

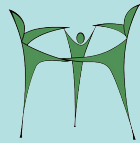
**Pascale Sykes Foundation South Jersey  
Strengthening Families Initiative  
Executive Summary of  
the Ten-Year Evaluation**



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for Public Affairs



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The Senator Walter Rand Institute for Public Affairs (WRI) at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey - Camden produces and highlights research leading to sound public policy and practice, and with that as a foundation, aims to convene and engage stakeholders in making the connections across research, policy, and practice in support of Southern New Jersey residents. From 2012 to 2022, WRI conducted a comprehensive evaluation of the implementation of the Pascale Sykes Foundation's Strengthening Families Initiative across 18 nonprofit collaboratives in Southern New Jersey. This Initiative was centered on The Whole Family Approach, a preventative, family-led strategy that provides adults and children tools to set, plan for, and achieve goals together. Collaborating agencies work together with families with two adult caregivers to develop long- and short-term goals to thrive. WRI's evaluation of the Whole Family Approach includes:

- A longitudinal, quasi-experimental evaluation of families' changes in forming healthy relationships, child well-being, and financial stability.
- A process evaluation to understand how the Whole Family Approach was implemented across collaboratives, including observations, interviews, focus groups, and document review.
- Multiple focused evaluations that examine the impact of the Whole Family Approach in areas of interest including student social, emotional, and behavioral growth, service delivery, family-community partner relationship development, and the cultural responsiveness of the Whole Family Approach.

The Whole Family Approach is rooted in one holistic foundation: two caregivers and children working together with a family advocate, staff member, or mentor representing a collaborative organization from a group of nonprofits to engage in individualized goal setting to achieve the family's goals across the areas of healthy relationships, financial stability, and child well-being. As part of this approach nonprofit organizations partnered as collaboratives and sponsored a wide range of primary missions including the provision of social-

emotional learning supports to children within schools, college readiness and access, community and economic development, adult employment and education, and family strengthening. The Whole Family Approach was implemented across a variety of contexts from rural to urban areas in Southern New Jersey, and included both English and Spanish speaking families with varying documentation and citizenship statuses. In all cases, collaboratives sought to recruit staff from their communities to serve families, and emphasized the importance of community-focused, culturally responsive, solutions-oriented family supports.

Over the ten-year period where collaboratives were engaged with families through Pascale Sykes' initiatives, WRI evaluated the process and outcomes of families working with collaboratives. As the evaluation concludes and the Pascale Sykes Foundation prepares to sunset in December 2022, there are multiple notable results that have been consistent throughout the evaluation. In the Whole Family Approach pillar of healthy relationships, the strengthening of the relationship and reciprocity in responsibilities between caregivers was the strongest, most consistent finding in our evaluation. WRI's evaluation found that families increased their social supports externally, and increased bonds and communication between caregivers and children. In the area of financial stability, WRI's findings indicate that families experienced challenges that included food and housing insecurity, employment challenges, and a lack of transportation. However, WRI's findings also indicated a reduction in financial challenges over time, which was most pronounced in results for the second caregiver. Child well-being was also positively affected throughout the Initiative as caregivers' educational aspirations and optimism for their educational futures improved over time. In addition, several data points indicated significant improvements in children's math and language arts grades over time.

Evaluation of nonprofit collaboratives' processes also revealed several notable findings throughout the course of the evaluation. The strongest and most consistent finding indicates that collaboratives

focused on clear, open, and frequent communication between organizational partners about ways to meet families' needs. Partner agencies were also repeatedly cited as an asset by participants in meeting family needs. Extensive one-on-one support and goal setting with families was also constant throughout the evaluation as families sought to explicitly build trust between collaborative staff and families. Community building and social connection were a central focus of collaboratives as they worked to create opportunities to make connections among families and build relationships with other community members.

Collaboratives also experienced challenges in their implementation of the Whole Family Approach. Collaboratives experienced challenges with family recruitment for their programs, and the subsequent evaluation, as the Whole Family Approach requires two caregivers; identifying a second caregiver was occasionally a challenge in single-caregiver households. Collaboratives also discussed challenges with sustainability of their initiatives after the conclusion of the project, and actively discussed ways to acquire additional funding or to shift programming. Accountability for collaborative partners was also a consistent challenge as collaboratives discussed ways to ensure partners were fulfilling their roles and responsibilities. Collaboratives also discussed staffing as a recurring challenge throughout the evaluation as they sought to hire family advocates and staff members from the communities they served, and continued to seek to fill various volunteer, part-time, and full-time positions.

WRI conducted targeted focused studies with collaboratives and families to better understand family impacts and processes within specific contexts. These focused studies highlighted the flexibility of the Whole Family Approach, as it has lent itself to different outcomes depending on the individual context of the communities served.

- *Transportation Workgroup Observations* from 2012-2015 examined the activities and outcomes for riders of transportation collaboratives, which organized transportation services in areas in

Atlantic and Cumberland counties. Throughout the course of the evaluation, the riders used transportation for employment, social services, and medical needs, and said that access to transportation improved their access to both employment and social services.

- *COVID Impacts, Supporting Collaboratives* explored the ways that collaboratives adjusted their supports to meet changing families' needs during the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Collaboratives provided material supports to address food, employment, and housing insecurity, and adapted their service delivery models to create stronger family and community connections.
- *In the Child Connection Center Evaluation* WRI evaluated outcomes for families' children in a school-based social-emotional learning program, finding significant improvements in math and language arts grades, reductions in total social-emotional challenges, and a positive impact on children's engagement in the classroom.
- *The Family Strengthening Network Evaluation* included a mixed-methods approach that revealed more stable family social supports and increased financial stability among families engaged with this program, and described the ways in which family advocates worked to build trust and support families to meet goals.
- *The Whole Family Culturally Responsive Approach Evaluation* was conducted with collaboratives serving Hispanic communities and the families they serve. This evaluation focused on the ways in which collaboratives built trust with families and addressed barriers including discrimination, immigration status, concerns over the quality of supports provided externally, information access, and food and financial insecurity.

WRI's evaluation reveals consistent, positive changes in healthy relationships, financial stability, and child well-being over 10 years of implementation, and the strengthening of the relationship and reciprocity in responsibilities between caregivers was the strongest, most consistent finding in our

evaluation. Collaboratives actively worked with, supported, and monitored individual families to ensure they met their goals. The contributions of the rapport and trust built between collaborative staff and family members to family success also hints at the value of strengthening overall social support beyond immediate family members. Collaboratives focused on the development of social networks first

through their one-on-one relationship with families, and later through connecting families to community events and members whenever possible, which resulted in some families forming new relationships and taking on roles as volunteers and advocates. The Strengthening Families Initiative can serve as a framework for future whole-family, goal-oriented, community-based social service provision efforts.



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