



A Comprehensive Focus Group Analysis on Social and Emotional Development of Youth 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), 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 [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?

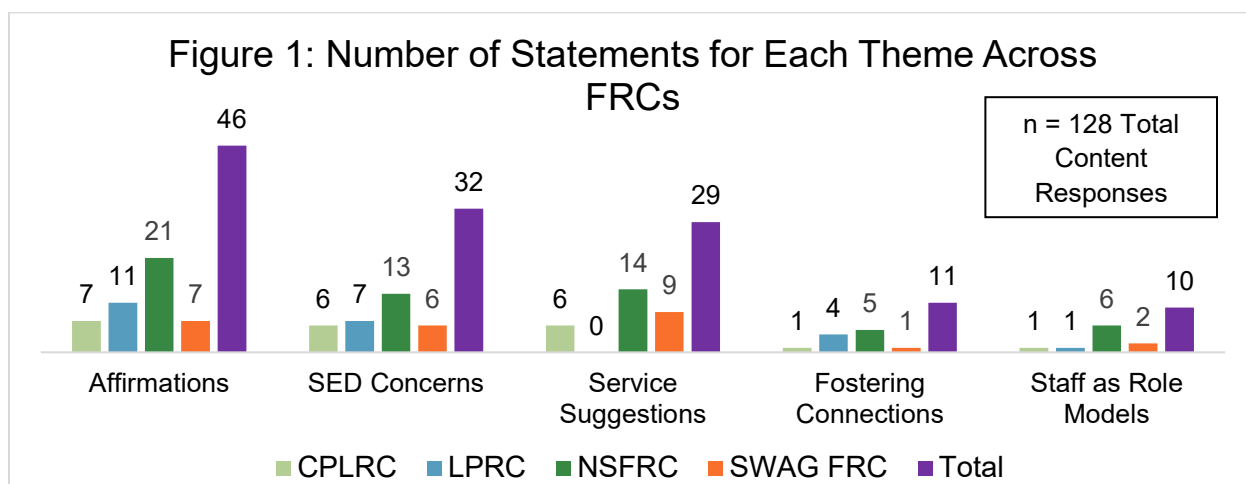
Did these services help you to better deal with the demands of parenting during stressful times?

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 [insert FRC name]?

How the FRCs Help Support the Social and Emotional Development of Youth

This report is an analysis focused on how the Family Resource Centers (FRCs) help support social and emotional development of youth that visit or participate in events and youth programming. Patrons across eight feedback groups were asked, “*Do program activities support your children’s social and emotional development?*” After analysis of the recorded sessions, researchers identified five themes apparent across all eight groups. These themes are affirmations, social-emotional development (SED) concerns, fostering connections, service and support suggestions, and staff as role models. 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 128 total counted statements in response to this question, as shown in Figure 1, affirmations had the most mentions among patrons in the feedback groups (n = 46, 35.9%),

followed by SED concerns (n = 32, 25%), service suggestions (n = 29, 22.7%), fostering connections (n = 11, 8.6%), and staff as role models (n = 10, 7.8%). This process revealed what may be salient to the FRC patrons when answering this question, 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 SED concerns, and service suggestions have been further broken down into relevant subthemes that more precisely sort patron statements. These subthemes are detailed below.

The first theme, affirmations (n = 46), included statements from patrons and caregivers affirming that the program activities at their FRC support and promote the social-emotional development of youth in the community. With the highest number of statements, this highlights the perceived positive impact of FRC events and programming on youth's social and emotional development. No subthemes were developed for this theme as the title of 'affirmations' aptly captured the wide variety of patron statements identified in this theme.

The second theme, SED concerns (n = 32), involves patron statements revealing their beliefs on why youth may have poor social and emotional development skills, and statements sharing what they deemed as indicators of lower levels of social-emotional development. The following subthemes were formed to better represent the individual outcomes or reasonings identified by patrons; youth maladaptive behaviors, familial traits, community activities, undiagnosed disabilities, and educational challenges, as well as three statements which were deemed outliers to these categories.

The third theme, service suggestions (n = 29), covers patron statements that include suggested alterations to current youth programming, or ideas for potential services in the future. The following subthemes were formed to easily identify the suggestions presented by patrons; counseling, peer-to-peer learning and mentoring, and expansion of youth activities, as well as four statements which were deemed outliers to these categories.

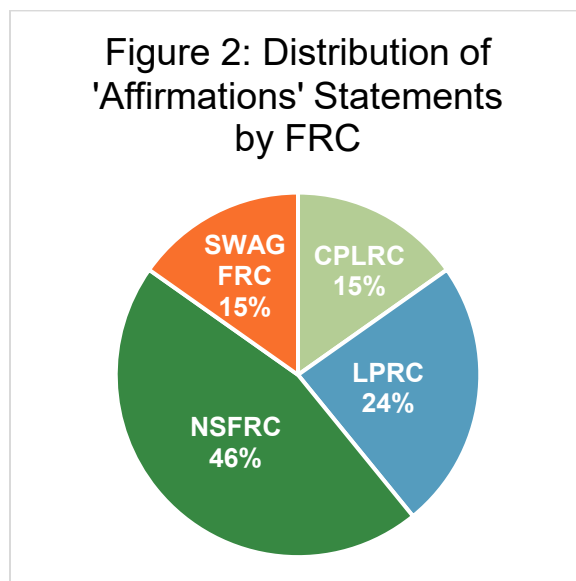
The fourth theme, fostering connections (n = 11), includes patron statements emphasizing the importance of the family resource centers in providing a space where young people may connect with one another and develop a sense of community. No subthemes were developed for this theme as the title ‘fostering connections’ aptly summarized this collection of patron statements.

The fifth and final theme, staff as role models (n = 10), encompasses patron statements indicating positive qualities of FRC staff that suggest they are strong role models for youth and caregivers alike. These qualities serve to enhance the social-emotional wellbeing of children and show caregivers effective and appropriate parenting strategies. No subthemes were developed for this theme as the title ‘staff as role models’ aptly summarized this collection of patron statements.

