



A Comprehensive Focus Group Analysis on Managing Caregiver Stress and Dealing with the Demands of Parenting via the Family Resource Center

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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

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.

group with 75% of participants serving as caregivers of children (an additional stratum for 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 [insert 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?

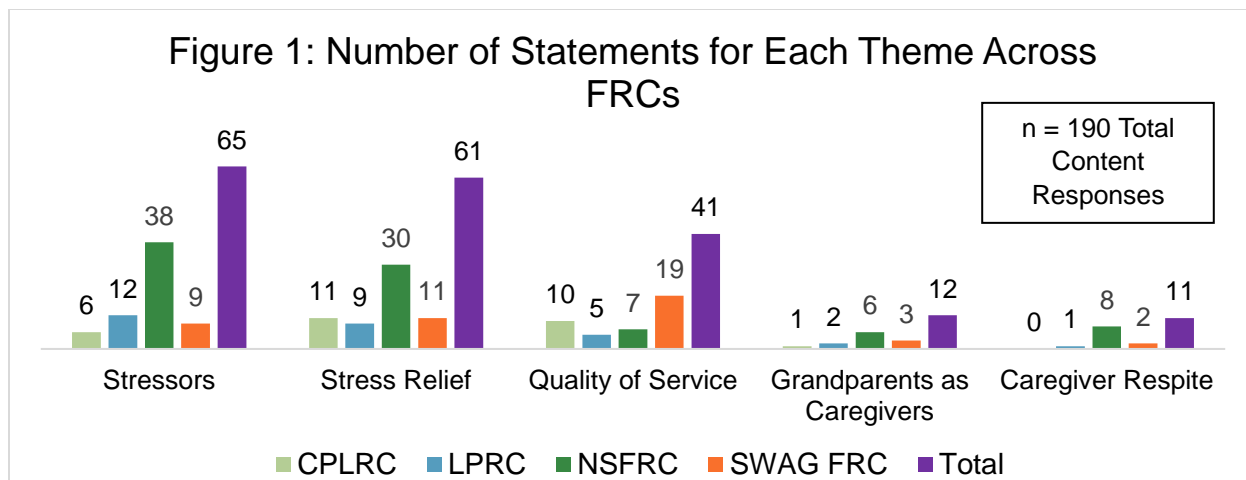
Did these services help you to better deal with the demands of parenting during stressful times?

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 [insert 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 [insert FRC name]?

How the FRCs Help Patrons Manage Caregiver Stress and Deal with the Demands of Parenting

This report is an analysis focused on how the Family Resource Centers (FRCs) help patrons manage caregiver stress and deal with the demands of parenting. Patrons were asked, *“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?”* The follow up, or probing question, was posed in cases where patrons did not mention stresses particularly associated with parenting or meeting children’s needs in the context of the main question. The moderator clarified that while this question may seem more pertinent to caregivers, individuals who are not caregivers were still encouraged to respond. After analysis of the recorded sessions, researchers identified five themes apparent across all eight feedback groups. These themes were conceptualized to focus upon stressors, stress relief, quality of service, grandparents as caregivers, and caregiver respite. A count of patron statements that apply to each theme can be found below in Figure 1. Patron statements may vary in length from a brief affirmative statement to an extended personal account. Statements may contain content that applies to multiple themes, or content that researchers agreed warranted multiple counts for a single theme.



With a total of 190 counted statements in response to this question, as shown in Figure 1, stressors had the most mentions among patrons in the feedback groups ($n = 65$, 34.2%), followed by stress relief ($n = 61$, 32.1%), quality of service ($n = 41$, 21.6%), grandparents as caregivers ($n = 12$, 6.3%), and caregiver breaks ($n = 11$, 5.8%). This process might suggest what is most salient to the FRC patrons when answering this question, as indicated by high statement counts of certain themes. Figure 1 also displays statement counts across specific FRCs, indicating particular importance for those patrons. 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. The themes of stressors, stress relief, and quality of service have been further broken down into relevant subthemes that more precisely sort patron statements. These subthemes are detailed below.

The theme of stressors ($n = 65$) involves statements from patrons that explicitly identified factors in patron's lives or in the community that contributed to elevated levels of stress for caregivers. With the highest number of statements, this further emphasizes the amount of stress placed upon caregivers in the community and the subsequent need for FRCs to assist in providing relief. The following subthemes were manifested to aid in the identification of patron

stressors: concrete support stress, caregiving stress, community stress, general stress, and monetary stress.

The second theme, stress relief (n = 61), encompasses patron comments regarding the ways in which the FRCs help alleviate stress faced by caregivers in the community. Comments aligned with this theme represented 32.1% of all responses to this question; strongly suggesting the significance and influence of the services and supports offered by the FRC in mitigating caregiver stress in the local community. The following subthemes were manifested to aid in the identification of what precisely helped reduce stress: concrete supports, programs for youth, one-on-one support, FRC atmosphere, and general affirmations of stress reduction.

The third theme, quality of service (n = 41), showcases patron sentiments that the FRCs are a sort of ‘hub’ or ‘one-stop shop’ for resources they may need, and that they provide these services and supports to the community at a higher quality level than other available social service agencies. The following subthemes were manifested to aid in the identification of the various ways patrons felt regarding the quality of FRC services: hub of resources, superior service quality, and positive staff qualities.

