

**Fort Saskatchewan Families First Society**  
Evaluation Report  
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## **1. Organization and Program Overview**

Vision: Safe, Strong, Healthy Future Generations

Mission: Through improving the lives of our children, youth and families today, we help create a resilient, healthy community for tomorrow.

Families First Society is a unique, grassroots, not for profit organization established in 1998 that supports the healthy development of children and families in Fort Saskatchewan, Sturgeon County, and neighbouring communities. Families walk through our door looking for programs in early learning or parenting. Sometimes they also need family support or a helping hand. None of the work we do gets done alone. We have amazing community partners who we work closely with every day, all in the name of building safe, strong, healthy future generations! With the help of 18 permanent and several contract staff and volunteers, Families First Society serves approximately 900 families each year. Our work is made possible by funding from all three levels of government, a variety of other local funding agencies and community members, and a passionate, dedicated and knowledgeable group of staff and volunteers.

The program that we evaluated during our term at Project Impact, was not really a program per say. Rather, we decided to evaluate the impact that our agency has on families who walk through our doors, without necessarily attending any program at all. They come to Families First to just be with us and with each other. But why? What are they getting out of being here? What difference are we making?

A few years ago, as a Families First team, we began using #thisisourvillage as our agency hashtag. We consistently used the language of “It takes a village to raise a child; but it also takes a child to raise a village.” Our community responded very quickly and extremely positively to our “village” concept, and when we asked people why, they told us that “village” is more familial than “city” or “town” or even, “community”. In a village everyone belongs. There is a role for everyone to play.

In our village, then, we were hoping that we were having the following impacts:

### Direct Impacts

1. Village develops competencies in areas that reflect their goals.
2. Village learn story and voice matter.
3. Village is connected to agency programs and staff.
4. Village makes informed educated choices.

### Secondary Impacts

1. Village works toward their goals.
2. Village learns to advocate for themselves.
3. Village feels a sense of belonging and hope.
4. Village start to take control over their situation.

### Tertiary Impacts

1. A more empowered community.
2. A healthier community.
3. A more resilient community.
4. Safe, strong, healthy future generations.

We thought we were achieving these impacts – we hope we were. And our intended impacts would stem from our principles of change, or, the philosophies we hold close about how we treat one another. Our principles of change refer to how our work is being done and speak to why Families First is having an impact on our community and why people keep coming back:

- i. When someone is heard they feel valued. They feel their story is important. They also get practice sharing their voice – this leads them to understanding their story and embracing/owning their story.
- ii. Research indicates that the majority of people have experienced some form of trauma, and this trauma rewires the brain and shapes behavior. The impact of this shifts our perspective from “something is wrong with him/her” to “I wonder what happened in his/her life. Where is that behavior coming from?”
- iii. UBUNTU is the South African idea that in a connected society, there is an understanding that everyone needs each other. Today you ask me for help, and that’s ok. Tomorrow you may be helping me.
- iv. In a village, everyone belongs – there is a role for everyone to play. When this “village” language is used the experience changes and allows people to adopt this attitude and behavior.

## 2. Evaluation Methodology

The aim of our evaluation was to see what kind and quality of impact we are having in the population we are serving. Over the course of the project, we (a) developed and refined our ideas of intended impact and indicators, (b) designed and implemented both qualitative and quantitative methods to collect and analyze our data, and (c) identified findings and considered the implications to those findings for program adjustments.

Our project began with a focus on the work of identifying and clarifying the intended impact of our agency overall, regardless of what program a family was participating in, if any at all. Once the direct, secondary and tertiary indicators had been identified, we then designed a qualitative interview protocol to collect qualitative data a paper questionnaire to collect quantitative data. We then analyzed our data and identified themes which were then translated into findings. From the findings, we developed program responses and methods to disseminate knowledge gained.

For the qualitative portion of this project, we designed an in-depth interview to gain data about the structural, qualitative changes resulting from being at Families First. We identified a sample of subjects using a purposeful stratified technique to select a representation of the population we served. Our population size was 84. Our sample size was 12 and we drew our sample from the strata of the families who walked in, but did not necessarily attend a program.

We convened one-on-one interviews with our 12 samples, each interview lasting from between 45 minutes to one hour in length. Data were collected and we applied a four-step model of textual analysis to each of the interviews. This process allowed us to interpret the meaning and significance of the interview data. We then examined the overarching themes that emerged from the full scope of our data analysis to illuminate the primary insights and discoveries.

For the quantitative portion of the evaluation, we designed an eight question questionnaire to collect data on our quantitative indicators of impact. We administered this instrument to 28 parents and had a response rate of 100%. The data were analyzed primarily using measures of central tendency.