Theme One: Affirmations

The theme of affirmations encompasses patron statements indicating an agreement with the statement that FRC services, programs, and events support the social and emotional development of local youth. Oftentimes patrons gave personal anecdotes regarding children in their care to support the efficacy of the FRC to enhance social-emotional development. These 46 comments came from 18 patrons across the four FRCs. See Figure 2 for a breakdown of how often this theme was manifested at each FRC. Statements related to this theme were associated with five CPLRC patrons, seven NSFRC patrons (with one additional multiple participant

response), three LPRC patrons, and three SWAG FRC patrons. Of these 18 patrons, 14 of them identified as a caregiver for a child under 18, suggesting they would have more experiential knowledge regarding the impact of youth programs on children.



Occasionally, patrons indicated agreement to the notion that programs and services enhance social-emotional development of youth through short statements of affirmation such as “yes, definitely,” “absolutely,” “I feel like they really do,” “It’s been great, great, great,” or “yeah they do.” While these brief statements provide little contextual understanding regarding how the FRC promotes these factors, they seem to suggest that patrons that visit each FRC had a positive experience in regard to their child’s social-emotional development. More often, however, patrons agreed by providing specific examples of programming or service opportunities to support their experience, for example:

“My daughter is actually a Girl Scout, she just joined last- two weeks ago ... she likes it.”

“She loved it [homework help] ... because she was struggling with math ... they taught her the steps immediately.”

“Yeah, like Girl Scouts and stuff like that, track, all that stuff. So that’s good.”

“I would say yeah, because don’t they do like tutoring and stuff here as well? So, with kids who like actin up and stuff at school and stuff like they can get that extra one-on-one help to help better them with whatever they lackin on, so I think I would say, you know, it could be very supportive.”

“My granddaughter needed help and they supported me by assisting her with her homework, that was the biggest thing ... and that support is just awesome.”

“I mean I think it definitely helped him build his confidence up, which definitely helps with the mental and the social. Because when you feel good about what you’re doing...”

“[Their son] met a whole, you know, all the kids that went there over the summer and he built some connections, you know, with some of the kids. And he found out they go to this school and that school you know. Like I say he have lifelong friendships with ‘em. And so, he was kind of shy like getting to know people and that kind of brought him out of his shell.”

“They do offer Girl Scouts meetings here and that’s huge because Girl Scouts opens up a whole new world for girls ... Girl Scouts taught her [her daughter] so much. I mean, you learn how to interact with other kids, you learn teamwork, you learn to work together.”

“My son loved that, capoeira, the karate. I think that was awesome to have. He used to didn’t even want to go to baseball practice to come back here to the SWAG to do that.”

As indicated through patron comments and stories, programs and services provided at PSF’s network of FRCs such as Girl Scouts, Strong Kids Summer Programming, homework help, capoeira, and more, can greatly bolster the social and emotional development of youth. Patrons often indicated that youth are given the opportunity to make social connections with other children through FRC programming, further enhancing their development often even outside of the FRC, a topic fully covered in theme four of this report.

In some instances, patrons indicated the benefit of the FRC to children’s social and emotional development was provided indirectly through supportive, meaningful interactions with FRC staff. Particularly at the NSFRC, patrons indicated a specific appreciation for the FRC manager for a variety of reasons including his ability to be a male role model for youth, his longstanding involvement in the local community, and patience with youth served. As shared by

one caregiver, “*They work one-on-one with these kids sometimes ... or [FRC Manager] working with the kids, that’s that male figure, positive male figure working with the boys and girls because some of them don’t have that.*” Another patron indicated her familiarity with the FRC manager’s longstanding involvement in the community, contributing to the comfortability and family-oriented environment of the NSFRC. As this patron shared:

I’ve known the [NSFRC Manager]’s family forever. I knew the dad, mom, whatever, the whole entire family. 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 ... We used to go every evening she wanted something from Burger King or something, but now she just wants to come to NorthStar.

Another caregiver indicated their appreciation for the NSFRC manager’s ability to connect with youth and counsel them. As they shared:

[FRC Manager] would counsel [son] sometimes, he comes for summer camp. He pull him to the side, you know, follow up and ask him how you doing today, you know, kind of get him talking and get him comfortable with him. So, he come in he like “where’s [FRC Manager] at?” You know, like, you know want to talk to him if he has any kind of issues at school or anything.

The ability for FRC staff to cultivate a supportive, open environment for youth to participate, learn, and flourish was not specific to the NSFRC, but was found throughout each of the participating FRCs. At the LPRC, one patron discussed the care and positive interactions they observed between youth and the FRC staff, which they found to be conducive to a child’s positive development. As this caregiver noted:

[Other social service agencies] 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. They don’t care. And here it’s a total different atmosphere. They do care.

This caregiver went on to share:

They’re very interactive with people. They’re very interactive with the kids, even when the kids are in a bad mood, which happens to all kids, you know. They didn’t get enough sleep, they’re hungry, or whatever. Yeah, and there’s always toys out there for them to

play with and little books, and you know, pamphlets of all kinds of information in the community where you go to get help.

The friendly, kind, and caring atmosphere created at the FRCs may help influence youth and develop their social-emotional skills, while giving caregivers peace of mind that their children are taken care of and paid attention to while at an FRC. In addition to being kind and friendly, FRC staff have been known to redirect and discipline youth involved in FRC programming and events in a positive and appropriate way when needed. As one patron observed:

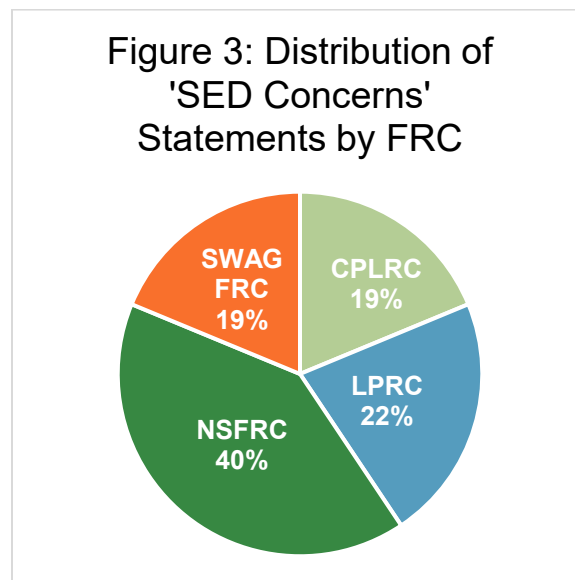
... Some of them sometimes misbehave and the ladies have to, you know, try to get them straight, you know. So, all of that, they are being trained how to be- to behave, you know, how to be respectful, I've seen that. Yeah, and when they misbehave, you know... then the ladies try their best, you know, like to get them back in line, try to discipline them, get them back.