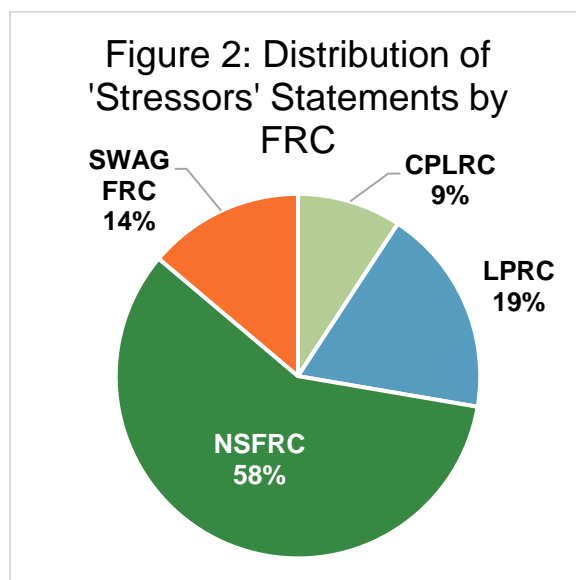
The fourth theme, grandparents as caregivers (n = 12), explores how grandparents frequently take on the responsibility of caring for grandchildren, either as a permanent arrangement for the child or as a means of providing respite to the child’s primary caregivers(s). No subthemes were identified for this theme, as the overall title of ‘*grandparents as caregivers*’ encompassed the identified statements well.

The fifth and final theme, caregiver respite (n = 11), identifies the necessity of breaks for caregivers, allowing them to rest, rejuvenate and tend to other responsibilities outside of their child(ren). Patrons highlighted instances where the FRC facilitated opportunities for caregiver

breaks, and generally spoke of the value of these moments. No subthemes were identified for this theme, as the overall title of '*caregiver breaks*' encompassed the identified statements well.

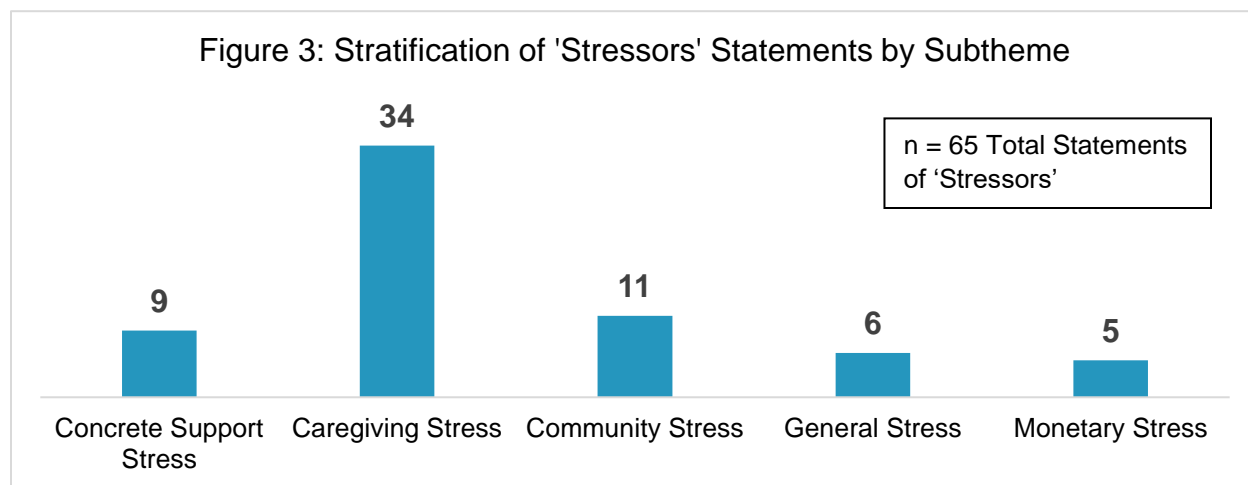
Theme One: Stressors

The theme of stressors encompasses any stressor that patrons indicated were greatly impactful to them and other caregivers in the community. There were 65 statements which reflected this theme across all FRCs. See Figure 2 for a breakdown of how often this theme was manifested at each FRC. Patrons shared a wide variety of stress-inducing factors for caregivers, and how those stressors impact them, their family, and others in the community. While not directly answering the main question of how the FRC helps caregivers manage stress, these statements provide context for what patrons are experiencing in the community, then allowing for patron sentiments on how the FRC specifically may assist with these stresses. Sharing these stressors indicates that patrons found the feedback group setting to be a safe and comfortable place to share these personal anecdotes openly and honestly.



Five subthemes were identified to more specifically represent these stressors discussed by patrons: concrete support stress (n = 9), caregiving stress (n = 33), community stress (n = 12),

general stress (n = 6), and monetary stress (n = 5). Figure 3 displays the stratification of statements across these identified subthemes.



Concrete Support Stress

Concrete support stress encompasses statements from patrons indicating difficulty acquiring specific basic or immediate needs (n = 9). These needs may vary based on the patron's individual circumstances, but could include accessing food, securing housing, obtaining clothing, and more. There were nine statements across all FRCs indicating concrete support stress. Most concrete support stressors were regarding access to food or access to printing/copying/faxing of important documents. As one patron shared:

I was stressing out because I was like if I don't get this [notary and fax] done, they're gonna shut my case down, you know, and all of my work I've done trying to get this done, it's- it's going to be gone.

Several patrons shared their difficulties accessing food consistently for themselves and for their children as *"my kids will eat you out of house and home."* One patron, who is also employed at a partnering organization, recalls overhearing another patron share their struggles with securing adequate housing, sharing:

It was a lady came here Tuesday, she said she was sleeping in her car with her kids. She got a job, so we're trying to work with her to get her childcare and housing. But she's working, she's making halfway decent money. She just doesn't have a place to stay.

Another significant concrete support sought out by patrons is access to clothing, as one patron revealed, *"I don't have no money, so I come to the clothes closet."* With each FRC providing a version of a clothing closet, this service is well utilized by patrons across centers. Other concrete supports mentioned as stressors include purchasing school supplies and getting haircuts.