Our evaluation produced findings which capture the primary discoveries from the data. The most significant findings are described in the following narrative.

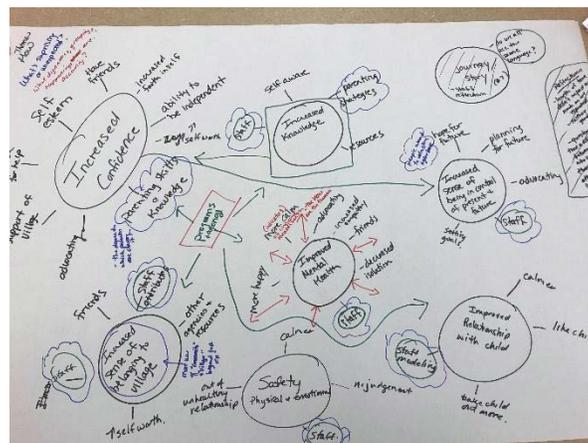
### 3. Findings and Responses

#### Finding 1 - All roads lead to improved mental health (AKA: The bird's eye view – what we saw from above)

##### Description

If you've ever been on an airplane looking down on the landscape below, you may have experienced a moment of geographic clarity. Down on the ground, the view is much different than from above, where you can see how pieces of land fit together, like a patchwork quilt, stitched together - or sometimes disrupted - by paths, roads, and streams.

When the Families First Project Impact team mapped out our findings, laying them out on the landscape of our chart paper, themes circled and connected by series of lines and arrows, it was admittedly a bit of a mess. We were on the ground, excited by where we were but not quite sure where that was – until we stood and looked down at our landscape from above.



What we saw from above was beautiful! Exhilarating! Much less complicated. We could see our themes and how they were supported by their neighboring indicators and descriptors and connected by our

directional streams. But we could also see a major thoroughfare. One that we had not realized was there before, nor one that we had sought to find. It was the thoroughfare of improved mental health, and all roads on our map, we could see from our birds eye view, led to, and from, there.

Our data clearly showed us that because of Families First, 100% of parents we interviewed felt better emotionally in several ways. They felt happier, less isolated, had friends and had more faith in themselves as parents. They had an increased sense of belonging to their community, their village. But what was surprising to us from our bird's eye view, was how defined the improved mental health thoroughfare was.

### **Significance**

Improved mental health, then, is not only a finding from our project, but a central, or an overarching finding. And this is significant, because our agency has always had this emotional, ethical baggage when it comes to the lack of services available for timely mental health support. To say that there are gaps in mental health services is understating it. There are canyons (which we would also be able to see from the air!). The fact that Families First is doing more that we realized to improve mental health for our families does not change this, however, simply knowing about the finding has implications.

Firstly, as Families First staff, we can feel a little better – a little less frustrated and helpless perhaps, knowing that while the mental health gap is there, and is a barrier, at least we are doing something in the way of creating a bit of a bridge for people to make their way across. Secondly, we wonder if we shift our language and start to declare the good work we are doing, could the profile of our work as well as the profile of the importance of mental health be increased? And thirdly, could there be more funding streams available to us as we explore opportunities categorized for mental health? It will be interesting to see!

For now, though, let's explore the roads that travel into and away from our first and overarching finding of improved mental health. We hear the voices of our families along these roads, and the voices are calling to us, "We are!"

"I see myself differently because I've been through postpartum and so coming here and getting help with it I can see things – that I'm going through it again. You saw it, now I see it. I recognize it and I know, I come in, I'm a better parent because of it, because I can see where I was and where I am now through here."

## Finding 2 – We are knowledgeable!

### Description

Q: What are three things that you know now that you didn't know before coming to Families First?

A: "How to speak to my children, new ways to redirect if a problem occurs, become more involved in my community."

A road that we were very excited to see clearly established from the air, was the road of Increased Knowledge. This alone was not a surprise for us as we work hard to give parents different tools to help with parenting and managing the stresses that come with day to day life. What we discovered was just how much parents want and appreciate this knowledge. During one of our parent interviews, one mom remarked, "I learned about the lizard brain. It's amazing! Now I watch for it – its mind blowing!" We heard from many parents that not only were they gaining knowledge but they were actually applying what they learned to improve their situations. This increase in knowledge and the ability to apply it gave parents an increase in self- confidence and self-awareness. One parent told us, "I think it is the independence level I feel like I can do anything now." And other, "Myself I am calmer, more confident in parenting."

