



Supporting Families by Providing
Concrete Support in Times of Need
at the SWAG Family Resource Center

Robin Perry (Lead Evaluator), Mikaela David-John (Community Research Coordinator for SWAG Family Resource Center), Dorothy Benson, Lynda Bowie-Locklear, Reva Brewster, Dennis Franklin, Euricka Franklin, Dawn Harper, Shandra Nichols, Robin Wilkerson (SWAG SFSA Team) & Toni Spoliansky

Institute for Child and Family Services Research



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.

Introduction

This report summarizes key findings from, and recommendations developed by the SWAG Family Resource Center (FRC) Strengthening Families Self-Assessment (SFSA) Team utilizing a standardized process developed by the Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP)¹. The CSSP Strengthening Families Protective Factors Framework is a research-informed model that focuses on engaging families, programs, and communities in enhancing five protective factors:

- Parental Resilience
- Social Connections
- Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development
- Concrete Support in Times of Need
- Social and Emotional Competence of Children

Since supports and services at the SWAG FRC are structured in accordance with the CSSP Protective Factors Framework, the Strengthening Families Self-Assessment Tool for Community-Based Programs, and associated processes were used to help determine the fidelity of specific implementation strategies (in accordance with the above noted framework), identify existing strengths of select supports and services, and identify areas for potential improvements. This report focuses specifically on SWAG FRC's efforts at strengthening families by providing concrete support in times of need.

The SWAG Family Resource Center

Partnership for Strong Families (PSF) began in 2007 to develop a network of Family Resource Centers (FRC) that emphasize a strengthening family approach while utilizing a Protective Factors Framework to provide prevention services and supports to families. The PSF Resource Center model is built upon a multi-system collaborative focusing on primary prevention that works toward strengthening families with the goal of preventing child maltreatment and reducing entries into foster care. The Southwest Advocacy Group (SWAG) is an established entity in the community that has historically worked toward improving the lives of residents in southwest Gainesville. SWAG partnered with PSF and with the donation of a building from the Alachua County Board of County Commissioners and tremendous community support and financial contributions from several community partners, the SWAG Family Resource Center opened its doors to the community in 2012 and has been providing continuous supports and services in a non-stigmatizing manner to individuals and families since.

¹ For a more comprehensive review of findings, including additional details related to the history of the SWAG Family Resource Center, enhanced review of methods used, and associated appendices, please see: Perry, R., David-John, M., Benson, D., Bowie-Locklear, L., Brewster, R., Franklin, D., Franklin, E., Harper, D., Nichols, S., Wilkerson, R., & Spoliansky, T (2022). *The Southwest Advocacy Group (SWAG) Family Resource Center Strengthening Families Self-Assessment (SFSA) Team's Findings and Recommendations/Action Items Associated with Supporting Families by Providing Concrete Support in Times of Need*. Tallahassee: Institute for Child and Family Services Research.

The SWAG Family Resource Center is one of three Resource Centers in Gainesville that partner with a network of over 75 community partners (across all sites) to provide services that are free and are intended to be responsive to the needs of the surrounding community as identified by community partners/stakeholders and parents/household members (referred to as patrons) within the targeted areas. It is this multi-system collaborative, with representation from across the five sectors (public, business, philanthropy, community, and nonprofit), that has allowed a blending of funding, expansion of services to meet the needs of patrons and enhancement of the community's ability to leverage resources to benefit some of Gainesville's most at-risk populations.

The SWAG FRC Strengthening Families Self-Assessment Team and Method

The *Strengthening Families Self-Assessment Tool for Community-Based Programs* and associated protocols were developed by the Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP). This is a comprehensive, research-informed approach (based on national studies) that aids in assessing the extent to which a RC has implemented services/activities to engage and strengthen families in alignment with core strategies for building each of the protective factors². The assessment criteria and protocol for self-assessment is standardized. Protocols require the establishment and utilization of a Self-Assessment Team that includes at a minimum: Administrative Staff and/or Program Director, Direct Service Staff, and Parents who participated in the program/received services (or whose children participated in service activities). For this project, it was deemed important to also include collaborative partners and other stakeholders in the process (as informed parties/members). These processes were followed in the establishment of the SWAG FRC Strengthening Families Self-Assessment (SFSA) Team.

The SWAG FRC Strengthening Families Self-Assessment Team includes:

Dorothy Benson – SWAG Board Member
Lynda Bowie-Locklear - CareerSource of North Central Florida
Reva Brewster – Community Ambassador
Dennis Franklin – Community Ambassador
Euricka Franklin – Community Ambassador
Dawn Harper – Department of Children and Families
Shandra Nichols – SWAG Staff (RC Manager)
Cassandra Roncarti – Community Ambassador
Robin Wilkerson – SWAG Staff

² For more information regarding CSSP's Strengthening Families and Protective Factors Framework, please see: <https://cssp.org/our-work/project/strengthening-families/>. Additional information regarding the self-assessment model and associated methodology, tools, and recommended processes, see: <https://cssp.org/our-work/projects/self-assessments-for-programs/> and Harnar, M., & Tarr, J. (n.d.). Strengthening Families: A look at national data on program strategies, staff capacity and the protective factors. Washington, D.C.: Center for the Study of Social Policy's Strengthening Families & Mosaic. Available at: <https://www.strengtheningfamiliesevaluation.com/national/>

Within the *Strengthening Families Self-Assessment Tool for Community-Based Programs* there are a series of questions linked with each protective factor. These questions represent actions/activities, program elements, protocols, and policies associated with providing services meant to enhance each protective factor according to best-practice/evidence-based standards. For services and supports focused on providing concrete support in times of need there are 8 topics with 39 associated questions for which each team member is asked to individually rate their level of item statement agreement on a five-point Likert-type scale (Strongly Agree, Agree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree) with an option for Not Applicable. This same scale is used for an assessment of all protective factor questions. Team members received an orientation to the CSSP Protective Factors Framework, its relationship to the SWAG Family Resource Center service model, and the *Strengthening Families Self-Assessment Tool for Community-Based Programs* and its associated protocol. After individual team members complete their scores, these data were shared via a written summary report highlighting the distribution of responses by team members for each item. Efforts were made through critical discussion and dialog to arrive at a consensus assessment for each item and indicator (if such was possible) so that a collective assessment could lead to a structured action plan to address any fidelity concerns and program needs. The initial meeting of the SWAG SFSA Team took place on June 30, 2021, and monthly meetings continued through November. The team meetings that involved the discussion of Concrete Support in Times of Need questions took place September 8 and October 13.

Strengthening Families Self-Assessment (SFSA) Findings and Recommendations/Action Items Associated with Supporting Families by Providing Concrete Support in Times of Need

The following represents a summary of key findings and recommendations by the team for questions associated with providing concrete support in times of need. For the purposes of the summary, findings are presented in accordance with the broader questions the tool was structured to answer.

How Does the SWAG Family Resource Center Respond Immediately When Families are in Crisis?

The following is measure of how the SWAG Family Resource Center responds immediately when families are in crisis. There were no SFSA questions for which the majority of team members thought to not be applicable. Findings highlight a team consensus of agreement with 14 of the 15 questions (93%), with 1 within the Neither Agree nor Disagree range. There were no questions for which there was a consensus of disagreement. The team had an opportunity to discuss all item responses and brainstorm potential action items generating from open discussion of the SWAG FRC's strengths and potential areas of improvement.

What the SWAG Family Resource Center Does Well to Respond Immediately When Families are in Crisis.

There was uniform consensus in the assessment that staff at SWAG FRC are engaging and responsive to parents and families in times of distress and crisis. SWAG FRC's efforts at providing concrete supports in a time of need were highlighted as its greatest strength. These findings are paralleled with other PSF Resource Centers and speak to the priority of concrete support needs within the communities served. Findings detail the responsiveness of staff to the immediate needs of families that come to the Resource

Center, and staff's sensitivity and concern for aiding individuals and families experiencing stress given the crises associated with identified needs for concrete supports. Concrete supports have been comprehensive and varied over time, in response to identified needs (through structured surveys, feedback from community members, and specific requests and inquires) of patrons and families within the neighborhoods served. In sum, there was consensus among the team that the following activities, supports/activities, and actions are implemented with fidelity at the SWAG FRC:

Parents are encouraged to turn to staff in the event of a crisis through:

- The fact that staff listen, show concern and share their own personal challenges as appropriate in informal conversations and regular interactions.
- Information on which staff members can help families with particular issues.

Staff proactively respond to signs of parent or family distress by:

- Expressing concern and offering help in line with the program's philosophy and resources.
- Offering to connect families to resources, including help lines, community resources or public agencies.
- Making space available for staff to meet with parents privately.
- Ensuring that parents can talk with staff members with whom they are the most comfortable.
- Being sensitive and responsive to the impact of family stress on children.
- Keeping family issues confidential unless given explicit permission to share information (except when potential abuse or neglect is at issue and a report is made).

When a family is experiencing extreme difficulties or crisis:

- At least one staff member with a close relationship with the family reaches out to the family proactively.
- If the family wants assistance, staff members, including supervisors or a staff team, work with the family to help them manage the crisis.
- The programs has resources for family assistance, such as diapers, transportation, a safe sleeping environment or even emergency funds.
- The program has flexible hours of operation to accommodate families outside of regular business hours.
- If the family agrees, staff connect the family to resources outside the program that can help them, such as medical or mental health specialists, or services such as respite care or emergency crisis services.
- Staff continue to offer support to the family and monitor the situation daily until the situation is manageable.

There was uniform consensus in the assessment that staff at the SWAG FRC are engaging and responsive to parents and families in times of distress and crisis. SWAG FRC's efforts at providing concrete supports in a time of need were highlighted as its greatest strength.

The team identified numerous concrete supports and resources that have been provided by the SWAG FRC, including (but not limited to):

- Meal Provision: Breakfast, Lunch, Thanksgiving Basket Giveaway, etc.
- Healthy Cooking Demonstration/Classes, and Healthy Heart Food Tasting Events.
- Car Seat Event, Infant Care Products, School Supplies, and Back-to-School Giveaway Events.
- Child Support Information Dissemination and Events.
- Information, Assistance, and Advocacy for Receipt of Food Stamps/SNAP, Medicaid, Social Security Benefits and Other Benefits.
- Financial Assistance Primarily for Rent and Utilities
- Community Scholarships to Assist with Education or Training Related Expenses.
- Clothing and Clothing Closet Events, Household Items, Furniture, and Holiday Assistance.
- Computer Use and Classes; Phone, Fax, Printer/ Copier Use.
- Transportation Provision (especially for emergencies) and Bus Pass Provision.
- Dentist Referrals and Services.
- Family Planning Information and Referrals; Family Court Packets.
- Job Board, Resource Fairs, and Employment Assistance.
- Housing Assistance, Rent Assistance, Utility Assistance and Events.
- Notary Services.
- Meeting Room and Space Usage.

These supports and resources have reportedly been provided in a non-stigmatized and supportive environment. The supportive environment and proactive efforts of staff to connect with patrons reinforces a caring atmosphere and helps build trust and meaningful relationships with families in the community³. The SWAG FRC (along with the SWAG Board) are seen as a valued resource within the community. This status is sustained given that supports and activities are implemented with clear fidelity to the CSSP model as such relates to how: parents are encouraged to turn to staff in the event of a crisis, staff proactively respond to signs of parent or family distress, and how staff and the program supports families experiencing extreme difficulties or crises.

The supportive environment and proactive efforts of staff to connect with patrons reinforces a caring atmosphere and helps build trust and meaningful relationships with community families.

³ Neighborhoods primarily served by SWAG FRC and other SWAG sponsored service centers include: Majestic Oaks, Holly Heights, Harbor Cove, Pine Meadows, Hidden Oaks, Mobile Home Park, Gordon Manor, Tower Oaks/Tower Oaks Glen, and Linton Oaks.

...supports and activities are implemented with clear fidelity to the CSSP model as such relates to how: parents are encouraged to turn to staff in the event of a crisis, staff proactively respond to signs of parent or family distress, and how staff and the program supports families experiencing extreme difficulties or crises.

Areas of Potential Focus/Improvement for the SWAG Family Resource Center to Respond Immediately When Families are in Crisis.

There was only one item with consensus rating of neither agree nor disagree:

Parents are encouraged to turn to staff in the event of a crisis through:

- Materials regularly provided to participating families.

Seven of the nine team members agreed or strongly agreed with the above statement. The weighted team average score was skewed because of one “strongly disagree” rating that was not spoken to by the scoring member. Regardless, in terms of assisting families in distress due to concrete needs, the SWAG FRC has been effective in their response to families, doing so in a proactive, non-stigmatizing and supportive manner. A discussion of familial stresses by the team highlighted other social and environmental stresses that families are reportedly enduring within the community, including issues related to the community’s relationship with law enforcement, as well as neighborhood violence or the threat of such. One member noted that “...we are in a crisis daily” within the SWAG neighborhoods. Others highlighted that many parents and caregivers will not allow their children to visit the county-operated park next to the SWAG FRC alone; indicating that “...this is the children’s community too and they should feel safe.” These community and environmental stressors compound the perceived stress parents and families experience due to concrete support needs. The fact that the SWAG FRC is a safe place for children and families and provides specific concrete supports makes it an asset within the community. Although, no action item was considered related to this discussion, one suggestion for how the SWAG FRC can help mitigate some of this parental and family distress (due to community violence and safety concerns) is by providing training (formal or informal) on how to handle or talk with the police and to strategize or teach parents how to advocate for themselves and for their families, as well as how to respond to others in distress.

How Does the SWAG Family Resource Center Provide Information and Connections to Services in the Community?

There are 13 questions associated with a measure of how the SWAG FRC provides information and connections to services in the community. Findings highlight a team assessment (consensus) of

agreement with 12 of these 13 questions (92%), and 1 within the Neither Agree nor Disagree range. No questions had a consensus of disagreement.

What the SWAG Family Resource Center Does Well to Provide Information and Connections to Services in the Community.

Efforts at disseminating information about and linking patrons to existing resources and concrete supports within the community (in addition to supports offered at the SWAG FRC) were praised by the team and reflected in the consensus agreement with the following items:

Staff proactively respond to signs of parent or family distress by:

- Expressing concern and offering help.
- Offering to connect families to resources, including help lines, community resources or public agencies.
- Being sensitive and responsive to the impact of family stress on children.
- Keeping family issues confidential unless given explicit permission to share information (except when potential abuse or neglect is at issue and a report is mandated).
- Helping families to identify short-term supports and prepare long-term strategies so they are better able to sustain themselves and endure hardships.

Parents are encouraged to share information about community resources (e.g., toy exchanges, resale shops, play lots, family activities), as well as more formal services.

The program maintains up-to-date information about services in the community that includes hours of operation, fees, locations, eligibility requirements, language capacities, etc. Services to be included are:

- Food pantries
- Health providers
- Domestic violence services
- Shelters
- Respite care for children
- Alcohol and substance abuse services
- Mental health services (for adults and children)
- Economic supports
- Legal assistance
- Quality early care and education

The program actively builds collaborative links with other service providers by:

- Bringing services on site, when possible.
- Easing the referral process by ensuring the workers in different programs know each other and work together.
- Coordinating follow-up efforts across service providers, ensuring that the family is involved in service coordination and informed about all communication.
- Developing memorandum of understanding or established processes with partners to coordinate services for families in crisis.
- Using input from participating parents to identify and advocate to fill gaps in the services available to families.

These findings reinforce that the thoughtful, sensitive, and supportive nature of service provision by SWAG FRC staff are key strengths that enable the development of meaningful relationships with parents and families. Proactive engagement with parents happens in a manner that respects a family's privacy, while addressing immediate concrete needs helps mitigate distress intensified by other environmental conditions. Further, the above findings speak strongly of the quality and quantity of collaborative partners within the community that work conjointly with the SWAG FRC to assist parents and families in need. SWAG FRC staff and PSF representatives have identified that memorandums of understanding exist for a plethora of community agencies, services, and supports across a wide range of service areas and need classifications—as expanded upon in other communications, reports, and publications, including results garnered from annual surveys of existing community partners. These partners are an integral part of the service delivery system at the SWAG FRC. The effective collaboration between an abundance of community partners, the SWAG FRC, and other SWAG Board sponsored service centers (including the Southwest Health Clinic and the Child Center) ensure a timely and effective provision of concrete supports to distressed families within the community⁴.

...findings speak strongly of the quality and quantity of collaborative partners within the community that work conjointly with SWAG FRC to assist parents and families in need... [there is] ... a plethora of community agencies, services, and supports across a wide range of service areas and need classifications... [that are]... an integral part of the service delivery system at SWAG FRC. The effective collaboration between an abundance of community partners, SWAG FRC, and other SWAG sponsored service centers (including the Southwest Health Clinic and the Child Center) ensure a timely and effective provision of concrete supports to distressed families within the community.

Areas of Potential Focus/Improvement for the SWAG Family Resource Center to Provide Information and Connections to Services in the Community.

There was only one item that received a consensus neither agree nor disagree rating related to staff proactively respond to signs of parent or family distress by:

- Making themselves and/or other designated home visitors available to parents if parents need to talk.

Home visitation is not a service offered through the SWAG FRC. Given staffing constraints and safety procedures in place that prohibit home visits, the team did not recommend any action associated with this item.

⁴ For more information regarding current supports and services provided by Southwest Advocacy Group service centers, visit: <https://swadvocacygroup.org/>

How Does the SWAG Family Resource Center Help Families to Develop Skills They Need to Identify their Needs and Connect to Supports?

There are 11 questions associated with a measure of how the SWAG FRC helps families to develop skills they need to identify their needs and connect to supports. Consensus agreement existed for 10 of 11 indicators, suggesting that staff do a very good job helping parents to identify and mobilize their own resources to address their families' needs and support family leadership when they make referrals to outside services.

Consensus agreement existed for 10 of 11 indicators, suggesting that staff do a very good job helping parents to identify and mobilize their own resources to address their families' needs...and support family leadership when they make referrals to outside services.

What the SWAG Family Resource Center Does Well to Help Families to Develop Skills They Need to Identify their Needs and Connect to Supports.

Collectively, consensus agreement was demonstrated with respect to the following:

Staff help parents to identify and mobilize their own resources to address their families' needs by:

- Encouraging families to take the lead when creating a plan to address family needs, including addressing barriers and anticipated outcomes.
- Communicating to families that seeking help is not an indicator of weakness or failure as a parent, but rather is a step toward building resilience.
- Encouraging parents to advocate for themselves and their child.
- Providing information and guidance to families so that they understand their rights in accessing services, gain knowledge of relevant services and learn how to navigate through service systems.

When staff make referrals to outside services, they support family leadership by:

- Brainstorming with families about what resources would be helpful.
- Respecting when a family is not comfortable with a specific provider by helping them to either address and resolve the issue or identify other resources.
- Helping parents learn how to address barriers to utilizing services (e.g., lack of transportation or childcare, fees, language barriers, lack of translation services, lack of cultural sensitivity and inclusiveness).
- Coaching parents as they fill out initial paperwork required to access these services, (e.g., insurance and eligibility forms).

- Following up with families on referrals to ensure that they were satisfied with the services they received and providing help in advocating for themselves if they were not satisfied.
- Making a personal connection between families and service providers (if families have agreed to share information through written consent).

Areas of Potential Focus/Improvement for the SWAG Family Resource Center to Help Families to Develop Skills They Need to Identify their Needs and Connect to Supports.

There was a consensus neither agree nor disagree rating for one item that stimulated discussion and consideration of a recommended action item:

Staff help parents to identify and mobilize their own resources to address their families' needs by:

- Connecting parents to peer-to-peer navigation support

There was general support (particularly among the Community Ambassadors) for the integration of opportunities for enhancing the capacity of parents and community members to connect with their peers and assist one another. Existing efforts to provide supports are considered successful by the SWAG FRC staff. The staff's current approach to providing supports is to ensure that concrete (basic) needs met serve as a foundation for continued contact and, for many, the receipt of additional assistance (including individualized assistance) focused on promoting stability and self-sufficiency. However, SFSA team members also believe existing efforts focused on promoting "...positive thinking, learning how to be successful, and the development of life/success plans" could be enhanced. It was suggested that the encouragement of more peer-to-peer engagement, support groups, and training could potentially have a more sustained impact on building support networks (and a sense of community), advocacy and self-sufficiency skills, and promote better communication between and amongst parents and households in the community. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, Robin Wilkerson was in the process of creating a peer-to-peer support group for community members looking to pursue their education at any level (i.e., GED, college, technical training). There was reportedly strong interest in this initiative, but it was paused due to the pandemic. This effort should resume, and other efforts should be explored to enhance peer-to-peer support mechanism. Subsequently, the following action item was recommended:

Action Item #1: Explore peer-to-peer training created by and for community members related to getting needed supports and resources and how to act in a collective manner to advocate for each other.

...the encouragement of more peer-to-peer engagement, support groups, and training could potentially have a more sustained impact on building support networks (and a sense of community), advocacy and self-sufficiency skills, and promote better communication between and amongst parents and households in the community.

Fidelity of Concrete Supports and Services to CSSP Protective Factor

As denoted earlier, the SFSA Team identified the weighted average team score as the consensus measure for each item associated with the Concrete Support assessment questions. Following the development of a consensus rating, individual item scores were converted—in keeping with Harnar and Tarr, (n.d.) and Tarr, Harnar, & Ahsan (2014)⁵ method recommendations—to binary/dichotomous scores where 1=Agree and Strongly Agree, and 0=Disagree, Strongly Disagree, Neither Agree or Disagree, and Not Applicable. These scores were summed for the Concrete Support in Times of Need Protective Factor where scores <50% of the total score possible represent low fidelity, 50-74% represent moderate fidelity, and >75% possible scores represent high fidelity. The aggregate fidelity score from all tabled findings is 36 (of a possible score of 39) or 92%, suggesting that the services and supports associated with concrete supports were implemented with high fidelity to the Center for the Study of Social Policy's Strengthening Families' Protective Factor Framework.

The aggregate fidelity score from all tabled findings is 36 (of a possible score of 39) or 92%, suggesting that the services and supports associated with concrete supports were implemented with high fidelity to the Center for the Study of Social Policy's Strengthening Families' Protective Factor Framework.

⁵ Harnar, M., & Tarr, J. (n.d.). Strengthening Families: A look at national data on program strategies, staff capacity and the protective factors. Washington, D.C.: Center for the Study of Social Policy's Strengthening Families & Mosaic. Available at: <https://www.strengtheningfamiliesevaluation.com/national/>

Tarr, J., Harnar, M. A., & Ahsan, N. (2014). Strengthening Families: A look at national data on program strategies, staff capacity and the protective factors. Unpublished whitepaper presented at the National Association for the Education of Young Children's annual conference in Dallas, TX.

The SWAG Strengthening Families Self-Assessment Team

As denoted earlier, a team of dedicated community ambassadors, SWAG FRC staff, and collaborative partners worked together to engage in a comprehensive assessment of the supports and services provided by the SWAG FRC in accordance with the CSSP's protective factors framework. The names and select biographies of these team members are detailed below.



Dorothy Benson – SWAG Board Member

Dorothy A. Benson was born and raised in Tampa, FL, but moved to Gainesville as she was raising her family. The Bensons have lived in the Gainesville community since 1989. Dorothy fell in love with Gainesville, and it quickly came to feel like "home." Dorothy was a homemaker and a mom who got involved in her community after seeing Dr. Nancy Hardt's density maps showing high concentrations of Medicaid births and babies being born underweight in southwest Gainesville. At that time in 2008, Dorothy's youngest son was just heading off to college, and she was able to devote her time to community organizing. After connecting to SWAG community members like Joan Canton, Dorothy began advocating for the children and families in southwest Gainesville at the county commission meetings and helped Joan and others found the Southwest Advocacy Group (SWAG) in 2010. SWAG is grassroots, community-based group that soon became a certified 501(c)(3) non-profit. SWAG works closely with

Partnership for Strong Families and other community partners to bring greater opportunities and resources to the SWAG neighborhoods through the SWAG Family Resource Center, the SW Health Clinic, and the CHILD Center - a model demonstration childcare center. Dorothy has loved being a part of the Strengthening Families Self-Assessment Team because it has allowed us to look back on where we started, where we are now, and how we can best grow to better serve families and children in our community. Dorothy has been married to my supportive husband, Keyton, for 40 years. They raised two children in Gainesville, our daughter, Brenna now 37, and our son Keyton Jr. now 32. Dorothy is an avid walker and bird watcher, and she loves working with the SWAG board and community partners to bring positive changes to this wonderful community we call home. Dorothy loves the SWAG Family Resource Center because it provides a loving, safe and nurturing place for our community to come together and focus our greater collective resources to support children, families, and our seniors. The SWAG FRC provides a tangible place where people can share their love for each other through many volunteer opportunities.

Lynda Bowie-Locklear - CareerSource of North Central Florida

Lynda L Bowie-Locklear was born and raised in Minter, AL, and has been a part of the Alachua County community for 28 years. Lynda is married and have two children who she raised in the Alachua County Community. Lynda career started back in 2003 in early childhood education with Child Care Resources which lead her to The Early Learning Coalition of Alachua County for the next 12 years, and a year with Episcopal Children Services. Lynda continues working in the community with families through workforce with CareerSource NCFL as the WIOA Youth Program Coordinator.



Lynda has been a partner to Partnership for Strong Families Resource Centers since the inception of Library Partnership Resource Center and continues to work closely with the staff from all Resource Centers in Alachua County. When Lynda was asked to be a part of the SWAG FRC's Self-Assessment Team it wasn't a hard decision. It has been a pleasure to serve alongside of SWAG FRC staff, SWAG Board Member, the community Ambassadors, Robin Perry, Mikaela David-John and Toni Spoliansky. Lynda feels the time spent together on this project has taken our partnership relationship to another level. She looks forward to continuing our partnership to better serve the families in the Alachua County Community.

Lynda has kept these words in the forefront of her mind daily as she works with families in the community. It is an empathy reminder like no other “We often think that admitting struggle is a sign of weakness, but we all struggle sometimes. We all get overwhelmed sometimes. We need help sometimes. Acknowledging this is not a sign of weakness, but struggling alone is a choice to grow weak” -Lori Deschene

“I can’t change the direction of the wind, but I can adjust my sails to always reach my destination” -Jimmy Dean



Reva Brewster – Community Ambassador

Reva Brewster was born and raised in the U.S. Virgin Islands. Reva has been a member of the Gainesville community for 24 years. Reva raised her two children in the Gainesville community and now enjoys spending time with her four (soon to be five) grandchildren. Reva has been serving others for many years starting back in the U.S. Virginia Islands where she volunteered for a summer camp for youth with disabilities. Here in Gainesville, Reva volunteered for Altrusa House, an adult day health care program, for many years not only to give back to her community but also to spend time with her father while he was part of the program. Reva joined the SWAG SFSA team because of the support she feels when interacting with the staff. She receives so much positive feedback and information from the staff. Compared to the “outside the SWAG FRC’s walls where everything feels very negative, inside the Resource Center staff are uplifting.” During the SFSA process, Reva enjoyed having positive people from the community around her. Reva loves that the SWAG FRC staff are “here with resources and information and that the community has a place to turn to for help and answers.”