Caregiving Stress

The majority of statements within the stressors theme were related to caregiving stress (n = 34). Many patrons commented on the general stress that accompanies being a caregiver, whether for a child or elderly person, as one patron stated *"Obviously, children as much as we love them, they can stress you out and have you aggravated, and wanting to beat them."* Feeling this often-overwhelming stress, many caregivers indicated the need for a break from their responsibilities, a topic fully covered in theme 5.

For individuals responsible for caring for children, more targeted stressors became apparent. Accessing necessary resources for their children was of high priority, including childcare, diapers, toys, and clothing. Caregivers frequently discussed the overwhelming stress experienced when their child needs something that they are unable to provide as they would like to. As one patron summarized, *"if the kids aren't happy, the caregiver is stressed, trust me."* Many patrons across focus groups specifically mentioned the challenges associated with having children with special needs, learning disabilities, or mental health struggles. These patrons often felt ill-equipped to handle these challenges and expressed a desire for external assistance. With many caregivers having children with ADHD, patrons connected over this struggle. As patrons

discussed this point amongst themselves, one patron shared, “*my son’s ADHD too, so I mean it’s- as a parent when you’re around it all the time, it kind of, you get stressed.*” Other caregivers of young children had extensive trouble with the modern education system and helping their child with school lessons or homework. One patron shared their personal struggles with teaching their child, saying:

... I can tell you right now because it- it’s- it’s tough. The English language is hard. It’s- it’s hard to learn it. It’s hard to teach it... and you know, and it’s hard to explain it to a 7-year-old.

One caregiver stressor that, though not brought up as often, significantly impacted patrons that did mention it, was the stress associated with taking children to places where children are disapproved of or not welcome. As they shared, “*because a lot of places you go to take care of official business or- they don’t want no part of that. Kids screaming, take the kid out. Never mind you’ve been standing in line for two hours or whatever.*” Naturally, this can have a notable impact on a caregiver, particularly those with limited or no access to childcare, who must still complete essential tasks.

While caregiving is commonly associated with children, patrons indicated instances of hardship while being a caregiver to not only children, but to elderly family members as well. One patron, caring for their 95-year-old mother with dementia, speaks of the impact on their well-being, commenting “*... I need somebody to take care of me because I take care of them, you know?*”

Community Stress

Several patrons discussed stressors present in the community that impact them and other caregivers (n = 11). One community stressor brought up by multiple patrons was “*the gun violence, the shooting and all*” that cause them to be “*so concerned about your child or*

grandchild.” Despite efforts to bring the community together and reduce gun violence, these issues persist. Gun violence as a community stressor was found to be specific to the community in Lake City, Florida, as these concerns were brought up solely by patrons from the NorthStar Family Resource Center.

Another major community stressor identified across all represented FRC’s was drugs and drug abuse. Patrons felt that there were many instances in their communities of “*kids that come from these drug-addicted parents*” and “*young mothers out here on these drugs*”, which can negatively impact local families, children, and the community at large. These remarks often accompanied the belief that this is why grandparents are assuming the caregiver role at an increased rate.

An additional prevalent community stressor is the perceived mental health crisis that patrons often felt was present in their communities. When directly asked if mental health issues were a source of stress, patrons quickly confirmed this to be the case. One patron expressed the pervasiveness of the issue in that it affects “*everybody’s community*”, locally, and as a perceived nationwide mental health crisis.

The COVID-19 pandemic was often brought up as a relevant stressor that amplified pre-existing community stressors such as drug abuse and economic instability. Patrons felt in addition to exacerbating current issues, the COVID-19 pandemic generally “*hurt a lot of people*” throughout the community. While the COVID-19 pandemic began approximately three years prior to these feedback groups, the impacts were found to be prominent and long-lasting.

General Stress

There were six statements attributed to general stress, encompassing statements from caregivers indicating their high levels of stress through general affirmations, i.e. “*yes it’s*

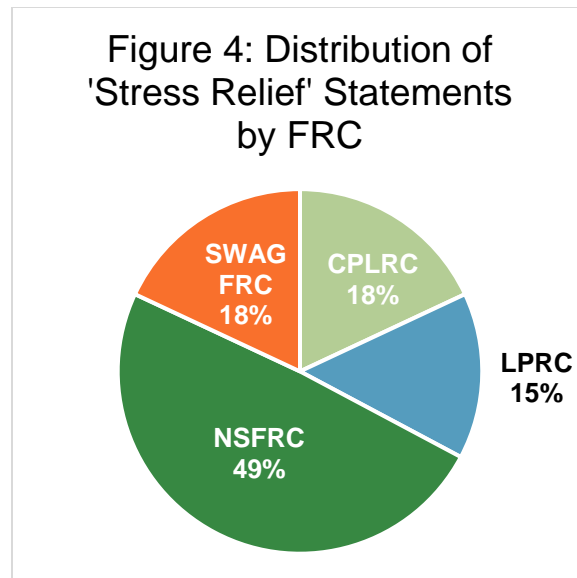
overwhelming.” While not specifically naming what is stress-inducing, these sentiments convey the perceived weight on the shoulders of these caregivers. In relation to the main question of ‘*did the services and events at the resource center help manage stress*’ these general stress statements often followed praise of the Family Resource Center’s assistance in reducing the mentioned stress through various services and supports.