It was clear in the interview that families were not only gaining knowledge from staff but also from other parents or adults who were visiting Families First (peer to peer support). As an interviewee stated, she appreciates "...learning from other moms here (about) what else is going on."

The science is very clear about improved ability to learn when our brains are calmer. This leads us back to our overarching mental health theme. When our families are feeling calmer and more confident, they are in a better place to take in the knowledge Families First staff are imparting. And now we know, they are taking it in, and also using it!

### Significance

Often we hear that "Knowledge is Power". 100 percent of surveyed parents agreed with this. They clearly told us that the knowledge we gave them not only helped them with parenting it also helped them to feel confident and better about who they were as people. **42%** of parents actually stated they wanted more knowledge, and they referred to programs that were very direct in their approach of sharing knowledge. Families First staff can feel confident in that the knowledge that they are sharing, is valued. Parents enjoy that knowledge is shared with them in a very direct way through courses and one-on-ones but also through the modeling the staff does. Our staff, we learned, is instrumental to the sharing of the knowledge through the relationships that they build and how they facilitate programs. When we reflect on the bird's eye view we cannot ignore that feeling safe and secure is essential to

creating an atmosphere in which our families absorb and practice the knowledge they receive. If knowledge is power then we cannot ignore the other findings, mental health, confidence, and feeling safe that lead to this knowledge being received.

“Everything I know, I know from here. Literally Everything”

#### Possible Response

We are very grateful to understand now how important the knowledge is that we are sharing with the families who walk through our doors, as well as the knowledge that they are gaining from each other. We need to ensure we continue to create the spaces emotionally and physically to nurture the continuous learning the parents are wanting and needing.

### **Finding 3 – We are confident!**

#### **Description**

As you may expect with an increase in knowledge, our data also indicated parent reports of increased confidence. 100% of the parents we interviewed indicated an increase in confidence as a result of coming to Families First, however, the way that parents described their confidence, varied.

For some of our interviewees, increased confidence was described by the fact that they have friends now, because of coming to Families First. As one interviewee responded, “...people that come here are worthy of friendship...there is trust here.”

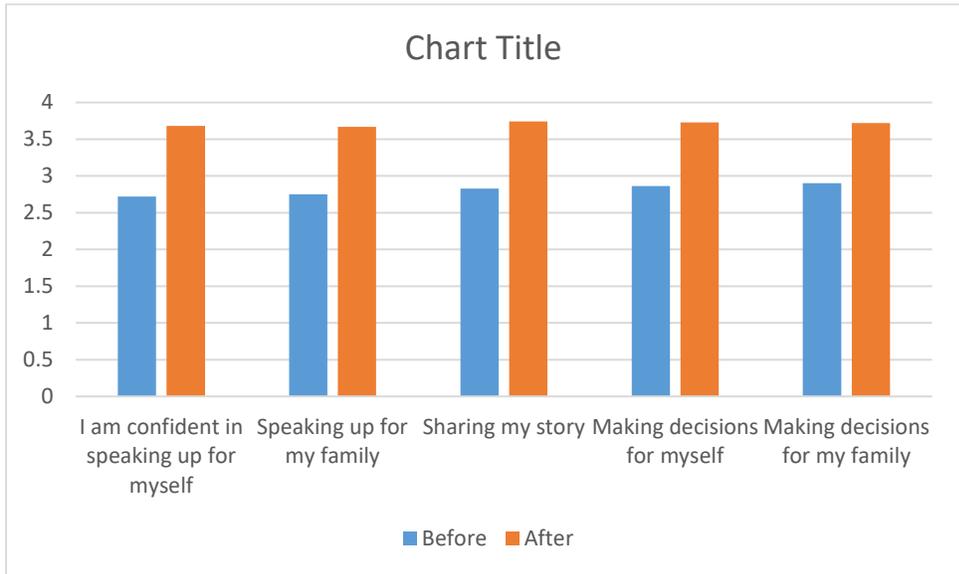
Increased confidence also showed up as people having hope for their future, because of coming to Families First. One parent told us, “I am hopeful that I will settle down and be happy with the choices I make.” Wow! Another, shared, “I hope to have a secure future – I feel secure. I am hopeful for a stable, safe place for the kids and me. Maybe I can actually retire at one point!” This reflection was especially poignant for our research team because we happened to know that nobody in this parent’s family had ever been able to retire. To have the confidence in herself to be this hopeful about the future showed incredible growth. A third parent told us that, “I’m hopeful he’s going to do well. I know he is going to be ok.” This parent does not only hope, but she knows. That’s confidence!