Dennis Franklin – Community Ambassador

Dennis Franklin was born and raised in Harlem New York with one sister of an 18-year age difference. Dennis received education and training in speech, drama, journalism, communications, and business. After finishing his education, Dennis spent ten years involved in marketing and sales for a variety of different businesses. Dennis grew up with an unconditional love for the entertainment industry. As a young adult, Dennis spent his time discovering, up-and-coming and the mainstream artists in the entertainment industry. Dennis always knew that his purpose in life was to make a mark in entertainment that would change the life of music. Dennis was taught early on from his own personal hardships that everyone is not guaranteed the opportunity to advance themselves, so he decided to use his love for music to give back to the community. Dennis enhanced his entrepreneurial skills to establish The Disco Den Record Pool in 1976 which was an educational program to teach disc jockey candidates on how to promote records. Nevertheless, founding The Disco Den Record Pool was just the beginning of the many strides to come. In 1983, Dennis turned the Disco Den into a school for up-and-coming disc jockeys. “We were the original uptown outlet for information and the exchanging of ideas among club jocks. Then, we expanded our base and increased our services.” The Disco Den was replaced with The Record School, a non-profit umbrella corporation that contained a record pool, a Harlem nightclub, The Music Bank, a promotion and Production Company, and a record label.



Dennis moved himself and his family of eight to his mother’s hometown, Gainesville, FL, after his mother got sick. After living in Florida for eight years, Dennis’ life took a drastic flip - Dennis had a relapse on drugs and alcohol. Following an incarceration, Dennis agreed to one year of drug court and was released after eight months. Growing as a man of God, Dennis was taught that being a great leader was not just about what he accomplished, but what he did Christ-like. He later learned that “the best leader is a servant leader.” Reminiscing the struggles and hardships that he experienced, Dennis vowed to do whatever he could to prevent people from slipping through the cracks. “I think this was the greatest turning point in my life. I made a decision that I would work as hard as I could and see that no one would have to go through what happen to me, the feeling was not nice”. He vowed that

he would dedicate himself to people that had situations with addiction, ex-offenders, lost children, the homeless, in aspiration that anyone who has lost hope will have some place to go. That place would be called The Neighborhood House, a non-profit organization Dennis co-founded that strives to make a positive impact on our community and youth. Dennis has enjoyed being part of the SWAG SFSA team as it has been an opportunity for him to connect with people in the neighborhood and share information that can help strengthen the community and bring the community together. Currently, Dennis is working on a new project called The Nuskool which is a success training program which he hopes to share with the southwest Gainesville community and beyond.



Euricka Franklin – Community Ambassador

Euricka L. Franklin originates from New York City. She was born and raised in Harlem. Euricka graduated from Fashion Industry in New York City. In 1995, Euricka moved to Gainesville and became a resident of Clayton Estate located a few blocks away from the SWAG Family Resource Center. Euricka attended Santa Fe College and became a CNA. For several years, Euricka worked in the healthcare industry until an injury made her unable to continue. Starting in 2004, Euricka was a stay-at-home mother to her six children. Euricka and her husband, Dennis have been together for 31 years. Euricka has volunteered in the community extensively including the MCBC Saturday Academy assisting first through fifth graders with a variety of subjects including English and math and accompanying the students on field trips. Euricka has volunteered for decades with the Board of Elections doing many duties from clerk to ballot scanner. Euricka also

volunteered back in New York city with the YMCA Summer Youth Employment Program as a camp counselor assisting children with educational enrichment. Euricka also assisted with Dr. Shawn Kneipp's 'welfare-to-work' study. Euricka and her husband founded a nonprofit organization called The Neighborhood House which partners with the Big Brother Big Sister program to provide food for children and families in the community. Living across the street from the SWAG FRC, Euricka has been involved with the Resource Center from the beginning – she even watched as the building was reconstructed from apartments to be able to house the Resource Center. Euricka and her family have participated in numerous events and activities at the SWAG FRC and their nonprofit organization, The Neighborhood House, has donated clothes and food in the past. Currently, Euricka cares for her mother and her grandchildren. Euricka found that some of the conversations had, and information shared during the SFSA meetings at the SWAG FRC helped Euricka adequately address situations that will arise when caring for her mother and grandchildren. Euricka was happy to be part of the SFSA team because she received important information from the discussion with fellow SFSA team members, that she can share with my family and community. Euricka particularly enjoyed the discussions around mental health treatment and self-care as they are needed in this community, and every community. We all have a hurts, habits, and hang-ups. Euricka joined the SFSA team because she believes that sharing our different experiences with others strengthen everyone.

Dawn Harper – Department of Children and Families (DCF)

Dawn Harper was the DCF Community Partner Liaison for circuits 3 and 8.



Shandra Nichols, MS, CHES, CWCM – SWAG FRC Staff (Resource Center Manager)

Shandra is a native of Ocala, FL, but has lived and worked in Gainesville for about 10 years. Shandra attended the University of Florida where she received a Bachelor of Science and Master of Science degree in Health Education and Behavior. In her spare time, Shandra enjoys spending time with her family and friends, traveling, attending concerts and other entertainment events, listening to music, and DIY projects. After working with the State of Florida Department of Health, Shandra realized that her passion was in working with children and families and transitioned into the child welfare sector, where she has been serving families for the past 8+ years. Shandra began her employment with Partnership for Strong Families in the summer 2016 after accepting a position as the Family Support Facilitator at the Library Partnership Family Resource

Center. As the Family Support Facilitator for 4 and a half years, Shandra found great pleasure in meeting and engaging families on a regular basis. She assisted them with meeting their needs through onsite and community resources and by helping them to identify their own personal and family skills and strengths. Most of all, she enjoyed building relationships with the families she served. Currently, as the Manager of the SWAG FRC, Shandra continues to work closely with children and families, however, spends most of her time planning and developing programs to meet the needs of the community, maintaining working relationships with collaborating partners, and managing the oversight of day-to-day activities and patron services with staff, interns, and volunteers. As a member of the Strengthening Families Self-Assessment Team, Shandra has had the opportunity to learn more about the history of SWAG, as well as the southwest Gainesville neighborhoods the resource center serve. As the new manager, Shandra is even more encouraged and see the importance of seeking input from community members when planning programs and events that will have a direct impact on the community. Often times, the SWAG FRC serve as a place of hope for individuals and families who are experiencing uncertain times in their lives. Our staff members are compassionate, invested, and really want the best for the families we serve.

Cassandra Roncarti – Community Ambassador

Ms. Roncarti and her two daughters were patrons of the SWAG FRC and lived in the SWAG community. Ms. Roncarti's oldest daughter attended children's programming at the SWAG FRC.

Robin Wilkerson, M.Ed., RBT – SWAG FRC Staff (Family Support Facilitator)

Robin Wilkerson is originally from south Florida and has been part of the Gainesville community for 27 years. Robin has been at the SWAG Family Resource Center since December 2018, first in the Early Childhood Support Facilitator Role and now as the Family Support Facilitator. Robin holds a bachelor's degree in psychology from Saint Leo University and a master's degree in applied behavioral analysis from Arizona State University. Previously, Robin worked clinically in behavioral analysis as well as seven years in educational roles for the Alachua County School Board. Robin is also a founding board member of Healing for All, a local nonprofit that specializes in mental health services for underserved populations. Robin is a single mother of two children. Her son, who was diagnosed with Asperger's, was her inspiration for the degrees she has pursued. Robin loves working at the SWAG FRC because of the families she works with, and she enjoys being able to be a support for them.



Support for SWAG SFSA Team Processes

Although not formally members of the SWAG SFSA Team, Robin Perry (Lead Evaluator), Mikaela David-John (Community Research Coordinator for SWAG Family Resource Center), and Toni Spoliansky (Project Director for the *Resource Center Model: Evaluation, Refinement, and Expansion* grant) attended each meeting of the SWAG SFSA Team meetings and served as key supports for team processes. Robin Perry provided initial training and overview of the Center for the Study of Social Policy's SFSA Tool for Community-Based Programs and associated processes for review of findings and development of an action plan and recommendations by the team. Robin Perry was the lead facilitator of select group meetings; summarizing findings generated from the self-assessment tool/survey, asking questions, and clarifying team members' views as they discussed survey results with the goal of moving toward a consensus of perspective related to select survey questions and recommended action items for the SWAG FRC. Mikaela David-John is the Community Research Coordinator for the SWAG FRC, and a principal on-site contact for team members. Ms. David-John maintained regular contact with team members and distributed meeting materials; aided with the facilitation of group processes, and (along with Robin Perry) took detailed notes of comments and discussion items. Ms. Spoliansky served as an information support and assisted in answering questions individual team members had about the funded project and the role, function, and support of Partnership for Strong Families for the SWAG FRC. It is important to note that the role of the above three individuals was seen as supportive in nature. An empowerment perspective was adopted, as the team they would decide the meeting schedule and facilitation process with all members assuming equal status as knowledge experts with respect to community needs and the role, value, functioning, and responsiveness of the SWAG FRC to community need related to supporting families through the promotion of concrete supports in times of need. There was no effort by those in supportive roles to censor conversation and discussion points; efforts were made as feedback was regularly sought regarding facilitation processes and preferences of group members for these processes. All notes were converted into minutes and distributed to team members for their review, edits, and approval. Feedback and recommended edits to documented discussion items and decisions could be provided within scheduled meetings (the team decided on monthly two-hour meetings) or in dialog/e-mails to Robin Perry and/or Mikaela David-John in-between meetings (which would then be discussed with all team members at the next in-person or virtual meeting).

Suggested Citation:

Perry, R., David-John, M., Benson, D., Bowie-Locklear, L., Brewster, R., Franklin, D., Franklin, E., Harper, D., Nichols, S., Roncarti, C., Wilkerson, R., & Spoliansky, T. (2022). *Supporting Families by Providing Concrete Support in Times of Need at the SWAG Family Resource Center*. Tallahassee: Institute for Child and Family Services Research.



Supporting Families by Promoting
Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development
at the SWAG Family Resource Center

Mikaela David-John (Community Research Coordinator for SWAG Family Resource Center), Robin Perry (Lead Evaluator), Dorothy Benson, Lynda Bowie-Locklear, Reva Brewster, Dennis Franklin, Euricka Franklin, Dawn Harper, Shandra Nichols, & Robin Wilkerson (SWAG SFSA Team) & Toni Spoliansky (Project Director)

Institute for Child and Family Services Research



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.

Introduction

This report summarizes key findings from, and recommendations developed by the SWAG Family Resource Center (SWAG FRC) Strengthening Families Self-Assessment (SFSA) Team utilizing a standardized process developed by the Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP)¹. The CSSP Strengthening Families Protective Factors Framework is a research-informed model that focuses on engaging families, programs, and communities in enhancing five protective factors:

- Parental Resilience
- Social Connections
- Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development
- Concrete Support in Times of Need
- Social and Emotional Competence of Children

Since supports and services at the SWAG FRC are structured in accordance with the CSSP Protective Factors Framework, the Strengthening Families Self-Assessment Tool for Community-Based Programs, and associated processes were used to help determine the fidelity of specific implementation strategies (in accordance with the above noted framework), identify existing strengths of select supports and services, and identify areas for potential improvements. This report focuses specifically on the SWAG FRC's efforts at strengthening families by promoting Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development.

SWAG Family Resource Center

Partnership for Strong Families (PSF) began in 2007 to develop a network of Family Resource Centers (FRC) that emphasize a strengthening family approach while utilizing a Protective Factors Framework to provide prevention services and supports to families. The PSF Resource Center model is built upon a multi-system collaborative focusing on primary prevention that works toward strengthening families with the goal of preventing child maltreatment and reducing entries into foster care. In collaboration with the Southwest Advocacy Group (SWAG), Alachua County Library District (ACLD), the SWAG FRC opened its doors to the community in June 2012 and since then has been providing continuous supports and services to individuals and families. The SWAG FRC is one of three Resource Centers in Gainesville that partner with a network of over 75 community partners (across all sites) to provide services that are free and are intended to be responsive to the needs of the surrounding community as identified by community partners/stakeholders and parents/household members (referred to as patrons) within the targeted areas. It is this multi-system collaborative, with representation from across the five sectors (public, business, philanthropy, community, and nonprofit), that has allowed a blending of funding, expansion of services to meet the needs of patrons and enhancement of the community's ability to leverage resources to benefit some of Gainesville's most at-risk populations.

¹ For a more comprehensive review of findings, including additional details related to the history of the SWAG Family Resource Center, enhanced review of methods used, and associated appendices, please see: David-John, M., Perry, R., Benson, D., Bowie-Locklear, L., Brewster, R., Franklin, D., Franklin, E., Harper, D., Nichols, S., Wilkerson, R., & Spoliansky, T. (2021). *The Southwest Advocacy Group (SWAG) Family Resource Center Strengthening Families Self-Assessment (SFSA) Team's Findings and Recommendations/Action Items Associated with Supporting Families by Promoting Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development*. Tallahassee: Institute for Child and Family Services Research.

The SWAG FRC Strengthening Families Self-Assessment Team and Method

The *Strengthening Families Self-Assessment Tool for Community-Based Programs* and associated protocols were developed by the Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP). This is a comprehensive, research-informed approach (based on national studies) that aids in assessing the extent to which a RC has implemented services/activities to engage and strengthen families in alignment with core strategies for building each of the protective factors². The assessment criteria and protocol for self-assessment is standardized. Protocols require the establishment and utilization of a Self-Assessment Team that includes at a minimum: Administrative Staff and/or Program Director, Direct Service Staff, and Parents who participated in the program/received services (or whose children participated in service activities). For this project, it was deemed important to also include collaborative partners and other stakeholders in the process (as informed parties/members). These processes were followed in the establishment of the SWAG SFSA Team.

The SWAG FRC Strengthening Families Self-Assessment Team includes:

Dorothy Benson – SWAG Board Member
Lynda Bowie-Locklear – Episcopal Children's Services
Reva Brewster – Community Ambassador
Dennis Franklin – Community Ambassador
Euricka Franklin – Community Ambassador
Dawn Harper – Department of Children and Families
Shandra Nichols, MS, CHES, CWCM – SWAG FRC Resource Center Manager
Cassandra Roncarti – Community Ambassador
Robin Wilkerson, M.Ed., RBT – SWAG FRC Family Support Facilitator

Within the *Strengthening Families Self-Assessment Tool for Community-Based Programs* there are a series of questions linked with each protective factor. These questions represent actions/activities, program elements, protocols, and policies associated with providing services meant to enhance each protective factor according to best-practice/evidence-based standards. For services and supports focused on Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development there are 18 topics with 70 associated questions for which each team member is asked to individually rate their level of item statement agreement on a five-point Likert-type scale (Strongly Agree, Agree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree) with an option for Not Applicable. This same scale is used for an assessment of all protective factor questions. Team members received an orientation to the CSSP Protective Factors framework, its relationship to the SWAG Family Resource Center service model, and the *Strengthening Families Self-Assessment Tool for Community-Based Programs* and its associated protocol. After individual team members complete their scores, these data were shared via a written summary report highlighting the

² For more information regarding CSSP's Strengthening Families and Protective Factors Framework, please see: <https://cssp.org/our-work/project/strengthening-families/>. Additional information regarding the self-assessment model and associated methodology, tools, and recommended processes, see: <https://cssp.org/our-work/projects/self-assessments-for-programs/> and Harnar, M., & Tarr, J. (n.d.). *Strengthening Families: A look at national data on program strategies, staff capacity and the protective factors*. Washington, D.C.: Center for the Study of Social Policy's Strengthening Families & Mosaic. Available at: <https://www.strengtheningfamiliesevaluation.com/national/>

distribution of responses by team members for each item. Efforts were made through critical discussion and dialog to arrive at a consensus assessment for each item and indicator (if such was possible) so that a collective assessment could lead to a structured action plan to address any fidelity concerns and program needs. The initial meeting of the SWAG SFSA Team took place on June 30, 2021, and monthly meetings and additional contacts through November 2021. The team meeting that involved the discussion of Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development items took place on November 10th.

Strengthening Families Self-Assessment (SFSA) Findings and Recommendations/Action Items Associated with Supporting Families by Promoting Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development

The following represents a summary of key findings and recommendations by the team for questions associated with promoting Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development. Recommendations and observations from supplemental dialogues with the Family Support Facilitator (FSF) at the SWAG FRC, approved by the whole team, are also summarized. These supplemental discussions took place throughout the months of December 2021 and January 2022 and were facilitated by the on-site Community Research Coordinator to discuss the individualized approaches to services and supports related to the knowledge of parenting and child development protective factor. Findings in this report are presented in accordance with the broader questions the tool was structured to answer.

How Does SWAG Family Resource Center Model Developmentally Appropriate Interactions with Children?

There were 14 SFSA items associated with how the SWAG FRC models developmentally appropriate interactions with children. Respondents signaled agreement with 64.28% of the items. There were no SFSA questions for which a majority of team members disagreed with, or thought were not applicable.

What the SWAG Family Resource Center Does Well to Model Developmentally Appropriate Interactions with Children

There was a consensus of agreement among team members for the following items:

Staff demonstrate a strong understanding of child development:

- Staff model developmentally appropriate responses to children's behavior, interests, temperaments and need for exploration and learning.
- Staff understand and can explain the development arc for young children.
- Staff can explain to parents how various activities and interactions support their child's development.

Staff work collaboratively with parents to coordinate support for children's development:

- Staff develop an ongoing partnership with parents to ensure regular communication, common understanding of the child's development and

coordinated action to provide each child with the appropriate experiences for their developmental stage.

Physical discipline (i.e., spanking or hitting) is not allowed in the program by staff or parents.

When staff talk with parents about discipline, they:

- Explain why physical discipline is not allowed in the program, even though this may be different from the family's approach to discipline.
- Provide information on age- appropriate positive discipline techniques and reasonable expectations.
- Offer ideas for alternate ways to manage children's behavior and to recognize and reinforce desired/appropriate behavior.
- Encourage parents to discuss behavior challenges they may have at home.

Areas of Potential Focus/Improvement for SWAG Family Resource Center to Model Developmentally Appropriate Interactions with Children

Due to the lack of awareness of individualized nature of these services and supports prior to SWAG SFSA meeting discussions, the following items were rated with less agreement by team members:

Staff demonstrate a strong understanding of child development:

- Staff participate in regular training that updates their knowledge on advances in understanding child development.

Staff work collaboratively with parents to coordinate support for children's development:

- Staff and parents together use appropriate assessment tools to screen for developmental concerns and monitor development.

When staff talk with parents about discipline, they:

- Connect parents to other parents who can share or model positive parenting approaches.
- Recognize different parental and cultural approaches to discipline and discuss them with parents.
- Make arrangements to have appropriate language and cultural interpreters to support difficult conversations with families.

It was noted during team discussions that due to the individualized nature of some of the collaboration between staff and parents to coordinate support for the children's development, some team members may have answered in the neither agree nor disagree range items related to developmentally appropriate interactions with children. The SFSA team agreed supplemental discussions with the FSF were needed related to developmentally appropriate interactions with children due to the individualized nature of the services. No action items were identified to enhance developmentally appropriate interactions with children. Current examples of the individualized nature of services and supports at the SWAG FRC include:

- Attending meetings with parents as they work to establish an Individualized Education Plan with the school system.
- Hosting open dialogue discussions with parent(s) or caregivers after observing developmental or behavioral challenges in children who frequently attend programs at the RC.
- When appropriate, staff attend social educational evaluations and development evaluations with parents whose children are experiencing development or behavioral challenges.
 - In several circumstances, staff assisted the parents with getting these evaluations set up through trusted providers and provided space and equipment for the meetings to be facilitated as the meetings were online due to the pandemic.
- Hosting programs for parents and providing a space in the community that allows these types of connections to be fostered organically and informally.
 - This is not a formal service because it could potentially cause a HIPAA violation. However, the SWAG FRC staff believe that due to the strong relationships that have been developed with parents whose children frequently attend programming, if that sort of connection was wanted or needed, parents would be comfortable asking the staff for assistance.

How Does SWAG Family Resource Center Provide Information and Resources on Parenting and Child Development?

There are 30 questions associated with how the SWAG FRC provides information and resources on parenting and child development. Findings highlight a team assessment of agreement with 13 questions (43.3%), and the 17 remaining questions were rated within the Neither Agree nor Disagree range. No questions had a consensus of disagreement.

What SWAG Family Resource Center Does Well to Provide Information and Resources on Parenting and Child Development?

Collectively, consensus agreement was demonstrated with respect to the following:

Parenting education classes are offered in a way that reflects best practices in the field, including:

- Staff exhibit warmth, genuineness, flexibility, empathy and good communication skills with families.
- If implementing an evidence-based or proven program, the program is delivered with fidelity to the original course design and content.

Information is provided to parents on stages of child development and what to expect of their children at each stage.

Parenting information and materials used by the program are culturally and linguistically appropriate, and:

- Are available in the language spoken by program families.
- Reflect a diversity of racial and ethnic backgrounds and family structures.

- Encourage parents to reflect on their own parenting history and culture, rather than encouraging stereotypes.

Parenting and child development information is provided through multiple avenues to meet diverse learning styles, including:

- Books and videos in a resource library.
- Regular postings on bulletin boards in public spaces.
- Posting of information and links on a program website and/or social media pages accessed by participants.

Parents are connected to a variety of resources that can help them explore different ways of parenting, such as:

- Counseling.

Staff provide “just in time” parenting tips and discuss parenting issues with parents when:

- Child behavior or development issues arise (e.g., potty training, changes in eating or sleeping patterns, separation issues, aggressive behavior).
- A parent appears to be frustrated or stressed and in need of support.
- A parent appears to be having difficulty relating to or communicating with their child.

Areas of Potential Focus/Improvement for SWAG Family Resource Center to Provide Information and Resources on Parenting and Child Development?

Based on the discussions initiated by the SWAG FRC staff, it was suggested that the community may not be fully aware of the parental development supports available at the Resource Center because these services are typically individualized initiatives, not advertised group-based activities which the CSSP SFSA tool focuses upon as measures of fidelity. The team agreed that there are ways to instill knowledge of parenting and child development without a formal training as such trainings may have an adverse impact on the relationships that the RC staff work to build. SWAG FRC staff believe that family support is needed more, as compared to formal parenting classes or groups. This aligns with community feelings regarding the perceived stigma with formal parenting classes and groups. Overall, the team members agreed that parenting classes or groups should not be an Action Item or focal point for the Resource Center’s programming. Prior to discussions among the SFSA team, the consensus for the following items suggested a Neither Agree nor Disagree rating:

Parenting education classes are offered as one among several strategies for increasing parents’ knowledge of parenting and child development.

Parenting education classes are offered in a way that reflects best practices in the field, including:

- Parents go through a series of classes as a group – with other forms of contact between classes to maintain their engagement.
- Course content is focused on parenting information and developmental information for a particular age group or targeted population, such as children with special needs.

- Parents have opportunities to try out new parenting techniques in the context of parent-child activities and/or as “homework” assignments between classes.
- Classes are engaging and interactive with opportunities for discussion and reflection (rather than being overly reliant on lecture and written information).
- Classes and programs are delivered by staff with appropriate training and credentials for the program.
- Childcare is offered while parents are in classes.
- Transportation, food or other supports are provided as appropriate to enable parents to participate.

Parenting and child development information is provided through multiple avenues to meet diverse learning styles, including:

- Parenting classes.
- Support groups.
- Opportunities for parents with similar concerns to come together and share specific information on such issues as accident prevention, toilet training, routine preventative health care, nutrition, sleep patterns, Shaken Baby Syndrome, safe sleep, etc.

Parents are connected to a variety of resources that can help them explore different ways of parenting, such as:

- Parent education groups (including fatherhood groups).
- Support groups.
- Mentors/coaches.
- Parenting groups and organizations that promote social inclusion and host groups that correspond to different ethnic, cultural and linguistic groups represented the community.

Parent education offerings and staff coaching on parenting are responsive to the needs of parents in different circumstances. For example:

- Different parenting styles of mothers and fathers and the strengths of each
- Needs and concerns of first-time parents
- Needs of parents who are parenting a child with a disability
- Noncustodial parents
- Nontraditional caregivers (e.g., grandparents, foster parents)

If the program serves expecting families and new mothers and fathers, the program provides opportunities for parents to learn about:

- Prenatal and infant health and development
- The birth process and what to expect
- The needs of postnatal women and their families
- The developing role of first-time parents (including adolescent parents, if appropriate)
- Planning for the child’s needs after birth (e.g, car seats, cribs).

SWAG FRC staff believe that family support is needed more, as compared to formal parenting classes or groups. Overall, the team members agreed that parenting classes or groups should not be an Action Item or focal point for the Resource Center's programming.

It was made evident by the SFSA team discussions that the community may not be fully aware of or know how to access parental development information and supports offered at SWAG FRC, thus the following Action Item was endorsed:

Action Item #1: Explore the means and mechanisms by which the community can become more aware of parenting and child development supports available at the Resource Center.

How Does SWAG Family Resource Center encourage parents to observe, ask questions, explore parenting issues and try out new strategies?

There are 14 questions associated with how the SWAG FRC encourages parents to observe, ask questions, explore parenting issues, and try out new strategies. Of these, the team responses ranked 11 questions (78.6%) in the Neither Agree nor Disagree range. There were no items for which there was average representing a consensus of disagreement.

What SWAG Family Resource Center *Does Well* to encourage parents to *observe, ask questions, explore parenting issues and try out new strategies.*

Findings from the SWAG SFSA highlight SWAG FRC staff's strengths in connecting parents with local resources through a variety of different platforms. Collectively, consensus agreement was demonstrated with respect to the following:

Parents and staff work together to design and organize opportunities for parent led discussions (such as a Community Café or Parent Café series) to explore:

- Connecting parents with materials and websites, support groups, play groups and community resources specific to their children's special needs.

Staff recognize and support the parenting challenges experienced by families with children who have special needs by:

- Being sensitive to parents' frustration, protectiveness, guilt, loss and other related feelings, and acknowledging the challenges families may be experiencing.
- Connecting parents with materials and websites, support groups, play groups and community resources specific to their children's special needs.

Areas of Potential Focus/Improvement for SWAG Family Resource Center to encourage parents to observe, ask questions, explore parenting issues and try out new strategies.

Prior to discussions among the SFSA team, the consensus for the following items suggested a Neither Agree nor Disagree rating:

Parents and staff work together to design and organize opportunities for parent led discussions (such as a Community Café or Parent Café series) to explore:

- Cultural/ethnic expectations and practices about parenting.
- Different parenting practices.
- Parent/child relationships.
- How to interact effectively with their children (e.g., listening; appreciating ideas, efforts and feelings; creating a non-threatening environment).
- Being especially supportive at the time that special needs are initially identified.
- Ensuring that program parent-child activities are appropriate for families with children with special needs.

