



STRATEGY BRIEF

# SUPPORTIVE COMMUNITIES

## How have community voice and leadership guided the implementation of **Family Success Centers in Washington, D.C.?**

All families face challenges at one time or another, often leaning on their communities and personal networks for support. In some communities, resources may be scarce, making it more difficult for families to access the right supports at the right time. If the child welfare system mistakes unmet needs for neglect, some families ultimately may be unduly reported to child protective services. [Family resource centers](#), known in some jurisdictions as **family success centers**, help families locate and access the resources and services that they need to thrive, which ultimately may help reduce instances of unnecessary child protection system involvement into the lives of families.

In Washington, D.C., the number of children separated from their families and placed in foster care has decreased from over 3,300 in the early 2000s to less than 650 today.<sup>1</sup> This reduction has allowed the District's **Child and Family Services Agency** (CFSA) to reinvest foster care cost savings to build a continuum of community-based prevention services. Building on over two decades of reinvestment in prevention, CFSA has successfully implemented its federally approved [Family First Prevention Plan](#) in partnership with







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CFSA leadership did recognize, however, that this requirement could exclude smaller or newer organizations that have close ties to the community but lack the resources required to compete in a formal government RFP process. To address this, CFSA requires FSCs to share resources throughout the community. **FSCs are mandated to spend a portion of their grant on subgrants with other community organizations**, such as mental health and education providers. Some FSCs also provide up to \$2,500 in microgrant support to small local organizations and individuals with relevant expertise and talents. Many of them have been disenfranchised historically. This support allows community members to see their ideas come to life, as the funding supports activities like art classes, dance classes, and other community-led events.

## Integrate local expertise

Once the FSC provider agencies were selected, each organization received a nine-month planning grant to allow time to fully explore and research community needs, hire staff, identify and develop appropriate services, and create a **Community Advisory Council (CAC)**. A key and distinctive feature of the FSC model, the CAC solicits and incorporates feedback from the community to guide programming and funding decisions.

CACs are composed of community stakeholders, with at least 50% of them residents (though most have a much higher percentage). CAC membership strives to represent the diversity of the community, such as by race, ethnicity, age, gender, sexual orientation,

## SUPPORTING A FATHER

At one FSC, staff observed a man walking around outside the building looking overwhelmed. They invited him in and learned that his ex-wife had dropped their children off at his house with nothing. He felt lost and had no idea where to go or what to do. The FSC staff immediately connected him with an attorney to begin the process of obtaining custody of the children, and assisted him with enrolling the children in school and obtaining mental health counseling for the children. The father commented to the FSC staff that, "I had no idea you guys could do this. I just thought you guys passed out diapers and food. I didn't know I could come here and have a full conversation and get some needed resources."

educational background, and household composition. Individuals must apply to be a member of a CAC. If selected, FSCs provide professional development opportunities, including training on topics such as active listening, advocacy, and trauma. CAC members receive a minimum of a \$50 stipend per monthly meeting, and child care and food are provided for in-person meetings. In addition to participating in meetings, many CAC members volunteer at FSC events and increase FSC awareness in the community through word of mouth and outreach to their personal networks.

We had a 'Women's Day' brunch. We paired an elder with a young person at each table to make sure they could learn from each other. They all had a wonderful time. That was an idea from a CAC member. They see their ideas being implemented and how well they work.

— ALEESHA CADE,

HUMAN RESOURCE/FINANCE DIRECTOR, NORTH CAPITAL COLLABORATIVE

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By creating a formal avenue for community members to participate in their local FSC, community members are able to feel invested, as they have a role in funding, programming, and other decisions. They also commit to ensuring that their family, friends, and neighbors are aware of the various resources and events offered at the FSC. CACs also have provided a path to employment, as some members have been hired into staff roles at their local FSC.

