



Family Nurturing Center

Project Impact

Understanding Our Impact

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1. Organization and Program Overview

The Family Nurturing Center (FNC) is a grassroots organization created in 2006 by a group of passionate people in response to the continual increase of child abuse in Southern Oregon. Our founding goals were to 1) help the whole family become healthy 2) dispel the myth that families must figure it out on their own 3) nurture caregivers and model effective behaviors that give them a road map for the future, rather than seeking to force change. These founding goals exist today, along with the goals of helping to create healthy, stable and attached families; coordinating with other service providers; and ensuring children are ready to enter kindergarten healthy and able to thrive.

Our mission is to strengthen families so that children can live safely and develop fully in their parents' care. FNC services are designed to stabilize and strengthen families, improve child development, and reduce child abuse and neglect by increasing family protective factors. Services that build these protective factors include Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Services, Early Learning Classrooms, Home Visitation, Peer Support, Parent Education, Respite Care, as well as help with basic needs such as clothing, food, diapers and housing.

The Family Nurturing Center (FNC) has worked with marginalized families for the last 17 years, many of whom experience extreme stress due to financial instability, food insecurity, unmet medical needs, lack of dependable transportation, lack of safe support systems, isolation, domestic violence, substance use disorder, mental health challenges, involvement with the justice system, and experience of Adverse Childhood Experiences. FNC has a rich and successful history of meeting people where they are, using a trauma-informed and equity lens, regardless of the challenges they are facing.

We prioritize safety, self-awareness, and intentional self-regulation in every contact, relationship, and activity. We ensure consistency in our practice while also recognizing and thoughtfully responding to the specific needs of individuals and families. We view each individual and family as the expert in their own lives, and we partner with families and each other to build on current strengths and find solutions together. We view making mistakes, asking for help, and working to integrate new understandings as necessary and expected aspects of growth and development at all levels. And we confirm and communicate that the potential for resilience is remarkable, and that those who have known chaos, danger, and adversity can find peace, health, and happiness.

Intended Impacts

IMPACT #1 – Children and their families are able to form healthy attachments

What we mean: *Children and caregivers have the ability to develop safe and caring relationships with each other.*

IMPACT #2 – Children and their families are able to regulate their feelings

What we mean: *Children and caregivers will have the ability to recognize, accept and soothe a range of emotional experiences.*

IMPACT #3 – Children and their families build healthy affiliation with their community

What we mean: *Affiliation - Families will recognize that they are part of a community and can both contribute to and benefit from connections with their community.*

IMPACT #4 – Children and their families are able to be attuned to one another

What we mean: *Attunement - Children and caregivers recognize and respond effectively to the feelings and needs of others.*

2. Evaluation Methodology

The aim of our evaluation was to see what kind and quality of impact Family Nurturing Center is having on the families we are serving. To understand this, we explored two broad evaluation questions:

1. What kind and quality of impact are we having on our program participants?
2. What aspects of our program are causing this impact?

Over the course of the project, we (a) developed and refined our ideas of intended impact and indicators, (b) designed and implemented a mixed methods outcome evaluation using both qualitative and quantitative means to collect and analyze data, (c) identified themes and findings, and (d) considered the implications to those findings for program improvement and innovation.

This project began by identifying and clarifying the intended impact of Family Nurturing Center's programs. Once the ideas of impact had been developed, we used the Heart Triangle™ model to identify qualitative and quantitative indicators of impact on the mental, behavioral, and emotional changes in our participants. We used these indicators to design a qualitative interview protocol and a quantitative questionnaire to evaluate progress toward achieving our intended impact.

Qualitative Data Collection and Analysis

For the qualitative portion of the evaluation, we designed an in-depth interview protocol to gain data about the structural, qualitative changes resulting from our program. We used a purposeful stratified sampling technique to select a representative sample from the population we serve. The number of program participants was 605. Our sample size was 20, drawn from the following strata of our population:

- Families that were enrolled and participated in at least 2 Family Nurturing Center programs.
- Parents that currently have their children in their physical care.

Our interview team consisted of our Senior Program Director and our Clinical Director. We convened one-on-one interviews lasting between 45 minutes and one hour in length and collected interview data.

We then analyzed the data inductively using a modified version of thematic analysis. Each interviewer generated initial codes and identified themes for each interview. Together, we developed common themes from the entire data corpus identifying the overarching and inter-interview themes that emerged from the full scope of our data analysis to illuminate the collective insights and discoveries. We mapped these themes visually and examined the dynamics among the themes, causes and catalysts of the themes, new or surprising insights related to the themes, and relationships between the themes that were revealed in the data. We then determined the most significant and meaningful discoveries and brought them forward as findings.

Quantitative Data and Analysis

For the quantitative portion of the evaluation, we designed a survey to collect data on our quantitative indicators of impact. We administered this survey instrument to 101 families and had a response of 35 families, a 34% response rate. The data were analyzed primarily using measures of central tendency. We identified key insights, patterns, and gaps within the data and incorporated these discoveries into the related findings. The most significant insights from the quantitative data are described in the narrative that follows as well.

3. Findings

Finding 1: You can count on me, like 1, 2, 3...

