WHOLE FAMILY CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE APPROACH EVALUATION

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Families In Motion
A Pascale Sykes Foundation Collaborative

Stronger Families

Unidos Para La Familia

FAMILIES TO COLLEGE

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Immigrant families and the organizations that work with them experience circumstances and challenges related to their cultural background and personal and social resources that can only be captured through a culturally responsive evaluation. Using interviews with Hispanic participants and collaboratives, we sought to identify the ways in which collaboratives implemented the Whole Family Approach within the context of these families' lives to help them work towards their goals. We found that collaboratives and Hispanic families faced challenges stemming from their past disadvantages and inherent to their new environment, often aggravated by the pandemic. However, we also found that the ability to rely on each other, as families and communities, bolstered a sense of resilience and support that carried many forward, as well as a desire for autonomy and, in some cases, community engagement. These findings highlight the importance of a family-centered intervention that can be adapted to meet clients where they are and help them get where they want to be. The flexibility of the Whole Family Approach allows collaboratives to facilitate structuring families' goals while empowering them to decide their own paths.

INTRODUCTION

The grantee collaboratives that the Pascale Sykes Foundation has sponsored since 2013 as part of its Strengthening Families Initiative are as diverse in their functions and services as the communities they serve. As part of the evaluation of the Whole Family Approach, our team has interacted directly with dozens of collaborative staff and hundreds of families since WRI began its evaluation in 2013. While many of the outcomes of the Whole Family Approach have been captured through our longitudinal survey and collaborative observations, these face-to-face interactions also allowed our evaluation team members to notice the differences in needs, resources, and interventions occurring across populations in Southern New Jersey, most notably, those relevant to the Hispanic, immigrant population.

According to the census estimates of 2019 for Cumberland County, almost a third of the population identifies as Hispanic or Latino, while over 27% indicate speaking a language other than English at home and 10% have reported being born in a foreign country (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019b). Hispanic or Latino immigrants commonly face challenges such as limited employment options, below minimum wages, labor transmigration, inadequate health care, social isolation, and discrimination (Furman et al., 2009; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2012). Moreover, immigrant and refugees may experience trauma associated with the circumstances of their displacement, challenges to their individual and cultural identity during the process of acculturation, and continued barriers related to their legal status that impact families' financial stability, overall health, and quality of life wich complicate access to support services (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2012).

For this reason, effective social service agencies working with Hispanic/Latino immigrant populations consciously engage in culturally competent and responsive practices. For the purposes of this study, we are defining cultural competency as the ability to acknowledge, recognize, and respect differences in people's perspectives and norms, and cultural responsiveness and the implementation of cultural competency to adapt policies and interventions to account for people's circumstances and needs in ways that are mindful of their cultural background and context. Furman et al. (2009) provide a succinct guide towards cultural competency:

> According to Colon (1997), culturally competent practice focuses on the need for a general sensitivity to cultural factors that may influence clients. Being sensitive to cultural variables can be conceptualized as holding a cultural lens to human behavior and making allowances for the possibility of cultural influence. However, to avoid stereotyping, it is important that the clinician recognize the existence of within-group differences as well as the influence of the client's own personal culture or values. (Furman et al., 2009, page 2)

Studies examining social service agencies that work with diverse populations have concluded that cultural responsiveness is a continuously evolving mindset and practice at the individual, family, organizational and community levels that requires both staff and client communication and understanding (Chow & Austin, 2008).

METHODOLOGY

To capture the nuances in the challenges Spanish-speaking families face as well as the collaboratives' responses, we opted for a qualitative approach in the form of interviews with both families and collaborative staff from four collaboratives. Families in Motion, Unidos para la Familia, Families to College, and Stronger Families have consistently referred Hispanic families for our survey component of the larger evaluation for Pascale Sykes's Strengthening Families Initiative; thus, we determined these organizations would be able to provide the richest data when it came to servicing Hispanic families. For the purposes of this focused study, we centered on Spanish-speaking families who had immigrated from South and Central America. In accordance with best practices recommended for culturally responsive evaluations, this study uses qualitative methods in the form of semi-structured interviews to make space for participants to express themselves and share their stories at their level of comfort (Delgado-Romero, Singh, & De Los Santos, 2018; Frechtling Westat, Frierson, Hood, & Hughes, 2002).

After communicating with collaborative staff about the purpose and scope of this focused study, our team reached out directly to previous survey participants who speak Spanish, leveraging the rapport we have built through the retention processes conducted for the primary evaluation. We also expanded our pool of potential participants by asking collaborative staff to refer families who would be interested in participating in the interviews even if they did not participate in the survey. We limited the interviews to one adult per family.

Interviews were held from the end of June 2021 through the end of August 2021. All interviews were conducted remotely via Zoom or phone calls in light of continuing precautions to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Data collection protocols were designed in a semi-structured interview format. We asked collaborative and family participants questions pertaining to barriers, supports, goals, successes, and community needs. Interviews were conducted in English or Spanish based on the participant's preference.

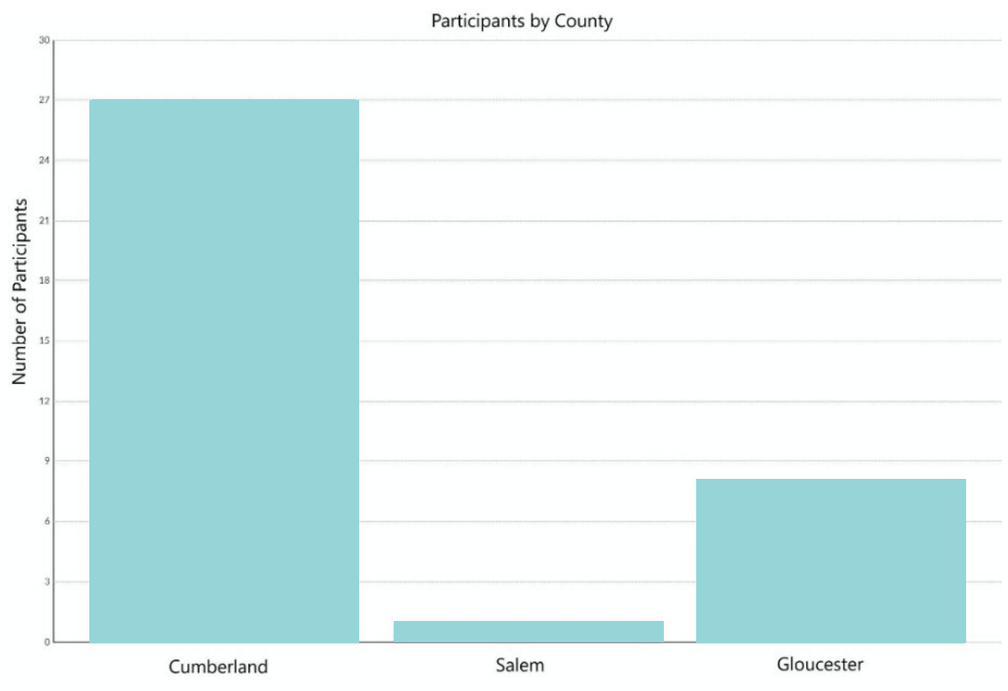
To facilitate data collection, we used notetakers during the interviews. All data collected was translated to English by bilingual staff from the evaluation team. Staff engaged in the interview conducted an initial level of analysis to identify themes in the data, which were then used to formally code the data using the qualitative analysis tool NVivo.

PARTICIPANTS

A total of 15 collaborative staff members and 21 family members participated. Collaborative participants included both members of leadership and case management staff. To maintain focus on the overarching implementation of the Whole Family Approach, we will use the general term "case managers" to refer to both Family Advocates and Family Development Coaches. All family participants were adult, Spanish-speaking, caretakers who had been involved with one of the target collaboratives within the last three years.

COLLABORATIVE	FAMILY INTERVIEWS	STAFF INTERVIEWS
Families in Motion	13	5
Families to College	1	3
Stronger Families	4	2
Unidos para la Familia	3	5

All participants, except for one staff member, reported living in towns across Cumberland, Gloucester, and Salem counties, corresponding to the areas serviced by the collaboratives. As illustrated in the graph below, the majority of participants resided in Cumberland county. This distribution is representative of the target collaboratives' areas of service, given that all four collaboratives operate at least partially from Bridgeton in Cumberland County.



FAMILIES

All family participants were female and identified as the maternal figure in the household. When asked about their typical week, participants described routines set around household chores and caring for their family. The majority of participants mentioned that they have a male spouse and he is often the primary or only provider of income. Some spouses prefer that the female caretaker stay in the home, according to the participants. Men often were reported to work long hours of physically demanding labor in factories or farms, leaving them with little time or energy to participate in childcare. Participants' perspective did not suggest that there was a high expectation for men to engage in home and child care duties in the first place; nevertheless, there were also instances in which the men did take on household chores and childcare when the female caretaker was either sick or engaging in temporary studies, indicating that some families show flexibility to this model depending on the situation and their family goals.

Both working and non-working mothers discussed multiple competing responsibilities. Caring for the home is a day-long endeavor between cooking, cleaning, entertaining children, and raising a family. As the primary caretaker, participants are responsible for making sure their children develop study skills and discipline, that they get enough recreation during their free time, and that they are developing healthily. This means that often they are the ones making appointments, answering school calls, supervising family nutrition, monitoring the family's physical and mental health, planning trips to the park or zoo, and sitting with their children to help them stay focused during virtual schooling and homework. Other family members share responsibilities as well. For instance, given that most families have one car only, participants noted that their spouse would call off work to drive the family to medical appointments or other official matters. Children were also described to have their own set of responsibilities corresponding with their age. Participants highlighted that their children are expected to study and learn at school, "Their job is school; my job is housework." As children grow older, they often help with house chores such as laundry, or they help their parents by interpreting for them in English settings.

Giving children a sense of responsibility also came across as a value for families. Both parents seemed to agree that it was important to teach children the meaning of hard work and to motivate them to aspire to a professional career. Creating opportunities for a bright future for their children would justify their long hours of hard labor and postponing personal goals.

Another important value that was prevalent in the interviews is that of family unity. Spending time together was important to families. Whether it be joining their spouse at work to have a family meal, planning outings to the grocery store or the park, or reassessing the status of their work-life balance, these families put family first.

> "We've focused a lot on working, but I want more balance. I want to take vacations with my children. I want to go camping with them. Take them to the zoo. Spend more time as a family. Over the last year I spent it focused on work, so there was not much recreation with them... I don't want to have that kind of life because my son one day will leave for college. I want to enjoy them."
>
> —FAMILY MEMBER, 6/29/21

COLLABORATIVES

As mentioned previously, the four collaboratives selected for this study serve a significant population of Hispanic families. All these collaboratives count with Spanish-speaking case managers in their staff and offer services in Spanish to varying extents. Here, we provide more context around each collaborative's characteristics that we considered throughout this study, followed by the aggregated findings of collaborative activities relevant to Hispanic families.

Unidos para la Familia: specializes in services for immigrant, working-class families by providing case management services, connecting them to educational, employment, and legal resources, and organizing family activities in the community. Unidos para la Familia offers its services across Cumberland County, with most of its activities taking place in the city of Bridgeton. This collaborative is affiliated with the United Advocacy Group and thus is known to interact with the other affiliated collaboratives in this study.

Families to College: seeks to foster academic success by offering resources to students and families as they navigate secondary education and subsequent opportunities. Families to College offers its services across Cumberland County and it is based in Bridgeton. This collaborative is affiliated with the United Advocacy Group and thus is known to interact with the other affiliated collaboratives in this study.

Stronger Families: offers holistic case management services and accessible programming for growth and recreation at the Alms Center. Stronger Families primarily offers its services within the Greater Bridgeton Area. This collaborative is affiliated with the United Advocacy Group and thus is known to interact with the other affiliated collaboratives in this study.

Families in Motion: offers families case management services, access to educational and employment resources, and civic engagement opportunities. Families in Motion originally offered its services in Gloucester and Cumberland county. At the time of these interviews, the Cumberland county office was closing and Families in Motion was devising a plan to transition families to a new case manager.

ACTIVITIES

Collaboratives offered families access to a plethora of workshops, classes, and trainings that aligned with their recreational, personal, and professional interests. English language learning was the collaborative activity most often mentioned with regards to Spanish-speaking families. Many families expressed a strong desire to master the English language in an attempt to make their lives easier, navigate resources more confidently, and pursue other opportunities that would help them achieve more autonomy while living in the United States. Confronting a language barrier across several aspects of their daily lives, many families explained their desire to attend classes across the variety of models, platforms, and schedules offered. Although classes were offered throughout the pandemic, both staff and families noted the difficulty of finding classes which could accommodate the students' working schedules as well as their home life. To accommodate childcare, some programs offered childcare and ESL activities for children at the same time and location as the adult classes, although others were exclusively for adults.

