



## **Strengthening Partnerships: A Comprehensive Review of Advisory Council Engagement at NorthStar Family Resource Center**

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**This report was funded by the Children’s Bureau; Administration on Children, Youth, and Families; Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, under grant # 90CA1868. The contents of this report are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of the Children’s Bureau.**

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## **Introduction**

In 2019, Partnership for Strong Families' (PSF) received the notice of award for the Community Collaborations to Strengthen and Preserve Families Grant to evaluate and expand the established Family Resource Center (FRC) network. At this time, the agency was aware that Columbia County, the area directly north of Alachua County where PSF is headquartered, had a need for an increased level of intervention to combat the rising number of shelters and child maltreatments. The decision to establish a Family Resource Center came after extensive discussions about the need and community readiness for such support among community members, partners, outside agencies, and PSF staff (Partnership for Strong Families, 2019; WCJB, 2021). This initiative led to the successful application for a grant from the Children's Bureau, which provided partial funding for the project. With the resources available due to the grant award, it was determined that a new FRC would be developed in the city of Lake City, Florida, the largest populated city located in Columbia County.

One of the first implementation steps to ensure the FRC's responsiveness to the community's strengths and needs was to establish a Resource Center Advisory Council (RCAC) to assist in identifying the activities and services that would be provided at the Family Resource Center.

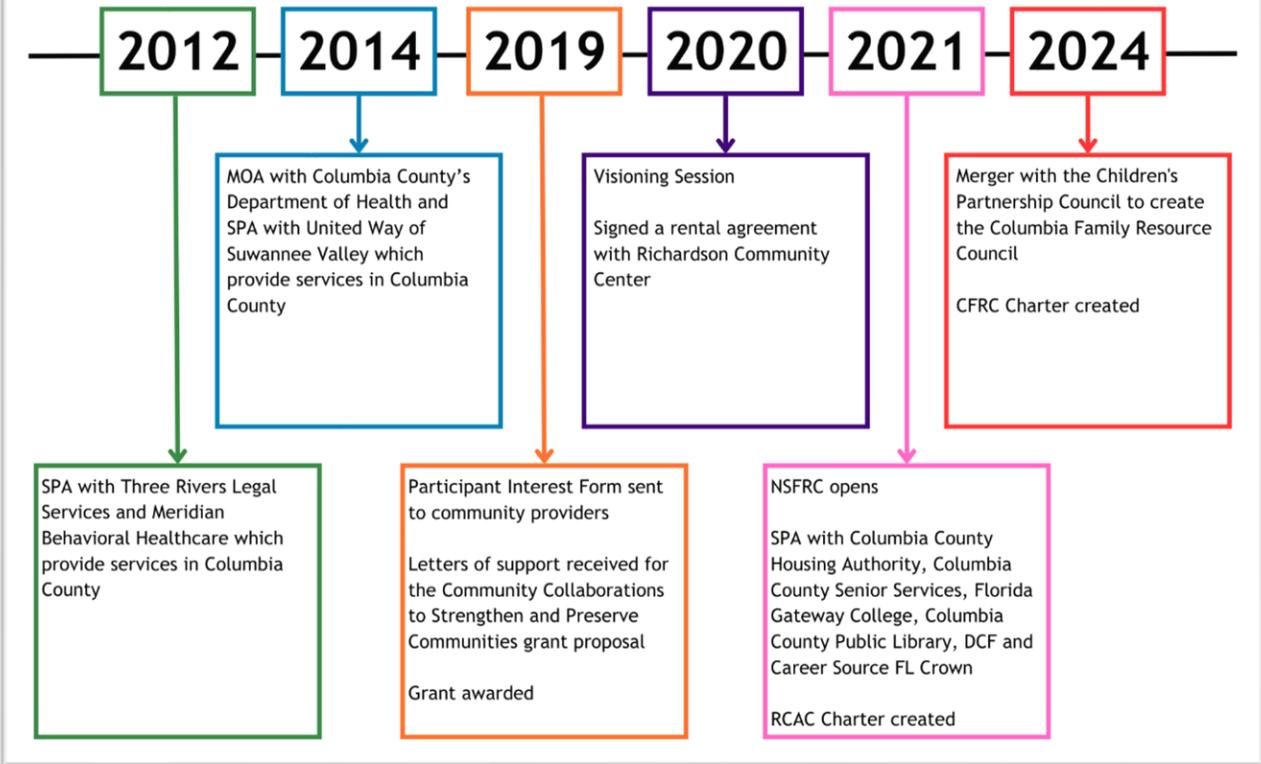
### ***Early Engagement***

PSF was already established in Columbia County as an agency providing case management services for families involved with the formal child welfare system. In 2012, Service Provision Agreements (SPAs) with Three Rivers Legal Services and Meridian Behavioral Healthcare were established to cover Columbia County. Again, in 2014, a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Columbia County Department of Health and a

SPA with the United Way of Suwannee Valley were also put in place to support the citizens of Columbia County. Building upon these formal relationships, PSF worked to identify additional community collaborators. Combined, these collaborators were members of the Lake City community familiar with the needs of the community and representing a variety of social service agencies, including representation from the public child welfare agency (PSF), the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) provider (Florida Department of Children and Families), the legal (Three Rivers Legal Services) and judiciary community, caregivers with lived child welfare experience, the public health community (Florida Department of Health – Columbia County), and public housing partners (Columbia County Housing Authority), as well as other community members and partners providing direct services to children and families in the area.

A Participant Interest Form (**Appendix A**) was developed and sent in late 2019 to the different agencies and individuals identified by PSF, to solicit participation in the RCAC; and by the end of 2019, 22 completed applications had been returned. After reviewing those applications and contacting each of the applicants, additional references for key community partners was provided and 42 formal invitations (**Appendix B**) were sent to individuals, inviting each one to be a member of the RCAC. Meetings began and the RCAC's charter was approved in May 2021. RCAC members would help with the development of the opening of a Family Resource Center, which would eventually be named the NorthStar Family Resource Center (NSFRC), as well as assist in identifying the activities and services provided at the NSFRC on an ongoing basis. See Figure 1 for a timeline highlighting key moments and identifying some of PSF's collaborations in Columbia County, both prior to and during the opening of NSFRC.

Figure 1: Key Moments Timeline for Collaborations in Columbia County FL



### *Evaluation*

The development of the RCAC was part of a broader evaluation effort to understand the utilization of services and supports at each FRC. This effort aimed to address general questions related to the fidelity of services and supports to the protective factor model, the reach of FRC efforts, and implementation drivers, solutions, and barriers. The FRCs included in this evaluation are the Library Partnership Resource Center (LPRC), the SWAG Family Resource Center (SWAG FRC), the Cone Park Library Resource Center (CPLRP), and the NorthStar Family Resource Center (NSFRC).

It is hoped that information and qualitative narratives from patron participants will provide meaningful insights into their experiences and the responsiveness of the FRCs to their needs, ultimately aiming to strengthen families and prevent child maltreatment. This comprehensive review of the council's community engagement utilizes both quantitative and qualitative methods to assess the extent and nature of meaningful and functional relationships, membership activity, engagement, and responsiveness.

The review covers the period from the first meeting on January 16, 2020, to the last combined meeting as the CFRC on July 9, 2024, before the close of the project period. There are several research questions which this report addresses in relation to reach and implementation drivers, solutions, and barriers. The questions are listed here along with how they are addressed.

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*R-1: To what extent have meaningful and functional relationships been developed and maintained between each of the Family Resource Centers and collaborative partners (multi-agency/multi-system) for the provision of needed services and supports to patrons? — System Level*

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This report provides an in-depth profile of collaborative partnerships across various sections, highlighting the functional relationships between NSFRC and its collaborative partners. The RCAC Membership Analysis section provides a quantitative review of attendance among various groups and sectors, highlighting participation over the years. Additionally, there is an examination of formal MOU and SPA agreements, illustrating how they cater to patron needs.

The descriptive analysis of meeting minutes reveals early efforts by the RCAC, offering insights into their initial activities and showcasing support from the visioning session.

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*R-2: To what extent is the membership of the Resource Center Advisory Council for each Family Resource Center active, engaged, and responsive to implementation, organization, and patron needs? — System and Community Level*

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Activity engagement and responsiveness are assessed in the RCAC Membership Analysis, which quantifies attendance over time; the descriptive analysis of the RCAC meeting minutes and documents, including the RCAC charter, provides further insights. The entirety of the content analysis focuses on qualitatively assessing engagement. The questions selected for the feedback group were specifically designed to best address this research question.

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*I-1: What factors or actions contributed to any perceived success in developing and implementing the Family Resource Center in Lake City and the continued operation of the three Gainesville Family Resource Centers?*

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*I-2: Were there any challenges and/or barriers impacting the development and implementation of the Family Resource Center in Lake City and the continued operation of the three Gainesville Family Resource Centers?*

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The descriptive analysis of meeting minutes and the RCAC feedback group analysis aim to address these questions for the NSFRC. Perceived successes, such as the RCAC's support in establishing a new food pantry at the NSFRC, are evident from the minutes. The minutes also illuminate challenges with implementation during the COVID-19 pandemic. The content analysis from the feedback group specifically addresses challenges, focusing particularly on questions two and three.

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*I-3: Are services provided in a manner that is supportive and non-stigmatizing for patrons (especially marginalized and minority populations)?*

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RCAC feedback group question five directly pertains to this question.

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*I-4: To what extent does a sense of community amongst patrons impact their response to—or is changed by—engagement and participation in Family Resource Center services/activities?*

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RCAC feedback group question four directly pertains to this question.

### **RCAC Membership Analysis**

PSF's Resource Center Model is grounded in the belief that services at our Resource Centers must be responsive to the local neighborhoods and communities they serve. Members of the RCAC play a pivotal role in helping the NorthStar Family Resource Center achieve these goals. Their roles include serving as ambassadors, identifying gaps and strengths, aiding in outreach, supporting fundraising, and attending regular meetings. Additionally, funding from the Children's Bureau through the Community Collaborations to Strengthen and Preserve Families Grant, which supports this report, emphasizes the importance of a collaborative, community-based approach to serving children and families.

To gather information about the nature of collaborators' engagement with the project and to track changes in the number and types of collaborators over time, membership representation was analyzed. The names and job descriptions of attendees were extracted from the approved meeting minutes to create a comprehensive spreadsheet of all attendees and their roles. From the first session on January 16, 2020, to the final RCAC meeting before the merger on August 23,

2023, there were 24 meetings attended by a total of 268 members, representing the following 29 different roles/groups:

- Career Source Florida Crown
- Catholic Charities
- Columbia County Government
- Columbia County Housing Authority
- Columbia County Public Library
- Columbia County School District
- Columbia County Sherriff's Office
- Community Member
- Department of Children and Families
- Department of Juvenile Justice
- Florida Gateway College
- Health Department
- Healthy Families
- Hedges and Highway Outreach
- Lake City Police Department
- Lake City Housing Authority
- New Bethel Missionary Baptist Church
- New Hope United Methodist Church
- North Florida Pediatrics
- Partnership for Strong Families Board
- Richardson Community Center
- Suwannee Valley Community Coordinated Child Care
- Three Rivers Legal Services
- United Way of Suwannee Valley
- Wellcare
- WIC

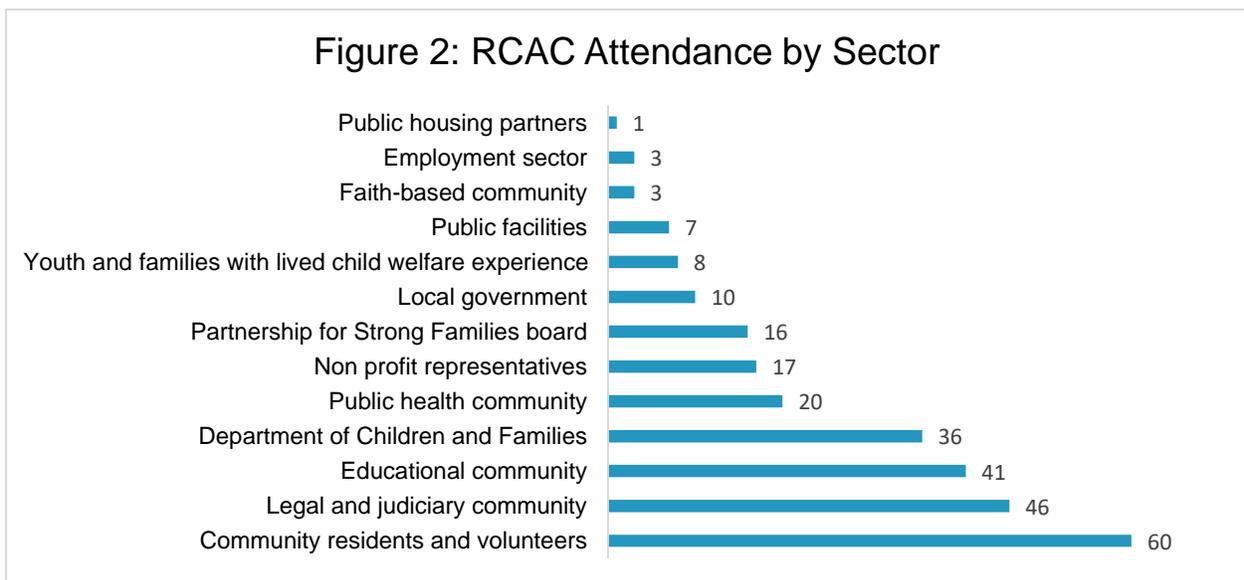
In cases where members held dual roles, which occurred with two members, efforts were made to categorize them based on the role offering the most significance to the group, ensuring they were not counted twice. The first member, a participant with 8 visits who was both on the PSF board and a foster and adoptive parent, was listed under the foster and adoptive parent role because this attendee was the only one who met that criterion. The second example involved a participant with 16 visits who was both on the School Board and an NSFRC volunteer; her role

as a volunteer was chosen because of the significant impact of her frequent volunteer work on the center. Cases in which members changed roles and sectors were also accounted for.

The RCAC charter states that membership should:

*...reflect the community as a whole. Each member will be a contributor to this effort individually, professionally, and as an agent for the interests of the NorthStar Family Resource Center and the organization they represent, and the membership should include a strong multi-system collaboration with representatives.*

Consequently, a selection of sectors was identified. Each attendance entry was assigned a sector based on the member's role and the identified sectors from the RCAC charter. Three additional sectors—local government, employment sector, and public facilities—were added to account for all participants. When attendees changed jobs over time, their new positions were recorded, and a new sector was chosen if appropriate. Figure 2 shows the attendance for these sectors.



### *Meaningful Attendance*

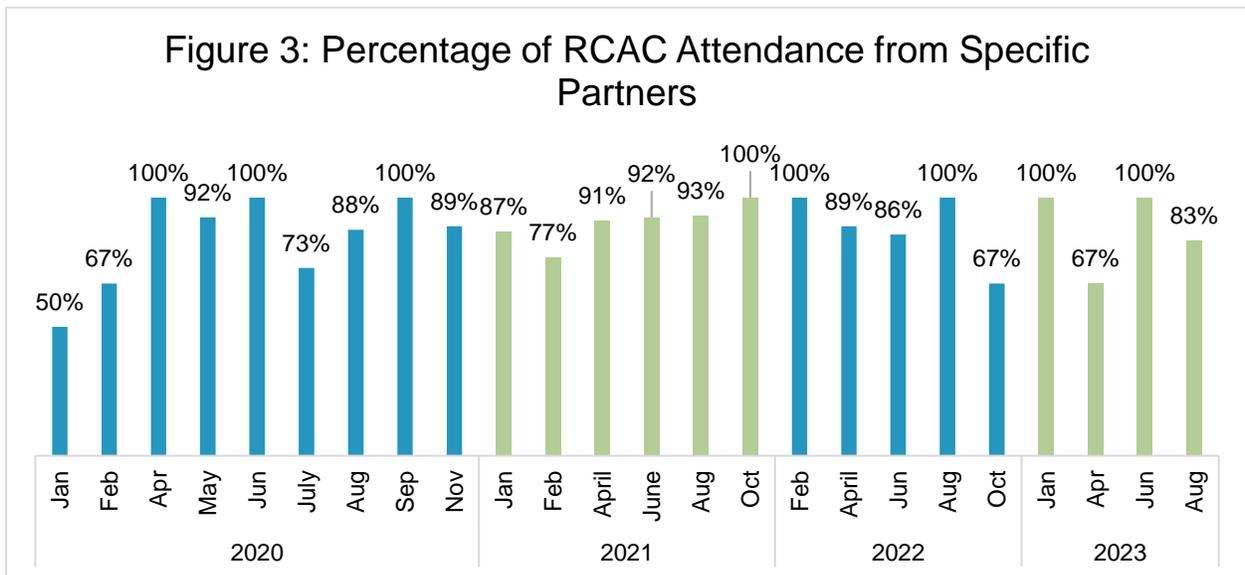
Meaningful attendance for the RCAC was defined in the evaluation plan as achieving a minimum of 75% attendance by specific invited partners during at least three-quarters of the scheduled meetings throughout the year. To identify these partners, a static copy of the RCAC contact list dated February 2024 was used for comparison. This choice was made because the original contact list is a living document that undergoes minor changes over time. Consequently, all yearly attendance figures were juxtaposed against this static list of invitees, excluding PSF staff and the lead evaluator from attendance calculations. However, PSF board members were included as they are among the specifically invited partners.

Determining three-quarters of scheduled meetings each year involved rounding down the total number of meetings once three-quarters were identified. For example, in 2022, with five scheduled meetings,  $5 * 3/4 = 3.75$ , rounded down to 3 out of the 5 meetings being considered. After establishing the number of meetings per year, the months with the highest attendance percentages were used to calculate the average percentage for the year.

Meaningful attendance, defined as achieving 75% attendance by specific partners in the top three quarters of meetings each year, was consistently attained (see Figure 3). The following is a breakdown of attendance percentages, highlighting the high and low months each year and the overall average of those monthly averages for the top three quarters of meetings involving the identified partners:

- **In 2020:** Nine RCAC meetings occurred, with attendance ranging from a low of 50% in January to a high of 100% in April, June, and September. The average across the top 3/4 of records for that year was 94.78%.

- **In 2021:** Six RCAC meetings took place, with attendance fluctuating from a low of 77% in February to a high of 100% in October. The average attendance across the top three quarters was 94.02%.
- **In 2022:** Five RCAC meetings were held, featuring a low of 67% in October and a high of 100% in February and August. The average attendance for this year across the top three quarters increased to 96.3%, the highest among all years.
- **In 2023:** Four RCAC meetings occurred, with attendance ranging from a low of 67% in April to a high of 100% in January and June. The average attendance across the top three quarters was 94%.



