



# Family Strengthening Network Evaluation

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The Senator Walter Rand Institute for Public Affairs (WRI) at Rutgers University - Camden produces and highlights research leading to sound public policy and practice, and with that as a foundation, aims to convene and engage stakeholders in making the connections across research, policy, and practice in support of Southern New Jersey residents. From 2013 to 2022, WRI has conducted a comprehensive evaluation of the implementation of the Pascale Sykes Foundation's Whole Family Approach initiative across 12 nonprofit collaboratives in Southern New Jersey,. The Whole Family Approach is a preventative, family-led strategy that provides adults and children tools to set, plan for, and achieve goals together. Collaborating agencies work together with families with two adult caregivers to develop long- and short-term goals to thrive. WRI's evaluation of the Whole Family Approach includes:

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

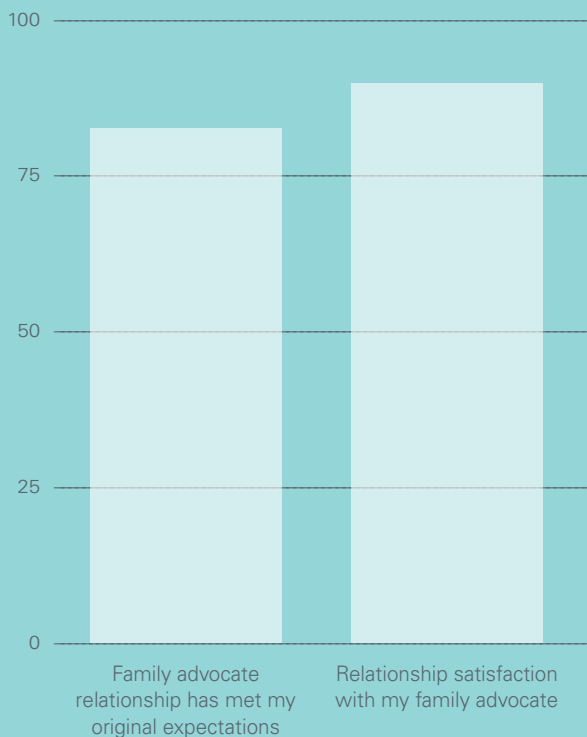
The Family Strengthening Network (FSN) aims to build resilience in the family unit as a whole, thus improving the quality of life of all family members. The Senator Walter Rand Institute (WRI) is a research and public service center at Rutgers-Camden that has worked with FSN to conduct an evaluation study of FSN. The research goal is to understand the efficacy of the family advocacy model employed by the Family Strengthening Network and to unravel the contributing factors to that efficacy. A mixed-method approach is used to get a holistic perspective on the work that family advocates do with the families they serve.

#### **QUANTITATIVE STUDY**

The quantitative report investigated the average changes in subjective well-being, child well-being, health, financial stability, and healthy relationships with families working with Southern New Jersey collaboratives during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Quantitative data was collected through the use of a survey given to those who work with family advocates, and analyzed in comparison with families' scores on a tool used by FSN. The outcomes to consider are: The quality of the relationships between the family advocates and the families they serve. Social support that families gain as they collaborate with the family advocates. The degree to which families feel important and feel they are able to rely on others. Measures used are Social Support, Interpersonal Mattering, Relationship Quality, Family Assessment Tool. The data collection happened from January 2021 to June 2021 in both English and

## FAMILY ADVOCATE SATISFACTION



Spanish. A paired t-test was performed to examine the difference in FAT score improvement over time for the 60 observations and determine whether there was a statistically significant mean difference between the baseline (intake) survey and the 6-month follow-up.

While subjective well-being did not change significantly between March 2020 through March 2021, results showed higher variability in areas such as relationship support with family, the importance of child education attainment, and free lunch or breakfast. This study further examined associations of financial stability, and services families utilized when working with their collaborative; the majority utilized tutoring/mentoring services, counseling services, child activities, help with bill payment, and connecting to other outside resources. The support collaboratives provide was essential to the family they support. The study findings imply that well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic for families who are working with collaborators was found to have stable social support outside the family and an increased level of financial stability.

### QUALITATIVE STUDY:

Qualitative data was collected through interviews conducted with family advocates, in an effort to further understand the effective ways in which they support families. The qualitative report seeks to expand on the analysis to detail what specifically the advocates provide to families that assist families and provide insights on the effective ways that family advocates support and positively impact families. Interviews were conducted with a small group of family advocates at the Family Strengthening Network. The interviews utilized semi-structured, open-ended questions. All interviews were conducted remotely, either through Zoom technology or over the phone, from May 2021 through June 2021. The interviews were coded and analyzed to answer the question about the effectiveness of the FSN program.

The findings show that the family advocates' effectiveness can be understood in their work process

and the outcomes they work to empower the families to achieve. In general, the process of family advocate's work shows how and why a certain outcome is achieved. The outcomes measure the success of the program. Family advocates' relationship building and maintenance, as well as their advocacy role, are central to their work process for empowering families and delivering the FSN outcome, "thrive amidst life's challenges." It should be considered that COVID-19 has impacted this process during the pandemic. Understanding family advocates' work process provides insights on family advocates' barriers and how the advocacy is implemented as intended. This could unfold why the desirable outcomes were or were not achieved. Other influential factors impact family advocate's effectiveness, such as the family advocates' expertise and where they visit families.

## EFFECTIVENESS

FAMILY  
ADVOCATES  
(FA)

FAMILIES

### PROCESS

### OUTCOMES

#### RELATIONSHIP BUILDING & MAINTENANCE

##### FA/FAMILIES

- Trust Building
- Engagement (Kids vs. Adults)
- Checking In
- Accountability
- Cultural Competency
- Confidentiality
- Equal Level Approach
- Positive Attitude

##### WITHIN FAMILIES

- Communication
- Perspective Taking
- Family Bonding
- Selflove
- Identifying the Roles of the Family Members

#### ADVOCACY

- Understanding Needs
- Action Planning
- Connecting With Resources & Support Network
- Learning New Perspective Taking
- Flexibility

#### FAMILIES EMPOWERMENT

- Support Network
- Self Confidence/Trust
- Independence with Safety Net

#### OTHER INFLUENTIAL FACTORS

FA EXPERTISE | LOCATION OF VISIT



**RUTGERS**

UNIVERSITY | CAMDEN

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