Staff recognize and support the parenting challenges experienced by families with children who have special needs by:

- Regularly checking in with parents about parenting issues.
- Supporting parents in understanding appropriate developmental expectations for their children with special needs.
- Checking in with parents about the impact their children's special needs may have on family dynamics and parental stress.
- Being especially supportive at the time that special needs are initially identified.
- Ensuring that program parent-child activities are appropriate for families with children with special needs.

The team saw great value in enhancing community-led parenting discussions. While discussions of various parenting topics were deemed important by the team, the importance of the peer-to-peer nature of the parenting discussions was also stressed. For example, the SWAG FRC saw high interest levels in a peer-to-peer adult education support group that was in progress of being formed pre-COVID.

While the team agreed that these peer-to-peer programs are needed in the community, they also acknowledged the potential resistance and general lack of participation that may occur. The language used to promote these activities matters, according to the team members. When planning these types of education and peer-to-peer activities, the team stressed the importance of language because "it's not what you say, it's how you say it!" This discussion led to the following action item:

Action Item #2: Ensure that value is placed on peer-to-peer programs and services that are most needed and desired by parents in the community.

Additional discussion highlighted strengths of the SWAG FRC. The SWAG FRC staff reportedly has a “see a need, fill a need” mindset that reigns true when recognizing and supporting the parenting challenges experienced by families with children who have special needs. The SWAG FRC does not currently have a dedicated program geared towards families with children who have special needs, but the supports are still being offered in an individualized nature which aligns with that fact that children with special needs and their families do not have a cookie cutter set of needs. Staff reportedly look out for the specific needs of these children and families when interacting and building relationships with them so they can connect them with the most relevant services and supports. The Family Support Facilitator at the SWAG FRC also plays an important role in facilitating communication between parents and schools, when appropriate. This has proven to be a positive action of the FSF’s part because the parents feel supported but also the school system is alerted and made aware that the parents and caregivers have external supports. The individualized nature of these services and supports also means that the SWAG FRC are flexible with how the services are provided or how referrals are made. SWAG FRC staff understand that sometimes a phone assessment can/may be done depending on the family’s circumstances such as transportation, work schedules, or there is a need to be at home with other children. To ensure there is some flexibility in how parents receive information and supports related to knowledge of parenting and child development, the Resource Center staff develop and maintain relationships with community partners who offer services and supports in flexible and inclusive manners.

Resource Center staff develop and maintain relationships with community partners who offer services and supports in flexible and inclusive manners.

Regular check-ins with parents regarding parenting issues are also provided in an individualized manner. The FSF and Resource Center Manager conduct frequent informal check-ins especially with families who are involved in extra tutoring support or afterschool programming. These informal check-ins usually occur as the caregivers drop off or pick up their children from programming. Check-ins are conducted with parents about the impact their children’s special needs may have on the family dynamic or parental stress are also individualized. The FSF believes these check-ins come up organically during informal situations or interactions. When the situations arise, the FSF frequently refers to resources such as the University of Florida’s Center for Autism and Related Disorders (CARD) which has classes for siblings and hosts “mom’s night out” events. The FSF has noticed through these individualized interactions with caregivers that there is a general lack of awareness among patrons of these types of resources that are available in the community. One strategy the FSF proposed to increase awareness of these resources is hosting info nights at the SWAG FRC with organizations like CARD to get the word out in the community.

How Does SWAG Family Resource Center Address Parenting Issues from a Strength-Based Perspective?

The team scores signaled agreement with 5 of the 12 questions associated with how the SWAG FRC addresses parenting issues from a strength-based perspective; with the remaining 7 scoring as neither agree nor disagree.

What SWAG Family Resource Center Does Well to address parenting issues from a strength-based perspective.

Collectively, consensus agreement was demonstrated with respect to the following:

Home visitors share their observations of children with parents to help the parents recognize:

- Activities families can use to enhance their children's skills and development.
- Signals that development may not be on track.

Staff reinforce positive parent-child interactions by:

- Sharing something positive with parents about their children's behavior and development.

Staff proactively and respectfully address concerns about parenting techniques or behavior by:

- Sharing concerns about a child's behavior and/or about the parents' parenting practices and respectfully offering alternatives.
- Connecting parents to resources and supports that may help to address parenting issues.

Areas of Potential Focus/Improvement for SWAG Family Resource Center to address parenting issues from a strength-based perspective.

The SWAG SFSA team chose not to discuss their ratings at length due to individualized nature of the supports. Instead, the team determined supplemental discussions with the FSF would be best suited to understand, evaluate, and suggest enhancements to the supports and services related to addressing parenting issues from a strengths-based perspective. Prior to discussions that occurred during the SFSA team meetings, the consensus for the following items suggested a Neither Agree nor Disagree rating:

Home visitors share their observations of children with parents to help the parents recognize:

- Their children's unique assets, temperament, personality, communication styles and behavioral cues.
- Their children's growth and development patterns.
- Their children's positive social skills and developmentally appropriate emotional behavior.
- Their children's independence and abilities.

Staff reinforce positive parent-child interactions by:

- Noticing and acknowledging when parents are attuned to their children's needs or are communicating effectively with their children.

Staff proactively and respectfully address concerns about parenting techniques or behavior by:

- Asking open-ended questions to understand the behavior from the parent's perspective.
- Acknowledging young children's frustrating behavior and recognizing parents' efforts to deal with it effectively.

It is important to note that team members who selected neither agree or disagree on items related to home visits reportedly did so because home visits are not included or permitted in PSF's Resource Center Model.

An example of the individualized services and supports for addressing parenting issues from a strengths-based perspective provided by the SWAG FRC staff include:

- Some children enrolled in programming exhibit challenging behaviors while at the SWAG FRC, which prompts the staff to dialogue with parents.
 - If an interaction is out of the ordinary for the child, the staff may ask open-ended questions such as "how is everything going at home with (child's name)?" This simple open-ended question allows the staff to hear the parent's perspective and unique insight into the child's behavior which lead to more in-depth discussions.

The following action item is not associated with a particular set of items on the Strengthening Families Self-Assessment Tool, although discussion ensued in reaction to alternatives to "classes" and other group-based information/education dissemination activities. Instead, the team identified the following action item as a means to address the remaining gaps in services and programs at the SWAG FRC:

Action Item #3: Create a dynamic speaker series and/or programs to reach the two audiences – parents and youth.

The SWAG FRC SFSA team is eager to get started on the proposed Action Items. During the SFSA process, all of the team member shared excellent insights into the Resource Center and the community. At many points in the SFSA meetings at the SWAG FRC, great ideas to improve upon existing programs, services and resources were provided by the team. Therefore, the following Action Item was developed, which is tied to the whole SFSA process, not one particular action item.

Action Item #4: Start moving forward as a team to plan the next steps for the previously identified action items.

Fidelity of Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development Services and Supports to CSSP Protective Factor

The SFSA Team identified the weighted average team score as the consensus measure for each item associated with the Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development assessment questions. Following the development of a consensus rating, individual item scores were converted—in keeping with Harnar and Tarr, (n.d.) and Tarr, Harnar, & Ahsan (2014)³ method recommendations—to binary/dichotomous scores where 1=Agree and Strongly Agree, and 0=Disagree, Strongly Disagree, Neither Agree or Disagree, and Not Applicable. Within the tables denoted in this report, any green shaded cells (Agree and Strongly Agree) reflect a score of 1 and any yellow (Neither Agree or Disagree), red (Disagree and Strongly Disagree), or no shade (Not Applicable) reflects a score of 0 (zero). As observed, there were no red or no shade cells in each table. These scores were summed for the Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development Protective Factor where scores <50% of the total score possible represent low fidelity, 50-74% represent moderate fidelity, and >75% possible scores represent high fidelity. **The aggregate fidelity score from all tabled findings is 30 (of a possible score of 70) or 43%, suggesting that the services and supports associated with the Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development were implemented with low fidelity to the Center for the Study of Social Policy’s Strengthening Families’ Protective Factor Framework.** However, as noted within this report, this score is impacted by ratings specific to listed items associated with select activities (e.g., parenting “classes” and “education groups”) that the SFSA team deem may not applicable or relevant (as referenced) for the context of service at the SWAG FRC. Alternative, more “individualized” efforts, and partnership with collaborative agencies/organizations are thought to address select service and support needs associated with knowledge of parent and child development.

The SWAG Family Resource Center Strengthening Families Self-Assessment Team

As shared earlier, a team of dedicated community ambassadors, SWAG FRC staff, and collaborative partners worked together to engage in a comprehensive assessment of the supports and services provided by the SWAG FRC in accordance with the CSSP’s protective factors framework. The biographies of these team members are detailed below.

³ Harnar, M., & Tarr, J. (n.d.). Strengthening Families: A look at national data on program strategies, staff capacity and the protective factors. Washington, D.C.: Center for the Study of Social Policy’s Strengthening Families & Mosaic. Available at: <https://www.strengtheningfamiliesevaluation.com/national/>

Tarr, J., Harnar, M. A., & Ahsan, N. (2014). Strengthening Families: A look at national data on program strategies, staff capacity and the protective factors. Unpublished whitepaper presented at the National Association for the Education of Young Children’s annual conference in Dallas, TX.



Dorothy A. Benson was born and raised in Tampa, FL, but moved to Gainesville as she was raising her family. The Bensons have lived in the Gainesville community since 1989. Dorothy fell in love with Gainesville, and it quickly came to feel like "home." Dorothy was a homemaker and a mom who got involved in her community after seeing Dr. Nancy Hardt's density maps showing high concentrations of Medicaid births and babies being born underweight in southwest Gainesville. At that time in 2008, Dorothy's youngest son was just heading off to college, and she was able to devote her time to community organizing. After connecting to SWAG community members like Joan Canton, Dorothy began advocating for the children and families in southwest Gainesville at the county commission meetings and helped Joan and others found the Southwest Advocacy Group (SWAG) in 2010. SWAG is grassroots, community-based group that soon became a certified 501(c)(3) non-profit. SWAG works closely with Partnership for

Strong Families and other community partners to bring greater opportunities and resources to the SWAG neighborhoods through the SWAG Family Resource Center, the SW Health Clinic, and the CHILD Center - a model demonstration childcare center. Dorothy has loved being a part of the Strengthening Families Self-Assessment Team because it has allowed us to look back on where we started, where we are now, and how we can best grow to better serve families and children in our community. Dorothy has been married to my supportive husband, Keyton, for 40 years. They raised two children in Gainesville, our daughter, Brenna now 37, and our son Keyton Jr. now 32. Dorothy is an avid walker and bird watcher, and she loves working with the SWAG board and community partners to bring positive changes to this wonderful community we call home. Dorothy loves the SWAG Family Resource Center because it provides a loving, safe and nurturing place for our community to come together and focus our greater collective resources to support children, families, and our seniors. The SWAG FRC provides a tangible place where people can share their love for each other through many volunteer opportunities.

Lynda Bowie-Locklear was born and raised in Minter, AL, and has been a part of the Alachua County community for 28 years. Lynda is married and has two children who she raised in the Alachua County Community. Lynda's career started back in 2003 in early childhood education with Child Care Resources which lead her to The Early Learning Coalition of Alachua County for the next 12 years, and a year with Episcopal Children Services. Lynda continues working in the community with families through workforce with CareerSource of North Central Florida as the WIOA Youth Program Coordinator.



Lynda has been a partner to the Partnership for Strong Families Resource Centers since the inception of Library Partnership Resource Center and continues to work closely with the staff from all Resource Centers in Alachua County. When Lynda was asked to be a part of the SWAG FRC's Self-Assessment Team it wasn't a hard decision. Lynda feels it has been a pleasure to serve alongside of SWAG staff, SWAG Board Member, the community Ambassadors, Robin Perry, Mikaela David-John and Toni Spoliansky. Lynda feels the time spent together on this project has taken our partnership relationship to another level. She looks forward to continuing the partnership to better serve the families in the Alachua County Community.

Lynda has kept these words in the forefront of her mind daily as she works with families in the community. It is an empathy reminder like none other "We often think that admitting struggle is a sign of weakness, but we all struggle sometimes. We all get overwhelmed sometimes. We need help sometimes. Acknowledging this is not a sign of weakness, but struggling alone is a choice to grow weak" -Lori Deschene

"I can't change the direction of the wind, but I can adjust my sails to always reach my destination" -Jimmy Dean



Reva Brewster was born and raised in the U.S. Virgin Islands. Reva has been a member of the Gainesville community for 24 years. Reva raised her two children in the Gainesville community and now enjoys spending time with her four (soon to be five) grandchildren. Reva has been serving others for many years starting back in the U.S. Virginia Islands where she volunteered for a summer camp for youth with disabilities. Here in Gainesville, Reva volunteered for Altrusa House, an adult day health care program, for many years not only to give back to her community but also to spend time with her father while he was part of the program. Reva joined the SWAG SFSA team because of the support she feels when interacting with the staff. She receives so much positive feedback and information from the staff. Compared to the “outside the SWAG FRC’s walls where everything feels very negative, inside the Resource Center staff are uplifting.” During the SFSA process, Reva enjoyed having positive people from the community around her. Reva loves that the SWAG FRC staff are “here with resources and information and that the community has a place to turn to for help and answers.”

Dennis Franklin was born and raised in Harlem New York with one sister of an 18-year age difference. Dennis received education and training in speech, drama, journalism, communications, and business. After finishing his education, Dennis spent ten years involved in marketing and sales for a variety of different businesses. Dennis grew up with an unconditional love for the entertainment industry. As a young adult, Dennis spent his time discovering, up-and-coming and the mainstream artists in the entertainment industry. Dennis always knew that his purpose in life was to make a mark in entertainment that would change the life of music. Dennis was taught early on from his own personal hardships that everyone is not guaranteed the opportunity to advance themselves, so he decided to use his love for music to give back to the community. Dennis enhanced his entrepreneurial skills to establish The Disco Den Record Pool in 1976 which was an educational program to teach disc jockey candidates on how to promote records. Nevertheless, founding The Disco Den Record Pool was just the beginning of the many strides to come. In 1983, Dennis turned the Disco Den into a school for up-and-coming disc jockeys. “We were the original uptown outlet for information and the exchanging of ideas among club jocks. Then, we expanded our base and increased our services.” The Disco Den was replaced with The Record School, a non-profit umbrella corporation that contained a record pool, a Harlem nightclub, The Music Bank, a promotion and Production Company, and a record label.



Dennis moved himself and his family of eight to his mother’s hometown, Gainesville, FL, after his mother got sick. After living in Florida for eight years, Dennis’ life took a drastic flip - Dennis had a relapse on drugs and alcohol. Following an incarceration, Dennis agreed to one year of drug court and was released after eight months. Growing as a man of God, Dennis was taught that being a great leader was not just about what he accomplished, but what he did Christ-like. He later learned that “the best leader is a servant leader.” Reminiscing the struggles and hardships that he experienced, Dennis vowed to do whatever he could to prevent people from slipping through the cracks. “I think this was the greatest turning point in my life. I made a decision that I would work as hard as I could and see that no one would have to go through what happen to me, the feeling was not nice”. He vowed that he would dedicate himself to people that had situations with addiction, ex-offenders, lost children, the homeless, in aspiration that anyone who has lost hope will have some place to go. That place would be called The Neighborhood House, a non-profit organization Dennis co-founded that strives to make a positive impact on our community and youth. Dennis has enjoyed being part of the SWAG SFSA team as it has been an opportunity for him to connect with people in the neighborhood and share information that can help strengthen the community

and bring the community together. Currently, Dennis is working on a new project called The Nuskool which is a success training program which he hopes to share with the southwest Gainesville community and beyond.



Euricka L. Franklin originates from New York City. She was born and raised in Harlem. Euricka graduated from Fashion Industry in New York City. In 1995, Euricka moved to Gainesville and became a resident of Clayton Estate located a few blocks away from the SWAG Family Resource Center. Euricka attended Santa Fe College and became a CNA. For several years, Euricka worked in the healthcare industry until an injury made her unable to continue. Starting in 2004, Euricka was a stay-at-home mother to her six children. Euricka and her husband, Dennis have been together for 31 years. Euricka has volunteered in the community extensively including the MCBC Saturday Academy assisting first through fifth graders with a variety of subjects including English and math and accompanying the students on field trips. Euricka has volunteered for decades with the Board of Elections doing many duties from clerk to ballot scanner. Euricka also volunteered back in New York

city with the YMCA Summer Youth Employment Program as a camp counselor assisting children with educational enrichment. Euricka also assisted with Dr. Shawn Kneipp's 'welfare-to-work' study. Euricka and her husband founded a nonprofit organization called The Neighborhood House which partners with the Big Brother Big Sister program to provide food for children and families in the community. Living across the street from the SWAG FRC, Euricka has been involved with the Resource Center from the beginning – she even watched as the building was reconstructed from apartments to be able to house the Resource Center. Euricka and her family have participated in numerous events and activities at the SWAG FRC and their nonprofit organization, The Neighborhood House, has donated clothes and food in the past. Currently, Euricka cares for her mother and her grandchildren. Euricka found that some of the conversations had and information shared during the SFSA meetings at the SWAG FRC helped Euricka adequately address situations that will arise when caring for her mother and grandchildren. Euricka was happy to be part of the SFSA team because she received important information from the discussion with fellow SFSA team members, that she can share with my family and community. Euricka particularly enjoyed the discussions around mental health treatment and self-care as they are needed in this community, and every community. We all have a hurts, habits, and hang-ups. Euricka joined the SFSA team because she believes that sharing our different experiences with others strengthen everyone.

Shandra Nichols, MS, CHES, CWCM is a native of Ocala, FL, but has lived and worked in Gainesville for about 10 years. Shandra attended the University of Florida where she received a Bachelor of Science and Master of Science degree in Health Education and Behavior. In her spare time, Shandra enjoys spending time with her family and friends, traveling, attending concerts and other entertainment events, listening to music, and DIY projects. After working with the State of Florida Department of Health, Shandra realized that her passion was in working with children and families and transitioned into the child welfare sector, where she has been serving families for the past 8+ years. Shandra began her employment with Partnership for Strong Families in the summer 2016 after accepting a position as the Family Support Facilitator at the Library Partnership Family Resource Center. As the Family Support Facilitator for 4 and a half years, Shandra found great pleasure in meeting and engaging families on a regular basis. She assisted them with meeting their needs through onsite and community resources and by helping them to identify their own personal and family skills and strengths. Most of all, she enjoyed building relationships with the families she served. Currently, as the Manager of the SWAG FRC, Shandra continues to work closely with children and families, however, spends most of her time planning and developing programs to meet the needs of the community, maintaining working relationships with collaborating partners, and managing the oversight of day-to-day activities and patron services with staff, interns, and volunteers. As a member of the Strengthening Families Self-Assessment Team, Shandra has had the opportunity to learn more about the history of SWAG, as well as the southwest Gainesville neighborhoods the resource center serve. As the new manager, Shandra is even more encouraged and see the importance of seeking input from community members when

planning programs and events that will have a direct impact on the community. Often times, the SWAG FRC serve as a place of hope for individuals and families who are experiencing uncertain times in their lives. Our staff members are compassionate, invested, and really want the best for the families we serve.



Robin Wilkerson, M.Ed., RBT is originally from south Florida and has been part of the Gainesville community for 27 years. Robin has been at the SWAG Family Resource Center since December 2018, first in the Early Childhood Support Facilitator Role and now as the Family Support Facilitator. Robin holds a bachelor's degree in psychology from Saint Leo University and a master's degree in applied behavioral analysis from Arizona State University. Previously, Robin worked clinically in behavioral analysis as well as seven years in educational roles for the Alachua County School Board. Robin is also a founding board member of Healing for All, a local nonprofit that specializes in mental health services for underserved populations. Robin is a single mother of two children. Her son, who was diagnosed with Asperger's, was her inspiration for the degrees she has pursued. Robin loves working at the SWAG FRC because of the families she works with, and she enjoys being able to be a support for them.

Support for SWAG SFSA Team Processes

Although not formally members of the SWAG SFSA Team, Robin Perry (Lead Evaluator), Mikaela David-John (Community Research Coordinator for SWAG Family Resource Center), and Toni Spoliansky (Project Director for the *Resource Center Model: Evaluation, Refinement, and Expansion* grant) attended each meeting of the SWAG SFSA Team meetings and served as key supports for team processes. Robin Perry provided initial training and overview of the Center for the Study of Social Policy's SFSA Tool for Community-Based Programs and associated processes for review of findings and development of an action plan and recommendations by the team. Robin Perry was the lead facilitator of select group meetings; summarizing findings generated from the self-assessment tool/survey, asking questions, and clarifying team members' views as they discussed survey results with the goal of moving toward a consensus of perspective related to select survey questions and recommended action items for the SWAG FRC. Mikaela David-John is a principal on-site contact for team members. Ms. David-John maintained regular contact with team members and distributed meeting materials; aided with the facilitation of group processes, and (along with Robin Perry) took detailed notes of comments and discussion items. Ms. Spoliansky served as an information support and assisted in answering questions individual team members had about the funded project and the role, function, and support of Partnership for Strong Families for the SWAG FRC. It is important to note that the role of the above three individuals was seen as supportive in nature. An empowerment perspective was adopted, as the team they would decide the meeting schedule and facilitation process with all members assuming equal status as knowledge experts with respect to community needs and the role, value, functioning, and responsiveness of the SWAG FRC to community need related to enhancing knowledge of parenting and child development. There was no effort by those in supportive roles to censor conversation and discussion points; efforts were made as feedback was regularly sought regarding facilitation processes and preferences of group members for these processes. All notes were converted into minutes and distributed to team members for their review, edits, and approval. Feedback and recommended edits to documented discussion items and decisions could be provided within scheduled meetings (the team decided on monthly two-hour meetings) or in dialog/e-mails to Robin Perry and/or Mikaela David-John in-between meetings (which would then be discussed with all team members at the next in-person or virtual meeting).

Suggested Citation: David-John, M., Perry, R., Benson, D., Bowie-Locklear, L., Brewster, R., Franklin, D., Franklin, E., Harper, D., Nichols, S., Wilkerson, R & Spoliansky, T. (2021). *Supporting Families by Promoting Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development at SWAG Family Resource Center*. Tallahassee: Institute for Child and Family Services Research.



Supporting Families by
Promoting Parental Resilience at the
SWAG Family Resource Center

Robin Perry (Lead Evaluator), Mikaela David-John (Community Research Coordinator for SWAG Family Resource Center), Dorothy Benson, Lynda Bowie-Locklear, Reva Brewster, Dennis Franklin, Euricka Franklin, Dawn Harper, Shandra Nichols, Cassandra Roncarti, Toni Spoliansky & Robin Wilkerson (SWAG SFSA Team)

Institute for Child and Family Services Research



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.

Introduction

This report summarizes key findings from, and recommendations developed by the SWAG Family Resource Center (FRC) Strengthening Families Self-Assessment (SFSA) Team utilizing a standardized process developed by the Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP)¹. The CSSP Strengthening Families Protective Factors Framework is a research-informed model that focuses on engaging families, programs, and communities in enhancing five protective factors:

- Parental Resilience
- Social Connections
- Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development
- Concrete Support in Times of Need
- Social and Emotional Competence of Children

Since supports and services at the SWAG FRC are structured in accordance with the CSSP Protective Factors Framework, the Strengthening Families Self-Assessment Tool for Community-Based Programs, and associated processes were used to help determine the fidelity of specific implementation strategies (in accordance with the above noted framework), identify existing strengths of select supports and services, and identify areas for potential improvements. This report focuses specifically on SWAG FRC's efforts at strengthening families by promoting parental resilience.

The SWAG Family Resource Center

Partnership for Strong Families (PSF) began in 2007 to develop a network of Family Resource Centers (FRC) that emphasize a strengthening family approach while utilizing a Protective Factors Framework to provide prevention services and supports to families. The PSF Resource Center model is built upon a multi-system collaborative focusing on primary prevention that works toward strengthening families with the goal of preventing child maltreatment and reducing entries into foster care. The Southwest Advocacy Group (SWAG) is an established entity in the community that has historically worked toward improving the lives of residents in southwest Gainesville. SWAG partnered with PSF and with the donation of a building from the Alachua County Board of County Commissioners and tremendous community support and financial contributions from several community partners, the SWAG Family Resource Center opened its doors to the community in 2012 and has been providing continuous supports and services in a non-stigmatizing manner to individuals and families since.

The SWAG Family Resource Center is one of three Resource Centers in Gainesville that partner with a network of over 75 community partners (across all sites) to provide services that are free and are

¹ For a more comprehensive review of findings, including additional details related to the history of the Cone Park Library Resource Center, enhanced review of methods used, and associated appendices, please see: Perry, R., David-John, M., Benson, D., Bowie-Locklear, L., Brewster, R., Franklin, D., Franklin, E., Harper, D., Nichols, S., Roncarti, C., Spoliansky, T., & Wilkerson, R (2021). *The Southwest Advocacy Group (SWAG) Family Resource Center Strengthening Families Self-Assessment (SFSA) Team's Findings and Recommendations/Action Items Associated with Supporting Families by Promoting Parental Resilience*. Tallahassee: Institute for Child and Family Services Research.

intended to be responsive to the needs of the surrounding community as identified by community partners/stakeholders and parents/household members (referred to as patrons) within the targeted areas. It is this multi-system collaborative, with representation from across the five sectors (public, business, philanthropy, community, and nonprofit), that has allowed a blending of funding, expansion of services to meet the needs of patrons and enhancement of the community's ability to leverage resources to benefit some of Gainesville's most at-risk populations.

The SWAG FRC Strengthening Families Self-Assessment Team and Method

The *Strengthening Families Self-Assessment Tool for Community-Based Programs* and associated protocols were developed by the Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP). This is a comprehensive, research-informed approach (based on national studies) that aids in assessing the extent to which a RC has implemented services/activities to engage and strengthen families in alignment with core strategies for building each of the protective factors². The assessment criteria and protocol for self-assessment is standardized. Protocols require the establishment and utilization of a Self-Assessment Team that includes at a minimum: Administrative Staff and/or Program Director, Direct Service Staff, and Parents who participated in the program/received services (or whose children participated in service activities). For this project, it was deemed important to also include collaborative partners and other stakeholders in the process (as informed parties/members). These processes were followed in the establishment of the SWAG FRC Strengthening Families Self-Assessment (SFSA) Team.