Monetary Stress

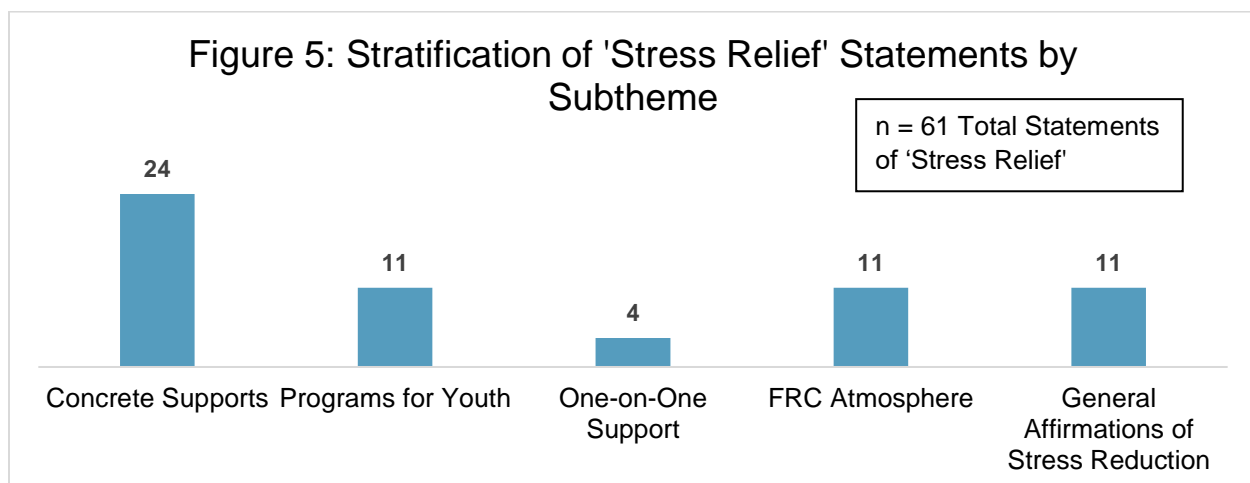
While patrons frequently mentioned specific needs that resulted in monetary stress, there were five statements expressing a general financial strain among individuals in the group, and within the community. One patron provided their view of the community at large saying, “*there are people right now that are struggling still financially for food assistance, light bills, whatever it is...*” expressing that while the exact source of the financial burden may vary, the monetary stress is a shared experience. Other comments were personal disclosures such as “*so I don’t have no money*” or “*being a single mom financially, I couldn’t afford that,*” briefly affirming that money is a problem for them.

Theme Two: Stress Relief

Despite the stressors identified by patrons in Theme 1, numerous caregivers commended their FRC for being a place that mitigates stress, whether through formal services and supports or otherwise. There were 61 statements which reflected this theme across all FRCs. See Figure 4 for a breakdown of how often this theme was manifested at each FRC.



Five subthemes were identified to more precisely represent the stress-relieving factors discussed by patrons: concrete supports (n = 24), programs for youth (n = 11), one-on-one support (n = 4), FRC atmosphere (n = 11), and general affirmations of stress reduction (n = 11). Figure 5 displays the stratification of statements across these identified subthemes. Patrons found relief through formal services offered at their FRC, such as food distributions, the clothing closet, homework help programming for youth, and one-on-one meetings with the FRC manager or family support facilitator, among others. Some patrons also found that the atmosphere of the FRC, including staff attitudes, were comforting and stress reducing themselves.



Concrete Supports

There were 24 statements indicating that various concrete supports provided by patrons' local FRC helped reduce stress levels. Concrete supports encompass those basic needs, goods, and services including food, clothing, hygiene items, faxing, and more. By being a safe place for the community to access these services, patrons don't have to worry about "*getting down to like the last little bit of food*" because the FRC services "*...come right on time. So instead of me stressing over what they gonna eat, it's already done.*" Other patrons shared the lengths they have gone to acquire their basic needs, with one patron sharing, "*I used to steal out the store and stuff for my kids until I started getting free services here, I don't have to do it no more.*" Situations such as this show the life-changing effect the services and supports at FRCs can have for local families.

Patrons not only commended the FRC for providing a multitude of resources in one location, but expressed gratitude towards FRC staff for connecting them to other relevant social service agencies if the FRC was unable to meet their needs. As summarized by one patron,

Whatever it is that you need, and having the ability to come here and get either help here or referrals to places that will help with that. And then also you know, so obviously once those needs are met, your stress is gonna go down a little.

Another patron conveyed the transformative effect of the concrete support services offered at their FRC, emphasizing that they would not have been able to access such support elsewhere:

When I was in a homeless shelter, that's where I found out about this place. And they-like this was an integral part of getting out of the homeless shelter because I was able to use the computer and apply for housing and apply it for EBT and like I was able to get back on my feet because I had access to like the internet, and a printer, and a notary and I could get everything done that I needed to get done, that I wouldn't have been able to do otherwise.

Through the provision of free computer access, printing, and notary services, this patron experienced a positive turnaround in their life. In line with the overarching objective of strengthening families and reducing child abuse and maltreatment, this patron disclosed that *“there’s a lot of people in that shelter I was in that had children that were doing the same thing,”* showing that FRC services and supports are imperative to the lives of many parents and children.

Programs for Youth

Given that caregiving stress was the most significant subtheme of stressors in Theme 1, patrons identified programs for youth (n = 11) as a notable source of stress relief for caregivers. Caregivers commended the FRCs particularly for their after-school homework help programming, in which dedicated staff and interns offer support to children of all ages, helping with homework and providing additional educational opportunities. A caregiver with two children presently in the after-school homework help program detailed their experience, sharing,

When they come here, it literally will be like [staff] will sit down with him one-on-one and read that book with him so that he could test on it the next day. That’s a- that’s a huge de-stressor for us, I can tell you right now because it- it’s- it’s tough... It takes so much off of us when they can come here, and they can get that done quickly and then we can move on to something else.

Numerous caregivers had similar concerns about their child’s homework being too challenging for them to assist with, so having the resource center staff available to bridge this gap proved to be immensely beneficial. One caregiver, who shared that their son has ADHD, expressed how much of a relief it was to have *“somebody else to come in and step in and fill that role of helping, it does alleviate the stress and not make it a battle.”* Even individuals who are not caregivers visiting the resource center have observed the significance of the after-school homework help program for caregivers in the community. As one patron shared:

I see the children are being dropped off, getting help for their homework, so sometimes that- that in itself is stress relief for certain parents because some parents, you know, educationally they cannot help their children. So they are glad to have somewhere that these children could come and get help with homework and stuff like that. So that eases some of the stress from them.