## Continue to collaborate and adjust as needed

The 10 FSCs in Washington, D.C., constitute a local network that has structures in place for regular communication and collaboration among themselves and with CFSA. Given early success, the FSC network expanded in April 2022 to include another FSC in a different part of the city: Ward 5. From the outset, evaluation has been a part the FSC initiative to build evidence that — individually and collectively — family success centers positively impact families and communities. CFSA administers the FSC evaluations, though it is important to note that individual and family-level data are not shared with CFSA.

The FSCs and CFSA worked together during the planning phase to identify goals and develop the data reporting process. Short-term goals at the program and family levels include performance on key performance measures, utilization and service uptake, and progress towards individual and family goals. Long-term goals are more community-based and include decreases in crime, reductions in child abuse and neglect, and improvements in economic mobility, education, health, and well-being.

## CREATING COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS TO HELP A YOUNG MOTHER

A young mother attending an FSC’s parent café disclosed that she felt like she didn’t know how to be a mom and considered herself a “bad mom” because she let her two children, ages 1 and 3, tell her what to do. A great-grandmother, living in a household of four generations, stepped up to mentor the young mother. She calls the mother every morning to check in and provide inspiration, and babysits the children from time to time.

As the FSCs began operating, the FSCs and CFSA realized that the process they had designed for data collection was not working. The reality of balancing the need to gather data with the varying needs of residents across 10 different sites has been challenging, but not impossible. CFSA and the FSCs are committed to developing an improved data collection process in order to create less of a burden on residents. For example, the data reporting process initially included a “welcome form” for clients to complete upon entry to a FSC. FSCs found few clients were completing the form, which was very long and included personal questions, so the form was revised to include only the most necessary information. Additional questions are asked retrospectively only of residents who are deemed to need intensive services.

CFSA also is tracking data from its child maltreatment hotline and to date, no FSC has reported any concerns with any of the families they serve. This may be due, at least in part, to the fact that while all FSC staff

They’re doing an excellent job and I really appreciate it. I can see the smiles on the kids’ faces. I can see the smiles on the parents’ faces. Having the success center here means a lot to us.

— FRIEDA PAYNE,

COMMUNITY ADVISORY COUNCIL MEMBER, LIFE DEEDS FAMILY SUCCESS CENTER

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are mandated to report any concerns of child abuse and neglect, they emphasize providing support and working alongside families to prevent incidents before they occur.

In addition to quantitative data, qualitative data also is being collected through surveys and focus groups to

gain a deeper understanding of the impacts of FSC services on families. Initial satisfaction surveys indicate “outstanding” satisfaction with FSC services. Family success, though, means different things to different people. That’s why allowing each community and family to shape their own definition of success is at the heart of the FSC vision and model.

To learn more, visit [Questions from the field](#) at [Casey.org](#).

- 1 FamilyFirstAct.org (Producer). (2020). *DC Families First Family Success Center Initiative: Advancing Equity and Transforming Child Welfare* [\[Webinar\]](#).
- 2 This brief is based on information from a [webinar](#) presented through the National Family Support Network on Nov. 17, 2020; and interviews with Dominique Griffin and Kiara Streater, program specialists, D.C. Child and Family Services Agency, March 1, 2021; Aleesha Cade, Human Resource/Finance Director, North Capitol Collaborative, March 21, 2021; Yvonne Hargrove, Community Advisory Council (CAC) member, Community of Hope Family Success Center (FSC), March 22, 2021; Amy Javaid, Interim President and CEO, A Wider Circle FSC, March 29, 2021; Terrance Davis, Center Manager, East River FSC, March 29, 2021; Calvin Smith, Ward 8 Health Council Member and Director of Government and Community Relations, BridgePoint Healthcare, March 31, 2021; Roger Bell, Program Manager, Keith Cunningham, Outreach Coordinator, Frieda Payne, CAC member, and Nicole Styles, Family Engagement Specialist, Life Deeds FSC, March 30, 2021; Octavia Shaw, Families First DC Program Manager, March 31, 2021; Jaelyn Torrence, CAC member, Woodland Terrace FSC, April 5, 2021; and Natalya Walker, CAC member, Woodland Terrace FSC, April, 9, 2021.

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