The SWAG FRC Strengthening Families Self-Assessment Team includes:

Dorothy Benson – SWAG Board Member
Lynda Bowie-Locklear - Episcopal Children's Services
Reva Brewster – Community Ambassador
Dennis Franklin – Community Ambassador
Euricka Franklin – Community Ambassador
Dawn Harper – Department of Children and Families
Shandra Nichols – SWAG Staff (RC Manager)
Cassandra Roncarti – Community Ambassador
Robin Wilkerson – SWAG Staff

Within the *Strengthening Families Self-Assessment Tool for Community-Based Programs* there are a series of questions linked with each Protective Factor. These questions represent actions/activities, program elements, protocols, and policies associated with providing services meant to enhance each protective

² For more information regarding CSSP's Strengthening Families and Protective Factors Framework, please see: <https://cssp.org/our-work/project/strengthening-families/>. Additional information regarding the self-assessment model and associated methodology, tools, and recommended processes, see: <https://cssp.org/our-work/projects/self-assessments-for-programs/> and Harnar, M., & Tarr, J. (n.d.). *Strengthening Families: A look at national data on program strategies, staff capacity and the protective factors*. Washington, D.C.: Center for the Study of Social Policy's Strengthening Families & Mosaic. Available at: <https://www.strengtheningfamiliesevaluation.com/national/>

factor according to best-practice/evidence-based standards. For services and supports focused on Parental Resilience there are 25 topics with 97 associated questions for which each team member is asked to individually rate their level of item statement agreement on a five-point Likert-type scale (Strongly Agree, Agree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree) with an option for Not Applicable. This same scale is used for an assessment of all protective factor questions. Team members received an orientation to the CSSP Protective Factors framework, its relationship to the SWAG FRC service model, and the *Strengthening Families Self-Assessment Tool for Community-Based Programs* and its associated protocol. After individual team members complete their scores, these data were shared via a written summary report highlighting the distribution of responses by team members for each item. Efforts were made through critical discussion and dialog to arrive at a consensus assessment for each item and indicator (if such was possible) so that a collective assessment could lead to a structured action plan to address any fidelity concerns and program needs. The initial meeting of the SWAG SFSA Team took place on June 30, 2021, monthly team meetings continued through November. Subsequent meetings that involved the discussion of parental resilience items took place on July 26 and September 8. The dates and times of meeting were in accordance with preferred times and schedules of all team members and attendees.

Strengthening Families Self-Assessment (SFSA) Findings and Recommendations/Action Items Associated with Supporting Families by Promoting Parental Resilience

The following represents a summary of key findings and recommendations by the team for questions associated with promoting Parental Resilience. For the purposes of the summary, findings are presented in accordance with the broader questions the tool was structured to answer.

How Does the SWAG Family Resource Center Demonstrate that Parents are Valued?

There are 32 questions associated with a measure of how the SWAG FRC demonstrates that parents are valued. There were no SFSA questions for which the majority of team members rated as not applicable. Findings highlight a team consensus of agreement with 21 of the 32 questions on demonstrating that parents are valued, with 11 within the Neither Agree nor Disagree range. There were no questions for which there was a consensus of disagreement. The team had an opportunity to discuss all item responses and brainstorm potential action items generating from open discussion of SWAG FRC's strengths and potential areas of improvement.

What the SWAG Family Resource Center Does Well to Demonstrate that Parents are Valued

Staff strive to recognize and affirm the central role of parents in their children's lives through every interaction with families including policies, practices, and informal communication.

The program has multiple avenues for regular communication with families:

- The program provides an orientation for families about the program philosophy, goals, and objectives.
- Staff use a variety of methods (e.g., new family orientations, small group meetings, individual conversations, and written questionnaires) to provide information and gather input from families about activities throughout the year.

- Staff regularly ask parents about their observations of their child.

All family members are made to feel welcome:

- Someone is available to greet families when they come in.
- Staff are respectful even when family visits are unexpected.

Staff develop mutually respectful relationships with all family members by:

- Taking time to get to know family members individually, by name.
- Listening and learning about their interests, current activities, hopes and expectations for themselves and their children.
- Regularly inquiring about what is happening in their lives.
- Providing emotional support and encouragement.
- Sharing appropriate information about themselves.
- Recognizing and acknowledging parents' strengths, efforts and contributions.
- Taking time to understand the complex needs of individual parents, such as navigating child custody or the child support system, playing dual roles in a single-parent household or having children with different partners.
- Using intake forms, applications and surveys that are gender neutral.

Staff show that they value fathers and are sensitive to their unique needs by:

- Being aware of barriers that limit father involvement, such as a difficult relationship with the child's mother, lack of information or a non-custodial relationship with child.

As a part of staff orientation and ongoing staff development, program staff regularly have opportunities to develop skills and knowledge to work effectively with diverse families. Staff development may include:

- Inviting partner organizations to provide workshops for staff on working with diverse families.
- Facilitating discussions to help staff members understand and appreciate their culturally different communication styles.

The program seeks to reflect the community and families it serves by:

- Building a staff that reflects the community and families served.
- Intentionally recruiting and employing staff members who are skilled at working with the diversity of the families in the program.
- Connecting with elders and other trusted messengers of the diverse cultural groups represented in the community served.
- Seeking to hire staff members that provide families and children with connections to the diversity that exists in society - even if the program's community is mono-lingual, mono-ethnic or mono-cultural.

The above findings reinforced the overall positive impact and meaningful practices that the SWAG Family Resource Center and its staff engage in to recognize and affirm the central role of parents in their children's lives; make all family members feel welcome; and aid in the development of mutually respectful relationships between staff and all family members. Staff utilize formal, informal, and regular communication methods to ensure these meaningful practices occur with parents and families. These are clearly identified strengths of the SWAG FRC.

...findings reinforced the overall positive impact and meaningful practices that the SWAG Family Resource Center and its staff engage in to recognize and affirm the central role of parents in their children's lives; make all family members feel welcome; and aid in the development of mutually respectful relationships between staff and all family members. Staff utilize formal, informal, and regular communication methods to ensure these meaningful practices occur with parents and families. These are clearly identified strengths of the SWAG FRC... [as] all patrons and family members are authentically valued and respected by staff and SWAG FRC practices.

The team's level of agreement on these items collectively reinforced their assessment that all patrons and family members are authentically valued and respected by staff and SWAG FRC practices. Although there was collective agreement regarding the above identified strengths, the team did identify select action items associated with enhancing existing communication efforts with patrons and the community. These action items included:

Action Item #1: Reevaluate the current engagement and outreach strategies to improve messaging to parents/families/households regarding the agency (SWAG FRC).

Action Item #2: Formalize some level of communication between the SWAG Board and the members of the Strengthening Families Self-Assessment Team.

Action Item #3: Utilize community members to help raise awareness of the SWAG FRC.

Action Item #4: Increase engagement with local businesses and schools to promote the Resource Center.

Although there are existing outreach efforts that the SWAG FRC engages in within the community, it was thought that word of mouth is one of the biggest ways that community members find out about the SWAG FRC. An exploration of alternative messaging and engagement activities was recommended. Some suggestions focused on the messaging that highlighting on the support, growth, and sharing focus of the RC (e.g., “Resource Centers Can Help You Grow”) for patrons and families. Other suggestions included: the development of more formal connections with supportive landlords and leasing offices of apartment complexes as a conduit/dissemination source of information regarding the SWAG FRC; the utilization of the Community Ambassadors for outreach and engagement with families (e.g., modelled after an approach used by the Gainesville Housing Authority); increased engagement with local business and schools to promote RC information; and, hosting more open houses and community dinners/events when able to do so safely (post-COVID). Members of the SWAG SFSA Team discussed the potential role/opportunity of the team becoming a standing (advisory) committee for the SWAG FRC that can collaborate with the community SWAG Board as a continued support (see also below discussion associated with Action Item #11 and #12). A new Community Outreach Coordinator position with PSF may be an added support that can be used by SWAG FRC to aid with some of the recommended action items. Overall, there was general agreement and praise for efforts of the SWAG FRC to ensure its program’s efforts reflect the communities and families it serves.

...there was general agreement and praise for efforts of the SWAG FRC to ensure its program’s efforts reflect the communities and families it serves.

Areas of Potential Focus/Improvement for the SWAG Family Resource Center to Demonstrate that Parents are Valued

Although individual team member ratings may have been impacted by a lack of knowledge or limited utilization of services and supports applicable to select questions, there were eight that focused on the value of fathers and their unique needs for which the consensus was a rating of Neither Agree nor Disagree for eight of these items by the team. These included:

Staff show that they value fathers and are sensitive to their unique needs by:

- Taking part in periodic training on understanding and appreciating fathers' needs and parenting.
- Providing information specific to fathers/male family members in a special area such as a lounge, bulletin board, or bookshelf.
- Providing a diaper changing table in the men's room or other area accessible to men.
- Providing peer activities or services that are man-to-man, father-to-father.
- Engaging male participants to greet other men at program activities.
- Establishing ongoing partnerships with community resources that provide services to fathers.
- Sharing responsibility for inviting fathers to attend programs and working to engage them in activities.
- Encouraging fathers and male family members to engage in all aspects of the program, not only activities for fathers, including leadership roles.

There was variation in opinion regarding most of the above items, with a notable number of team member disagreeing or strongly disagreeing with these statements. There was a very involved discussion regarding these items, including an overview of broader factors and influences (in society and the community) impacting upon the level of engagement and responsiveness of fathers to SWAG FRC engagement attempts, supports and activities. These discussions led to consideration of two action items:

Action Item #5: Recruit more fathers to utilize the services and programs at the SWAG FRC.

Action Item #6: Host social connection events with themes catered towards fathers.

There was consensus among team members of the value and need of engaging with and encouraging the active involvement of fathers/males in family life and SWAG FRC activities. Any efforts of engagement, it was suggested, need to be sensitive and responsive to potential factors contributing to the historical limited utilization of SWAG FRC supports and activities... Collaborating with local fathers was perceived as a necessity...

There was consensus among team members of the value and need of engaging with and encouraging the active involvement of fathers/males in family life and SWAG FRC activities. It was suggested that any efforts of engagement should be sensitive and responsive to potential factors contributing to the historically limited utilization of SWAG FRC supports and activities. Some of the suggested factors include limited trust of social/human service agencies, stigma associated with receipt of assistance (especially given perceived cultural, gender, and family roles and responsibilities), conflicts with work schedules, and engagement events and activities that may not be targeted to specific interests of fathers/males. Collaborating with local fathers was perceived as a necessity in developing a plan to address the above action items (Action Item #5 and #6), although some suggested activities were suggested; for example: dads, daughters, and doughnuts (i.e., Donuts with Dads); father/daughter dance, neighborhood kickball or softball game, etc.

The team was not aware of a significant refugee or immigrant population within the community/service area for the SWAG FRC thus unable to collectively agree with the following statements that the program and services support immigrant and refugee families by:

- Ensuring that staff are knowledgeable about immigrant and refugee families' unique challenges and can help address them in a respectful manner.

- Maintaining up-to-date information on supports and services most relevant to immigrant and refugee families.

Subsequently, there was no associated action item, although continued efforts of improving resources for addressing language barrier issues and collaboration with partners to assist with specific needs of these population would continue, as needed. The action item generated from this discussion is as follows:

Action Item #7: Explore how to better engage with diverse populations within the community.

Another item for which there was no consensus agreement was:

As a part of staff orientation and ongoing staff development, program staff regularly have opportunities to develop skills and knowledge to work effectively with diverse families. Staff development may include:

- Coordinating site visits at organizations that serve different populations so that staff can learn how to best serve diverse families.

The team agreed that the observed level of variation in individual member scoring on this item reflects variation in the level of knowledge respondents had regarding the training PSF/SWAG FRC staff receive with respect to working with diverse families. An involved discussion ensued where PSF staff informed the SFSA Team that all RC staff receive cultural competency trainings on an ongoing basis that parallel training received by all PSF employees. Community Ambassadors highlighted the value of trainings on this topic, especially as such relates to the diversity of the population within the community. There appeared to be consensus among the Community Ambassadors in support of informing patrons of these trainings, utilizing a Parent Advisory Committee/Group to discuss training opportunities for staff. An emphasis was also placed on exploring opportunities for Community Ambassadors and parents and others in the community receiving training as well on diversity and inclusion. It was noted that sometimes engagement and communication across families from different cultures can be limited by language and cultural barriers within the community.

Some Community Ambassadors spoke of the value (and their willingness to volunteer) to engage with select families that may be isolated within the community. Here, training or "...open discussions" and/or opportunities for Ambassadors and community members to discuss diversity issues may be an opportunity to promote engagement and subsequently link diverse families to the RC or other community resources. These comments highlighted the value of the RC and the need to enhance its impact for all families. Acknowledging the benefits of the RC, one Ambassador noted "SWAG is my second home." These benefits may not be fully realized for other families that may feel isolated due to cultural and/or language barriers. While they may feel comfortable accessing food or clothing services, English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) families may not be accessing services and programs that may help them become more stable/economically self-sufficient.

There was an involved discussion regarding the use of engagement strategies that could utilize Community Ambassadors and motivated/ “trusted” parents for outreach efforts and in helping promote self-reliant and self-sufficiency skills of parents and community members. Reinforcing “...neighbors helping others,” “building relationships with patrons...[and]...building up individuals as well...” where Ambassadors and other trusted parents are “...given something to do... [as partners and not] ...told what to do” (as some report is typically done by other human service agencies) were some themes in this discussion.

There was an involved discussion regarding the use of engagement strategies that could utilize Community Ambassadors and motivated/ “trusted” parents for outreach efforts and in helping promote self-reliant and self-sufficiency skills of parents/community members. Reinforcing “...neighbors helping others,” “building relationships with patrons...[and]...building up individuals as well...” where Ambassadors and other trusted parents are “...given something to do... [as partners and not] ...told what to do” (as some report is typically done by other human service agencies) were some themes in this discussion.

Within the context of the broader discussion, it was noted that three children/youth were shot in the neighborhood in the past weekend. “We are experiencing a crisis within a crisis” noted a Community Ambassador highlighting the grieving the “...parents and community” are currently experiencing while “...we deal with problems every day.” These events led to a broader discussion of community mental health needs, a desire to “get young kids involved” in activities so they “feel part of the system,” consideration of reinstituting/developing a “neighborhood garden” (that engages multiple generations, especially kids), having more “community events” that promote engagement, and using select Community Ambassadors and community members as “resources to be involved in planning [or RC activities]”

Opportunities, it was thought, should be explored related to the establishment of a Parent/Community Advisory Committee to review, and discuss training received and training needs of staff, Community Ambassadors, and community members; and the empowerment of Community Ambassadors/targeted parents as partners in the development and implementation of engagement strategies and RC activity planning (see also below Action Item #11 and #12).

How Does the SWAG Family Resource Center honor each family’s race, language, culture, history, and approach to parenting?

There are 8 questions associated with a measure of how the SWAG FRC honors each family’s race, language, culture, history, and approach to parenting. Findings highlight a team assessment (consensus)

of agreement with 5 of these 8 questions, and 3 within the Neither Agree nor Disagree range. No questions had a consensus of disagreement.

What the SWAG Family Resource Center Does Well that Honors Each Family's Race, Language, Culture, History, and Approach to Parenting

Program staff ensure that all families, regardless of family structure; socioeconomic, racial, religious, and cultural backgrounds; sexual orientation; abilities; or preferred language are included in all aspects of the program, including volunteer opportunities.

- Staff are trained to be knowledgeable about the parenting practices and approaches to family decision-making of different cultural and ethnic groups.
- The program regularly gathers information about family interests, beliefs and expectations, including those relating to the child's culture and language development, and seeks to partner with families in incorporating those features into program activities and structure.
- Parents have opportunities to share skills, talents and cultural traditions with children and other parents.
- The program displays diverse families and family structures in books, posters and program materials.

An effort is made to ensure program information and outreach materials are linguistically and culturally appropriate. Materials are:

- Designed or selected to reflect the culture(s) of the community served.

No action item was recommended by the team as such relates to any of the above items. Specific note was made of efforts and consideration by staff across all SWAG FRC programs and supports to be respectful and inclusive of all families from different cultural, religious, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Concerted efforts reportedly are made to be friendly, supportive, and engaged and respectful of those from diverse backgrounds.

Specific note was made of efforts and consideration by staff across all SWAG FRC programs and supports to be respectful and inclusive of all families from different cultural, religious, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Concerted efforts...are made to be friendly, supportive, and engaged and respectful of those from diverse backgrounds.

Areas of Potential Focus/Improvement for the SWAG Family Resource Center to Honor Each Family's Race, Language, Culture, History, and Approach to Parenting

There were three items for which the consensus was a rating of Neither Agree nor Disagree by the team; these include:

Program staff ensure that all families, regardless of family structure; socioeconomic, racial, religious, and cultural backgrounds; sexual orientation; abilities; or preferred language are included in all aspects of the program, including volunteer opportunities.

- Staff engage grandparents, elders, and extended family members in discussions on parenting and the transmission of cultural beliefs.

An effort is made to ensure program information and outreach materials are linguistically and culturally appropriate. Materials are:

- Translated, whenever possible, into the language(s) spoken by all families in the community served.
- Reviewed by a Parent Advisory Committee to ensure that they are culturally relevant and linguistically accessible to all families in the program.

With respect to program information and outreach materials being linguistically and culturally appropriate, the team was made aware of current efforts underway to address the need for greater translation of program and outreach materials that are linguistically and culturally appropriate. PSF and SWAG FRC staff reported that a series of engagement, enrollment, and program information materials (e.g., “Getting to Know You” forms, Family Resource Center rack cards/program and support descriptions, etc.) have been translated into Spanish. These materials will soon be printed and disseminated. Staff have used Google translate to help overcome language barriers. Spanish speaking interns, a SWAG Advisory Board Member, and select PSF employees on occasion have served as translators. However, efforts are in place (through PSF) at securing live/telephonic interpretation services. For community members that want to learn English, referrals are made to collaborative partners and other community resources for additional supports (e.g., ESOL programs at/through a local school, Santa Fe College, through Catholic Charities, and at public libraries).

The last listed rating is reflective of the fact that there is no Parent Advisory Board associated with the SWAG FRC; however, community participation and representation is present on the SWAG Board. Efforts to be associated with Action Item #2 are thought to address this issue insofar as exploration is made of the possible extension of the SWAG SFSA Team becoming a standing committee or the impetus for the development of a formal Parent/Community Advisory Committee specific to the SWAG FRS that can have a formal collaborative relationship with the SWAG Board.

How Does the SWAG Family Resource Center encourage parents to manage stress effectively?

There are 13 questions associated with a measure of how the SWAG FRC encourages parents to manage stress effectively. Of these, the team scores signaled agreement with eight items (61.5%).

What the SWAG Family Resource Center Does Well that Helps Parents Manage Stress Effectively.

Program staff are perceived as proactively responsive and supportive when parents/patrons demonstrate common signs of stress. Further, team members reached consensus in their agreement with respect to staff knowledge on how to respond appropriately to families in crisis.

When common signs of stress occur, program staff reach out to families proactively and supportively. Some common signs of stress include:

- Parents' acknowledgement of stress or problems
- Unusual parental behavior
- Repeated unexplained absences
- Repeated tardiness or missed appointments
- Divorce, separation, military deployment, family dissolution, job loss or other family crises
- Changes or fluctuations in a child's emotional state, acting out, distress, challenging behavior, fearful behavior, inappropriate language/behavior (such as sexual acting out), signs of abuse or neglect (such as bruises) or other unexplained changes in child behavior.

The program provides regular opportunities for parents to relieve stress through:

- Linking parents to organized support groups.
- Setting aside space and time for parents to gather, talk and participate in informal activities.
- Making staff or consultants available for parents to talk to individually about issues that are troubling them.

Staff know how to respond appropriately to family crises that come to their attention. Staff receive training and support from other staff members on:

- Talking to families about difficult issues and helping them access additional help.
- Maintaining confidentiality.
- Recognizing domestic violence, depression, developmental delays, mental illness, chronic health problems, substance abuse and other signs of imminent crisis and knowing how to respond appropriately.
- Other community agencies providing specialized services to families and children.

Program staff are perceived as proactively responsive and supportive when parents/patrons demonstrate common signs of stress. This corroborates other findings denoted elsewhere in the report that suggest a quality level of support, professionalism, respectful, and caring attitude of SWAG FRC staff toward parents and all patrons. Opportunities are provided for parents to relieve stress through referrals to support groups, engaging parents informally, and (if necessary and/or requested) arranging for individual consultations with staff and other professionals to address issues that are a source of stress in their lives.

Opportunities are provided for parents to relieve stress through links/referrals to support groups, engaging parents informally, and (if necessary and/or requested) arranging for individual consultations with staff and other professionals to address issues that are a source of stress in their lives.

SWAG FRC professionalism and concern for parents and all patrons is reflective in the consensus agreement that staff do a good job. Examples of staff actions include talking to families about difficult issues and helping them access additional help; maintaining confidentiality; and, recognizing domestic

violence, depression, developmental delays, mental illness, chronic health problems, substance abuse and other signs of imminent crisis and knowing how to respond appropriately.

SWAG FRC professionalism and concern for parents and all patrons is reflective in...that staff do a good job. Examples of staff actions include talking to families about difficult issues and helping them access additional help...; maintaining confidentiality...; and, recognizing domestic violence, depression, developmental delays, mental illness, chronic health problems, substance abuse and other signs of imminent crisis and knowing how to respond appropriately...

Areas of Potential Focus/Improvement for the SWAG Family Resource Center to Help Parents Manage Stress Effectively

Although the staff affiliated with the SWAG FRC are seen as responsive to families in crisis, there was less agreement in terms of the extent to which regular opportunities are provided to relieve parental stress through:

- Organizing spa days, exercise classes or other parent-only social activities.
- Providing occasional childcare so parents can take a “night out,” go shopping or participate in other parent-only activities.

The above team scores (below an average level of agreement) reflect a desire, especially among Community Ambassadors and patrons for opportunities for more parent-only activities at the SWAG FRC, resources permitting. Given the impact of COVID-19, these opportunities have become more limited; however, expansion of such activities (when safe to do so) were seen as an area of value and importance in promoting parental and community resilience. The implementation of parent-only activities may be a way of engaging parents and subsequently lead to knowledge and utilization of additional programs and supports offered by the SWAG FRC. This led to the following action item:

Item #8: Explore parent-only activities where childcare is provided in “post-covid” world.

The lack of reaching an agreement threshold for three other items reflect real and timely concerns about community stressors having an impact on the mental health of parents, children/youth, and families. The items in question include:

Staff know how to respond appropriately to family crises that come to their attention. Staff receive training and support from other staff members on:

- Understanding the impact of family crises and/or loss on all family members—especially children—and how to respond appropriately.
- Supporting families’ immediate and long-term plans.
- Understanding trauma and its impact on children and how staff can help.

Community Ambassadors reinforced that families are “stressed” and that “...parents and our community are grieving” due to weekly gun violence and an erosion of trust within the community.

Historically, and during the time of this review, gun violence has impacted this community and taken lives of its members (including youth). Community Ambassadors reinforced that families are “stressed” and that “...parents and our community are grieving” due to weekly gun violence and an erosion of trust within the community. SWAG FRC staff acknowledged that mental health partnerships are needed or need to be strengthened to better support the community and individual families and children impacted by violence within the community/neighborhood. Current efforts have been initiated (by the SWAG FRC Manager) to explore additional supports, and the team brainstormed additional ideas, including (but not limited): reaching out directly to parents when an act of violence happens; partnering with MOMS Demand Action; partnering with Healing for All (an organization devoted to providing mental health counseling to those without insurance); facilitating on-site support/services with Meridian Behavioral Health (i.e., community has better access to mental health services); speaking/community engagement about mental health issues. These discussions led to the following Action Items:

Action Item #9: Host a community event to talk about gun violence that can serve to help connect the community with grief counselors.

Action Item #10: Strengthen partnerships with local organizations such as Meridian Behavioral Health to provide mental health support for the community.

Shortly after the meeting when Action Item #10 was created, efforts were made to partner with Meridian Behavioral Health that resulted in a commitment for them to be onsite once a month beginning in November 2021. Meridian Behavioral Health is a non-profit organization that provides mental health and substance abuse education and evidence-based treatment services from a community mental health perspective to as a means of “...enhancing the quality of life...wellbeing and health of our patients and community” (see: <https://www.mbhci.org/>).

How Does the SWAG Family Resource Center support parents as decision-makers and help build decision-making and leadership skills?

The team scores signaled agreement with 30 of the 41 (73.2%) questions associated with how the SWAG FRC support parents as decision-makers and help build decision-making and leadership skills.

What the SWAG Family Resource Center Does Well that Support Parents as Decision-makers and Help Build Decision-making and Leadership Skills

Responses and feedback highlight a level of respect and understanding afforded parents by staff in actions that reinforce parental authority in dealings and interactions with their children. There was strong agreement that the following items and actions take place:

Staff receive program support when working with families under stress through:

- Acknowledgement and support for their efforts from supervisors and administrators.
- Opportunities to process their own emotional reactions with appropriate support.
- Time off if needed.

Staff reinforce parental authority by:

- Respecting parents' directions and/or decisions about their children.
- Learning about parents' expectations and limits for their children.
- Talking respectfully with parents about how to handle differences in expectations regarding children's behavior and development.
- Understanding the parenting and child behavior norms of the parent's culture.
- Being careful not to contradict a parent in front of his or her child or other children.

Parents are engaged as partners in developmental screenings or assessments of their child:

- All staff are trained in the program's confidentiality policy regarding screening and results.
- Parents are informed about the confidentiality policy and what it means to them.
- The program consults with parents immediately when child health, behavior or developmental problems are suspected or identified.
- Parents work with staff to develop plans and accommodations for their children based on the screening.
- The program assists parents in finding and connecting to specialists (e.g., a physician, physical therapist, or child study team) for further evaluation when their children are identified in the screening process as having possible special needs.

Parents and staff develop family plans together that:

- Identify the family's assets, interests, skills, needs and goals for themselves and their children.
- Identify services and opportunities within the program that may help parents achieve their goals and effectively use their skills and talents.
- Identify other community resources and opportunities that may help families achieve their goals, continue their learning and/or provide other avenues for involvement and leadership.

Select findings denoted above highlight a level of respect and understanding afforded parents by staff in actions that reinforce parental authority in dealings and interactions with their children. Collectively, these findings reinforce a perceived perspective that SWAG FRC staff interactions and efforts are perceived as informed, responsive, respectful, and in the best interests of strengthening families through supportive engagement and promotion of parental authority/role as decision makers. The quality and level of support for parents is clearly where the team agreed that SWAG FRC staff and resources (across all activities associated with each item) clearly support a parent's personal education and career goals.

...findings reinforce a perceived perspective that SWAG FRC staff interactions and efforts are perceived as informed, responsive, respectful, and in the best interests of strengthening families through supportive engagement and promotion of parental authority/role as decision makers.

Areas of Potential Focus/Improvement for the SWAG Family Resource Center to Support Parents as Decision-makers and Help Build Decision-making and Leadership Skills?

Consensus agreement did not exist for the following statements, instead consensus suggested a Neither Agree nor Disagree rating:

Staff receive program support when working with families under stress through:

- Access to a mental health consultant.

Parents are engaged as partners in developmental screenings or assessments of their child:

- All plans for the child that result from assessments are fully discussed with parents and documented in the children's files, and parents are provided copies of the plan.

The program provides opportunities and support for families to serve as leaders and decision makers by:

- Providing opportunities for families to volunteer and contribute to the program.
- Asking families for regular input on programmatic decisions.
- Asking families for input into staff hiring and training.

The program promotes participation in activities by:

- Providing child care during trainings or workshops.

The program helps to support the continued development of parent leaders by supporting:

- Personal growth -- such as attending conferences or special events and collecting and sharing information of interest to other parents.
- Leadership development trainings and mentoring activities.
- Training opportunities for advocacy and civics (e.g., how local and state government works, how to foster change).