Similar positive sentiments emerged from patrons at the SWAG FRC. A child of one SWAG patron participated in one iteration of the patron feedback groups and was able to give a unique perspective into a child's experience at the FRC. They shared, "*... Like most people when they work, they don't really listen to the kids as much as they listen to the adults, but here they do.*" By giving youth a voice in FRC services, events, and daily functioning, they are given a sense of agency and confidence they may not receive elsewhere, contributing to positive social-emotional development. They went on to share that while kids typically go straight to their parents to ask questions, at SWAG FRC kids "*can ask the staff, they don't need to ask anybody else,*" attesting to the approachability and comfortability youth find when engaging with staff.

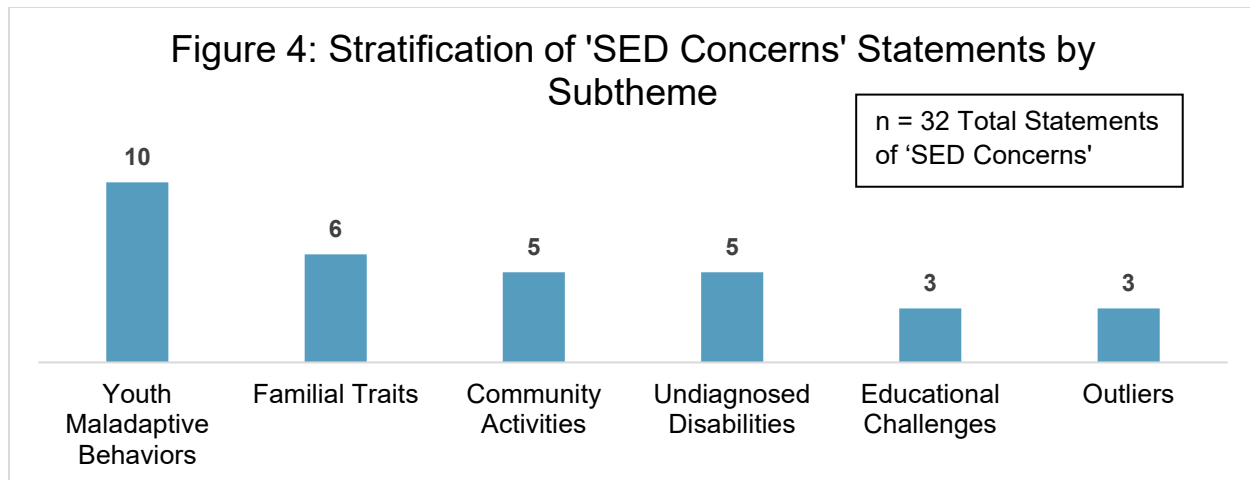
Theme Two: SED Concerns

The theme of SED concerns encompasses patron explanations for why youth in the community may not be reaching a higher level of social-emotional development, and what patrons perceived as signs of lower levels of social-emotional development in youth. There were

32 statements which reflected this theme across all FRCs. See Figure 3 for a breakdown of how often this theme was manifested at each FRC. Statements from this theme were associated with four CPLRC patrons, six NSFRC patrons, three LPRC patrons, and four SWAG FRC patrons. While not directly answering the main question of how the FRC supports the social-emotional development of youth, these responses provide context for how patrons view the social-emotional development of youth in the community currently, and what can be done to elevate it.



Five subthemes were identified to more specifically represent the factors identified that impede social-emotional development or are signals of impeded social-emotional development: youth maladaptive behaviors ($n = 10$), familial traits ($n = 6$), community activities ($n = 5$), undiagnosed disabilities ($n = 5$), and educational challenges ($n = 3$). Three outlying comments were also identified but did not fit into these general themes. Figure 4 displays the stratification of statements across these identified subthemes.



Youth Maladaptive Behaviors

The subtheme of youth maladaptive behaviors (n = 10) encompasses statements from patrons indicating instances of youth's behaviors that were indicative of low social-emotional development. These behaviors manifest in various ways, one in which is disrespecting others. Patrons brought up a variety of personal instances in which they witnessed a child being disrespectful to adults, their peers, or even their own caretakers. As one patron shared of their experience with their nephew, *"My nephew had disrespect [staff] in my face before."* Another patron shared their frustrations with youth in the community saying they're *"terrorizer[s]"* and have *"bad behavior problems."* Continuing this thought, this patron noted that when local children come to their 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 that most of them can't get at home, you know? They don't get that, they come here and run to these women.