KEY INSIGHT

Caregivers build trusting, collaborative relationships with Family Nurturing Center's service providers, making it possible for them to feel safe enough to actively engage in services.

DISCUSSION

Many of the caregivers who engage with the Family Nurturing Center's services have survived traumatic experiences, including abuse and neglect in their families of origin, interpersonal violence, homelessness, involvement with the child welfare system, and incarceration. These traumatic experiences affect the way that survivors approach potentially helpful relationships. Being vigilant and suspicious are often important and thoroughly understandable self-protective mechanisms in coping with trauma exposure, but these same ways of coping may make it more difficult for survivors to feel the safety and trust necessary

to access helpful relationships. Not surprisingly, those individuals with histories of abuse are often reluctant to engage in, or quickly drop out of, many human services.

The Family Nurturing Center’s services are designed specifically to avoid retraumatizing those who come seeking assistance, supporting parents and caregivers to build growth-promoting relationships with our staff members. Throughout our interviews we heard that feelings of trust and safety were essential for caregivers to be able to engage in our services.

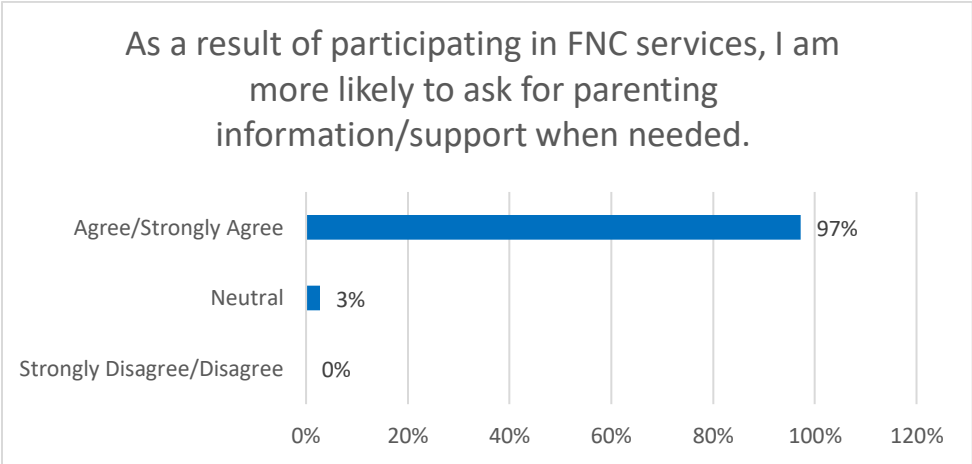
One participant stated, “I lived on the streets a lot in my life and I've been through a lot of trauma where I don't trust people.” He shared that at FNC he was most impacted by “how kind and courteous (the service provider) was with us. It just felt like a warm, loving environment. Yeah, it was a safe place to share about our day or whatever we were going through and support each other. I really enjoyed that.”

Participants described the relational safety they experienced at the Family Nurturing Center, contrasting their experience at FNC with their experiences in other important relationships. According to one participant, “My family (of origin) isn’t healthy, so this is my family of choice. FNC feels like family.”

Even participants introduced to FNC services under stressful circumstances reported developing positive and meaningful connections with FNC service providers, which made them want to stay involved with services in an ongoing way. An interviewee who first became involved with FNC through a referral from Child Welfare said, “I made a real connection with (FNC service provider). I miss her. You guys are great. I’m glad to have you guys in my life.”

The trusting and supportive relationships between caregivers and service providers helped caregivers feel more comfortable asking for and receiving help. Another participant stated, “I thought that I couldn't really trust people... It wasn't natural for me to reach out and so I thought that was cool about the Family Nurturing Center for reaching in and they just kept reaching in until I was able to learn how to reach out.”

Our quantitative survey data revealed that nearly all survey respondents (97%) agreed or strongly agreed that they are more likely to ask for parenting information/support when needed because of participating in FNC services.



SIGNIFICANCE

The positive relationships between FNC service providers and the caregivers participating in services can have a significant bearing on caregivers' ability to engage in services in meaningful ways. These positive relationships can also have a significant bearing on caregivers' relationships with their children. When parents are “held” in nurturing, effective relationships with service providers, parents learn to relate to their children in ways which contribute to their wellbeing. When we prioritize safety in our relationships with parents, this helps parents learn how to bring these same characteristics into their relationships with their children.

POSSIBLE RESPONSES

- Trauma Informed Care Trainings
- Increased low barrier programming
- Reviews of intake paperwork, informed consent specific to each program
- Offering a variety of engagement opportunities
- Materials that are targeted for families
- Reflective Supervision - to hold consistency

Finding 2: You are not alone

KEY INSIGHT

Caregivers feel significant emotional relief and decreased isolation after reaching out to FNC for support.

DISCUSSION

Many caregivers rely on their friends, families, and neighbors for companionship, validation, information, financial assistance, or hope and encouragement. But caregivers whose relationships have been unsafe, conflictual, or unhelpful may be unable to access these natural supports. When these caregivers want and need support, they must make active efforts to access the help that many others take for granted.