***Formal Agreements***

In addition to attendance, several organizations have forged formal agreements with NSFRC to provide services or utilize shared space. Some of these organizations, which have actively participated in RCAC advisory council meetings, have extended early support through commitment letters endorsing PSF's proposal for the Community Collaborations to Strengthen and Preserve Families Grant from the Children's Bureau. Below is a list of the 11 formal

agreements with NSFRC, along with brief descriptions of their past interactions and work with NSFRC, followed by relevant links.

### **1. CareerSource Florida Crown**

CareerSource Florida Crown provides workforce services to employers, job seekers, and youth across Columbia, Dixie, Gilchrist, and Union counties. Keaven Jones, a Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) supervisor at CareerSource FL Crown, participated in the NSFRC Strengthening Families Self-Assessment (SFSA) process. This Self-Assessment helps programs determine how well they are implementing strategies to strengthen families. During the SFSA process, another participant remarked, "*On several occasions, patrons have come into NorthStar FRC saying they need employment assistance, which resulted in an immediate referral to Keaven Jones... who responded with 'I'm on my way'*" (Lancaster, 2022). Additionally, a member of the leadership team at CareerSource Florida Crown joined as a participant in the advisory council feedback group, which the content analysis portion of this paper is based on. Furthermore, temporary host agency agreements were established on May 26, 2021, and June 13, 2022, to support volunteers participating in the Summer Youth Employment program. CareerSource Florida Crown has also tabled at several NSFRC events, demonstrating their active involvement with NSFRC.

Website: [CareerSource Florida Crown](#)

### **2. Columbia County Housing Authority**

Columbia County Housing Authority (CCHA) is a public housing agency located in Lake City, Florida, providing housing to eligible low-income families, the elderly, and persons with disabilities within Columbia County. As an early supporter, CCHA provided a letter of commitment on May 28, 2019, endorsing PSF's proposal for the Community Collaborations to Strengthen and Preserve Families Grant. On March 30, 2021, all PSF FRCs executed a SPA with CCHA. This agreement established CCHA as a referral source for affordable housing needs, a co-sponsor and participant in social activities for CCHA residents and NSFRC patrons, and a provider of on-site and virtual housing counseling services to help patrons determine eligibility for affordable housing and complete the necessary documentation. Columbia County Housing Authority has also tabled at several NSFRC events, demonstrating their active involvement in NSFRC initiatives.

Website: [Columbia County Housing Authority](#)

### **3. Columbia County Public Library**

The Columbia County Public Library (CCPL) is a publicly funded and managed library serving approximately 67,729 residents. As an early supporter, the Columbia County Public

Library (CCPL) provided PSF with a letter of commitment on May 24, 2019, endorsing PSF's proposal for the Community Collaborations to Strengthen and Preserve Families Grant. On June 4, 2021, all PSF Family Resource Centers executed a SPA with CCPL to conduct family programming and programs that promote and strengthen the social engagement skills of young people of all ages, both on-site and virtually. This agreement also includes providing books and resources for academic development, as well as books and resources on child development for parents and caregivers.

Katrina Evans, Director of CCPL, has attended 17 advisory council meetings and remains a major supporter of NSFRC. CCPL staff also participated in NSFRC's Strengthening Families Self-Assessment (SFSA) on three days in late 2022 and the RCAC feedback group on May 22, 2024. The Friends of the Columbia County Public Library have donated several totes of books to the center, so youth have something to read during Homework Help. Additionally, they established a book walk installation outside of NSFRC, where families can walk along and read a book together, and then go inside and be awarded their own book to take home and read. Columbia County Public Library has also tabled at several NSFRC events.

Website: [Columbia County Public Library](#)

#### **4. Columbia County Senior Services, Inc.**

The mission of the Columbia County Senior Services Center (CCSS) is to assist adults aged 60 and above in maintaining their physical, mental, emotional, and nutritional health. They strive to reinvigorate a person's sense of usefulness and their capacity to celebrate life and socialize. All PSF Family Resource Centers executed a SPA with CCSS on March 12, 2021, to provide referral-based services and supports (e.g., counseling, food, transportation) for senior adults or other qualifying individuals. Columbia County Senior Services has also tabled at several NSFRC community events, demonstrating their active involvement and commitment to supporting the community.

Website: [Columbia County Senior Services](#)

#### **5. Department of Children and Families**

Florida's Department of Children and Families (DCF) was an early supporter of PSF, providing a letter of commitment on May 29, 2019, endorsing PSF's proposal for the Community Collaborations to Strengthen and Preserve Families Grant. PSF's NSFRC executed an MOU with the DCF Economic Self-Sufficiency (ESS) Program on July 12, 2021, to become a community partner providing various services to individuals seeking or receiving assistance. The DCF Office of Economic Self-Sufficiency helps promote strong and economically self-sufficient communities by determining eligibility for food, cash, and medical assistance for individuals and families in Florida. These services include providing informational handouts, paper applications, access to a telephone to call the DCF Customer Call Center, a computer to apply for assistance online, a printer for ESS program documents, a fax machine to fax applications and other documents to DCF, a copy machine to copy

application-related documents, information regarding the application process, and customer assistance for patrons' "My ACCESS Account."

Since February 2023, DCF staff through the ESS Hope Navigator program have been on-site every Tuesday, and they have now extended their hours to 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. While on-site, these staff meet one-on-one to provide direct support to patrons who may work or live nearby. Stephanie Harden, a Hope Navigator II with DCF's Office of ESS, participated in the SFSA group in late 2022. DCF staff have attended advisory council meetings 32 times and have tabled at several NSFRC community events, demonstrating their active involvement and commitment to supporting the community.

Website: [Department of Children and Families / Hope Florida](#)

## **6. Florida Department of Health**

The Florida Department of Health (FDOH) was established by the Florida Legislature in 1996. As the leading agency for public health in the state, FDOH provides licensure, education, programming, and training related to children's health, women's health, community health, and more. FDOH was an early supporter of NSFRC, providing a letter of commitment on May 29, 2019, endorsing PSF's proposal for the Community Collaborations to Strengthen and Preserve Families Grant. On January 23, 2014, all FRCs executed a MOA with FDOH, which was updated on February 15, 2021. This updated agreement included provisions for health promotion, HIV/AIDS and STD education, Tobacco Free Alachua initiatives, Healthy Onsite medical and health-related services, including preventative dental care, resources to support parents and caregivers, and healthy lifestyle and community health discussions at special events. FDOH has tabled at several NSFRC community events and has been integral in providing support and services to their annual health fair.

Website: [Florida Department of Health](#)

## **7. Florida Gateway College**

Florida Gateway College (FGC) offers affordable, high-quality postsecondary educational opportunities to North Central Florida community members. On March 15, 2021, all PSF Family Resource Centers entered into a SPA with FGC to provide resources and guidance on college coursework, financial aid, and related topics. FGC provide student volunteers and interns approved by the college to support Family Resource Center activities such as Homework Help and summer youth camps. Additionally, FGC staff have actively participated in advisory council meetings seven times and contributed to the RCAC feedback group. FGC has also represented itself at numerous community events hosted by NSFRC.

Website: [Florida Gateway College](#)

## **8. Meridian Behavioral Healthcare, Inc.**

Meridian Behavioral Healthcare, Inc. is a tax-exempt behavioral healthcare network dedicated to promoting the health, recovery, and well-being of individuals affected by mental illnesses and substance use disorders. They achieve this through prevention, coordinated treatment, and supportive services. On October 3, 2012, Library Partnership, the only Family Resource Center (FRC) open at the time, executed a SPA with Meridian to provide outreach. Subsequent SPAs were renewed on October 8, 2014, and February 19, 2021. Meridian demonstrated early support by providing a letter of commitment to PSF on May 29, 2019. Beginning in May 2023, Meridian staff started tabling weekly at NSFRC to offer services and referrals as needed. Additionally, Meridian has been actively involved in several NSFRC community events, providing valuable outreach and support.

Website: [Meridian Behavioral Healthcare](#)

## **9. Richardson Community Center**

The Richardson Community Center in Lake City, FL, established in 1971, has been serving the community by providing various recreational and community services. The center boasts numerous amenities, including an indoor gymnasium, cafeteria, playground, locker rooms, meeting rooms, and concessions areas. The NSFRC building is located on the same property as this center. Richardson Community Center was an early supporter of NSFRC, providing a letter of commitment for their grant proposal on May 23, 2019, endorsing PSF's proposal for the Community Collaborations to Strengthen and Preserve Families Grant. Richardson staff have participated in advisory council meetings seven times and regularly collaborate with NSFRC staff on event planning. A rental agreement was established on August 4, 2020, to lease the Ferguson building to NSFRC. A lease extension was signed on August 23, 2022, extending the agreement for two more years.

Website: [Richardson Community Center](#)

## **10. Three Rivers Legal Services, Inc.**

Three Rivers Legal Services, Inc. is a nonprofit law firm dedicated to providing high-quality legal assistance to underserved populations, including the poor, abused, disabled, and elderly, and empowering them through preventive legal education. They were early supporters of PSF's proposal for the Community Collaborations to Strengthen and Preserve Families Grant, endorsing the initiative and contributing to its success. PSF executed a SPA with Three Rivers Legal Services on May 16, 2012, to conduct community legal education through presentations on selected topics. A second SPA agreement was executed on September 18, 2014, to provide legal services at all Family Resource Center (FRC) sites. Staff from Three Rivers Legal Services have been actively involved, attending advisory council meetings 16 times, and contributing to the advisory council feedback group. Additionally, Three Rivers

Legal Services has tabled at several of NSFRC's community events, further supporting the initiative.

Website: [Three Rivers Legal Services](#)

## **11. United Way of Suwannee Valley**

Established in 1968, the United Way of Suwannee Valley is committed to advancing the common good by building strong partnerships with impact agencies to enhance lives and strengthen communities. The organization focuses on promoting health, education, and financial stability throughout the Suwannee Valley region. Since December 9, 2014, the United Way of Suwannee Valley has been an early supporter of all Family Resource Centers (FRCs). Initially, a SPA was established to provide information and referrals for case management and financial assistance to eligible households. An updated SPA on February 10, 2021, expanded these services to include concrete support, such as access to essential goods, both onsite and through referrals. The partnership also encompasses guidance on parenting and child development, including literacy support for children, resilience-building through homelessness prevention counseling, and other parental supports. United Way staff have actively participated in advisory council meetings 14 times and expressed interest in joining the RCAC feedback group, though scheduling conflicts prevented their participation. In August 2022, NSFRC was awarded a community grant that facilitated assistance for patrons with rent and utility bills. Additionally, the United Way has tabled at several NSFRC community events and provided support in grant writing.

Website: [United Way of Suwannee Valley](#)

## **Descriptive Analysis**

A descriptive analysis was conducted by the project director through the review of RCAC meeting minutes and documents. This descriptive analysis highlights, in part, manifested content related to collaborative processes, mutual support among partners, successes or issues in service delivery, changes in practices, protocols or policies impacting services and collaborations, as well as anticipated challenges. Further insight into these topics can be found in the RCAC Content Analysis of the feedback group.

### ***Visioning Session***

The RCAC introductory meeting was held in the Richardson Community Center cafeteria on January 16, 2020, and then later that year, on November 9, 2020, a visioning session was held

in the same community center's gymnasium. The community center is a recreational facility managed by Columbia County at the time, that was identified as a potential community partner and offered their support in hosting RCAC meetings. This session was planned and facilitated by Paul DiLorenzo (formally from Casey Family Programs). Mr. DiLorenzo and Casey representatives have helped PSF and the Gainesville Resource Centers in the past, from which tangible results from dialog with the broader community that have helped to shape the goals and activities of our FRCs. All collaborative partners, RCAC members, and patrons/families/households within the targeted geospatial service area were invited to participate in the event. Feedback was solicited from community members and stakeholders, which was analyzed in a qualitative manner (identifying themes in responses, support, and recommendations) with an itemization and summarization of comments and recommendations for RC operations going forward.

It is important to note that the partnership with the Richardson Community Center developed and is currently the location site of the NSFRC. The introduction meeting had 27 participants and topics of discussion included the vision for the Resource Center, as well as next steps needing to be taken, including establishing goals for the RCAC which were identified as:

- Planning for a Family Resource Center opening in Lake City in 2021
- Helping PSF conduct a comprehensive Needs Assessment in Lake City
- Analyzing and discussing results of the Needs Assessment related to local service and resource needs
- Providing ongoing support to ensure that the needs of the community are being met
- Collaborating to identify and fill gaps in resources and services

It was also advised that an RCAC charter (**Appendix C**) would be developed and presented at the following meeting and encouraged for participants to spread the word about the RCAC to select individuals to increase membership.

### *Preliminary actions by RCAC*

Per the RCAC Charter, in person meetings were initially scheduled to take place monthly, on the 4th Wednesday of each month. In the initial two meetings, time was spent reviewing and approving the RCAC Charter, explaining membership roles and responsibilities. The plan to indicate a co-chair for the RCAC within a year was also established, as was the need to conduct a Community Strengths and Needs Assessment. It was also shared that any grant related documents, including the approved Evaluation and Implementation Plans, would be shared with RCAC members as they became available. The intention of this initial and continued effort to keep members of the RCAC abreast of the project's evaluation activities serves a two-fold purpose- to imbed the culture of inclusion of the council in important activities related to the grant project, as well as to receive and utilize any feedback they may have or be able to provide to better inform the project's evaluation as part of their collaboration. It was also established that members would be asked to submit any items they would like to see added to future agenda items, understanding that there would be certain topics that would always be on the agenda to be in alignment with federal grant reporting. These topics included updates to the implementation, opening and progress of the NSFRC, as well as project evaluation updates. A project timeline, as well as a summary of the proposed evaluation plan was also sent to RCAC members, to share the outcomes measures that would be planned to collect from the project evaluation. It was also asked that the RCAC members share any existing Community Strengths and Needs Assessments for Lake City that they or their agency may have access to, as well as any reports with local data that could be helpful. Although members did not expressly provide material in response to this request, their input and suggestions in subsequent Council meetings provided meaningful

collaboration and contribution as to how the Community Strengths and Needs Assessments for Lake City would ultimately be finalized and utilized.

For example, information that was collected from RCAC members, to help develop a Community Strengths and Needs Assessment was considered, as were the responses from a survey that was sent to the members of the RCAC in June 2020, containing questions to help guide what information was to be included in the assessment. The survey explained how each of the services provided at PSF's Family Resource Centers are connected to one or more of the five Protective Factors, and then each protective factor was included, with a brief definition and examples of service types. For each protective factor, the survey asked the following:

- If it was important to have the types of services provided as examples in Lake City to address the needs of families.
- To list the service types provided as examples, ranking them in order of importance. With 1 having the highest importance and the largest number having the lowest importance. The largest number varied by Protective Factor, as each had a different number of service type examples provided. The range of largest number (lowest importance) varied from 3-8.
- To complete a 7-point Likert-type scaled response, indicating the importance level for each of the service type examples (not at all important, neutral, low importance, slightly important, moderately important, very important, and extremely important).
- What additional resources could be of value for that protective factor.

The next section of the survey referenced and displayed the project's Theory of Change (**Appendix D**), which had already been presented in an earlier RCAC meeting, was shared again, asking the following questions:

- Does this proposed Theory of Change make sense to you?
- Do you have other suggestions or consideration for our Theory of Change?
- If you answered yes to the question above, please briefly tell us your suggestions or considerations.

Next the survey addressed and presented a summarized version of the project's proposed evaluation plan, which had previously been shared with RCAC members at an earlier meeting, asking the following:

- Does it make sense to measure the impact of the Resource Center services/activities on parent's/patron's perceived level of stress over time?
- Does it make sense to measure the extent to which select Resource Center services/activities have impacted any change in parent/patron reports of resources that they rely upon for support?
- Does it make sense to measure the change over time (for applicable children and youth) regarding any reported difficulties (social, emotional, behavioral) children and youth have been dealing with?
- Does it make sense to measure over time any changes in the level of each protective factor in families receiving service(s)?
- Please let us know if there are other factors/indicators we should consider in measuring if patron/family involvement with the Resource Centers provides meaningful change in addressing unmet needs and supporting and enhancing the well-being of children and families.

Of the 42 RCAC members surveyed, 19 submitted responses between June 11 and July 16, 2020. These procedures highlight the effort that was made on PSF's behalf to engage RCAC members in important decisions regarding the project's evaluation and the opening of the NSFRC, which opened on March 18, 2021.

Below is a summary of some of the key responses received from the survey:

- Regarding Concrete Supports, 100% of the survey respondents indicated that it would be important to have these types of services available at the Resource Center to address the needs of families. Of the service types provided as examples, access to food/ meals was ranked as the most important. Other areas of highlighted importance included access to clothing, housing, and emergency financial assistance.
- Regarding Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development, 100% of the survey respondents indicated that it would be important to have these types of services available at the Resource Center to address the needs of families. Of the service types provided as examples, access to parenting education was ranked as the most important. Other areas of highlighted importance included early childhood learning and information and resources for parents.
- Regarding Social Connections, 95.2% of the survey respondents indicated that it would be important to have these types of services available at the Resource Center to address

the needs of families. Of the service types provided as examples, access to community events was ranked as the most important. Other areas of highlighted importance included community dinners and special interest activities.

- Regarding Family Functioning and Resiliency, 100% of the survey respondents indicated that it would be important to have these types of services available at the Resource Center to address the needs of families. Of the service types provided as examples, access to counseling and outreach was ranked as the most important. Other areas of highlighted importance included job readiness programs, stress management, and financial literacy programming.
- Regarding Social and Emotional Competence of Children, 92.5% of the survey respondents indicated that it would be important to have these types of services available at the Resource Center to address the needs of families. Of the service types provided as examples, access to parent- child activities were ranked as the most important. Other areas of highlighted importance included Homework Help and summer programming for children.

Regarding the survey questions related to the evaluation plan, the responses indicated an overwhelming support and approval of the proposed Theory of Change and evaluation questions.