Noting that youth in the community often behave better at their FRC, the importance of positive staff qualities and building relationships with those in the community, including youth, to promote healthier ways of functioning is highlighted. One patron tried to understand why youth may be acting in these ways, expressing that *"They'll act out and throw a fit and say hurtful things and be mean when really they're just feeling something that they're not able to put*

into words.” Another example of this behavior comes in the form of bullying that often occurs among youth. Patrons occasionally discussed the often-cyclical pattern bullying has, as those who have been bullied can often turn into bullies. Along with this discussion, patrons at the LPRC discussed how it is possible that feelings of unworthiness and feeling lesser than someone else may surface for youth who access FRC resources. They shared that, *“kids take that to heart”* and that they can *“get embarrassed real easy”* or *“bullied”* for needing to access select concrete supports, such as used clothes rather than their family being financially able to purchase new items. These feelings can lead to other undesired maladaptive behaviors if not addressed. Fortunately, patrons at the LPRC report that having a space like the FRC has been helpful to show to youth that *“there’s other people that have needs too, and it’s okay. There’s other kids that come here to get clean clothes too and it’s okay.”*

Familial Traits

Patrons often tried to understand the reasons behind select youth having social-emotional development issues. One reason explored included a focus on genetics and the extent to which negative behaviors/traits of the immediate family or caregivers of the child are being passed on. There were six statements from patrons naming familial traits as a potential reason behind youth behaviors. One patron from the CPLRC shared examples of the familial influence on children, explaining *“if you see a child who may have anger issues, sometimes, maybe more than sometimes, there’s an adult in the home that has anger issues, and they’re just mirroring the adult.”* Continuing:

Maybe one of the parents is throwing something across the house when they get frustrated because the bill is higher and they don’t know how they going to pay it, you know. And then the kid goes to school and throw something across the table at school because that’s what they know.

They go on to explain that familial issues can be passed on from generation to generation, noting that *“there’s some really deep-rooted things going on.”* Another patron at the NSFRC had similar sentiments regarding youth being exposed to negative attention-seeking behaviors, *“usually a child’s acting out because they’re trying to tell you something. And it’s not always that something bads going on. It could be that they’re just wanting attention or something like that.”* These discussions sparked the idea of having professionals to teach one-on-one or a class focused on sharing emotions, coping mechanisms, and stress reduction strategies to help youth and families generally cope with stressors in a better way, breaking those generational patterns.

Community Activities

Across patron feedback groups, patrons shared their wishes that there were more fun, safe, and free community activities present in the community for youth to enjoy, and ideally keep them out of trouble. Patrons asserted there were programs for younger children but more limited options for middle-school age children and teenagers. As summarized by one NSFRC patron, *“once they’re 12 years old- after 12, 13, and up then they’ve aged out of some of the programs. But we know 13, 14, 15, they need something to do to stay not in trouble.”* A patron at the SWAG FRC shared a similar hope in that children could:

knock on the door and say, “hey is it movie night today or is it book story time or arts and crafts?” I think it will get a lot of them from being outside, running around by themselves when they can be there doing something productive.

While the Family Resource Centers do have events open to families and children of all ages, more targeted and frequent events seem to be desired by patrons to keep children from getting involved in dangerous or harmful activities around the community. Within this discussion at the LPRC, one patron summarized the effects of having targeted children’s programming or events:

I think having the resources for children to be happy for a while and parents to be able to interact does reduce stress so that domestic violence goes down, communication, loving

interaction between children and parents goes up. And so DCF is not involved in that respect at least.

Undiagnosed Disabilities

Throughout the patron feedback groups, many patrons disclosed that they are caregivers to a child with a diagnosed or suspected learning or developmental disability that greatly influences their behaviors, work ethic, focus, and relationships. These patrons often praised their family resource center for assisting them with their child as they encounter many challenges due to their child's diagnosis. One NSFRC patron shared that their son has ADHD and that resource center staff are patient with him *"because he has these... this way of 'i'm going to do it my way,' so when someone helping him that'll take the stress off of me, because if they have more patience than I do that is better."* Some patrons posed that other children in the community may be struggling with these disabilities but are going unnoticed and unaddressed. As one NSFRC patron speculated, *"Some of these three-year-olds may be acting out because they have ADHD."* Having the resources and desire to address undiagnosed developmental disabilities in youth in the community could help them better navigate the world and their own emotions, lowering what could be perceived as bad behavior. Another patron continued this discussion pointing towards the lack of knowledge on the caregiver's side for children lacking a proper diagnosis, saying:

Some people take that even speaking to them about that [diagnoses] it makes them defensive. That it's the route of that communication and education. Just because your child has this diagnosis doesn't mean they're going to be a failure; doesn't mean they're never going to be able to be take care of themselves or function healthfully.

This patron's sentiment encourages caregivers to seek diagnoses as it is not a sign of failure, but rather a potential steppingstone towards success.

Educational Challenges

There were three statements within the context of this question that referenced the educational challenges faced by youth and their caregivers trying to teach them, and how the

FRC may assist caregivers in this difficult task. Particularly, this relates to the idea that caregivers often struggle to understand modern schoolwork themselves, let alone understanding how to teach it to their child, leading to concerns of the child's overall learning and development.

As one NSFRC patron shared:

he's trying to figure out, that doesn't make sense to me, and you know and it's hard to explain it to a 7-year-old. So, it's literally like that. 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 and focus on something else so... that's huge.

Another patron in this group continued the conversation and summarized the presenting issue well, sharing:

They're learning totally different in school than how I learned. I was a sub down in the schools in Port Saint Lucie for several years and I had to relearn math, adding, and subtracting from how I learned, to teach it the way they're teaching it now. So as a parent, if I wasn't in that situation where I had to relearn it if my son came home and he's explaining to me "well no to add these two- like 42 and 32 together you need to break the tens and the ones" I'm like no! "Then you add them together" why are you breaking it apart to add it together? But then he would get frustrated because I'm telling him no, he's wrong, but he's not wrong. I'm not wrong either, but he's learning a different way. But as a parent in a totally different generation, they're teaching different techniques.

Both of these caregivers praised their FRC for providing the assistance they need through the homework help program, minimizing the alternative stressful situations that come about between children and their families. The third statement within this subtheme is a non-caregiver patron from LPRC that commented on the helpfulness of the resource center's homework help programming, saying:

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 whom can do stuff like that. So that eases some of the stress from them.

