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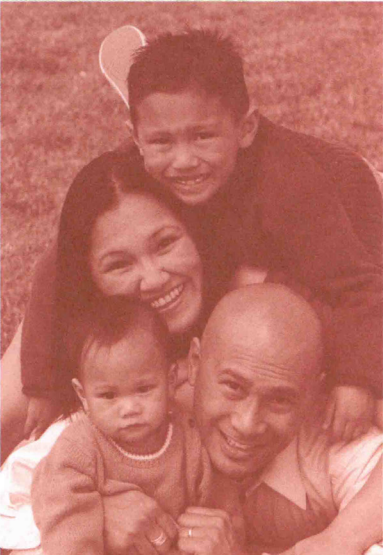


# **Neighborhood House Basic Needs Family Center program evaluation**



*Evaluation results for 2012*

**F E B R U A R Y   2 0 1 3**



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*Evaluation results for 2012*

**February 2013**

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# Introduction

## *Overview*

The Family Centers of Neighborhood House support children, families, and neighborhoods in the east side of Saint Paul by providing education, support, and referrals to community resources. The Family Centers operates out of offices in six east side sites, including Bruce F. Vento Elementary, Dayton's Bluff Achievement Plus Elementary, John A. Johnson Achievement Plus Elementary, Saint Paul Music Academy, Highland Family Center, and Wellstone Family Center.

The Family Center contracted with Wilder Research to conduct an independent evaluation of programs and services. The following report summarizes the services provided by the Family Center sites, as well as the impact of case management services for clients served.

## *Family Center services*

Following are descriptions of programs and services offered through the Family Center. These services are ongoing, with the exception of individual Life Skills education courses which vary from year to year.

### **Crisis services**

Crisis services are provided to families with children attending one of the Family Center schools, as well as to other families in the community. Services are provided by Family Center staff who assist families with meeting basic needs such as food, clothing, shelter, medical, and mental health needs. Some crisis services are provided as part of the housing program, with most families receiving crisis services through the housing program either homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. Housing program families often need assistance with rental issues, housing, repair issues, issues with utilities, or resolving conflict with neighbors or landlords, for example, and may also need referrals to services not related to housing.

### **Case management**

The Family Center supports families through three different case management programs. The Family Community Partnership and Family Assessment Response programs are supported by grants from Ramsey County. Family Community Partnership is a voluntary program that assists low income families with minor children with basic needs and information regarding community resources. Family Assessment Response is a Child Protection

diversion program, for families who have been referred to Child Protective Services but do not meet criteria for a case. Family Center staff work with families in both programs to address basic needs, connect to community resources, including mental health supports, and offer general support and guidance to families.

### **Housing Trust Fund housing program**

The housing program works to stabilize the housing situations of families with children attending Johnson Elementary. Program services include case management and housing placement. Program staff help families find and maintain decent, safe, and affordable rental and owner-occupied housing. Staff also provide supportive services, resources, and referrals for a variety of issues that may pose challenges to self-reliance, addressing employment, mental health, transportation, child care, school attendance, and other concerns faced by clients. Wilder Research conducts a separate evaluation of the housing program.

### ***Evaluation methods***

As described above, the Family Center provided a variety of services to families through its programs. Following are brief descriptions of the evaluation methods for the program components included in this report. More detailed information on evaluation methods is provided in the Appendix, including copies of survey tools (Figure A1).

### **All services**

Program records from the Family Center's ClientTrack database provided descriptive information about clients served by the Family Center overall, as well as clients who received crisis services or case management services. In addition, program records described the type of services clients received.

### **Crisis services**

#### **Exit survey**

In January 2012, program staff began administering a brief survey to all clients exiting services each month in an effort to gather information from clients. The survey is completed by individuals who *exit* service during these months, regardless of when they began receiving services from the Family Center. This exit survey measures participant satisfaction with program services, and attainment of outcomes and changes in participants' knowledge, behavior, and circumstances.

## **Case management**

In December 2012, a proportion of families participating in one of the three case management programs participated in one of two focus groups. Focus group participants shared how participation in the program had impacted their and their children's lives and offered recommendations for improving programming going forward.

# Program participation

In addition to the services described, this program also supports a community food shelf. In 2012 the food shelf served a total of 14,615 clients, including 6,378 children.

Clients served represented diverse ethnic groups. Many clients served were Asian/Southeast Asian/Pacific Islander (44%), and about two-thirds of clients accessing the food shelf were below the federal poverty guideline (Figure 1).

Most clients receiving food shelf support (93%) were from Ramsey County, and 5 percent were from Dakota County. Figure 2 shows where clients who received food shelf support were living in Saint Paul.