In addition to the after-school homework help program offered during the school year, most of the FRCs organize a summer education and enrichment program during the summer months. Patrons have expressed that summer programming is highly valuable and appreciated because caregivers continue to work during the summer, and often struggle to find free or low-cost summer activities for their child(ren). As one patron shared in regard to their grandchild:

There's some programs here that she can come to over the summer when I have her and it's important to have that support for these caregivers and I think it is offered... it matters and it is helping. I do see that.

One-on-One Support

One notable aspect of the FRCs is the ability to have one-on-one sessions with staff, offering a compassionate ear and support for personal and complex needs following a thorough assessment of the individual's situation. Staff members are equipped to provide direct assistance or guide patrons in connecting with the relevant social service agencies for mental healthcare, insurance, benefits, and other essential resources. Patrons often praised the FRC as a place to “unload” all that they are mentally carrying in their day-to-day lives. As one patron shared,

It's good to have somewhere to come to- where somebody can offer you just a listening ear or 'hey we got programs here, we got this here' ... you can come in here not unload but unload [laughs] but you got somewhere to go.

Patrons often sought the advice and guidance of FRC staff with their personal problems and needs, even if the FRC was not able to directly assist them with their issues. As one patron emotionally shared “*I mean I'm coming in here in tears... and so I've gotten counseled.*”

Through these experiences, patrons have found the FRC and FRC staff to be safe and trustworthy

enough to share detailed, personal stories and ask for feedback. One patron summarized their experience with this, stating:

But I was able to come in here and talk about what happened ... and get positive feedback on it... that was with the staff and I remember I was just so... I was just in a funk about it.

Although one-on-one support garnered the lowest number of relevant statements (n = 4), it is important to acknowledge that some FRCs faced understaffing during the time of the patron feedback groups, limiting this service. Consequently, specific centers were without a Family Support Coordinator, typically tasked with conducting individual meetings with patrons. In the absence of a Family Support Coordinator, the FRC manager assumes the responsibility of both one-on-one patron meetings and other managerial duties, limiting the time available to have one-on-one sessions.

FRC Atmosphere

FRC staff are dedicated to cultivating a safe and respectful environment within the FRCs, open to anyone seeking services. According to patrons, these endeavors are not unnoticed, as many caregivers express that the FRC atmosphere is inherently stress-relieving. Caregivers specifically highlighted the FRC's exceptional welcoming atmosphere for children, a quality that sets it apart from other social service agencies that may not extend the same level of warmth and consideration to families with children. One grandparent gave their detailed positive experience at their FRC, sharing,

I don't care how well I feel or whatever, if my grandkids aren't happy or if they're needy, then I'm not going to be able to relax. But if they're happy and they're- I mean even just sitting out here my grandson will be playing and [making noises] and you know people come by and go [funny noises] and he laughs. I feel better. I can relax, you know. And nobody freaks out if he starts crying... everybody's like "oh he's so cute". That makes me feel way more at ease like okay nobody's getting irritated because I have a kid, you know? Because a lot of places you go to take care of official business or- they don't want no part of that, kids screaming, take the kid out, nevermind you've been standing in line

for two hours or whatever. They don't care. And here it's a total different atmosphere. They do care.

Other patrons echoed the notion that the FRC provides a uniquely welcoming and secure environment, fostering a sense of confidence and ease for caregivers with children, which may not be as evident in other service locations. Alternatively, one caregiver found that the FRC was the perfect place to actually have a break from their child and “*destress from like mom brain*”, sharing that staff are “*always good.*”

Some patrons expressed a notable sense of relief by simply being present at the FRC, describing the experience as overall positive and empowering saying, “*it's like you still feel like overwhelmed but you feel better, or you feel capable.*” Another patron highlighted various factors that assisted in relieving immediate stress, including being able to “*sit in the AC... I'm comfortable, I can use the bathroom, I can change [grandchild]'s diaper... I feel welcome*”. The FRC staff play a crucial role in shaping this environment, fostering a sense of comfort and inclusion that patrons highly appreciate. One patron emphasized this impact, sharing, “*If I didn't feel comfortable enough to come in here and say what I had to say, I wouldn't have been able to get the help I needed.*”

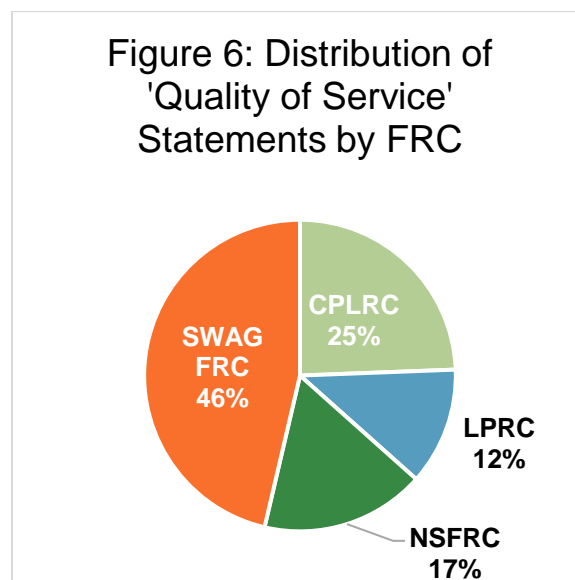
General Affirmations of Stress Reduction