Outliers

There were three statements mentioned in the context of this question related to factors signifying or thought to cause lower social-emotional development in youth not easily embodied

by other identified themes, and thus considered outliers. The first outlier addressed youth social media use and its impacts on their social-emotional development. As mentioned by a patron at the CPLRC, “...he loves TikTok. Every time I turn around, I’m looking, I open up my phone and that’s where he’s on. I don’t even have it.” This statement demonstrates the pervasiveness of social media in the lives of youth in the modern age, potentially leading to stunted social-emotional development if used inappropriately. The second outlier focused on the social-emotional impacts that the COVID-19 pandemic and virtual school had, and continue to have, on children. This SWAG FRC patron shared:

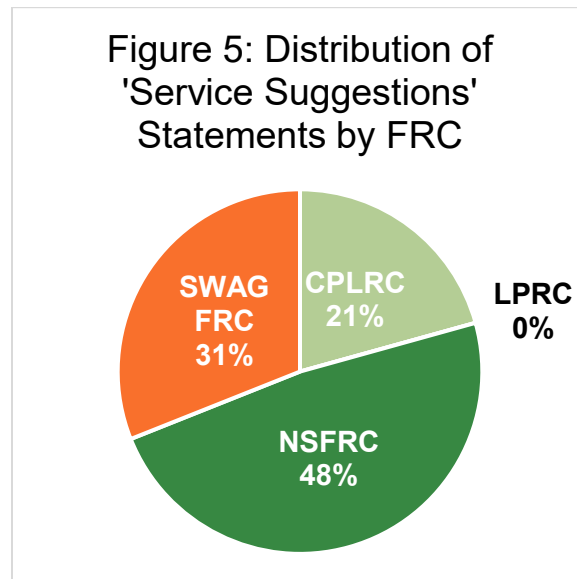
I feel sorry for the parents that were not able to stay at home and assist with these fragile minds like I’m in elementary school brain. You know how hard it was to keep that kid on task in his own home where he could just get up and go in his room and play with his toys and not be bothered with digital academy? I was thankful that I was able to be there to be... I work hand in hand with my teacher. It was the best thing ever, but the social skills were going down because it was just him and me basically interacting.

This patron’s experience highlights the potential negative impacts of COVID-19 and virtual school on children’s development, as they may not get the proper socialization and learning opportunities with their peers as they would have otherwise. The third outlier was from a patron’s son that joined the patron feedback group. He shared that at most places, they don’t listen to children’s wants or needs, stifling their voice and potentially their development. He noted, however, that at the SWAG FRC they do listen to children and their ideas, setting it apart from other community organizations.

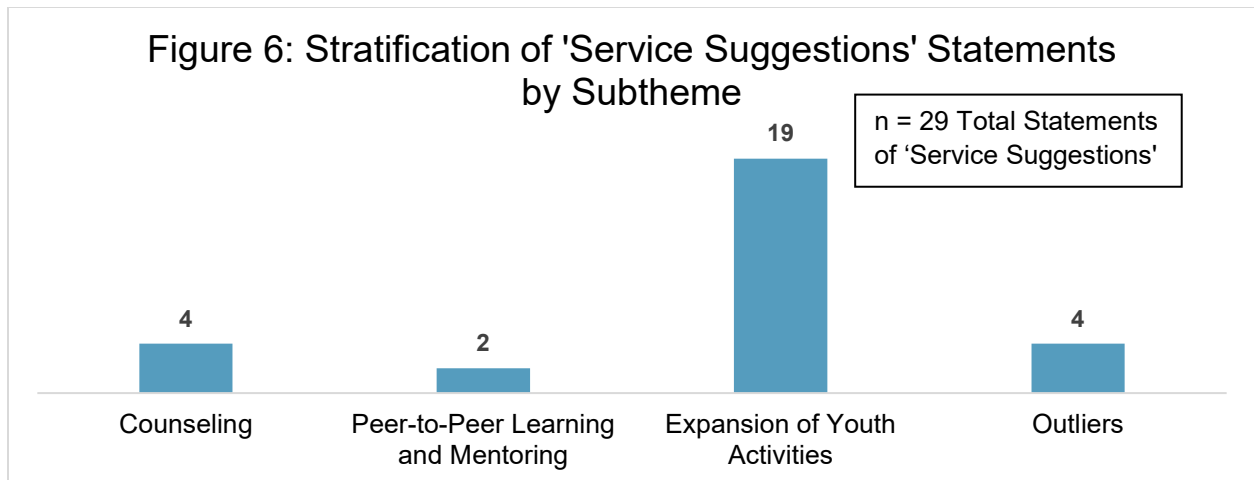
Theme Three: Service Suggestions

The theme of service suggestions encompasses patron suggestions on ways to improve current youth services or new ideas to improve the social-emotional development of youth. There were 29 statements which reflected this theme across all FRCs. See Figure 5 for a breakdown of how often this theme was manifested at each FRC. Statements from this theme were associated

with five CPLRC patrons, four NSFRC patrons (with an additional multiple participant response), and three SWAG FRC patrons.



Three subthemes were identified to represent new service ideas or improvements to current services targeting social-emotional development: counseling (n = 4), peer-to-peer learning and mentoring (n = 2), and expansion of youth activities (n = 19). Additionally, there were four statements mentioning ideas or suggestions that were only brought up by one patron each. These outliers cover topics including connecting with local churches, expanding outreach efforts, partnering with children's schools, and interpreting children's art. Figure 6 displays the stratification of statements across these identified subthemes.



Counseling

Two patrons, one from the NSFRC and one from the CPLRC, brought up the need for the Family Resource Centers to provide some sort of counseling or therapy for youth and adults alike. Many individuals and families visiting the Family Resource Centers face a variety of multifaceted issues, which could be assisted through a listening ear that can help build resilience and effective coping mechanisms. As the CPLRC patron shared:

So, I do believe that counseling and coping, learning how to cope or manage your emotions would be important for the parents as well as the children. Or at least, like you said, kind of have a one-on-one conversation, find out where the problem is. I feel like coping, especially in impoverished areas where stress has been high for a long time in their families.