Other descriptors in our data that demonstrate increase self-confidence because of coming to Families First are increased faith in themselves, the ability to be independent, and developing a new ability to advocate for themselves and their families. For instance, one mom shared, “I’m a good mom now.” So simple, but so powerful! Another parent remarked, “I know my child better than other people. What works for everyone else doesn’t work for me – that’s ok.” Yes! That is ok, and when we first met this mom she did not have the confidence in herself to understand that.

Enjoying and even “liking” my child now, were other indicators of increased confidence. In all our interviews people spoke about the shift with their children. As their own self confidence increased, there was an increase in the belief that they could enjoy their children and they were the best person

for their child. With the increase in knowledge, faith in themselves and the modeling they were seeing from staff and peers, parents saw themselves as parents in a different light but they also had a shift in how they saw and interacted with their children.

Quantitative surveys told a similar story. We asked parents to rate their confidence in 5 different areas before coming to Families First and after.



(Because of coming to Families First) I feel a lot more confident in myself and knowing that I have all that support, I don't feel as crappy about myself because I'm finding out I'm kind of normal. I'm confident in who I am. This is the first place I've ever lived that I want to stay living...I tell my friend I'm having a bad day and she says 'Red or White?' I never wanted to move here but I'm so glad I did. Now I'll never move away.

### **Significance**

According to the Health Indicator Frameworks (<http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/82-221-x/2013001/tbl-eng.htm#nm>) perceived health, perceived mental health and perceived life stress are all non-medical determinants of health. We heard overwhelmingly from our interview participants that as a result of coming to Families First, self-confidence increased. And we can surmise, then, that if a person's view of one's self, or one's perception of themselves has become more positive, their overall health has also been positively impacted. From a social return on investment standpoint, then, the significance of increased confidence is outstanding!

## Possible Response

What this finding tell us is that our culture of change is effective. We need to continue to train new agency staff and volunteers in the importance of our philosophy, and continue to reinforce it with our existing team.

## **Finding 4 – We are in control – of our present and of our future!**

### Description

From our bird's eye view looking down on the landscape below, we could see that many of our roads leading in and out of Improved Mental Health, were actually connected to each other. This was the case with "We are confident" and "We are in control." Looking at our Findings Map again (see page 1), if you consider each finding to be a town, and each town has its neighboring indicators, or hamlets, now look at Increased Confidence and Increased Sense of Being in Control. Our data shows that the indicators that support Increased Confidence, make it necessary to have a good road over to Increased Sense of Being in Control, and its surrounding indicators.

Let's look at this parent's comment as an example. "Susan" (not her real name) told us that as a result of being involved with Families First,

"I realize there are things I have to do to push forward. It's super easy to stay in bad relationships. It's hard to be where I am...I realize I can do things. I have to believe in myself, and I need people around me to help."

Susan is a parent who is continually traveling the road between these two towns of Increased Control and Increased Confidence.

Here's another example. This parent – let's call her Anna - reports that because of Families First,

"I am calmer, more confident in parenting."

So here she is hanging out in the town of Increased Confidence. But then,

"I can come here and make mistakes and let him go too far and then I learn I can take more chances. Maybe I can leave him alone with a sitter."

Anna says that maybe she can get a sitter. She is now thinking forward, thinking to the future...hoping perhaps? Maybe feeling in control enough to make a plan? It seems Anna is heading down the road to Increased Sense of Control; but let's look at what she says next, to know for sure:

"We are going on vacation for the first time since I had him, going to Jasper for a week. This is the first time we will take a trip. I would not have done that before. I bought a bike and a bike trailer, I take him shopping...I get to make more decisions."

Yes! Anna is definitely feeling more in control of her present as well as of her future, because of the support she has received at Families First. And, in fact, 57% of parents who completed our quantitative survey indicated they are making educated choices more now after having been involved with Families First. This is exciting news!

### **Significance**

We cannot ignore the fact that not only is increased sense of control a significant outcome of being involved with Families First, but that it is also closely tied to the outcome of increased confidence. If we believe that healthy and resilient communities are built by individuals who are hopeful, feel positive about their future, and have ability to set goals and advocate for themselves, for their families and for those who have not yet found their voice, then a strong and sustained investment must be made into programs and projects that help to build confidence in the people we serve. Best practice in prevention and early intervention is giving people opportunities to they need to thrive and to overcome obstacle when they are small, rather than waiting until moments of crisis to intervene. What our data has helped to reinforce to us, is that when we increase parents' confidence, they are able to be more in control of their lives. And when they experience success in the decisions they make and the goals they set, this in turn, helps to increase their confidence more. The road between Increased Confidence and Increase Sense of Control is a busy and important one!

Q: What are three things that you know now that you didn't know before coming to Families First?