> "When I was taking English classes at [external organization], I couldn't bring my daughter, so I said, 'Well, I guess, I won't be able to come back.' But [collaborative staff] was there and told me about [collaborative] where I could bring my children as well. So I took advantage of that."
>
> –FAMILY MEMBER, 7/30/21

> When we were in the center, we had an additional program from Pascale Sykes which was English classes. So the people would go and ask for the English classes, and many times the hours did not work for them, but we also had a section for English classes and English classes for kids as well.
>
> –COLLABORATIVE STAFF, 6/25/2021

Participants explained that in addition to English-focused classes, programming geared towards personal and professional development was also helpful. A range of activities were offered across collaboratives, namely in the areas of adult secondary education, financial planning, and entrepreneurship. Families found workshops about topics such as budgeting, credit building, and resume building were useful for both adults and older children.

> Yes, well right now she's in school. She wants to learn to read and write well, completing elementary school. My mom was told about the programs they were giving and she found it interesting.
>
> –FAMILY MEMBER, 7/27/21

> I would like to see more classes in English and high school or middle school. I'd like them to let more people know about these classes. I just finished a class on citizenship but I'm going to start taking these English classes.
>
> –FAMILY MEMBER, 7/27/21

> We usually have workshops aimed towards financial aid, resume building, job search, use of search engines or LinkedIn (especially during the school year), interview skills, cover letters. After that, the students have an opportunity to apply for [partner program] over the summer. It's useful because [the partners] have that foot in the door already, so they can help people get employed.
>
> –COLLABORATIVE STAFF, 8/18/21

Other activities noted by participants involved skill learning, community education, and health. Families spoke favorably of activities involving crafts and skills they could apply to their own lives or for additional income. Collaborative staff also noted workshops and classes about the naturalization process, acquiring a New Jersey driver's license, and campaigns to promote participation in the census. Food and nutrition were also mentioned as individuals were eager to live healthier lives, with a few mentioning how they utilize their newly learned skills to procure affordable food and experiment with new meals, while also losing weight. Physical activities such as soccer, skating, and self-defense training were each mentioned specifically as a way to get the children out of the house despite strict safety protocols in the midst of the pandemic.

> Learn through workshops like painting, clothes making, and something to learn. I think workshops are important. Learning about nutrition is also good.
>
> –FAMILY MEMBER, 6/25/21

> I like the activities they offer, but I cannot go to these activities because of my work schedule, like the cooking class, even though I really want to.
>
> –FAMILY MEMBER, 7/26/21

> Soccer—definitely soccer. The kids are staying entertained. If I see parents at the store they always ask about soccer. The kids always want to go play.
>
> –COLLABORATIVE STAFF, 6/25/21

Collaborative staff also emphasized the importance of offering a variety of family-oriented activities. Activities that are appealing and engaging to children provide a source of distraction and entertainment for children. Additionally, the free to low-cost of activities made them accessible for families, as parents typically may be unable to arrange for some of these experiences on their own.

> Family events are most well-attended because a lot of times they don't get to spend time together. When the Appel Farm fest event happened, there were lots of activities for the little ones.
>
> –COLLABORATIVE STAFF, 6/23/21

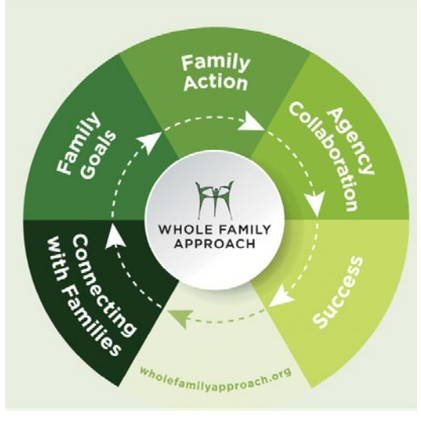
Events can be split into two categories: Enjoyment and Service. While some events revolved around outings, such as a movie night or bingo, other events aided the community, such as a park clean up. Events were mostly in person but Zoom/Facebook events hosted online were also briefly mentioned.

> Events that make an impact on their actual lives. For example, cleaning the park where the kids play. Someone will see that we are really helping to clean the park. Someone asked me the other day when that is happening. The event has been something that they care about. We need to do something that shows many people that are interested and part of the community—(other types of events may) disregard that people are working 16 hours a day.
>
> –COLLABORATIVE STAFF, 6/29/21

WHOLE FAMILY APPROACH

> The Whole Family Approach is a family-led strategy which provides adults and children with the tools to set, plan for, and achieve their goals together. When the whole family works together to support each other's goals, long-term change, stability and well-being become a reality.
>
> – PASCALE SYKES FOUNDATION

By definition, the Whole Family Approach is meant to be adaptable and responsive to the families who participate in it. Hispanic families like the ones described in this study already strive for family cohesion and advancement, values which naturally align with this Approach. Following, we describe how collaboratives implement the four components of the Whole Family Approach with Hispanic families.



CONNECTING WITH FAMILIES

TRUST AND RAPPORT

Collaboratives use a variety of strategies for outreach and retention of families from embedding staff in local high schools to organizing activities in the community to advertising programming over printed and virtual media. With Hispanic families, however, collaboratives indicated that the main source of recruitment of new families comes from word-of-mouth. Positive experiences from established families is the best referral card for new, potential families.

> "Other people trusting us with things makes them trust us. Sometimes our families tell others how we took them somewhere, and then those people ask for that." –COLLABORATIVE STAFF, 6/23/21

Trust building is a priority when collaborative staff establish rapport with families and help them devise a goal plan. Building trust with families is a difficult task, but when the families are comfortable they are more willing to participate wholeheartedly in workshops and return for additional services. During intake meetings, collaborative staff prioritize the families' comfort by establishing a low-pressure, friendly dynamic based on the family's boundaries. This might mean that the staff take everything that the family shares at face value, even if they sense missing details.

> "Yes, I try to make them feel like it is not an interview in a way, so they can feel like 'okay, I can tell her more.' So when they feel more comfortable, they tell me everything they need. This is my best way to get everything for them." –COLLABORATIVE STAFF, 6/30/21

Collaborative staff also highlighted the value of relatability and connection with families. Leadership staff explained that they make conscious decisions to hire individuals who are both culturally competent and passionate to provide a greater connection between families and the organization. Not only does this mean identifying candidates who can speak Spanish, but also searching for them within the community they would serve. Additionally, some collaborative case managers share with families their own experiences immigrating or dealing with barriers as a Hispanic person.

> "[I build rapport] By giving them examples of things I've gone through. For example, a client was not doing well financially, so I told them about my own story and how my family struggled financially when they first came here. At first, we were all in a little car. I tell them, 'Your kids are going to be happy you took them out of a bad situation.'" –COLLABORATIVE STAFF, 6/23/21

> "...there is a motivating factor of 'here is someone [where] I'm aspiring to [be], who has walked my journey or at least is from my culture.' There is a motivating factor and credibility that has answers to questions they are not even asking." –COLLABORATIVE STAFF, 7/20/21

Community events also provide a critical opportunity for families to see and interact with collaboratives in a different, more casual context. One collaborative case manager pointed out that students did not seem to want to engage in virtual events during the height pandemic, probably due to an exhaustion of virtual activity while school was in session, but students were more likely to show up at in-person events that collaboratives organized after health precautions allowed it. Events such as Hot Dog Night, Mexican Independence Day, and pool parties featured a combination of food and entertainment and allow families to enjoy themselves and associate collaboratives with fun family activities in their communities.

Collaborative staff noted the importance of being inclusive in the activities and events they offer. Staff design activities with the understanding that participants will speak predominantly Spanish yet still hail from diverse countries and regions. When directly discussing cultural competency, staff noted that it is critical to understand the reasoning and meaning behind people's actions. Furthermore, though familiarity with the diversity within and across Latin American cultures is helpful, it is important to put assumptions aside so as to fully be receptive to the experience of Hispanic immigrants.

> "The choices that people make are often rooted in a lot of history whether it is their own upbringing, positive or negative experience or something else, class things as case workers we are in the job of changing people's perspective and worldview so that they act in a more balanced way— but cultural competency is understanding more of the why people do things, not just the details of what is happening." –COLLABORATIVE STAFF, 7/20/21

> "In my opinion, understanding the local culture is a challenge. People need to forget everything they know about the country. [Immigrants] form a third culture here. It's different— collaboratives need to understand where the families come from. In Bridgeton, most families come and it informs their worldview and vision, because it's way different in California... Even in Philly it's different... I've learned that they tend to think that it's one big thing and monolithic, and Hispanic culture is so different." –COLLABORATIVE STAFF, 6/29/21

COMMUNICATION

Prior to the pandemic, collaboratives kept in touch with families primarily through in-person meetings and activities, or phone calls when unable to meet. Although all collaboratives have a website, information that would directly impact families is primarily communicated via social media and the community word-of-mouth. The pandemic drastically changed the methods and practices around communication for collaboratives, at times permanently, and those working with Hispanic families have had to account for obstacles such as poor access to technology and unfamiliarity with commonly used software. In response to the uncertainty and rising needs, collaborative case managers increased the frequency of phone calls to families to share vital information such as food distributions and to check in on families' health. Within months, collaboratives began implementing additional tools such as Zoom and WhatsApp to improve the quality of interactions with families and expand their offerings of activities.

The switch to a primarily virtual communication was met with mixed feelings. Collaborative staff found that they are able to access more families at once through a group message. For those families who became proficient with the online tools, they could continue with their activities, engage in recreational programming as a family, or simply be able to see someone else's face when conversing with them. At the same time, members from both collaborative staff and families indicated that they prefer in-person contact. Not only are there still many families who face technological challenges, but also physical check-ins are perceived as higher quality and more beneficial to the rapport between collaboratives and families.

> "It was hard due to the pandemic, because we can connect a lot in person, for them it's better in-person, not Zoom [or] phone, because they prefer to connect in-person, they feel better to see your face."
> –COLLABORATIVE STAFF, 6/30/21

Collaborative staff was also mindful of the frequency of follow-ups with families, trying to keep a balance between making themselves available and willing to help but also respecting the families' boundaries. Case managers also pointed out that part of being communicative is to respond to families' inquiries promptly and provide them with resources that can help them work towards their goals.

> "Sometimes it takes 'hey are you okay how can I support' follow-up calls... If I call a family and they say they haven't heard from the [case manager] in two weeks, then that's a problem. I tend to follow up with [the case managers] not to micromanage but as a way of knowing that we're doing what we need to do."
> –COLLABORATIVE STAFF, 7/8/21

> "If [families] need immediate assistance, I search for resources, then meet them and provide those resources. With new-new families, I follow up with them weekly to make sure they're following up with the steps."
> –COLLABORATIVE STAFF, 7/30/21

FAMILY GOALS

In interviews with Spanish-speaking families, goals were a central part of their work with collaboratives. Families identified their own internal motivations for pursuing certain activities beyond just collaborative input. Many of the participants mentioned that learning English was a goal that they wished to accomplish:

> "I'd like to have better opportunities and be able to communicate with others because it's frustrating not being able to understand. Like, if I go to the DMV, I have to ask for help. So, I do want to learn English to be able to communicate with others."
> –FAMILY MEMBER, 7/20/21

Some participants remarked that their collaborative case managers have encouraged them to attend English classes as steps towards another goal, often related to work and financial stability. "I told [case manager] that I'd like to open a restaurant but she told me I'd have to learn English because I don't know English." Another participant commented, "I'd like to learn more English and get a better job. I'd like to get a job in health or an office, helping people." Collaborative case managers echoed these claims, noting they felt that English was an avenue for families to find better job opportunities:

> "...When we do ESL and GED, we talk about the importance of education from a financial end. You are doing this so you can thrive but this is going to open up doors for employment —maybe when the promotion comes but maybe you were looked over before but now because your English is better and you have your GED maybe that wage goes up from $15 to $20 and the motivation in the money."
> –COLLABORATIVE STAFF, 7/20/21

Another goal often mentioned by participants was that of buying a home, although this goal is often accompanied with the acknowledgement of the financial challenges of saving enough money. A family member stated, "I want to have my own house but we don't have the money. It's difficult to save; everything goes on expenses right now." Some families reported that the collaboratives have been supportive by providing information on the process of obtaining home ownership, "[Collaborative case manager] also taught us how to buy a house so others don't take advantage of us...," while others noted not being at the stage in which they are ready to ask for advice. A number of families mentioned that their goal was to secure a house in their home country, often for their elderly parents or in the instance of their own return "My husband is building a home back in our home country. Our family goal is to finish it so we could use it in the future..." The recurrence of this goal highlights the prevalence of family unity and togetherness in these families' lives, despite the distance and sacrifices that must be made.