The program helps to support parents' opportunities for leadership in community change by:

- Connecting parents to groups that inform and shape policy at the local, state or national level.

Although the team perceives there is strong support for parents and strengthening families among SWAG FRC staff and within program activities and supports, the team identified areas of potential improvement where opportunities can be afforded to parents to serve as leaders and decision makers. Potential opportunities include enhancing patron and parent participation in programmatic decision-making processes at the SWAG FRC. These discussions and considerations resulted in the following action items:

Action Item #11: Create a Parent Advisory Committee (PAC) or Community Advisory Community (CAC) to advise the SWAG FRC.

Action Item #12: Create a Youth Advisory Council (YAC) to advise the SWAG FRC.

Action Item #13: Explore what the organizational framework would be in terms of engagement and program planning that involves parents/patrons.

All the Community Ambassadors on the SFSA team see value in an advisory committee being consulted, especially on program matters highlighting the importance of “...keeping the neighborhood involved...” as a valued partner in SWAG FRC activities. Active engagement of Ambassadors and parents/patrons in program planning may lead to better engagement in program participation and more timely assessment of community and household needs. These efforts may be of assistance to existing efforts of the RC Manager in networking with community resources to address to emerging needs within the community (e.g., current efforts to partner with the University of Florida on an anti-bullying initiative; strengthening ties with the Gainesville Police Department and Alachua County Sheriff’s Office; and work being done to develop STEM programs for youth, etc.). SWAG has an Advisory Board that does have parent/citizen participation/members. Dorothy Benson (a member of the SWAG SFSA Team) is part of the SWAG Advisory Board who helps with program planning. Although the form, function, and activities of the SWAG Advisory Board are valued and have relevance for the SWAG FRC (as they are a supportive, collective partner), it was thought a separate Parent Advisory Committee (PAC) or Community Advisory Community (CAC) to advise the SWAG FRC would be of value and could interact/collaborate with the SWAG Advisory Board (that provides insights, oversight, and guidance on a broader array of SWAG initiatives). A PAC or CAC would/could be SWAG FRC specific. Consideration of Action Items #11 through #13 should explore options for implementation, with specific focus on its association and relationship with the SWAG Board. Some consideration should be given to research on how PACs and CACs have been structured in other communities where they had meaningful impact. Extending from this discussion was support for considering the creation of a Youth Advisory Council as a means of better

informing engagement with and program decisions focused on the needs of youth in the neighborhoods served. Such may allow for multiple generations in the community to be involved in the planning and programming process.

All the Community Ambassadors on the SFSA team see value in an advisory committee being consulted, especially on program matters highlighting the importance of “...keeping the neighborhood involved...” as a valued partner in SWAG FRC activities.

There was involved feedback and suggestions from Community Ambassadors regarding items associated with supporting the continued development of parent leaders by supporting. Community Ambassadors expressed a willingness to continue to volunteer their time (following the SFSA process) to enhance parent/patron involvement and serve as advocates for the community. Some ideas and suggestions perceived of value included (but were not limited to):

- Providing opportunities for parents and community members (Ambassadors) to receive training or be exposed through trainings, developments, and events on how to talk to others from different cultures, recognize variations in needs across cultures (and other diversity factors), celebrate diversity and how to come together as a community, etc.
- Provide training and support to volunteer leaders/Community Ambassadors on community engagement tactics/methods.
- Involve Community Ambassadors (and other parent leaders) as information/knowledge experts on the influence and impact of SWAG FRC at meetings and conferences (e.g., the annual Florida DCF Summit, etc.).
- Develop and implement parent support nights that are facilitated by the Community Ambassadors/parent leaders. These events could be opportunities for parents to provide input into SWAG FRC programming decisions, explore parent mentoring, and the development of formal and informal supports among parents. These events could build off of existing and past efforts organized by the SWAG FRC (e.g., financial literacy workshops, etc.) where it was highlighted that informal supports and connections among parents developed organically.

These discussions/brainstorming activities led to the itemization of two additional action items:

Action Item #14: Explore means and mechanisms for training for Community Ambassadors.

Action Item #15: Create a parent support night or some informal type of way to facilitate parents meeting.

How Does the SWAG Family Resource Center help parents understand how to buffer their child during stressful times?

There were three questions associated with a measure of how the SWAG Family Resource Center helps parents understand how to buffer their child during stressful times for which the team scores signaled neither agreement nor disagreement with two items, including:

- Staff receive training on talking with parents about helping children in times of family crisis.
- Parents and staff receive ongoing training and up-to-date information on dealing with stress and trauma including:
 - How stress impacts the child's brain, behavior, and development
 - Recognizing the signs of stress in children
 - How stress may impact the child's behavior and how to shape adult responses to the child's behavior accordingly
 - The important role that parents and caring adults play in buffering children during stressful times

And agreement on one:

- Parents and staff have access to a mental health consultant who can help them proactively address the needs of children and other family members during stressful times.

Although there were two items where the team score did not reach the threshold of agreement, no action items were suggested for the above noted items as it was thought efforts highlighted by the Partnership for Strong Families to provide continued and targeted training on these topic areas were sufficient for the future. In any regard, the importance of all staff to receive training and support to enhance their ability to help parents meet the needs of their children during stressful time was reinforced. An itemization of any such training would be of value in any subsequent SFSA reviews.

Fidelity of Parental Resilience Services and Supports to CSSP Protective Factor

As denoted earlier, the SFSA Team identified the weighted average team score as the consensus measure for each item associated with the Parental Resilience assessment questions. Following the development of a consensus rating, individual item scores were converted—in keeping with Harnar and Tarr, (n.d.) and Tarr, Harnar, & Ahsan (2014)³ method recommendations—to binary/dichotomous scores

³ Harnar, M., & Tarr, J. (n.d.). Strengthening Families: A look at national data on program strategies, staff capacity and the protective factors. Washington, D.C.: Center for the Study of Social Policy's Strengthening Families & Mosaic. Available at: <https://www.strengtheningfamiliesevaluation.com/national/>

where 1=Agree and Strongly Agree, and 0=Disagree, Strongly Disagree, Neither Agree or Disagree, and Not Applicable. Any Agree and Strongly Agree consensus score reflects a score of 1 and any Neither Agree nor Disagree, Disagree and Strongly Disagree, or Not Applicable consensus score reflects a score of 0. These scores were summed for the Parental Resilience Protective Factor where scores <50% of the total score possible represent low fidelity, 50-74% represent moderate fidelity, and >75% possible scores represent high fidelity. The aggregate fidelity score from all tabled findings is 65 (of a possible score of 97) or 67%, suggesting that the services and supports associated with the Parental Resilience Factor were implemented with moderate fidelity to the Center for the Study of Social Policy's Strengthening Families' Protective Factor Framework. The series of action items recommended by the SWAG SFSA Team are appropriately targeted to enhance the fidelity score of provided supports and services addressing parental resilience.

The aggregate fidelity score from all tabled findings is 65 (of a possible score of 97) or 67%, suggesting that the services and supports associated with the Parental Resilience Factor were implemented with moderate fidelity to the Center for the Study of Social Policy's Strengthening Families' Protective Factor Framework.

The SWAG Strengthening Families Self-Assessment Team

As denoted earlier, a team of dedicated community ambassadors, SWAG FRC staff, and collaborative partners worked together to engage in a comprehensive assessment of the supports and services provided by the SWAG FRC in accordance with the CSSP's protective factors framework. The names and select biographies of these team members are detailed below.



Dorothy Benson – SWAG Board Member

Dorothy A. Benson was born and raised in Tampa, FL, but moved to Gainesville as she was raising her family. The Bensons have lived in the Gainesville community since 1989. Dorothy fell in love with Gainesville, and it quickly came to feel like "home." Dorothy was a homemaker and a mom who got involved in her community after seeing Dr. Nancy Hardt's density maps showing high concentrations of Medicaid births and babies being born underweight in southwest Gainesville. At that time in 2008, Dorothy's youngest son was just heading off to college, and she was able to devote her time to community organizing. After connecting to SWAG community members like Joan Canton, Dorothy began advocating for the children and families in southwest Gainesville at the county commission meetings and helped Joan and others found the Southwest Advocacy Group (SWAG) in 2010. SWAG is grassroots, community-based group that soon became a certified 501(c)(3) non-profit. SWAG works closely with

Partnership for Strong Families and other community partners to bring greater opportunities and resources to the SWAG neighborhoods through the SWAG Family Resource Center, the SW Health Clinic, and the CHILD Center - a

Tarr, J., Harnar, M. A., & Ahsan, N. (2014). Strengthening Families: A look at national data on program strategies, staff capacity and the protective factors. Unpublished whitepaper presented at the National Association for the Education of Young Children's annual conference in Dallas, TX.

model demonstration childcare center. Dorothy has loved being a part of the Strengthening Families Self-Assessment Team because it has allowed us to look back on where we started, where we are now, and how we can best grow to better serve families and children in our community. Dorothy has been married to my supportive husband, Keyton, for 40 years. They raised two children in Gainesville, our daughter, Brenna now 37, and our son Keyton Jr. now 32. Dorothy is an avid walker and bird watcher, and she loves working with the SWAG board and community partners to bring positive changes to this wonderful community we call home. Dorothy loves the SWAG Family Resource Center because it provides a loving, safe and nurturing place for our community to come together and focus our greater collective resources to support children, families, and our seniors. The SWAG FRC provides a tangible place where people can share their love for each other through many volunteer opportunities.

Lynda Bowie-Locklear - Episcopal Children's Services

Lynda L Bowie-Locklear was born and raised in Minter, AL, and has been a part of the Alachua County community for 28 years. Lynda is married and have two children who she raised in the Alachua County Community. Lynda career started back in 2003 in early childhood education with Child Care Resources which lead her to The Early Learning Coalition of Alachua County for the next 12 years, and a year with Episcopal Children's Services. Lynda continues working in the community with families through workforce with CareerSource NCFL as the WIOA Youth Program Coordinator.



Lynda has been a partner to Partnership for Strong Families Resource Centers since the inception of Library Partnership Resource Center and continues to work closely with the staff from all Resource Centers in Alachua County. When Lynda was asked to be a part of the SWAG FRC's Self-Assessment Team it wasn't a hard decision. It has been a pleasure to serve alongside of SWAG FRC staff, SWAG Board Member, the community Ambassadors, Robin Perry, Mikaela David-John, and Toni Spoliansky. Lynda feels the time spent together on this project has taken our partnership relationship to another level. She looks forward to continuing our partnership to better serve the families in the Alachua County Community.

Lynda has kept these words in the forefront of her mind daily as she works with families in the community. It is an empathy reminder like no other "We often think that admitting struggle is a sign of weakness, but we all struggle sometimes. We all get overwhelmed sometimes. We need help sometimes. Acknowledging this is not a sign of weakness, but struggling alone is a choice to grow weak" -Lori Deschene

"I can't change the direction of the wind, but I can adjust my sails to always reach my destination" -Jimmy Dean



Reva Brewster – Community Ambassador

Reva Brewster was born and raised in the U.S. Virgin Islands. Reva has been a member of the Gainesville community for 24 years. Reva raised her two children in the Gainesville community and now enjoys spending time with her four (soon to be five) grandchildren. Reva has been serving others for many years starting back in the U.S. Virginia Islands where she volunteered for a summer camp for youth with disabilities. Here in Gainesville, Reva volunteered for Altrusa House, an adult day health care program, for many years not only to give back to her community but also to spend time with her father while he was part of the program. Reva joined the SWAG SFSA team because of the support she feels when interacting with the staff. She receives so much positive feedback and information from the staff. Compared to the "outside the SWAG FRC's walls where everything feels very negative, inside the Resource Center staff are uplifting." During the SFSA

process, Reva enjoyed having positive people from the community around her. Reva loves that the SWAG FRC staff are “here with resources and information and that the community has a place to turn to for help and answers.”

Dennis Franklin – Community Ambassador

Dennis Franklin was born and raised in Harlem New York with one sister of an 18-year age difference. Dennis received education and training in speech, drama, journalism, communications, and business. After finishing his education, Dennis spent ten years involved in marketing and sales for a variety of different businesses. Dennis grew up with an unconditional love for the entertainment industry. As a young adult, Dennis spent his time discovering, up-and-coming and the mainstream artists in the entertainment industry. Dennis always knew that his purpose in life was to make a mark in entertainment that would change the life of music. Dennis was taught early on from his own personal hardships that everyone is not guaranteed the opportunity to advance themselves, so he decided to use his love for music to give back to the community. Dennis enhanced his entrepreneurial skills to establish The Disco Den Record Pool in 1976 which was an educational program to teach disc jockey candidates on how to promote records. Nevertheless, founding The Disco Den Record Pool was just the beginning of the many strides to come. In 1983, Dennis turned the Disco Den into a school for up-and-coming disc jockeys. “We were the original uptown outlet for information and the exchanging of ideas among club jocks. Then, we expanded our base and increased our services.” The Disco Den was replaced with The Record School, a non-profit umbrella corporation that contained a record pool, a Harlem nightclub, The Music Bank, a promotion and Production Company, and a record label.



Dennis moved himself and his family of eight to his mother’s hometown, Gainesville, FL, after his mother got sick. After living in Florida for eight years, Dennis’ life took a drastic flip - Dennis had a relapse on drugs and alcohol. Following an incarceration, Dennis agreed to one year of drug court and was released after eight months. Growing as a man of God, Dennis was taught that being a great leader was not just about what he accomplished, but what he did Christ-like. He later learned that “the best leader is a servant leader.” Reminiscing the struggles and hardships that he experienced, Dennis vowed to do whatever he could to prevent people from slipping through the cracks. “I think this was the greatest turning point in my life. I made a decision that I would work as hard as I could and see that no one would have to go through what happen to me, the feeling was not nice”. He vowed that he would dedicate himself to people that had situations with addiction, ex-offenders, lost children, the homeless, in aspiration that anyone who has lost hope will have some place to go. That place would be called The Neighborhood House, a non-profit organization Dennis co-founded that strives to make a positive impact on our community and youth. Dennis has enjoyed being part of the SWAG SFSA team as it has been an opportunity for him to connect with people in the neighborhood and share information that can help strengthen the community and bring the community together. Currently, Dennis is working on a new project called The Nuskool which is a success training program which he hopes to share with the southwest Gainesville community and beyond.



Euricka Franklin – Community Ambassador

Euricka L. Franklin originates from New York City. She was born and raised in Harlem. Euricka graduated from Fashion Industry in New York City. In 1995, Euricka moved to Gainesville and became a resident of Clayton Estate located a few blocks away from the SWAG Family Resource Center. Euricka attended Santa Fe College and became a CNA. For several years, Euricka worked in the healthcare industry until an injury made her unable to continue. Starting in 2004, Euricka was a stay-at-home mother to her six children. Euricka and her husband, Dennis have been together for 31 years. Euricka has volunteered in the community extensively including the MCBC Saturday Academy assisting first through fifth graders with a variety of subjects including English and math and accompanying the students on field trips. Euricka has volunteered for decades with the Board of Elections doing many duties from clerk to ballot scanner. Euricka also

volunteered back in New York city with the YMCA Summer Youth Employment Program as a camp counselor assisting children with educational enrichment. Euricka also assisted with Dr. Shawn Kneipp's 'welfare-to-work' study. Euricka and her husband founded a nonprofit organization called The Neighborhood House which partners with the Big Brother Big Sister program to provide food for children and families in the community. Living across the street from the SWAG FRC, Euricka has been involved with the Resource Center from the beginning – she even watched as the building was reconstructed from apartments to be able to house the Resource Center. Euricka and her family have participated in numerous events and activities at the SWAG FRC and their nonprofit organization, The Neighborhood House, has donated clothes and food in the past. Currently, Euricka cares for her mother and her grandchildren. Euricka found that some of the conversations had, and information shared during the SFSA meetings at the SWAG FRC helped Euricka adequately address situations that will arise when caring for her mother and grandchildren. Euricka was happy to be part of the SFSA team because she received important information from the discussion with fellow SFSA team members, that she can share with my family and community. Euricka particularly enjoyed the discussions around mental health treatment and self-care as they are needed in this community, and every community. We all have a hurts, habits, and hang-ups. Euricka joined the SFSA team because she believes that sharing our different experiences with others strengthen everyone.

Dawn Harper – Department of Children and Families (DCF)

Dawn Harper was the DCF Community Partner Liaison for circuits 3 and 8.

Shandra Nichols, MS, CHES, CWCM – SWAG FRC Staff (Resource Center Manager)

Shandra is a native of Ocala, FL, but has lived and worked in Gainesville for about 10 years. Shandra attended the University of Florida where she received a Bachelor of Science and Master of Science degree in Health Education and Behavior. In her spare time, Shandra enjoys spending time with her family and friends, traveling, attending concerts and other entertainment events, listening to music, and DIY projects. After working with the State of Florida Department of Health, Shandra realized that her passion was in working with children and families and transitioned into the child welfare sector, where she has been serving families for the past 8+ years. Shandra began her employment with Partnership for Strong Families in the summer 2016 after accepting a position as the Family Support Facilitator at the Library Partnership Family Resource Center. As the Family Support Facilitator for 4 and a half years, Shandra found



great pleasure in meeting and engaging families on a regular basis. She assisted them with meeting their needs through onsite and community resources and by helping them to identify their own personal and family skills and strengths. Most of all, she enjoyed building relationships with the families she served. Currently, as the Manager of the SWAG FRC, Shandra continues to work closely with children and families, however, spends most of her time planning and developing programs to meet the needs of the community, maintaining working relationships with collaborating partners, and managing the oversight of day-to-day activities and patron services with staff, interns, and volunteers. As a member of the Strengthening Families Self-Assessment Team, Shandra has had the opportunity to learn more about the history of SWAG, as well as the southwest Gainesville neighborhoods the resource center serve. As the new manager, Shandra is even more encouraged and sees the importance of seeking input from community members when planning programs and events that will have a direct impact on the community. Often times, the SWAG FRC serve as a place of hope for individuals and families who are experiencing uncertain times in their lives. Our staff members are compassionate, invested, and really want the best for the families we serve.

Cassandra Roncarti – Community Ambassador

Ms. Roncarti and her two daughters were patrons of the SWAG FRC and lived in the SWAG community. Ms. Roncarti's oldest daughter attended children's programming at the SWAG FRC.

Robin Wilkerson, M.Ed., RBT – SWAG FRC Staff (Family Support Facilitator)

Robin Wilkerson is originally from south Florida and has been part of the Gainesville community for 27 years. Robin has been at the SWAG Family Resource Center since December 2018, first in the Early Childhood Support Facilitator Role and now as the Family Support Facilitator. Robin holds a bachelor's degree in psychology from Saint Leo University and a master's degree in applied behavioral analysis from Arizona State University. Previously, Robin worked clinically in behavioral analysis as well as seven years in educational roles for the Alachua County School Board. Robin is also a founding board member of Healing for All, a local nonprofit that specializes in mental health services for underserved populations. Robin is a single mother of two children. Her son, who was diagnosed with Asperger's, was her inspiration for the degrees she has pursued. Robin loves working at the SWAG FRC because of the families she works with, and she enjoys being able to be a support for them.



Support for SWAG SFSA Team Processes

Although not formally members of the SWAG SFSA Team, Robin Perry (Lead Evaluator), Mikaela David-John (Community Research Coordinator for SWAG Family Resource Center), and Toni Spoliansky (Project Director for the *Resource Center Model: Evaluation, Refinement, and Expansion* grant) attended each meeting of the SWAG SFSA Team meetings and served as key supports for team processes. Robin Perry provided initial training and overview of the Center for the Study of Social Policy's SFSA Tool for Community-Based Programs and associated processes for review of findings and development of an action plan and recommendations by the team. Robin Perry was the lead facilitator of select group meetings; summarizing findings generated from the self-assessment tool/survey, asking questions, and clarifying team members' views as they discussed survey results with the goal of moving toward a consensus of perspective related to select survey questions and recommended action items for the SWAG FRC. Mikaela David-John is the Community Research Coordinator for the SWAG FRC, and a principal on-site contact for team members. Ms. David-John maintained regular contact with team members and distributed

meeting materials; aided with the facilitation of group processes, and (along with Robin Perry) took detailed notes of comments and discussion items. Ms. Spoliansky served as an information support and assisted in answering questions individual team members had about the funded project and the role, function, and support of Partnership for Strong Families for the SWAG FRC. It is important to note that the role of the above three individuals was seen as supportive in nature. An empowerment perspective was adopted, as the team they would decide the meeting schedule and facilitation process with all members assuming equal status as knowledge experts with respect to community needs and the role, value, functioning, and responsiveness of the SWAG FRC to community need related to supporting families through the promotion of social connections. There was no effort by those in supportive roles to censor conversation and discussion points; efforts were made as feedback was regularly sought regarding facilitation processes and preferences of group members for these processes. All notes were converted into minutes and distributed to team members for their review, edits, and approval. Feedback and recommended edits to documented discussion items and decisions could be provided within scheduled meetings (the team decided on monthly two-hour meetings) or in dialog/e-mails to Robin Perry and/or Mikaela David-John in-between meetings (which would then be discussed with all team members at the next in-person or virtual meeting).

Suggested Citation:

Perry, R., David-John, M., Benson, D., Bowie-Locklear, L., Brewster, R., Franklin, D., Franklin, E., Harper, D., Nichols, S., Roncarti, C., Spoliansky, T., & Wilkerson, R (2021). *Supporting Families by Promoting Parental Resilience at the SWAG Family Resource Center*. Tallahassee: Institute for Child and Family Services Research.



Supporting Families by Promoting Social and Emotional Competence of Children at the SWAG Family Resource Center

Mikaela David-John (Community Research Coordinator for SWAG Family Resource Center), Robin Perry (Lead Evaluator), Dorothy Benson, Lynda Bowie-Locklear, Reva Brewster, Dennis Franklin, Euricka Franklin, Dawn Harper, Shandra Nichols, Robin Wilkerson (SWAG SFSA Team) & Toni Spoliansky (Project Director)

Institute for Child and Family Services Research



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.

Introduction

This report summarizes key findings from, and recommendations developed by the SWAG Family Resource Center (SWAG FRC) Strengthening Families Self-Assessment (SFSA) Team utilizing a standardized process developed by the Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP)¹. The CSSP Strengthening Families Protective Factors Framework is a research-informed model that focuses on engaging families, programs, and communities in enhancing five protective factors:

- Parental Resilience
- Social Connections
- Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development
- Concrete Support in Times of Need
- Social and Emotional Competence of Children

Since supports and services at the SWAG FRC are structured in accordance with the CSSP Protective Factors Framework, the Strengthening Families Self-Assessment Tool for Community-Based Programs, and associated processes were used to help determine the fidelity of specific implementation strategies (in accordance with the above noted framework), identify existing strengths of select supports and services, and identify areas for potential improvements. This report focuses specifically on the SWAG FRC's efforts at strengthening families by promoting social and emotional competence of children.

SWAG Family Resource Center

Partnership for Strong Families (PSF) began in 2007 to develop a network of Family Resource Centers (FRC) that emphasize a strengthening family approach while utilizing a Protective Factors Framework to provide prevention services and supports to families. The PSF Resource Center model is built upon a multi-system collaborative focusing on primary prevention that works toward strengthening families with the goal of preventing child maltreatment and reducing entries into foster care. In collaboration with the Southwest Advocacy Group (SWAG), Alachua County Library District (ACLD), the SWAG FRC opened its doors to the community in June 2012 and since then has been providing continuous supports and services to individuals and families. The SWAG FRC is one of three Resource Centers in Gainesville that partner with a network of over 75 community partners (across all sites) to provide services that are free and are intended to be responsive to the needs of the surrounding community as identified by community partners/stakeholders and parents/household members (referred to as patrons) within the targeted areas. It is this multi-system collaborative, with representation from across the five sectors (public, business, philanthropy, community, and nonprofit), that has allowed a blending of funding, expansion of services to meet the needs of patrons and enhancement of the community's ability to leverage resources to benefit some of Gainesville's most at-risk populations.

¹ For a more comprehensive review of findings, including additional details related to the history of the SWAG Family Resource Center, enhanced review of methods used, and associated appendices, please see: David-John, Perry, R., M., Benson, D., Bowie-Locklear, L., Brewster, R., Franklin, D., Franklin, E., Harper, D., Nichols, S., Wilkerson, R. & Spoliansky, T. (2022). *The Southwest Advocacy Group (SWAG) Family Resource Center Strengthening Families Self-Assessment (SFSA) Team's Findings and Recommendations/Action Items Associated with Supporting Families by Promoting Social and Emotional Competence of Children*. Tallahassee: Institute for Child and Family Services Research.

The SWAG FRC Strengthening Families Self-Assessment Team and Method

The *Strengthening Families Self-Assessment Tool for Community-Based Programs* and associated protocols were developed by the Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP). This is a comprehensive, research-informed approach (based on national studies) that aids in assessing the extent to which a RC has implemented services/activities to engage and strengthen families in alignment with core strategies for building each of the protective factors². The assessment criteria and protocol for self-assessment is standardized. Protocols require the establishment and utilization of a Self-Assessment Team that includes at a minimum: Administrative Staff and/or Program Director, Direct Service Staff, and Parents who participated in the program/received services (or whose children participated in service activities). For this project, it was deemed important to also include collaborative partners and other stakeholders in the process (as informed parties/members). These processes were followed in the establishment of the SWAG SFSA Team.

The SWAG FRC Strengthening Families Self-Assessment Team includes:

Dorothy Benson – SWAG Board Member
Lynda Bowie-Locklear – Episcopal Children's Services
Reva Brewster – Community Ambassador
Dennis Franklin – Community Ambassador
Euricka Franklin – Community Ambassador
Dawn Harper – Department of Children and Families
Shandra Nichols, MS, CHES, CWCW – SWAG FRC Resource Center Manager
Cassandra Roncarti – Community Ambassador
Robin Wilkerson, M.Ed., RBT – SWAG FRC Family Support Facilitator

Within the *Strengthening Families Self-Assessment Tool for Community-Based Programs* there are a series of questions linked with each Protective Factor. These questions represent actions/activities, program elements, protocols, and policies associated with providing services meant to enhance each protective factor according to evidence-based best practice standards. For services and supports focused on Social and Emotional Competence of Children there are 16 topics with 48 associated questions for which each team member is asked to individually rate their level of item statement agreement on a five-point Likert-type scale (Strongly Agree, Agree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree) with an option for Not Applicable. This same scale is used for an assessment of all protective factor questions. Team members received an orientation to the CSSP Protective Factors framework, its relationship to the SWAG Family Resource Center service model, and the *Strengthening Families Self-Assessment Tool for Community-Based Programs* and its associated protocol. After individual team members complete their scores, these data were shared via a written summary report highlighting the distribution of responses by team members for each item. Efforts were made through critical discussion and dialog to arrive at a

² For more information regarding CSSP's Strengthening Families and Protective Factors Framework, please see: <https://cssp.org/our-work/project/strengthening-families/>. Additional information regarding the self-assessment model and associated methodology, tools, and recommended processes, see: <https://cssp.org/our-work/projects/self-assessments-for-programs/> and Harnar, M., & Tarr, J. (n.d.). *Strengthening Families: A look at national data on program strategies, staff capacity and the protective factors*. Washington, D.C.: Center for the Study of Social Policy's Strengthening Families & Mosaic. Available at: <https://www.strengtheningfamiliesevaluation.com/national/>

consensus assessment for each item and indicator (if such was possible) so that a collective assessment could lead to a structured action plan to address any fidelity concerns and program needs. The initial meeting of the SWAG SFSA Team took place on June 30, 2021, and monthly meetings and additional contacts through November 2021. The team meeting that involved the discussion of Social and Emotional Competence of Children items took place on November 10th.