---

## 1. Characteristics of client served: Food Shelf

	N (%) of clients
<b>Gender (N=14,615)</b>	
Female	7,599 (52%)
Male	6,986 (48%)
Unknown/don't know	30 (1%)
<b>Age (N=14,615)</b>	
0-59 months	1,461 (10%)
5-9 years	2,023 (14%)
10-14 years	1,861 (13%)
15-17 years	1,033 (7%)
18-22 years	1,571 (11%)
23-54 years	5,449 (37%)
55 years and older	1,215 (8%)

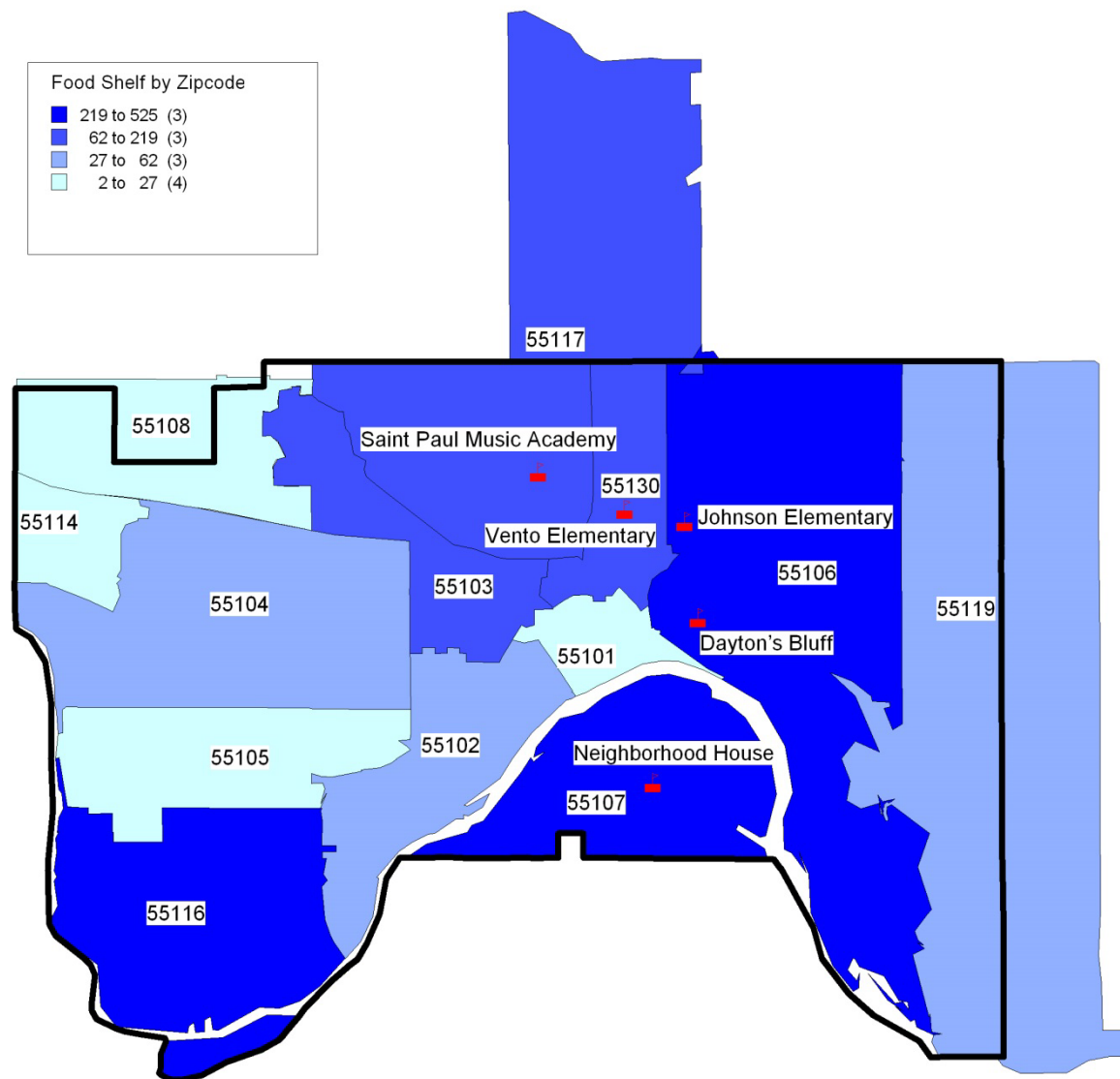
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**1. Characteristics of client served: Food Shelf (continued)**

<b>Race/ethnicity (N=14,609)</b>	<b>N (%) of clients</b>
African	749 (5%)
African American	1,437 (10%)
American Indian	195 (1%)
Asian/ SE Asian/ Pacific Islander	6,488 (44%)
Caucasian White	1,042 (7%)
Hispanic/ Chicano/ Latino	3,878 (27%)
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	37 (<1%)
Multiracial	556 (4%)
Other/Unknown	227 (2%)
<b>Poverty level (N=11,717)</b>	
Below 100% of Poverty Line	9,212 (63%)
Between 100%-200% of Poverty Line	1,526 (10%)
Above 200% of Poverty Line	979 (7%)
Missing/no data	2,898 (20%)
<b>Area/County (N=14,577)</b>	
Anoka County	7 (<1%)
Chisago County	8 (<1%)
Dakota County	764 (5%)
Hennepin County	95 (1%)
Isanti County	1 (<1%)
Ramsey County	13,624 (93%)
Washington County	76 (1%)
Other/Unknown	2 (<1%)

---

## 2. Food Shelf Map



## ***Family Center***

The Family Center served a total of 3,133 clients in 2012. Clients represented diverse ethnic groups, including African American (39%), Hispanic/Latino (17%), and African (16%). Most clients served were again from Ramsey County (98%) (Figure 3).