The remaining statements, (n = 11), consisted of general affirmations from patrons reflecting their belief that services and supports provided by their FRC significantly alleviated stress for caregivers. Several of these affirmations were brief, using phrases like “*big time*”, “*oh yes*”, or “*I think so*”. Additionally, other affirmations were straightforward expressions of gratitude, praising the existence of the FRC. Two patrons echoed similar sentiments, sharing that “*that eliminates the stress of oh my goodness where do I go to get this*” and, “*that eliminates the stress knowing hey I can go here and it's taken care [of]*”. According to these patrons, the FRC

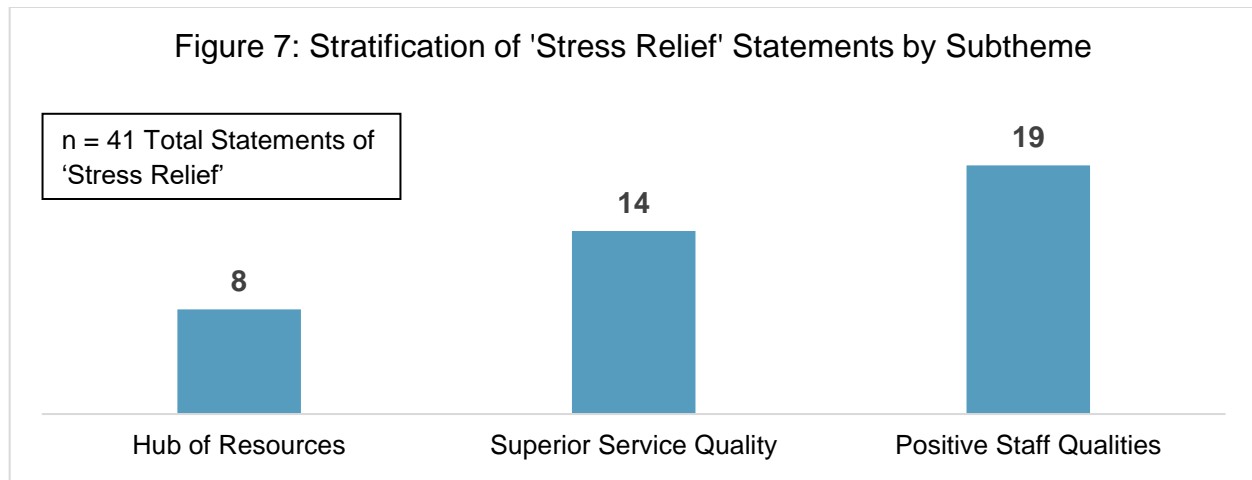
serves as a unique resource, offering a comprehensive range of services that they might not find elsewhere, particularly at no cost.

Theme Three: Quality of Service

The theme quality of service includes patron statements that delve into the factors contributing to a high-quality environment at their respective FRC. There were 41 statements which reflected this theme across all FRCs. See Figure 6 for a breakdown of how often this theme was manifested at each FRC.



Three subthemes were identified to encompass the factors contributing to making an FRC deliver services at such a high-quality: a hub of resources (n = 8), superior service quality (n = 14), and positive staff qualities (n = 19). Figure 7 displays the stratification of statements across these identified subthemes. Patrons expressed that their FRC serves as a reliable location they can go to for any need, even if the need isn't fulfilled directly by the center. Many patrons commended the FRC for delivering services and supports in a kinder and more effective way than other social service agencies utilized. Additionally, patrons noted that the FRC staff had numerous positive qualities that further enhance their experience.



Hub of Resources

There were eight statements indicating that patrons view their FRC as a centralized hub of essential resources, catering to the multifaceted needs of the local community. Patrons often shared that they appreciated everything being “*all in one place*” and could “*come there for everything*” that they need. The FRC acts as a focal point for community members to converge in, with FRCs situated in the neighborhoods most in need of services. By providing an array of resources under one roof, the process of accessing assistance is simplified, allowing more individuals and families to be helped. Through providing these resources in one location, the FRC becomes a centralized space for community, networking, and socializing with other individuals and families in need of mutual support. Patrons feel they are able “*get everything done that I needed to get done, that I wouldn't have been able to do otherwise.*” Even when the center may not be able to directly fulfill every need, patrons appreciate the FRC's role as a connector, guiding them to the appropriate resources or agencies. This dynamic hub not only consolidates essential services but also fosters a sense of community and support, creating a space where individuals feel empowered to seek assistance and enhance their overall well-being.

Superior Service Quality

There were 14 statements from patrons emphasizing their appreciation for the FRCs comparatively higher quality of service delivery when compared to other social service agencies. Patrons consistently praise the FRC for its commitment to providing support in a manner that goes beyond mere assistance. The FRC staff's approach is marked by a genuine concern for the well-being of individuals and families, fostering an atmosphere of kindness and understanding.

As one patron shared,

I know a lot of places you can go and feel extremely uncomfortable asking or getting help. And I feel like in the past few years just coming here that I feel as though- I feel respected. Where a lot of places you- I don't know if I'm answering the question right but I feel like some places you go, you don't want to feel- you don't want to feel like they're treating you, belittling you like "what do you want?" "hurry up" "get out of here". You don't want to be talked to like a child when you're asking for help, because you're still an adult.

Unlike some social service agencies, the FRC is recognized for its personalized and empathetic service delivery, creating a welcoming environment that empowers patrons. One patron emotionally shared:

It's good to have somebody that really care when you walk in the door, they don't even know you. You- you know people you feel like done gave up on you. You come in here? Somebody feel like you a queen again, you know? I like it. [laughs] Made me feel good about myself by coming here. I can do it. I'm somebody, you know?