Asking for and accepting help from an organization requires vulnerability and courage, but caregivers report feeling stronger and less alone through their involvement with FNC. One interviewee noted, “I’m totally like that person that feels like I can do it all on my own... This is one of the first times in my life where I did reach out for help. And I was vulnerable, and I got all the help that I needed, plus more, you know? So it was a good experience.”

Because parenting young children can be exhausting and lonely, the connections participants make at FNC are vital. Another interviewee stated, “I kind of got to this like fork in the road where it was like I was miserable because I was isolating and I was lonely.... I was just feeling overwhelmed. And with having (service provider) come to the house and just kind of sit and check in and talk with me—that kind of was what I needed... I just needed that person to kind of just sit down and have an adult conversation with. So, I got a lot of relief in that and was

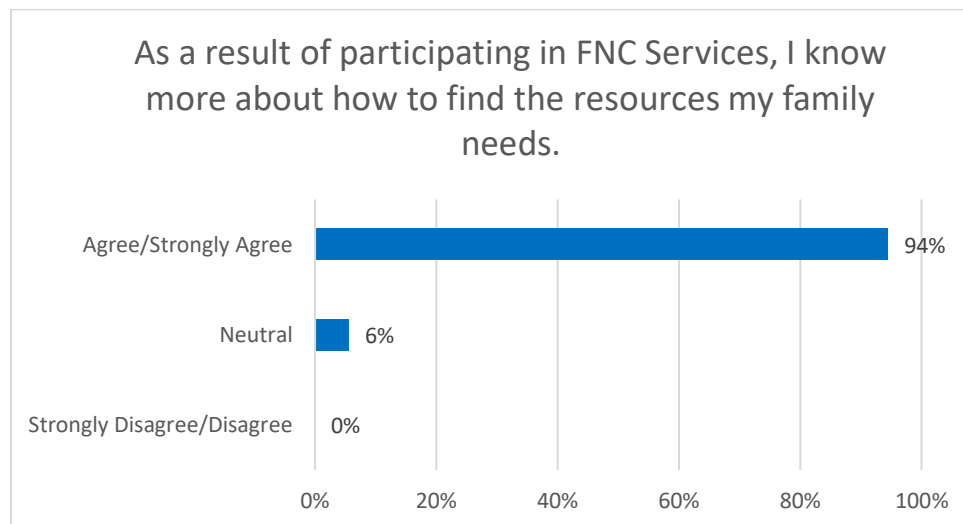
able to come to a lot of new realizations around my parenting and the way that, you know, our family functioned...”

One interviewee shared how FNC services helped by noting, “I always wanted to be sure that I was able to do it all by myself and not have to ask for help. So that was the hardest part, just kind of knowing that I didn’t have it all under control. But *reaching out* actually did help. It affected us in a good way. It was good for my family and my kids...”

Yet another interviewee specifically noted, “I usually don’t ask for help. Asking for help is hard. I’ve always just felt like I had the answers. And then I had this third child, and I was like, “Oh, my gosh, I have no idea what the problem is. This kid’s totally different. I think I just felt like I had to ask for help. I had no other options. It was helpful. Nobody acted like I was doing anything wrong. It was all positive. I didn’t have one bad experience.”

The support that FNC offers enables families to make significant and meaningful changes in their lives which they might not make on their own. An interviewee said, “FNC helped me get out of a bad domestic violence situation. That was a huge change for us. Now we actually feel safe somewhere. I mean, breaking cycles from being with abusive partners, you kind of feel like you’re trapped when you don’t have any support anywhere, so you just stay with them, but FNC just supported me through that... It’s just great.”

The data indicate that the Family Nurturing Center is an important resource for isolated caregivers, offering them emotional support, informational support, and instrumental support, and helping them to feel more connected to their community. When asked about how FNC involvement impacted caregivers’ knowledge about how to find/access resources in our community, participants overwhelmingly agreed that they have increased knowledge around finding resources as a result of participating in Family Nurturing Center Services.



SIGNIFICANCE

The Family Nurturing Center acts as a significant support for many isolated families. Research shows that, “The presence of social support networks may reduce the number of stressful

events experienced by parents through the provision of concrete assistance, may mediate the stress experienced by parents, and may facilitate better coping with the demands of parenting. Additionally, support networks provide role models for parents as well as a link to other sources of parenting information.” (Keller & McDade, 2000, p. 286)

POSSIBLE RESPONSES

- Increased family events
- Evaluating past programs that were points of connection that may no longer be a part of our program offerings
- More support groups versus prescriptive programming
- More connections for events for people in recovery
- Expand respite (childcare) to support parent education or adult interactions and during hours that work for families
- Funding for group activities
- Expand our texting communications
- Milestone of celebrations - family friendly

Finding 3: You can't pour from an empty cup

KEY INSIGHT

Caregivers who work with FNC providers understand that their own responses to challenging situations impact their children's responses. Caregivers feel better equipped to remain emotionally regulated as a result of their work with FNC.