A: Talk openly to people, ask for help, feel confident in my parental choices.

### **Possible Response**

It is interesting to think about the amount of travelling that occurs between Self Confidence and Self Control. Uncovering this in our findings is a great gift, because now as an agency we can reflect on what we do, and perhaps what we can do more of, to enhance and encourage people to travel more to Self - Control. When parents report increased self - confidence, that's good. But when they report that they act on it because they are in control now, that's great! Brain science teaches us that to change long standing behavior patterns, consistent, persistent messaging over time is a must. We know we do well as a team to be consistent in the messages that we give our parents...is this what is helping move people from confidence to control? Can we do even better as staff, to assist more families make this journey? Something to explore!

## Finding 5 – We are safe!

### Description

None of the interview questions that our project team asked Families First parents asked directly whether or not they experienced increased feelings of safety (emotional or physical) as a result of coming to Families First. Safety was, however, referenced by our interviewees enough that it earned some prominence as a theme within our findings.

Our bird's eye view showed us that this finding of increased feelings of safety appeared somewhat isolated from our other findings. We believe that this is because interviewees only referred to it incidentally, rather than being asked specifically about it; so while we know from our experience in the field as well as from other research that feeling safe is of utmost importance to overall physical and emotional health, on our map it is not surrounded by clusters of indicators like our other findings are. Feeling safe, for those we spoke to, showed up in our transcripts as feeling calmer because of coming to Families First, feeling there was no judgement within the agency, and actually physically removing themselves out of unhealthy relationships.

My house was a stressful place. It still is, but not always.

### Significance

The significance of people feeling safer because of coming to Families First has far reaching positive impacts with respect to family and community wellbeing.

Grounded in a solid base of research by Lana Wells, Brenda Strafford Chair in the Prevention of Domestic Violence at the University of Calgary, the government of Alberta developed a Framework to End Family Violence in Alberta in 2014. Within this framework, roles of community and various community and government organizations were identified. Here is some of what the framework has to say (Family Violence Hurts Everyone: A Framework to End Family Violence in Alberta, 2014, p.9)

Large-scale social change requires broad cross-sector leadership, coordination, collaboration and engaged citizens. No single organization or sector is going to solve family violence. Everyone has a role in ending this complex social issue. Working together, we can reduce the rates of family violence and build and sustain healthy relationships in every community.

(a) Role of individuals, families and neighbours:

- Take personal responsibility for individual wellness and healthy relationships
- Be active bystanders to prevent and/or stop violence from occurring
- Be engaged citizens and stand up to end family violence in Alberta
- Support family, friends and neighbours to get help when they need it
- Stop the transmission of violence from one generation to the next

(b) Role of formal and informal community leaders and community groups

- Improve community connections to reduce social isolation
- Value and support non-violence
- Help build respectful and equitable gender relations
- Take action to address family violence within the community
- Inform, influence and lead community change

(c) Role of service providers and non-government organizations

- Deliver front-line services and supports
- Share research and best practices to identify emerging trends
- Work with government to identify needs, issues and strategic directions
- Partner with academics to identify and implement promising and evidence-based practices
- Lead, support and build community capacity to prevent family violence

What our findings tell us, is while we are doing our best to fulfill our responsibilities as outlined in (b) and (c) above, we are at the same time, naturally assisting the individuals we support to fulfill their own responsibilities (see (a) above). As outlined previously in this report, our data shows that our parents are feeling more in control and more a part of their village because of coming to Families First. The protective factors that help to prevent family violence, as highlighted by Lana Well's research ([Family Violence Hurts Everyone: A Framework to End Family Violence in Alberta](#), 2014, p.17) include experiencing positive parenting that includes parental encouragement and support, and non-coercive rule-setting and monitoring, having strong links with supportive adults and belonging to an association with strong sanctions against violence. Families First provides each of these protective factors for our parents, and in turn, they report that they feel safe to be who they are and who they need to be, both emotionally and physically.

I don't feel like I have to go back...Now I know these options are available I feel I don't have to go back. Coming here helped me look forward for myself.

**Possible Response**

Moving forward, we must not underestimate the power that we have as agency staff, to impact the feeling of safety that a person experiences – for the better, or for the worse. This finding reinforces that our status of being a Trauma Informed Agency is a status we need to maintain, and it also tells us that our principles of change are effective.