Strengthening Families Self-Assessment (SFSA) Findings and Recommendations/Action Items Associated with Supporting Families by Promoting Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development

The following represents a summary of key findings and recommendations by the team for questions associated with promoting Social and Emotional Competence of Children. Recommendations and observations from supplemental dialogues with the Family Support Facilitator (FSF) and Resource Center Manager (RCM) at the SWAG FRC, approved by the whole team, are also summarized in this report. These supplemental discussions took place throughout the months of December 2021 and January 2022 and were facilitated by the on-site Community Research Coordinator to discuss some of the individualized approaches to services and supports related to the social and emotional competence of children. For the purposes of the summary, findings are presented in accordance with the broader questions the tool was structured to answer.

Along with deciding to utilize supplemental staff discussions for the final protective factor, the SFSA team also decided on the following overarching action items which are also referenced in the SWAG SFSA promoting social and emotional competence of children:³

Action Item #1: Create a dynamic speaker series and/or programs to reach the two audiences – parents and youth.

Action Item #2: Start moving forward as a team to plan the next steps for the previously identified action items.

The SWAG SFSA team reached a consensus that it was appropriate to create a plan to address the proposed action items. All present team members also agreed during the November 10, 2021 meeting that inviting external speakers to promote topics related to the social and emotional competence of children would be the best approach to addressing any potential gaps.

³ David-John, M., Perry, R., Benson, D., Bowie-Locklear, L., Brewster, R., Franklin, D., Franklin, E., Harper, D., Nichols, S., Spoliansky, T., & Wilkerson, R (2021). *The Southwest Advocacy Group (SWAG) Family Resource Center Strengthening Families Self-Assessment (SFSA) Team's Findings and Recommendations/Action Items Associated with Supporting Families by Promoting Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development*. Tallahassee: Institute for Child and Family Services Research.

How Do SWAG Family Resource Center Programs Help Parents Foster Their Child's Social Emotional Development?

The team assessment conveyed agreement with 71.4% (5 out of 7) of the items related to the SWAG FRC helping parents foster their children's social and emotional development. The remaining two items were assessed in the neither agree nor disagree range by the team. There were no items for which there was an average representing a consensus of disagreement.

What the SWAG Family Resource Center *Does Well to Help Parents Foster Their Child's Social Emotional Development?*

The SWAG FRC frequently incorporates social emotional development activities into programming and the FRC's programming was redesigned in a way that allowed it to continue during the pandemic. The team had a consensus of agreement on the following items related to fostering children's social emotional development:

The program introduces family members to social and emotional development by:

- Providing parents with information on the importance of supporting children's healthy social and emotional development— and its connection to success in school and life.
- Offering parents ideas on how to foster a child's social and emotional learning at home.
- Asking about parents' observations of their child's social and emotional development.

Program activities provide opportunities to strengthen bonds between parents and their children (e.g., parent-child playgroups, playing together in cooperative games or make believe, cooking, making an art project together).

Staff respect families' knowledge and expertise about their children's unique strengths and challenges as they share information about social and emotional competence.

The SWAG FRC provides several opportunities for families to strengthen bonds. Prior to the pandemic, monthly community dinners provided an avenue for families to bond. Currently, the RC is providing to-go meals and to promote family bonding, and both parents and children must be present to receive a meal. During the height of the pandemic, the SWAG FRC pivoted to ensure children's social and emotional programs and activities were still able to occur. The SWAG FRC sent home family bonding activities including picnic baskets. Each year, the SWAG FRC hosts a homework help holiday party and invites parents to attend. In 2021, families competed in a gingerbread house contest which was planned to strengthen family bonds. Parents are also invited on all fieldtrips for spring break and summer camps.

Areas of Potential Focus/Improvement for SWAG Family Resource Center to Help Parents Foster Their Child's Social Emotional Development?

The SWAG FRC takes an individualized approach to many of their service offerings related to social and emotional development. The following questions were rated as neither agree nor disagree by the team:

The program introduces family members to social and emotional development by:

- Helping parents understand age-appropriate social and emotional skills and behaviors.
- Providing opportunities to discuss social and emotional issues within a racial and cultural context.

There is no formal programming which allow staff to help parents understand age-appropriate social and emotional skills and behaviors, but it is typically done via one-on-one situations as staff observe children exhibiting challenging behaviors or behaviors that are not developmentally appropriate. When staff discuss these behaviors, the caregivers reportedly are “more receptive” to the discussion because of the relationships staff have built with the families. These dialogues are less likely with a new family as staff note they need time to observe, engage, and form appropriate professional relationships first. Selection for inclusion in programs like Summer SOAR (Supporting Our Academic Readiness), and extra support tutoring with providers hosted onsite occur because of “identified needs based on individual interactions with children” noted by SWAG FRC staff.

Opportunities to discuss social and emotional issues within a racial and cultural context are not built into programming. Staff do, however, ensure program content is culturally relevant and program facilitators, volunteers, and interns onsite reflect the racial and cultural backgrounds of the community to help families feel welcome and ensure inclusivity. During the 2021 homework help holiday party, staff included a Black Santa in the celebration. During summer camp 2021, members of Black Architects in the Making (BAM) provided onsite programming. In BAM’s case, both the program content and the program facilitators aided in making local youth aware that individuals from the same racial, ethnic, or cultural backgrounds are thriving in a variety of professional fields, such as architecture.

Staff...ensure program content is culturally relevant and program facilitators, staff, volunteers, and interns onsite reflect the racial and cultural backgrounds of the community to help families feel welcome and ensure inclusivity.

How Does SWAG Family Resource Center Model Nurturing Care to Children?

Findings related to the SWAG FRC modeling nurturing care to children did not reach team consensus of agreement as 50% the items fell in that range. Eight items were rated as neither agree nor disagree. There were no items for which there was an average representing a consensus of disagreement.

What SWAG Family Resource Center Does Well to Model Nurturing Care to Children?

SWAG FRC staff provide a supportive environment at the family resource center that extends beyond the typical confines of children’s afterschool or summer programming. There was a team consensus of agreement on the following statements:

Staff nurture children and model nurturing for parents by:

- Responding consistently to children in a warm, supportive manner.

- Creating an environment in which children feel safe to comfortably express their emotions without fear of judgment.
- Showing warmth through appropriate physical contact.
- Demonstrating mutual respect between children and adults (e.g., listening attentively, making eye contact, treating children fairly).
- Responding sympathetically to help children who are upset, hurt or angry.
- Encouraging children to express their feelings through words, artwork and expressive play.
- Modeling empathy and appropriate emotional responsiveness.

Staff receive training, consultation and ongoing coaching to support their skills in supporting children's social emotional development, including:

- Understanding the impact of loss or trauma on children and how to respond appropriately.

During homework help and other afterschool programming, RC staff ensure children are consistently responded to in a warm, supportive manner. The RC staff have an open-door policy which allows children to know staff are there to support them beyond academics. Several times last year, youth have utilized this open-door policy to discuss different events in their life and staff have provided a space for the children to work through the situations and their emotions in a healthy way.

Areas of Potential Focus/Improvement for SWAG Family Resource Center to Model Nurturing Care to Children?

There were eight items that received a consensus of neither agree nor disagree:

Staff receive training, consultation and ongoing coaching to support their skills in supporting children's social emotional development, including:

- Fostering children's social and emotional development in the context of their culture and language.
- Recognizing behavioral/emotional problems or developmental delays.
- Recognizing the role of sensory awareness and integration in social emotional development and understanding how to promote it.
- Understanding gender differences in child rearing and its impact on social and emotional development.
- Promoting positive relationships among children living in the same household.
- Understanding how mental health and wellness affects family relationships and the developmental process of young children.
- Recognizing and responding to the impact of child or parental trauma on parent-child relationships.

Families are invited to observe their children interacting with other children and/or staff in the program.

While staff do not receive ongoing coaching to support their skills related to promoting social and emotional development in children, there is some peer-to-peer training that occurs at the SWAG FRC

because the current Family Support Facilitator (FSF) has a master's degree in behavioral analysis. The FSF typically conducts "peer-to-peer" training with new interns and volunteers so they can be well equipped to support the children's social and emotional development when onsite. Staff have access to trainings periodically that can strengthen their skills related to promoting the social and emotional competence of children such as Youth Mental Health First Aid⁴ trainings and Lemonade for Life⁵ trainings which are designed to build hope and resilience in the lives children who have lived through adverse childhood experiences (ACEs).

Families are allowed to observe their children, although they may not be aware of this option. Parents are welcome to observe children's programming to see how their children are interacting with others. In some cases, parents may be aware of this option but many of the programs occur during working hours, so parents do not have the time to observe. One suggestion the Resource Center Manager provided to help spread awareness is to advertise the open-door policy on applications for children's programming. A barrier that may be faced once awareness increases is caregivers who want to be involved beyond observing their children will need to be cleared as a volunteer through PSF (as per PSF and State policy and operating protocols) before interacting with other children.

How Does SWAG Family Resource Center Include Children's Social and Emotional Development Activities in Programming?

The team assessment conveyed agreement with 71.4% (5 out of 7) of the items related to the SWAG FRC including children's social and emotional programming in developmental activities. The remaining two items were assessed in the neither agree nor disagree range by the team. There were no items for which there was average representing a consensus of disagreement.

What SWAG Family Resource Center Does Well to Include Children's Social and Emotional Development Activities in Programming?

The program supports children's social and emotional development with intentional practices that include:

- Encouraging children to express their feelings in ways that are the most comfortable for them.
- Encouraging and reinforcing social skills such as sharing, taking turns and cooperative play.
- Actively involving children in solving their conflicts and problems (e.g., helping children talk out problems and think of solutions; sensitizing children to feelings of others).

⁴ For more information regarding Mental Health First Aid trainings please see:

<https://www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org/> These trainings are an initiative of the National Council for Mental Wellbeing (see: <https://www.thenationalcouncil.org/> for more information). Staff at the SWAG FRC have access to all professional development trainings offered or contracted by the Partnership for Strong Families. For a list of existing training provided by the Partnership, please see: <https://www.pfsf.org/training/professional-development/>

⁵ For more information regarding the Lemonade for Life program and associated trainings, see: <https://lemonadeforlife.com/>

- Setting clear expectations and limits for behavior.
- Helping children separate emotions from actions (e.g., not reacting by hitting even when angry).

Areas of Potential Focus/Improvement for SWAG Family Resource Center to Include Children's Social and Emotional Development Activities in Programming?

Mental health consultants assist staff in integrating social emotional development into everyday work by:

- Providing coaching on how to support social and emotional learning for all children.
- Providing support for individual staff in working with children and parents around social and emotional issues, including challenging behaviors.

Mental health consults are not available every day to assist staff with integrating social and emotional development elements into programming, however the SWAG FRC has several initiatives and community partners to assist with this integration. CDS Family and Behavioral Health Services⁶, a community partner, has offered the Stop Now and Plan (SNAP) program at the SWAG FRC. The SNAP program is designed to help children manage their emotions effectively. The WhyTry program, a strengths-based approach to teaching life skills, is offered during spring break and summer camps. During spring break and summer camps, the FSF hosts “circle time” with youth to support social and emotional learning for children. The SWAG board recently secured funding to hire a new part-time staff member to assist with all afterschool programming. Approximately 50% of the FSF's job duties pertain to afterschool programming. This upcoming staff position would free up the FSF's time to assist with children's social and emotional challenges but also for more in-depth interactions with patrons for services related to the other protective factors such as concrete supports or parental resilience.

This upcoming staff position would free up the FSF's time to assist with children's social and emotional challenges but also for more in-depth interactions with patrons for services related to the other protective factors such as concrete supports or parental resilience.

How Does SWAG Family Resource Center Help Children Develop a Positive Cultural Identity and Learn to Interact in a Diverse Society?

Findings related to the SWAG FRC helping children develop a positive cultural identity and learn to interact with a diverse society did not reach team consensus of agreement as only two items (16.67%)

⁶ As noted on their website, CDS Family & Behavioral Health Services is a “...non-profit social services agency that has provided services in North Central Florida for over 51 years. CDS's has different programs and serves a wide variety of community needs, all [their] programs fall under the umbrella of the organization's mission statement, “Strengthening Communities by Building Strong Families. [They] ...target familial strength through prevention, counseling, and youth shelters.” For more information, please see: <https://www.cdsfl.org/>

fell in that range. Ten items were rated within the neither agree nor disagree range. There were no items for which there was average representing a consensus of disagreement.

What SWAG Family Resource Center Does Well to Help Children Develop a Positive Cultural Identity and Learn to Interact in a Diverse Society

There was a consensus of agreement among the team for the following items:

The program welcomes and affirms the cultures of families it serves by:

- Implementing meaningful and relevant activities, stories and discussions regarding cultural and linguistic differences.
- Including appropriate instructional resources such as books and toys that expose children to role models from their own and other cultural backgrounds.

Areas of Potential Focus/Improvement for SWAG Family Resource Center to Help Children Develop a Positive Cultural Identity and Learn to Interact in a Diverse Society

The following ten items received a team consensus of neither agree nor disagree:

The program welcomes and affirms the cultures of families it serves by:

- Inviting families to define and express their ethnicity or culture, including the experiences and values they hold to be most important.

Staff receive training on how cultural differences affect social and emotional development, especially differences in:

- How the sense of identity is fostered as an individual and/or as part of a family or clan in different cultures.
- The extent to which nonverbal communication is predominant across cultures.
- Diverse cultural views success and appropriate child development.

Staff are encouraged to enhance their own understanding and appreciation for different races, ethnicities, sexual orientations, languages and cultural expressions through:

- Being encouraged to share and reflect on their own cultural background, including self-awareness of biases they may hold.
- Being provided with professional development opportunities that allow them to learn more about the history and experiences of different racial and cultural groups.
- Being trained in how to sensitively ask questions about each family's specific experience and cultural perspectives.
- Program policies and practices support the preservation of home languages by building upon the home languages and dialects of the children and families they serve.
- The program's mental health consultant offers consultation that is respectful of differences in parenting behaviors and child behaviors that stem from traditions and cultural roots.
- Staff are trained in how to address children exhibiting verbal or nonverbal indicators of racism or intolerance.

Programming at the SWAG FRC does not explicitly invite families to define and express their ethnicity or culture but the staff do utilize informal strategies to welcome and affirm cultures of the families it serves by asking questions that start with “How does your family do.....?” These simple questions provide a platform for children to discuss their home cultures. Currently and historically, program policies and practices have not supported home languages primarily because very few youths in programming had a primary home language other than English. In the past, one child in homework help had a different home language and they were the only individual in their family that spoke English. In this instance, the RC staff communicated important information primarily through the child and utilized Google Translate when appropriate, with other family members.

SWAG FRC staff complete required and supplemental cultural competencies trainings. One suggestion provided by the FSF to enhance understanding and appreciation for individuals from different backgrounds is to include volunteers and interns in cultural competency trainings. The FSF suggested enhancing trainings to include competency of environmental and economic factors and how these factors come into play in social and emotional development.

SWAG FRC partners and staff are considerate of differences in parenting and child behaviors due to cultural traditions and roots, but there is not a mental health consultant onsite which may have contributed to team member disagreement. Partners and staff reportedly “understand that their life experiences do not necessarily mirror the experiences of patrons...” and that “selection of staff and interns and staff backgrounds help with inclusivity and understanding of cultural differences in parenting.”

How Does SWAG Family Resource Center Respond Proactively When Social or Emotional Development Needs Extra Support?

There was team consensus of agreement among a high number (83.3%) of items related to the SWAG FRC responding proactively when social and emotional development needs extra support, with only one item ranked within the neither agree nor disagree range. There were no items for which there was an average representing a consensus of disagreement.

What SWAG Family Resource Center Does Well to Respond Proactively When Social or Emotional Development Needs Extra Support

Staff regularly monitor children’s social or emotional development and connect with parents to report their insights. There was consensus of agreement among team members for the following items:

When staff are concerned about a child’s social and emotional development, they respond by:

- Discussing concerns (including objective descriptions of behaviors) with the child’s parents without casting blame on the parents.
- Arranging for appropriate screenings and assessments.
- Connecting the family to resources that can support the child’s social and emotional development (e.g., play therapy, mental health services, parenting classes).
- Helping parents develop strategies for addressing the issue at home.

Staff have access to a mental health consultant to help them:

- Identify and receive additional resources and/or training to work effectively with individual children and parents.

Areas of Potential Focus/Improvement for SWAG Family Resource Center to Respond Proactively When Social or Emotional Development Needs Extra Support

Staff do not have access to a mental health consultant onsite though they have access to consultants through local partnership. Therefore, the following item was ranked as neither agree nor disagree among team members:

Staff have access to a mental health consultant to help them:

- Talk respectfully with parents about the child’s development, needs or challenges.

It was reported that staff talk to parents about their child’s development, needs or challenges in a one-on-one setting. While this could be done more frequently, given the nature of the FRC, these interactions typically only occur with afterschool families where the relationships are already established. SWAG FRC’s Resource Center Manager pointed out that, “many of the programs at the RC are focused on adults and caregivers because those are the individuals that need to be reached in order to prevent child abuse in neglect. While, of course, children’s programming is important to building social and emotional competence of local children.”

Many of the programs at the RC are focused on adults and caregivers because those are the individuals that need to be reached in order to prevent child abuse in neglect.

Fidelity of Social and Emotional Competence of Children Services and Supports to CSSP Protective Factor

As denoted earlier, the SFSA Team identified the weighted average team score as the consensus measure for each item associated with the Social and Emotional Competence of Children assessment questions. Following the development of a consensus rating, individual item scores were converted—in keeping with Harnar and Tarr, (n.d.) and Tarr, Harnar, & Ahsan (2014)⁷ method recommendations—to binary/dichotomous scores where 1=Agree and Strongly Agree, and 0=Disagree, Strongly Disagree, Neither Agree or Disagree, and Not Applicable. Within the tables denoted in this report, any green shaded cells (Agree and Strongly Agree) reflect a score of 1 and any yellow (Neither Agree or Disagree), red (Disagree and Strongly Disagree), or no shade (Not Applicable) reflects a score of 0 (zero). As observed, there were no red or no shade cells in each table. These scores were summed for the Social

⁷ Harnar, M., & Tarr, J. (n.d.). Strengthening Families: A look at national data on program strategies, staff capacity and the protective factors. Washington, D.C.: Center for the Study of Social Policy’s Strengthening Families & Mosaic. Available at: <https://www.strengtheningfamiliesevaluation.com/national/>

Tarr, J., Harnar, M. A., & Ahsan, N. (2014). Strengthening Families: A look at national data on program strategies, staff capacity and the protective factors. Unpublished whitepaper presented at the National Association for the Education of Young Children’s annual conference in Dallas, TX.

and Emotional Competence of Children Protective Factor where scores <50% of the total score possible represent low fidelity, 50-74% represent moderate fidelity, and >75% possible scores represent high fidelity. **The aggregate fidelity score from all tabled findings is 25 (of a possible score of 48) or 52%, suggesting that the services and supports associated with the Social and Emotional Competence of Children were implemented with moderate fidelity to the Center for the Study of Social Policy's Strengthening Families' Protective Factor Framework.**

The aggregate fidelity score from all tabled findings is 25 (of a possible score of 48) or 52%, suggesting that the services and supports associated with the Social and Emotional Competence of Children were implemented with moderate fidelity to the Center for the Study of Social Policy's Strengthening Families' Protective Factor Framework.

The SWAG Family Resource Center Strengthening Families Self-Assessment Team

As shared earlier, a team of dedicated community ambassadors, SWAG FRC staff, and collaborative partners worked together to engage in a comprehensive assessment of the supports and services provided by the SWAG FRC in accordance with the CSSP's protective factors framework. The biographies of these team members are detailed below.



Dorothy A. Benson was born and raised in Tampa, FL, but moved to Gainesville as she was raising her family. The Bensons have lived in the Gainesville community since 1989. Dorothy fell in love with Gainesville, and it quickly came to feel like "home." Dorothy was a homemaker and a mom who got involved in her community after seeing Dr. Nancy Hardt's density maps showing high concentrations of Medicaid births and babies being born underweight in southwest Gainesville. At that time in 2008, Dorothy's youngest son was just heading off to college, and she was able to devote her time to community organizing. After connecting to SWAG community members like Joan Canton, Dorothy began advocating for the children and families in southwest Gainesville at the county commission meetings and helped Joan and others found the Southwest Advocacy Group (SWAG) in 2010. SWAG is grassroots, community-based group that soon became a certified 501(c)(3) non-profit. SWAG works closely with Partnership for

Strong Families and other community partners to bring greater opportunities and resources to the SWAG neighborhoods through the SWAG Family Resource Center, the SW Health Clinic, and the CHILD Center - a model demonstration childcare center. Dorothy has loved being a part of the Strengthening Families Self-Assessment Team because it has allowed us to look back on where we started, where we are now, and how we can best grow to better serve families and children in our community. Dorothy has been married to my supportive husband, Keyton, for 40 years. They raised two children in Gainesville, our daughter, Brenna now 37, and our son Keyton Jr. now 32. Dorothy is an avid walker and bird watcher, and she loves working with the SWAG board and community partners to bring positive changes to this wonderful community we call home. Dorothy loves the SWAG Family Resource Center because it provides a loving, safe and nurturing place for our community to come together and

focus our greater collective resources to support children, families, and our seniors. The SWAG FRC provides a tangible place where people can share their love for each other through many volunteer opportunities.

Lynda Bowie-Locklear was born and raised in Minter, AL, and has been a part of the Alachua County community for 28 years. Lynda is married and has two children who she raised in the Alachua County Community. Lynda's career started back in 2003 in early childhood education with Child Care Resources which lead her to The Early Learning Coalition of Alachua County for the next 12 years, and a year with Episcopal Children Services. Lynda continues working in the community with families through workforce with CareerSource of North Central Florida as the WIOA Youth Program Coordinator.



Lynda has been a partner to the Partnership for Strong Families Resource Centers since the inception of Library Partnership Resource Center and continues to work closely with the staff from all Resource Centers in Alachua County. When Lynda was asked to be a part of the SWAG FRC's Self-Assessment Team it wasn't a hard decision. Lynda feels it has been a pleasure to serve alongside of SWAG staff, SWAG Board Member, the community Ambassadors, Robin Perry, Mikaela David-John and Toni Spoliansky. Lynda feels the time spent together on this project has taken our partnership relationship to another level. She looks forward to continuing the partnership to better serve the families in the Alachua County Community.

Lynda has kept these words in the forefront of her mind daily as she works with families in the community. It is an empathy reminder like none other "We often think that admitting struggle is a sign of weakness, but we all struggle sometimes. We all get overwhelmed sometimes. We need help sometimes. Acknowledging this is not a sign of weakness, but struggling alone is a choice to grow weak" -Lori Deschene

"I can't change the direction of the wind, but I can adjust my sails to always reach my destination" -Jimmy Dean



Reva Brewster was born and raised in the U.S. Virgin Islands. Reva has been a member of the Gainesville community for 24 years. Reva raised her two children in the Gainesville community and now enjoys spending time with her four (soon to be five) grandchildren. Reva has been serving others for many years starting back in the U.S. Virginia Islands where she volunteered for a summer camp for youth with disabilities. Here in Gainesville, Reva volunteered for Altrusa House, an adult day health care program, for many years not only to give back to her community but also to spend time with her father while he was part of the program. Reva joined the SWAG SFSA team because of the support she feels when interacting with the staff. She receives so much positive feedback and information from the staff. Compared to the "outside the SWAG FRC's walls where everything feels very negative, inside the Resource Center staff are uplifting." During the SFSA process, Reva enjoyed having positive people from the community around her. Reva loves that the SWAG FRC staff are "here with resources and information and that the community has a place to turn to for help and answers."

Dennis Franklin was born and raised in Harlem New York with one sister of an 18-year age difference. Dennis received education and training in speech, drama, journalism, communications, and business. After finishing his education, Dennis spent ten years involved in marketing and sales for a variety of different businesses. Dennis grew up with an unconditional love for the entertainment industry. As a young adult, Dennis spent his time discovering, up-and-coming and the mainstream artists in the entertainment industry. Dennis always knew that his purpose in life was to make a mark in entertainment that would change the life of music. Dennis was taught early on from his own personal hardships that everyone is not guaranteed the opportunity to advance themselves, so he decided to use his love for music to give back to the community. Dennis enhanced his entrepreneurial skills to establish The Disco Den Record Pool in 1976 which was an educational program to teach disc jockey candidates on how to promote records. Nevertheless, founding The Disco Den Record Pool was just the beginning of the many strides to come. In 1983, Dennis turned the Disco Den into a school for up-and-coming disc jockeys. "We were the original uptown outlet for information and the exchanging of ideas among club jocks. Then, we expanded our base and increased our services." The Disco Den was replaced with The Record School, a non-profit umbrella corporation that contained a record pool, a Harlem nightclub, The Music Bank, a promotion and Production Company, and a record label.



Dennis moved himself and his family of eight to his mother's hometown, Gainesville, FL, after his mother got sick. After living in Florida for eight years, Dennis' life took a drastic flip - Dennis had a relapse on drugs and alcohol. Following an incarceration, Dennis agreed to one year of drug court and was released after eight months. Growing as a man of God, Dennis was taught that being a great leader was not just about what he accomplished, but what he did Christ-like. He later learned that "the best leader is a servant leader." Reminiscing the struggles and hardships that he experienced, Dennis vowed to do whatever he could to prevent people from slipping through the cracks. "I think this was the greatest turning point in my life. I made a decision that I would work as hard as I could and see that no one would have to go through what happen to me, the feeling was not nice". He vowed that he would dedicate himself to people that had situations with addiction, ex-offenders, lost children, the homeless, in aspiration that anyone who has lost hope will have some place to go. That place would be called The Neighborhood House, a non-profit organization Dennis co-founded that strives to make a positive impact on our community and youth. Dennis has enjoyed being part of the SWAG SFSA team as it has been an opportunity for him to connect with people in the neighborhood and share information that can help strengthen the community and bring the community together. Currently, Dennis is working on a new project called The Nuskool which is a success training program which he hopes to share with the southwest Gainesville community and beyond.