DISCUSSION

Children depend on their caregivers to help them learn how to manage their own feelings through a process called co-regulation. Caregivers support co-regulation when they provide soothing, coaching, and modeling that help children begin to understand, express, and modulate their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. But when an adult struggles with self-regulation and is unable to regulate their own thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, they can't provide the consistent, warm, and supportive responses that their child needs in order to regulate. Emotions may then escalate for both the child and caregiver in an unproductive and potentially unsafe spiral. Many caregivers noted that through their work with FNC, they came to understand how their own emotional regulation (or dysregulation) significantly impacts their children's regulation. They also mentioned learning and practicing skills to manage their frustration, regulate their emotions and behavior, and better support their children's needs.

One interviewee told us, “I just take five minutes to just breathe, and process my head, and just like get myself together. So that's something I've learned and picked up on in parenting classes, because they're like 'self-care, self-care, self-care'”

When asked how he deals with frustrating moments with his children now as a result of his engagement with FNC, one interviewee noted, “I think like a big part of it is staying regulated

myself. Because if I get dysregulated then he'll get more dysregulated and it turns into a whole storm, right? So, remaining calm, breathing, that kind of stuff."

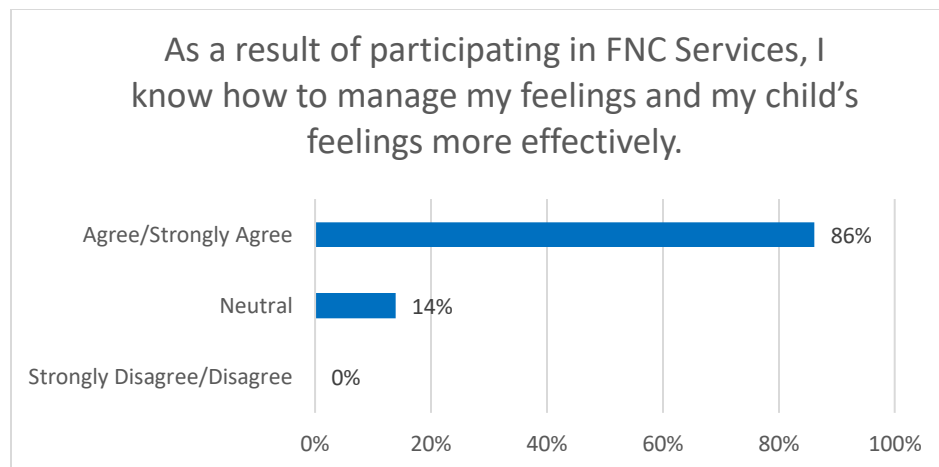
Another interviewee noted through his work with FNC he now knows that , "I need to do whatever I need to do, whether it's walk away for a minute and take a breath, count to 10 in my head, whatever it is that I need to do to regulate myself so that I can respond to the situation and not react to it."

A grandmother who is caring for her young grandchildren noted, "I've changed how I react to the kids' behavior. I don't get so angry all the time, just because they're having issues. I pick my battles with my grandson... Basically, he was driving me crazy there for a while. Now I take a breath and I focus on something good. ...I feel much healthier and stronger now. All that stress wasn't good for me. I thought I was going to have a heart attack!"

An interviewee who reports that he is in early recovery stated, "So my coping skills most of my life have been drugs or alcohol. I've learned not only do I have to learn how to regulate my own emotions, but to help teach my daughter how to regulate hers. She has some behavioral issues from being separated from the family for a while. It helped me to develop a lot of breathing exercises that work for my child and for me...The important thing is to stay calm and stay centered. Especially when your child is struggling you don't want to go down to their level and start in the same way. That's one of the big epiphanies in the last six months or so. I've been doing this thing my whole life when I don't get my drugs or wine, throwing a tantrum just like she does. To teach her to do better I need to show her better. I need to stay calm and just be the parent."

Another caregiver identified feeling significantly more able to support herself and her child during emotionally challenging moments, saying "I've learned more skills to help regulate my feelings and my child's feelings. I've learned to follow my child's lead and to address my kids' emotions. Now I'm able to de-escalate situations. Before coming to FNC I felt like I just didn't know what I was doing. I had no idea what to do! Now I take deep breaths, and sometimes I'll put myself on a timeout. Or I'll just say, "These are big feelings I don't understand. I'm gonna think about it and then we'll talk about it after."

Our quantitative data indicate that 86% of families say they know how to better manage their feelings and their child's feelings more effectively as a result of participating in FNC services.



SIGNIFICANCE

Parenting can be very stressful, even under the best of circumstances, and caregivers who lack the skills to understand, manage, and cope with their own emotional responses to stress may be more likely to engage in reactive and impulsive behaviors. They are also more likely to struggle to teach their children skills in self-regulation. When caregivers have the skills and abilities to care for their own emotional needs, this decreases stress and reactivity and allows them to respond in more helpful ways to their children's needs.

POSSIBLE RESPONSES

- Mindfulness groups
- Adult Mental Health
- Educating families in self-care across all our programs
- Self-care through the staff perspective
- Develop walking group / running group
- Partnerships with YMCA, Kid Time, and other outlets for families

Finding 4: The Power of Presence

KEY INSIGHT

Caregivers working with FNC gain an increased ability to accurately and empathically understand and respond to their children's actions, communications, needs, and feelings.

DISCUSSION

When caregivers are attuned to children's communications, needs, and feelings, they can accurately read their children's cues and respond appropriately. But attunement may be more difficult for caregivers with unresolved trauma. These caregivers may, like their children, have limited capacity to identify, tolerate, and cope with difficult emotions.