Family members also described goals for their children instead of themselves when asking specifically about what goals they hoped to achieve in the future. Family members often mentioned wanting their children to do well in school, become well educated and obtain a good job. Additionally, they mentioned their children as motivating factors to achieving their own goals:

> "I would like to see that [my children] finish school and go to a university and have a career. [My daughter] says she wants to be a doctor when she grows up...She is very smart, when the teacher asks a question, she answers very fast...I tell my husband that we have to work hard so they can get a professional career and be great, so they don't suffer what we suffer, so they can get a good job."
> –FAMILY MEMBER, 7/28/21

> "That's why I tell [my sons] to study a lot, so that they're someone in life. I don't want them to be una mensa ['a moron'] like me. I want them to know both English and Spanish. I make them study Spanish. My husband tells me 'You want your sons to be like that, then why don't you learn English!'"
> –FAMILY MEMBER, 8/9/21

Often, the goals families shared in interviews had no immediate connection to their individual needs or ambitions. As best described by a collaborative staff member, "they don't want their family working in a field for 12 hours bending over picking up cucumbers, but it amazes me to see how the parents are okay with it —they brought their kids here and they want their kids to do professional jobs—certainly there is a generational perspective on what their kids can become."

GOAL-SETTING

Collaborative case managers employ many different strategies for setting goals with families, including letting the family define their own goals, getting to the "why" behind the stated goal, setting motivational goals for the family, and helping them connect short-term goals towards longer-term goals. In initial intake with families, collaborative case managers shared that to set goals they must learn about the whole family first, which helps them conceptualize goals for the family. One collaborative case manager stated, "…on intake you'll learn about the whole family and the intake will tell you part of the family. There will be taboo questions…It gives us the opportunity to ask hard questions and help them better…We invite them to have more goals if we see that their family could benefit."

Collaborative case managers also mentioned that often families first identify a large goal such as buying a house, however the collaborative case manager works with the family to identify smaller goals which lead to the larger goal, "Another example could be [they] want to open a bank account because they are really looking to buy a house…When faced with their main goal we can help them with other goals. Such as credit booster, budgeting —it started with opening a bank account but now we know more about their family dynamics." The family dynamics and goals are seen as interconnected by collaborative case managers. A declared goal by the family sheds insight into the family needs and dynamics. As another collaborative staff explained:

> "Some families are focused on 'I need to work, provide for my family, have a roof over our head, have food, send money back to my home country…' As long as they have that, they're content. For other families, maybe they're in a relationship with their partner that is not the best, so they want to get out of that situation. In that case, we help them find a job so they can form an exit plan."
>
> –COLLABORATIVE STAFF, 7/30/21

Goals for family advocates are not always defined as large and small, as one collaborative case manager stated, "Every step to the big goal is a goal itself." However, collaborative case managers identified that families often do not view steps to a larger goal as equally important goals. A collaborative case manager described that often families are only thinking about short term goals that can be achieved very quickly, "Many of the families think very short term for today or today after tomorrow. We have to make them realize that their goals are not for tomorrow they are for the next year. That is a challenge." This difference in the timeline for achieving goals between collaborative case managers and families has been attributed to differences in cultural perception of time. As one collaborative case manager stated, "It's a cultural challenge— it's very different from American culture. The time term of the vision is super short–tomorrow."

Collaborative case managers also reflected on how they communicated with families about their goals. Often mentioning that families were given the opportunity to set their own goals and the importance of not being "pushy" with families about staying on track with their set goals. Collaborative case managers mentioned, "…we lose focus on staying on track to achieve the goals. That's why I try to be cheering for them and try not to be pushy" and "I let the family tell me what goals they want to set. I don't want to tell them what goals to set. I let them tell me why, because maybe that could lead us to other goals as well." In speaking with families, understanding the "why" of the goal is important for building trust and developing additional goals. As a collaborative case manager commented, "Basically, we start conversations like friends so you can know why they need that assistance."

Independence was also mentioned as an ultimate goal that the collaborative case manager is trying to see the family achieve. Additionally, some collaboratives had different strategies for setting goals with families. Instead of having the family define goals, the collaborative case manager would set concrete goals related to attaining independence:

> "To determine the goals we ask pointed questions such as do you have a library card? We make that a goal to make sure the volunteer can show them how to access those resources. 'Do you have a driver's license? Do you want your citizenship as a goal?'"
>
> –COLLABORATIVE STAFF, 6/23/21

A challenge to setting goals was the fatigue that families reported feeling when the goals seemed unobtainable. To combat this feeling, collaborative case managers try to "break it into microsteps—not only do they see a sense of success, but it's also a step towards the larger thing." Collaborative case managers also mentioned that families get busy and start to focus less on goals due to having other more pressing responsibilities; it was also stated that the pandemic impacted goal-setting. Some collaborative case managers had the perspective that goals should not be rushed with families, a collaborative case manager commented, "good goals should take a while." Moreover, it is important to take into account the entirety of family dynamics before making changes towards goal. For instance, a collaborative staff member offered an example on cutting expenses for budgeting purposes, "Maybe their schedules are really full, and they spend [their family time] on their favorite show. Maybe it's their only source of entertainment — there's a lot of different reasons, but it's not as cut and dry as let's get rid of cable." This highlights the importance of taking into account all aspects of families' lives and activities while suggesting changes to meet their goals.

The goal setting process uses understanding of family dynamics to develop the goals which best fit the needs of the family. Both the family and the collaborative case manager work in collaboration to develop multiple goals. The long-term aim for the collaborative case manager is independence for the family. For families, the long-term aim is the achievement of a stated goal such as buying a home. Goal-setting is one of the core elements of case managers' role in families' lives.

FAMILY ACTION

INDEPENDENCE

The theme of independence was identified by both collaborative staff and participant families. For collaborative staff, independence was mentioned in the context of shifts in independence for families due to their immigration to the United States with a collaborative staff member stating, "…here they are learning to drive (for the first time) and have their freedom and that's a big cultural change which implies that women back there that don't have the same authority in the house." Collaborative staff also spoke about independence for families in relation to the mission of their work at their collaborative commenting, "We are trying to have them be more independent so they don't always just rely on us" and "we're working with them to help them grow, build independence."

Although collaborative staff often spoke of independence for families as part of the long-term goals for families, families spoke about their independence in the context of experiences. Families mentioned independence as a tool for achieving future goals. A family member stated, "I would like to have another vehicle for me in the future. This way I don't have to depend on another person." Other families spoke about independence in the context of ways in which they maintained their independence. Families commented, "Even if my English is not perfect, I handle my own paperwork" and "I was left without a job. I started selling food, I had told my husband's coworkers. I make them Guatemalan food, breakfast, and lunch. I

make some money to pay the rent." And while some families named the collaborative as a connector to resources, others asserted that they had achieved their success solely on their own efforts.

> "No one has really helped me find resources. I don't have a source of support. I have done everything on my own."
>
> –FAMILY MEMBER, 8/18/21

Families also described independence as a long-term skill set that they hoped to instill in their children, "… when I'm no longer here, I want them (their children) to know how to do things for themselves" and "My children prepare their own food. They're very independent." The importance of developing independence in their children was mentioned frequently by families:

> "I'm teaching her to be an autonomous person and worker. I don't want to give her everything. I want to teach her to fight for her dreams and to study and fight for what she wants, to learn that everything requires work. We might want a thousand things for her but it's up to her."
>
> –FAMILY MEMBER, 7/26/21

A family member mentioned challenges to the independence that is expected for mothers within the United States stating, "[My husband] is against me leaving the children with someone just so I can go work." From interviews with both families and collaborative staff, independence is understood in different ways. For collaborative staff, independence for families is a key element to their goal-setting and long-term mission of their work with families. For families, independence is focused on future skill sets in children as well as past and present experiences of working to maintain independence. Cultural differences in expectations of independence were also mentioned.

RESOURCEFULNESS

The theme of resourcefulness was often spoken about in the context of information sharing, navigation of barriers and connections to outside resources. The collaborative staff mentioned examples of when they were able to assist families outside the context of the traditional resources offered by the collaborative:

> "…[O]ne of our mentors was helping a mom get mental health counseling. She didn't have insurance, but [the mentor] was able to get her services without insurance. The mentors sometimes have resources that we don't because of their own experiences."
>
> –COLLABORATIVE STAFF, 8/18/21

Collaborative staff often mentioned that providing resources to families was an integral part of the job regardless of if those resources were immediately available at their specific collaborative. Collaborative staff were part of a shared network of other resources that were given to families. A collaborative staff member characterized the collaborative as a "one stop shop" for resources. The challenge of working with undocumented families was mentioned in the context of difficulty getting resources to families due to their status. However, collaborative staff mentioned creative ways for providing needed services to these families:

> "I can't go the traditional way to get them services because they don't qualify. I use a community or resources that the community offers and that families give to me. Someone will tell me who's paying under the table, or who is staying at home taking care of other children. I have to use other resources than traditional to bring the community together."
>
> –COLLABORATIVE STAFF, 7/30/21

Families spoke about specific experiences in which they used resourcefulness to solve an issue which was occurring within their family or community. A family member stated, "I used to like to go to my library but since the pandemic I now get virtual books. I have about 300 virtual books." Another family member mentioned, "I'm doing better but I have to pay for medication, but I found a pharmacy that gives me discounts" and "I remember I used to have a little booklet where I'd write down the directions to everywhere I went in case I needed to go there again or I was lost."

As families reflected on their past experiences, they also demonstrated a resilience that contributes to their ability to withstand even the most dire of situations. These families have made difficult decisions: leaving their home and loved ones behind for decades, sacrificing savings and family and leisure time for better opportunities, quickly taking on new skills and roles to move forward, and adapting their vision of their futures to an ever-changing environment. Trust in their work and abilities, patience during trying times, gratitude for what they have, and acceptance of the things they cannot change are some of the coping mindsets that have helped them navigate the challenges of immigrating to the United States:

> "Thinking about where we started…we had few resources in Honduras, but we always had food, shelter, and water. Here, we lacked food and shelter. I'm glad that only my husband and I went through that, and not the children. We have all the basic things. We don't have anything in excess but we also don't lack anything… we won't starve because there is work."
>
> –FAMILY MEMBER, 8/16/21

Both collaborative staff and families used resourcefulness to navigate barriers to access due to undocumented status, language barriers and financial insecurity among other challenges. Collaborative staff approached these challenges through resource sharing and understanding community networks. Families mentioned specific instances of problem solving which often reflected on past experiences and centered on adjustment to life in the United States.

FAMILIAL OBLIGATION

The theme of family obligation addresses the ways in which families value supporting and taking care of each other and their extended family despite the hardships that may cause. Collaborative staff spoke of their experience observing the obligations that families have which often cause additional financial strain. A collaborative staff member described both their own personal experience as well as what has been observed in working with families:

> "It's like a double standard. They are willing to do whatever for their kids —working 16 hours for their kid to remain here even though they don't remain here. What I want to make sure of is that I would like to tell you that when we moved here we had to relearn the values that the immigrant community had because I knew the values from my country but we had to relearn that another value is having to prove back home that you made it. In Mexico, a big value is family. Family took precedence over your job situation. Here in theory it's the same value but the means to help the family is very different. They are trying to help the family through economic stability."
>
> –COLLABORATIVE STAFF, 6/29/21

The value of family over financial stability is reiterated in interviews with families with a family member commenting, "I still send money to Mexico. My mom is by herself. I have less savings now." Despite the sacrifices that come with familial obligation, often to family members still living in their home country, being able to support their extended family was described as a point of pride for many families:

> "I am proud because when I came from Guatemala I couldn't help my parents. We didn't have anything. We didn't have a place to live. Now thanks to God I have my house and every month we send them money so they can eat. Thanks to God I met the father of my children, I have my children and I always work. I worked in a restaurant for 11 years, so I could save a little money to make a house for my parents. I'm proud of it because I would have never made it in Guatemala. Even if I send them $100 it's like $800 over there, they can eat for a month. When I worked in Guatemala I earned $600 a month."
>
> –FAMILY MEMBER, 7/28/21

Families also spoke about their obligation to their children as well as their children's obligation to them. A family member commented, "My son doesn't like his dad to spend money because he says his dad works a lot." Families also mentioned the sacrifices they make for their children, "What if I die tomorrow and [my son] is left with the idea that his dad never took him [to the beach]. What's the point of saving money if I cannot give them (my children) what they want?" Family obligation was mentioned by families in the context of the value of family. Collaborative staff also observed this relationship to family which puts family support and sacrifice above individual needs and financial stability.

