



A Comprehensive Patron Feedback Group Analysis on Welcoming and Inclusiveness at PSF Family Resource Centers

Christen Lancaster
Partnership for Strong Families, USA

Robin Perry
Florida A&M University, USA

Haley Pegram
Partnership for Strong Families, USA

Stacy Merritt
Partnership for Strong Families, USA

Toni Spoliansky
Partnership for Strong Families, USA

Pebbles Edelman
Partnership for Strong Families, USA

Institute for Child and Family Services Research



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Focus Group Methods

As part of a broader evaluation effort, the utilization of focus groups of patrons receiving services and supports at each of the project family resource centers (FRC) was proposed to help answer general questions related to fidelity of services and supports to the protective factor model, the reach of FRCs' efforts, and implementation drivers, solutions, and barriers. The FRCs include the Cone Park Library Resource Center (CPLRC), the Library Partnership Resource Center (LPRC), the SWAG Family Resource Center (SWAG FRC), and the NorthStar Family Resource Center (NSFRC). Please note, although initially identified as “*focus groups*” within the evaluation plan, the phrase “*patron feedback groups*” was substituted for these efforts following consultation with evaluation team members and advisory groups (that included patrons) that suggested the revised group reference would be more engaging and inviting for prospective members¹.

Detailed information related to the methodology guiding the sample selection of patrons to participate and other procedures and limitations associated with the evaluation design can be found in a separate brief (see Perry et.al, 2024). Further, a separate guide was produced that highlighted in detail the processes and protocols utilized in forming and facilitating the patron feedback groups and the structure for the content analysis, results of which are detailed in this report (see Institute for Child and Family Services Research, 2023). In sum, patron participants were randomly sampled to participate from a sampling frame of patrons that consented to participate in the formal evaluation. The selection was stratified across PSF Family Resource Centers with two groups per FRC. Efforts were made to secure between 6 and 10 participants per group with 75% of participants serving as caregivers of children (an additional stratum for

¹ Methodological and planning considerations were still guided by theory, principles and protocols associated with the term “focus groups” and other qualitative/narrative approaches for planning, implementation/data collection, and content analyses found with the normative/professional literature.

selection) given that one of the objectives (among others) of the evaluation is to assess the effect of FRCs in their capacity to prevent maltreatment and family involvement with child welfare systems. Although focus patron feedback groups are FRC specific (and analyses can be stratified by FRC), patrons at each were asked the same questions. Some commonalities of perspective across FRC focus groups were identified that permit an aggregation of findings (and identification of an aggregate content saturation level) in select analyses denoted in this and other reports.

Questions for Patron Feedback Groups

The generation and final selection of questions to be asked with each feedback group was multifaceted and involved a few iterations. First, draft questions were constructed in consultation and brainstorming with other project staff, project implementation team members, and select PSF and FRC administrators. Following refinements to these questions, feedback, edits, and question suggestions were solicited via survey methods from key stakeholders that have been a source of information and consultation for other process evaluation activities. These individuals included program managers at each FRC, as well as members of each FRC Strengthening Family Self-Assessment (SFSA) teams (which include patrons/community ambassadors, key program staff and volunteers, and collaborative partners from the community). Although the survey was made available in electronic format, it was also available in paper form, upon request. One group of respondents—members of the Cone Park Research Advisory Council—met in-person as a group to discuss each question and provide feedback on the content and structure of select questions. The responses from surveyed stakeholders were reviewed, tallied, and summarized. At least one question originally aligned with each protective factor was chosen for inclusion for feedback group procedures deemed to be of highest rated value to “...best understanding patrons' experiences at, and the impact of, each family resource center” (Perry, Lancaster, & Pegram, 2024).

The final set of questions (and associated sub-questions) included the following:

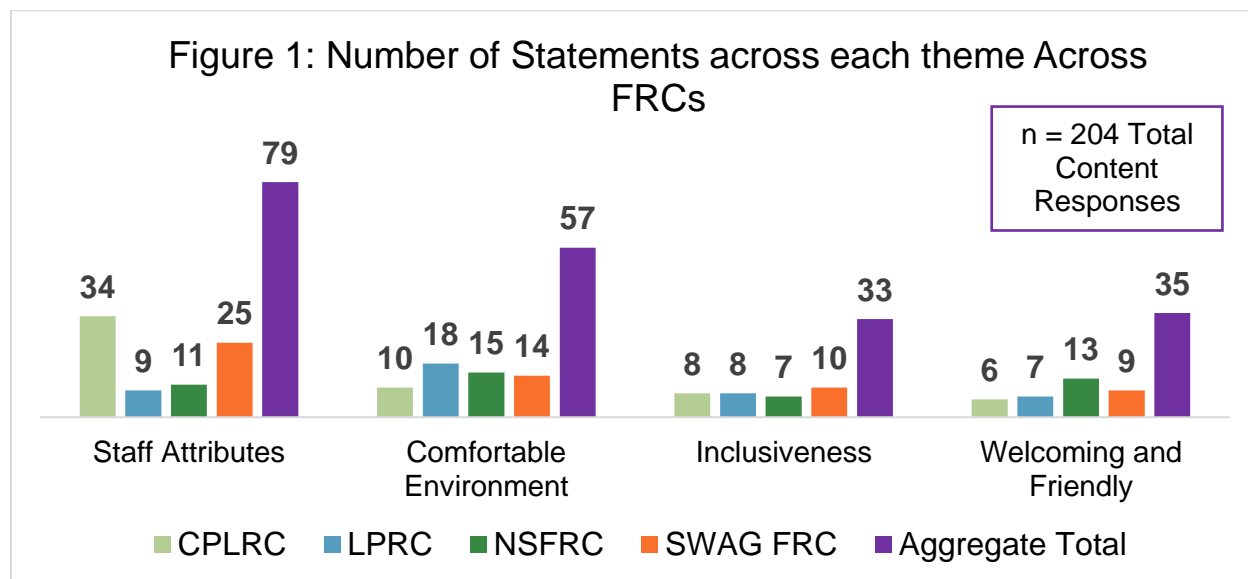
1. How does [FRC name] assist individuals and families with immediate needs?
2. What resources and supports do they provide?
 Have they been helpful?
3. Were the activities and programs welcoming and inclusive? Did they make families feel comfortable interacting with others and participating in activities?
4. When interacting with staff, are you listened to and supported?
 Do you think program staff are willing to work collaboratively with you to support your child(ren)'s development?
5. When thinking about yourself or other caregivers in the community, did the services and events at the resource center help manage stress?
 Did these services help you to better deal with the demands of parenting during stressful times?
6. What additional services do you need as a caregiver to better cope with everyday stressors? What additional services do you need to cope with the stressors in your community?
7. Do program activities support your children's social and emotional development?
8. Do you think that [FRC name] resources have helped caregivers in the community from being involved with the child welfare system?
9. Is there anything else you would like to say about your experiences with [FRC name]?

Welcoming and Inclusiveness

This report is an analysis of patron answers across all FRCs to the questions: *Were activities and programs at FRCs welcoming and inclusive? Did they make families feel*

comfortable interacting with others and participating in activities? After the content analysis of recorded transcripts, four overall themes of staff attributes, comfortable environment, inclusiveness, and welcoming and friendly were identified (see Figure 1).

