

Review of FRC Evaluation and Impact Reports

One of the goals of the 2019 California Family Resource Center Statewide Survey was to compile resources on FRCs' impact in California by inviting FRCs to submit recent evaluation and reports of FRCs in their networks. Survey participants submitted a total of 29 documents reporting activities or outcomes for FRCs in California. Harder+Company also supplemented these submissions with a web search, through which we inventoried an additional 16 reports: of these, 6 were related to FRCs in California, and 10 were related to FRCs in other parts of the US.

Seventeen California counties were included in the reports submitted or found:

- Alameda
- Colusa
- El Dorado
- Fresno
- Humboldt
- Los Angeles
- Modoc
- Napa
- San Bernardino
- San Francisco
- San Joaquin
- San Luis Obispo
- Santa Barbara
- Santa Clara
- Siskiyou
- Sutter
- Ventura

6 other US areas were included in the documents submitted or found:

- Alabama
- Allegheny County, PA
- Connecticut
- Maryland
- Massachusetts
- New York (state)

The FRC Evaluation & Impact Report Grid (available [here](#)) includes a summary of the findings from each report (where relevant), as well as an inventory on the types of outcomes and data contained in each.

FRC Evaluation in Context

The California Family Resource Center Learning Circle's white paper, *Family Resource Centers: Vehicles for Change*, cautions the field that

Judgments and decisions [about social programs] should be based on accumulation of wisdom. No single study, no single set of statistics, should be the basis of decisions to fund or not to fund, to abandon or to replicate a project. Judgments about what works should be based on a thoughtful appraisal of the many kinds of evidence available. (2000)

The authors also note that FRC service delivery models do not easily lend themselves to controlled, randomized experiments. These challenges may make it difficult for FRCs to find the funding, expertise, or opportunity to conduct more "rigorous" evaluations.

In “Vehicles for Change,” the Learning Circle lists a set of measures through which FRCs can track their progress:¹

- Meeting identified community needs
- Appropriately implementing program components
- Serving target populations
- Assuring that services are utilized
- Keeping participants satisfied with the services
- Helping participants achieve their goals
- Upholding fiscal policies and accountability
- Achieving program purpose and outcomes
- Meeting funder requirements or contractual obligations

Indeed, through our scan of publications on FRCs’ effectiveness and the evaluation reports submitted by respondents to the California FRC Survey, we found that the monitoring and evaluation activities FRCs are most likely to carry out routinely touch on only a few of the items listed above, namely: (1) tracking service counts (*assuring that services are utilized*), (2) tracking client demographics (*serving target populations*), and (3) conducting client satisfaction and service quality surveys (*keeping participants satisfied with the services*). Of the subset of documents that included some outcomes (29 of the 45 documents), less than half of those (13 out of 29) examined differences in outcomes between groups that received FRC services to those that did not. Instead, most evaluations focused either on point-in-time snapshots (e.g. % of clients that met certain benchmarks at the time they were surveyed) or on pre/post comparisons (e.g. improvement in measures before and after participation in a service), and these were largely self-reported measures.

Notable trends in outcomes among California FRCs:

Among the documents that reported FRC outcomes in California, positive outcomes tended to fall into the following four categories:

Client satisfaction. Client satisfaction with FRC services was very high among all the documents we reviewed (7 of which included client satisfaction or service quality surveys). Satisfaction rates (rating of positive or very positive) for any of the measures included ranged from 79% to 99%.

