



## FAMILY RESOURCE CENTERS: Programs and Services

While each Family Resource Center (FRC) is unique, there are commonalities in how FRCs approach their work and the types of programs and services that are most frequently provided.<sup>1</sup>

### APPROACHES TO PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

Relationship building is an important focus of FRCs. The relationships that FRC employees develop with the families they serve are important to the success of FRC programs and services. The relationships fostered between families matter as well. These relationships increase confidence, build inner strength and support growth for families.



*“I can figure this out. I can cope. I can make it.’ That’s all developed through relationship, whether that be through relationship with a Parent Educator who is warm and trusting and unconditional, or whether it’s developed through that affirmation from other parents who are in that same situation.”*

Angela, FRC Leadership

Parents are adult learners. They are also predominantly voluntary learners. As such, they have strong feelings about the type, quality and effectiveness of services they would like to have available. Consequently, FRCs are very aware of the importance of parent-driven selection of services. FRC staff are responsive to parents, listening to parents

<sup>1</sup> National Family Support Network | Championing Family Support. <https://www.nationalfamilysupportnetwork>

and requesting their feedback to offer selections that meet parents' needs. This is an ongoing process, which can strengthen the FRC moving forward or, when neglected, can undermine its success.

The ability to customize and accommodate parent needs is key. According to FRC leadership, parents require both breadth and depth of services and program offerings. FRCs engage a broad range of families who have different constraints in terms of accessing services and different levels of comfort engaging in programs. FRCs offer a variety of program options to meet the diverse needs of families. Examples include complementing a group-based offering with a one-on-one option, offering programs that occur onsite at the FRC and others take place at family's home or in the community, as well as having some programs that engage the whole family and others focus more narrowly on parents and caregivers.

When it comes to depth of services, FRCs often look to a range of programs across a spectrum of intensity. For example, an FRC might offer lighter touch programs to engage parents, like car seat safety programs or play groups, then increase the intensity and commitment with offerings like a parent café where parents connect with peers over several sessions. Many evidence-based parent education options have tiered or customizable options of higher intensity. For example, the evidence-based parent education program, Triple P, has a range of offerings for families that vary in focus and time commitment.

Whereas universal home visiting provides a light touch approach suitable for any family, targeted home visiting in an intense and

long-term program, offered on a regular basis over the course of several years.

*Fig. 1: A Spectrum of Parenting Support*



## CORE SERVICES OF FRCS

Programming and services offered by FRCS are designed to strengthen families and build family protective factors, including social and emotional competence of children, knowledge of parenting and child development, social connections, parental resilience and concrete support in times of need. They also reduce the likelihood of child maltreatment by addressing known risk factors, such as inappropriate developmental expectations, lack of concrete supports and community resources, social isolation, stress, and the need for parenting support.

### ***Services commonly provided by FRCS:***

- ▶ Family resource navigation and basic needs support
- ▶ Parent education services and programming
- ▶ Parenting groups
- ▶ Developmental screenings and observation
- ▶ Lending libraries
- ▶ Open play spaces
- ▶ Home visiting
- ▶ Family and community events
- ▶ Parent-child groups
- ▶ Financial literacy education and resources
- ▶ Drop-in services

The services and programs viewed as most fundamental to the mission of an FRC are parent education, family engagement,

fostering parent connections, parent support, home visiting and community resource navigation.

## PARENT EDUCATION

*[E]ducation is the biggest piece [...] And [...] is going to change along with the community itself. You know, parent education, I don't think we can say enough about how important that is." Melissa, FRC Leadership*

Parent education teaches parents how to foster child development and helps them have appropriate developmental expectations for their child. It also helps them assess their parent skills and provides them with useful tools and strategies. Parent education can be offered in a variety of formats, including one-on-one, small group or large group settings. Curriculum can focus on one central topic or a series of topic areas. However, all highly effective parent education provides information, concrete parenting strategies and opportunities for active skill building.

Evidence-based parent education curricula have been certified as having high-quality research demonstrating the effectiveness of the program on specific parenting outcomes.