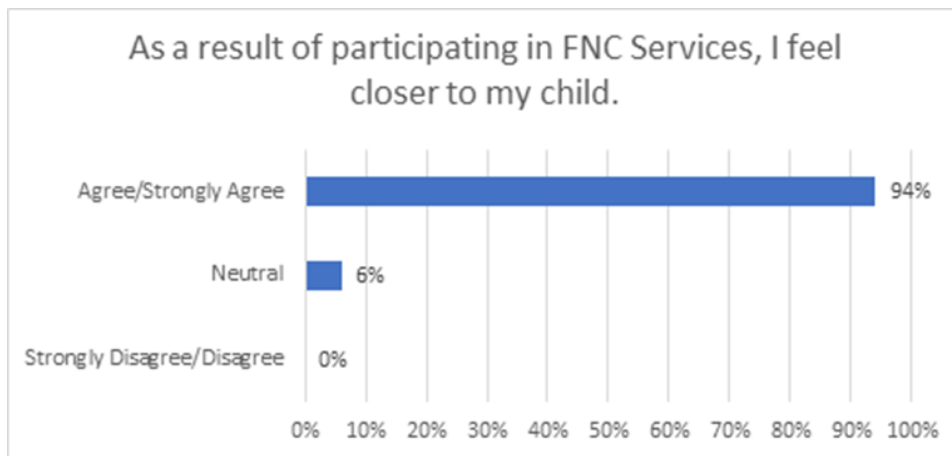
Following involvement with FNC, caregivers reported feeling better able to understand and respond to the emotion underlying their children’s behavior rather than simply reacting to the most distressing behavior. Caregivers also reported being more able to take the time to understand the child’s perspective and to be respectful of what the child is feeling.

One parent said, “Before it was more like, ‘You’re in trouble. You’re going in timeout.’ Like, ‘Oh, I’ll come back when you’re finished.’ And that’s kind of the opposite of what we do now-- we just address the feelings and talk through them. Before it was sort of like, I don’t know, almost like abandoning your kid to go and sit by themselves or telling them like, “Stop crying.” Instead, it’s like, “I can see you’re crying. You’re upset right now. That’s okay.”

Another parent said, “I feel like a lot of the times we’re so used to shoving it under the rug or yelling at them for having big feelings, but once we understand the big feelings, then we can offer more support emotionally for them. And I feel like the biggest takeaway is showing support for his feelings, and just reflecting back--sometimes it’s the simple reflection of ‘Oh, you’re feeling this way because of this and this,’ that’s all he needs is just acknowledging that I acknowledge that I see him.”

One kin caregiver noted, “Now I know he needs more understanding and to make sure I’m there. I didn’t understand PTSD. I’m old school and I thought you were supposed to punish your child. Not all kids benefit from that.”

94 percent of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they felt closer to their child as a result of participating in FNC services.



SIGNIFICANCE

“When children are born, they do not have the skills to deal with emotions on their own. They rely on parents to comfort them and help them manage distress. When children consistently receive nurturance from their parents, they learn that feelings are not permanent, that distress can be tolerated, and that it will eventually subside. Children who receive inconsistent, neglectful, or rejecting caregiving have little support in managing the challenging experiences of early childhood. When they feel distress, they must rely on

primitive and frequently ineffective or insufficient coping skills.” (Blaustein and Kinniburgh, pg. 50)

Many of the caregivers we interviewed identified an important change in their understanding of the meaning of their children’s behaviors as a result of their engagement with FNC. With increased caregiver insight into the reasons behind the children’s difficult behaviors, caregivers are better able to provide the nurturing care their children need.

POSSIBLE RESPONSES

- Therapeutic supervised visitation for families who are reunifying
- Mindfulness and Parent Baby Groups
- Talking is Teaching initiative
- Training staff in PRIDE skills
- Advertising Attachment and Biobehavioral Catchup (ABC)

Finding 5: Turning your story into your strength

KEY INSIGHTS

When caregivers work with FNC they are supported to recognize and build on their strengths. FNC’s strengths-based approach increases participants’ readiness to learn new skills that support their ability to care for their children and meet their goals.

DISCUSSION

According to the Children’s Trust Fund Alliance, “A strengths perspective is an approach that puts the strengths and resources of people, communities, and their environments, rather than their problems and pathologies, at the center of the helping process—recognizing that every individual, group, family and community has strengths and resources.”

Before reaching out to FNC for support, many of the caregivers we work with feel ashamed that they have struggled significantly as parents and in other important areas of their lives, and they anticipate that they will be seen as “bad” parents, or they may worry that they are incapable of making positive changes. Through our strengths-based approach, caregivers learn to move through challenges without getting stuck in feelings of shame.

Caregivers develop resilience in many ways. We partner with them as they develop strategies to solve whatever challenges they’re facing; we coach and mentor them as they carry out their strategies; and we celebrate their successes, no matter how small. Engaging with caregivers in this way helps them use and build their own strengths which makes them better equipped for the next challenge they face, whether we’re there with them or not.