Each of the counts for themes represents the statements of those who attended one of the patron feedback groups. A captured statement may be as short as a word or affirmative agreement (in response to another person's statement) or as long as a paragraph with multiple quotes. Select statements by individuals may contain content that reflects multiple themes. The total count of statements for each theme is stratified by FRC. Each theme's content embodies subthemes listed and described at the beginning of each applicable themes section within this report. Figure 1 provides the sum of each statement for each theme broken down by FRC along with the aggregate total of each theme. The count of statements for each theme demonstrates a common level of importance across FRCs. It should be noted, however, that while some counts may be higher at one FRC compared to others, this could be a byproduct of the feedback group process and the variable participation from patrons across groups and centers.



Among the 204 total content responses to this question, the theme highlighting staff attributes was most represented (n = 79 or 38.7%) and perceived as a major contributor to

making patrons feel welcome and comfortable. The following subthemes represent these staff attributes: general praise, good with youth, supportive, welcoming, respectful, and maintaining grace under pressure. The term '*staff*' used in this report includes full and part-time staff, volunteers, and interns who work for the FRC. Though some statements reflect the support received from volunteers and interns, most statements reflect the work of paid staff, particularly FRC managers who are responsible for the daily operations of the FRC and family support specialists who provide support to some patrons in a case management role.

The subsequent theme, designated as the comfortable environment, comprised 57 (27.9% of all content) statements that underscored the various ways in which the FRCs established a welcoming and comfortable atmosphere. The manifestations of a comfortable environment are evident in several subthemes encompassing a focus on fellowship, youth friendliness, professionalism, and comfort in seeking support. The purported superiority of the comfortable environment at FRCs in contrast to reported experiences with other social/human service agencies appears to be influenced by sentiments highlighting the genuine and authentic nature with which support and services are provided. The overarching theme of a comfortable environment represents a holistic perspective, accentuating the collective sense of welcome and inclusion experienced by patrons during their time at an FRC.

The third theme showcases the ways in which patrons perceived the FRCs as inclusive, fostering a welcoming and comfortable atmosphere for everyone. The 33 statements (16.2% of all statements) within this theme underscore inclusiveness through the subthemes of diversity, the creation of safe spaces, and ensuring universal access to supports.

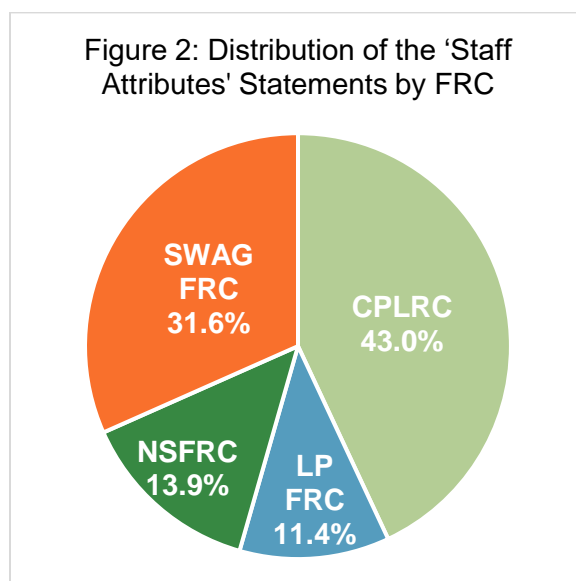
The final theme, focuses on welcoming and inclusion, directly examines the friendliness and hospitality of FRCs. Within this theme, 35 (17.2% of 204) statements emphasize the explicit manifestation of welcoming behavior. No subthemes were identified, as the statements straightforwardly express that individuals feel genuinely welcome. Many patrons noted that this

sense of welcoming and inclusion made them feel wanted, included, and an integral part of the community.

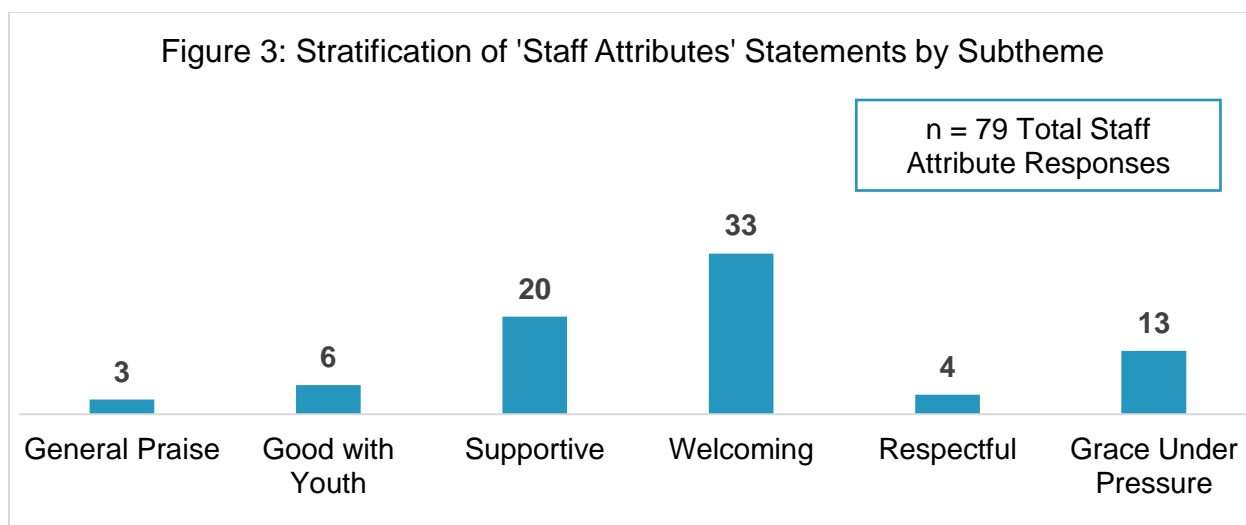
Theme One: Staff Attributes

This theme is focused on the qualities and traits frequently found within FRC staff, which strengthen a welcoming and inclusive space and help families feel comfortable in their interaction with others and their participation in activities. Again, the term 'staff' is used here to include full and part-time staff, volunteers, and interns who work at the FRC. There were extensive discussions and examples of how staff attributes are responsible for developing a welcoming and inclusive FRC. Each FRC has between one and three paid staff members supported by interns and volunteers when available. Reportedly interns and volunteers are often difficult to retain, as they are typically college students who complete their volunteer hours and/or graduate and move out of the area. For this reason, interns and volunteers are not always a consistent, long-term source of staff support, and when not available, the majority of the work falls on the few paid staff members, frequently the FRC manager.

There were 79 content statements associated with a theme of staff attributes for which 43.0% (n = 34) from the CPLRC, 13.9% (n = 11) from the NSFRC, 11.4% (n = 9) from the LPRC and 31.6% (n = 25) from the SWAG FRC (see Figure 2). There were 18 patrons who made these statements across several Family Resource Centers: six at CPLRC, four at NSFRC, three at LPRC, and five at SWAG FRC.



Statements regarding staff attributes are highlighted by six subthemes, including general praise (n = 3), good with youth (n = 6), supportive (n = 20), welcoming (n = 33), respectful (n = 4), and having grace under pressure (n = 13). Each of these subthemes represents ways in which staff attributes are manifested to create a welcoming and inclusive environment. Figure 3 represents the total number of statements highlighting staff attributes that create a welcoming and inclusive FRC, stratified by subtheme.