As this patron indicates, stress and poor coping skills may be passed on in families for generations, necessitating an opportunity for parents and children to unlearn these patterns to develop healthier, more sustainable skills and techniques. This patron goes on to share both a personal anecdote and a fictitious example to further speak to this point,

I was going through a stressful time in my life, and I didn't want to take any anger out on my daughter ... I didn't want to make her feel, you know, yell at her and then feel guilty later and feel like I shouldn't have did that. So, I would go in the bathroom, turn the water on, turn the shower on, turn the vent on [makes running water noise] just to kind of drown out and regroup. And that looked like a really good idea until one day my daughter did the same thing. She got upset and she went in the bathroom and closed the door, and it didn't look good to me anymore. It did not look like a good idea. I don't want

her managing her emotions that way, you know, perception is everything ... And a lot of times, that's what's going on in the household, but more- maybe in a more extreme way, maybe one of the parents is throwing something across the house when they get frustrated because the bill is high and they don't know how they're going to pay it, you know. And then the kid goes to school and throws something across the table at school because that's what they know. So, if we come up with a resource, to get back on what I think might help, is to focus on reducing stress and how to cope with stress.

With this, it can be equally important for both youth and their caregiver to participate in some sort of evidence-based therapeutic techniques so that caregivers may correct behaviors that may be impacting their children, while children can learn healthier stress relief skills, correct negative thought patterns, and utilize effective calming techniques in the face of challenges and adversity. Similarly, the patron at NSFRC also felt that youth would benefit from therapy or counseling of some sort, suggesting a professional could come to *“talk about feelings and things like that, come and mentor the kids a little bit in those areas”* rather than children holding on to negative emotions and acting out in other ways. A child acting out, as described by this NSFRC patron, could be *“because they're trying to tell you something ... and its not always that something bads going on, it could be that they're just wanting attention or something like that.”* Viewing poor behaviors of youth through this lens can allow youth to obtain the proper assistance they need, and as suggested by these patrons, a counselor at the FRCs would be the assistance needed.

Peer-to-Peer Learning and Mentoring

There were two statements across feedback groups, one from an NSFRC patron and another from a CPLRC patron, indicating the need for peer-to-peer learning or mentoring amongst younger generations at the Family Resource Centers. Currently, each FRC hosts an afterschool homework help program that allows eligible elementary, middle, and high school students to get assistance with their homework and participate in enrichment activities. In addition to the dedicated staff, volunteers, and interns that support the functioning of these

programs, one patron at CPLRC suggests allowing the youth themselves to teach each other in areas they are stronger in. As they shared,

I'm not sure if there's just a tutor who's helping the child with their homework or if there's "hey, this child does a whole lot better in this reading, maybe I'll just pair you up with Jonathan over here and maybe Jonathan can help you out" you know? And then "you might need help in reading, but you might be really good at math so let- have you pair up with Alyssa over here so you can help her with that" and that builds a confidence ... Yeah, I believe in that, I believe in that kind of peer- I call it like a peer influence, you know? I believe in pairing a stronger child with maybe a higher level with a not-so-high level child.

As noted by the patron, allowing youth to teach their own strengths can benefit all children involved, as youth that are weaker in one area can get much needed assistance, the youth stronger in certain areas build up their confidence in that subject and in teaching others, and both children build a social connection with various social-emotional benefits. A patron at the NSFRC has a similar sentiment, however involving recruiting local college students to *"partner with them at certain times, even during the day or whatever they can come, you know to help out."* By having older adolescents mentor younger children, they have closer life experiences and can relate more to the children, often enhancing the bond and effectiveness of the mentorship.

Expansion of Youth Activities

There were 19 statements with service suggestions specifically towards expansion of current youth activities and programming, given by two CPLRC patrons, three NSFRC patrons, and three SWAG FRC patrons. Patrons across the NSFRC and SWAG FRC both discussed the desire for a variety of youth programming and activities to be introduced at the FRC, often through the existing homework help programs. Ideas for future youth activities in the homework help program at the Family Resource Centers include the following:

"Break out, okay, you got kitchen time here, got sewing time here, and our homework crowd there."

“You got outdoor time there, you got time for the kindergarten time, for the first grade, because their needs are different from the needs of the 7th grader.”

“They could use it [movie night] here, yep.”

“... Like a culinary for the kids, you know ... if there’s no place to offer it, you know they turn and look at other stuff to do ... Teaching them at a young age how to operate a computer, how to work it. I think just different programs for the kids would be excellent.”

“You know crochet? Show these kids, maybe what they do you put and sell over there very cheap.”

“If you add a couple more activities here throughout the week, they won’t be out here running around. It’ll be ‘hey, I’m- you going to go to the SWAG because they have music back there today,’ ‘they got a program to help us find how to get a job’ or you know, just different activities for them.”

While the FRCs do offer many enrichment activities to youth in their homework help programs, patrons provided many new ideas that could give youth a variety of skills and knowledge sets to further enhance their social-emotional development. Patrons gave suggestions for these activities, as well as indicated a need for different physical spaces to conduct these activities in. As one patron shared, *“Like everybody’s in the same room or in that one over there, and you breaking them out into different space. It needs to be expanded.”* While additional space would be beneficial for the FRCs, this type of expansion requires resources that, while currently not available, could be the focus of future initiatives facilitated via alternative funding sources.

In addition to suggestions on specific activities and program opportunities, patrons indicated a need to provide more youth programming for older and younger youth that often fall outside of the bounds of many programs. As one NSFRC patron shared, *“... After 12-years-old, 13 and up, then they’ve aged out of some of the programs.”* On the other end, one patron with younger children indicated a need for more programs for youth aged five or younger. When their older child is able to participate in programs at the FRC, they have to tell their younger child,

“*Hey, you’re too young for their program,*” which can cause issues of its own. They go on to explain:

...he’s not understanding like “but they have books that I can read in there that’s age appropriate, and my brother goes in there and watch movies,” you know, “we could watch a movie together” or they might have an event for the kids and he’s like “why can’t I go?” I think it would be beneficial for those kids that’s out here running around at four- or five-year-olds.

As noted by both patrons, youth that are not able to participate in FRC activities may run around outside unsupervised and get into trouble.