In describing the growth she experienced through her work at FNC one interviewee stated, “I think like not beating myself up over those kinds of things has created that resiliency where I’m like, ‘Acknowledge that this was a mistake that I made, but don’t live in it or parent out of guilt because of it. Just acknowledge it. Accept it. And do better moving forward’”

Another parent stated, “My ‘go to’ is still sometimes to like, you know, reflect back on the mistake. But I also get to remind myself that I’ve made a lot of changes not only in my life, but for their lives as well... I really do believe that I’m a good mom today, and I show up for my kids. I’m there to give them consistency and structure and stability and, you know, everything that I didn’t have growing up.”

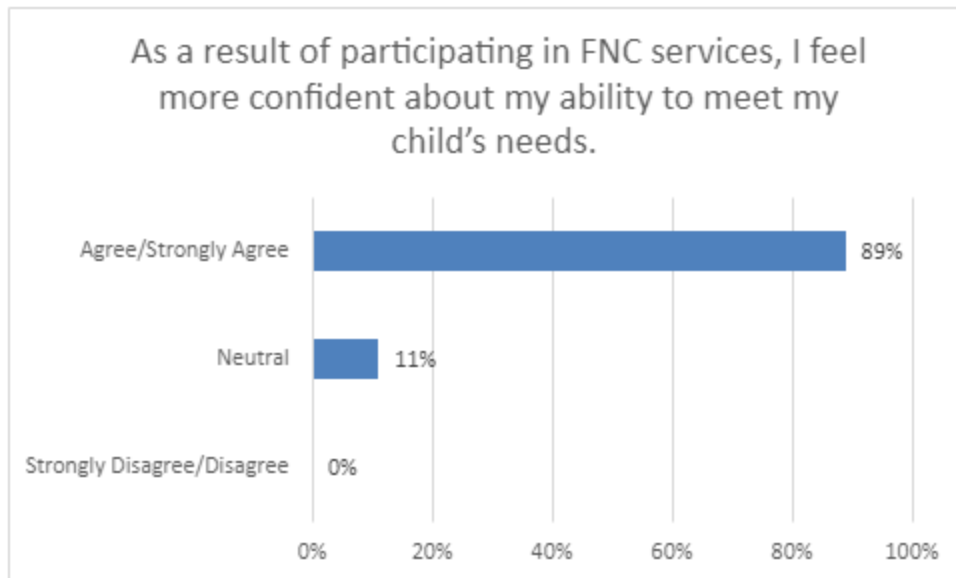
Another interviewee noted that he found newfound self-compassion, hope, and self-confidence at FNC. “It’s more confidence, I guess. And just knowing that everybody makes mistakes. Just the knowledge that I’ve been learning this go round. If you put yourself out there... good things can happen.”

Through his work with FNC, this caregiver reported finding increased awareness of his internal strength and resilience. “I learned, you know, that I have a lot of perseverance and I also learned how to take what I’ve been through, like going to prison and having a criminal record and being addicted, and turn it into my story...”

Caregivers often experience multiple stressors which impact their capacity to parent, and it can be overwhelming. One interviewee noted that at FNC, “I learned all the things that come with parenting—like how to make it to doctor’s appointments, how to set those appointments, how to get ready, and all the things to make sure that I’m able to do that on my own... And so it gave me an opportunity to feel like ‘Hey, maybe I can do this successfully on my own! And then to be able to maintain that and actually follow through it just builds my self-esteem. And then it allows me to know that if something happens, then I know the steps I need to figure out what to do next...The services that you provided me allowed me to navigate through the child welfare system in a way that I was able to parent my child. And I think because of those tools I’m still able to continue to grow and be a better parent.”

Another caregiver noted the ways in which she was able to overcome significant barriers and reunify with her children. “I feel like I have become a stronger, healthier person. I’ve been able to practice setting goals and actually meeting them...I spent two years in prison and so my background was a hard thing to navigate. I have four kids and I work at a gas station, so I’m just navigating what all of that looks like again...I was able to get into a ...house and in doing so I reunified with my children. And *service provider* was great. She helped me track down places and printed me out applications and brought them to me and was more than amazing... I was able to get into a house, and in doing so I reunified with my children.”

Our quantitative data indicate that a large majority of caregivers feel more confident in their ability to meet their children’s needs as a result of participating in FNC services.



SIGNIFICANCE

The Pygmalion Effect occurs because other's expectations impact both their behavior and our own. If someone believes we are likely to succeed, they will treat us differently to help us achieve those goals. In turn, when someone expects us to succeed, we try our best to meet those expectations. (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968; Jenner, 1990)

Caregivers often experience multiple stressors which impact their capacity to parent, and it can be overwhelming. Having the ability to set and accomplish goals helps caregivers believe that change is possible. And having another's support helps us believe that it's possible that our situation will improve and the challenges we are experiencing will not last forever. FNC providers believe that change is possible, and they work hard alongside participants so that change can happen.

POSSIBLE RESPONSES

- Training staff in PRIDE Skills and reflecting back the growth to families
- Setting realistic goals with families and follow-ups
- More peer support services and connections
- More staff training in Motivational Interviewing
- Trauma Informed Care, Strength Based training
- Children's Mental Health and Adult Mental Health
- Parent to Parent and Peer Support
- Parent Mentors increased

Finding 6: You can teach an old dog new tricks!