General Praise

General praise encompasses statements from patrons which commend staff for their welcoming and inclusive demeanor, often lacking specific details regarding how these qualities

manifest in staff actions or behaviors. While the documented staff attributes include only three specific instances of general praise, patrons frequently use terms like "good," "great," and "awesome" to express their admiration for staff. Moreover, some patrons go beyond generic accolades, expressing genuine affection for select staff members. For instance, one patron reflected on various staff members they have known over time, affirming, "*I love them too; they were awesome too.*"

Good with Youth

Many patrons shared that staff were good at interacting and working with youth through formal and informal programs and services. There were six statements celebrating staff members' work with youth, half of which reflected admiration at the staff member's ability to remain calm and respectful while working with children who were perceived as acting disrespectful and disruptive. It was reinforced that when staff work well with youth, it creates a welcoming and inclusive environment in which children feel comfortable participating in programming and utilizing services, and allowing caregivers to feel that their family is accepted. One parent recounted their experience when their children were loud and moving chairs and books, causing a general disruption. They praised staff for giving reminders to quiet down instead of yelling and expressed gratitude that staff "*never kick them out*" of the FRC or program/service that they were receiving. This parent expressed relief because they often have difficulty accessing services due to the number of children they have and the behaviors they exhibit.

Many patrons spoke positively of staff's ability to provide a supportive and professional environment for youth. Staff are said to be both firm and loving, resulting in better behavioral outcomes for youth. As one patron shared:

When you come in here, these volunteers and these women who work here, they're the ones ... telling them [youth] right from wrong. This patron goes on to say, you'll hear them [youth] cussing. But when you see them in here [FRC] you would think they came from church cause these ladies don't play that. And they show

them... very professional, they show them love but most of them can't get at home you know? They don't get that... they come here and run to these women.

The remaining statements related to staff having good interaction with youth were specifically directed to Dr. Philip Mobley's efforts in working with youth at the NSFRC. Though all FRCs have programming for youth, such as Homework Help, NSFRC is currently the only PSF FRC with a male manager. Many patrons at NSFRC believe that this allows Dr. Mobley a unique opportunity to be a positive male role model in the lives of youth who may be lacking a male figure in their life. Dr. Mobley is said to be patient while assisting with tutoring and being "good at relating to children." One patron suggests that Dr. Mobley's positive connection and efforts at meaningful engagement with children and youth could be utilized, if needed, as a preventative measure within the school system:

He may make a statement like 'what's going on with you today young man?' And that, that gets into their head. And if they're having a problem with social or mental issues or bullying or whatever, they might share that. And then he can get that back to the school and let them know that this child, you know, is having a problem with conflict resolution.

Similarly, another parent shared an experience of their child receiving tutoring from Dr. Mobley saying "he was so good at building his confidence level up and making him feel good about what he was doing. So, of course, that helped his emotional state."

Supportive

There were 20 statements by patrons regarding the supportive qualities of staff members, both a practical and emotional ways. Many patrons remarked that there was a distinct positive difference between staff supportiveness at the FRCs compared to other social services agencies which led to increased feelings of welcome and inclusion. Stating that services were not only provided efficiently, but their needs were treated with care, attentiveness, and reminders that accompany that service.

Some patrons felt that staff were supportive by simply showing up to help families in need and maintaining that support in the face of negativity or obstacles. Indeed, being present

and attentive for patrons can be a support as one patron explained, “Sometimes they have help, sometimes not, but they listen to you. That help you a lot when you can talk and bring out your situation, you know.” Another patron shared that staff are: *attentive to whatever need I have, and I've come here for a number of different kind of things*, [remarking that their familiarity with staff already known in the community leads them to feel] *very comfortable coming here for anything that I need.*

Many patrons spoke at length about the emotional support they experienced while receiving services. Patrons stated that that staff provide a sense of emotional support by listening to them, being patient with their time, being attentive, and showing love and care. Sharing about the FRC manager at the center she frequents, stating One patron shared about their FRC manager at the center she frequents: *“she give you her love and her attention and her best advice that she knows how, you know, to give you at that time and stuff.”*

Many patrons spoke of staff as providing mentoring and encouragement in their lives. Staff were often referred to as *“very motivating”* and inspiring, providing steps for patrons to take to accomplish their goals. One patron shared their experience of feeling alone and frustrated and how staff would point out the positives in their life that they hadn't seen, allowing them to have a more positive outlook on their situation and themselves. Another patron shared that she found staff to be encouraging when talking about their shared faith. It's worth noting that many patrons felt that the ways staff were seen to communicate about faith were appropriate and sensitive to the patron's faith and experiences. Patrons known to be of a similar faith to the staff may be invited to pray or provided encouraging scripture, while those patrons with a different or unknown faith were given general inspiration and encouragement. Knowing when and when not to bring up religious topics is one way staff are believed to create a sense of welcome and inclusion for all patrons.

Several patrons spoke positively of staff supporting them through sending reminders and following up with them. This could be reminding them of upcoming appointments or tasks that need to be done to achieve stated goals. Several patrons laughed and smiled, stating that they receive several appointment reminders, which they find helpful in their busy lives. Many patrons praised staff for following up with them on a variety of personal issues, one saying they “*call and check up on you*”. One example of this is the communication between staff and caregivers regarding Homework Help programming. Homework Help is a Social and Emotional Competence of Youth¹ program offered every afternoon at the FRCs that provides snacks and homework assistance. This program is designed to provide support to youth so they can finish their homework before going home. On occasion, parents who are running late or need to make arrangements to pick up their children will call FRC staff for support. Parents from two different FRCs shared similar stories of receiving support from staff while arranging pick up for their youth from Homework Help. One patron caregiver at NSFRC, and a member of Dr. Mobley’s church, shared her experience of running late to pick up her grandson. She called, explaining that she was on her way and asking that the FRC remain open until she could get there. Dr. Mobley provided support in caring for her safety and offering a flexible alternative, responding:

Well, just take your time now. Don't rush and get in an accident. Because if you're not here, I'm gonna take him to church. She responded with a laugh saying, well that's where he needs to be, I don't mind you taking him to church I'll come by there and pick him up then shared it's good to, to have this program.

In this situation, the staff support was strengthened by their interconnectedness in the community, providing a safe solution for the patron’s grandchild, and putting the caregiver at ease, increasing the sense of welcome and inclusion. A SWAG FRC patron shared a similar

¹ You can read more our research with this protective factor here:
<https://www.pfsf.org/resourcecenters/evaluationandexpansion/refinement/>

situation where they connected with staff to verify the plan for the child at the end of the day.

This parent recounted an experience where staff were aware of her family's situation:

[FRC staff called asking] *'hey, is he walking home or are you coming to get him?'* So, *oh yeah, they will call you, mhm, especially if you didn't put that he was supposed to walk home, they'll call and make sure. I just, SWAG is awesome.*

Many patrons expressed agreement with phrases that staff *"try their best"* and *"they keep you happy."* Even when services are not available, many patrons praised staff for keeping their eyes open for new resources that can be shared with families in need. One patron praised staff's ability to have needed services, saying, *"she gets it before I get it,"* suggesting that staff's awareness of needs is such that they have the services available when needed. Staff being ready with the needed services can be a huge help to patrons with emergency needs, as one patron shared, *"I came and got pull-ups and everything. It's like so much stress reliever when it comes down to money and food with my kids. [Staff] is my release; I come there for everything."*

Welcoming

The welcoming subtheme of staff attributes had 33 statements from patrons across every FRC. When being welcoming, staff are reported to behave in a polite or friendly way to patrons who visit the FRC. One way staff are welcoming is by helping patrons equally and nonjudgmentally. As one patron shared *"People that are here, want to be here. When you talk to them, they don't look down on you."* Another way staff express welcoming behavior is through nonverbal attributes that help patrons feel welcomed and included. Cited attributes include humility, calmness, mellowness, patience, being funny, and caring through body language and gestures. This welcoming subtheme is directly tied to the attitudes and behaviors of staff, differentiated from the Welcoming and Friendly theme found later in this report, which is more environmental or general in nature, encompassing all aspects of the FRC, not just the staff.