In reviewing the results from the survey administered to the RCAC members during a RCAC meeting, other suggestions regarding the Community Strengths and Needs Assessment were discussed. One major suggestion that was provided was to shorten the Community Strengths and Needs Assessment, which was originally four pages, to a single page, to facilitate a clearer and easier experience for the community members who would complete it. The original assessment included more detailed questions, requiring short answer responses about the best and worst things about living in the community, as well as the Sense of Community Index II (SCI-2). Additional and more in-depth demographic questions were also part of the original assessment. Per the feedback received from the RCAC members, it was suggested to remove the SCI-2 from the assessment, simplify the demographic questions asked, and remove the questions requesting short answer responses about living in the community. What remained was a one-page questionnaire, listing needs (separated by Protective Factor), asking the responder to rate as not needed, enough supports available (need is met), some supports available (need still exists); and

no support available (still have need). The RCAC members also suggested to make the assessment available in an electronic format, which proved to be incredibly beneficial in collecting responses from community members.

### ***Form and Structure of RCAC Meetings***

24 meetings of the RCAC, each lasting approximately 75 minutes, took place between January 16, 2020, through August 23, 2023, at which time the Council merged with the Columbia County Children's Partnership Council, to form the Columbia Family Resource Council (CFRC). Of these 24 meetings, 13 took place in person and 11 were held virtually, using the Microsoft Teams platform. The need to hold virtual meetings existed periodically during 2020 and 2021 because of social distancing requirements due to the COVID- 19 pandemic. Monthly meetings took place in person through February 2020 and then became virtual in April 2020 (a meeting was not held in March 2020, due to the onset of the COVID- 19 pandemic). In June 2020, the RCAC determined it safe to have an in person meeting in a larger space, with the allowance for social distancing (15 people participated in that meeting), however due to an increase in COVID- 19 cases, meetings went back to being virtual in July 2020 and remained in a virtual platform until June 2021, when another in person meeting was held (with 19 participants). Virtual meetings took place in August and October 2021 and then went back to being held in person. After the grand opening event of the NSFRC on March 18, 2021, it was determined that RCAC meetings could back down from being held monthly and began to take place on a bi-monthly schedule, still occurring on the 4th Wednesday of every other month. This remained until January 2023 when it was determined that meetings could be backed down to quarterly.

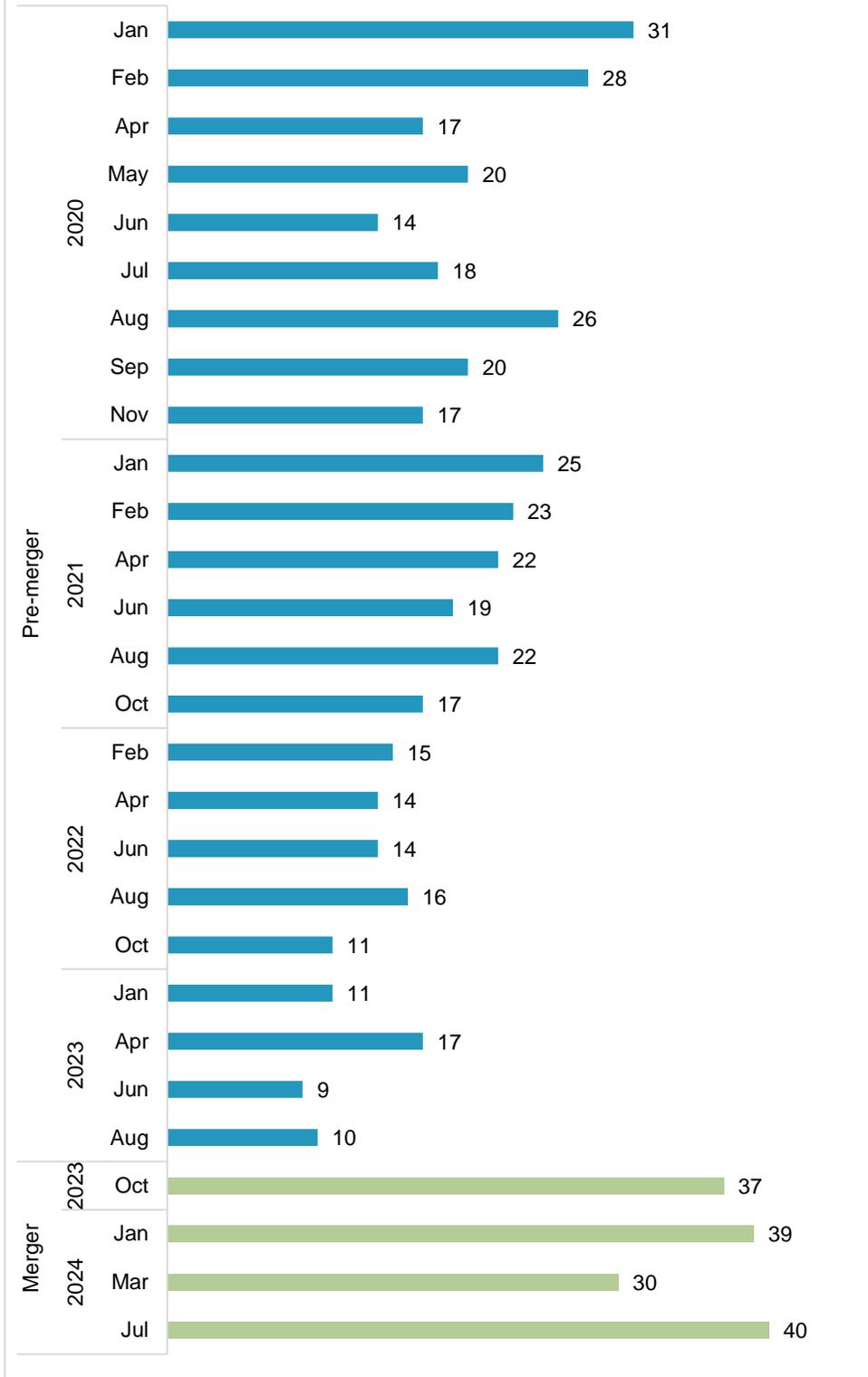
The average number of meeting participants in meetings of the RCAC (before merging with the CPC to form the CFRC) was 18. While being held virtually, the average number of participants was 20 and when held in person, the average number of participants was 16. Over time, and especially after the COVID- 19 pandemic, it became evident that participation in the meetings declined when returning to an in-person platform, although the meeting with the largest number of participants was one which was held in person, with 28 participants. It is important to note, however, that this meeting was held in February 2020, before the onset of the COVID- 19 pandemic. After the return to in person meetings, participation from RCAC members dwindled until the merge with the CPC to form the CFRC. The meeting with the lowest amount of participation from RCAC members was in June 2023, with 9 members (see Figure 4). This was one of the final meetings of the RCAC before the merge to form the CFRC.

### ***Collaborative Merger Insights***

The merge with the Columbia County Children’s Partnership Council (CPC) was determined by PSF administration to help with member participation and to streamline meetings for Council members, as there were many members participating in both Councils, finding the meetings to be redundant. While the CPC focused on gaining a better understanding of the additional resources needed to best serve children and families in Columbia County, the RCAC had a similar focus, although centered more directly around serving children and families through the NSFRC. The idea to merge the Councils was presented to both the CPC and RCAC in August 2023 and was embraced and supported by both entities. The first merged meeting took place, in a hybrid platform, allowing for both in person and virtual attendance, on October 24, 2023, and had a total of 37 participants. This was a tremendous jump in participation from the final RCAC meetings. It was determined that the newly merged Council would be called the

Columbia Family Resource Council (CFRC) and that a new charter would be developed (**Appendix E**) indicating that the CFRC would continue to meet in a hybrid platform, on a quarterly basis. Four CFRC meetings took place throughout the remainder of the federal grant project period, from October 2023 to July 2024, with an average of 35 participants. It is noteworthy that the meeting with the highest attendance numbers was after the Council merge, with 40 members in attendance. Figure 4 provides an overview of attendance over time, first as the RCAC then as the CFRC.

Figure 4: Impact of Merger on Advisory Council Attendance



Another benefit of merging the two Councils came in the way of a non-PSF staff Council chairperson. As part of the RCAC charter, it was determined that the federal grant Project Director (a PSF administrator) would initially serve as the RCAC Council chairperson and that a non-PSF employee co-chair would be elected to assist in administering the Council and to eventually take on the role of Council chairperson. Although an RCAC member volunteered themselves and was acclaimed as co-chair, participation from this person was infrequent and most of the council's administration remained as a responsibility of PSF staff. When the merge with the CPC to form the CFRC took place, it happened that two CPC members, who were not already RCAC members, took on the role and leadership as chairperson and co-chairperson of the CFRC. These two council members now work together with PSF staff to administer the Council and adhere to the guidelines set forth in the Council's charter.

Prior to the opening of the NSFRC, RCAC meeting topics were primarily focused on implementation activities leading up to the Center's grand opening on March 18, 2021. This included RCAC member feedback in conducting the Community Strengths and Needs Assessment, as well as feedback regarding assessment results, which, when compiled with data collected from heat maps of Lake City and Columbia County, were presented as part of the Visioning Session that took place with community leaders prior to the opening. Meeting topics were also heavily focused on the development and approval of the federal grant project's evaluation plan. Once the NSFRC opened, the monthly meeting agenda topics remained consistent, providing federal grant project updates typically targeting evaluation activities and NSFRC services and programming updates, as well as ideas for ongoing service expansion to address potential gaps and meet the ongoing and evolving needs of the community. Such ideas included the importance of after school activities for children and youth, the installation of a

community garden, the addition of a food pantry, and the co- location of Hope Florida, a program that utilizes trained staff (employed by the Florida Department of Children and Families) to guide community members on an individualized path to prosperity and economic independence by focusing on community collaboration between the private sector, faith-based communities, nonprofits, and government entities. The part time co-location of this program at the NSFRC has been an important partnership in serving patrons who visit the Family Resource Center.

In addition to contributing ideas to the services and programming to be made available at the NSFRC, updates and announcements from RCAC members, sharing information about current activities from their own organizations was a standing agenda item for meetings, thus contributing to the project's focus on community collaboration. In 2023, the RCAC adopted the practice of inviting a community spotlight presenter to highlight their program, with the intention of learning more about other local agencies. Since merging with the CPC to form the CFRC, the meeting time expanded to 90 minutes to allow for additional agenda items, which currently include local children data, community needs, and council budget priorities.

Other important contributions came from the mutual and supportive partnerships and collaborations that were established by the NSFRC with RCAC members. Although this may not have been addressed expressly in meetings of the RCAC, this is addressed in discussions from the feedback group that was conducted with select members.

### **RCAC Feedback Group Procedures**

As part of the process evaluation, the utilization of a RCAC feedback group was proposed to explore the extent of RCAC activity, engagement, and responsiveness to implementation, organization, and patron needs.

Content saturation, or redundancy, occurs when no new content or insights are presented by participants compared to themes identified in earlier feedback groups on the same topic with members of the same target population. Methodologically, it is recommended that feedback groups continue with representative members of a target population until saturation is reached. The number of attendees available who regularly attended the RCAC limits the number of feedback groups to one.

The original plan included conducting RCAC focus groups every 12 months after the project started. However, the COVID-19 pandemic presented specific challenges for certain process evaluation activities and in 2021 modifications to the evaluation plan were made for safety considerations. This resulted in one RCAC feedback group planned as part of the process evaluation on May 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2024, from 11:45am to 1:45pm.

While the term "feedback group" was chosen to mitigate the reactive effects of participants, all practical procedures are derived from the attributes of focus groups. To make the group size reasonable and workable, 10 RCAC participants were recruited to be in a group with the NSFRC manager.

The feedback group was led by Christen Lancaster, the primary author of this paper, chosen for her previous facilitation experience and familiarity and knowledge of RCAC activities. Efforts were made to foster an open and non-threatening group discussion, facilitated in a familiar setting—the same room used for previous RCAC meetings with other members. The feedback group questions, and sequencing were finalized in collaboration with the evaluation team. Participants received a brief introduction before the session, emphasizing the value of respectful responses. The facilitator did not push for agreement or consensus; all individual insights and perspectives were documented.

### ***Participant Selection***

Efforts were made with participant selection protocols to ensure consistency and participant recall. Participants were selected from minutes spanning from the first session (1/16/2020) to the last day the RCAC existed independently (8/23/2023) before its merger with the Columbia Children's Partnership Council into the Columbia Family Resource Center Council (CFRC). Preference was given to those who last attended RCAC meetings in 2023 or 2024; participants whose last attendance was before 2022 were excluded. Homogeneity within the RCAC feedback group was based on participants' shared commitment and experience, having attended no fewer than six RCAC meetings.

To ensure sector participation, as outlined in the RCAC charter, priority was given to including at least one participant from each identified service sector. Refer to Figure 2 for the complete list of recognized service sectors.

Priority was given to participants who met both the sector representation and frequency criteria. If at least one participant was not able to be secured for each sector, the attendance criteria could be reduced from six attendances to no fewer than three visits. Participants were excluded if their last attendance was before 2022 and/or if they had fewer than three visits, even if this results in no participants being selected from a particular sector. This resulted in no sector attendance from the faith-based community (though several attendees are religiously affiliated), public facilities, and public housing partners.

Participants who only attended CFRC meetings were not included in the count. Participants' names were organized to tally the number of times they attended and were categorized by the above sectors, with their organization's name added for clarity. Participants who met the criteria, had their names placed in a random number generator. Starting from the

first listed sector, one person with the largest randomized number from that sector (meeting the time frame and frequency criteria) was selected and invited to attend. If that person declined or was unable to attend, the next randomized person meeting the criteria from the same service sector was invited.

For the above sectors, if there were not enough participants to meet the criteria, invitations continued from the top of the randomized list until at least one participant from each sector was secured. After securing at least one eligible participant for each sector, invitations continued from the top of the randomized list until at least 10 participants could be secured.

Ten participants were initially secured for this feedback group, but one participant had to cancel at the last minute, leaving a total of nine participants and the NSFRC manager. The group comprised 30% male and 70% female participants, with an equal representation of 50% Black and 50% White individuals. As these individuals are community providers, we do not have their dates of birth (DOB).

### ***Facilitation***

The NSFRC conference room was arranged in the same fashion as the RCAC meetings to promote easy communication, familiarity, and comfort. The room's divider and door were labeled clearly that a meeting was in progress. The facilitator and co-facilitator, Haley Pegram, arrived early to set up the room, food, and recording device. Food orders from a local sandwich shop were pre-ordered and delivered before the meeting.

Participants were welcomed by the facilitator and co-facilitator who assisted them in getting their name tents and food. A brief time of casual conversation and an opening icebreaker question preceded the formal questions. Consent was received from participants for recording, and everyone was encouraged to be on a first name basis. Capacity for childcare was available

but no participants used this. At the end of the feedback group participants were given a letter of appreciation and a \$25 gift card.

### ***Original Questions and Changes***

Below is the list of the original draft questions from the evaluation plan, followed by the finalized questions that were presented at the feedback group, along with an explanation of the modifications and the rationale behind them. Questions one through four were allotted a longer discussion time, resulting in a higher number of statements. In comparison, questions five through seven had a shorter discussion period and generated fewer statements. Question 8 allowed for broader input across all topics.

**Original question 1:** Perception of shared/collective purpose and impact within and between RCAC membership, collaborative partners, RC staff, the Project Implementation Team, and Community Stakeholders, (including patrons).

**Kept as question 1:** Can you offer examples that demonstrate the value and impact of collaborations between NorthStar and community partners in assisting patrons and their families?

Changes: To simplify the question, the term "community partners" was chosen instead of listing out examples of partners. To increase clarity, "NorthStar" was used instead of "RC" to denote the Resource Center. Additionally, the wording was changed to provide a more casual tone and included a request for direct examples.

**Original question 2:** Recommendations to improve RCAC functioning and processes.

**Turned into question 3:** Now we want to hear about the RCAC specifically. From your perspective, what aspects of the RCAC are functioning well? [This can include before or after the merger into the CFRC in October of 2023]

- a. Are there any barriers or challenges that hinder the efficient functioning and responsiveness of the RCAC to NorthStar and their patron needs?
- b. Any suggestions for addressing challenges and improving RCAC processes?

Changes: The question was moved to be question three, so the first two questions focus directly on NorthStar, aiming to improve the flow of topics and avoid bouncing between them. Sub-questions on challenges, which were generally discussed in the original question three, were added.

**Original question 3:** Perceived success and limitations/challenges associated with project implementation (including identification of need, community outreach and engagement tasks, developing and sustaining partner collaborations and networking, and communication and dissemination strategies)

*Changes:* Instead of having one question discussing all limitations, the question was broken up and separated into the questions about NorthStar (the new Question 2) and the RCAC (the new Question 3). This adjustment aims to provide a more focused discussion on each topic.

**Original question 4:** Responsiveness of implemented services/activities to identified patron needs; are there any unmet needs/service gaps that can feasibly be addressed?

**Turned into question 2:** Have NorthStar services and activities been responsive to community and patron needs? Can you provide examples of services or activities that have been particularly effective in meeting the needs of patrons?

- a. Are there any challenges or obstacles that patrons face in accessing services, and how might these challenges be mitigated?
- b. Are there unmet needs or service gaps within the community that NorthStar could help address?

*Changes:* Moved up to question two so that the first two questions focused on NSFRC, improving the flow of questions. Sub-questions were added discussing the challenges originally in question three. To increase clarity, "NorthStar" was used to narrow the focus.

**Original question 5:** Perception of sense of community within neighborhoods patrons live; level of trust within and among patrons and each RC; whether and how RC is (or can improve) sense of community trust and engagement.

**Turned into question 4:** How would you describe the sense of community within the neighborhoods where patrons live and the level of trust among and between patrons and NorthStar?

- a. What has or can the RCAC and NorthStar do to enhance a sense of community trust and engagement?

*Changes:* To increase clarity, "NorthStar" was used instead of "RC" to denote the Resource Center. The question was separated into how community might be described and how to enhance community to improve clarity. Because the original question three is not being used directly, this now moves up to question four instead of five.

**Original question 6:** The extent to which RC services and activities are respectful of, and responsive to, cultural diversity of patrons.

**Turned into 5:** Have NorthStar services and activities been respectful of and responsive to the cultural diversity of patrons and the community?

*Changes:* To increase clarity, "NorthStar" was used instead of "RC" to denote the Resource Center. Added "and the community" to expand the scope of this question to the community level, aligning it with the scope of the original questions 1, 3, and 5.

**Original question 7:** What efforts have been made to support the sustainment of RC services beyond the life of the project period.

**Turned into question 6:** What efforts have been made to support the sustainment of NorthStar services beyond the current project period?

**Turned into question 7:** What challenges or obstacles may arise in sustaining NorthStar services beyond the project period, and how might these be addressed?