KEY INSIGHT

Caregivers make significant changes in their beliefs and behaviors around parenting as a result of their engagement in FNC services.

DISCUSSION

None of us are born knowing how to be a parent. We primarily learn about parenting from our own caregivers. For those caregivers who experienced abusive or neglectful parenting when they were children, it can be very difficult to even imagine how to parent differently. Caregivers who engage in FNC services report feeling able to parent their children with the emotional and physical safety that they did not have as children, learning and practicing new ways of parenting and finally breaking intergenerational cycles of neglect or abuse.

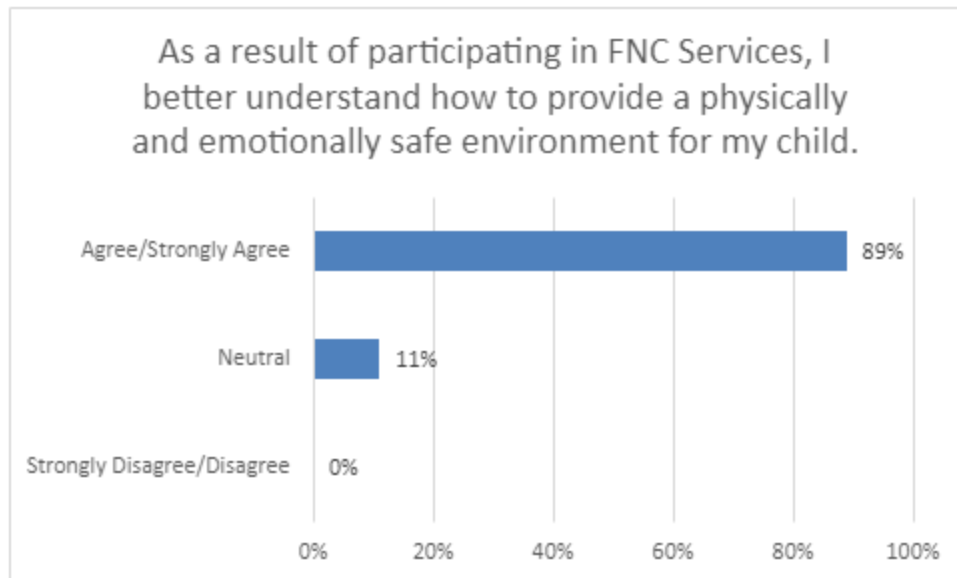
One participant shared, “I didn’t really have parents to parent me growing up. My dad was very absent throughout my childhood, and my mom struggled with her own substance use disorder. I don’t think that she had a real understanding of what parenting should look like... I didn’t want to parent like that anymore. Like I wanted my kids to come first. So taking those parenting classes gave me the skills that I needed to be able to do that, and to know what appropriate discipline is, learn how to not parent out of guilt and hold boundaries and give my kids structure and stability and like all the things that they need to thrive and grow.”

Another participant described how he now is able to parent his children differently from how his own parents raised him: “I’ve worked to really commit to changing my own behavior so that I can try to break that cycle for them... learn how to put myself empathetically into her experience when she’s having tantrums and stuff and not go into what I learned growing up—we would be like, ‘Timeout! Don’t do that!’ What they need from you is having more care and concern, and just like putting myself down on her level, in a positive way.”

Yet another participant shared the significant parenting changes that she had made through her participation in FNC services, “Never in my life would I have thought that you would have these conversations with kids. When I was little, we didn’t have those... Instead of ‘Hush, keep it under the rug,’ we’re going to talk about it, whatever questions they have, and we’ll answer. And I just need to be open and transparent with them.”

Another interviewee stated, “I am a lot more cuddly and a lot more affectionate and a lot more present. And I try to meet all their needs, you know—within reason! And I’m just consistent, which is what he needs.”

89% of our quantitative survey participants agreed or strongly agreed that they increased their understanding of how to provide a physically and emotionally safe environment for their children.



SIGNIFICANCE

We learn about parenting from our own parents. For those parents who experienced problematic and even abusive or neglectful parenting when they were children, it can be very difficult to know how to parent without continuing intergenerational cycles of neglect or abuse. Significantly, our interviews with participants indicate that caregivers who engage in FNC services feel better able to parent their children with the emotional and physical safety that they did not have as children.

POSSIBLE RESPONSES

- Protective Factors Training
- Remind staff of stories of healing
- Children's Mental Health
- Trauma specific treatments
- Support groups
- Therapist lead Healing Groups
- Food group / Nature group
- Music and Art Groups (Window Between Worlds or similar)

Finding 7: Hey, this is fun!

KEY INSIGHT

Through their participation in FNC services caregivers and children find increased joy and satisfaction in being with each other.

DISCUSSION

The interviews reveal that prior to engaging in FNC services, many individuals found parenting to be highly stressful and burdensome. Through participation in FNC services, caregivers report finding increased pleasure in parenting and a new understanding that spending time with their child is the most important gift they can give. Parents report that they now have the ability to develop loving relationships with their children, filled with positive memories and values they want to instill.