Many patrons shared that staff are welcoming by creating an open-door policy, making space for everyone to be welcomed equally and pulling in patrons to get past any initial

discomfort associated with seeking assistance. One patron shared that even though the staff member regularly attended church, and she did not, staff would welcome her to come to their church “*but it wasn't like a push thing.*” While this statement may not explicitly convey a sense of welcome within the FRC, it does bring attention to the fostering of a welcoming environment and the establishment of strong interpersonal connections during this patron’s time at the FRC. Patron statements such as “[staff] *loves everybody*” and “*I'll bring my grandbaby too, ... and I don't have no problems, everybody love her*” reflect these patrons’ perception that everyone is included in being welcomed. One patron described staff as open, sharing that staff have an open-door policy where you can call and be provided with resources you may not have used before, subsequently providing stress relief. Another patron shared “*its 'everybody welcome out here', everybody come to the SWAG*” and listed many of the staff names she has worked with over the years stating, “*they are all beautiful people.*”

One mother shared a vulnerable experience she had when her son was a month old, and she was running low on pampers and struggling financially. When she came in to the FRC, staff greeted her and gave diapers as well as a baby basket which she shared “*became very useful.*” She goes on to say that at another time she was struggling with food for herself and four children but was not wanting to ask for help and not wanting to strain her family relationships through continually asking them for help. When she eventually went to a food distribution day at the FRC, she found that she agreed with another patron: “*like how she said, they welcome you and stuff. They made me feel like, okay.*” Staff welcomed her and explained food distributions:

[staff shared] “*here we got all this type of stuff, get your kids some sweets and stuff*”. She goes on to share to the other patrons: “*Girl, so my kids grabbing everything. So, it's like, okay I feel kind of a little better knowing that I'm not the only one who is inside this type of situation. So yeah, that really helped a lot to know.*”

Despite some patrons expressing initial hesitations to seek support at the FRCs due to feelings of embarrassment, pride, shame, or concerns about potential involvement with DCF (as

discussed further in Q8), those who eventually overcame their reservations reported to have experienced a welcoming atmosphere, feeling reassured that they would not be made to feel ashamed.

Many patrons spoke of the ways in which staff being welcoming was manifested in their attitudes and behaviors, with comments that staff are good, lovely, nice, calm, mellow, hilarious, and have open hearts. One patron shared from their perspective of staff, “*everybody come calming and relax all the problem.*”

Numerous patrons conveyed that the staff were not only approachable, reachable, and welcoming, but also courteous. In certain instances, staff members were likened to be like family, with one patron even expressing a sense of kinship by feeling the staff's energy, almost as if they were related. The words that are used may vary, but they all express the different ways in which patrons feel that staff helped them to feel welcomed, included, and comfortable. For instance, though no other FRC patron used the word humble to describe their local FRC staff, two patrons at CPLRC spoke of Ms. Erica Reed, the FRC manager, as being humble.

On several occasions, patrons expressed their view that staff were welcoming and exhibited a non-judgmental attitude of acceptance for them in whatever situation they were in.

As one patron shared:

I've never walked in here and felt like I wasn't welcome. When I talk to them, they act like they've been there. They act like they're peer-to-peer advocates basically, and I know [staff] hasn't been through half the crap I've been through.

This statement not only underscores the patrons' sense of feeling welcomed but also alludes to a cultivated interpersonal connection with the staff, where there is a mutual knowing and being known. Genuine, authentic relationships have evolved over time, positioning staff members as integral parts of the community, akin to an extended family. The subsequent patrons' statement further accentuates this deepened relationship:

Yeah nonjudgmental. Yeah, because I feel like she [FRC Manager] would be honest with me. You know, and because she has a way of saying things to you. Because I had been wrong about some things, you know? And but she didn't come out (murmuring disagreement), but it was the way she came to me and presented the truth. It had me to look at where I was wrong when I was in error, you know, and I apologize and stuff.

Indeed, a non-judgmental attitude is very important to patrons who may otherwise feel ashamed of asking for help or embarrassed at needing help with tasks they can't do themselves. As one patron expressed, *"Is that none of the staff makes you feel ashamed or less than because you need help. They're all like right there to help you, with open arms and that's huge."* Multiple patrons shared feedback about observing staff members consistently demonstrating welcoming and inclusive behavior towards other patrons. In some cases, patrons come in assistance but do not know how to work with emails or faxes so the staff member will ask them when they walk in:

'Well, what is it that you need to do? Ok well you're gonna need a cover sheet. And where's the phone number where you're gonna send it?' They [staff] walk them through it and don't make them feel stupid. Because I've been to other places, not here, but you know other resources that, you know, looked at you like you had three heads when you asked a question because you didn't know. And there really are no dumb questions except the ones you don't ask.

Similarly, another patron observed:

I wait to go to the [clothing] closet and the way in which they deal with the, the patrons that come is very, you know, in a respectful manner. Everybody's treated, you know, like somebody. And I think they are doing a good job.

Even in situations that may be otherwise difficult or cause a barrier to service, many staff were praised as having a welcoming attitude. Two patrons spoke of staff welcoming in children who are not welcome in other environments, due to the children's behavior. As mentioned earlier in the context of Homework Help programming, youth that are being disciplined while receiving help still *"run to these women"* who welcome them in. This statement highlights the strength of a healthy interpersonal relationship between staff and youth. The way discipline is administered is designed to enhance, rather than diminish, these connections. An example of another difficult

situation came from a patron who shared that she has been asked at other social service agencies to leave two-hour long lines for assistance because her child was screaming, and the service provider didn't care, adding that the FRC is "*a totally different atmosphere. They do care.*"

Three patrons spoke of their gratitude that FRC staff are welcoming and not fearful of them even though their voice or demeanor can be too much for other people. As one patron explained, "[staffs] *not afraid to hear my voice ... [staffs] not fearful of that energy.*" To these patrons, it was a relief to be accepted as they are.

Several patrons shared and agreed that welcoming is extended to everyone. One patron share that she loves seeing local patrons from ARC¹, who have mental and developmental challenges, come to the FRC and she uses this as an opportunity to speak to her grandchildren that:

not everybody is the same and we all have different gifts, and we all have different, you know, abilities and some people's abilities are not quite as high as others, but that doesn't mean they don't have value. It doesn't mean that they're not loving, and that they're not lovable and they're part of us and we embrace everybody.

Staff were believed to be welcoming to diverse cultures, religions, languages and more as one patron shared, "*You can, you can find your tribe here, period... they always feel welcoming, period.*" Though the term "*tribe*" is only used here, it resonates with the myriad of ways in which staff extend a sense of welcoming through community, behavior, attitudes, non-judgmental approaches, and more.