*Changes:* The original question 7 was separated into two different questions, with the new question 6 focusing on sustainment and the new question 7 focusing on obstacles. To increase clarity, "NorthStar" was used instead of "RC" to denote the Resource Center.

**Question 8:** A wrap-up question was added as question eight, offering participants a final chance to offer comments.

*Changes:* The original list of questions developed in the evaluation plan before the project began did not include a wrap-up question.

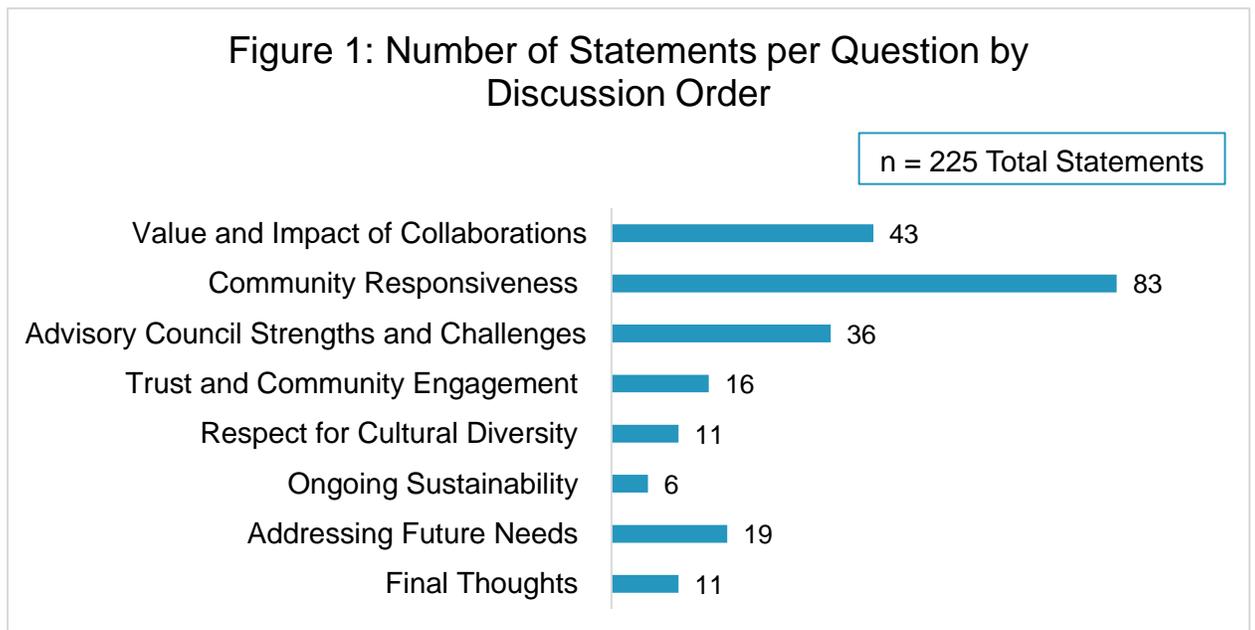
### *Analyzing Content*

The facilitator and co-facilitator recorded, saved, and transferred data using the same protocol as the patron feedback groups (Perry et al., 2024b). After cleaning the transcripts, they met in person for the first stage of content analysis to extract themes relevant to the questions into an Excel document, with one sheet dedicated to each question. Once all relevant quotes were extracted from the transcripts and organized into an Excel workbook, the team proceeded to the second stage of content analysis: theme development. Reviewing quotes for each question, the team identified overlapping themes that encompassed the content. Upon determining the themes, they moved to the final stage of content analysis, tallying the number of statements within each theme.

To ensure consistency in statement counts, the team agreed that in cases where consensus couldn't be reached, due to having a team of two, no count would be assigned. Additionally, if it was evident that all speakers supported a statement, the count would reflect the total number of attendees (n = 10). If multiple speakers contributed to a statement but the exact number was unclear, a count of two would be assigned for that theme related to that statement. For statements directly affirming another known statement, the count of the known statement would be used. While there were no outlier quotes, some themes emerged with only a few statements.

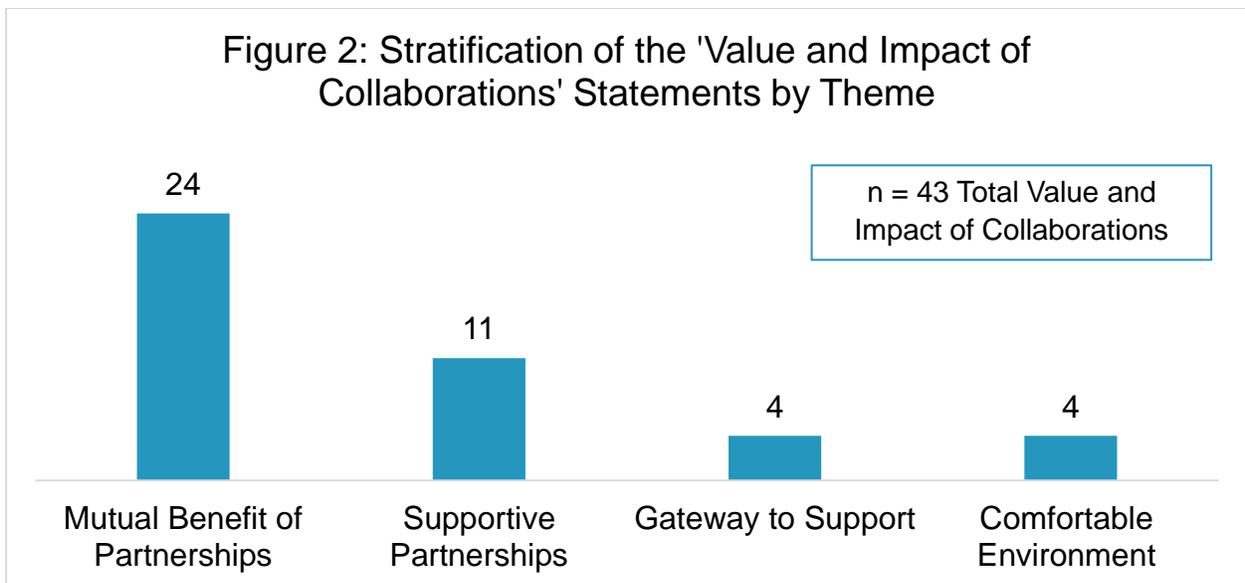
### RCAC Feedback Group

The RCAC feedback group had a high attendance rate, with 91% of invited participants present. Each question was addressed in the sequence outlined in the 'Original Questions and Changes' section of this report. Each question is treated as a separate subsection, with themes identified within each section. Figure 1 displays the questions in their respective order and the total number of statements attributed to each section, totaling 225 statements.



***Question 1: Value and Impact of Collaborations***

Each participant provided valuable insight when asked: *Can you offer examples that demonstrate the value and impact of collaborations between NorthStar and community partners in assisting patrons and their families?* The 43 statements addressing this question were categorized into four themes: 24 statements focused on Mutual Benefit of Partnerships, 11 on Supportive Partnerships, four on Gateway to Support, and four on Comfortable Environment (see Figure 2).



*Mutual Benefit of Partnerships*

Over half (24 or 56%) of the responses highlighted the mutual benefits of partnering with the NSFRC, underscoring the significant value and impact that collaborations bring to all involved. One mutual benefit highlighted was the increased efficacy of outreach efforts. As one participant put it, *“the location of this center and the, the feeling of a relationship with the individual patrons that come in it, it allows different agencies to connect with us to be able to serve our patrons.”* They go on to add:

*...the ones that are actually employed here can be the liaison to connect them with those services so that they can feel a sense of comfort and confidence when they are able to go and receive the services that are out there.*

Larger annual events were identified as a benefit to outreach, such as the Health Fair, Back to School Bash, and Toys for Tots, which had 57, 568, and 107 attendees respectively in 2023 (Perry et al., 2024a). High attendance at these events, as one participant shared, *“helped the community that they got to know a lot more about the different services provided.”* Community events like these offer opportunities for local providers to set up an information table to reach more prospective participants for their programs in a non-threatening environment. Particularly, the annual agency fair was designed to let each provider table and mingle, familiarizing themselves with services provided and making beneficial connections. According to one participant this also increased outreach efforts: *“the agency fair was really good because there were so many things that the different agencies were doing that nobody knew, we just didn't know what all the agencies that were here. So that was really valuable.”*

A second benefit of collaborative partnerships includes a mutual support of each agencies program goals. Together more can be accomplished. Columbia County Library staff discussed their collaboration with the NSFRC on the Story Walk—an outdoor exhibit featuring a story displayed one page at a time in weatherproof stands along a designated path. This initiative allows caregivers to read the book while walking with their child. The story paths installation near the NSFRC building provides easy access to many neighborhood families and allows *“the kids in the after-school program”* to make use of the walk as well. The library staff go on to share another positive connection, *“Friends of the Library<sup>1</sup> provide copies of the book to give away to kids so that they can take it home with them.”* Once the outside story walk is read, the

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<sup>1</sup> Learn more about this organization here: [Friends of Columbia County Public Library | Lake City FL | Facebook](#)

children can go inside NorthStar and get a copy of their own to take home, bolstering both reading and resource center visits.

A collaboration with a local Florida Hope Navigator exemplifies mutually supportive program goals by providing onsite services hosted within the NSFRC once a week. This service strengthens patrons' comfort in accessing needed services from both the Department of Children and Families and the NSFRC. One participant spoke about the importance of that comfort and the difference this arrangement can make:

*...it's a very different feel coming into a Resource Center to seek help with what's going on in my food stamp case or "I need help in an emergency" or that kind of thing versus having to go into a DCF office. Because you know, there's always that perception of if I tell too much to DCF, they're going to- it's going to be more than just food stamps, it's gonna be my kids or, you know. And so, I think that comfort level of coming to a place that they already are familiar with the staff here and then speaking with somebody who does represent DCF, [and] is there in a helping capacity, I think it's- It's a wonderful model. I would love to have them out in every one of my communities if we had more staff and more funding, but I'm glad you guys are hosting that.*

In response another participant added, "Awesome. Awesome... and we love them [Florida Hope Navigator]."

A collaborative relationship with Career Source Florida Crown and the NSFRC provides another example of mutually supportive program goals as supports that are provided to those in need of employment. Through positive connections with the NSFRC, Career Source Florida Crown efficiently delivers services to those in need, while the NSFRC enhances its ability to provide holistic assistance to attendees. One participant highlighted a way this relationship has manifested in the past:

*Yeah, I would just say also Florida Crown, one of the things that really happened with Florida Crown is just always amazing... whenever someone comes in here and they- lots of times people come for concrete services they want, they need food or lights and stuff. And when they say, well, we start asking "how you get in the situation" and that's "well I don't have a job." As soon as I say, "can you wait for a minute?" [laughter] and if [Florida Crown Employee Name] can get here, [Florida Crown Employee Name] will say*

*“keep him in the office, I'll be right there.” And he's, he's right there and he'll, he'll, he'll get him signed up.*

A fourth example of mutually supporting program goals comes from the NSFRC's collaboration with Florida Gateway College. One participant noted how they notified FGC staff of a patron's needs and received a quick response. They shared, *“this person needs this, and [Group Attendee/Community Partner] said 'I'm on my way' and see that, that worked real well.”* Because of their collaborative relationship, both agencies were able to bring the best support they could to this patron. In addition to aiding on an as-needed basis, this collaborative relationship can also support initiatives. One such initiative, run by Career Source Florida Crown is the Federal Work Study program. Finding suitable volunteer opportunities for youth at non-profits is reportedly challenging, as their requirements mandate at least three percent of the work be dedicated to non-profit activities. This mutually beneficial opportunity not only provides volunteers to support the NSFRCs Homework Help program, but also allows volunteers to fulfill this federal requirement. Volunteering for the Homework Help program also supports students' personal goals, as one participant shares:

*...the pitch I'm trying to give to our teaching students is if you really want to get a taste of teaching, come here first, and see what it's like to tutor these students and see if that's really where you want to go. This, this is a really good starting point for them to see if it's something that they really want to do...*

Another participant praised the program adding:

*As a matter of fact, [Community Partner]'s son, he's one of the volunteers here. He I guess he gets his in-service points, for his scholarship to be here and help us with the children. So, it, it has truly been a blessing to our kids to get involved with the Homework Help [program].*

The community partner adds more on her son's experience:

*Our son... he comes, and he does the Homework Help [program]. He loves it. So, he comes out of foster care, and he was adopted. So, it's given him a lot of those skills and tools and everything that he needs. And he comes home talking about the kids every day.*

*He's got something new to tell. But what he did tell me that "I would never be a teacher." So, we have learned that so, so he has learned that. But he loves- He loves to come. He loves helping the children. He loves to give back. And so that's, that's a big accomplishment for him.*

Another mutually supportive youth positive collaboration is with the Summer Youth Employment program, an initiative that is a collaboration between the Lake City Police Department and Career Source Florida Crown. Originating as a Lake City Police Department initiative under Chief Gilmore's leadership, the program aimed to keep children occupied and out of trouble after school. Additionally, it seeks to foster positive relationships between youth and local police, nurturing their interactions with law enforcement to be more positive. Starting with only 30 youth, the program has expanded to 70 youth. This program allows 14- to 19-year-olds to work during the summer, earning up to \$2,400 during the program. In some cases, these organizations reportedly also hire the youth once they graduate high school. An integral part of this initiative is the need for a host site, as explained by one participant:

*...it's hard to find organizations or companies that would host our kids because we're going to pay them, but we need places to... place them so that they can, you know, acquire some, not only just acquire some working skills, but how to interact with other people and with authority and, and, ensuring that you are being respectful and everything like that.*

The NSFRC has been a host site for the last three years where students have provided support to the resource centers youth enrichment activities.

Another way the NSFRC's collaborations provide mutual benefit is through the creation of opportunities for participants. Opportunities to work with children can help youth discover if this is what they want to do for a career. Educational opportunities are also provided to these youth every Friday with various speakers as part of the program with soft skills training and basic career etiquette. For one such Friday, the NSFRC's manager was invited to come, and he spoke

on “being professional, you know and, and what was acceptable in the workplace and things of that nature” The collaboration also allowed for mentoring as one participant shared:

*...it worked out well because they what- what really works well with them is that it's a time that you can counsel with them and teach them job skills and just career readiness skills, you know, so a lot of that was going on and then they mentor you that that every one of them we developed relationships that we still talk to them you know so that's really nice.*

Mutual partnerships also, in fortunate circumstances, result in opportunities that may not be financially possible otherwise. An example of this is the funds donated by Florida Blue in 2023, enabling five youth to attend Richardson Community Center’s summer program at a cost of \$350 each. In 2024, the Columbia Family Resource Council (CFRC) (formerly the Resource Center Advisory Council) donated unallocated funds to cover \$100 of the \$350 summer program admission fee for four children.

Mutual benefits were also noted from various sources: homeschoolers receiving support at the NSFRC, schools like Niblack and Melrose providing books to children, and children receiving assistance with homework. Additionally, the advisory council reportedly plays a crucial role in offering timely solutions to pressing community needs, benefiting all involved.

### *Supportive Partnerships*

The theme of supportive partnerships explores moments in which one partner provided significant support, demonstrating the value and impact of these collaborations. There were 11 (26%) statements speaking to examples of supportive partnerships in action. For example, the NSFRC’s Homework Help program was supported by local schools offering free educational books and asking nothing in return:

*...NiBlack to Melrose, they had additional books. And we were able to get books that have already been identified by their reading level, so it helps them with the AR that we will be able to help them with their AR points.*

As children continue to use these materials, the school's mission for their success is reinforced:

*...we provide materials so that they can work on their math skills as well as their reading skills. And the schools are very thankful for our support. We have seen improvement in the children's grade and in their midterm reports, so that has proven to be a blessing to them.*

Panera Bread's donation of previously baked pastries also stands out as a supportive partnership in which they provide the NSFRC with free pastries and ask nothing in return. With their generous donation, the NSFRC attracts more visitors and patrons that can access these free services. Often this service is so popular that "*patrons that visit regular on Tuesday morning, they know. ... and about- about 10:30, 11 o'clock is when the pastries [are] gone.*"

Another example is a patron who stepped up as a partner after attending a community event and now offers free translation support to the NSFRC by translating the monthly calendar and flyers for community events.

The Columbia County Library also provides support through direct referrals to the NSFRC and has donated several age-appropriate books that can be read by children during Homework Help programming or sent home with them.

In some cases, support comes from unexpected financial contributions. For example, while preparing for the yearly back to school event the NSFRC was contacted from a physician at Medicus Cannabis<sup>2</sup> saying "*I have some money I want to give you.*" Grateful, Dr. Mobley went over and received the funds and took a picture with the physician, creating a new relationship with a supportive partner.

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<sup>2</sup> Medicus Cannabis is an Osteopathic Medicine & Medical Marijuana Specialist. Learn more here: <https://www.medicuscannabus.com/>

A final example of supportive partnerships occurred during the feedback group on which this paper is based. In response to a need for support for non-native speakers, advisory council members, who are accustomed to discussing issues and potential solutions, provided a valuable suggestion:

*Have you ever partnered with migrant education to see if they might outpost here a couple of times a month? ... Migrant education is, is located physically in Gainesville, but they have outposted workers that work all these communities. Because I've, I've had them come with me to outreach events.*

Grateful for the insight, Dr. Mobley, the NSFRC manager recorded the contact information to foster a collaborative relationship in the future. This instance offers a glimpse into the collaborative nature of the council's work, exemplifying the organic way supportive partnerships are cultivated. Bringing individuals together in a shared space to discuss needs, brainstorm ideas, and offer solutions from their wealth of knowledge transforms an idea into a relationship, and a relationship into a partnership.

#### *Gateway to Support*

One of the ways the NSFRC provides value through collaboration is as a gateway or starting point from which to get other resources, services, and supports. There were four statements speaking about ways in which connections with the NSFRC led to greater connections with information or services. By being on local community boards, NSFRC staff can stay informed of and access resources through positive relationships and information sharing. Whether it's Kiwanis, the Housing Authority, or the local Homeless Coalition, the NSFRC gathers knowledge about upcoming events and available services. This ensures that NSFRC patrons can access comprehensive information conveniently in one place. They can then use those resources as an informed starting place for accessing services.

Community events put on by the NSFRC can act as a gateway to supports. For instance, patrons who come in for backpacks during the Back-to-School Backpack Giveaway or health screenings during the Health Fair, leave with a wide array of information. As one patron put it these events are a “...big example of how it helped the community, that they got to know a lot more about the different services provided...”