COMMITMENT TO COMMUNITY

The theme of community commitment was mentioned by collaborative staff as an integral part of their work and effectiveness in providing services to the community. Collaborative staff mentioned many events which involved having multiple community partners provide resources and support through events stating, "We did volunteer barbers with haircuts with food and everyone who came brought something" and "Once, a whole family got COVID, so we delivered essential things to them. The whole family made a full recovery, and we were part of that by delivering items to the home." Collaborative staff also shared their thoughts on what community commitment meant from the perspective of the collaborative stating:

> "I think that the most important thing is the community being created and existing. People want to be associated with and it's been developed that it's an organization that's part of the community that lives next door to them—that is the family advocate and teaches the GED class. People volunteer because they associate it with part of us."
>
> –COLLABORATIVE STAFF, 6/25/21

Collaborative staff also commented that having staff at the collaborative that valued community commitment was vital to success with families, "…We are trying to build a community. Building those relationships and connecting. When people really trust you and know you well."

To an extent, civic engagement was mentioned in conjunction with volunteer events and classes provided by the collaboratives. Collaborative staff mentioned events such as park cleaning, volunteer work at a food pantry and classes such as citizenship and census workshops which promoted civic engagement. A collaborative staff member stated, "The community in general is caring and look out for each other by nature of the community. There's eyes to look out and volunteer. This is something that we want to encourage and foster because it can disappear over time." Other collaborative staff mentioned civic engagement as a core element of their work commenting:

> "We always set citizenship as a goal. We want the family to understand how they can understand how to be part of a democracy and where they fit and the roles. I can imagine they might feel that everything is set up against them but we want to understand there are laws that work for them."
>
> –COLLABORATIVE STAFF, 6/23/21

Families spoke less directly about civic engagement but did mention being involved in volunteer events and wanting more events that focus on giving back and caring for the community. Families mentioned their experience of community commitment and hopes of being more involved in the future with a family stating:

> "Where I live there are a lot of elderly who wouldn't leave their houses. I'd see that the school was giving out food, but many families wouldn't come out to take it. So I asked if I could take it to the elderly, and I'd deliver them to the houses and pack them food or treats. I would tell the ladies that I needed extra food to give to the elderly because they couldn't come out or didn't have a method of transportation."
>
> –FAMILY MEMBER, 7/27/21

Another family member shared, "WIC used to give me juice and food that I don't use, so I donate[d] that food, which felt wasteful," expressing awareness of the needs in the community and a desire to support others in overcoming barriers. Overall, families shared experiences of working within the community to help others and related that as positive for their family.

AGENCY COLLABORATION

Agency collaboration was a key component for success at the institutional and family levels. Collaboration was mentioned in aspects of staff collaboration, connections with other agencies (either partner agencies, other collaboratives, or external organizations), and community partnerships. Concentrating on collaboration proved vital for efficiency, communication, and strategy adjustments within agencies. Collaboratives expressed the importance of task delegation to agency operations. One staff member mentioned being responsible for family nights and college tours, while another staff member coordinated the after-school program. Another collaborative had two staff members coordinate the needs of families, collectively working to serve families. One agency embraced collaboration through regular meetings, allowing everyone to discuss their updates and enhancing staff teamwork. Other agencies explained how they incorporated staff collaboration in their regular programming.

> "One of the things I did as well, like everyone should have their own part to discuss their own matters, updates…just to have the involvement of all partners. I think that has helped us a lot to work together…[w]e're all involved now, anytime they say: 'you know I'm still working on this and that', we are all brainstorming on what to do next. What resources we can provide… For the collaborative, it's important for us to communicate things that are ongoing issues… I feel like it's very important for everyone to be involved and take part. And that's what a collaborative should be about…"
>
> –COLLABORATIVE STAFF, 7/8/21

One collaborative holds a separate meeting with representatives from each partner agency just to focus on family case discussions. To this collaborative, family case conferences are unique opportunities for agencies to collaborate on analyzing and improving a families' progress. Staff members mentioned the significance of family case conferences and meetings as an approach to involve all partners. One staff member stated, "I find that as a collaborative it's great that we meet often, at least once a month sometimes twice a month. We hold case conferences where all the collaboratives are involved. We also hold a collaboration meeting."

Ongoing relationships with other collaboratives and external organizations are commonplace, enabling agencies to provide comprehensive resources for families. Collaboratives work closely with fellow PSF collaborative grantees and external organizations to provide extensive services and programming for families, ranging from literacy programs to cooking classes. When collaborative families expressed interest in specific topics, it directed staff members to identify partner organizations and local resources.

One collaborative stated, "Some families may have expressed interest in English classes, and in that case, we refer them to [other PSF collaborative]," another said, "...we only take very beginners. If they are at a higher level, we send them to Rowan University, Camden County College...we only make referrals if they have received the furthest we can provide for them." Other staff members explained the role of partner organizations in supporting families.

> "...once we assign [a family] to the [collaborative case manager] they might realize that something the family is saying that might be better for [other PSF collaborative]—if a [collaborative case manager] hears that family is interested in college, [they] will say we have this program and let me see if I can sign your child up for this thing. A lot of times we have a student base for [other PSF collaborative] and will transfer them back that way. Again, we do try to keep everyone somewhat abreast of the other projects so that when they are digging through their resources that comes to mind." –COLLABORATIVE STAFF, 7/20/21

> "We have an agreement with [a] Chef...[He] does personalized boxes of the food and you just cook at home...He'll be on Zoom preparing these meals with families and they'll be provided their own boxes at home to prepare these meals. We're always looking at what we can change and what we can do to work together to better support our families."
>
> –COLLABORATIVE STAFF, 7/8/21

A vital piece to collaborative partnerships is the relationship with the party that agencies serve—families and communities. Staff members utilized a collaborative approach for serving families, which instilled an appreciation for strong relationships between agencies and the community. A key component to this approach was to maintain a community-based perspective, actively engaging families through their progress. One staff member explained that "...one thing we do is the college tours [and] require that some type of family member come with you on the tours—to build up the network and community with these kids." Collaboratives were responsible for teaching and guiding families, but the synergetic relationship with families and communities yielded a mutually beneficial learning experience.

> "When I started them virtually, I met/called them and asked what needs they had. I also tell them things we have going on. I told them about the events [our collaborative] has throughout the week, but also about events at CASA and other partners." –COLLABORATIVE STAFF, 8/20/21

> "...yes, we love the collaborative approach between volunteers and students. We try to instill in volunteers that it's not a hierarchy. We are working together and let your students also be teachers and learn from your students. Volunteers report learning more from their students..."
>
> –COLLABORATIVE STAFF, 6/23/21

SUCCESS

Over the course of the pandemic individuals participating in the WFCRA interviews commented several times about educational ambitions. From studying English to achieving a GED level degree to collecting a certificate of completion for classes, adults show a clear desire to engage in new learning opportunities. Collaborative case managers also reflected on the experiences families have when achieving their goals, often highlighting this as the one of the best aspects of their work. Collaborative staff often remarked that being part of a family's success brings them the greatest joy. Over the course of several interviews many program employees shared just how close they feel to those they assist and even had the chance to celebrate their educational victories.

> "Seeing them happy and then, for example—the last family I worked with passed the last section of the GED. When she was on the way there she was texting me. She was so nervous, so I was telling her not to be nervous and that she was smart and when she finished she was the first person to let me know. I love to see the success of the family." –COLLABORATIVE STAFF, 6/25/21

In addition to working on purely educational pursuits many families and program employees discussed the process of acclimating to the United States. Finding community in the time of COVID-19 is extremely challenging, so when a participant mentioned this achievement it was clearly notable. Learning English to communicate with others outside of their Spanish-speaking communities became a priority but activities like getting a driver's license, speaking to a lawyer about US residency, and finding work were also mentioned as important achievements.

> "Another thing that makes me happier than most is when they achieve a goal that makes them feel like they are in their home and not in a foreign country—like yes we are in a community. That's my favorite (part of) goal setting. It can look like a lot—like learning English, GED, getting a driver's license. It makes them feel like they are not wandering around."
>
> –COLLABORATIVE STAFF, 6/29/21

It is normal for goals to be adjusted and flexible. As noted by several participants there have been times over the past year when things did not go explicitly to plan. Regardless, collaborative staff from the separate programs have reiterated how they work with others in the community to ensure aspirations move forward. One employee went so far as to say achievement levels have been on the rise as of late but added that attendance is a crucial part of such trends.

> "Sometimes we have families that start a goal and this happens often and get busy with life, and we understand it has happened especially during the pandemic, where we have to adjust their goals. I know they set this goal but they have a lot on their plate right now and can't focus on it right now. They have set goals, but because they have things going on, things change in the household. So we do have the case where they're not achieving their goals because whatever is going on in their house." –COLLABORATIVE STAFF, 7/8/21

CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS

Collaborative staff and families spoke to a variety of barriers that are inherent to their living environment, the psychological process of adapting to a new culture, and external perspectives placed upon them that make it all the more challenging for them to work towards achieving their goals.

PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

HOME ENVIRONMENT

Throughout interviews, families described very complex living situations in which they often have to balance home, work, childcare, and health activities within a small living space with limited income, resources, and nearby support networks. Participants indicated that housing availability for immigrant families is limited due to the documentation and payments required upfront, and because many would not qualify for housing assistance programs. Moreover, rent prices have increased over the years across all three counties (Pries, 2021). One family member noted that "Now there is no cheap housing. It's difficult to find a home and the rent is high everywhere. Nothing for less than $1300-$1400," an observation which is congruent with recent estimates for Cumberland county based on the American Community survey (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019a). Even if families were willing to trade space for affordability, they still expressed concerns around living costs such as food and utility bills. "My apartment is one bedroom and too small for a washer and dryer. My light bill is also very expensive."

In order to afford housing, some families reported sharing housing with non-relatives and strangers, leading to uncomfortable dynamics. One participant described having to persuade their housemate because he was unwilling to get the COVID-19 vaccine, and this made the participant fearful for her family. Another participant complained that her housemates are loud and make it difficult for her family to relax at the end of the day.

> "I would like to get a house. A house that isn't too big and that is just one floor so we could be more relaxed. The people like to drink and play music. Sometimes I just want to come home and relax but they make a lot of noise. I'd like to get a house in a much quieter place."
>
> —FAMILY MEMBER, 7/27/21

Other families shared that their living arrangements constrain them to share small living spaces, in some cases having the entire family sleeping in one room. At times, this could lead to an overwhelming intersection of responsibilities that ultimately impact families' time and well-being. For instance, one participant explained that her long working hours impact her children health as well as their family relationship:

> "The later I go to sleep, the later my kids go to bed. When my children were in school, they would also go to bed at like 11pm when I do, and then the next day they would wake up all groggy... I've spent most of my time working, and not spending it with my children. My children spend most of their time in their rooms."
>
> –FAMILY MEMBER, 6/29/21

Many families expressed the desire to find better accommodations or even buy a home, but collaborative staff discussed how they have to be mindful of intersecting barriers and help families identify which challenges to tackle first.

> "Some families are living in a room with the children, and the partner is the only one who works. I ask what they want. If mom wants to work, then first we gotta figure out childcare."
>
> —COLLABORATIVE STAFF, 7/30/21

CHILDCARE

Childcare was commonly a responsibility that takes priority over everything else. Mothers explained that their plans to work and study were pushed back until their children were older. Mothers identified the cost of daycare and their distrust of unknown caregivers as the main concerns. One participant shared that her child had come back with a scratch that the daycare would not account for; and even if it had been accidental, this led the mother to question how closely the daycare staff was watching her child.

> "I want to find a job, in anything. My children are little. Maybe I'll look when my [youngest] child starts talking. Right now they can't tell me if they're being taken care of well or not."
>
> –FAMILY MEMBER, 8/16/21

Many families who said they would prefer to leave their children with a trusted relative do not have any within feasible distance. One mother who is fortunate enough to have her family in a nearby town explained that the commute between her home, her family's home, and her work results in a commute of at least two hours twice a day.

Mothers who stay at home to meet the family's childcare needs explained that they attempted joining some of the collaborative's online programming that became available during the pandemic. In particular, the availability of remote English classes alleviated the burden for these mothers to have to find alternative childcare. However, many mothers found that their student responsibilities simply got piled onto their childcare duties.