Respectful

Though there were only two direct statements referring to respect as a staff attribute, there was frequent agreement that staff were respectful. One patron shared a personal trauma that they experienced within a church setting and that staff respected them by never pushing their

¹Learn more about The ARC of Alachua County here: <https://www.arcalachua.org/>

faith, denoting “*whether you go to church or you're not, ... she still treats you the same and she still see the positive, the stuff in you, you know, she still pull those out and point those out.*”

Many patrons spoke at length of personal concerns with privacy, so one staff attribute that was highlighted in helping them feel welcomed and included was respect for their privacy. As one patron shared, “*They don't tell your business. They business stay between us and them, and that's how it should be and I love them for that. They do that, between us and them. They don't go no further.*” It's important to note here that patrons are sometimes vulnerable while dealing with situations like divorce paperwork or custody issues which can be stressful and often require assistance with complicated paperwork. The belief that staff are known to respect patrons' privacy is imperative to fostering a sense of patrons feeling welcomed and included.

Grace Under Pressure

Though there were 13 statements that spoke to this staff attribute, 12 of them were from CPLRC, showing a particular importance to patrons of that center who spoke at length about staff's ability to demonstrate grace under pressure, or a professional and kind demeanor while experiencing stress and disrespectful behavior from patrons. This may imply that the patrons participating in these feedback groups felt that grace under pressure was an important way staff attributes manifested at CPLRC, not that the staff attribute of grace under pressure isn't important or present in the other FRCs.

Many patrons were appalled at the amount of disrespect staff received and in awe that staff are “*still the same person*”, instead of being disrespectful in turn. These patrons shared that they have seen other patrons being ungrateful, yelling, cursing, slamming doors, and acting rude, impatient, and entitled, to which staff would respond with a calm smile. Several patrons admired staff's strength of character as they would react much harsher if they were in her place, saying “*she better than me*” and “*That's what you call it, Jesus in her.*” In the same sentiment they

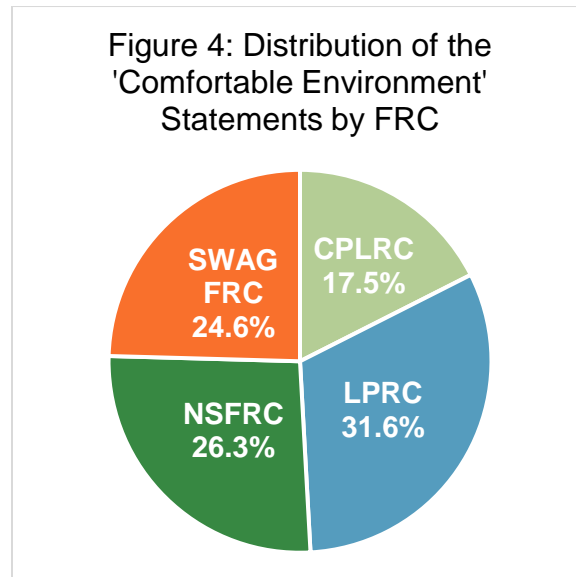
shared their understanding that the services offered are free, adding staff “*don’t have to do nothing she do for us.*”

There was one statement at another FRC reflecting staff’s ability to maintain grace under pressure. This patron explained a time that they came to a Christmas party at the FRC, and their 7-year-old son got in a physical altercation with another young boy. Instead of panicking, staff were “*too professional to freak*” as the parent explained. Once things were calm, staff asked this parent if they wanted to call the police. This patron admired that staff asked them first before calling the police for what they described as a playground fight. The staff respected the parents’ role and helped them feel good about the situation instead of escalating the situation to involve law enforcement. Their approach involves exhibiting grace under pressure and exercising discernment to determine the need for police support. For instance, in a playground fight, the staff recognized that police support was not necessary, aligning with the overall goal of minimizing law enforcement involvement unless crucial. If a crisis does arise PSF staff adhere to a formal Resource Center Crisis Response Procedure guiding staff in crisis response situations. Within this policy, staff are explicitly instructed to immediately contact law enforcement if they observe a criminal act. While acknowledging potential concerns from parents regarding interactions with law enforcement, PSF’s stance emphasizes involving them only when it is deemed necessary, ensuring a balanced and measured approach to crisis management.

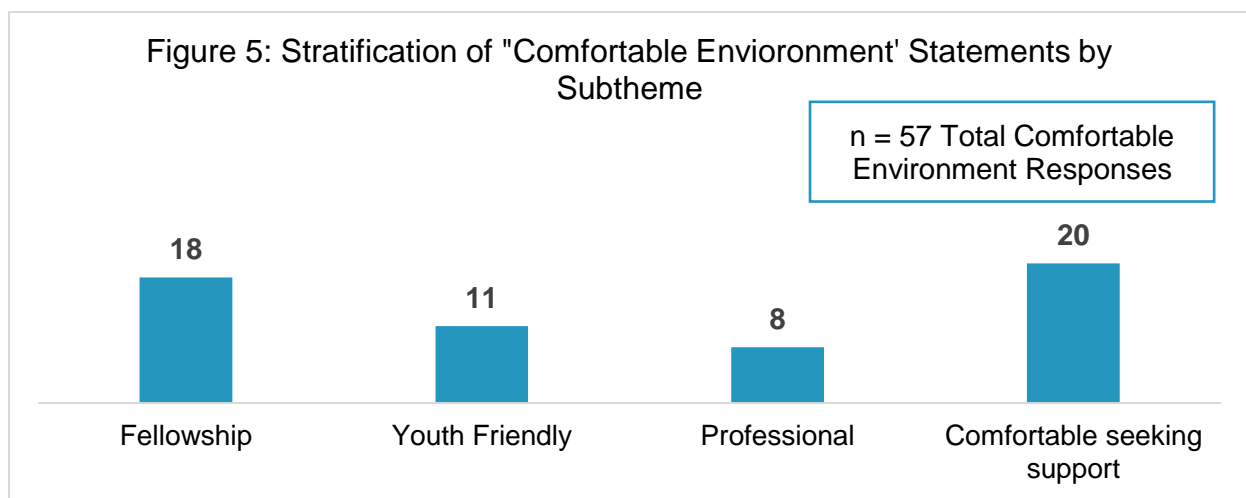
Theme Two: Comfortable Environment

The theme of comfortable environment highlights how the FRC is a place patrons can go where they are known by name, feel happy, and at ease in seeking assistance. The atmosphere at FRCs, as perceived by patrons, is often described (n = 57) as comfortable in both physical and emotional facets. The environment is clean and organized, causing patrons to feel contentment and security.

There was a total of 51 content statements associated with the theme of comfortable environment for which 17.5% (n = 10) were generated from patrons at CPLRC, 26.3% (n = 15) at NSFRC, 31.6% (n = 18) at LPRC and 24.6% (n = 14) at SWAG FRC (see Figure 4). There were 21 patrons which spoke to this theme from several FRCs: four at CPLRC, eight at NSFRC, four at LPRC and five at SWAG FRC.



Several factors contributed to a sense of comfort, identified in the subthemes: fellowship (n = 18), youth-friendly (n = 11), professionalism (n = 8), and comfort in seeking support (n = 20).