## Finding 6 – We Belong

### Description

As described in our Overview, at Families First we have a strong belief that “This is our village”. It is our hashtag but beyond that it is our belief that individuals and families need to have a sense of belonging to something or someone beyond themselves. As we interviewed people, we saw that this seemingly simple concept that flows through our agency was a strong finding with 100% of the individuals interviewed expressing an increase in their sense of belonging because they came to Families First. The concept of belonging came up in interviews in the following ways,

1. For some it meant having a support system, a place to go with no judgement. We heard, “When I first came here I thought no one cared, now when I come here I feel like people care” and “I wanted my own support system.”
2. For some it was about meeting friends. We were told, “There are people that will listen and support you even if you don’t have family, then I make friends, even talk to a stranger.”
3. For some interviewees it was about having a safe place for their child or children to discover their world, a place where it was OK to learn by making mistakes. One parent told us, “I just go out more where there are kids or other people instead of being isolated.... Why? Because (he) has a chance to make mistakes here and we can then go to other places.”
4. For many it was about learning what was out there beyond Families First, what else was available in their community, village. One parent shared, “I know there are things out there now. I know I can ask for help. I am able to actually meet and interact with people, I felt so alone. The more people you meet the better Fort is to me.” Another parent told us, “I see more opportunities to have a family and community. If (Families First) wasn’t here I probably would not have seen it at all.” And a new resident of Fort Saskatchewan told us, “I didn’t enjoy it for the first month because I didn’t know anybody. There’s been a shift – feel like I belong now.”

### Significance

This was definitely one of the outcomes we had hoped for, but to have all participants share that they felt like they had a place to go where they were not the only ones going through something, and where they found people they could relate to, is extremely reinforcing for us. Also of significance was that these individuals expressed a sense of belonging to the bigger picture the “community” or “village”.

“This is the first place I’ve ever lived that I want to stay living.”

How does this sense of belonging impact people? Does it impact our community? According to Statistics Canada,

Research has established links between social networks and health outcomes<sup>1</sup>. Social isolation tends to be detrimental to health, while social engagement and attachment are associated with positive health outcomes. Sense of community belonging embodies the social attachment of individuals and reflects social engagement and participation within communities. This type of indicator supports an "upstream" approach to preventing illness and promoting health.

<http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/82-229-x/2009001/envir/cob-eng.htm>

Our data clearly shows that there is an important connection that happens when people attend our programs or walk in our door. When people walk into Families First they connect with our staff and start to feel comfortable. They start coming to our office more regularly they begin to feel safe here, and develop a sense of belonging. They then go to programs and they start making connections with other participants, and other staff and volunteers. They find people that they feel they belong with. The next steps seems to be going to other community events and agencies which opens them to the connection to community, a village where they belong. This quote from a single Mom who has been coming to Families First for close to six years sums it up well. "It definitely takes a village, knowing someone's there for you, it is definitely a good feeling. Village – You are my village – my community."

## Finding 7 – Families First Staff Rocks!

This is the finding that allows us to celebrate the work our staff does and how they do it! When we looked at our findings map from the air, the patchwork quilt of findings below was woven together by our skilled and dedicated team. Our data clearly showed that there is a huge connection between the staff and all the findings. We heard from all interviewees about how important to them the staff's ability to **share hope** was. One interviewee told us, "My happy spot is coming in and seeing everyone welcoming and happy, why give up?"

Equally important was our team's ability to **form relationships**. We heard comments like "(Families First is) helping me be more confident I guess because you or certain people here know if I'm having a bad day, I get the guidance or advice and they cheer me up."

Our team's ability to **model behaviors** "Helps me be more the kind of person I've always wanted to be – outgoing, friendly – because people who work here are that way." The staff was key in sharing knowledge but what we also heard about was the respect parents had for them. We heard the respect from an interviewee who said, "I see the behind scenes stuff going on and thankfully I don't need that. It's nice to see that it's going on and that people are getting help." Another parent shared, "We moved here for very specific reasons, the way that the county was, and we wanted to bring the children up in a more caring environment and more of a community. You see the village here going on."

## Significance

Our staff was mentioned throughout all interviews. From the air, our team is like a river, a connection throughout our whole road map. When we consider the theory and research about our brains being wired to need human connections, our compliment of staff and volunteers is that connection, at least initially, for many of the families. Our staff is forming connections with families but they are also an essential part of connecting families to each other (peer support) and the community. The relationship building, the referrals, the listening, the advocating are all key to helping the families feel connected.

## **Possible Response**

This finding shows us that at this moment we have a strong team with values that align. We need to continue to work and support staff and volunteers to have the time and ability to keep making these connections not only with clients but also with each other. Moving forward we need to continue our core training that supports the concept of connection. It will be important to ensure that staff have the time for connecting but also the time to celebrate and debrief. This finding has shown us the importance of the staff to our participants, and we need to make sure staff continues to understand the depth of this most important work.

