

KNOWLEDGE TO ACTION BRIEF

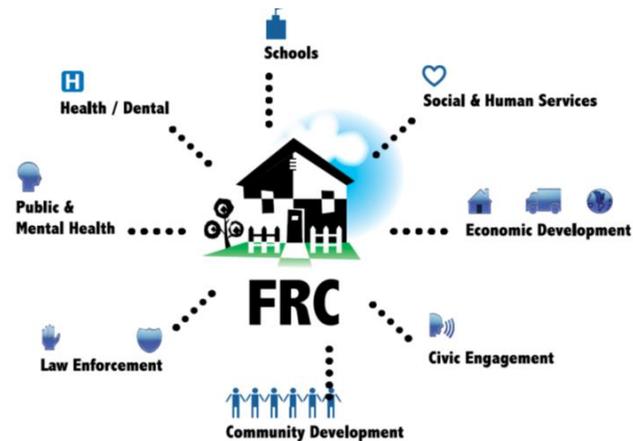
Family Resource Centers: Vehicles for Change

Strategies 2.0

Rooted in the legacy of the settlement houses of the 1800s that served and advocated for immigrants and those living in poverty, Family Resource Centers (FRCs) have emerged as leaders in supporting families and communities in the last few decades (Sherman & McQuaid, 2017). Though FRCs are as diverse as the people they serve, they share common characteristics as centrally located places in a neighborhood or community where families can access resources and services, participate in activities, and even have opportunities to be civically engaged and contribute to the health of their community. While a consistently important role of FRCs has been to provide direct support to families, such as parenting classes, counseling, and case management, FRCs have increasingly become centers for community advocacy and civic engagement to improve the well-being of community members on a larger scale (Sherman & McQuaid, 2017).

Common characteristics that define FRCs and may set them apart from other service providers and community spaces include:

- A warm, welcoming center environment
- A family-centered and family strengthening focus
- Community responsiveness, cultural sensitivity, and cross-system collaboration
- Engagement in community transformation through reciprocity and development of individual and community strengths
- Research informed programs that measure their impact (Sherman & McQuaid, 2017).



Source: <http://www.cdss.ca.gov/inforesources/OCAP/Resources>

Examining over 140 FRCs in California, a 2016 study found that families who participated in FRC services and programs grew from an “in crisis” or “at risk” level to a “stable” or “self-sufficient” level in all areas measured, including community resource knowledge, budgeting, and emotional well-being (Endres, 2016). In addition, families successfully strengthened protective factors which help to lower the risk of child maltreatment, including social connections, concrete support in times of need, and knowledge of parenting and child development.

A recent monograph funded by the California Office of Child Abuse Prevention laid out best practices for FRCs and the field to be most effective at influencing positive change for individuals, families, and whole communities. FRCs are at their best when they include a mix of individual- and family-focused as well as community-focused “Practice Methods” in their operations. These should include:

- Well-being services like home visiting, emergency resources, and access to basic needs
- Growth and development programs like parent education, youth activities, and healthy living classes
- Civic engagement efforts, such as voter registration, advocacy training, and providing community volunteer opportunities, and
- Community development practices, such as social policy analysis, partnerships with other community services like housing, and political action (Sherman & McQuaid, 2017).

Because they are deeply embedded in their neighborhoods and have intimate understanding of their communities’ strengths and needs, FRCs are in a unique position to improve well-being at multiple levels by directly supporting individuals and families while at the same time addressing the social and environmental factors that impact their lives.

Take Action

- 1) Connect families to family resource centers in their local communities and encourage them to participate in the services and activities offered.
- 2) If you work at or are involved in a family resource center, reflect on your center's use of the above Practice Methods. Consider if your center might benefit from becoming more involved in community development and advocacy efforts.
- 3) Assemble your team of FRC employees, partners, board members and parents and enroll in Strategies 2.0's Family Resource Centers: Vehicles for Change training for more support in developing your center. Find out more at StrategiesCA.org/trainings.
- 4) Join the California Family Resource Association to connect with colleagues, advocate for family-strengthening public policies, and build a strong, sustainable family support field. For more information visit <http://www.californiafamilyresource.org/membership>

The logo for Strategies 2.0 features the text "Strategies 2.0" in a blue, sans-serif font. Above the letter "i" in "Strategies" is a small graphic of a green leaf with an orange stem and a small orange circle at the top, resembling a stylized flower or sun.

Strategies 2.0 is a multi-dimensional initiative to help professionals and organizations make a bigger impact.

We train, support, and link professionals and organizations together to more effectively support families as well as build power to advance equity and opportunity in our communities.

Resources

National Family Support Network Standards Implementation – Online resource providing various tools to help FRCs evaluate their effectiveness including self-assessments and a participant survey: <https://www.nationalfamilysupportnetwork.org/standards-implementation>

California Family Resource Association – Provides resources for FRCs to learn advocacy strategies and how to build their capacity for making change: <http://www.californiafamilyresource.org/resources>

References

Endres, J. (2016). Family Assessment Effectiveness of California Family Resource Centers Using Family Development Matrix Outcomes. Retrieved from <http://www.matrixoutcomesmodel.com/mainpublications.php>

Sherman, J., & McQuaid, Y. (2017). Family Resource Centers, Vehicles for Change, Volume II: The Evolving Field. Retrieved from <http://www.cdss.ca.gov/inforesources/OCAP/Resources>

The California Family Resource Center Learning Circle. (2000). Family Resource Centers: Vehicles for Change, Volume I. Sacramento, CA: California Department of Social Services, Office of Child Abuse Prevention. Retrieved from <http://www.cdss.ca.gov/inforesources/OCAP/Resources>

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