Parenting skills. Family/parent education is the primary niche of most of the FRCs evaluated. It is therefore not surprising that outcomes related to parenting skills were the most commonly examined. In *all but one case* (see discussion of Safe & Sound below) where outcomes in parenting skills were reported, those outcomes tended to improve based on parents’ self-reported ratings or on self-reported behaviors. Some evaluations noted that positive outcomes in parenting skills were “dose-dependent,” but the results were mixed. For example, First 5 Colusa County reported positive pre/post improvements in parenting skills outcomes for families receiving 10 or more hours of FRC services.²

School readiness. School readiness, particularly the achievement of skills relevant to success in kindergarten, is one of the key outcomes that First 5 agencies focus on. While First 5 agencies do not fund FRCs exclusively, several agencies did report outcomes for FRCs, or for the family engagement components of their early childhood education programming. Among such agencies, several reported indirect, but positive, associations between receiving FRC services and improved school readiness, or with behaviors associated with improved school readiness. For example, First 5 Siskiyou County reported that higher school readiness was independently predicted by early childhood education experiences, which included services provided by FRCs. Meanwhile, First 5 Ventura County noted that participation in Parent and Child Together (PACT) classes were associated with higher rates of parents reading to children.

Child development. Overall child development was also an area in which higher outcomes were linked, directly or

¹ The list published in “Vehicles for Change” was based on the Family Resource Coalition of America’s book, *How Are We Doing?* (1988).

² There was only one outlier among the mostly positive results for FRCs’ impact on parenting skills, found by the FRC Safe & Sound (San Francisco, CA), which found that, counterintuitively, clients who spent the *most* time in services had the *least* gain in Protective Factors assessments. (Unpublished, submitted document.)

indirectly, to the provision of FRC services by a small number of evaluations (3 evaluations carried out in El Dorado, Los Angeles and Siskiyou counties). Metrics considered in this arena range from psycho-social to physical. The El Dorado County Office of Education reported that family engagement services were associated with improved school readiness using the Desired Results Developmental Profile (DRDP) across all developmental areas examined. Magnolia Family Place, an FRC in Los Angeles, reported substantial improvements across all developmental areas on the Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ) following completion of their Family Enrichment Program. First 5 Siskiyou similarly reported improvements in children's social skills after participation in FRC services.

Evaluations of FRCs outside of California.

The positive results of FRC evaluations that took place outside of California tended to be similar to the outcomes noted above. However, some of these nationwide evaluations were notable for their methodology, scale, or the scope of outcomes they considered.

For example, in 2016, the Allegheny County Department of Human Services (Pennsylvania) evaluated the impact of 25 FRCs by comparing outcomes in the neighborhoods those FRCs served vs. outcomes in similar neighborhoods where no FRC was present. The evaluation found positive outcomes in prevention of child abuse and neglect between neighborhoods with and without FRCs. A follow-up evaluation in 2018 compared rates of maltreatment investigations in neighborhoods with and without FRCs and found that "areas [...] served by [FRCs] had fewer maltreatment investigations once the level of social disadvantage and population size were considered."

In Colorado, an evaluation of FRCs in the state considered not only parenting skill outcomes, but also broader social outcomes, including family income, cash savings and debt management; housing status; employment status; and food security, among others. The evaluation noted improvements in all these domains for families that received FRC services.

Additionally, while none of the documents we reviewed from FRCs, FRC networks, or First 5 agencies in California considered the fiscal "return on investment" (ROI) of FRC services, in 2014, the Alabama Network of Family Resource Centers conducted the only ROI study of on FRCs that has come to our attention. The study found a substantial ROI from FRC services, determining that, for every \$1 invested in FRC services, there was a \$4.70 ROI in immediate and long-term financial benefits.



The literature scan summarized above shows evidence for the effectiveness of FRC services across several domains related to child development and the child-caregiver relationship. Additionally, evaluations of FRCs across the nation suggest that FRCs may contribute to other, down-stream social outcomes, such as those related to family economic and housing status, and food security. The literature also suggests that FRCs drive outcomes that can be measured not only at the individual level, but also at the neighborhood level and at the fiscal level.

There is potential for individual FRCs, FRC networks, and regional groups of FRCs (e.g. by county or region) to strengthen their capacity for assessment, monitoring and evaluation. As the services FRCs provide change or expand to respond to the needs of their client population, FRCs' core objectives may expand beyond child development and family functioning. In doing so, FRCs may want to broaden the types of outcomes they consider in their evaluations to highlight the impact of the full range of services and referrals they provide.