Euricka L. Franklin originates from New York City. She was born and raised in Harlem. Euricka graduated from Fashion Industry in New York City. In 1995, Euricka moved to Gainesville and became a resident of Clayton Estate located a few blocks away from the SWAG Family Resource Center. Euricka attended Santa Fe College and became a CNA. For several years, Euricka worked in the healthcare industry until an injury made her unable to continue. Starting in 2004, Euricka was a stay-at-home mother to her six children. Euricka and her husband, Dennis have been together for 31 years. Euricka has volunteered in the community extensively including the MCBC Saturday Academy assisting first through fifth graders with a variety of subjects including English and math and accompanying the students on field trips. Euricka has volunteered for decades with the Board of Elections doing many duties from clerk to ballot scanner. Euricka also volunteered back in New York city with the YMCA Summer Youth Employment Program as a camp counselor assisting children with educational enrichment. Euricka also assisted with Dr. Shawn Kneipp's

'welfare-to-work' study. Euricka and her husband founded a nonprofit organization called The Neighborhood House which partners with the Big Brother Big Sister program to provide food for children and families in the community. Living across the street from the SWAG FRC, Euricka has been involved with the Resource Center from the beginning – she even watched as the building was reconstructed from apartments to be able to house the Resource Center. Euricka and her family have participated in numerous events and activities at the SWAG FRC and their nonprofit organization, The Neighborhood House, has donated clothes and food in the past. Currently, Euricka cares for her mother and her grandchildren. Euricka found that some of the conversations had, and information shared during the SFSA meetings at the SWAG FRC helped Euricka adequately address situations that will arise when caring for her mother and grandchildren. Euricka was happy to be part of the SFSA team because she received important information from the discussion with fellow SFSA team members, that she can share with my family and community. Euricka particularly enjoyed the discussions around mental health treatment and self-care as they are needed in this community, and every community. We all have a hurts, habits, and hang-ups. Euricka joined the SFSA team because she believes that sharing our different experiences with others strengthen everyone.

Shandra Nichols, MS, CHES, CWCM is a native of Ocala, FL, but has lived and worked in Gainesville for about 10 years. Shandra attended the University of Florida where she received a Bachelor of Science and Master of Science degree in Health Education and Behavior. In her spare time, Shandra enjoys spending time with her family and friends, traveling, attending concerts and other entertainment events, listening to music, and DIY projects. After working with the State of Florida Department of Health, Shandra realized that her passion was in working with children and families and transitioned into the child welfare sector, where she has been serving families for the past 8+ years. Shandra began her employment with Partnership for Strong Families in the summer 2016 after accepting a position as the Family Support Facilitator at the Library Partnership Family Resource Center. As the Family Support Facilitator for 4 and a half years, Shandra found great pleasure in meeting and engaging families on a regular basis. She assisted them with meeting their needs through onsite and community resources and by helping them to identify their own personal and family skills and strengths. Most of all, she enjoyed building relationships with the families she served. Currently, as the Manager of the SWAG FRC, Shandra continues to work closely with children and families, however, spends most of her time planning and developing programs to meet the needs of the community, maintaining working relationships with collaborating partners, and managing the oversight of day-to-day activities and patron services with staff, interns, and volunteers. As a member of the Strengthening Families Self-Assessment Team, Shandra has had the opportunity to learn more about the history of SWAG, as well and the southwest Gainesville neighborhoods the resource center serve. As the new manager, Shandra is even more encouraged and see the importance of seeking input from community members when planning programs and events that will have a direct impact on the community. Often times, the SWAG FRC serve as a place of hope for individuals and families who are experiencing uncertain times in their lives. Our staff members are compassionate, invested, and really want the best for the families we serve.





Robin Wilkerson, M.Ed., RBT is originally from south Florida and has been part of the Gainesville community for 27 years. Robin has been at the SWAG Family Resource Center since December 2018, first in the Early Childhood Support Facilitator Role and now as the Family Support Facilitator. Robin holds a bachelor's degree in psychology from Saint Leo University and a master's degree in applied behavioral analysis from Arizona State University. Previously, Robin worked clinically in behavioral analysis as well as seven years in educational roles for the Alachua County School Board. Robin is also a founding board member of Healing for All, a local nonprofit that specializes in mental health services for underserved populations. Robin is a single mother of two children. Her son, who was diagnosed with Asperger's, was her inspiration for the degrees she has pursued. Robin loves working at the SWAG FRC because of the families she works with, and she enjoys being able to be a support for them.

Support for SWAG SFSA Team Processes

Although not formally members of the SWAG SFSA Team, Robin Perry (Lead Evaluator), Mikaela David-John (Community Research Coordinator for SWAG Family Resource Center), and Toni Spoliansky (Project Director for the *Resource Center Model: Evaluation, Refinement, and Expansion* grant) attended each meeting of the SWAG SFSA Team meetings and served as key supports for team processes. Robin Perry provided initial training and overview of the Center for the Study of Social Policy's SFSA Tool for Community-Based Programs and associated processes for review of findings and development of an action plan and recommendations by the team. Robin Perry was the lead facilitator of select group meetings; summarizing findings generated from the self-assessment tool/survey, asking questions, and clarifying team members' views as they discussed survey results with the goal of moving toward a consensus of perspective related to select survey questions and recommended action items for the SWAG FRC. Mikaela David-John is a principal on-site contact for team members. Ms. David-John maintained regular contact with team members and distributed meeting materials; aided with the facilitation of group processes, and (along with Robin Perry) took detailed notes of comments and discussion items. Ms. Spoliansky served as an information support and assisted in answering questions individual team members had about the funded project and the role, function, and support of Partnership for Strong Families for the SWAG FRC. It is important to note that the role of the above three individuals was seen as supportive in nature. An empowerment perspective was adopted, as the team they would decide the meeting schedule and facilitation process with all members assuming equal status as knowledge experts with respect to community needs and the role, value, functioning, and responsiveness of the SWAG FRC to community need related to enhancing knowledge of parenting and child development. There was no effort by those in supportive roles to censor conversation and discussion points; efforts were made as feedback was regularly sought regarding facilitation processes and preferences of group members for these processes. All notes were converted into minutes and distributed to team members for their review, edits, and approval. Feedback and recommended edits to documented discussion items and decisions could be provided within scheduled meetings (the team decided on monthly two-hour meetings) or in dialog/e-mails to Robin Perry and/or Mikaela David-John in-between meetings (which would then be discussed with all team members at the next in-person or virtual meeting).

Suggested Citation: David-John, M., Perry, R., Benson, D., Bowie-Locklear, L., Brewster, R., Franklin, D., Franklin, E., Harper, D., Nichols, S., Wilkerson, R & Spoliansky, T. (2022). *Supporting Families by Social and Emotional Competence of Children at SWAG Family Resource Center*. Tallahassee: Institute for Child and Family Services Research.



Supporting Families by
Promoting Social Connections at the
SWAG Family Resource Center

Robin Perry (Lead Evaluator), Mikaela David-John (Community Research Coordinator for SWAG Family Resource Center), Dorothy Benson, Lynda Bowie-Locklear, Reva Brewster, Dennis Franklin, Euricka Franklin, Dawn Harper, Shandra Nichols, Toni Spoliansky & Robin Wilkerson (SWAG SFSA Team)

Institute for Child and Family Services Research



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.

Introduction

This report summarizes key findings from, and recommendations developed by the SWAG Family Resource Center (FRC) Strengthening Families Self-Assessment (SFSA) Team utilizing a standardized process developed by the Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP)¹. The CSSP Strengthening Families Protective Factors Framework is a research-informed model that focuses on engaging families, programs, and communities in enhancing five protective factors:

- Parental Resilience
- Social Connections
- Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development
- Concrete Support in Times of Need
- Social and Emotional Competence of Children

Since supports and services at the SWAG FRC are structured in accordance with the CSSP Protective Factors Framework, the Strengthening Families Self-Assessment Tool for Community-Based Programs, and associated processes were used to help determine the fidelity of specific implementation strategies (in accordance with the above noted framework), identify existing strengths of select supports and services, and identify areas for potential improvements. This report focuses specifically on SWAG FRC's efforts at strengthening families by promoting social connections.

The SWAG Family Resource Center

Partnership for Strong Families (PSF) began in 2007 to develop a network of Family Resource Centers (FRC) that emphasize a strengthening family approach while utilizing a Protective Factors Framework to provide prevention services and supports to families. The PSF Resource Center model is built upon a multi-system collaborative focusing on primary prevention that works toward strengthening families with the goal of preventing child maltreatment and reducing entries into foster care. The Southwest Advocacy Group (SWAG) is an established entity in the community that has historically worked toward improving the lives of residents in southwest Gainesville. SWAG partnered with PSF and with the donation of a building from the Alachua County Board of County Commissioners and tremendous community support and financial contributions from several community partners, the SWAG Family Resource Center opened its doors to the community in 2012 and has been providing continuous supports and services in a non-stigmatizing manner to individuals and families since.

The SWAG Family Resource Center is one of three Resource Centers in Gainesville that partner with a network of over 75 community partners (across all sites) to provide services that are free and are

¹ For a more comprehensive review of findings, including additional details related to the history of the SWAG Family Resource Center, enhanced review of methods used, and associated appendices, please see: Perry, R., David-John, M., Benson, D., Bowie-Locklear, L., Brewster, R., Franklin, D., Franklin, E., Harper, D., Nichols, S., Spoliansky, T., & Wilkerson, R (2021). *The Southwest Advocacy Group (SWAG) Family Resource Center Strengthening Families Self-Assessment (SFSA) Team's Findings and Recommendations/Action Items Associated with Supporting Families by Promoting Social Connections*. Tallahassee: Institute for Child and Family Services Research.

intended to be responsive to the needs of the surrounding community as identified by community partners/stakeholders and parents/household members (referred to as patrons) within the targeted areas. It is this multi-system collaborative, with representation from across the five sectors (public, business, philanthropy, community, and nonprofit), that has allowed a blending of funding, expansion of services to meet the needs of patrons and enhancement of the community's ability to leverage resources to benefit some of Gainesville's most at-risk populations.

The SWAG FRC Strengthening Families Self-Assessment Team and Method

The *Strengthening Families Self-Assessment Tool for Community-Based Programs* and associated protocols were developed by the Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP). This is a comprehensive, research-informed approach (based on national studies) that aids in assessing the extent to which a RC has implemented services/activities to engage and strengthen families in alignment with core strategies for building each of the protective factors². The assessment criteria and protocol for self-assessment is standardized. Protocols require the establishment and utilization of a Self-Assessment Team that includes at a minimum: Administrative Staff and/or Program Director, Direct Service Staff, and Parents who participated in the program/received services (or whose children participated in service activities). For this project, it was deemed important to also include collaborative partners and other stakeholders in the process (as informed parties/members). These processes were followed in the establishment of the SWAG FRC Strengthening Families Self-Assessment (SFSA) Team.

The SWAG FRC Strengthening Families Self-Assessment Team includes:

Dorothy Benson – SWAG Board Member
Lynda Bowie-Locklear - CareerSource of North Central Florida
Reva Brewster – Community Ambassador
Dennis Franklin – Community Ambassador
Euricka Franklin – Community Ambassador
Dawn Harper – Department of Children and Families
Shandra Nichols – SWAG Staff (RC Manager)
Cassandra Roncarti – Community Ambassador
Robin Wilkerson – SWAG Staff

Within the *Strengthening Families Self-Assessment Tool for Community-Based Programs* there are a series of questions linked with each protective factor. These questions represent actions/activities, program elements, protocols, and policies associated with providing services meant to enhance each protective

² For more information regarding CSSP's Strengthening Families and Protective Factors Framework, please see: <https://cssp.org/our-work/project/strengthening-families/>. Additional information regarding the self-assessment model and associated methodology, tools, and recommended processes, see: <https://cssp.org/our-work/projects/self-assessments-for-programs/> and Harnar, M., & Tarr, J. (n.d.). *Strengthening Families: A look at national data on program strategies, staff capacity and the protective factors*. Washington, D.C.: Center for the Study of Social Policy's Strengthening Families & Mosaic. Available at: <https://www.strengtheningfamiliesevaluation.com/national/>

factor according to best-practice/evidence-based standards. For services and supports focused on Social Connections there are 18 topics with 43 associated questions for which each team member is asked to individually rate their level of item statement agreement on a five-point Likert-type scale (Strongly Agree, Agree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree) with an option for Not Applicable. This same scale is used for an assessment of all Protective Factor questions. Team members received an orientation to the CSSP Protective Factors framework, its relationship to the SWAG FRC service model, and the *Strengthening Families Self-Assessment Tool for Community-Based Programs* and its associated protocol. After individual team members complete their scores, these data were shared via a written summary report highlighting the distribution of responses by team members for each item. Efforts were made through critical discussion and dialog to arrive at a consensus assessment for each item and indicator (if such was possible) so that a collective assessment could lead to a structured action plan to address any fidelity concerns and program needs. The initial meeting of the SWAG SFSA Team took place on June 30, 2021, monthly team meetings continued through November. Subsequent meetings that involved the discussion of social connections items took place on September 8 and October 13. The dates and times of meeting were in accordance with preferred times and schedules of all team members and attendees.

Strengthening Families Self-Assessment (SFSA) Findings and Recommendations/Action Items Associated with Supporting Families by Promoting Social Connections

The following represents a summary of key findings and recommendations by the team for questions associated with promoting Social Connections. For the purposes of the summary, findings are presented in accordance with the broader questions the tool was structured to answer.

How Does the SWAG Family Resource Center Help Families Value, Build, Sustain, and Use Social Connections?

There are 21 questions associated with how the SWAG Family Resource Center (FRC) helps families value, build, sustain, and use social connections. Findings suggest a team consensus of agreement with 7 of the 21 questions, 14 within the Neither Agree nor Disagree range. There were no questions for which there was a consensus of disagreement. The team had an opportunity to discuss all item responses and brainstorm potential action items generating from open discussion of the SWAG FRC's strengths and potential areas of improvement.

What the SWAG Family Resource Center *Does Well* that *Helps Families Value, Build, Sustain and Use Social Connections*.

Families have access to a comfortable space where they can meet informally.

The program provides opportunities for families to socialize and foster a sense of community by organizing/hosting:

- Field trips and community events.
- Affordable family activities.

The program encourages positive relationships between families and staff members by planning informal social events where staff can interact with families.

The program offers or connects families to resources to strengthen relationships between adults (e.g., healthy marriage skills, communication skills, conflict resolution, co-parenting).

The informal efforts of program staff to engage with families in a friendly, supportive, and helpful manner—including personally networking families to an array of collaborative partners and supports that can help strengthen family relationships—were well acknowledged...

The collaborative connections of the SWAG FRC and the SWAG Board, the scope and quality of community partners, and the SWAG FRC staff's skills and authentic concerns serve as a foundation supporting consensus agreement that program staff encourage newcomers and isolated or marginalized families to participate in program activities by:

- Connecting them with resources (including mental health consultation) that can help them explore difficulties with forming social connections.
- Matching families with staff or other families who can help them feel welcome and valued in program activities.

The collaborative connections of the SWAG FRC and the SWAG Board, the scope and quality of community partners, and the SWAG FRC staff's skills and authentic concerns serve as a foundation...that...encourage[s] newcomers and isolated or marginalized families to participate in program activities

The above methods/activities are perceived strengths of SWAG FRC staff and supports. All team members acknowledge that the focus and purpose of the SWAG FRC is aligned with promoting social connections among patrons, parents, and families in the neighborhoods served. A strength of the SWAG FRC is that it is seen as a comfortable, welcoming setting with friendly, supportive, and helpful staff. These factors reinforce informal opportunities for interacting with and developing connections amongst patrons. Among the eight listed potential types of opportunities for families to socialize and foster a sense of community, there was consensus agreement that SWAG FRC has provided “field trips and community events” (primary focus on community events) and affordable family activities. No action items were suggested for the above items, although there was noteworthy discussion of their substance. Consensus agreement items denoted above is reinforced by other findings in this report and other reports (see report on promoting *Parental Resilience*³, Items 1.1 and 1.3 through 1.4.8) that highlight the commitment and skills of the SWAG FRC staff members and the value and respect afforded

³ See: Perry, R., David-John, M., Benson, D., Brewster, R., Franklin, D., Franklin, E., Harper, D., Locklear, L., Nichols, S., Roncarti, C., Spoliansky, T., & Wilkerson, R (2021). *The Southwest Advocacy Group (SWAG) Family Resource Center Strengthening Families Self-Assessment (SFSA) Team's Findings and Recommendations/Action Items Associated with Supporting Families by Promoting Parental Resilience*. Tallahassee: Institute for Child and Family Services Research.

to patrons and families in interactions with them. The informal efforts of program staff to engage with families including personally connecting families to an array of collaborative partners and supports that can help strengthen family relationships—were well acknowledged.

Areas of Potential Focus/Improvement for the SWAG Family Resource Center to Help Families Value, Build, Sustain and Use Social Connections.

There were several questions for which the consensus assessment/rating was neither agree nor disagree as there may have been examples of these opportunities in the past (pre-COVID). These include the following:

The program provides opportunities for families with similar interests, children's ages and/or circumstances (such as those with twins, parents of infants, parents with special-needs children or parents who speak the same language) to connect with one another:

- Formally, through parent support groups (including those with both broad and narrow focuses).
- Through parent mentoring and matching for one-on-one support.
- Informally, by introducing parents to one another.

The program provides opportunities for families to socialize and foster a sense of community by organizing/hosting:

- Regularly scheduled parent-child activities such as Play and Learn groups.
- Periodic events like coffee breaks and breakfasts.
- Celebrations, graduations, and holidays.
- Events celebrating cultural customs, potlucks, and other opportunities for parents to share and learn about each other's home lives and cultural backgrounds.
- Special programs for dads, grandparents, teen moms, teen dads and other caregivers who would enjoy activities directed at their unique needs and interests.
- Social media groups or web pages where parents can get program information and interact with one another.

Program staff encourage newcomers and isolated or marginalized families to participate in program activities by:

- Calling, sending notes, or making home visits inviting them to program activities.
- Connecting with them on social media platforms through program pages or groups.
- Offering support with transportation, childcare or other barriers to participation.
- Making special efforts to connect them with other families who share similar interests.

Staff receive training on how isolation or reluctance to participate can be the result of social exclusion due to differences in race, language, culture, appearance, gender, sexual orientation, ability, etc.

Discussion regarding the first three listed items as focus for potential improvement prompted a discussion and an associated action item. Although there have not been any formal parent support groups and mentoring opportunities, such supports have developed informally between and among

parents within the neighborhood and while accessing resources at the SWAG FRC. There was general endorsement (especially among the Community Ambassadors) for the development and implementation of parent support and mentoring groups/opportunities (both formal and informal) as a mechanism for parents to engage and connect with one another. These opportunities, it was suggested, should be guided by feedback from parents where “...everyone can put in their own insights.” There was some support for utilizing models where group facilitation is completed by, and the development of activities includes parents (self-help/peer support groups). Staff reported that some efforts in the past to facilitate similar activities fell short of attendance and engagement expectations. In absence of any formal support group/mentoring model, it was suggested that the SWAG FRC start with a planned “parent support night” as an opportunity for engagement. The form, structure, and focus of such an event should be guided by informed discussions with parents/community members regarding activities most likely to enhance interaction (i.e., motivate parents to attend) and connections among parents. Hence, the following action item was endorsed:

Action Item #1: Explore opportunities for the development of parent support group and mentoring opportunities that are parent centered. Consideration may be given to the implementation of a “parent support night” following discussions with parents and Community Ambassadors.

Among the eight listed potential types of opportunities for families to socialize and foster a sense of community, six items received a consensus rating of Neither Agree nor Disagree. Team members highlighted that their ratings were influenced by the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic had upon the opportunity for the SWAG FRC and SWAG Board (a grassroots community organization) to implement many of these activities over the previous year and a half. Team members reflected on pre-COVID-19 community and engagement activities that enhanced social connections amongst families/households in the community. These activities were organized by the SWAG Board and the SWAG FRC. Although separate entities, the close collaborative and supportive relationship between the SWAG FRC and the SWAG Board (and other community investments they have made) are perceived as a collective and unified resource among patrons and households within the community.

Although separate entities, the close collaborative and supportive relationship between the SWAG FRC and the SWAG Board...are perceived as a collective and unified resource among patrons and households within the community.

In the past, fun community events (e.g., community cookouts, Fall Festival, holiday events, and community celebrations like the Joan Canton Way’s Road Naming Event, etc.) fostered a sense of community and allowed neighbors to get to know each other. As Community Ambassadors noted “...just getting people together [will help create] ... more of a sense of community” adding “the pandemic can’t end soon enough.” Additionally, there have been (pre-COVID-19) Resource Fairs where SWAG FRC partners and organizations were able to table and provide resources and opportunities for the

community to learn, grow, and get connected with other local resources and supports. The Community Ambassadors and the SWAG FRC Resource Center Manager believe that if these types of events, that provide social connections, are reinstated, people will be able to get to know others in the community again and may develop mutual supports.

Many large community events in the past were planned and implemented by the SWAG Board; they plan to support the community again in facilitating social connections just as they did before, as soon as it is safe for the community. Although the pandemic has impacted the availability of social connection events that involve gathering, some efforts have been made to offset these barriers/issues. For example, although in-person community dinners have been paused, the SWAG FRC has provided “grab-and-go dinners” during the pandemic. This year, SWAG FRC passed out at least 60 Halloween bags with candy, other fun items for children in the community and messaging regarding Halloween safety. The SWAG FRC also prepared Thanksgiving baskets for 150 pre-registered households; a support that was valued given “word of mouth” appreciation and “community buy-in” for these initiatives. Although these accommodations are valued, consensus among team members supports the tremendous value of organized social events (e.g., monthly and/or special event community dinners/cookouts, cultural events, holiday parties/events, festivals, etc.) for improving social connections, enhancing a sense of community within the neighborhoods served, and engaging families with SWAG FRC services and supports. An involved discussion highlighted several potential formal and informal activities and events worth considering/exploring as opportunities for enhancing social connections. These include:

- Utilizing a community park and the few “green spaces” in the area—such as an area near the neighborhood retention pond—to host outdoor gatherings. This area will soon have benches. Entertainment has been offered/organized at this park in the past.
- Hosting a farmer’s markets. One of the SWAG board members works with a program that matches/links SNAP benefits with/at farmer’s markets.
- Hosting the health and wellness expo in an outdoor location.
- Showcasing the diverse cultures of the SWAG community through a food-related event. While it was determined that potluck-style is not the best method during the pandemic, one suggestion was that during the yearly holiday dinner hosted in partnership with the SWAG FRC and the SWAG Board, local cultural cuisine could be highlighted in a safe manner.
- Holiday activities and seasonal activities, including a holiday community dinner (in addition to the holiday gifts and family dinner focused specifically with Homework Help families).
- Community Cookouts - The SWAG board also usually hosts community cookouts. A suggestion was made to include a bounce house at the next cookout.
- Hosting a community cleanup as a social connection activity.
- Collaborating with a local church group that historically (pre-COVID) has hosted an outdoor Fall Fest (that includes a bounce house and face painting, etc.).

...consensus among team members supports the tremendous value of organized social events (e.g., monthly and/or special event community dinners/cookouts, cultural events, holiday parties/events, festivals, etc.) for improving social connections, enhancing/building a sense of community within the neighborhoods served, and engaging families with SWAG FRC services and supports.

Although the planning of any large-scale community event must be conscious of potential barriers and accommodations that may impact on implementation (e.g., food safety protocols, difficulty in getting permits if using public space or road closures are desired, etc.), the following action item resulted from these discussions:

Action Item #2: The SWAG FRC needs to reinstate and expand social connection/community events once the COVID-19 pandemic is at bay, and it is safe to do so.

There were four items associated with encouraging newcomers and isolated or marginalized families to participate in program activities that did not receive consensus agreement. Some variation in individual team member responses to these questions stemmed from a few considerations, concerns, and interpretation of the questions and their applicability to SWAG FRC service practices. With respect to the use of social media platforms, the SWAG Board and PSF have a robust social media presence, but SWAG FRC does not have any exclusive social media accounts/presence. Although there are no designated resources within the SWAG FRC for connecting with patrons (including newcomers and marginalized families) on social media platforms and/or through program pages or groups, there is social media outreach done on the Resource Center's behalf and at its request thanks to SWAG Board members. SWAG FRC activities, events, etc. are made known through the social media outlets used by the SWAG Board and PSF. Community members are reportedly more likely to access the SWAG Board's Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter accounts which the SWAG FRC staff can request notices and information to be disseminated through (see below). Therefore, it was perceived that utilization of the SWAG Board's social media accounts are more valued and targeted for those served by the SWAG FRC. Within community households, the recognition that the SWAG Board and the SWAG FRC share as key community supports is seen as a strength.

The quality of the collaborative relationship is evidenced in the formal and informal communications and resources that each organization share with one another. For example, there is no formal process for requesting information to be posted on the SWAG Board's social media accounts or for notifying each other of sponsored/planned activities and events hosted by the SWAG Board and the SWAG FRC. Both parties (SWAG FRC Resource Center Manager and SWAG Board representative) agreed that no formal process is needed because current (and historic) communication efforts are open, responsive, supportive, effective, and reflect the "special partnership" between the SWAG Board and the SWAG FRC. Several examples of existing processes, communication practices, and shared resources that enhance social connection functions include (but are not limited to) the following:

- Usually, event and activity information (for broader community dissemination) are communicated “...organically...” via text messages, email, or at the monthly SWAG Board meetings.
- PSF and SWAG Board “...community engagement” staff will ask for photos and event information. Community engagement staff utilize monthly calendars or flyers to learn more out about monthly events and to disseminate the information prior to program dates.
- SWAG FRC postings (on the SWAG Board’s social media) do include programs and services offered that are not in collaboration with the SWAG Board; although program or services funded by the SWAG Board receive strong social media promotion. The SWAG Board social media accounts, while not exclusive to Resource Center content, were structured to promote all SWAG based entities (i.e., the SWAG Health Clinic and the CHILD Center).
- The SWAG board includes community members (from one of the eight SWAG neighborhoods) who, in each monthly meeting, have a huge say in which supports and events the board decides to fund.
- In addition to social media, both organizations utilize email listservs to spread awareness of events, programs, and services. The SWAG Board and the SWAG FRC have a robust email listserv. These listservs require consistent updating as there is a lot of resident mobility/turnover (heightened during the pandemic) that requires continuous outreach and engagement efforts to newcomers and marginalized populations/families.

Although there was no action item recommended from the involved discussion associated with these findings, some suggestions/opportunities for enhancing engagement of families were made. These included:

- Develop a formal partnership with SWAG neighborhood landlords and apartment complexes to disseminate information about the SWAG FRC to the community, especially to those newer to the neighborhoods. The eight SWAG neighborhoods are already on a monthly listserv to receive the SWAG FRC calendar. Some Community Ambassadors on the team receive monthly emails from their landlords with this calendar, although the practice is not standard for all neighborhoods or housing units, etc. SWAG FRC has great access to Tower Oaks landlords thanks to the relationship these landlords have with a SWAG Board member.
- Create a “newcomer” packet or 1-page document about the SWAG FRC that can be provided to new residents when they sign their lease.
- Connect with landlords to place SWAG FRC magnets on the refrigerator when a new resident moves in.
- In locations (select housing/apartment complexes) that have clubhouses, SWAG Board members or PSF staff can ensure that there are flyers displayed to inform residents about the Resource Center. Currently, Harbor Cove, Majestic Oaks and Hidden Oaks Mobile Home Park have a clubhouse.
- Leave small flyers at leasing offices or clubhouses that can be returned to the SWAG FRC for a small promotional item; this mirrors an initiative done at the NorthStar Family Resource Center. Custom mailings in the past have not worked and were initiated with notable expense.
- Community Ambassadors suggested creating a Facebook group for the neighborhoods served.