An interviewee noted, “I always had this image in my head that like building memories and bonds and stuff with my kids meant that I had to like be doing something extravagant with them or spending all this money. And it’s not like that at all. Something as simple as taking them for a walk through the neighborhood—to them, that’s amazing!”

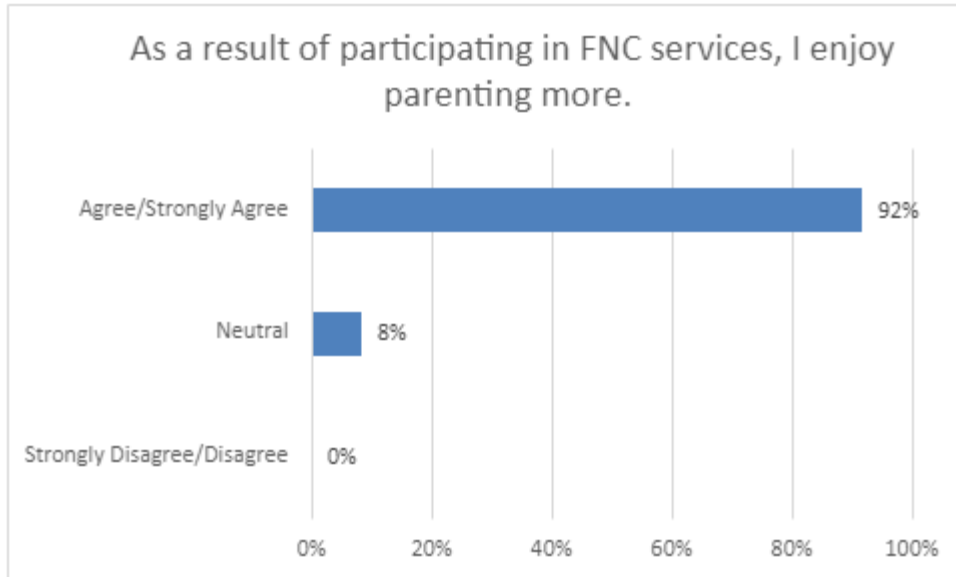
One interviewee talked about the joy she felt to be reunified with her child due, in part, to her work with FNC, “...when he got taken, our bond was broken and it took a long time for me to get that bond and that trust back with him. Now he is here everyday and it’s just so great, I just love him so much.”

An interviewee shared about the delight she now feels as a parent, “I love just watching him discover stuff for the first time—I love it! I really enjoy having this guy under my wing—just me and him. It’s been awesome watching him play.”

One caregiver noted, “I wasn’t able to parent for a really long time ...and so the fact that I get to be a mom today, and I utilized all the services at that time...I’ve just been able to embrace it with patience and kindness and all the tools that I’ve learned over the years.”

And finally, one participant stated, “I just love hearing his laugh, his little hugs and his little kisses. You see his smile? Oh, yeah sometimes I just think ‘how are you so cute?!’ I just remember what I’m doing it all for...without him I was lost and now it’s about our future, together.”

92% of the caregivers who completed our quantitative survey reported enjoying parenting more as a result of participating in FNC services.



SIGNIFICANCE

Unfortunately, stress and trauma have negative effects on early attachment. But families can be supported to create and enjoy gratifying experiences of relationships, even under stressful circumstances. Both children and caregivers benefit when they feel safe, loved, and nurtured.

POSSIBLE RESPONSES

- Family fun events
- Kaleidoscope play groups
- Children's mental health services
- Membership to Children's Museum or YMCA

4. Conclusion

Insights Into Impact

"How you are is as important as what you do."

--Dr. Jeree Pawl

We are so grateful to the service participants who shared their stories with us in our interviews. The feedback they shared with us was meaningful and highly encouraging.

This study has helped us to understand that our way of being in relationship with service participants is an important and impactful element of our work. Throughout our interviews, participants repeatedly shared that they were deeply supported by the ways that they felt seen, heard, and held by service providers.

Another insight is that families are buoyed by our holistic approach to support. Caregivers valued a range of FNC support, including information about child development and parenting, emotional support, social connection, and help to manage the problems of daily living.

Steps Forward

To support service providers' ability to see, hear, and hold families, we will continue to build our capacity to provide high quality Reflective Supervision for our staff. Reflective Supervision is a collaborative relationship for professional growth that improves program quality and strengthens practice. Reflective Supervision builds the capacity of individuals, relationships, and organizations by cherishing strengths and partnering around vulnerabilities (Shahmoon-Shanok, 1991, p. 18), and in many ways it acts as a model for how to be in a helping relationship with families.

We will also prioritize providing opportunities for social connection. One of the impacts of the Covid Pandemic was a decrease in our ability to engage in as many in-person groups/activities with families, and we have begun to ramp up the number and type of activities for groups of caregivers, children, and families.

Opportunities for Future Evaluation

We have been excited to learn about the overall impacts of families' engagement in a variety of FNC services, and in the future, we would like to evaluate the impact of each of our programs individually.

5. Appendix

- Exercise 3 - Indicators of impact
- Exercise 6 - Qualitative Interview Protocol
- Exercise 7 - Quantitative Questionnaire