## **Detour Ahead! (AKA: Things that Surprised Us)**

### Description

Naturally, looking at our findings from our eye in the sky, we did see some anomalies. Things about the landscape of our findings that surprised us. Things that did not necessarily get in the way of our findings, but rather, cause us to pause and reflect.

The first of our surprises was that most of our interviewees appeared confused when asked about “telling their story”. When we asked our interviewees how they share their story with others, and if that has changed since coming to Families First, most of the time people asked for clarification before answering. And when people did respond, their responses usually related to them telling people about Families First and the services we provide. Our Project Impact team expected that parents would have understood that we were referring more to sharing the story of their journey, or a little peek into themselves and their lives. These unexpected responses led us to wonder – are all of us as staff using the same language with our families? Are we consistent in our messaging to the families we serve, about our high regard for their story? We definitely use this language with each other, but do we use it with our clients? On the other hand, our quantitative surveys showed a 50% increase in confidence in telling their story since coming to Families First. Perhaps the question in writing was easier to understand than the question orally?

Another surprise to us was how families spoke about wanting to learn more. They asked for more direct knowledge; they enjoy it when staff learn something new and share it. Our philosophy has really revolved around more of a modeling approach and letting parents seek us out for what they thought they needed to know. We heard though they like the posters up, they liked when we talked about child development, they actually would like more. This will be interesting to take back to staff and see how moving forward we can have more direct and creative opportunities to share knowledge and information.

## **4. Steps Forward – Our Work on the Ground**

As stated at the beginning of this report, our first steps out into the land of our findings was chaotic. It was messy and overwhelming. Like being dropped off in the middle of New York’s Time Square on New

Year's Eve and not having a clue where to start walking to find your hotel. From the air, though, things made more sense. Our findings began to stand out amongst the clutter. We saw patterns and themes, and the way they were connected made sense, like the way that streets, roads and highways make sense when you can see them from above.

Now we are tasked with putting our feet on the ground. We have a better understanding now of the lay of the land; now we are ready to enjoy where we are and perhaps to discover some place new.

Moving forward, here are some of our most important steps:

- Share with staff and volunteers let them absorb and give feedback
- Share with our Families First Board of Directors
- Create a timeline to share our findings both internally and outside the agency
- Reflect on the mental health aspect of our findings and look if there is some awareness that needs to be shared with other outside agency on this finding
- Introduce and share parent education, child development and general knowledge in a more direct manner now that we understand the importance of this to our families
- Broaden the reach of our quantitative survey this October to get more data to share with community, funders and potential funders

## Appendix

## Indicators of Impact

<b>Impact #1 – Families have a sense of belonging and hope.</b>	
<b>What we mean:</b> People feel like they have gifts to give and people will receive them with gratitude. They have a role to play in their family, village and community.	
<b>E3 (Quantitative Indicators of Impact)</b> Do – clients attend programs Do – walk-ins come back Do – clients maintain relationship with staff Know – parents learn where to go in village for support Feel – clients feel included and valued	<b>E4 (Qualitative Indicators of Impact)</b> Belong – client develops sense of belonging Believe – client has increased hope Love – clients love their village
<b>Impact #2 – Families own their own story.</b>	
<b>What we mean:</b> This is my story and it is part of who I am, it doesn't define me but I am the author of my stories. By staff listening to clients and placing high value on client's story, client learns that their story is important. The other point is that by sharing and being they discover their voice.	
<b>E3 (Quantitative Indicators of Impact)</b> Do – clients share their story Do – client advocates for self/family Know – client understands his/her story Feel – client has confidence to share story	<b>E4 (Qualitative Indicators of Impact)</b> Believe – client is empowered Become – client becomes his own best advocate Love – client embraces/owns his story
<b>Impact #3 – Families are safe, happy and healthy.</b>	
<b>What we mean:</b> Families are in good relationships, have their basic needs met, are attaining their goals and are able to take care of themselves and their family.	
<b>E3 (Quantitative Indicators of Impact)</b> Do – client makes informed, educated choices	<b>E4 (Qualitative Indicators of Impact)</b> Become – client is empowered Believe – client believes he can reach his goals

<p>Know – client learns skills to meet his needs/goals</p> <p>Feel – client is confident in making decisions about himself and family</p>	<p>Love – client loves him/herself</p>
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## Principles of Change

The philosophies Families First Society holds dear about the treatment of one another directly relates to the organization's Principles of Change which are the four principles, listed below. The Principles of Change refer to how the work is being done and speaks to why we are able to help families reach their goals and learn skills; it is how the children are socialized; it is why people keep coming back.