Fellowship

A comfortable environment, characterized by fellowship, implies that there were opportunities for both staff and patrons to connect, share life experiences, and face challenges together. Fellowship opportunities reportedly promote friendly association, mutual support, and camaraderie among FRC patrons and staff. Numerous patrons, totaling 18, conveyed a strong sense of fellowship with both the staff and fellow patrons during their time at the FRC. Patrons described the FRC as a welcoming space where connections were fostered, friendships were formed, and everyone felt recognized and included—akin to being part of a close-knit family. One patron shared an idea she had to increase experiences of fellowship at the FRCs through parenting classes with incentives she’s experienced in the past, and another patron readily agreed:

you create a family within that system, so when you come in every week they're like, 'hey!' and they get to know the baby, they watch the child grow. So it becomes a family away from home. And again, you're not treated as though you're less than anybody else in the room because you need help.

Though not currently offered at this patron's FRC, the suggestion itself is indicative of the patron's perception that their local FRC is well-suited for formal programming supporting fellowship and additional parenting support. Certainly, a number of patrons emphasized their comfort in interacting with one another, praising the staff for fostering positive connections through fellowship. One patron aptly likened the atmosphere to that of "*one big family*." Another patron shared "*It's a welcoming feel, like a family, like you belong. Like it's not a 'you can't get this because of this', everybody's welcome and there's no turning anyone around.*"

Numerous patrons expressed that the atmosphere, even when simply observing, radiates a sense of fellowship, making everyone feel genuinely welcomed. For example, one patron and community provider shared that they wanted to set up a remote office from the FRC because "*the family atmosphere that's here it's not like any other place, ... you go in certain places and you don't always feel that, but when you come here yeah you feel like you're home.*" Once a week this

social service provider now sets up her office remotely at the FRC to find new and support current clients.

In some cases, patrons expressed gratitude and a sense of belonging within the group because of fellowship opportunities. Others shared a general appreciation such as “*For me, it's very nice all the time.*” One patron mentioned feeling warmly welcomed to fellowship by participating in office conversations with staff while utilizing the public computers. “*You just feel like part of the group. It doesn't, don't make you feel like 'oh you're just here to use the computer...stay out of our conversation', It's not that, I don't ever get that feeling coming here.*”

Similarly, another patron shared their experience and appreciation for being known by their name:

I think the second time I came here they remembered my name and like it was just, like it threw me off, I was like oh my gosh, like I'm welcome here. Like they know who I am. And it's just like, very comforting.

When discussing the diversity of FRCs, one patron shared their experience, emphasizing that everyone is welcomed to participate in fellowship activities.

So yeah, it's very diverse... some people come here, don't speak English, they don't speak Spanish, they speak like Polish... and I meet them and it's kind of like not a church, but like non-denominational. I like that too. You don't have to come here and feel like they're going to force... 'Do you know the Lord?' You know? You can, you can find your tribe here, period. They have the LGBTQ, they always feel welcoming, period.

One way fellowship is supported at the FRCs is through monthly community dinners at SWAG FRC where patrons are offered free cooked meals and are welcomed to have a seat at the tables set up outside the FRC to get to know one another. This creates opportunities for patrons to meet and create a community with different kinds of families and children. Unfortunately, not everyone takes advantage of fellowship opportunities and just takes the food to go. One patron shared their thoughts on this community dinner, wishing that more families took advantage of the fellowshiping, not just by taking the free dinner but by staying, talking to each other, and building friendships to strengthen families, saying:

Even being in the rough neighborhood, I found out mothers coming together right with our children and strengthening our families, that's, that's what it's about, you know, they see us communicating and getting along, they got a better chance of then getting along with each other. If it's a situation we should be able to as women, mothers, fathers, we should be able to come together and say, 'yo, you know, I had a situation with you' or your child or whatever, without having to fight each other.

Several patrons expressed that long-term relationships can be created through these comfortable environments of fellowship which promote welcoming and inclusion. One patron shared how she got to know another patron in the study closely through the FRC and now they both know each other's families. Laughing she said she often sees the other patron's brother and offers him a ride. She goes on to say, *"It's like, you know, you get to be friends with everybody and so that that is even a greater support system because you get to know people and what their situation is."* In other instances, patrons shared that they have built friendships that offered them support in difficult times. For instance, one patron shared that they would like to have someone to call and talk to, such as in a case when DCF shows up unexpectedly for an inspection, someone they can call and share *"do you know what they did?"* This same patron goes on to explain the importance of having a confidant that you can say *"'Can we meet? Let's go to the park' and, and have somebody to sound it off of, you know."* Her idea is to speak to someone with real world advice such as *"'Girl when they did that to me, this is what we did. Come on let's go get some coffee.' You know, or whatever."* The FRCs are friendly and inclusive places, offering comfortable settings for people to connect and enjoy fellowship.

Youth Friendly

Youth-friendliness in this context indicates a comfortable environment where young individuals feel a sense of belonging, actively seeking to be at the FRC, and where parents trust the care provided by FRC staff to their children.

Eleven statements expressed patrons' belief that the environment is comfortable, welcoming, and inclusive, fostering a strong sense of belonging for youth. They perceive youth services as safe, supervised spaces where young individuals genuinely want to be. In these

environments, youth reportedly feel at ease, connect well with staff, and experience a sense of care, resulting in their happiness, comfort, and excitement to see friends. As one father shared, he's seen the excitement in the children who are ready to greet their friends at the FRC, "*they literally walk in, bags go down and there like 'Oh hey!'*" Emphasizing that the social connections among children are very helpful he added:

I know my youngest son, he's on a track team and one of the kids here happened to be on track team as well. And so now they're, like, close with a bond outside of just this. And I think so, it definitely is, I think it it's really good for networking.

The environment is believed to be comfortable for youth even in instances where youth receive discipline or must work through difficult homework. One patron shared appreciation for the NSFRC Homework Help program stating:

But when you come out here, you are welcome. And I love the idea like you take them outside and they have a little free time. They love it. My granddaughter love it. So she said. 'Oh, I got to go. I got to go to NorthStar. I got to go.' You know, she's, and we used to go every evening. She wanted something from Burger King or something, but now she just wants to come to NorthStar she said 'oh im gonna go ahead and get my homework done.'

The environment's youth-friendliness is also enhanced by male staff (both paid and interns), reportedly providing positive male role models in youth programming. This contributes to building comfort for youth seeking male guidance.

Professionalism

Another way that a comfortable environment manifests at FRCs is shown through 8 statements which highlight professionalism in behavior, demeanor, and cleanliness. The environment's professionalism further enhances its comfort, creating an atmosphere that patrons find reassuring. There were three statements expressing appreciation for the buildings cleanliness and order which enhance their feelings of comfort in the environment. One patron shared gratitude for personal information being kept in confidence when shared at the FRC.

The remaining four statements were patrons speaking of their experience observing staff and patrons while waiting for assistance, for instance:

When I do come, you know I'm sitting and waiting for somebody else to get their services. Someone always asking me or telling me what's going on or something is going on that day. So, it's wonderful, just keep, keep it up.

Many patrons expressed through their observations and experiences that patrons consistently receive respectful treatment. The kind of treatment reflected in this statement shows an attentiveness to patron needs that is key in professional service environments.