The team reiterated a perspective that service and support development, and engagement activities should be responsive community and individual family needs. All engagement strategies should be designed with the following anecdote in mind:

When patrons come to the Resource Center for the first time, they usually ask, “what do you do here?” and staff reply, “what are your families greatest needs?”

It was noted that sometimes individuals and families do not necessarily know exactly what they need, instead they may know what they are lacking. Therefore, it is the SWAG FRC staff’s job to know what types of resources are within the community and to conduct a strengths-based assessment. This responsiveness to families perceived and expressed needs enhances the reputation of the SWAG FRC as a meaningful support and subsequently the likelihood of engagement and connectiveness with and for families.

One item solicited a rating regarding the extent to which SWAG FRC staff “...receive training on how isolation or reluctance to participate can be the result of social exclusion due to differences in race, language, culture, appearance, gender, sexual orientation, ability, etc.” Team members’ ratings were influenced, in part, by some confusion regarding the intent of the question and the lack of information non-SWAG FRC staff team members had about the type of training SWAG FRC staff receive. This prompted questions and an involved discussion that led to the recommendation of two action items. Community Ambassadors mentioned that knowing what kind of trainings staff receive would be useful in case they encounter a community member in a situation for which a specifically trained SWAG FRC staff may be of assistance. Key points and recommendations mirrored those highlighted when the team reviewed findings related to staff training and development opportunities for enhancing their “...skills and knowledge to work effectively with diverse families” (associated with items promoting parental resilience)⁴. Here, there appeared to be consensus among the Community Ambassadors in support of informing patrons of staff trainings, utilizing a Parent or Community Advisory Committee/Group to discuss training opportunities for staff but also exploring opportunities for Community Ambassadors, parents, and others in the community to receive training, as well, on select topics (e.g., diversity and inclusion, engaging with marginalized populations, etc.).

Discussion reinforced the value of having a Parent Advisory Committee (PAC) or Community Advisory Committee (CAC), although there were some questions about its structure, whether its purpose/function would be duplicative of (or in conflict with) the SWAG Board functions, and if there were any barriers to its formation. Team members did not think that a CAC or PAC would negate (or

⁴ See discussion related to Parental Resilience Item 1.8 and Action Item #7 in: Perry, R., David-John, M., Benson, D., Brewster, R., Franklin, D., Franklin, E., Harper, D., Locklear, L., Nichols, S., Roncarti, C., Spoliansky, T., & Wilkerson, R (2021). The Southwest Advocacy Group (SWAG) Family Resource Center Strengthening Families Self-Assessment (SFSA) Team’s Findings and Recommendations/Action Items Associated with Supporting Families by Promoting Parental Resilience. Tallahassee: Institute for Child and Family Services Research.

conflict with) the work of the SWAG Board. Forming a Parent Advisory Committee or Community Advisory Committee would take a lot of dedication and community buy-in. This would be a notable task and require considerable engagement with existing patrons/community members. In the end, these discussions led to the following Action Items:

Action Item #3: Ensure that parents/patrons have supportive and responsive means and mechanism to openly communicate with and/or inform the staff about any knowledge or skill sets they believe staff should have to better serve the community.

Action Item #4: Explore the formation of a Community Advisory Council (CAC) with broad representation of community members who are motivated to serve the community and enhance supports for its members. Special attention should be paid to ensure the inclusion of fathers and grandfathers on this advisory committee.

How Does SWAG Family Resource Center Create an Inclusive Environment?

There were 13 questions associated with three broad indicators that attempted to gauge the extent to which the SWAG FRC has created an inclusive environment. There was consensus agreement on nine (69%) that the SWAG FRC's programs and staff model positive social skills and community building, as well as help staff learn how to reduce stereotyping and bias. There were four questions where team consensus was within the Neither Agree nor Disagree range.

What the SWAG Family Resource Center Does Well that Creates an Inclusive Environment.

The program and its staff model positive social skills and community building by:

- Welcoming all families.
- Inviting all families to program parties or social events.
- Encouraging newcomers and reluctant families to participate through special outreach efforts.
- Helping to resolve conflicts among participants.
- Promoting families' understandings of different cultures and backgrounds.
- Working with participating parents to establish ground rules for programs and activities that ensure inclusiveness.

The program helps staff learn how to reduce stereotyping and bias by:

- Modeling inclusive behavior among the staff.
- Intervening appropriately to counteract prejudicial or discriminatory statements from children or other adults (e.g., discussing similarities and differences, establishing rules for fair treatment of others).

- Ensuring that any instances of prejudice are quickly and explicitly addressed, and that staff use any such incidents as opportunities to demonstrate program values of inclusion and respect.

Noteworthy positive attention was focused on the extent to which the SWAG FRC and its staff model positive social skills and community building. These findings reinforce other findings discussed by the team with respect to other protective factors (see Parental Resilience report; Perry et al., 2021) regarding "...general agreement and praise for efforts of the SWAG FRC to ensure its program's efforts reflect the communities and families it serves" (p.8) and "...a quality level of support, professionalism, respectful, and caring attitude of SWAG FRC staff toward parents and all patrons" (p. 13). Team members reiterated these sentiments and see staff as positive role models with good communication skills who authentically care about patrons and families.

Discussion focused more intently on findings highlighting areas of agreement and observed strengths of the SWAG FRC in creating an inclusive and supporting environment. Here, it was noted the SWAG FRC was perceived as an advocate for marginalized populations. The team perceived the SWAG FRC to be a "...non-biased advocate" for community members in many situations. Community Ambassadors note the staff have always been helpful, supportive, and kept information confidential, respecting their privacy.

In terms of counteracting stereotypes and biases within the community, the SWAG FRC perceives Community Ambassadors as a good source of relevant information for alerting and educating staff on these issues. If Community Ambassadors are aware of racial/ethnic tensions or conflicts in the neighborhood they can let the SWAG FRC know so staff can connect the families with the proper resources and supports. Community Ambassadors expressed that stereotyping and bias should be topics of trainings at Community Advisory Council (CAC) meetings if/when it forms. Community Ambassadors and others have and can continue to "...share the word" that the SWAG FRC is supportive, non-stigmatizing and non-biased in their interactions with patrons and families. Although word of mouth has been seen as the primary means within/across community households for sharing information regarding the SWAG FRC, other suggested methods included constructing a packet of information for "newcomers" to the community regarding ways of being "connected" to the SWAG FRC, distributing one-page flyers on select information (distributed through landlords, etc.), distributing magnets with SWAG FRC information that can also be placed on the refrigerators of units rented by new residences, etc. Although the above noted suggestions were put forth to SWAG FRC staff as suggestions, it was not thought these considerations required an action item.

Areas of Potential Focus/Improvement for the SWAG Family Resource Center to Create an Inclusive Environment.

The program helps staff learn how to reduce stereotyping and bias by:

- Providing training and support for helping families and children resolve conflicts effectively.
- Providing training and support for helping families and children resolve conflicts effectively.

- Regularly reviewing policies, forms, and documents to ensure that all content discourages beliefs and practices that stereotype, marginalize, or discriminate against families.

Families are encouraged to reach out and engage other families, including newcomers and more isolated members, in the program community.

Like other select items that involved some level of disagreement among respondents, differences in individual ratings were more a function of limited knowledge select team members had about internal trainings and interactions between SWAG FRC staff. No discussion or recommended action items were suggested for the above items.

How Does the SWAG Family Resource Center Facilitate Mutual Support?

What the SWAG Family Resource Center Does Well that Facilitates Mutual Support.

There was consensus agreement with a series of five statements examining the means and mechanisms by which the SWAG FRC helps facilitate mutual support among parents and patrons. These items include:

Administrators and staff seek opportunities to build good relations within the immediate neighborhood or local community (e.g., inviting neighbors to open houses, using neighborhood resources for special projects, building relationships with local schools).

The program encourages staff and families to participate together in community improvement or advocacy projects.

Staff are visibly engaged with issues of concern to the community and are actively involved with other community organizations.

The program provides and receives support from the local community (e.g., financial support, donated services, volunteer service, tangible gifts, discounted services, letters of support).

The program connects parents to local opportunities that promote family enrichment (e.g., reading hours at the library, parent-child book groups, cultural heritage events).

There was no involved discussion regarding these items nor recommended action items as the team agreed that discussion on other items reviewed within this report and other reports regarding protective factors corroborated these findings. Collectively, these responses reinforce that the SWAG FRC is an important source of direct support for families that encourages through (and plans to improve upon) a variety of formal and informal means of developing mutual supports for and among families.

Areas of Potential Focus/Improvement for the SWAG Family Resource Center to Facilitate Mutual Support.

There were four questions for which there was a consensus rating of Neither Agree nor Disagree:

The program encourages parents to set up mutual support mechanisms (e.g., phone trees, carpools, babysitting co-ops, play groups, social media groups or pages where parents can communicate with one another).

There is time built into program activities for parents to network and share with each other.

Parent-organized social/educational events and activities are encouraged and supported by:

- Providing information on outside activities for parents to attend together (for example, gathering at playgrounds, fun fairs or libraries).
- Providing supports such as gathering space, childcare and food so that parents can organize and participate in activities together.

Members of the team acknowledged that SWAG FRC staff is encouraging listed types of mutual support mechanisms as much as possible, but they are very busy with all the other offered programs and services. Networking and the development of mutual support mechanisms are sometimes the by-product of other organized efforts linked to the provision of support and services. For example, staff highlighted that the children and families who are part of the Homework Help program network among themselves more than “the average patrons” who seek individualized services or select (e.g., concrete) supports. The Community Ambassadors liked the idea of establishing and/or facilitating play groups. Reflections on earlier efforts to host a play group at the SWAG FRC in 2013-14 suggested that participation was low for such initiatives. These earlier efforts were originally facilitated by a SWAG Board member (Ms. Dorothy Thomas) that the team recommended follow-up contact with to gain more information on those initiatives. There are different models of playgroups that could be explored. These and other organized efforts and community events could be a starting point for linking parents and families together and the development of mutual support networks.

Fidelity of Social Connections Services and Supports to CSSP Protective Factor

As denoted earlier, the SFSA Team identified the weighted average Team Score as the consensus measure for each item associated with the Social Connections assessment questions. Following the development of a consensus rating, individual item scores were converted—in keeping with Harnar and Tarr, (n.d.) and Tarr, Harnar, & Ahsan (2014)⁵ method recommendations—to binary/dichotomous scores where 1=Agree and Strongly Agree, and 0=Disagree, Strongly Disagree, Neither Agree or Disagree, and Not Applicable. These scores were summed for the Social Connections Protective Factor where scores <50% of the total score possible represent low fidelity, 50-74% represent moderate fidelity, and >75% possible scores represent high fidelity. The aggregate fidelity score from all tabled findings is 21 (of a possible score of 43) or 49%, suggesting that the services and supports associated with the Social

⁵ Harnar, M., & Tarr, J. (n.d.). Strengthening Families: A look at national data on program strategies, staff capacity and the protective factors. Washington, D.C.: Center for the Study of Social Policy’s Strengthening Families & Mosaic. Available at: <https://www.strengtheningfamiliesevaluation.com/national/>

Tarr, J., Harnar, M. A., & Ahsan, N. (2014). Strengthening Families: A look at national data on program strategies, staff capacity and the protective factors. Unpublished whitepaper presented at the National Association for the Education of Young Children’s annual conference in Dallas, TX.

Connections were implemented with low fidelity to the Center for the Study of Social Policy's Strengthening Families' Protective Factor Framework. However, as highlighted by the team, there were several items where ratings were impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic; select services and activities were paused or suspended due to safety protocols limiting in-person contact. These were associated with Items 2.3.1 through 2.3.3, 2.3.5, and 2.3.7. Should these Items not be considered as part of a fidelity assessment given the influence of a known historical event (COVID-19) upon the services/supports delivered, the aggregate fidelity score from all tabled findings is 21 (of a possible score of 38) or 55%, suggesting that the services and supports associated with the Social Connections were implemented with moderate fidelity to the Center for the Study of Social Policy's Strengthening Families' Protective Factor Framework.

...the aggregate fidelity score...is 21 (of a possible score of 38) or 55%, suggesting that the services and supports associated with the Social Connections were implemented with moderate fidelity to the Center for the Study of Social Policy's Strengthening Families' Protective Factor Framework.

The SWAG Strengthening Families Self-Assessment Team

As denoted earlier, a team of dedicated community ambassadors, SWAG FRC staff, and collaborative partners worked together to engage in a comprehensive assessment of the supports and services provided by the SWAG FRC in accordance with the CSSP's protective factors framework. The names and

select biographies of these team members are detailed below.



Dorothy Benson – SWAG Board Member

Dorothy A. Benson was born and raised in Tampa, FL, but moved to Gainesville as she was raising her family. The Bensons have lived in the Gainesville community since 1989. Dorothy fell in love with Gainesville, and it quickly came to feel like "home." Dorothy was a homemaker and a mom who got involved in her community after seeing Dr. Nancy Hardt's density maps showing high concentrations of Medicaid births and babies being born underweight in southwest Gainesville. At that time in 2008, Dorothy's youngest son was just heading off to college, and she was able to devote her time to community organizing. After connecting to SWAG community members like Joan Canton, Dorothy began advocating for the children and families in southwest Gainesville at the county commission meetings and helped Joan and others found the Southwest Advocacy Group (SWAG) in 2010. SWAG is grassroots, community-based group that soon became a certified 501(c)(3) non-profit. SWAG works closely with

Partnership for Strong Families and other community partners to bring greater opportunities and resources to the SWAG neighborhoods through the SWAG Family Resource Center, the SW Health Clinic, and the CHILD Center - a model demonstration childcare center. Dorothy has loved being a part of the Strengthening Families Self-Assessment Team because it has allowed us to look back on where we started, where we are now, and how we can best grow to better serve families and children in our community. Dorothy has been married to my supportive husband, Keyton, for 40 years. They raised two children in Gainesville, our daughter, Brenna now 37, and our son Keyton Jr. now 32. Dorothy is an avid walker and bird watcher, and she loves working with the SWAG board and community partners to bring positive changes to this wonderful community we call home. Dorothy loves the SWAG Family Resource Center because it provides a loving, safe and nurturing place for our community to come

together and focus our greater collective resources to support children, families, and our seniors. The SWAG FRC provides a tangible place where people can share their love for each other through many volunteer opportunities.

Lynda Bowie-Locklear - CareerSource of North Central Florida

Lynda L Bowie-Locklear was born and raised in Minter, AL, and has been a part of the Alachua County community for 28 years. Lynda is married and have two children who she raised in the Alachua County Community. Lynda career started back in 2003 in early childhood education with Child Care Resources which lead her to The Early Learning Coalition of Alachua County for the next 12 years, and a year with Episcopal Children Services. Lynda continues working in the community with families through workforce with CareerSource NCFL as the WIOA Youth Program Coordinator.



Lynda has been a partner to Partnership for Strong Families Resource Centers since the inception of Library Partnership Resource Center and continues to work closely with the staff from all Resource Centers in Alachua County. When Lynda was asked to be a part of the SWAG FRC's Self-Assessment Team it wasn't a hard decision. It has been a pleasure to serve alongside of SWAG FRC staff, SWAG Board Member, the community Ambassadors, Robin Perry, Mikaela David-John and Toni Spoliansky. Lynda feels the time spent together on this project has taken our partnership relationship to another level. She looks forward to continuing our partnership to better serve the families in the Alachua County Community.

Lynda has kept these words in the forefront of her mind daily as she works with families in the community. It is an empathy reminder like no other "We often think that admitting struggle is a sign of weakness, but we all struggle sometimes. We all get overwhelmed sometimes. We need help sometimes. Acknowledging this is not a sign of weakness, but struggling alone is a choice to grow weak" -Lori Deschene

"I can't change the direction of the wind, but I can adjust my sails to always reach my destination" -Jimmy Dean



Reva Brewster – Community Ambassador

Reva Brewster was born and raised in the U.S. Virgin Islands. Reva has been a member of the Gainesville community for 24 years. Reva raised her two children in the Gainesville community and now enjoys spending time with her four (soon to be five) grandchildren. Reva has been serving others for many years starting back in the U.S. Virginia Islands where she volunteered for a summer camp for youth with disabilities. Here in Gainesville, Reva volunteered for Altrusa House, an adult day health care program, for many years not only to give back to her community but also to spend time with her father while he was part of the program. Reva joined the SWAG SFSA team because of the support she feels when interacting with the staff. She receives so much positive feedback and information from the staff. Compared to the "outside the SWAG FRC's walls where everything feels very negative, inside the Resource Center staff are uplifting." During the SFSA process, Reva enjoyed having positive people from the community around her. Reva loves that the SWAG FRC staff are "here with resources and information and that the community has a place to turn to for help and answers."

Dennis Franklin – Community Ambassador

Dennis Franklin was born and raised in Harlem New York with one sister of an 18-year age difference. Dennis received education and training in speech, drama, journalism, communications, and business. After finishing his education, Dennis spent ten years involved in marketing and sales for a variety of different businesses. Dennis grew up with an unconditional love for the entertainment industry. As a young adult, Dennis spent his time discovering, up-and-coming and the mainstream artists in the entertainment industry. Dennis always knew that his purpose in life was to make a mark in entertainment that would change the life of music. Dennis was taught early on from his own personal hardships that everyone is not guaranteed the opportunity to advance themselves, so he decided to use his love for music to give back to the community. Dennis enhanced his entrepreneurial skills to establish The Disco Den Record Pool in 1976 which was an educational program to teach disc jockey candidates on how to promote records. Nevertheless, founding The Disco Den Record Pool was just the beginning of the many strides to come. In 1983, Dennis turned the Disco Den into a school for up-and-coming disc jockeys. "We were the original uptown outlet for information and the exchanging of ideas among club jocks. Then, we expanded our base and increased our services." The Disco Den was replaced with The Record School, a non-profit umbrella corporation that contained a record pool, a Harlem nightclub, The Music Bank, a promotion and Production Company, and a record label.



Dennis moved himself and his family of eight to his mother's hometown, Gainesville, FL, after his mother got sick. After living in Florida for eight years, Dennis' life took a drastic flip - Dennis had a relapse on drugs and alcohol. Following an incarceration, Dennis agreed to one year of drug court and was released after eight months. Growing as a man of God, Dennis was taught that being a great leader was not just about what he accomplished, but what he did Christ-like. He later learned that "the best leader is a servant leader." Reminiscing the struggles and hardships that he experienced, Dennis vowed to do whatever he could to prevent people from slipping through the cracks. "I think this was the greatest turning point in my life. I made a decision that I would work as hard as I could and see that no one would have to go through what happen to me, the feeling was not nice". He vowed that he would dedicate himself to people that had situations with addiction, ex-offenders, lost children, the homeless, in aspiration that anyone who has lost hope will have some place to go. That place would be called The Neighborhood House, a non-profit organization Dennis co-founded that strives to make a positive impact on our community and youth. Dennis has enjoyed being part of the SWAG SFSA team as it has been an opportunity for him to connect with people in the neighborhood and share information that can help strengthen the community and bring the community together. Currently, Dennis is working on a new project called The Nuskool which is a success training program which he hopes to share with the southwest Gainesville community and beyond.



Euricka Franklin – Community Ambassador

Euricka L. Franklin originates from New York City. She was born and raised in Harlem. Euricka graduated from Fashion Industry in New York City. In 1995, Euricka moved to Gainesville and became a resident of Clayton Estate located a few blocks away from the SWAG Family Resource Center. Euricka attended Santa Fe College and became a CNA. For several years, Euricka worked in the healthcare industry until an injury made her unable to continue. Starting in 2004, Euricka was a stay-at-home mother to her six children. Euricka and her husband, Dennis have been together for 31 years. Euricka has volunteered in the community extensively including the MCBC Saturday Academy assisting first through fifth graders with a variety of subjects including English and math and accompanying the students on field trips. Euricka has volunteered for decades with the Board of Elections doing many duties from clerk to ballot scanner. Euricka also volunteered back in New York city with the YMCA Summer Youth Employment Program as a camp counselor

assisting children with educational enrichment. Euricka also assisted with Dr. Shawn Kneipp's 'welfare-to-work' study. Euricka and her husband founded a nonprofit organization called The Neighborhood House which partners with the Big Brother Big Sister program to provide food for children and families in the community. Living across the street from the SWAG FRC, Euricka has been involved with the Resource Center from the beginning – she even watched as the building was reconstructed from apartments to be able to house the Resource Center. Euricka and her family have participated in numerous events and activities at the SWAG FRC and their nonprofit organization, The Neighborhood House, has donated clothes and food in the past. Currently, Euricka cares for her mother and her grandchildren. Euricka found that some of the conversations had, and information shared during the SFSA meetings at the SWAG FRC helped Euricka adequately address situations that will arise when caring for her mother and grandchildren. Euricka was happy to be part of the SFSA team because she received important information from the discussion with fellow SFSA team members, that she can share with my family and community. Euricka particularly enjoyed the discussions around mental health treatment and self-care as they are needed in this community, and every community. We all have a hurts, habits, and hang-ups. Euricka joined the SFSA team because she believes that sharing our different experiences with others strengthen everyone.

Dawn Harper – Department of Children and Families (DCF)

Dawn Harper was the DCF Community Partner Liaison for circuits 3 and 8.



Shandra Nichols, MS, CHES, CWCM – SWAG FRC Staff (Resource Center Manager)

Shandra is a native of Ocala, FL, but has lived and worked in Gainesville for about 10 years. Shandra attended the University of Florida where she received a Bachelor of Science and Master of Science degree in Health Education and Behavior. In her spare time, Shandra enjoys spending time with her family and friends, traveling, attending concerts and other entertainment events, listening to music, and DIY projects. After working with the State of Florida Department of Health, Shandra realized that her passion was in working with children and families and transitioned into the child welfare sector, where she has been serving families for the past 8+ years. Shandra began her employment with Partnership for Strong Families in the summer 2016 after accepting a position as the Family Support Facilitator at the Library Partnership Family Resource

Center. As the Family Support Facilitator for 4 and a half years, Shandra found great pleasure in meeting and engaging families on a regular basis. She assisted them with meeting their needs through onsite and community resources and by helping them to identify their own personal and family skills and strengths. Most of all, she enjoyed building relationships with the families she served. Currently, as the Manager of the SWAG FRC, Shandra continues to work closely with children and families, however, spends most of her time planning and developing programs to meet the needs of the community, maintaining working relationships with collaborating partners, and managing the oversight of day-to-day activities and patron services with staff, interns, and volunteers. As a member of the Strengthening Families Self-Assessment Team, Shandra has had the opportunity to learn more about the history of SWAG, as well as the southwest Gainesville neighborhoods the resource center serve. As the new manager, Shandra is even more encouraged and see the importance of seeking input from community members when planning programs and events that will have a direct impact on the community. Often times, the SWAG FRC serve as a place of hope for individuals and families who are experiencing uncertain times in their lives. Our staff members are compassionate, invested, and really want the best for the families we serve.

Cassandra Roncarti – Community Ambassador

Ms. Roncarti and her two daughters were patrons of the SWAG FRC and lived in the SWAG community. Ms. Roncarti's oldest daughter attended children's programming at the SWAG FRC.

Robin Wilkerson, M.Ed., RBT – SWAG FRC Staff (Family Support Facilitator)

Robin Wilkerson is originally from south Florida and has been part of the Gainesville community for 27 years. Robin has been at the SWAG Family Resource Center since December 2018, first in the Early Childhood Support Facilitator Role and now as the Family Support Facilitator. Robin holds a bachelor's degree in psychology from Saint Leo University and a master's degree in applied behavioral analysis from Arizona State University. Previously, Robin worked clinically in behavioral analysis as well as seven years in educational roles for the Alachua County School Board. Robin is also a founding board member of Healing for All, a local nonprofit that specializes in mental health services for underserved populations. Robin is a single mother of two children. Her son, who was diagnosed with Asperger's, was her inspiration for the degrees she has pursued. Robin loves working at the SWAG FRC because of the families she works with, and she enjoys being able to be a support for them.



Support for SWAG SFSA Team Processes

Although not formally members of the SWAG SFSA Team, Robin Perry (Lead Evaluator), Mikaela David-John (Community Research Coordinator for SWAG Family Resource Center), and Toni Spoliansky (Project Director for the *Resource Center Model: Evaluation, Refinement, and Expansion* grant) attended each meeting of the SWAG SFSA Team meetings and served as key supports for team processes. Robin Perry provided initial training and overview of the Center for the Study of Social Policy's SFSA Tool for Community-Based Programs and associated processes for review of findings and development of an action plan and recommendations by the team. Robin Perry was the lead facilitator of select group meetings; summarizing findings generated from the self-assessment tool/survey, asking questions, and clarifying team members' views as they discussed survey results with the goal of moving toward a consensus of perspective related to select survey questions and recommended action items for the SWAG FRC. Mikaela David-John is the Community Research Coordinator for the SWAG FRC, and a principal on-site contact for team members. Ms. David-John maintained regular contact with team members and distributed meeting materials; aided with the facilitation of group processes, and (along with Robin Perry) took detailed notes of comments and discussion items. Ms. Spoliansky served as an information support and assisted in answering questions individual team members had about the funded project and the role, function, and support of Partnership for Strong Families for the SWAG FRC. It is important to note that the role of the above three individuals was seen as supportive in nature. An empowerment perspective was adopted, as the team they would decide the meeting schedule and facilitation process with all members assuming equal status as knowledge experts with respect to community needs and the role, value, functioning, and responsiveness of the SWAG FRC to community need related to supporting families through the promotion of social connections. There was no effort by those in supportive roles to censor conversation and discussion points; efforts were made as feedback

was regularly sought regarding facilitation processes and preferences of group members for these processes. All notes were converted into minutes and distributed to team members for their review, edits, and approval. Feedback and recommended edits to documented discussion items and decisions could be provided within scheduled meetings (the team decided on monthly two-hour meetings) or in dialog/e-mails to Robin Perry and/or Mikaela David-John in-between meetings (which would then be discussed with all team members at the next in-person or virtual meeting).

Suggested Citation:

Perry, R., David-John, M., Benson, D., Bowie-Locklear, L., Brewster, R., Franklin, D., Franklin, E., Harper, D., Nichols, S., Roncarti, C., Spoliansky, T., & Wilkerson, R (2021). *Supporting Families by Promoting Social Connections at the SWAG Family Resource Center*. Tallahassee: Institute for Child and Family Services Research.