> "I went to the nighttime class but the children knocked on the door. My husband is supposed to watch them but he just said they had been crying because they wanted me."
>
> —FAMILY MEMBER, 7/29/21

> "I think that as soon as the kids start school I could focus more on my English because with them being home I find it more difficult... I didn't have any inconvenience with the technology. It was just more organization with the children. I was there for two hours and the kids would be crying and calling me."
>
> —FAMILY MEMBER, 7/20/21

Being in charge of childcare, house responsibilities, and any educational or work commitments was exhausting for the mothers interviewed. It is clear that they view raising their children as the priority, but many acknowledged the loss of their time and personal development. Collaborative staff explained that this balancing act is one of the main barriers to adult engagement in activities, especially targeted toward children and students. "They were more than satisfied that someone was mentoring their kid…they felt like they just needed a break sometimes."

Childcare responsibilities intensified during the pandemic. Children were home longer and now had responsibilities of their own with virtual schooling. Mothers reported having to sit with their younger children to make sure they would pay attention.

TRANSPORTATION

Challenges related to transportation were prevalent among participants from all three counties. Several families expressed that the bus system in their area is insufficient for their needs, including going to the store, their children's schools, and appointments. Distance and inaccessible transportation deter families from engaging in collaborative programming such as English classes or activities for their children, indicating that even the distance between Vineland and Bridgeton made their attendance unfeasible. Lack of public transportation presents an issue also for families who possess a family car. The car is often used by the employed adult as transportation to work, while the adult responsible for homecare and childcare has to seek alternative forms of transportation, wait for the car to become available, or have someone else drive them.

> "Their dad works, and I stay at home. When we have appointments in Camden, their dad takes them in their car. On the weekends, he gets the groceries for me. I am in charge of making the appointments."
>
> –FAMILY MEMBER, 8/9/21

> "The car is a necessity not a luxury anymore; you need to mobilize yourself. I don't have a car because we don't have insurance, license, etc."
>
> –FAMILY MEMBER, 7/30/21

Walking is a common method of mobility to nearby destinations, weather-permitting; however, further destinations, usually those related to medical appointments, require the use of taxis. Although most families reported being able to afford occasional taxi rides, those who require more frequent medical appointments noted transportation as a significant, often detrimental expense.

> "Transportation is basic. Most people don't have a vehicle. I think that's one of the problems here. There should be better transportation in Bridgeton. There are many who probably don't have enough for a taxi."
>
> –FAMILY MEMBER, 7/30/21

> "Yes, we have one car. I usually use a taxi to get around. When I go to the clinic/doctor's office it's $10 each way."
>
> –FAMILY MEMBER, 8/16/21

> "When [my eldest son] was going to regular school, I'd get called to come to school like eight times a week. He used to throw things, so they called me over to help clean up after him. I was spending so much money on taxis that we didn't have money for food. I wanted to die."
>
> –FAMILY MEMBER, 8/9/21

Alternative transportation services for special activities were noted to be helpful when available. For instance, families noted that collaborative staff at times drive them to official appointments, and some collaborative staff confirmed that this is a service they provide based on availability. In another case, one family member pointed out that her son obtained transportation through a friend and his high school to reach his work study program in another town. Specialized medical transportation services were notably absent in participants' mentions of helpful services. In fact, complications around scheduling and waiting times made it more feasible to coordinate the use of the shared family car, even if it interfered with other responsibilities.

> "The specialist doctor for my son is in Egg Harbor. My husband takes me because public transportation is too much. They used to provide transportation, but it was very difficult and I had to wait a long time. Medicaid used to cover the transportation for the appointments. My husband has to miss work [when he takes us to appointments] but he makes it to work. He said his son's appointments are more important so he does not mind."
>
> –FAMILY MEMBER, 7/13/21

Both collaborative staff and families referenced the change in New Jersey law that expands the documentation required to obtain a state driver's license (Nieto-Munoz, 2021) as a positive development. Collaborative staff reported that workshops and assistance with paperwork were in high demand, and several families indicated they had started the process or were already waiting for appointments. This change has provided a great relief to families. Not only would this save them the complicated process of traveling north or out of state to renew their foreign documents, but this will also protect them from having to incur high fees for driving with a foreign license.

> "Whenever a police officer has stopped me, the first thing they ask me is my license. Many don't validate the Mexican license, and they give me a ticket, and I have to show up to court. I go by myself, without a lawyer, and I show my Mexican license to the prosecutor, and they reduce my charges... A police officer saw that my headlights weren't working and he stopped me, and gave me a ticket for not having a license. It's about $600 for driving without a license. If I show my Mexican driver's license, then they charge me half."
>
> –FAMILY MEMBER, 8/18/21

SAFETY

Threats to families' safety manifested in different areas of their lives. Potential COVID-19 contagion was a widespread safety concern that led to many families immediately stopping their engagement in collaborative activities, "Right now with the pandemic, I don't attend any events. Because of the pandemic I get scared. Last year I was attending everything they offered." Another side effect of the COVID-19 pandemic was the increase in household tensions, raising the concerns for domestic violence. One collaborative staff confirmed that domestic violence is a prevalent concern in Hispanic households, and reported being aware of domestic violence in at least five families, with whom this staff was developing a counseling and exit plan at the time of the interview.

The most recurrent example of unsafe environment was that of violence in neighborhoods, especially as reported by participants living in Cumberland county. According to the crime reports from the New Jersey State Police, there were a total of 3,861 offenses in 2020, of which 669 were violent crimes (i.e.

murders, robberies, and assaults) (New Jersey State Police, 2020). Some families reported being aware of the pervasive violence vividly and coping with it by keeping each other safe:

> "We are scared with all of the dead bodies... a lot of shootouts in front of where I live. People were shooting in front of our house. No one got hurt. I didn't notice what had happened until my son told me. Once things are done [the police] come around. We try to lock ourselves in the house. My son gets home at 11pm. I am always waiting for him to get home."
>
> —FAMILY MEMBER, 7/6/21

Other families noted that the violence they witness pales in comparison to that of their home countries, concluding that the abundance of opportunities for parents and children outweighs the potential danger:

> "Here, there are no barriers. I like it because I've found work. I have peace. There, one lives in distress that your child might join a gang ["amras"]. That's possible here too but I feel it less. Because here they go to school, and if they don't want to go to school, they can go to work. But there, there isn't any work, so they get into bad things...Since I don't go out, I don't worry about crime, because I don't get involved with bad people. I feel like it's safe. On the last street I left, it wasn't. If one left something outside, someone would take it. We saw things that weren't normal, but we didn't make it our business. Since we didn't get involved in their things, they didn't get involved with us. One has to be very careful."
>
> —FAMILY MEMBER, 8/16/21

In Bridgeton, however, concern for children's safety is at the forefront of many parents' minds. Recalling the disappearance of Dulce Maria Alavez, a five-year-old who was kidnapped from Bridgeton City Park in a matter of minutes back in September of 2019 (Rule, 2021), many parents shared that they did not feel confident going out with their small children out of fear that they would also be kidnapped.

> "There is a park but I don't like to go to the park because I'm not used to going out alone since I have two little kids. I'm scared that they could get kidnapped, which is why I never go alone."
>
> —FAMILY MEMBER, 7/20/21

> "I also wish there were fences around the park. That's where they took that child. They should have some fencing around it. It's dark and scary in some parts. There is one side where it just dips and leads to the parking lot. Anybody there can just escape from any side. No one says anything; I don't even know where to go to talk about it. You can go down towards the weeds, or towards the side, and no one can see you. There are too many places to escape to. Since they took that girl, I don't take my children to that park. There are no other places to go to in Bridgeton... I thought this country was safer, that it wasn't like Mexico where they just kidnap children and rob you."
>
> —FAMILY MEMBER, 8/9/21

Both collaborative staff and families disclosed that families' sense of insecurity around their immigration status leads them to be more protective of their personal information.

> "We work with a lot of undocumented people and the climate within the country has been very intense within those families—there is a definitely a skepticism and that trickles down [to] being very protective about your identity, family makeup... is my information going to get somewhere that I don't want to get to? So the response is to stay hidden..."
>
> –COLLABORATIVE STAFF, 7/20/21

This protectiveness can present a barrier when families are required to fill out documents for their own legal procedures or that of their children. For instance, the application for financial aid and scholarships for college often requires a bank account, which requires an ITIN or a social security number. This is information that would make families identifiable, trackable, and consequently vulnerable to investigation or deportation. This concern extends to situations in which families are victims of a crime that requires them to press charges. Multiple families reported being robbed by acquaintances aware of their vulnerable immigration status. In this situation, families are afraid of going to the police directly; instead, they have reached out to collaborative staff for support navigating the process. One family participant shared her experience going to court with the support of her case manager:

> "One time a lady that rented a room from us robbed us of some money. We were trying to save on rent money and we trusted her... we went to court and we called her because she had threatened me with calling immigration. I got scared and told my [case manager] the situation, and she told me not to be scared and that we were going to call her to court to get the money back. My [case manager] went with me to court. She accompanied me to fill out the paperwork to bring her to court. She was a translator to me and thank God that the lady admitted to robbing me. They gave me the money back and immigration didn't get involved."
>
> —FAMILY MEMBER, 7/28/21

UNDOCUMENTED STATUS

Immigration status was a prevalent theme among families, particularly for family members who described themselves as undocumented or who did not possess legal U.S. documents (also known as "not having papers"). Families frequently mentioned their undocumented status as a source of uncertainty and fear that impacted access to basic resources and counsel, including but not limited to obtaining legal documents, pursuing employment opportunities, and accessing medical care.

UNCERTAINTY & FEAR

Participants without legal U.S. documents expressed their concerns with the challenges of navigating the intricate immigration system, many times feeling confused and skeptical of the resources they have access to. Some participants mentioned their experiences working with immigration lawyers, stating that, "...People always told me that my daughter could ask to straighten my immigration documents once she turned 21...I went to a lawyer, and they told me that it wasn't an option anymore, that she could no longer ask for me."

> "If I could fix my immigration papers I would be able to visit my mother in Mexico and return whenever I wished...The lawyer said he's not sure what any other lawyer could do for me. He also said he doesn't want me to waste my money, because it's a lot of money. And he doesn't want to take it to the judge and that they end up deporting me. I don't want to be deported just like that..." –FAMILY MEMBER, 8/18/21

Collaboratives are key community elements that understand the fear and challenges faced by the undocumented community. One collaborative explained that many undocumented families are still hesitant to come onboard their organization despite Bridgeton being a sanctuary city. Fear was mentioned as a concern for the undocumented community across a variety of areas and activities such as performing various procedures, providing information, and accessing resources. Participants mentioned experiencing uncertainty with their future because of their undocumented status.

> "Remember the thing is that the people don't feel comfortable with the process in a different state, not just in New Jersey. They are scared with the process for undocumented people, but the thing is that normally they don't know there are a lot of laws, that can protect them, and they don't know." –COLLABORATIVE STAFF, 6/30/21

> "We ask for a SSN [social security number] on the application [to ESL classes] but we ask for a SSN because one of the grants we receive asks for the SSN because we are receiving federal dollars, but it is not required. It's another barrier because Spanish speakers are scared when they see the SSN and think they need documentation." –COLLABORATIVE STAFF, 6/23/21

Collaborative staff creatively apply their knowledge and network to provide families with resources despite their status. Likewise, certain staff members possess unique fields of expertise that offer an advantage to navigating and locating resources. For instance, one collaborative mentioned the challenges of finding mental health counseling for one of their uninsured family members; however, one of the staff was a social worker and found services that didn't require insurance. In another anecdote, a collaborative staff member mentioned that the process for a basic financial cornerstone such as opening a savings account can be complicated by the requirement for specific documents. Considering the fear and uncertainty faced by the undocumented community, collaboratives report striving to reassure families of their mission to support and guide them, functioning as their—and many times their only—advocate.

> "For example, if they have problems at work, they're not aware that they could file a complaint. Some will treat people however they want even if they don't speak up. They don't believe they can do it, or they can't. People I know don't want to come to us because they think we'll give their documents to immigration...Some people live in fear and some others are aware that they have rights." –COLLABORATIVE STAFF, 6/23/21

> "In my area, 90% are undocumented immigrants and so they feared giving some information because, you know, the intake asks for a lot of information. So telling them to not have fear, we are here to serve them, here for them." –COLLABORATIVE STAFF, 6/25/21

Collaborative staff members also mentioned that it presents a serious obstacle in students' pursuit of higher education due to complications with the financial aid process, "...If there's anything parents come for...is [financial aid]. Understanding federal v.s. state aid, public v.s. private foundation...it does become more difficult when we are dealing with undocumented students." Another one stated, "...there is a factor with registration, enrollment, FAFSA, financial aid— it is paperwork heavy, and we have encountered families that don't have the stuff, and there is a level of skepticism." Undocumented status corresponds to fear in the life of families, hesitation to perform intake processes, and uncertainty of their future.