Patrons also expressed a profound appreciation for the accessibility of FRC services, as they provide essential resources without the financial burden. Several patrons shared personal anecdotes of having to "pay out the nose" for services elsewhere yet lacking these funds to complete necessary tasks. However, the FRC was found to eliminate this stress, providing an inviting space to access free resources. Whether addressing immediate needs or offering ongoing support, the FRC staff is acknowledged for their professionalism, empathy, and dedication to enhancing the overall experience of those seeking assistance. FRC staff often check-in with

patrons in need of ongoing support, a feature valued highly by patrons who feel that when you “interact with [FRC staff], they’re always asking you “hey how did that work out?” The higher quality services and considerate approach of the FRC contribute significantly to its reputation as a trusted and valued resource within the community.

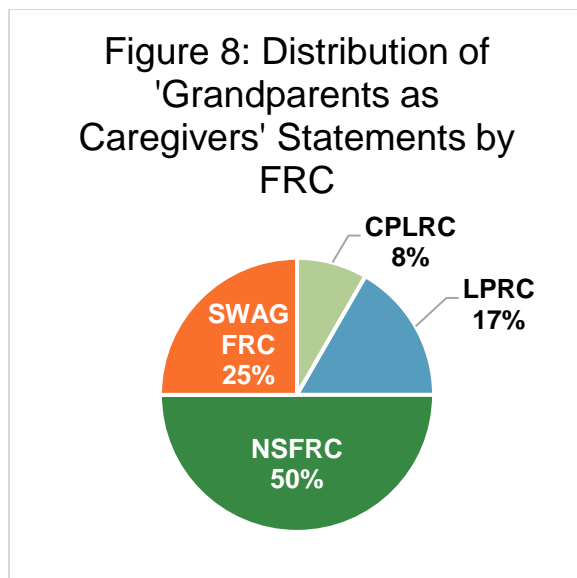
Positive Staff Qualities

There were 19 statements indicating various positive qualities of FRC staff that enhanced the experience of accessing resources. The FRC staff play a pivotal role in shaping the overall experience for patrons. Compassion, empathy, and a genuine commitment to service are qualities that resonate with individuals and families seeking assistance. Patrons feel they may come to staff with any issue, and that staff are determined to find a solution, affirming, “*they’re gonna make a way, I’m telling you.*” The positive demeanor of the staff fosters a welcoming atmosphere, while instilling a sense of trust and confidence among patrons. As one patron shared, “*Just coming in and the state of mind you be in, not knowing which way to go, and they definitely give you direction. And give you a sense of hope, you know? Lead you in the right direction.*” In an environment where individuals may be dealing with an array of challenges and stressors, the presence of approachable and understanding staff members makes the process of accepting and receiving assistance even easier. Patrons expressed that FRC staff “*don’t look down on you*” and meet patrons where they are at. Delving further into this point, 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.*” The staff’s ability to listen actively, respond with sensitivity, and provide guidance with patience significantly enhances the effectiveness of the services offered and encourages patrons to continue visiting the center as long as they need to. Patrons conveyed gratitude for the staff’s

attentiveness and inclination to go the extra mile, particularly during programming for youth. A caregiver whose child participates in the FRC's homework help program shared an instance where staff called to check "*hey is he walking home or are you coming to get him?*" This demonstrates the FRC staff's dedication to ensuring a safe and connected environment for youth in their care.

Theme Four: Grandparents as Caregivers

The theme of grandparents as caregivers delves into the unique challenges faced by grandparents who assume the caregiving role for youth within their own families. Many grandparents find themselves unexpectedly thrust into the role of primary caregiver due to various circumstances, such as the parents' struggles with issues like drug addiction, incarceration, or familial abuse. The emotional toll of navigating complex family dynamics and assuming the responsibility for a new generation can be overwhelming. Moreover, financial strain often accompanies this role, as grandparents may need to readjust their lifestyles or retirement plans to meet the needs of growing children. There were 12 statements which reflected this theme across all FRCs. See Figure 8 for stratification of this theme across FRCs. Again, no subthemes were identified for this theme, as the overall title of 'grandparents as caregivers' encompassed the identified statements well.



Regarding this question on caregiver stress, patrons took the opportunity to discuss the noticeable societal shift where grandparents are increasingly relied on as primary caregivers for the children in their family when others are unable or unwilling to fulfill this role. One patron succinctly captured this trend, and expressed the belief that the FRCs are helping this population, stating,

We are finding in times- I mean it could be some to COVID, some to the pandemic about addiction, and you know, the opioids and all of those things that are going on. We're finding that a lot more grandparents are taking care of because of the children- and- and it may not just be contributed to addictions. Because I will speak out and say it does seem like the adult generation right now it's- they're- they're not working. There's things going on. Something's going on there that's causing grandparents to be primary caregivers for a lot of children or aunts and uncles, you know, just other family members. And so I do think that having these programs helps because grandparents are tired.

Patrons cited a variety of reasons for why parents are unable to care for their own children, leading to the responsibility falling on grandparents. One patron attributed this to the pervasive issue of drug addiction, observing that, “...the mother's don't show up... we got a lot of young mothers out here on these drugs.” Another patron candidly shared

their personal struggles, and eventual success, with becoming a primary caregiving grandparent due to familial abuse, sharing,

Well, when I got my grandson and my- my granddaughter, they was on meds, heavy meds at Meridian. They're on none. My granddaughter could not read, and she could only- she only knew three alphabet letters, and she was like 10. She was like 10. And because her father then wasn't doing- then they abusing her, she was abused and all that stuff. Let me tell you I got in there to help that girl, that girl got past the FCAT¹.

As the discussion surrounding caregiver stress evolved and patrons grew more comfortable sharing their experiences, those in the role of grandparent as caregivers emotionally shared the challenges they face while navigating the unique stressors associated with raising children. Some patrons revealed that their caregiving responsibilities extended beyond tending to the needs of the younger generation; they also found themselves under the added pressure of caring for elderly loved ones. As one caregiver divulged,

I could use a caregiver, you know? Because I take care of my- my granddaughter's in there. So, I have her after school, well this is summer now so, i'm probably going to have her in the summer. And because of my situation, I had to stop working. So, I had my mom full time and she's 95, dealing with the beginning stages of dementia, and some days it's rough on me.