One patron explained the importance of compassionate support to make impactful results when taking the role of a gateway to supports:

*I think that so many people feel a sense of comfort when they come here. They are able to be themselves and... the ones that are actually employed here can be the liaison to connect them with those services so that they can they feel a sense of comfort and confidence when they are able to go and receive the services that are out there.*

In some cases, patrons themselves choose to participate in that gateway, taking resources from the FRC to people they know who are in need in the community as one patron reportedly does:

*We have one guy that comes and he's in a community where a lot of seniors are and that he- he's taking stuff [to the seniors], we had to- we had to kind of help him, say you can't take too much, but... he's helping people that need it.*

#### Comfortable Environment

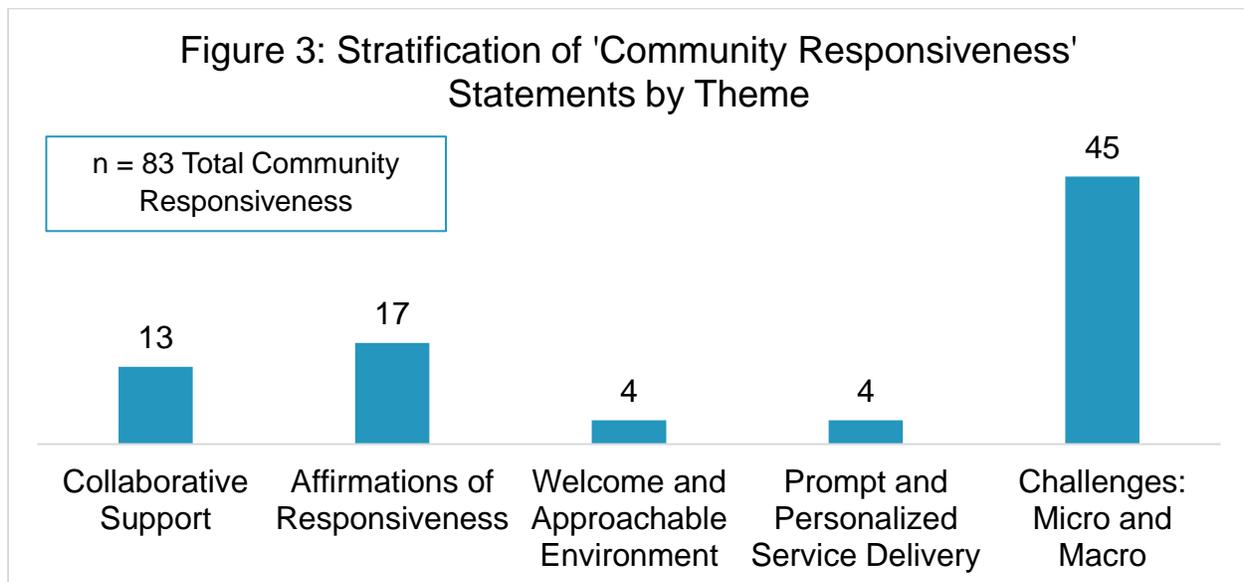
Caring staff at the NSFRC reportedly help patrons “feel a sense of comfort and confidence.” Four statements emphasized the comfort patrons feel in the environment, underscoring its value and impact in the community. The NSFRC has a familial tone; for instance, some children in the Homework Help program have taken to calling the FRC manager “Uncle Phil.” One participant, speaking from her experience in child welfare shared:

*...it's a very different feel coming into a Resource Center to seek help with what's going on in my food stamp case or “I need help in an emergency” or that kind of thing versus having to go into a DCF office. Because you know, there's always that perception of if I tell too much to DCF, they're going to- it's going to be more than just food stamps, it's*

*gonna be my kids or, you know. And so, I think that comfort level of coming to a place that they already are familiar with the staff here and then speaking with somebody who does represent DCF is there in a helping capacity, I think it's- It's a wonderful model. I would love to have them out in every one of my communities if we had more staff and more funding, but I'm glad you guys are hosting that.*

### **Question 2: Community Responsiveness**

The following statements speak to the questions: *Have NorthStar services and activities been responsive to community and patron needs? Can you provide examples of services or activities that have been particularly effective in meeting the needs of patrons?* They were also asked the follow up question: *Are there any challenges or obstacles that you think that patrons are facing in accessing services in the community?* There were 83 total statements to this question coming from six participants (60% of the group). These statements were stratified into five themes including 13 on collaborative support, 17 on affirmations of responsiveness, four on welcome and approachable environment, four on prompt and personalized service delivery and 45 (54%) on micro and macro challenges.



### Collaborative Support

One of the ways in which the NSFRC has been responsive to the community is through collaborations with providers to serve patrons. There were 13 statements discussing ways in which the NSFRC collaborates with other community providers to support families. For instance, the NSFRC can provide previously baked pastries to patrons in need because of their collaboration with Panera Bread, as well as distribute toys to local families in need before Christmas because of their collaborative relationship with Toys for Tots. The Back-to-School Backpack Giveaway is a success because of collaborative support from Columbia County Public Schools who donate backpacks, and local barbers who donate free haircuts. This teamwork means that NSFRC staff “*never had to say ‘you can’t get a bookbag’*” to any family in need.

With this collaborative support, the NSFRC is better able to be responsive to the needs in the community. This is one reason Dr. Mobley attends the homeless coalition meetings which has “*a good, strong group of advocates.*” Leadership which is interwoven in the community helps the NSFRC stay aware of current issues, build relationships, and widen supports. Such is manifested by Dr. Mobley’s efforts to be aware of and engaged with community issues impacting children, youth, and families served by NSFRC. For example, he scheduled time to speak with community members to discuss the issue of violence among youth within the surrounding neighborhoods.

Collaborative partnerships help address identified service gaps. A new collaboration with the Language Line<sup>3</sup> will help the NSFRC staff better support those who struggle to speak or understand English. Partnerships with the Richardson Community Center and the Childrens Partnership Council have led to scholarships for some youth who are NSFRC patrons to be able to attend the Richardson summer camp.

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<sup>3</sup> Learn more here: [Language Translation and Interpreting Services | LanguageLine Solutions](#)

Supported by United Way of Suwannee Valley and Florida Gateway College staff, NSFRC staff were able to write a grant which was awarded to help the Family Resource Center acquire Homework Help program volunteers and concrete services such as utilities. Local churches such as Northside Church of Christ, pastored by Dr. Mobley, and Bethel United Methodist church also work collaboratively with the NSFRC to provide quick support to families as they wait for assistance from local social service providers. In this way, several providers can collaborate to support a single family.

#### *Affirmations of Responsiveness*

There were 17 statements which highlighted affirmations that the NSFRC was responsive to patron and community needs. One participant shared how a survey was given out to “*see the hot spots and, and there were a couple areas in the community that were looked at and this was the one where the need was the most.*” They go on to affirm how this location allows for greater responsiveness in the community:

*It, it is centrally located, people of any gender, race, age can come here and I think they feel welcome and I think that's a, a positive for the facility here is that anybody can come and it doesn't matter your age, it doesn't matter your background if you need something and they're able to do it or able to steer you to where you need to go.*

The needs and responses can be varied from homework help, to deposit to electric bills, to help with telephone set up as one participant explained:

*Again, that goes back to the Homework Help [program]. It goes to the clothes giveaway, the Panera Bread. Did- do you want me to keep going? (laughter) They [NSFRC] help with the, the electric bill, light bill, I mean, water bill- ... And there's so many things they, they, they come in for. Sometimes they [patrons], I've, I've seen them come in for them to help them with their telephone how to set their telephones up...*

Another participant shared an example they worked with highlighting the needs of some homeless students:

*...they [couple of students] needed somewhere to stay and I believe that there were some gift cards or something and [NSFRC Manager] was able to get them a hotel room until we could work on trying to process a refund for them to help them put down on a place or get them- make sure that they had resources. I can think of two occasions we had students that were homeless, and they needed somewhere to stay and I referred them here and most got help*

As mentioned previously the NSFRC's Back to School Backpack Giveaway was considered a strong support for community needs, assisting "up to like 500 kids", with two participants remarking that attendees "wrapped around the building." Another participant added: "Yeah, because what happens is that not only are they getting book bags and school supplies, they're getting haircuts. So the barbers, he has about 8 or 9 barbers and in there and they're getting haircuts. "

There continued to be affirmations of responsiveness towards the Homework Help program, which was seen as a relief for exhausted parents and a support to the kids whose parents may not otherwise know how to assist with homework. The value was shared by one participant who said, "The beautiful thing about it, when they go home. Their homework is done, momma done worked all day." As generations pass and school methods change, parents face challenges with unfamiliar educational approaches, but NSFRC reportedly provides "the resource that we're able to help them." This help manifests in real changes to student performance:

*...grades have improved as well as their behaviors. We have seen in particular... one young lady came in and her parents actually had her put back because she was so immature, and she had so much baggage. By the end of the year, she is reading. When she came here, she, she was calling words, but she was not reading. And now she's reading. She has confidence. Is her behaviors perfect? No. But I have seen improvement in her behavior, and most of the children. We had one young man who was retained but... his background was very complex. But all of the children beside him were promoted, so we felt really good about that.*

NSFRC continuously engages in a feedback loop to listen to and address the community's needs. During the feedback group this paper is based on, Dr. Mobley affirmed a plan to support the identified need for increased father engagement in the community. NSFRC was planning a:

*...men's effort and on Father's Day week, I think Father's Day weekend around that we're going to have a men walk. But it's really to get the men's- get the get the men's program started and really try to encourage men to be in. What we want- that walk is going to highlight and... promote men that are involved in their children life, not the negative part... But what we want to do is to applaud men that are in already involved in their children's life.*

Regarding the NSFRC as a “portal of all things” one participant affirmed past successes and a path for the future:

*Well, and people are sending people to you like, you know you are that portal of all things. And so you know, it's promote yourself like that, that you're, you're filling a niche that doesn't exist otherwise. Because I remember when we started in the Advisory Board, when we were just trying to visualize what this was going to be. It was going to fill a niche that didn't exist in Lake City. And so now that you're here and you're, you know, you've, you've got your model in place, it's really time to start promoting. “This is what we've been able to accomplish.”*

#### *Welcoming and Approachable Environment*

There were four statements which attributed the NSFRC's capacity to be responsive to community and patron needs to their ability to have a welcoming and approachable environment. Patrons reportedly feel welcome to approach staff with their problems and needs no matter their need or background. Rent and utility assistance, clothing, food, phone set up, and more requests come in, allowing patrons to be assisted with where they need to go.

The welcoming environment may also be the reason a young girl attends the Homework Help program despite not having homework: “*she makes her grandmother bring her every day because that's her time to socialize... and she's the only child.*”

It is evident that creating a welcoming environment where people feel comfortable seeking help allows the organization to be more responsive to the needs of individuals and the community.

#### Prompt and Personalized Service Delivery

There were four statements which spoke to either the promptness or personalized nature of service delivery which supported the NSFRC's responsiveness to community need.

One participant shared how the NSFRC's prompt assistance supported some students experiencing homelessness. NSFRC staff "were able to get them a hotel room until we could work on trying to process a refund for them to help them put down on a place... make sure that they had resources." In one instance, the NSFRC's fast response resulted in accessing services from local churches to support patrons waiting for finances to come in. Another example was given of a patron reportedly struggling with affordable transportation, resulting in a need for food which the NSFRC was able to provide quickly.

Personalized supports were given to six youth from the Homework Help program who had no one to come for them to their schools Pro Dads event. Dr. Mobley recounted:

*We had several of our kids here that asked me, 'could you go to the Pro Dads at NiBlack and be my dad?' Six of the kids. I had to be- I had to go and be their dad, you know? And they were just so happy that, you know, they came and sat at my table, they were just happy that I can say I'm their dad. And but that's what they need.*

#### Challenges: Micro and Macro

As the NSFRC strives to be responsive to community needs, it faces several challenges, and participants had much to say about these issues. There were 45 (54%) statements discussing these challenges. This proportion is not unexpected given that the feedback group is comprised of advisory council members with experience in jointly identifying challenges and solutions. These challenges encompassed a wide array of topics, affecting both individuals on a micro,

interpersonal level and the NSFRC on a macro, systemic scale. For this theme, statements have been organized by topic and will mention the micro or macro challenges as appropriate. In some cases, challenges are provided an acknowledgement of the NSFRCs limitations and in other cases they are provided as suggestions of things that may be overcome.

The cost of summer programs, homework help, and other local youth services are reportedly one challenge for families. Though costs may be affected at a macro level, the interpersonal strain on the families makes this a micro challenge. The Richardson Community Center, which is located on the same property as the NSFRC, hosts a summer program which costs \$350 per student and reportedly does not accept older teens. Though the NSFRC has been able to obtain four \$100 scholarships to assist families in 2024, the responsibility is still on the caregivers to pay for the balance of the enrollment fee. The feedback group discussed various community options but as one participant shared, *“It's still going to be the issue of there is, a there is a fee for all of those programs.”* Similarly, there are reportedly various Homework Help programs in the community but many are unaffordable to caregivers, as one participant pointed out *“the problem is that they have to pay, these families can't afford to pay.”* The Homework Help program at the NSFRC is free but consistently remains at full capacity, unable to allow more youth to join with staffing and space limitations. Though the NSFRC is responsive to the community, they are challenged by financial, space, and staff barriers.

Caregivers are also limited on a micro level by their own education and unfamiliarity with new educational methods. Participation in the NSFRC's Homework Help program could potentially support this limitation, however only for those families who are able to participate in the program. One participant explained this struggle, *“just think about it, parents going home, and the child doesn't understand how to do the work and [the parent says] ‘I can't help them.’”*

Another identified micro challenge may be the language used to describe services or programs to parents/caregivers. As one participant shared, sensitivity is key:

*So, for example, if we want to address community violence, so we'll say we're we want to host a parenting class, well parents aren't going to show up because you're insulting a mother that that sounds insulting to a parent. Like, well, I don't need a parenting class because I'm doing the best that I can do.*

Micro challenges for local youth may in some cases reportedly be leading to violence perpetrated by youth in the surrounding area. One participant who is working with the NSFRC manager on addressing violence in the community feels that “*Our youth don't have anything to do.*” They went on to share that their previous attempt to address these challenges at a local alternative school only had six attendees because few of the youth returned the permission slip. Postulating as to why that was, they added, “*...lack of parental support because either the, the parents didn't care to fill it out or they're maybe some students like I'm not going to show this to my mom because I don't want to do it.*” This participant also estimated a reason for youth violence based on observations they have had:

*They go to school from like 7:00 to 12:00. So, we put these kids who are already in there because of something, we put them out at 12:00. Parents might not be home until 5:00 or 6:00 at night, so from 12:00 to 6:00 they got six hours. There's nothing. So, what are they supposed to do? And possibly by the time Mom comes home, she's too tired. So, when Mom comes home, it's like, well, I don't want to be in her space, so I'm going to go. And now they've got all this other time to really lash out.*

Mental health and drug addiction were spoken of both on a micro and a macro level.

These two topics can be intertwined as one participant shared:

*...you know, we have the segments within the homeless population that do have drug issues and mental health issues and, and sometimes you, you know, group them and it can become a very volatile situation without management so. But again, it really takes a lot of partnership for that and advocacy...*

The individual's challenge can often be affordability of mental health and substance abuse treatment which the NSFRC is not qualified to provide. Recalling a recent experience one participant shared:

*[The mental health facility] let him stay like for 21 days, but now he knows he's not ready to come out. But guess what? His insurance company covers 21 days. He's, he's, he's telling them "I'm not ready. I know I'm not ready, and, and I know if I get out right now, I'm going to go back in and do what I was doing before."*

The harsh reality of these macro systems then becomes apparent, *"the only way they can take him back is if he comes back in that place and he, he, has substance in the system, he got to get substances in his system for them to take him back."* Though the NSFRC is not able to make the systematic changes needed to help patrons in need, these needs do affect the daily lives of such patrons and highlight some limitations to solving those problems.

Another micro challenge for local families is the need for reliable transportation. In some cases, the cost associated with obtaining transportation in a city without public transit can be significant, as was reportedly the case for a recent NSFRC visitor, *"she spent all her money that she got from whatever, on transportation."* Transportation services lacking funding or changing procedures can provide additional strains on patrons using that service, as one participant reported:

*... [local agency] ran out of the grant so they don't do the rounds from Suwannee coming into Lake City and then going back. So, they don't do those rounds anymore- because they used to be used to be like \$3 one way... but the grant money ran out. So now to get transportation, you have to fill out the application and they have to, I think the way they're doing it now, they just bill it to your insurance.*

There is a need for awareness of what few transportation services exist. This issue also affects youth in the Homework Help program, who rely on transportation from the sixth-grade center. The current transportation method is expected to be disrupted next year due to school improvement projects. One participant shared:

*...the ones that come from Richardson Six Grade Center, they can, the bus will drop them off right up here so that, that works for them. But the others have to get here and now I'm concerned because now next year NiBlack is not going to be there so for the transition and what's going to happen with our kids...*

A macro, systematic level challenge that the NSFRC continues to address is outreach, especially to those who have limited English proficiency. NSFRC leadership acknowledged, “*One of the, our gaps has been with [supports for] Spanish speaking*” and then shared the recent efforts to be responsive to this need, “*we did have an agency come the other day and, and gave us some because there's a language line and, but and we talked about how we could better serve our Spanish speaking population.*” Staff also acknowledged a need to “*start promoting*” the services and supports they provide which are unique to the community.

Housing affordability and homelessness continue to be challenges in the community surrounding the NSFRC. These issues were so important to the participants that 21 (47%) of the 45 statements speaking to macro and micro challenges were about housing and homelessness. These issues affect families directly and are often the consequence of systematic decisions which make a significant impact.

One participant recalled two individuals experiencing homelessness who utilized NSFRC services: one who “*sleep up under the tree over there by the- by the ball field, under the shade*” and another who tragically passed away.