- i. When someone is heard they feel valued. They feel their story is important. They also get practice sharing their voice – this leads them to understanding their story and embracing/owning their story.
- ii. Research indicates that the majority of people have experienced some form of trauma, and this trauma rewires the brain and shapes behavior. The impact of this shifts our perspective from “something is wrong with him/her” to “I wonder what happened in his/her life. Where is that behavior coming from?”
- iii. UBUNTU is the South African idea that in a connected society, there is an understanding that everyone needs each other. Today you ask me for help, and that's ok. Tomorrow you may be helping me.
- iv. In a village, everyone belongs – there is a role for everyone to play. When this “village” language is used the experience changes and allows people to adopt this attitude and behavior.

## Qualitative Interview Protocol

### **Project Impact Interview Protocol**

1. (know) You've been in now a few times/keep coming back, what have you learned from us or Families First about what's here for you in your village?
2. (believe) Now that you know those things, how are you seeing yourself differently? How are you seeing your village differently?
3. (do) What are you doing or trying new that maybe you didn't before coming here? What are you still hoping to try that you haven't yet?
4. (become) How is this helping you to grow as a person? In what ways do you still need to grow to be an active part of your community?
5. (know) What have you discovered about your journey or story since coming to Families First? Of what you discovered, what was surprising to you? What assumptions did you used to hold about yourself and your story that have changed since coming here?
6. (believe) How has that impacted the faith that you have in yourself? How has this impacted the faith that others have in you?
7. (do) How have you shared your story with others? What about sharing your story have you tried in ways that you wouldn't have otherwise?
8. (become) How has that changed the way you express yourself? How has that helped you to become an advocate for yourself and others?
9. (feel) What do you feel more hopeful/excited/worried about since coming to Families First? What is frustrating for you?
10. (love) How has this made you more committed to creating the best life possible for your family? Your village?
11. (feel) In what ways has your confidence grown since coming to families first? (If they answer with a do we respond with – How has that impacted you emotionally? What continues to unnerve you or be uncomfortable about owning and sharing your story, even after your time here?

12. (Love) How has this helped you to keep going even when things get tough?

13. (Love) How has this helped you in making decisions for your family?

14. What do you want your story to be 5 or 10 years from now? How do you desire for the time in this program to affect your future story?

Quantitative Questionnaire

**Families First Society**

**1. Please check the Families First Society programs or services that you access**

- ChIPS
- Community Kitchens
- Visiting with other families in the front area
- Telling my story to Families First staff
- Triple P
- Family Violence Prevention Program
- Angel Whispers
- We Can Food Basket
- Diapers and/or Baby Formula

**2. If I need something that FF doesn't have, I know who to ask about it.**

Yes                      No

**3. Because of coming to Families First I know where to go to get the help I need.**

Strongly Agree      Agree      Undecided      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

**4. For the items below, please circle a responses in each column for each statement. For your response in the "Before" column think back to how you thought or acted before coming to Families First. For the second column, answer based on how you think or act now because of coming to Families First.**

	<b>Before</b> coming to Families First				<b>Now</b> because of Families First			
<b>a) I am confident in speaking up for myself.</b>	Not at all	A little	Some-what	Very much	Not at all	A little	Some-what	Very much
<b>b) I am confident in speaking up for my family.</b>	Not at all	A little	Some-what	Very much	Not at all	A little	Some-what	Very much
<b>c) I am confident in sharing my story.</b>	Not at all	A little	Some-what	Very much	Not at all	A little	Some-what	Very much

	<b>Before</b> coming to Families First				<b>Now</b> because of Families First			
<b>d) I am confident in making decisions for myself.</b>	Not at all	A little	Some-what	Very much	Not at all	A little	Some-what	Very much
<b>e) I am confident in making decisions for my family.</b>	Not at all	A little	Some-what	Very much	Not at all	A little	Some-what	Very much
<b>e) I am confident in making decisions for my family.</b>	Not at all	A little	Some-what	Very much	Not at all	A little	Some-what	Very much
<b>f) I feel that I matter.</b>	Not at all	A little	Some-what	Very much	Not at all	A little	Some-what	Very much
<b>g) I make educated choices.</b>	Not at all	A little	Some-what	Very much	Not at all	A little	Some-what	Very much

**5. What are the most important things you've learned since coming to Families First?**

**6. What are 3 things that you do now that you didn't do before coming to Families First?**

**7. Since coming to Families First, I am more committed to creating healthy changes in my community.**

Yes      No

**Thank you so much for sharing with us. It is only through your story, that we can tell ours.**

#thisisourvillage