> "Sometimes there's fear to fill [forms] out. Many people lie because they want some help from the government, and they say 'Oh if I fill this out it will affect me?' At least in our case, it doesn't apply because we don't share any information, but with other programs, they don't know how they work because sometimes they ask for social security, etc, since they help to pay for bills. Energy assistance programs, I don't know how they work. So those programs ask for social, ITIN numbers, and they don't want to be affected by being part of those programs." –COLLABORATIVE STAFF, 6/25/21

> "The biggest obstacle is not having my citizenship and not knowing the language. It's what's the most difficult because if I had that it would be very different." –FAMILY MEMBER, 7/28/21

EMPLOYMENT

Employers' need for legal U.S. documents ("papers") is a barrier that restricts many undocumented people from accessing employment opportunities. Families mentioned receiving lower pay, limits to advancement opportunities, and ineligibility for employer benefits. Ineligibility for benefits like unemployment further exacerbates the consequences of missing a day of work or losing their job. Many families expressed that they could not afford to leave work.

> "I want to find another [job], because now everywhere they're asking you for legal documentation. The place I work now is temporary. The other job, months later they started asking you for legal documentation and I couldn't stay there, and I liked that job. With the company, you have benefits, vacations, personal days, etc. Without papers, you don't. You don't have any benefits or anything." –FAMILY MEMBER, 7/30/21

> "There are factories near here but they ask for legal documents. Many factories don't ask you for documents, but they pay you like $21/hr with documents. We wish to have a lot of things, but if you aren't a legal resident you can't really have those things." –FAMILY MEMBER, 7/30/21

Collaboratives equally encounter significant challenges trying to support undocumented individuals who face unemployment. One collaborative staff member explained that initially, people express their primary concerns, but after analyzing their situation, they realize the issue is beyond the surface. For instance, a person may present a need for rent assistance, but collaboratives realize that person has problems with employment because of the language barrier or because they are undocumented. Another collaborative staff member mentioned that providing housing assistance and resources to undocumented families remains a significant challenge, especially since they do not qualify for state support.

> "...[t]he second would be loss of employment for families. Especially for our Spanish families, because a lot are undocumented, and if they lost their job due to the pandemic, they don't receive unemployment. A lot of them have been through economic hardships, we are now trying to work with them and seeking other employment, other agencies can support this..." –COLLABORATIVE STAFF, 7/08/21

MEDICAL CARE

Many undocumented families are also uninsured, further complicating their situation to navigate the healthcare system and access medical care. Many of their families do not have insurance or know how to apply for it, causing families to endure negative financial impacts. Collaboratives support families by connecting them to resources and guiding them through the healthcare process.

> "I don't have insurance so I have to pay $270 per consult with the specialist. I've been going there and all my plans went down the drain. It took me two years to save the money I had. I did my taxes, I did overtime. Overtime helped me, but we don't get overtime anymore."
>
> –FAMILY MEMBER, 8/18/21

> "A lot of families don't have insurance or don't know how to apply for it. Asking about medical insurance, home situation, what rights they have because their kid is born here...It's always a matter of me asking them or them asking me." –COLLABORATIVE STAFF, 6/23/21

Already facing challenges in healthcare access and cost of care, family members also expressed concerns about their quality of healthcare. Neglect by healthcare providers was a common theme among families who accessed care; many revealed that providers ignored their needs and concerns until it was too late. The marginalization of families, rejection of care by hospitals, and consequent distrust in providers obligated some family members to seek medical care elsewhere. Some family members described having to depend on medical care from another country, where they felt their voice heard and their needs acknowledged. A participant recounted her experiences with the healthcare system in the United States. Having witnessed two relatives die shortly after hospital visits, she started seeking medical care in Mexico for fertility treatments. "I don't trust [the doctors]. All the analyses came out fine, but look at [my relative] who was "fine" and he died. That's why I went to Mexico..." This woman had already undergone fertility treatments in the United States with no result. Upon getting a second opinion in Mexico, she learned that she was producing high levels of a hormone that interfered with her ability to conceive, a diagnosis that had never been suggested by any of her doctors. "In Mexico, they believe in certain illnesses they don't believe in here...They gave me some pills and quickly got pregnant. It cost a fraction of the $20,000 [the US treatment costs]. Plus, they checked me for ovulation and follow-up care." Her poor experiences with medical professionals led her to question the care American doctors provided her children nowadays. "My oldest had a fever. In Mexico, they gave him meds, and he was fine by the end of the day. Here, he was vomiting bile. I told that to the doctor through a translator. They didn't give him any meds, told me to have him drink liquids, and to come back if he kept vomiting. He did, and the doctor sent me meds for vomiting and nausea, but not antibiotics or anything. Luckily, my mom gave me some child probiotics she had [from Mexico], and my child got better. The doctor never told me what it could have been."

DISCRIMINATION

Growing up in an immigrant background there are various struggles that families have to go through, and worry about in their day to day lives. One of these things is discrimination. Discrimination does not always occur through words but also actions and the way people behave towards a person. Some participants expressed their discomfort and fear in their environment. They did not feel safe where they lived because of how their fellow neighbors reacted towards them.

> "I'd like to live good, live peacefully. I would like there to be less discrimination. I used to live in an apartment but I moved into a house we bought. We had neighbors that didn't like us. My son had bought chickens and the neighbor had taken a gun out on my husband and was saying things. We don't understand English so we couldn't understand. This happened last year. Luckily, the neighbor sold his house and no longer lives there." –FAMILY MEMBER, 8/17/21

Experiencing discrimination can be a lot more complicated when it is harder for people to have the words and ability to fight back. Participants expressed their need to learn English, so not only can they communicate better and get a job, but also so they can be taken seriously by others.

> "When they see that you're Hispanic and that you don't speak English, they don't pay you as much attention as they do to those who speak English." –FAMILY MEMBER, 7/29/21

> "If there's an issue, it's tough to call the police. I once called the police for something and I spoke in my [broken] English and they said "I don't speak with Hispanics." People don't call the police when they don't have papers because they're afraid." –FAMILY MEMBER, 7/19/21

Discrimination affects people's lives one way or another, and it is harder for one to stand up for themselves when they do not have the ability to do so whether it is because of fear, not being able to speak the language, or ignorance from society.

NAVIGATION OF CULTURES AND SYSTEMS

LANGUAGE BARRIER

Many of the collaborative families immigrate from diverse countries, with most families being Spanish-speakers. This was a challenge for collaboratives, especially those who did not have Spanish-speaking staff. Likewise, this was a significant barrier in the life of each family, specifically with medical visits, transportation, and even safety. Many participants mentioned their difficulty with the pronunciation of the language, hindering their communication with other people, and fearing they would be misunderstood. One participant even said that, "...if I spoke English, nothing would be difficult. It makes me sad when I see people who do know the language but don't do anything with it." Participants gave insight into their difficulties navigating the English language in a new country.

> "Knowing English, I could communicate better with my daughters. My daughters speak English at home. I could communicate better at school, with doctors, and make appointments without the need for a translator." –FAMILY MEMBER, 8/6/21

> "The pronunciation is very difficult for me, I try but I'm not good at it. I have tried using the phone to learn the pronunciation but I'm afraid they understand something other than what I say." –FAMILY MEMBER, 7/28/21

MENTAL HEALTH

Family members shared their personal stories of the struggles and barriers facing their mental health. Challenges with mental health included difficulties dealing with negative mental health symptoms, alcoholism of a family member, and frustrations with the COVID-19 pandemic. Notably, the pandemic exacerbated negative mental health symptoms, many families facing continuous isolation and depression as a consequence. As counseling and therapy shifted into virtual and phone call formats, it became less effective for some families. Equally important, family members expressed an evident need for counseling and mental health services—mainly services in Spanish—but with limited knowledge of resources.

> "My daughter actually had an anxiety attack from being in my house. No one noticed until my other daughter got up and looked for her, we had to call the police to help us find her, she was walking. She's 13. They found her walking in a street far away from the house. Apparently, she left at 9 pm and it was already 1 am, so she walked a lot. She can't stand being in the house anymore, she wants to go back to school. She was in therapy, but she stopped, I think the psychologist wasn't helping her because it was by talking on the phone." –FAMILY MEMBER, 7/30/21

> "I think I would get depressed in the pandemic with being home all the time. I was very isolated for the 8 months I was pregnant." –FAMILY MEMBER, 7/20/21

> "I was thinking, maybe looking for a way to get counseling for my children. My husband has alcohol problems. He can't help me the way I wish he could. That's why I work double. My husband doesn't want to go to rehab. He's still working, he does both [working and drinking]. I want counseling for all three of us. I haven't found anything. I asked my sister because her husband died from alcoholism. She found services for her children but lost the number since. For my children [I want counseling] in English, but for me in Spanish." –FAMILY MEMBER, 6/29/21

Even though some families acknowledge mental health concerns and the need for appropriate support, the topic is not commonly discussed and remains taboo across the population. Stigma and accessibility to Spanish counseling and mental health resources have been barriers for collaboratives to support families. Finding Spanish-speaking counselors is of particular difficulty, limiting the resources available. One collaborative is able to get quick appointments for families, but only because they have a personal connection in their network, otherwise lacking resources.

> "Specifically back to Spanish speaking families, there is a tendency to not want to air your dirty laundry and not want to get in—they come in with a problem but there is another problem they don't want to bring up—but I think with the number of our Hispanic families—we don't do counseling we're not talking about our stuff—maybe it's a little stronger to the hispanic families that can make life coaching and management a little more difficult." –COLLABORATIVE STAFF, 7/20/21

> "...we've talked a lot of about counseling/mental health in the Hispanic community is a double edged sword—they don't want to do counseling and talk about those types of things—you probably know this there is a definitely an alcohol problem particularly among men, and it is hard to find Spanish-speaking counselors and cumberland county doesn't have a great depth of counseling services—finding one that speaks Spanish is even more difficult." –COLLABORATIVE STAFF, 7/20/21

ADAPTING TO THE USA

Immigrating to a new country and navigating a new language, culture, and system brings challenges. Getting used to a new environment causes interrelational disconnects between parents and children. One collaborative staff member mentioned that in families whose children are the first generation in the United States, "...kids are at a complete disconnect from their parents. Starting with their language, and then culture at home." It becomes difficult for children to adapt to their parent's culture and establish respect, communication, and values. Parents end up feeling as if they're "stuck in two worlds." In contrast, some children abide by the deep-rooted values from their parents' culture, which influences their lifestyle.

> "Another area is that a lot of [parents] didn't go to college. Our students are first-time [first generation] college students. In their culture, it is always in the back of their head that they have to help their family. So it's about showing them they can do both, go to college and help." –COLLABORATIVE STAFF, 8/20/21

LACK OF INFORMATION

Access to information plays a vital role in ensuring community members are connected with resources. However, a lack of information confines the opportunities families can access, inhibiting their ability to succeed. Most commonly, participants mentioned difficulty accessing information regarding driver's licenses, immigration processes, and business-related resources. One collaborative staff member expressed that families sometimes struggle with revealing their needs, "...it's hard for them to let themselves be helped. I tell them it's okay and [sometimes] we need help…." This becomes a barrier for collaboratives to connect families to resources, "...I tell them with me, I don't even know if I will be applying for help we don't know [they need]." For this reason, trust and support between collaborative staff and families play a vital role in guiding families through information and providing them with adequate resources to meet their needs.

> "Information—knowing where to go and what to do. There is still a lot of lack of information or lack of trust and having places they can go to trust the information educationally with drivers license or immigration. For business—there is this available but they don't know about it." –COLLABORATIVE STAFF, 6/25/21

> "I think [a barrier is] the lack of knowledge for things. Let's say, for example, I want to take both of my kids to the pool for swimming lessons, but I don't know where I would go, I don't know if they would qualify because they weren't born here. Just like about the home-buying process, I don't know. Or Medicare." –FAMILY MEMBER, 7/20/21

NAVIGATION OF SYSTEMS

Collaborative staff provide information and resources to families, but a distinct consideration is the families' willingness and ability to pursue the resources and services available. Collaborative staff view themselves as navigators for families, leading them through the intricacies of various processes and applications as well as intimidating social interactions. One staff member talked about managing situations in which service providers are abrasive, "...sometimes people are not having a good day—so I'm like, I'm not gonna take it personally. I have a lot of patience, and this job has taught me a lot." Other staff members reveal that the families' attitude is sometimes a challenge, requiring staff members to have patience and maintain professionalism to support families. "They give up really easily. They're not patient with something…[a family member] se me desesperó ["got restless"] and stopped everything because it was taking longer than she thought. It's about patience and understanding how things work." Although some families pride

themselves in tackling administrative processes, collaborative staff members are aware that others may find these challenges overwhelming when combined with language barriers, immigration concerns, and just being new to the area. These are considerations that case managers keep in mind even as they focus on independence, encouraging families to become self-sufficient and self-advocates.