*One challenge that I see, and it really concerns me ...one thing that bothers me really, when I see people who are homeless and the closest shelter available is Gainesville. We had one ... lady who was sitting here, she would come and say she wanted to use the computer, but she would fall asleep at the computer and she was wanting somewhere, somewhere where she could rest her body....And as a matter of fact the young lady who is coming to help for the computer died within what, a month after she was hanging out here. She got a hold of some bad drugs or something. But the homeless, the homeless situation and I know that there are some people who play on it, but there are some people who are for real and they need a location and I've seen where people live out in the woods and things of that nature.*

In another example, the NSFRC was able to provide help to a mother with two children in paying her light bill so they did not have to live in her car. The families in need continue to come to the NSFRC for help, however, the FRC has limited capacity to provide solutions. As one participant put it, *“But that is the thing. But there's, there's many of them. Every week, someone's coming here and they have nowhere to go and we can't help them. We can't help them and that, that hurts, that hurts.”*

As homelessness is a complex issue, it is challenging to know the layers of micro and macro challenges involved. One participant suggested that *“a great number of homeless have underlying mental illness issues.”* Others in the group suggested, *“we have the segments within the homeless population that do have drug issues and mental health issues and, and sometimes you, you know, group them and it can become a very volatile situation without management.”* Another lamented, *“it's sad that they don't have [supports]... to actually help them, because many of them do not have the capacity to help themselves.”* A third spoke of *“the obligation of rent, lights, and water”* as a possible reason for homelessness. Lake City does have a Homeless Coalition hosted by United Way of Suwannee Valley which discusses these issues and works for solutions. Over time, several members of that group have also been involved in the advisory council.

Without a general population homeless shelter in Lake City, FL there was concern, *“when it's cold, you know, and I know that there are some churches that open their doors, but how many people are aware, you know, it's just a sad situation for the homeless in this county.”* Another participant remarked that the shelters which are open locally are cold night shelters, meaning they only open when the temperature is below 35 degrees. Funding to build new shelters and have more homeless initiatives was reported by one participant as *“almost nonexistent these*

days.” Instead of directing them to local services, some police officers reportedly put the people experiencing homelessness “*in their car, [and] they’ll drive them to Gainesville.*”

One participant shared new legislation that has reportedly been approved, mandating the creation of encampments that must be moved by law annually. HUD restrictions, which set the fair market value for local housing, are reportedly very outdated as one participant noted, “*We do need another HUD assessment. ... I think the last one was [in the] 90s I think?*” The importance of this outdated information has a very practical result, making housing waivers in many cases unusable and inadequate for rising rent costs in the community:

*Well, even the money that's available for like United Way because of the HUD restrictions- -that the rent has to be a below a certain amount, there's no available housing that meets their criteria to spend the money and in the disaster stuff, because I'm on the disaster committee, same thing. You have money available to put people in alternate housing, but it has to be a fair market value rent, according to HUD, which is totally ridiculous. It's not fair market value.*

Put succinctly, “*It's like they give you money, but then you can't spend it.*” Even if affordable housing is found, the costs associated with moving in become another barrier.

*First, last month, and a deposit. So, you need about 3 months to get into a place, and if you're talking a place costs \$1000, that means you got to have \$3000 to get in that place, plus deposit for electric, water...*

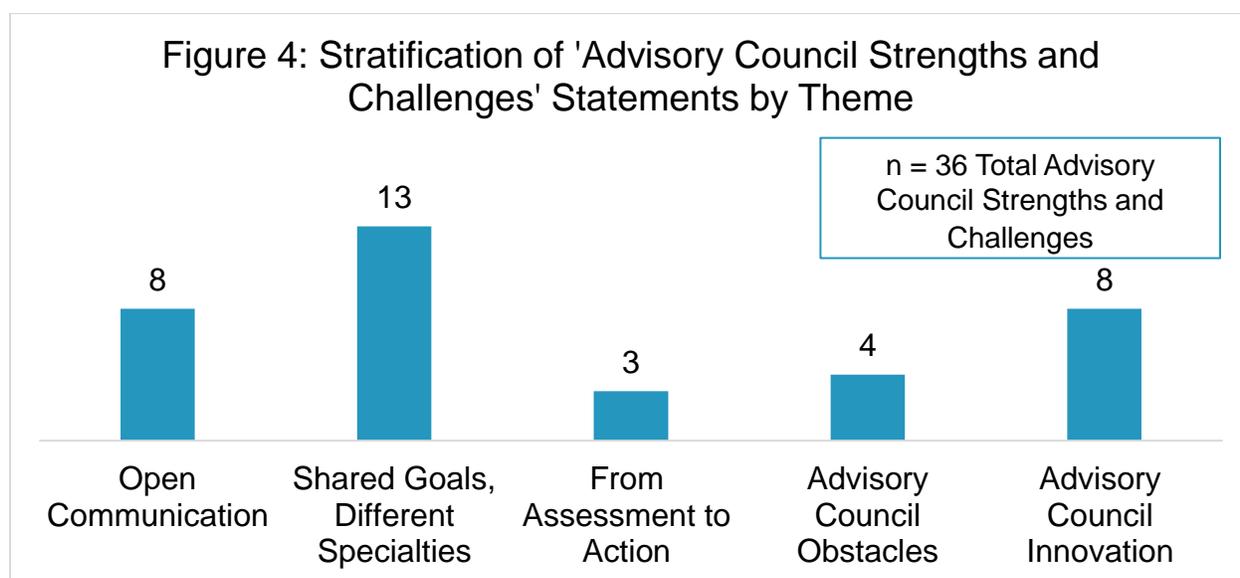
Two participants spoke of their desire to support people in need by providing low rent properties and found that “*people move in and then once they move in it, they don't want to leave.*”

### ***Question 3: Advisory Council Strengths and Challenges***

The following statements speak to the question: *Now we want to hear about the RCAC specifically. From your perspective, what aspects of the RCAC are functioning well?* [This can include before or after the merger into the CFRC in October of 2023] They were also asked the follow up questions: *Are there any barriers or challenges that hinder the efficient functioning*

and responsiveness of the RCAC to NorthStar and their patron needs? Any suggestions for addressing challenges and improving RCAC processes? There were 36 total statements from seven participants (70% of the group), with one instance of multiple participants saying the same thing at once.

The statements were stratified into five themes with eight statements for open communication, 13 for shared goals, three for from assessment to action, four for advisory council obstacles and eight for advisory council innovation (see Figure 4).



Open Communication

With eight statements, open communication was listed as an advisory council strength. In one instance, multiple speakers overlapped in their agreement saying, “yeah, yeah” that good communication was a success of the group. As one participant explained:

*It helps everyone to get the word out to the community that we serve about what's available because you know, then we find out, I find out something that, you know, some other agency does, and I can take that back to the library. And we can refer people there and that you know, that works all around for all the partners.*

Similarly, another participant shared about the advisory council, “...it's become a networking group of its own.... a referral.... referral base.” Other examples of positive

communication come from meeting notifications months in advance with follow up notifications as well as sharing the NSFRC calendar. One participant shared:

*The communication is always good. Dr. Mobley shares his calendar every month, so we know what's going on. There's something in the community. As [group member] was saying, so we get it out to the community, so I like the communication piece, it does, it helps a lot.*

Another participant shared how that good communication may be used in the future as a group to support the NSFRCs sustainability in the community:

*Well, I mean, if we're on different groups or whatever or even hearing of funding sources available, I mean Lake City's so connected, like we serve on lots of different things. Lots of us are United Way people and were Altrusa people and we're, you know, in lots of different groups. So whenever. ... You know, we could be suggesting to Phil like, hey, you might want to do a little grant application here or there and then we can talk it up in our circles to say, oh, I know that organization is doing really good work. And to help, you know, get funding sent that way.*

#### *Shared Goals, Different Specialties*

There were 13 (36%) statements speaking to the variety of different organizations represented in the group who have a “*vested interest*” in the NSFRCs success, as one participant pointed out:

*I think the variety of members that are in the Council and who actually have a vested interest in providing those services. It's a gamut of things, you know that that is available to, to the patrons and so forth, and they're willing to do it. Right. Like you've got, you know, United Way has been mentioned, Three Rivers, the library services that are there, I think you know just all those kinds of things that are there... that those Council members bring to the table and are willing to bring to the table.*

Together these organizations have different specialties but can come together as a “*cross-education piece*” who provide for networking, funding supports, and referrals. One participant suggested mobilizing the advisory councils for advocacy efforts such as homelessness and possibly gaining support from county officials. Though her office is in Gainesville FL, she added, “*you guys have your own county Commission that I think you know could be power*

*players in this group. To try to support some of the identified needs that you have.”* Though these ideas had support in the group, there was also pushback from participants who have tried to get buy in from local officials with no luck.

An identified benefit of having shared goals and different specialties have reportedly come from “*two funders we have here on the that's on the Council, which was the United Way and this, this... foundation, Scaffs*” whose funds have paid for the community garden which has now started to produce vegetables for the community.

Members of the advisory council come together to work on community needs. Having plans later that day to discuss community violence, two of the advisory council members provide an example of what community collaboration can look like.

*I was sharing with [FRC manager] because he's in our addressing youth violence meeting this afternoon at 2:45. And, and the purpose of that is for- We had an agency that conducted a focus group. Well, the agency wants to give the results of what that focus group was with these, these young people. But it doesn't do any good to put that data in just one person's hands. So, we want to share that. So, whatever we give [FRC Manager] can come back. And if we need to discuss that and find ways that we can really help, then then that's what we really want to try to do. And I think as an Advisory Council, we have to be able to almost find out what these kids want to do and, and help them.*

#### *From Assessment to Action*

There were three statements speaking to this theme, one of which celebrated the value of assessments and two which provided advice for moving into action.

Regarding success of the Homework Help program, one participant shared how the community assessment showed the need for youth activities, “*when we did the assessment, community assessment and what you mentioned was, was the top thing. Nothing to do for kids.*” Because of the community assessment, the NSFRC was able to know what was most valuable to put time and effort into.

Another participant spoke to the value of such assessments to make services more holistic to community and patron needs. She shares that the advisory council needs to:

*...hear from the people. Let those ideas bubble up, not, not from the top down. Otherwise, you're just throwing out a bunch of ideas that they'll be like, "oh, just that DCF person saying, we need this again" kind of thing. So, I think we always have to be cautious as an Advisory Board to say, what did they tell us they wanted from us? And then make that happen, not what we think they want from us.*

A third participant encapsulated the need to take all that has been learned so far and mobilize those assessments and experiences for future action, saying:

*I remember when we started in the Advisory Board, when we were just trying to visualize what this was going to be. It was going to fill a niche that didn't exist in Lake City. And so now that you're here and you're, you know, you've, you've got your model in place, it's really time to start promoting. "This is what we've been able to accomplish."*

#### Advisory Council Obstacles

The advisory council faces several challenges in its mission, as outlined in four statements. These challenges include a lack of government support for previous initiatives and existing community issues, such as insufficient youth activities and free services. Additionally, competition for funding presents a significant obstacle, as highlighted by one participant:

*And then bear in mind that there are, you know, 20 other nonprofits doing the same thing. So, you definitely need to be in the mix. And then do something to stand apart. You know you're; you're meeting needs that other organizations are not. You're unique. So, make sure that you brag on that.*

#### Advisory Council Innovations

Eight statements discussed future ideas and innovations for the advisory council. Five of these focused on strategies to ensure the financial sustainability of the NSFRC. Suggestions included identifying potential grants and funding partners, creating advertising campaigns to highlight the need, uniqueness, and success of the FRC, and offering support with grant writing. One specific innovation was suggested for the creation of "an after-school program like they do

*with the younger kids, that kids be allowed to stay there until a certain hour and do activities even if it is like video games or something that they like doing.”*

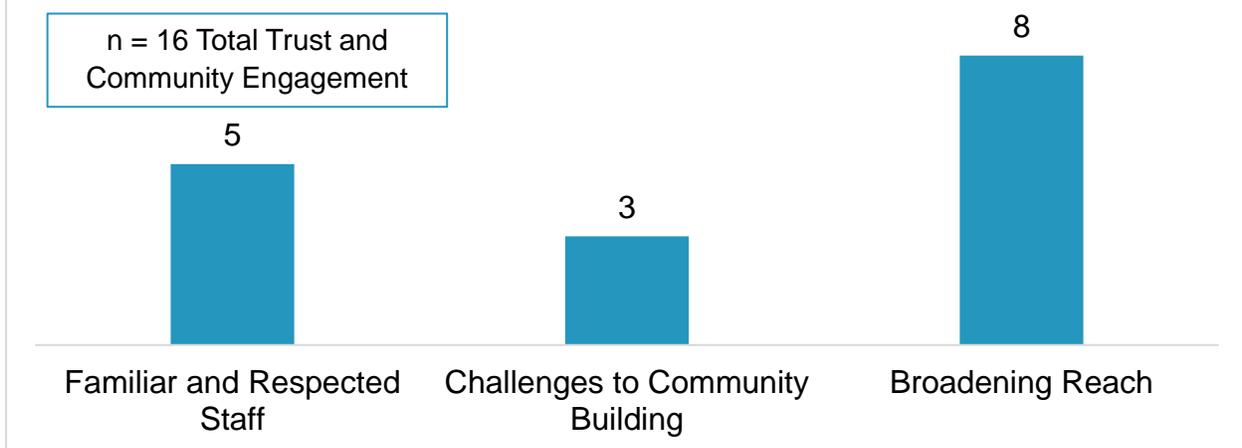
Another suggestion, provided by two different participants, was the use of data to create visuals that can be provided to various community collaborators to increase their engagement. There was a suggestion in the group to use artificial intelligence to cut the workload in designing presentations and infographics. One participant shared the importance of using data for innovative or sustainable efforts:

*And I think you have to get the data behind it because data speaks, unfortunately, it's like I don't know why, you know, just knowing what's going isn't enough but if you've got data to show that this many kids were involved in this many things, that speaks for itself.*

#### ***Question 4: Trust and Community Engagement***

There was a total of 4 patrons, 40% of participants, that gave 16 statements addressing the following questions: *How would you describe the sense of community within the neighborhoods where patrons live and the level of trust among and between patrons and NorthStar? What has or can the RCAC and NorthStar do to enhance a sense of community trust and engagement?* Those statements were stratified into three themes with five statements for familiar and respected staff, three for challenges to community building, and eight for broadening outreach (see Figure 5).

Figure 5: Stratification of 'Trust and Community Engagement' Statements by Theme



### *Familiar and Respected Staff*

There were five statements which pointed to the ways in which having familiar and respectful staff support trust and community engagement. In addition to a general affirmation of trust at NSFRC, there were some examples provided of staff and volunteers. The FRC secretary, who is known in the community for her previous work at the clerk of court, is a respected staff member.

*...people when they walk in here, they know her, and they will open up to her and just start. They just started sharing stuff with her. So, I think that, that, that helps too with, with, with the patrons and, and coming in and, and doing things. And, and feeling comfortable to tell us stuff. It's amazing we get people to tell us some stuff and [laughing] I didn't want to know that, but they. they, they, they do open up...*

Dr. Mobley, the FRC manager is reportedly seen as “*a man of God. They do, and by them seeing him as a man of God, they feel comfortable and talking with him and he does a lot of counseling... and it has worked in a very positive way...*”

Because of her respect in the community a NSFRCs volunteer has reportedly:

*propelled our Homework Help [program] because the last year, and the year before... it was marginal, but once [volunteer] came on, and because they trust her for being an educator and all of that, it just, we max out you know... I think a lot of it had to do with*

*the trust and, and the, and the person. They know we're not, they know we're not just babysitting and the kids are getting something.*

An illustrative example underscores how familiarity and respect impact the lives of local families:

*...we have a couple of parents, like a couple of parents, they prefer their child coming over here they because... the smaller setting and, and a couple of them like, I think this one little boy has some issues with behavior, but his grandmother wants him to come over here because she wants me to work with him you know individually because... he's been raised by his grandmother and grandfather. His granddad has had a major stroke. And so, she wants that male figure in his life.*

### Challenges to Community Building

During the meeting, two patrons raised concerns related to community building. One participant pointed out that the absence of location-specific social media platforms poses challenges for the FRC. This led to a detailed conversation about how PSF manages a single Facebook page that encompasses all FRCs. Reportedly, the decision not to establish individual social media accounts for each FRC revolves around the necessity to sustain effective communication channels with individuals who engage with their posts.

Additionally, there was discussion about a previous role at the resource centers aimed at enhancing communication efforts, which was criticized as “still Gainesville centric.” After a group discussion about PSF's choice to centralize its Facebook presence for all FRCs, concerns were raised that this approach might not effectively reach local users, as noted by one participant.

*...other resource centers are different geographical locations and I don't think the followers, people that are interested in this Resource Center, I don't think the other content is relevant to them, so I don't think in general, the resource centers aren't necessarily gaining followers, and I think that they're losing on, they're losing out on the people that are in Lake City, but if you had your own Facebook page and every time you had any kind of event, you created an event page, I think some of it's just marketing and it really doesn't cost anything to do that. It's just the manpower of the staff, but every single time you have a family fun day or the backpack giveaway instead of doing a post, you do an event and then when people are looking for events because of the way the algorithm for Facebook works, they can do a search and it's shareable. Then you can see how many*

*people are looking at it and that'll give you some measurable data. If you need to show it in a report or to a commissioner, you know, I think that would be tremendous. People share events on Facebook for kids like crazy and y'all are just not getting the benefit of that right now.*

### Broadening Reach

One of the identified ways that the NSFRC and the advisory council could enhance a sense of community is through a broadened reach, in which there were eight statements.. There were three suggestions that the NSFRC be given its own Facebook page. There were two suggestions to broaden reach though providing measurable data, including the use of AI to support this process. One participant spoke in general of increasing reach:

*...just being a little bit more visible because it's still a lot of people that don't even know about the Resource Center. Amazingly, that you know, we know about it, but it's still a lot of people, you know that ask questions and things like that. Just get us out a little bit more. I'm talking about. I mean, I still send people here a lot for notary, you know, get papers notarized and things like that. So, I just think if the Community knows about us. A little bit more.*

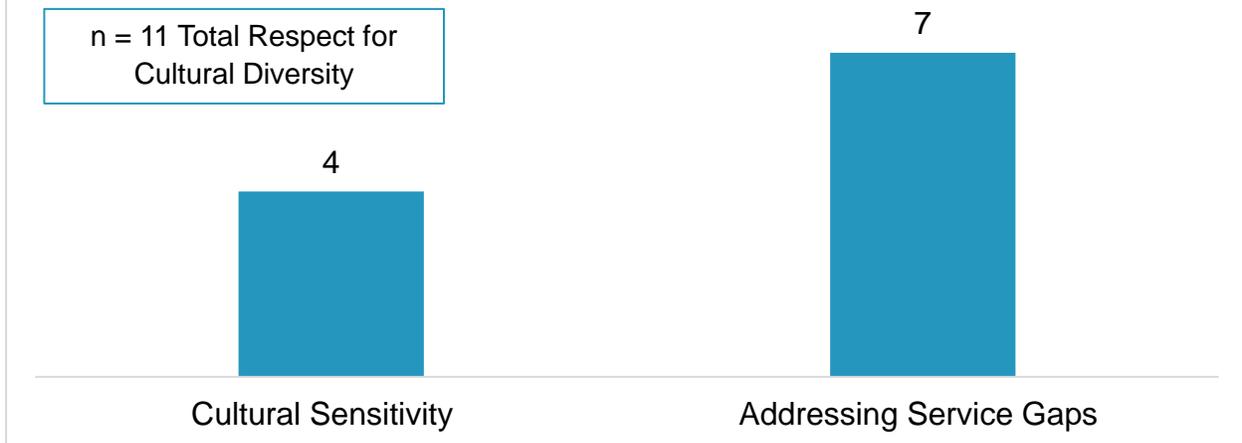
In response another participant simply agreed, saying “Right.”