Evidence-informed parent education is based on well researched information but does not have research attesting to its effectiveness.

FRCs can also develop parent education content in-house to respond to social and cultural needs. This can be very beneficial to parents when offered in addition to, and not in lieu of, proven programming.

## FAMILY ENGAGEMENT EFFORTS

FRCs are well aware that participation in their programming and activities is largely voluntary. To serve families effectively, they need to entice them to participate and keep them engaged.

*"If you're trying to draw people to the door, something like a baby boutique (a store offering baby products at no charge for parents' selection) is a must have. It gets people in and there are certainly situations where people desperately need things, and they just aren't available within their budget . . . They aren't part of a program or anything like that, so they can't receive those - car seats, in particular." Julie, FRC Leadership*

Family engagement opportunities support FRCs in building relationships with families so their connection and level of participation deepens over time. FRCs often offer tangible resources like car seat safety programs where families receive a car seat and a



demonstration or inspection of proper installation. Services can include free or low-cost family recreational opportunities or activities, child-parent play groups or parent seminars.

## PARENT SUPPORT

FRCs describe the importance of parent support services in the context of building social connections among families. These programs focus on peer-to-peer relationships for parents and caregivers. They might take the form of a parent support group or have more structure, like parent cafés.

Many FRCs offer parents the opportunity to contribute and build leadership skills through deeper levels of participation such as co-facilitating or hosting activities, serving on committees or boards or providing peer support to other parents.

## HOME VISITING



***"I think that's where you really do the best work, is in the home and in their environment."*** Donna, FRC Leadership

Home visiting can be offered universally to all families in a community providing information, opportunity for engagement and a chance to direct families to resources they need and desire. This type of home visiting consists of less formal or shorter-term programs that utilize the home environment to increase the comfort and accessibility of participating families.

Home visiting also serves as a more targeted approach to family service for those with higher needs or those who meet specific eligibility criteria for participation, such as



the presence of certain stressors that are known risk factors for child maltreatment. These types of long-term home visiting programs are longer in duration, provide services on a more frequent and ongoing basis and follow evidence-based models.

## COMMUNITY RESOURCE NAVIGATION

FRCs are experts at making themselves known within communities, responding to community wide needs and partnering with other organizations. They are aware that they cannot meet all the needs of the parents they serve, so they develop expertise in the availability of other types of community-based services and foster collaborative relationships with other service providers to best serve families.



***"We refer, refer, refer."*** Carla, FRC Leadership

This approach is sometimes called family or community resource navigation, family support services or other names. Regardless, they are an integral part of FRCs' service to families.



***"We're doing it. We just call it something different. We've done it forever."*** Virginia, FRC Leadership

Community resource navigation services range from less formal programming, in which families can access support via warmline or drop-in services, to highly formalized navigation programs that include warm referrals and track follow up. These community resource navigation services build self-efficacy for families as well as to enable them to take advantage of the broader FRC services. If families have unmet basic needs like accessing stable housing or gaining food security, they are less likely to have the emotional resources available to fully engage in parenting and relationship building until those basic needs are met.

## REFERRALS AND COLLABORATIONS

FRCs cultivate a range of partners as mutual referral sources and collaborators. These partners vary by community. Examples include schools, community hospitals or clinics, public health departments, WIC and libraries.

In addition to garnering support through referrals, FRCs seek to avoid duplicating services in their community. They leverage the strengths of community partners either by referring to partners' programs rather than competing, by seeking to identify and fill service gaps in the community or by joining forces with partners to offer combined programming. ●



*All of the information and quotes in this brief come from extensive interviews of leadership within eight Wisconsin Family Resource Centers. The names attributed to the quotes are pseudonyms of FRC directors and educators.*

*This publication is was partially funded with 2001WIBCAP grant funds. Twenty percent of the Prevention Board's funding is from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration on Children, Youth, and Families (Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention Grant). Points of view expressed do not necessarily represent the official positions of the financial sponsors.*