> "...Sometimes I help them figure out what they need because they don't know what they need. I don't know if that makes sense. For example, if they have problems at work, they're not aware that they could file a complaint. They didn't know they could do it... Our community still doesn't know that they can open a bank account because of immigration. It's always something new."
>
> –COLLABORATIVE STAFF (A), 6/23/21

> "...they expect me to do everything for them. I'll take you the first time and I'll show you how it's done. We'll show you the resources, but sometimes you gotta do it yourself. We want them to be independent."
>
> –COLLABORATIVE STAFF (B), 6/23/21

FINANCIAL (IN)STABILITY AND FOOD INSECURITY

When it comes to financial insecurities the responses made clear there is no single point of frustration. Participants are confronting harsh fiscal realities in which they are unable to receive many kinds of aid due to language barriers and immigration status. With prices increasing across many sectors, families are struggling to make ends meet and instead have to stretch their incomes further while supporting those around them. Undoubtedly the programs offered by several entities related to the WFCRA study are helping but results depend heavily on attendance, something not always adhered to for many reasons. However, some employees have managed to get adults in the community on the right path to alleviating their struggle.

> "'I need rent assistance', but when we start to talk, they say 'I don't have a job, I don't know how to speak English so it hard for me to get job, and my family is undocumented, I can't get food stamps'. So job, ESL, food, and insurance are four things you identified in one conversation. Okay, next step, we identified all your needs, next step, what are your services, what organizations can help this family. I ask, "do your children have social security numbers?" the mother answered "yes one of my children has a social security number" so with that we can start the process for food stamps. At that point, we start to see what exactly they need. So through the information already obtained you can start to find solutions."
>
> —FAMILY MEMBER, 6/30/21

In many of the responses the participants made clear the duties of the household. Often the father serves as the breadwinner and the mother remains home with the children in a more traditional gender role scenario. Many of the female participants did express a desire to work as well once their children are of age to be in school or take care of one another. Moreover, working adults were reported to have worked throughout the pandemic, even when sick, due to a lack of health resources and the need for income.

> "My husband works even when he's sick. He worked while having pneumonia. He was coughing blood. He went to the doctors and they gave him good pills and he got better. This was about 5 years ago. He only missed two days to go to the doctors."
>
> —FAMILY MEMBER, 7/13/21

Although English classes are the most popular type of program, classes regarding financial literacy are also prevalent in participant responses. Credit repair, shopping tips, and creating a bank account are often low cost or free thus encouraging members to attend more often. While not necessarily the most interesting courses, sometimes over complicated, and often lacking the large numbers of other classes, those which offered a look into a financially stable future coincide with many goals set by participants.

> "Financial and economic stability is really important for families to know about. Like saving, money management, and it's not always the top workshops that the families go to for some reason."
>
> —FAMILY MEMBER, 7/8/21

> "Also a financial literacy workshop on budgeting, banking, and how to buy a house. The financial literacy was well-attended."
>
> —FAMILY MEMBER, 6/23/21

Given the demographics of the WFCRA interviews it comes as no surprise that a great deal of instability comes from the trauma of immigration. Many participants retold aspects of their own journey and how it continues to haunt them in various forms. Now largely settled in the United States for a period of time, families are still not documented and struggle in the bureaucratic process of receiving residency. Meanwhile their bills continue to grow without the support of social safety net programs accessible by citizens. In some cases, debts have followed families as they had to take loans to even make it to the United States. Remittances also impact the day to day lives of immigrant families as they send money to their home country to support loved ones unable to make the journey north.

> "We have found some supplemental stuff to run those things. Talking about being undocumented limits the resources that we can access if it's utility access, if it's opening a bank account, home mortgage, student loans —all the money stuff can be tricky based on what your money looks like."
>
> —FAMILY MEMBER, 7/20/21

> "We had to pay off our debt for coming from Honduras. We worked at a restaurant and a hotel, and made about $600 and $500 every two weeks, respectively. It took us three years to pay off the debt."
>
> —FAMILY MEMBER, 8/16/21

SITUATIONAL

During the COVID-19 pandemic both children and adults have had to adapt to higher rates of technology usage. Unfortunately, this has spotlighted gaps in our society as individuals who are not technologically literate begin to fall behind. Participants mentioned needing help from their children for two primary reasons: language barrier when using technology and the use of the technology itself. Meanwhile kids are using applications like Classroom Dojo, Google Classroom, and Zoom to access school on a daily basis. When there is an issue with the education related materials parents are often unable to help, although some have mentioned watching YouTube tutorials on how to best approach the application. Finally, employees of the programs divulged that most adults are not using their email or the program website directly. Instead parents rely on Facebook and texting, often via a third party application like WhatsApp, to receive any and all of their information related to the program.

> "I would say it was difficult to get parents to get familiarized with Zoom. We had an introduction to log into Zoom, managing meeting IDs and passwords. The tech aspect was hard. A lot of the students came and helped their parents because they already knew Zoom, or we would just give parents a call and tell them how to log in." –COLLABORATIVE STAFF, 8/18/21

> "We have a Facebook and website too but I think Facebook reaches more people." –COLLABORATIVE STAFF, 6/30/21

Several parents lamented the amount of time their children spend on electronic devices during the day. Many activities have been canceled over the past two years due to the pandemic, forcing many families indoors with little reprieve from the day to day monotony that comes with all virtual programming. Despite the programming collaboratives offer, first virtually and gradually hybrid or in-person, some parents still feel the amount of media their children consume each day is still too large.

> "Well, apart from them taking a break from their phone and internet, I think it is important to do things manually. Now that children today only spend time on the computer and cellphone. I also think not only the children but adults as well, we do as well. Yes, it is terrible. Because of COVID, there is not much to do but watch your phone, internet or, T.V." –FAMILY MEMBER, 6/25/21

Both staff and adults mentioned a heavy reliance on WhatsApp. The app sends messages exclusively through internet connection, so users can access it through Wi-Fi if they do not have a data plan. Moreover, the app can be used to share "stories" for 24 hours, send voice messages, and make international calls at no extra cost, making it a well-known, cost-effective, and powerful form of communication with connections abroad. It is important to note that while attempting to broaden the program's attendance base, WhatsApp became a reliable tool.

> "Then it was a bit more difficult through the phone, we would call, use text, and now with the pandemic, we created a WhatsApp group so the collection was more direct. We have 80 members in the WhatsApp group from the 120 overall members. They don't all answer at the same time but some just peek in. That's why when we had the fair we had 130 families from nowhere." –COLLABORATIVE STAFF, 6/25/21

For many adults interviewed there was a distinct lack of access to technology. Often parents had to lend their child their cellphone in order to attend class or complete some other type of online activity. Additionally, laptops were in short supply in some homes due to a lack of funds at home or limited supplies from the school districts. Using Wi-Fi at home was another hurdle faced by several families as schools and providers were able to provide routers in some situations but not others. In lieu of Wi-Fi, mobile data was used to ensure participation which resulted in expensive phone bills.

> "Yes, well, it wasn't too good because they had their battles. They had to use the phone to hear. Sometimes we would run out of data, sometimes my daughter would have to use my phone to go in and I would get calls, but I couldn't answer because she was in class. The school gave us a Wi-Fi box and they were able to finish their classes, thankfully." –FAMILY MEMBER, 8/11/21

COVID-19 IMPACT

As mentioned across this report, the pandemic impacted all aspects of service for collaboratives and families. In the height of the pandemic, collaborative staff pivoted to supporting families in the most drastic challenges, namely virtual schooling. Staff often provided both technological support when helping set-up the children of participant families as well as emotional support by giving parents the opportunity to express their concerns regarding school but also in regards to greater overarching issues.

> "In the fall, we had the parent workshops during a time when kids were at the school. It would be nice to have parents who could come in and talk. Since school has been virtual, we've had times that the parents still had to be with the student helping them. It was helpful for parents to have someone to talk to when they had things going on." —COLLABORATIVE STAFF, 8/20/21

> "Then we had to see and support children. At that moment the families couldn't translate the work so we had homework help where they could go and receive tutoring for homework or anything they need help for, we provided that to the children first. Then we decided that we needed to put these classes together to help parents/caregivers understand how to use these things, google classroom, Zoom, etc. Workshops to support families and learning how to use this step by step. I think that has helped out a lot." —COLLABORATIVE STAFF, 7/8/21

Families did not comment on pandemic-specific challenges as often, but they did express a desire to make moves to return to pre-pandemic normalcy. This could be in seeing kids returning to school, starting night classes again, or building community.

> "I want my kids to go back to class, that this pandemic ends so that we can go out again. I want the children to go back to school." —FAMILY MEMBER, 8/11/21

> "Well, right now with the pandemic I don't attend any events because of the pandemic I get scared. Last year I was attending everything they offered." —FAMILY MEMBER, 7/28/21

STRENGTHS, SUPPORTS, RESOURCES

SCHOOL RESOURCES

Although there were many concerns expressed, there were also highlights when it came to resources found at school. Children attending school are able to receive Individual Education Plans (IEPs) as well as other specialized services to improve their education. Not only can finding resources be difficult but finding those who are culturally competent adds an additional layer of struggle for many parents. Fortunately, behavioral health and educational needs are met in some cases.

> "They give therapy to my children. I think it's called PerformCare. They also give him therapy at school. They give them occupational and speech therapy." –FAMILY MEMBER, 7/13/21

The larger portion of positive school stories came from teachers and staff operating in a way which is culturally sensitive and understanding of the obstacles the Spanish speaking parents are facing. Several participants mentioned how the teachers they interact with go above and beyond to not only make sure the students are getting their class materials but also conversing with parents regarding Individual Education Plans in their first language. When an individual is not available to translate directly, some teachers would run messages through Google Translate to ensure communications.

> "They have a bilingual teacher. I've been struggling with English. If you don't practice it, you forget. If I worked, it would be different. My husband works at a farm, so he always speaks Spanish now and I've forgotten some things. The teacher speaks in English and gives me a chance to follow, and switches to Spanish if I need it or if my child needs it when she talks to him." –FAMILY MEMBER, 7/29/21

> "The school has a secretary who speaks Spanish, or they get someone to translate during the IEP [meeting]." –FAMILY MEMBER, 8/9/21

EMPLOYMENT

According to the participant interviews there is a definitive distinction between documented and undocumented workers when discussing opportunities, work satisfaction, and future outlook. It should come as no surprise that those who are documented attested that they are able to access work benefits and perform duties in sectors not applicable to those without documents. For the majority of participant's work was limited to manual labor like farm work and packing in factories, which was described as physically draining and time-consuming.

> "I work doing cleaning at [a hospital]. There is lots of work doing cleaning at hospitals/clinics. Some places required documents, but not all. People who have documents have a lot of other supports [e.g. unemployment] so they can afford leaving work, whereas us undocumented cannot do that." –FAMILY MEMBER, 7/26/21

Compared to their home countries, many participants spoke positively of the opportunities presented in the United States. Although the educational requirements are different between countries, those who mentioned the place from which they emigrated were also eager to contribute to their new home in southern New Jersey.