The final suggestion for broadening reach was for local veterans who struggle to “*trust enough to ask for help.*” This participant suggested that staff take the opportunity to inform veterans about community events and resources while they are in the building as a way to build trust.

### ***Question 5: Respect for Cultural Diversity***

There were four (40%) participants who made 11 statements related to the question: *Have NorthStar services and activities been respectful of and responsive to the cultural diversity of patrons and the community?* These statements were stratified into the themes of cultural sensitivity (n = 4) and addressing service gaps (n = 7).

Figure 6: Stratification of 'Respect for Cultural Diversity' Statements by Theme



#### Cultural Sensitivity

Statements related to cultural sensitivity speak to the attitude NSFRC staff have when dealing with different cultures. One participant agreed that NSFRC staff were culturally sensitive, sharing, “*I think so. I mean, based on the interaction that I've seen here, it doesn't matter of, of ethnicity or gender or whatever, whatever the needs are we try to meet those needs.*” Another participant shared that staff use tools like Google Translate to speak with patrons who speak a different language and have a desire to truly connect in the process.

#### Addressing Service Gaps

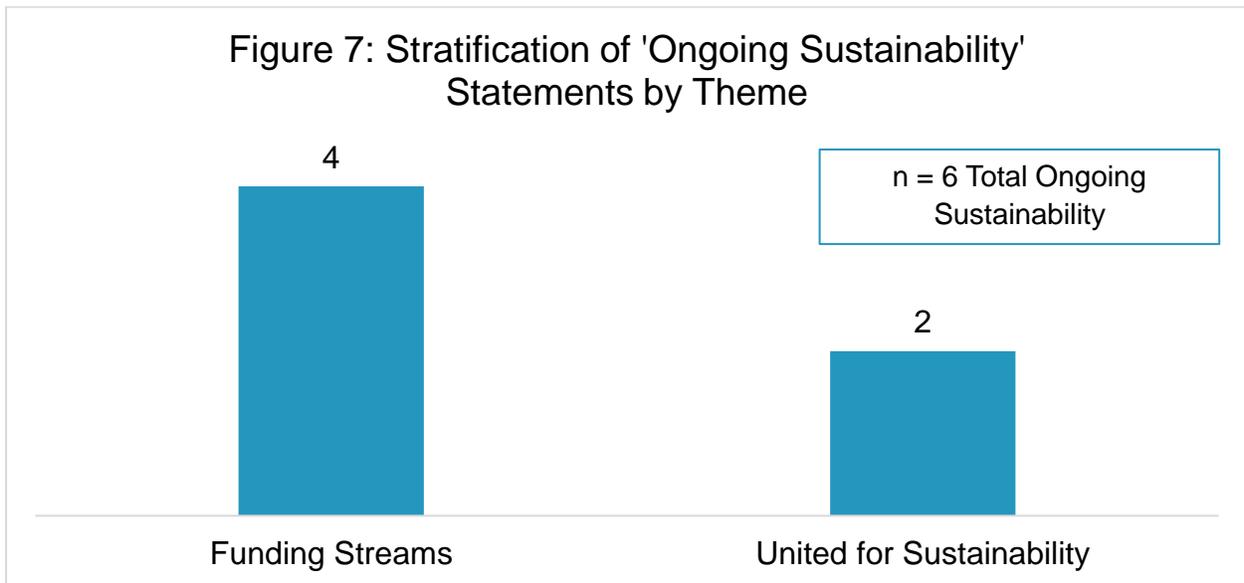
The seven statements which addressed culturally responsive service gaps outline actionable steps that the NSFRC could potentially undertake or is already prioritizing. As one participant shared:

*One of the, our gaps has been with Spanish speaking [people] and we did have an agency come the other day and, and gave us some [training] because there's a Language Line... and we talked about how we could better serve our Spanish speaking population, because we do get people coming here that need resources and, and we're, we're able to use Google, Google Translate.*

Both Language Line and Google Translate assist with translation services if there is a language barrier and though they may not always be ideal, “*we try to accommodate*” as one participant shared. Another translation initiative undertaken by the NSFRC involves collaborating with a local service provider to translate monthly event calendars and flyers into Spanish. During discussions, council members suggested that the NSFRC could also engage with Migrant Education, which has previously supported their events.

***Question 6: Ongoing Sustainability***

There were 6 statements made by three (30%) participants to the question: *What efforts have been made to support the sustainment of NorthStar services beyond the current project period?* The statements were stratified by the two themes of funding streams (n = 4) and united for sustainability (n = 2) (Figure 7).



*Funding Streams*

To start answering the question, one patron spoke about current known streams of funding used at the NSFRC. The Family Resource Center reportedly was awarded a grant from “*...Florida Blue that was a \$60,000 grant... we were able to hire a part-time resource for that*

*grant and, and we're hoping that we will be able to continue to receive some funding from Florida Blue.” Another grant was awarded from United Way of Suwannee Valley to provide financial assistance to patrons. These funds are reportedly “actually paying for the bulk of services that we give with people.”*

A third funding stream comes as a support from Columbia County, which rents the building to the NSFRC. As explained “*we do pay \$900 a month for rent here, but, but that covers all the utilities, all of the cleaning, all of that is, is all covered on that \$900 a month... even the internet is covered.*”

The last funding stream mentioned is the most recently awarded Opioid Grant which will cover the FRC Manager and secretaries’ salary at the NSFRC. This is a great joy for the NSFRC, but the need to work towards sustainability continues as this participant explained:

*...it will cover our base operating cost here so that. And that is now. That is a 15-year grant, but it, it, it's like first year it was \$700,000 for Columbia County the next year it would be \$300,000. So, it's, it's, it's, it, it, decreases real fast. So, so we're, we're, we're still looking for you know long term type of things.*

#### *United for Sustainability*

The funds from the Opioid Grant will secure the NSFRC until July 2025, but additional sustainability efforts are needed. Two participants provided suggestions to enhance sustainability. The first suggestion was to rally local support for the NSFRC, recalling a past event where such support helped sustain the FRC:

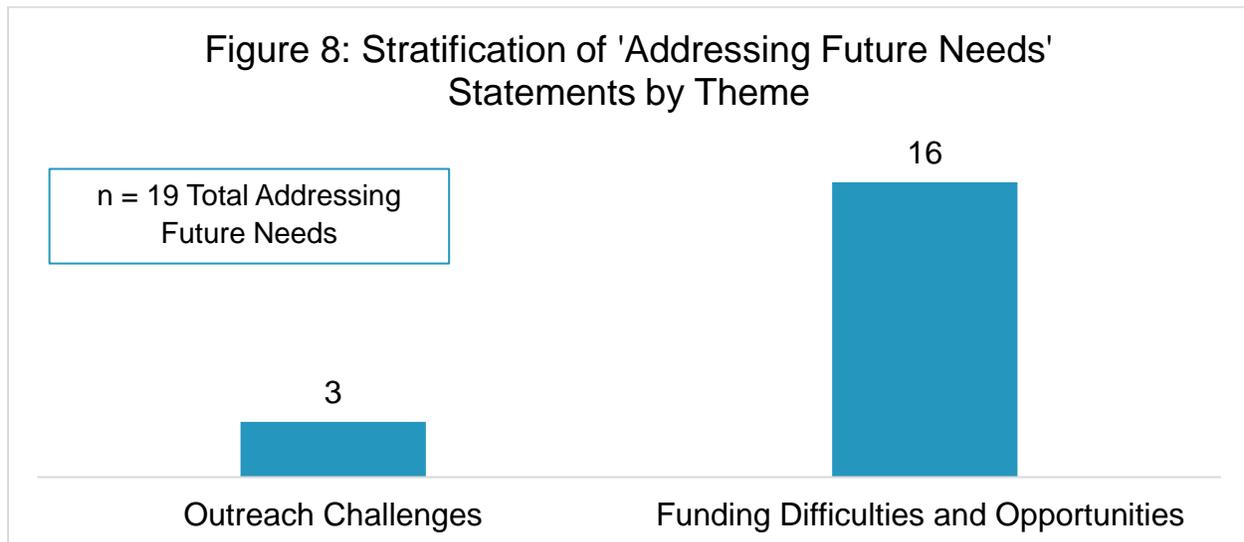
*...remember when this the property and the ownership of it was disputed. You know the way the community came together? I mean, I know that that's passed, but it goes to show that there's sustainability with your home base maybe?*

The second suggestion was to utilize advisory council staff as eyes to spot possible funding sources:

*...we're on different groups or whatever or even hearing of funding sources available, I mean Lake City's so connected, like we serve on lots of different things. Lots of us are United Way people and were Altrusa people and we're, you know, in lots of different groups.*

### ***Question 7: Addressing Future Needs***

A total of 19 statements were made by four speakers (40% of the participants), plus one from an unknown speaker, in response to the future-oriented question: *What challenges or obstacles may arise in sustaining NorthStar services beyond the project period, and how might these be addressed?* These statements were then separated into the two themes of outreach challenges (n = 3) and funding difficulties and opportunities (n = 16) (Figure 8).



#### *Outreach Challenges*

Two patrons identified outreach challenges as causing difficulties for the sustainment of the NSFRC. A lack of outreach can result in missed opportunities or funds as one participant shared:

*There's gaps getting the message out. Right? Because look at all the people that you're helping and their, their word of mouth is probably, you know, great, but it's only going to go so far. There are. There are supporters that don't know you're here. There are donors that don't know you're here. It's not just about getting kids at the Resource Center. Businesses that have money to spend.*

The other participant agreed, suggesting that NSFRC staff should "start promoting" the FRC within the community and explore additional ways to engage with the community through social media. One proposed solution to address the social media challenge involved utilizing a separate nonprofit organization as a central hub for social media outreach on behalf of the center.

### *Funding Difficulties and Opportunities*

The remaining statements to this question addressed the need for funding to sustain the NSFRC in the future. As already identified, poor outreach can result in loss of financial supports. One of the identified opportunities for advisory council members was promoting the NSFRC through "*servicing as ambassadors.*" Another opportunity was that advisory council may use their unique experiences to keep an eye out for possible grant funding opportunities and in some cases, "*...for those of us that are grant writers, we can help with writing grants as needed.*" Once the proposals are written, advisory council members may also have an opportunity to "*...talk it up in our circles to say, oh, I know that organization is doing really good work. And to help, you know, get funding sent that way.*"

There were six statements discussing potential ways to reduce costs with the assistance of local government. One suggestion was to "*go before the county or the city whenever funding comes up.*" Another suggestion involved requesting the county to waive the rent that the NSFRC pays for the building. It was reported that NSFRC staff would need to formally request the county to cover the costs for the Richardson Community Center, which they plan to pursue this year.

Fundraising was considered a challenge as one participant explained that funding for the NSFRC specifically was not allowable so all fundraising would have to be done through Partnership for Strong Families and "*we still have to be real careful how we do it.*" A recent

experience with a provider supporting the annual resolution walk brought with it a possible opportunity for fundraising:

*...the guy that helped us organize that he, he, he does walks and runs all over the country. And he asked me, he says. what kind of funds, are you, are you asking people to donate to run? I said none, he said, well, you need to ask people to donate to run. And I said, well, we were just doing that, he said no, we and I said, well, I can't, I can't do a direct fundraiser so what he said that he would do is that he will do the fundraising and all the money that he gets from it, he would donate it to us. And so that's just that's the way. So, we're, we're going to do that run walk again next year, but he will be the one that actually does the fundraiser. So, this is how we just have to make sure that we do it.*

Another suggestion made was to utilize a separate nonprofit organization as a central hub for fundraising for the NSFRC.

### ***Question 8: Final Thoughts***

There were 11 statements made by three (30%) participants which asked the group if they had “any last comments.” Overall, the nature of these statements reflected a mutual appreciation among council members. In addition to these statements, there were several nonverbal supports such as head nodding to these statements. In a gesture of support, two attendees also donated the gift cards they received for their feedback group attendance back to the NSFRC to be used to support the center and patrons who use the services.

One participant shared their thoughts of watching progress with Partnership for Strong Families Family Resource Center model over the years:

*I, I just always loved the model of the resource centers because I've, I've been fortunate, again because I'm old and been around a long time, but have seen the, the development of every Resource Center that Partnership has started from Library Partnership is their first one and then SWAG and even Cone and, and then Tri-county and then this one. And just that model of having that comfortable place that people in crisis can come to. And they know they'll be treated with dignity and somebody's going to try to help. They may not be able to have every answer, but they're going to try on your behalf. And I think that has value beyond what any data would show. So, I just, I love this model. I've always been an advocate for it. I think it will outlive all of us...*

With laughing and agreement another participant answered, “*Yeah, oh definitely, definitely me.*” And later added “*I love all y'all on the council. Thank you.*”

Another patron added in response to the first adding:

*I just say ditto to what she just said because I know that once I saw what was actually going on here, I just thought it was amazing that we could have something like this in the community so that folks would have a safe haven to come in and help them because they're a lot of times folks just don't know what to do, but they do know that they can come here and if we can't help them, we can just point them in the right direction.*

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, this report has provided a comprehensive review of the role, relationships, and reach of the RCAC throughout the development and operation of the NSFRC in Lake City, FL. From the first introductory meeting of the RCAC in January 2020, to the final RCAC meeting (now the Columbia Family Resource Council- CFRC) in July 2024, the council played a pivotal role in shaping the center’s offerings and ensuring that its services are tailored to the community’s needs. The Council’s merged to form the CFRC, which has marked a new chapter in community collaboration and support. The findings summarized here address the key research questions outlined in the evaluation plan, highlighting the RCAC's significant contributions to the success of the NSFRC and laying the groundwork for the continued efforts of the CFRC.

### ***Meaningful and Functional Relationships***

To address Research Question 1 (R-1), an overview of the RCAC’s membership, its formal relationships, and an analysis of attendance and input from the council is provided. This review seeks to provide a detailed examination of how these factors collectively contribute to answering the question.

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*R-1: To what extent have meaningful and functional relationships been developed and maintained between each of the Family Resource Centers and collaborative partners (multi-agency/multi-system) for the provision of needed services and supports to patrons?*

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The RCAC membership analysis revealed that 248 attendees participated over the four-year period, representing 29 different roles or groups. The RCAC charter emphasized that membership should reflect “*the community as a whole*,” leading to the identification of ten key sectors, with three additional sectors added for classification purposes (see Figure 2).

Each identified sector had some level of representation, with the highest attendance from the Community Residents and Volunteers sector (n = 60), driven by the consistent participation of five dedicated individuals. This was followed by the Legal and Judiciary Community (n = 46) and the Educational Community (n = 41). In contrast, the Public Housing Partners sector had the least attendance, with only one participant.

The varied attendance across roles and sectors underscores the broad connections within the community. Additionally, member feedback on the RCAC’s form and structure highlighted a strong determination to remain engaged, even as meeting formats shifted from in-person to online, and eventually to a hybrid model, in response to COVID-19 concerns.

Meaningful attendance, as defined in the evaluation plan, refers to achieving a minimum attendance of 75% by specific partners during at least three-quarters of the scheduled meetings. A review of attendance data indicates exceptionally high levels of recurring participation among these specified partners, with at least 94% maintaining consistent attendance throughout the period (see Figure 3).

Recurring attendance over time fosters a strong sense of community among the group, reinforcing relationships and enhancing collaboration. This consistent participation reflects the dedication of these members to the advisory council and the NSFRC. Not only were meaningful relationships formed, but they have also been maintained at an impressive rate over the years. This continuity allows members to dive straight into sharing information, bypassing lengthy introductory phases and enabling efficient communication of needs and resources. This dynamic was evident during the feedback group when an issue arose, and participants instinctively shifted into problem-solving mode, exchanging resource contacts seamlessly. One participant humorously captured the moment by remarking, “*And there’s your Council at work,*” prompting laughter from the group.

One of the functional outcomes of these relationships is the establishment of formal agreements with NSFRC. Of the 11 formal agreements, 91% were made with RCAC members. These agreements outline the terms for service use and support, benefiting patrons and ultimately increasing the availability of needed services and supports.

The descriptive analysis also provides an overview of the introductory RCAC meeting held on January 16, 2020. Demonstrating significant community interest, 70% of the attendees at this session continued their involvement, including Dr. Philip Mobley, who initially attended as a community stakeholder and became a major supporter of the project. Dr. Mobley applied for and was hired to fill the NSFRC manager position. During the introductory meeting, attendees established goals and discussed how the advisory council could support the NSFRC. Consequently, the RCAC charter was then created.

In addition to assisting with the planning for the opening of NSFRC, RCAC members’ input and suggestions were crucial for meaningful collaboration and contribution to finalizing

and utilizing the Community Strengths and Needs Assessment for Lake City. Their recommendation to shorten the assessment to one page and make it available in an electronic format proved to be incredibly beneficial in collecting responses from community members in the height of the COVID-19 pandemic.

### ***Responsive Engagement***

To address Research Question 2 (R-2), engagement and responsiveness through consistent attendance, ways in which the RCAC charter provides insights, and a few quotes from the content analysis which speak to the responsiveness to patron needs based on this question are highlighted.

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*R-2: To what extent is the membership of the Resource Center Advisory Council for each Family Resource Center active, engaged, and responsive to implementation, organization, and patron needs? — System and Community Level*

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Much of the information relating to question one also speaks to the engagement and activity of RCAC members. Particularly, a consistent meaningful attendance of over 94% over the course of four years shows a commitment for community members to be engaged with what was happening at the NSFRC. The RCAC charter (**APPENDIX C**) outlines various responsibilities for members, including regular attendance, serving as ambassadors, identifying service gaps, aiding in outreach, and assisting with fundraising efforts. While we have reviewed their regular attendance, we can also assess how members fulfilled these additional roles through the feedback group.