One patron specifically commended the FRCs and their dedicated staff for serving as empathetic listeners during moments of stress, as well as being a trusted haven where children could engage in activities and events, providing all caregivers with an opportunity to take a much-needed break. This patron shared,

It's important to have that support for these caregivers and I think it is offered. And it is shown even if it is just a listening ear or if it is taking the kids for an

¹ The Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test, or the FCAT, was the standardized test used in the primary and secondary public schools of Florida. It is no longer in use; beginning in the spring of 2015 the state transitioned to the Florida Standards Assessment (FSA) which were discontinued in 2022.

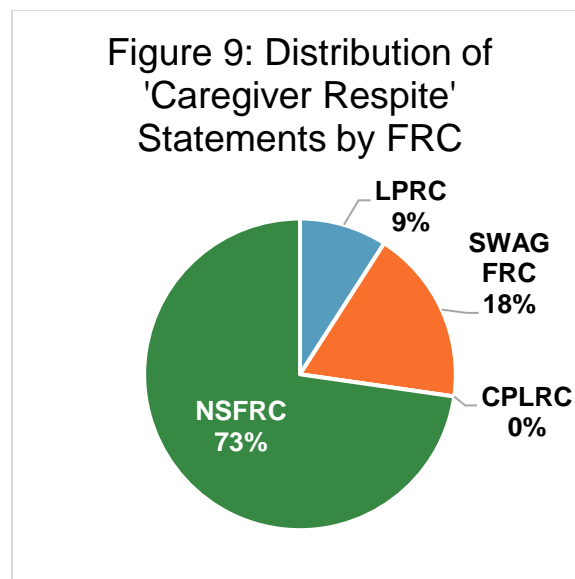
afternoon to do a couple hours worth of activities. It matters and it is helping. I do see that.

Amidst the challenges grandparents often endure, FRCs play a crucial role by offering tailored support to grandparents as primary caregivers. The FRCs provide a vital network, addressing not only immediate needs like childcare but also offering emotional support, educational resources, and connections to relevant social services.

Theme Five: Caregiver Respite

The theme of caregiver respite covers patron statements indicating the importance of times of respite for caregivers to participate in self-care, grocery shopping, socializing, and other essential tasks, without the added concern for their child(ren)'s wellbeing.

There were 11 statements which reflected this theme across all FRCs. See Figure 9 for stratification of this theme across FRCs. No subthemes were identified for this theme, as the overall title of 'caregiver breaks' encompassed the identified statements well.



Patrons discussed the importance of caregiver breaks, emphasizing their crucial role in giving caregivers the opportunity for personal time and respite from the demanding responsibilities of parenting. This collective sentiment suggests that these breaks serve as not just

moments of relaxation to recharge, but by extension contribute to a more balanced and harmonious family dynamic. As one patron shared:

Even having that opportunity to, you know, come here, talk about it. Or also having programs for them [youth] to be at, it will allow those caregivers the time that they may need to run an errand, or maybe it is just to take that hour for themselves. Or, you know, prepare dinner or whatever the case is. I do think that it's helping with this lowering the stress of your primary needs as well as, you know, some of the, the stresses of just being a caregiver.

This patron highlighted multiple ways by which the FRCs support caregivers; by being empathetic, listening about their stressors and frustrations, and by providing programs to engage youth so that caregivers may take a much-needed break. Some caregivers specifically praised the FRCs for their youth homework help programming, stating; *“When they come here, it literally will be like [staff] will sit down with him one on one... That's a ... huge de-stressor for us, I can tell you right now because it, it's, it's tough.”*

Caregivers often emphasized that just coming into their FRC, even without accessing formal services, provided a valuable respite from their otherwise demanding days. Patrons viewed the FRC as a space where they could unwind and recharge amidst the challenges of their daily responsibilities. One patron noted that they'd *“been leaving the house and coming to SWAG in the morning just so I can get relief.”* Similarly, another patron shared they *“always come up here in the daytime like when I need to destress from like mom brain.”* According to these patrons, the FRCs can serve as more than just service hubs; they can act as essential sanctuaries of relief and respite, providing caregivers with a space to retreat as needed.

Some patrons shared instances in which those in caregiver roles are not caring for children, but rather for sick or elderly family members or friends. Despite this distinction, the need for a break or time away remains unchanged. One patron highlighted the significance of caregiver breaks regardless of the specific caregiving responsibilities involved,

Just imagine you have a sick person, and you are the- the sole caregiver. You know, but you, you are giving care to somebody, but you also have your own personal needs. You have your own personal life, so sometimes you just need a break.

Summary

This report analyzed how the Family Resource Centers (FRCs) have assisted patrons in managing caregiver stress and dealing with the demands of parenting. After eight patron feedback groups and analysis of 190 statements identified for this question, five themes became apparent across patrons and FRCs. With the highest number of statements, the theme of stressors comprises statements from patrons explicitly naming factors in their lives and in the community that heightened stress for caregivers. The second theme, stress relief, encapsulates patron statements detailing how their FRC has greatly assisted them in alleviating stress. The third theme, quality of service, highlights patron sentiments that the FRC acts as a one-stop shop for resources, offering services and supports at a higher quality than other agencies. Grandparents as caregivers explores the occurrence of grandparents assuming the sole responsibility of caring for youth in their family. The fifth and final theme identified, caregiver breaks, underscores the importance of times of respite for caregivers to allow them time to tend to other responsibilities. Overall, this report emphasizes the essential role of the FRCs in supporting caregivers in a variety of ways to alleviate stress.

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