The final service support or suggestion for expansion of youth programs, given by the CPLRC feedback group patrons, was the desire for summer programming including meals during the summer. While patrons discussed this as a future suggestion, during the time the CPLRC was operational, they did have a summer program for youth, oftentimes with snacks throughout. Other centers also offer meals during summer programming for youth signed up.

Outliers

There were four outlying service suggestions from patrons that were only mentioned by one patron across feedback groups. These suggestions cover topics including connecting with local churches, expanding outreach efforts, partnering with children’s schools, and interpreting children’s art. As these ideas were only discussed by one patron, they may not reflect the true needs of the local community or needs across FRCs.

The first outlier came from a patron at the NSFRC, suggesting the center coordinate with local churches to promote the NSFRCs services. They suggested that the center “... *need to send a flyer or something to them so they can have it on their bulletin board.*” In the Lake City community where the NSFRC is located, the church community is very prominent and can be a great asset to have as partners to the Family Resource Center.

The second outlier also came from a patron at the NSFRC, recommending that outreach efforts are expanded because they, “*know for a fact there are more families out there in the- you know, because you have your surrounding area, but there’s others in Columbia County that definitely could use the services that may not know about it.*” They note the benefits of community members building social networks through the Family Resource Center and believe more opportunities for outreach would allow for more individuals and families to engage and create community relationships in this way.

The third outlier, coming from another NSFRC patron, is a suggestion for the FRC to form a close connection with a child’s school and parent, so that, “*if they’re having a problem with social or mental issues or whatever, they may share that and we can get that back to the school and let them know that this child, you know, is having a problem.*” If FRC staff notice anything concerning about children that participate in youth programming, partnering with the child’s school and parents will allow an ease of communication and united front to tackle issues with.

The final outlier, given by a CPLRC patron, is regarding examining art made by youth participating in youth programming. This patron felt that:

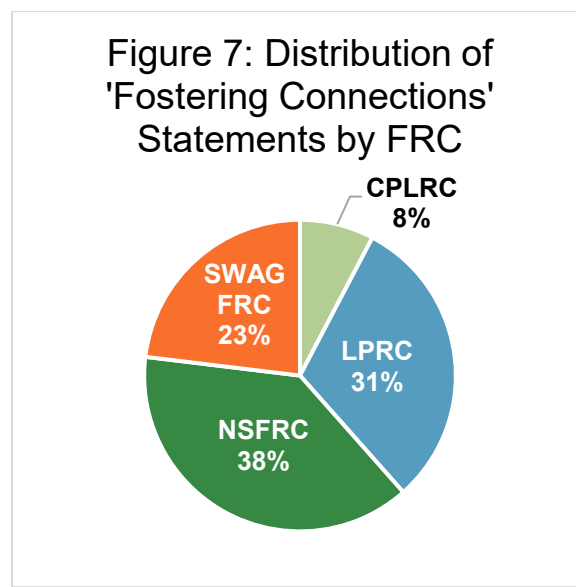
a kid’s artwork can tell you a whole lot about that child, you know? Is it drawing a lot about guns? Why are they drawing guns, you know? Is it something in the home? Is it something they’re looking at on television or something? How can I redirect this child to something more positive, you know?

By having a trained individual, (a community partner, intern, or volunteer), who examines children’s artwork, one could potentially get insights into the child’s internal emotional state or things going on in their personal life that are relevant to their development.

Theme Four: Fostering Connections

The theme of fostering connections encompasses patron statements indicating that youth make positive connections with other children through programs offered by the FRCs, enhancing their social-emotional development. There were 11 statements which reflected this theme across all FRCs. See Figure 7 for a breakdown of how often this theme was manifested at each FRC.

Statements from this theme were associated with two CPLRC patrons, four NSFRC patrons, two LPRC patrons, and one SWAG FRC patron. No subthemes were identified for this theme, as the title of ‘fostering connections’ aptly described the statements from patrons regarding youth participation in FRC programming.



The FRCs provide a variety of youth programming throughout the year, however, their afterschool homework help programs and youth summer programs are staples that are utilized and praised widely by patrons. During the school year, youth in elementary, middle, and high school can come to their FRC Mondays through Thursdays and receive assistance with their homework. One NSFRC patron shared that their son was able to foster a connection with another child in the homework help program that also shared outside interests, saying:

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, it definitely is. I think it's really good for networking.

In addition to the homework assistance, the FRC provides enrichment programming for youth to participate in, including Girl Scouts, a healthy cooking program, a capoeira class, and more. As one patron shared regarding the Girl Scouts enrichment specifically:

Girl Scouts opens up a whole new world for girls ... You learn how to interact with other kids, you learn teamwork, you learn to work together. Also, you know it gives them the opportunity to engage in stuff that they wouldn't otherwise.

Another patron at LPRC shared that after participation in children's programming, her daughter would come back saying, "Mommy, I made new friends, mommy I made new friends!" showing the excitement youth can have while participating in these programs. When school is out, some FRCs provide a summer program that includes enrichment activities and other learning opportunities. Even patrons without children in these youth programs have noted the benefits just from observing the youth in these programs. As one NSFRC patron shared regarding the summer programming,

So now the kids are coming here for summer, almost like summer camp but its summer enrichment... So, I'm watching them and they- at one point they were sitting around the table, everybody was on their phones and then one of the kids said, "okay that's enough phones let's do this let's do that." They were doing different things and then I seen the kids going over there or getting books and stuff and reading and just enjoying each other's time. Nobody was arguing, nobody was fighting, nothing like that. They were just enjoying each other's time. So, this is beneficial, definitely.