RCAC members consistently served as ambassadors in each meeting by leveraging their connections to share updates on resource center developments. One of the advisory council's

identified strengths was its open communication, a point that multiple participants in the feedback group agreed on. One participant specifically shared how their role as an ambassador functioned:

*It helps everyone to get the word out to the community that we serve about what's available because you know, then we find out, I find out something that, you know, some other agency does, and I can take that back to the library. And we can refer people there and that you know, that works all around for all the partners.*

Another participant shared how ambassadors could be used to enhance further community support, suggesting that leveraging the influence of “*power players in this group... [could be used] to support some of the identified needs that you have*” with the local county commission.

Again, RCAC members also played a crucial role in identifying gaps in local resources and services by contributing to the Community Strengths and Needs Assessment. One participant reflected on this work, stating, “*when we did the assessment, community assessment and what you mentioned was, was the top thing. Nothing to do for kids.*” With this information, the NSFRC has been able to make a thriving Homework Help program. Another participant reflected on the early steps taken to address the identified gaps, stating how the NSFRC has successfully filled these needs:

*I remember when we started in the Advisory Board, when we were just trying to visualize what this was going to be. It was going to fill a niche that didn't exist in Lake City. And so now that you're here and you're, you know, you've, you've got your model in place, it's really time to start promoting. “This is what we've been able to accomplish.”*

RCAC members also contribute to outreach efforts by identifying potential new partners and promoting the NSFRC within the community. Much of this outreach was conducted one-on-one, with RCAC members inviting new attendees to join. A notable example of this effort was the merger with the Children's Partnership Council (CPC), which led to the creation of the

Columbia Family Resource Council (CFRC). Members recognized that both the CPC and the RCAC shared the same goals—to support local families and reduce entries into the formal child welfare system. This merger resulted in a more than threefold increase in attendance (see Figure 4).

Lastly, RCAC members were involved in discussions about fundraising to expand the programs and resources at the center. While there was considerable conversation about the possibilities of fundraising, there were some identified limitations as to what they could accomplish. One feedback group participant noted using their connections to stay informed about funding opportunities:

*...we're on different groups or whatever or even hearing of funding sources available, I mean Lake City's so connected, like we serve on lots of different things. Lots of us are United Way people and were Altrusa people and we're, you know, in lots of different groups.*

Using each member's connections to get the word out about the need at the NSFRC was identified by one participant as important because, *"There are supporters that don't know you're here. There are donors that don't know you're here. It's not just about getting kids at the Resource Center. Businesses that have money to spend."* Other suggestions included providing support for grant writing, requesting funds from local government and *"...talk it [NSFRC] up in our circles to say, oh, I know that organization is doing really good work. And to help, you know, get funding sent that way."*

To enhance responsiveness to implementation, organizational needs, and patron suggestions, recommendations were made to increase social media presence, particularly by creating events on Facebook. Another participant shared their experience and offered advice to the council, stating that they should:

*...hear from the people. Let those ideas bubble up, not, not from the top down. Otherwise, you're just throwing out a bunch of ideas... So, I think we always have to be cautious as an Advisory Board to say, what did they tell us they wanted from us? And then make that happen, not what we think they want from us.*

### ***Successes***

To address the third research question (I-1), the descriptive data from the meeting minutes and select relevant statements from the feedback group can be analyzed.

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*I-1: What factors or actions contributed to any perceived success in developing and implementing the Family Resource Center in Lake City and the continued operation of the three Gainesville Family Resource Centers?*

---

RCAC members discussed various ideas, including the importance of after-school activities for children and youth, the installation of a community garden, the addition of a food pantry, and the co-location of Hope Florida staff at the NSFRC. Each of these ideas have led to the development of different programs at the NSFRC.

Additional insights on successes were provided from participants of the feedback group such as, *“the location of this center and the, the feeling of a relationship with the individual patrons that come in it, it allows different agencies to connect with us to be able to serve our patrons.”* Larger events with attendance of over 50 people were also seen as successes which, *“helped the community that they got to know a lot more about the different services provided.”*

Other identified successes include the agency fair, which facilitated connections between agencies. Collaborations with the FL Hope Navigator, Columbia County Public Library, CareerSource FL Crown, Florida Gateway College, the Summer Youth Employment Program, and local schools were all partially built through RCAC connections and praised for their support of patrons. These supportive partnerships, which foster further connections, have been a

significant benefit for the NSFRC. The comfortable environment at the NSFRC is also reported to be a strong support for patrons.

### ***Challenges***

To address the fourth research question (I-2), we can analyze the descriptive data from the meeting minutes and relevant statements from the feedback group.

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*I-2: Were there any challenges and/or barriers impacting the development and implementation of the Family Resource Center in Lake City and the continued operation of the three Gainesville Family Resource Centers?*

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Focusing on the NSFRC in Lake City, the descriptive analysis highlights how the COVID-19 pandemic impacted the center's implementation. Although the community strengths and needs assessment was available online via a QR code, its delivery just four months into the pandemic may have reduced participation. Additionally, the format of the meetings had to adapt between in-person and online formats due to COVID-19 safety measures.

Other identified obstacles, as listed by the feedback group, include a lack of government support for previous initiatives and the general insufficiency of free services to meet community needs. Additionally, competition for available funding is viewed as a challenge for the continued operation of the NSFRC.

### ***Non-Stigmatizing Support for Patrons***

To address the fifth research question (I-3), we can review the fifth question from the feedback group, which directly pertains to this question.

---

*I-3: Are services provided in a manner that is supportive and non-stigmatizing for patrons (especially marginalized and minority populations)?*

---

One participant shared their perspective, “...based on the interaction that I've seen here, it doesn't matter of, of ethnicity or gender or whatever, whatever the needs are we try to meet those needs.” Even when service gaps, such as the increased use of a language line, were discussed, the desire to be supportive and non-stigmatizing was evident. As one participant shared, “we try to accommodate.”

### ***Sense of Community***

To address the sixth research question (I-4), we can examine the fourth question from the feedback group, which directly relates to this issue.

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*I-4: To what extent does a sense of community amongst patrons impact their response to—or is changed by—engagement and participation in Family Resource Center services/activities?*

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One highlighted success of the NSFRC was having staff members who are well-known in the community. For instance, the office manager is a local church pastor, a long-time volunteer has a career in teaching and serves on the school board, and the secretary is recognized for her years at the clerk of court. This familiarity was believed to help patrons feel more comfortable sharing information about their life situations to receive support.

Challenges to increasing a sense of community were also identified, including the perception that PSF's social media presence was too 'Gainesville-centric' and the need for a

locally managed Facebook account. Additionally, there were general suggestions to enhance outreach to both the general population and specific groups, such as veterans.

Though there remain areas for growth, this report underscores several successes of the RCAC group and its members in supporting the NSFRC, including achieving meaningful attendance and contributing significantly to the center's development. The establishment of the RCAC was part of a broader evaluation aimed at understanding the utilization of services and supports at the NSFRC, as well as the reach and implementation of its programs. By analyzing both quantitative and qualitative data from RCAC members, this report provides valuable insights into their experiences and the FRCs' responsiveness to patron needs, with the overarching goal of strengthening families and preventing child maltreatment.

Suggested Citation:

Lancaster, C., Spoliansky, T., Pegram, H., Perry, R., Merritt, S., & Edelman, P. (2024). *Strengthening Partnerships: A Comprehensive Review of Advisory Council Engagement at NorthStar Family Resource Center*. Tallahassee: Institute for Child and Family Services Research.

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**APPENDIX A**

**Participant Interest Form**



**Resource Center Advisory Council  
Participant Interest Form**

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

AGENCY/ORGANIZATION: \_\_\_\_\_

PROFESSIONAL TITLE (If Applicable): \_\_\_\_\_

AGENCY/HOME ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_

TELEPHONE:  
(Home) \_\_\_\_\_ (Work) \_\_\_\_\_ (Mobile) \_\_\_\_\_

EMAIL: \_\_\_\_\_

DO YOU HAVE THE CAPACITY TO COMMIT TO ATTENDING THE RCAC'S MONTHLY MEETINGS?  
YES  NO  (Meeting frequency will decrease to quarterly after opening of the Resource Center)

BRIEF SUMMARY OF KNOWLEDGE/ EXPERTISE YOU HAVE OF THE LAKE CITY COMMUNITY:

TELL US WHAT EXCITES YOU ABOUT THE IDEA OF A RESOURCE CENTER IN THE LAKE CITY COMMUNITY:

SIGNATURE: \_\_\_\_\_ DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix B

### Formal Invitation to Participate in the RCAC



352.344.1500  
www.psf.org  
PSF Headquarters  
3950 NW 1st Place, Suite A, Gainesville, FL 32607

October 29, 2019

Dear XXX,

As you may have heard, Partnership for Strong Families was recently awarded a five-year federal grant from the Children's Bureau to further evaluate our Resource Center Model and expand our model into Lake City. This grant will bring in more than \$2.5 million over the next five years. We were one of only nine communities to be awarded these federal dollars in the nation, and the only in Florida. As a valued partner and community expert, your input is important to us as we work to establish a new Resource Center in Lake City.

We currently operate four Resource Centers (three in Gainesville, one in Chiefland) to work with families before they reach crises that can often lead to formal child welfare involvement. These prevention-focused centers provide services related to the five protective factors, which when present in families have been shown to reduce the likelihood of abuse and neglect. We have seen positive, measurable results in communities served by our Resource Centers over the past ten years, and we look forward to expanding this model into the Lake City area.

One of our first implementation steps to ensure the Resource Center is responsive to the community's strengths and needs is to establish a Resource Center Advisory Council (RCAC) that will assist in identifying the activities and services provided at the Resource Center. This RCAC will begin monthly meetings in January 2020, with the intent to move to quarterly meetings once the Resource Center has opened.

You are receiving this letter because we have identified you as a key individual who could be of great value to our collective efforts. If you are interested in serving on the RCAC, we invite you to complete the attached *participation interest form*. We ask that you send your completed form back to us by **Friday, November 15, 2019**. Our grant team will review the interest forms received and make final determinations of council membership in early December.

As an integral part of this process, we value your input and expertise as we begin taking steps toward implementation. We look forward to taking this journey with each of you.

Thank you for working with us and supporting our efforts as we work to improve outcomes for our community's children and families.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Stephen Pennypacker".

Stephen Pennypacker, Esq.  
President/CEO  
Partnership for Strong Families, Inc.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Pebbles Edelman".

Pebbles Edelman, M.Ed., Ed.S., LMHC  
Sr. VP of Clinical and Community Services  
Partnership for Strong Families, Inc.

# Appendix C

## RCAC Charter



Lake City Resource Center Advisory Council

A project of the *Community Collaborations to Strengthen and Preserve Families Grant*

**Purpose of the Resource Center Advisory Council:** The NorthStar Family Resource Center, located in Lake City, FL, exists to provide services and supports that strengthen families and reduce the risks of child abuse and neglect. Partnership for Strong Families (PSF) believes that every family and community has resources and strengths. The challenge is to effectively bring these assets together to help families succeed and thrive. The purpose and function of the Resource Center Advisory Council (RCAC) is to help facilitate this process.

The RCAC follows the following essential principles:

- Serve the interests and priorities of the entire community, reflecting diversity
- Maintain a strength focused perspective, by ensuring community strengths are recognized and used to overcome community challenges
- Provide essential input from community partners
- Ensure all members have an equal voice in the process
- Acquire parents' input and leadership as an essential focus of the RCAC

RCAC Members serve in a variety of ways to help guide the formation of the NorthStar Family Resource Center, including:

- Serve as ambassadors by utilizing their connections to share information about the Resource Center's developments.
- Identify gaps in the resources and services on a local level by helping with community strengths and needs assessments.
- Aid the outreach efforts of PSF by identifying new and potential partners, as well as promoting the NorthStar Family Resource Center to the community
- Support fundraising efforts to grow the programs and supports available at the Resource Center.
- Attend RCAC meetings on a regular basis.

**Membership:** Funding provided by the Children's Bureau through the Community Collaborations to Strengthen and Preserve Families Grant emphasizes the need for a collaborative, community-based approach to serving children and families. Likewise, PSF's Resource Center Model is rooted in the belief that services provided at our Resource Centers must be responsive to the local neighborhoods and communities they serve. Members of the RCAC play a pivotal role in helping the NorthStar Family Resource Center meet these goals. RCAC membership should reflect the community as a whole. Each member will be a contributor to this effort individually, professionally, and as an agent for the interest of the NorthStar Family Resource Center and the organization they represent, and the membership should include a strong multi-system collaboration with representatives that include, but are not limited to:

- Lake City community residents and volunteers;
- Partnership for Strong Families
- the Department of Children and Families,
- public housing partners

- the public health community
- the legal and judiciary community
- youth and families with lived child welfare experience
- the mental and behavioral health community
- representatives from the nonprofit, business and philanthropic sectors
- the faith-based community
- the educational community

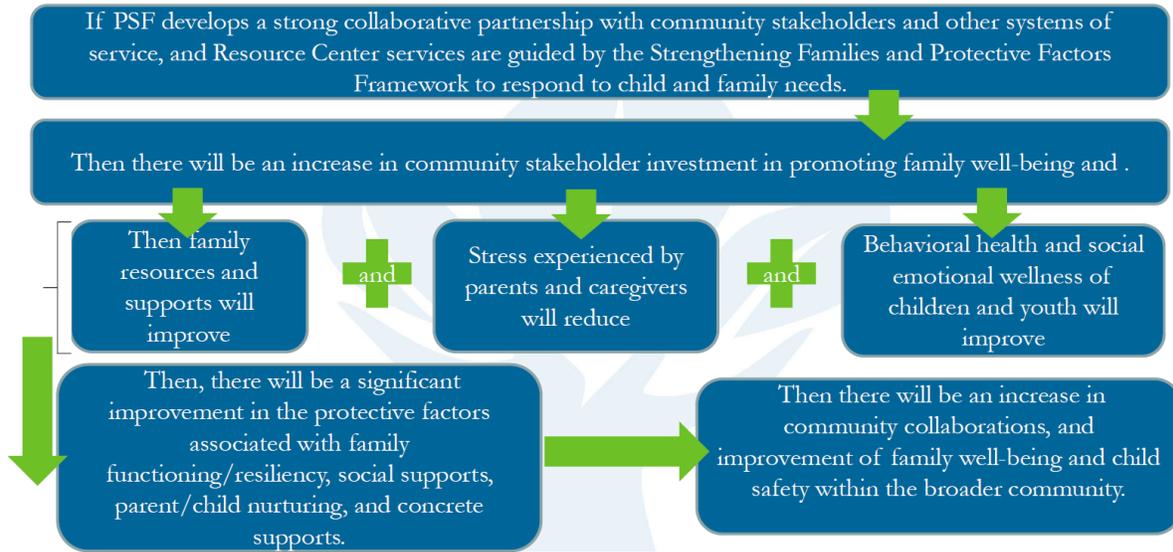
The Council will meet bi-monthly and a Chair of the Council will be elected. This Chair will be a community resident, volunteer, or parent member. Attendance and minutes of the meetings will be available to each member. Partnership for Strong Families may assign an employee to represent the agency at Council meetings. There is no mandated quorum for meetings. The Council is an advisory council and has no authority over budgetary issues; however, the Council may make budgetary recommendation and support efforts to raise funds for the annual operating budget.

Learn more at [www.pfsf.org/resourcecenters](http://www.pfsf.org/resourcecenters)

## Appendix D

### Theory of Change

# Theory of Change



## Appendix E

### CFRC Charter



#### Columbia Family Resource Council

**Purpose of the Columbia Family Resource Council (CFRC):** The NorthStar Family Resource Center, operated by Partnership for Strong Families, and located in Lake City, FL, exists to provide services and supports that strengthen families and reduce the risks of child abuse and neglect. Partnership for Strong Families (PSF) believes that every family and community have resources and strengths. The challenge is to effectively bring these assets together to help families succeed and thrive. The purpose and function of the CFRC is to help facilitate this process as well as to gain a better understanding of the additional resources needed to best serve children and families in Lake City and its surrounding areas.

The CFRC follows the following essential principles:

- Serve the interests and priorities of the entire community, reflecting diversity.
- Maintain a strength focused perspective, by ensuring community strengths are recognized and used to overcome community challenges.
- Provide essential input from community partners.
- Ensure all members have an equal voice in the process.
- Acquire parents' input and leadership as an essential focus of the CFRC

CFRC Members serve in a variety of ways including, but not limited to:

- Serve as ambassadors by utilizing their connections to share information about the Resource Center's developments.
- Identify gaps in the resources and services on a local level as well as opportunities to fill those identified gaps.
- Aid the outreach efforts of PSF by identifying new and potential partners, as well as promoting the NorthStar Family Resource Center to the community.
- Support fundraising efforts to grow the programs and supports available at the Resource Center, as well as in the Lake City community.
- Attend CFRC meetings on a regular basis.

**Membership:** Funding provided by the Children's Bureau through the Community Collaborations to Strengthen and Preserve Families Grant emphasizes the need for a collaborative, community-based approach to serving children and families. Likewise, PSF's Resource Center Model is rooted in the belief that services provided at our Resource Centers must be responsive to the local neighborhoods and communities they serve. Members of the CFRC play a pivotal role in helping the NorthStar Family Resource Center meet these goals. CFRC membership should reflect the community. Each member will be a contributor to this effort individually, professionally, and as an agent for the interest of the NorthStar Family Resource Center and the organization they represent, and the membership should include a strong multi-system collaboration with representatives that include, but are not limited to:

- Lake City community residents and volunteers.
- Partnership for Strong Families
- the Department of Children and Families,
- public housing partners

- the public health community
- the legal and judiciary community
- youth and families with lived child welfare experience
- the mental and behavioral health community
- representatives from the nonprofit, business, and philanthropic sectors
- the faith-based community
- the educational community

The Council will meet quarterly and two co-chairs of the Council will be elected. The Co- chairs will be a community partner, resident, volunteer, or parent member. Attendance and minutes of the meetings will be available to each member. Partnership for Strong Families may assign an employee to represent the agency at Council meetings. There is no mandated quorum for meetings. The Council is an advisory council and has no authority over budgetary issues; however, the Council may make budgetary recommendation and support efforts to raise funds for the annual operating budget.

Learn more at [www.pfsf.org/resourcecenters](http://www.pfsf.org/resourcecenters)