Comfortable Seeking Support

Lastly, patrons are said to feel comfortable when seeking both interpersonal and practical support at the FRCs. There were 20 statements which highlighted patrons' feelings of comfort in seeking support, with many sharing instances when they felt at ease requesting help for various needs and were treated with kindness. For example:

They're respectful and welcoming, and I feel like when I come on a Friday even to get groceries, I'm like, 'hi, you know yeah, yeah, how's your Mom?', you know, and that's what you want to feel. You don't want to feel as though, you don't feel embarrassed, and you don't want to feel like somebody's looking down on you. So, I don't get that when I'm here, I feel very comfortable.

Some patrons shared their positive interactions and expressed they were comfortable seeking support from staff regarding interpersonal or emotional needs they were having. In some cases, patrons have not personally sought out emotional support from staff one-on-one but felt that they could if they needed to. According to one patron, the FRCs are places to talk *"About things that was real frustrating and have felt that when I felt alone, down, low and stuff."*

Another patron shared that the welcome and kindness she received when asking for help made her feel good that she's not alone in her need.

The FRCs are seen by some patrons as places you can go to relax and clear your mind. Such was the case for a patron who takes breaks from caregiving for an elderly family member, *"I'll come over here and just be like 'pew'. Just relax for a couple of minutes. I got somebody I could talk to you know for a couple of minutes and kind of de-stress."* Taking a few moments to

retreat to a safe space and unwind can provide a significant relief for individuals shouldering the responsibilities of full-time caregiving.

Several patrons shared that they felt comfortable seeking services at the FRC because the environment was an open and accepting place that really does care. Patrons indicated that those with disabilities, young infants, expressive personalities, among others who may not be welcomed elsewhere, were welcomed, and accepted at the FRCs with open arms. As one caregiver shared *“I feel better I can relax...and nobody freaks out if he, he's breastfeeding, so nobody freaks out if he starts crying.”* Another patron shared *“Welcoming, it is welcoming. You know, people feel comfortable coming in because there's a lot of people in here that I didn't know and you know we introduced ourselves, you know, and that's very important.”* She goes on to explain that even though she has been in the community for 10 years, she didn't know a lot of people and kept to herself. Now that she's volunteering at her local FRC, she says a lot of people now know her as the *“food lady”* because she helps with food distribution.

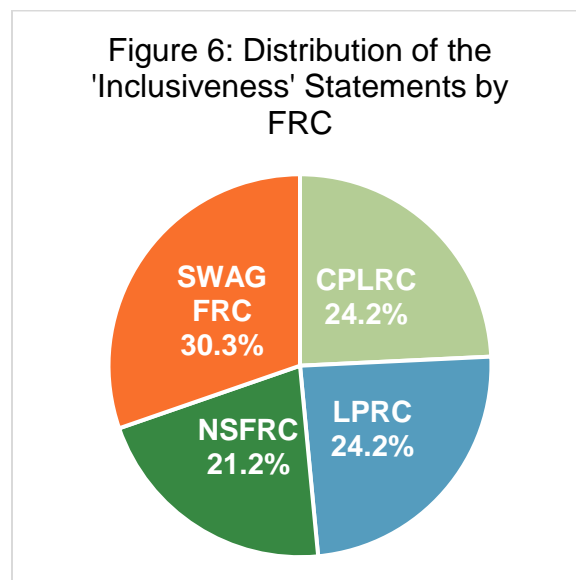
In some cases, this comfort in accessing services is a starting point to being comfortable in interacting with each other. The mutual comfort among patrons at the FRC is sometimes as valuable as the services they receive. One patron, suggested the addition of parenting classes would be of value where patrons could help each other by sharing experiences like, *“oh, I've dealt with this, let me help you with this”* or *“what's going on with you, maybe I can make a suggestion?”* She goes on to say that these kinds of interactive groups allow patrons to meet face-to-face and get to know each other. She offers these ideas from experience as she and another participating patron in the room met through the FRC and now know each other well.

Theme Three: Inclusiveness

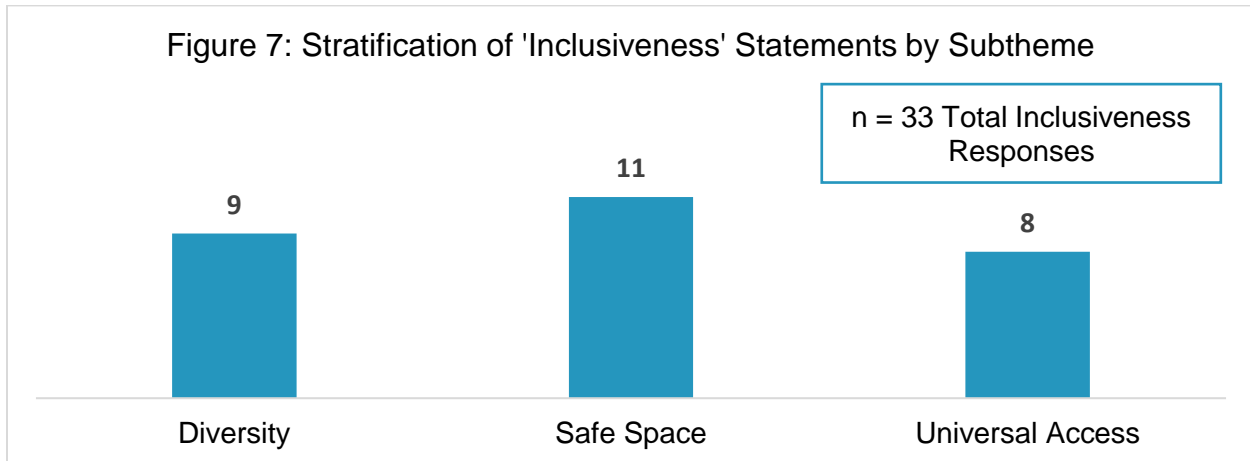
The theme of inclusiveness speaks to how well the FRCs make all people feel comfortable being themselves. Inclusiveness goes beyond simple tolerance and speaks to intentional efforts by FRCs to foster an environment in which all people are welcomed. There

were 33 statements on inclusivity from patron participants, eight (24.2%) at CPLRC, eight (24.2%) at LPRC, seven (21.2%) at NSFRC and 10 (30.3%) at SWAG FRC (see Figure 6). The number of statements for inclusiveness at the other FRCs is roughly equal. There were 14 patrons which made these statements across all FRCs with three from CPLRC, three (and one instance of multiple speakers) from NSFRC, four from LPRC and four from SWAG FRC.

Patrons noted that the FRCs equally welcome religious and non-religious people, single parents and couples, individuals of different races, multigenerational and multilingual families, LGBTQ individuals, and more, creating a safe space that is friendly and non-judgmental.



Three main factors contributed to this sense of inclusivity including the diversity exhibited (n = 9), experiencing FRCs as a safe space (n = 11), and finding that FRC services are universally accessible (n = 8) (see Figure 7).



Diversity

Numerous patrons pointed out the diversity evident at the FRCs, with nine specific statements underscoring diversity as a key marker of inclusivity. FRCs were noted for being inclusive, welcoming individuals of all backgrounds, including but not limited to race, sex, sexuality, gender, socio-economic status, religion, single parenthood or relationship-status, disabilities, linguistic diversity, and multi-generational representation.

Each FRC is strategically located in low-income areas who experienced historically limited access to family support services. One patron shared the story of Miss Joan Canton, who initiated the Southwest Advocacy Group (SWAG) before PSF partnered with them in 2012 to formalize the SWAG FRC. As this patron described, SWAG is built upon an inclusion that saw the need of families in an area that many wanted to ignore due to drug and gang involvement.

