide the protection needed while offering advantages across all socio-economic groups.

## Family Resource Centers as a Prevention Program

What can help sustain healthy families, assist struggling families, and improve the issues of unhealthy families? What are some of the essentials that can lead to family health and success? Research data indicates that Family Resource Centers (FRCs) have led to both short- and long-term positive outcomes for children and families when implementing appropriate strategies to include trauma-informed care and culturally competent practices coupled with evidenced-based prevention-intervention models (Bayless et al, 2021). As defined by the Casey Family Programs (2019), “FRCs are community-based, flexible, family focused, and culturally sensitive facilities that provide programs and services based on the needs of families.” There are various names for FRCs, including family support centers, family centers, parent-child resource centers, family resource schools, and parent education centers (National Family Support Network, 2022). FRC implementation programs may focus on child abuse and neglect, substance abuse issues, family violence or instability, employment/vocational assistance, community unity, behavioral health, family and community health, educational outcomes, and juvenile justice issues that create mechanisms for families to improve their various health domains (Wulczyn & Lery, 2019). It is important to note that FRC services also vary widely but employ a shared mission to implement services and supports driven by family needs, while offering a multitude of programs and resources (such as diapers, food, or clothing) with a community focus (National Family Support Network, 2022). FRCs can also provide in-home prevention and intervention services utilizing evidence-based models to address at-risk family parenting needs with the goal of averting involvement in the child protection system and causing trauma related to family separation.

Further, as Casey Family Programs (2019) stated, “FRCs are more than just a place but also represent a different philosophy and process than traditional approaches to providing services for families. They are proactive, accessible, and parent/community informed; they do not require that families falter to offer them help.” Although there are many variations of the definition of “family,” a working definition for those served in



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FRCs is those families that are responsible for raising children that consist of at least one adult and one child who may be related biologically, legally, or have emotional ties. These families may have one parent, two parents, grandparents, foster parents, adoptive parents, or legal guardians.

## The Goals of Family Resource Centers

FRCs aim to promote family health through the five protective factors: parental resilience, social connections, concrete support in times of need, knowledge of parenting and child development, and social and emotional competence of children. As a result, the FRCs' services help strengthen families and provide support in their local communities while preventing involvement with local child protection agencies. They also mitigate crises before they occur, avoiding out-of-home care of a child. Most aim to be "one-stop shops" for children and parents, helping with comprehensive needs for families while easing the stress of locating services in various locations. This model also enhances the essence of building community relationships while allowing the FRC to become a neighborhood hub for families. As such, FRCs become the visible, safe refuge for families in surrounding neighborhoods to convene and forge relationships while engaging in a spectrum of services and support.

## Operations Costs of Family Resource Centers

According to the National Family Support Network, (2021), FRC budgets vary across the United States in relation to local costs of living, specific programming, and physical space. FRCs are funded by creative resources from states, counties, individual programs, in-kind support, and donors. There is no dedicated federal funding for FRCs; however, FRCs have braided funds from various federal funding streams for financial sustainability. As presented by the National Family Support Network (2021), an example is the community-based New Jersey Success Center, with an annual budget of \$240,000 to \$300,000 and three to four full-time staff. A school-based FRC in Kentucky has an annual budget of \$33,000-\$82,000 with one to two full-time staff and space and other resources provided in-kind.

## Return on Investment from Family Resource Centers

FRCs are highly economical and a cost-effective means of supporting families. Research has shown that they yield a \$4.93 Social Return on Investment for every dollar invested. For every dollar invested, there is a \$3.65 savings for the child welfare system (Bayless et al., 2021). Regarding positive child welfare outcomes because of FRC services, there was a 63% reduction in child abuse cases per the OMNI Institute (2019), a 50% reduction in home placements (Allan et al., 2018), and 26% lower rates of community-level child abuse investigations (Wulczyn & Lery, 2019). Also reported were gains in economic self-sufficiency, health, social support, family functioning and resiliency, child nurturing and healthy attachment, and children's educational success (Family Resource Center Association & OMNI Institute, 2019). Several state studies presented have



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found significant return on investment for FRCs:

- In Alabama, an analysis of short- and long-term impacts shows that for every \$1 invested in FRCs, the State of Alabama receives \$4.70 of immediate and long-term financial benefits (Alabama Network of Family Resource Centers, 2015).
- In Vermont, the Parent Child Center Network determined that through services to prevent adverse childhood experiences, the Vermont FRCs saved the state \$210,000 (in 2010 dollars) per family, including “\$33,000 in childhood health care costs, \$11,000 in adult medical costs, \$144,000 in productivity losses, \$8,000 in child welfare costs, \$7,000 in criminal justice costs, and \$8,000 in special education costs” (Patterson, 2017).
- Recent and ongoing research co-led by Safe & Sound, a FRC in San Francisco, indicates that if only half of the money currently spent on dealing with the repercussions of child maltreatment was redirected to prevention efforts — particularly, efforts to strengthen families’ protective factors — child abuse and neglect would be reduced by almost 50 percent, (Safe & Sound, 2018). Calculations reveal an estimated economic burden of child maltreatment of \$456,033 per victim in San Francisco County in 2018, or more than \$233 million over the course of the year, based on a conservative estimate (Safe & Sound, 2019). Given that child maltreatment is often underreported, the financial impact could total as much as \$6.8 billion a year (Peterson, Florence, & Klevens, 2018).

## Family Resource Centers in Your Community

What can be done to prevent child abuse and neglect in your community? How can all families be supported and strengthened to succeed in healthy, robust communities that aggregate to society? As the Casey Family Programs (2020) stated, “Direct investments in social programs for children demonstrate high returns in both the short and longer term. Tangible benefits show up in their health and well-being, as well as in money saved by avoiding the costly results of child maltreatment.” Those direct investment programs include FRCs that are impactful, cost-effective, and provide comprehensive services incorporating standards of quality approach to supporting children, families, and communities. Although further studies are indicated that would illuminate the benefits of FRCs and strengthen services that protect children and support families, it is evident that FRCs are valuable as a resource to families and the community. When one considers that the national cost of maltreatment is an estimated \$220,000,000 daily, that translates to an overall expense which is more money per year than it would take to end hunger in the U.S. (Bayless, 2021), the investments into FRCs become a high priority to our children, families and communities. Beyond the financial impacts, an even higher priority prevails to supply children and families the best resources available. This will strengthen and protect them morally and ethically while providing legacies of healthy families as opposed to generations of trauma impacted families. Given the findings from the few existing studies, however, there is reason to believe that FRCs have been, and can be, instrumental in increasing protective factors and supporting children’s safety through family support and strengthening (Casey Family Programs, 2019).

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