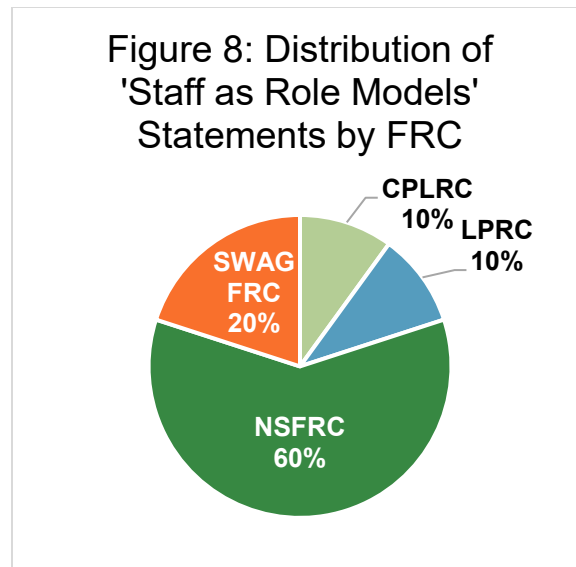
Youth have also been able to foster connections between one another during other adult-centered events. As mentioned by one LPRC patron, their daughter reconnected with an old friend whose parent attended the same event. The patron goes on to share:

She reconnected with somebody that she used to go to school with from me coming to one of these business classes and it's like "oh mommy that's my friend, I haven't seen her in a while", and me and the mom was in here ... our kids was already friends before they even came here and they reconnected.

In this instance, because the children were friends previously, the parents were able to make their own new connection and exchange information, leading to a potential source of support in the future. Even when talking about the importance of connections between youth generally, patrons often praised their FRC for ensuring that opportunities for connection occurs. One SWAG FRC patron who was able to stay home with their child during the COVID-19 pandemic lamented the difficulties faced and the lack of proper socialization that occurred because of the pandemic. They went on to share, *“so he needed to come around and be around his peers and SWAG was here. So, they have a group now just starting for boys and I think that’s awesome.”* Oftentimes, youth make these connections during FRC events and programming, however friendships and connections may extend outside of the FRC, providing lasting and more stable connections and support systems for youth and caregivers alike to rely on.

Theme Five: Staff as Role Models

The theme of staff as role models includes patron statements praising a quality held by staff that make them a great role model for youth and families alike in terms of social interactions and positive emotional development techniques. These staff qualities varied, including traits such as kindness, patience, problem solving, discipline, loving, and looking out for the youth in their programs. The way staff interact with individuals, families, and youth promotes positive development and encourages positive parenting, often through modeling appropriate techniques.



There were 10 statements which reflected this theme across all FRCs. See Figure 8 for a breakdown of how often this theme was manifested at each FRC. Statements related to this theme were associated with two CPLRC patrons, four NSFRC patrons, one LPRC patron, and two SWAG FRC patrons. No subthemes were identified for this theme, as the title of ‘staff as role models’ aptly described the statements from patrons regarding staff’s positive qualities.

Staff interactions with youth benefit their social-emotional development by guiding youth in a positive, appropriate way, while modeling these behaviors for caregivers and other patrons to internalize and use in their own lives. One trait staff at multiple centers embodied is kindness and patience in their service delivery, even in the face of those who may be disrespectful. As one CPLRC patron shared, *“my nephew had disrespect [staff] in my face before and I had to get on him, like, and she still sit there and said I still love you.”* A patron at the SWAG FRC further emphasized this point sharing, *“[staff] show them [youth with bad behavior problems] love that most of them can’t get at home.”* Staff simultaneously show this kind side to the children while appropriately disciplining them when needed. As mentioned by the same SWAG FRC patron, she continued to share:

These volunteers and these women who work here, they're the ones doing the parenting and giving them direction and telling them right from wrong ... when you see them [youth] in here, you would think they came from church, cause these ladies don't play that.

Disciplining youth can be difficult to do when the children are not your own, however patrons maintain that staff discipline youth in a loving way that attempts to teach them proper anger or stress management techniques to elevate the social-emotional development of youth. As one LPRC patron shared:

Some of them [homework help youth] sometimes misbehave and the ladies have to, you know, try to get them straight you know. So, all of that, they are being trained how to behave, you know, how to be respectful, I've seen that.

Having patrons, and caregivers specifically, view the methods used to redirect and discipline children can allow staff to become a sort of role model on what parenting strategies are effective and appropriate even when outside of the center. Patrons at the NSFRC had similar feedback, however, with the NSFRC manager being a male, this affords the youth in that community a male role model that other resource centers do not have. With many children lacking a male figure in their life, patrons praised NSFRC for inadvertently providing this male role model. Patrons from the NSFRC groups went on to share that the kids always seem comfortable and excited to participate in homework help programming. Patrons see the ways the NSFRC manager interacts with the children, sharing that he's "*good at relating to children*" and:

if they're having a problem with social or mental issues or whatever, they might share that [with FRC manager] and then we can get that back to the school and let them know that this child is you know having a problem with conflict resolution.

Another patron goes on to say, "*It was like you could tell they felt comfortable, like it wasn't like they walked in the door and they're like "where do I go?", was like they were happy to be here, they're excited.*" By having the children feel comfortable sharing their thoughts and emotions with staff, this can help develop their social-emotional well-being by problem-solving

with staff, then allowing staff to share relevant information with the child's parents or school community to better assist them.

Summary

This report analyzed how the Family Resource Centers (FRCs) help support social and emotional development of youth that visit or participate in events and youth programming. After eight patron feedback groups and analysis of 128 statements identified for this question, five themes became apparent across patrons and FRCs. With the highest number of statements, the theme of affirmations encompasses general affirmative statements from patrons that FRC services, programming, and events promote the positive social-emotional development of youth. The second theme of SED concerns includes patron statements citing reasons why youth could have poor social and emotional development skills, and statements suggesting potential indicators of lower levels of social-emotional development. The third theme of service suggestions covers patron recommended alterations to current youth programming, or ideas for potential services in the future. The fourth theme of fostering connections includes patron statements emphasizing the importance of young people connecting with one another and how the FRCs may facilitate this. The fifth and final theme of staff as role models encompasses patron statements sharing positive qualities of FRC staff that make them strong role models for youth and caregivers alike. These qualities serve to enhance the social-emotional wellbeing of children and show caregivers effective and appropriate parenting strategies. Overall, this report emphasizes the important and potentially greatly impactful role of the FRCs in promoting youth's social-emotional development.

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