Safe Space

Many patrons (n = 11) spoke of their FRCs being a safe space where you can come as you are, no matter who you are. As one patron explains “*I mean, just from observing like when I've been here using the computer and somebody will walk in to use the computer, like they're always very helpful. It doesn't matter who walks in the door.*”

Several patrons shared that they felt safe to access services, speak their mind and be themselves while at the FRC. Two patrons shared gratitude that they were not made to feel ashamed, and another spoke of being glad to have “*people that don't make you feel guilty [when*

getting services].” A large piece of what seemed to make the FRC a safe space included four mentions of how non-judgmental it was. One volunteer with the food distribution highlights this safe space for anyone seeking services, “*Right it’s like this, I don’t care what they do, they can come here and when we get our food, we’ll still serve em... we’re gonna treat them the same way we treat all of them.*” Authentic communication is said to be a result of this safe space. As one patron put her relationship with staff, “*we talk our junk all the time*”. Having a safe space to be honest about things going on in your life leads to increased feelings of being welcomed and included.

Universal Access

The subtheme of universal access indicates that there are no reported barriers for some patrons to receive services more than others. Programming and services at the FRCs, it was held, are designed to be accessible by all people in need. There were eight statements which highlighted how accessible the services are.

One manner FRCs provide universal access is through free community activities which are held throughout the year. Some events target a specific group, such as Father’s Day events, while others are more general, such as a health fair with blood pressure screenings and COVID-19 shots. All services are free and open to the public and many patrons agreed that they felt included to participate. As one patron put it, “*anybody could come in*” and explains even in the case of language barriers, “*there’s no communication, but they still get what they need.*” From this patron’s perspective, even though it could be an asset at the FRC to have someone to translate different dialects, all patrons are still being served.

Another patron who describes themselves as having eyesight issues and struggles navigating new applications said that they found that the FRC is where they can go to get assistance. Though access may be available, there was some belief among patrons that the FRCs

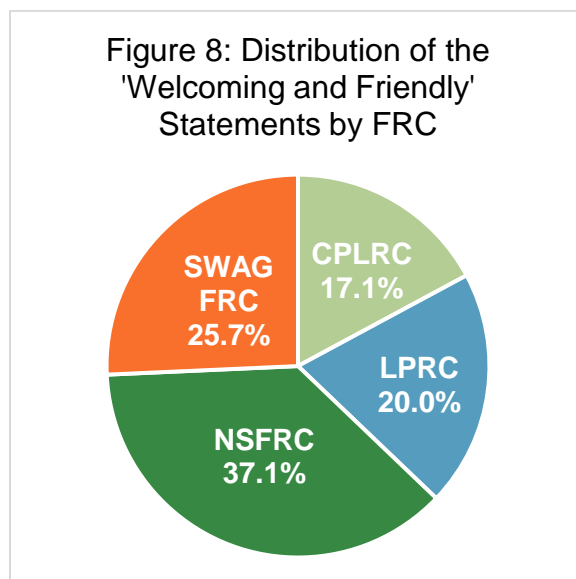
are not known and are not being taken advantage of by some families in the community. As another patron shared:

It's very welcoming I mean they just got to come in and get the help. I mean, it's very welcoming. They won't turn you around and... the community got to take advantage of it, you know.

Indeed, many patrons spoke about their belief that families that need the services are not accessing them, despite the FRCs universal access.

Theme Four: Welcoming and Friendly

There were 35 statements which identified FRCs as welcoming and friendly from across FRCS with six (17.1%) from CPLRC, seven (20%) from LPRC, 13 (37.1%) from NSFRC and nine (25.7%) from SWAG FRC. Each of these highlight the welcoming and inclusive questions asked at the beginning of this report. There were no subthemes for this category, as the statements straightforwardly express that individuals feel genuinely welcome. A total of 18 patrons contributed this theme across FRCs with five from CPLRC, seven (plus one unidentifiable speaker) from NSFRC, three from LPRC and three from SWAG FRC. Many patrons noted that this sense of welcoming and inclusion made them feel wanted, included, and an integral part of the community. Many patrons shared their perspective that FRCs are welcoming and approachable, with courteous and helpful people.



It's of note to point out that though the CPLRC had the fewest statements on the theme of welcoming and friendly (n = 6 or 17.1%) they had the most statements (n = 34 or 43%) on the theme of staff attributes. Considering that the CPLRC was most often run by only one full time staff member, whereas the NSFRC has two full time staff members, it would make sense that the welcoming and friendly attributes would be directly assigned to staff attributes at the CPLRC instead of an overall welcoming and friendly environment highlighted at the NSFRC.

One patron shared her experience of being assisted at her local FRC by the manager and part time assistant who keeps her informed saying *"they're not bashful or shy about anything you know, they'll open their mouth and volunteer and let you know about things."*

Another patron shared an experience where she felt supported and listened to. She began to become emotional, sharing how she once worked as a provider in the community but lost her job and came to an FRC for support. With tears she shared:

You know, it's hard to swallow your pride, especially with people that you've worked with when they know you on a professional level but being able to come and get food and get help and get clothes and just having them be able to encourage me. It felt good.

One patron at the NSFRC, and parishioner at Dr. Mobley's church, shared that she was welcomed to come down and volunteer at the NSFRC. When asked if patrons felt welcomed to be a part of programs and services, one patron shared:

I think definitely, I know the first time I came here was for the backpack thing that they had at the beginning of school, and I didn't feel like I wasn't invited. I felt like, come on in. It wasn't, you know, some places you do go, you feel like I shouldn't be here, people are looking at me like. But I did not feel that coming here, anytime I've come here.

Several patrons expressed comfort in interacting at the FRC and one patron shared *"it's welcoming. It's never a day I've come here and left with my head down."*

At one point the moderator asked if the patrons have felt comfortable coming in and interacting with one another at the FRC. In response, one woman shared that she personally hasn't experienced interaction with other patrons at the FRC. She was immediately invited by

another patron “*Well, you need to come around girl. We need you to come hang out.*” This patron normalized her invitation explaining that how she met the other participating patron in the room was by utilizing the FRC’s clothing closet.

Two patrons spoke of their experience with coffee time provided at their local FRC. This event, open to the public, allows for space to “*sit around and talk*” while having coffee and donuts. These two patrons provided detailed information on how to access this service to the other patrons in the feedback group. Both patrons shared that it is welcoming, and anyone can come to this event, adding that it is helpful.

The welcoming and friendly atmosphere and behaviors at the FRC create connections between patrons and staff, as well as amongst other patrons.

Summary

The patron feedback groups revealed four dominant themes across all FRCs to the questions: *Were activities and programs at FRCs welcoming and inclusive? Did they make families feel comfortable interacting with others and participating in activities?* The first of these themes involved the ways that staff attributes helped patrons feel welcomed and included. Staff attributes had the most statements, indicating the vital role of staff at the FRCs in creating and sustaining welcoming and inclusion. The theme that followed revealed the importance of a comfortable environment at the FRC. The level of ease patrons felt while at the FRCs and their comfort in asking for help was covered in this theme. Next, a theme on the FRCs inclusivity was discussed, covering how different groups are made to feel included. The fourth and final theme discussed was welcoming and friendly. While some patrons expressed that they hadn’t had certain experiences, the input from patrons continually placed the FRCs as being both welcoming and inclusive.

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