> "In my country, you can graduate in anything, but the job opportunities just aren't there. When I graduated from school, I wanted to study Law, but I couldn't. I'd like to get the GED and to follow my dreams. I would like to educate myself more for my children, for everyone. In Honduras, you invest, you graduate, but you do not find a job. I used to get paid $150 per month to work at a private school. They pay more at the public school but it's difficult to get there. It depends on who you know." –FAMILY MEMBER, 8/16/21

> "In Colombia none of us were employed, neither my husband nor my friend's husband. That is why I decided to travel and come here." –FAMILY MEMBER, 7/20/21

SOCIAL SUPPORTS

PERSONAL CONNECTIONS

Families often spoke about the personal connections they have which helped to instill motivation and feelings of togetherness when navigating adjustment to life in the United States. Many families mentioned their partners as important sources of support in their lives. Partners, specifically husbands, were described as helpful for taking care of their children, providing financially for the family and giving emotional support. One family member commented, "I've suffered and the depression isn't easy so I am proud of my husband because he didn't leave me in the difficult times." Children were also frequently mentioned as personal connections associated with pride, motivation and accomplishment with a family member stating, "My children motivate me and working to stay alive." Families spoke about their connection with their children in the context of their child's accomplishments with a family member stating:

> "He is going to 8th grade...I think that him being good in school will benefit him, because he gets motivated. He likes it when I motivate him and when I praise him. He likes it when I tell him he's doing a job and likes it when I give him hugs and kisses. He always wants to be first in school and in everything. I feel like he's going to be someone in this life. I have get him on a good path, he's going to be a successful young man." –FAMILY MEMBER, 8/16/21

Families also spoke about their connections with their own family and siblings. The extended family unit was referred to as a strong pillar of personal support and connection. A family member commented when speaking about her family, "…And my family. We support each other within our abilities and morals. We keep each other company. If we ever lack something, we help each other out, with food and anything. I have a good relationship with my siblings." Families described family unity and strong connections with siblings as providing both emotional and tangible support.

Collaborative staff recognize the importance of the relationships families have with their extended family and community. A collaborative staff member stated:

> "When I think community—it's people that have spent time together—what's interesting (is that) intergenerationally it's more inherent than American families—it's more common to have grandparents watching children and raising people has a village..." –COLLABORATIVE STAFF, 7/20/21

Collaborative events are places where families also make personal connections. A collaborative staff member shared that part of the role of collaborative staff is to make personal connections with families at these events and to make sure the family feels comfortable. Another collaborative staff member mentioned food as a way to connect with families, "…We feed them. They always say if you feed people they become family." Collaborative staff and families identified the family unit as the strongest personal connections. Families also mentioned collaborative staff and lawyers as personal connections in their life that they considered strong and important.

COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS

Families were able to count on community organizations for health necessities, connections to resources, and guidance with compassionate and reliable efficacy. Families most often discussed supports provided by collaboratives and their community partners, but they also mentioned relying on other organizations such as the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) Program in Bridgeton for pregnancy and maternity care, Catholic Charities in Gloucester county for free legal services, Un Paso hacia Adelante in Cumberland county for school advocacy services, and church for socialization and even assistance with bills.

Staff and family reflections, however, characterize the support provided by the collaboratives as significant and long-lasting. Once rapport is established, families feel comfortable reaching out to case managers for access to food and clothes, assistance with paperwork and technology, help with translation and making appointments, and finding mental health and special needs services. Collaborative staff highlighted that being embedded in the community, building on it, and helping families feel that they belong was key to fulfill their role. For instance, assigning Americorp tutors to local high schools expands the collaboratives visibility and students' familiarity with services. In turn, organizing support group meetings for parents allow adults to discuss their questions, concerns, and thoughts with others in a similar situation. The creation and protection of spaces for families to relate and connect with staff and each other allows for that support system to flourish.

> "They are not just passing by. They can call us and we are available for them. Sense of belonging and pride of being part of this community. People would be afraid to speak Spanish in public and that explains a lot —I matter and I am appreciated. They can be who they are and they don't have to pretend to be something else." –COLLABORATIVE STAFF, 6/29/21

> "I just [want] to thank them [Families in Motion] for helping me with what I need. I think it's a program that has helped a lot of people. I am very happy that I met this organization. I think if I encounter someone who needs help I'd refer them to the program. I feel like they're part of my family." –FAMILY MEMBER, 7/28/21

Collaborative staff admitted that families often hesitate or refuse to ask for help, but that sharing their own personal stories of immigration and progress sometimes makes it easier for families to accept sympathy and compassion from others.

> "I tell them it's okay that we ask for help. We are human beings and just because we need help it doesn't mean we are taking advantage of things." –COLLABORATIVE STAFF, 6/25/21

It appears that collaborative staff increase their outreach efforts to address family's resistance to request help at first. Staff expressed that they feel they needed to demonstrate their ability to keep showing up for families until they are ready to open up. This could be through regular outreach efforts, answering inquiries in a timely manner, encouraging openness while patiently respecting boundaries, and offering help even when no specific concerns have been shared.

> "With new families, it all comes down to consistency. If I say I will get them info, I try to follow up with them soon after. I invite them to my monthly family events. What I say I'm doing, I follow-through, and show them I'm here for them." –COLLABORATIVE STAFF, 7/30/21

> "They are always there for us, for any doubt we had they were always there supporting us. To be honest I appreciate them because honestly there are a lot of organizations that will help us but then it ends up costing a lot but that's understandable. I have seen that with this organization a lot of resources are free." –FAMILY MEMBER, 7/27/21

The impact of collaboratives' persistent and continued presence was felt in particular during the pandemic. Ultimately, collaboratives seek to provide a stabilizing, unifying presence in these tumultuous times and beyond as things transition to in-person activities with continuing uncertainty.

> "After we started doing things online, I heard people say "Wow, you are really dedicated, making everything work online and just having the screen feel like love." Having them know that we were there with them through the scary times. The more we learn about COVID, the more we shared, and the more we grew as a community." –COLLABORATIVE STAFF, 8/20/21

BELIEF SYSTEMS

Attending church, praising God, and attributing daily events to a higher power came up as sources of comfort for participants during the interviews. The mentioning of faith was particularly strong when it came to coping with COVID-19. Some believed in a combination of medical knowhow as well as continued belief in a higher power. Others instead stipulated that the events of the past two years were part of a divine plan.

> "Proud that I survived all of this. I stuck to my faith and the help of my doctor." –FAMILY MEMBER, 8/11/21

> "I believe in God and I believe that whoever died during the pandemic it was their time." –COLLABORATIVE STAFF, 7/6/21

For several participants, religion and spirituality represents a kind of support structure in their daily lives and in church. When members of the community are in need, often the congregation is able to provide some kind of aid in place of or in addition to government related social programs.

> "Also church. If we don't have money to pay rent, they help us. If we don't have food, they help us. We can do family activities, chat, make friends. My husband is a member at the church."
>
> –FAMILY MEMBER, 8/16/21

Again, these efforts are then attributed to a higher power watching over them. Families place their faith in the belief that they will reach a positive outcome as long as they persevere through challenges. Furthermore, parents believe it is important that they foster this faith in their children as well so they will be protected and happy.

> "Thanks to God that He puts before you the way to get what you need."
>
> –FAMILY MEMBER, 7/30/21

> "[Religion is] very very important for me because I think that when one has younger children it's easier to tell them, there's a God and he loves you. Because there comes an age where they don't want to follow the family, I think I fulfilled my duty. Someday when they don't feel good or feel like they need someone they know about God. For me it's very important, family is something that is always cultivating and helping us grow." –FAMILY MEMBER, 7/15/21

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

As the Pascale Sykes Foundation prepares for sunsetting, collaboratives are planning for sustainability to continue their service to their families. Recognizing that many of the families are considered vulnerable members of the population, collaboratives strive to maintain consistency in their operations.

> "...we're hoping to look for a funder willing to adopt the program. It's looking a little different now because we are unsure how it's [it will play out] right now... but the main focus is the families. I don't have much time to think about what has happened in the past, it is now what can I do to support families." –COLLABORATIVE STAFF, 7/8/21

All collaboratives noted that funding via grants is particularly limited when it comes to social service programs for undocumented families. Government grants often carry restrictions around the target population or require multiple pieces of documentation that could prevent families from participating. Collaboratives are addressing these challenges by being creative with their programming and networking with local powers, but all expect a decrease in funding with the end of their current grant.

> "The simple answer organizationally is funding, finding grants. Pascal Sykes is great– they were very flexible in allowing us to do what we needed to do—any type of government grant out there has a lot more restrictions particularly among the Hispanic community. It's almost impossible finding funds to pay our staff... to do programming, ESL and GED funding."
>
> –COLLABORATIVE STAFF, 7/20/21

RECOMMENDATIONS

The collaboratives funded by the Pascale Sykes Foundation have provided families with many opportunities that they otherwise were not previously able to utilize in order to thrive. However, many of the families felt as though they would benefit from further resources specifically around language learning, activities for children, and forming personal and business connections that would further help them establish themselves.

More ESL programs: Many families expressed that they wish there were more English language classes in their area so as to limit travel concerns given the general preference to have in-person classes again. Families argued that in-person classes reinforce the material better and allow them to receive the one-on-one attention that is missing from online classes. Other families also indicated a desire for more accurate language-level placement and appropriate pacing. Families reflected that some programs place them in levels too advanced for them, resulting in failure to progress in their ESL curriculum. Others noted that some programs are too standardized, resulting in repetition of the material covered when new students join and the feeling that everyone has to move at the same pace.

Specialized departments: Some families also expressed interest in seeing more specialized agencies to successfully assist with processes such as job searching. A family member commented, "Many times they limit the search and grab the first job they find because they're too hurried. Not like [collaborative]. They should be specialists to look for jobs, but not part of the government. It's an office where you go…just for work." According to this participant, this would allow job seekers to consider their options based on their skills, education, and aspirations, so that they are not caught up in the same position and income for years out of fear or uncertainty of exploring other options.

Social networking opportunities: Along with these classes, families requested for more chances to meet with others who are going through the same struggles as them in order to form relationships and talk with each other to support one another. While they feel supported by what the program has to offer, some families feel more comfortable also having other individuals that they can converse with from a more personal perspective. Families express interest in activities for adults such as book clubs, craft workshops, social events in the community, as well as more formal community groups such as AA meetings in Spanish. This type of community and interpersonal relationship may allow for a better relationship for physical and mental health and individuals would feel more comfortable with their situations.

Safe spaces for children: Many families wanted to see more activities for their children, especially in an in-person setting. The consensus is that many of their children do not have enough safe spaces to communicate with individuals their age and participate in activities outside of school that let them engage and have fun, "I don't know what activities are in my area. I sometimes hear about soccer. I would like to have my son do it, but practices are far, I think. I don't know where the practice is. I think I heard it was in Vineland but it's too far." Many families noted the absence of playgrounds and parks, or, if there were some within walking distance, mothers expressed concern about letting their children roam the playgrounds due to fears that they would run away or get kidnapped. A couple families were adamant that the Bridgeton park, for instance, should have fencing around it to make it a safer place.

CONCLUSION

Hispanic families in Southern New Jersey face many barriers in their community across financial stability, healthcare access, living situation, access to education, child-well being, and family well-being. Due to differences in cultural background and pre-existing barriers in their physical environment, these challenges may manifest regardless of families' legal status in the United States. Organizations like Families in Motion, Unidos para la Familia, Families to College, and Stronger Families have provided critical support to these families by offering targeted programming, navigating gaps in the system, and guiding them through opportunities to achieve their goals. Although there are many systematic barriers that continue to impact the well-being of Hispanic families, many expressed gratitude towards collaborative staff for serving as language and cultural interpreters navigating the school system, community resources, and advocating for their rights.

> "I am very thankful to them. I admire them because they speak both languages. It's for Americans too, I love this service, and I'm very thankful because of that type of service for the community. I say if I can provide my small grain of salt so I can keep being in these services. They are a service that I love. I have always admired everything they do because I know they work for the community."
>
> –FAMILY MEMBER, 7/15/21

Collaboratives are also aware of their role as community builders. Offering programming that appeals to families and conducting monthly check-ins is only part of the work. These collaboratives demonstrate cultural responsiveness in their awareness of their families' need for a community and a sense of belonging.

> "If I can define it in short what differentiates [us] from other things in the community —I would say the sense of belonging. [We] have helped families to feel like they belong to somewhere and are part of somewhere."
>
> –COLLABORATIVE STAFF, 6/29/21

Moreover, in the process of creating a community for their families, collaboratives strengthen their local community alongside them. That is, collaborative staff expressed an understanding that the Hispanic families they serve are part of a bigger picture which, through the development of skills, access to resources, and fostering family relationships and well-being, the overall community benefits.

> "A strength is that there is a large Spanish speaking community so there is an ability to build the group together and there is a lot of potential for that group to lead the area because they can lead the community but getting people to change isn't easy. The work is getting people to come together and maximize everyone's strengths for the region. At the chamber we had a Spanish restaurant cater the food and now many new people have come to their restaurant. Getting people to come together and see things differently. Maybe the groups get by but if they come together they could really make a difference from the region. That's why we are here to bring groups together that haven't been working together that have a lot to offer. It could make a big impact on the region."
>
> –COLLABORATIVE STAFF, 6/25/21

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For more information, about the Strengthening Families Evaluation, please contact Ross Whiting at ross.whiting@rutgers.edu

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