---

### **3. Characteristics of client served: Family Center**

	<b>N (%) of clients</b>
<b>Gender (N=3,133)</b>	
Female	1,872 (60%)
Male	1,261 (40%)

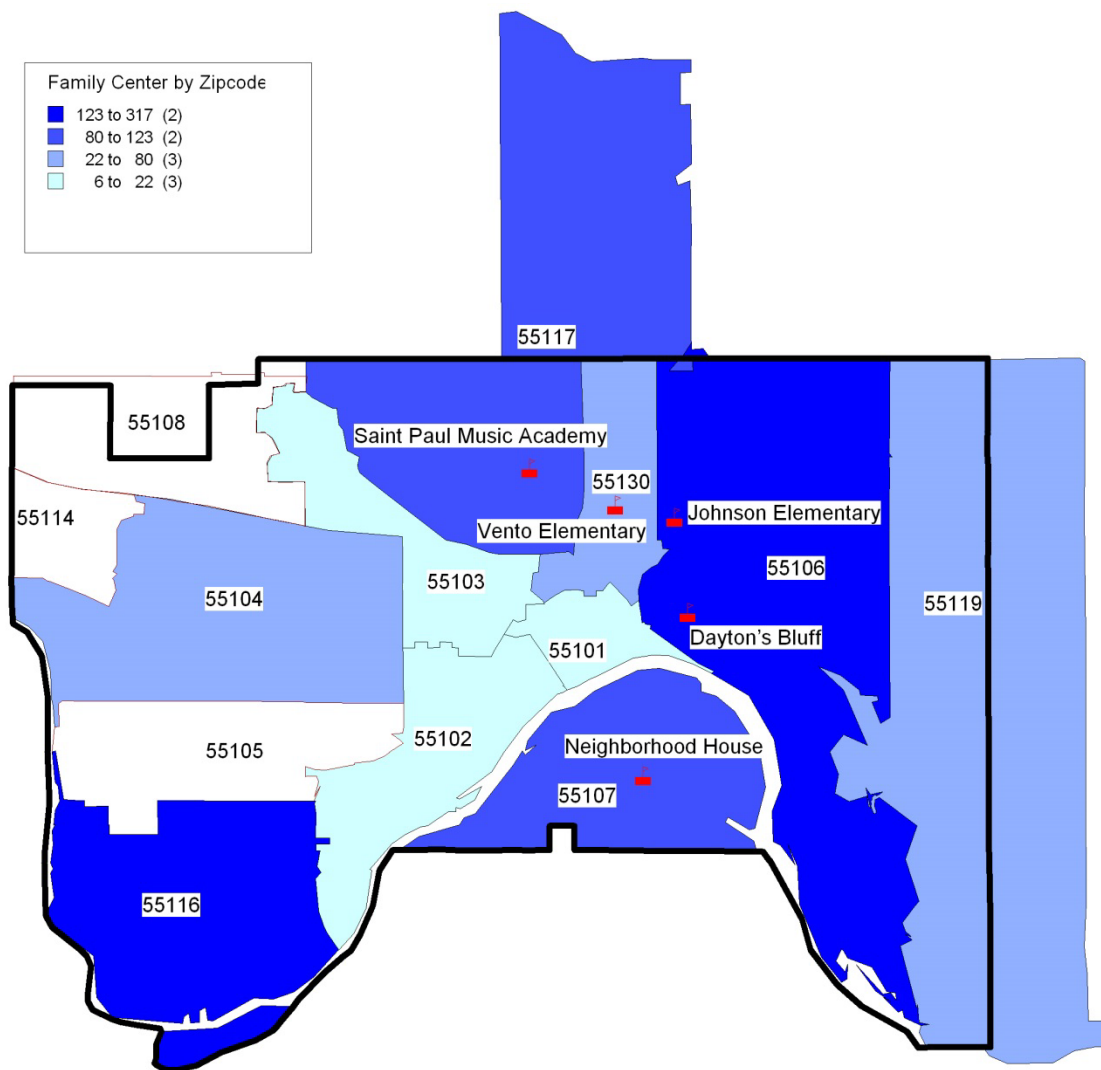
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### 3. Characteristics of client served: Family Center (continued)

	N (%) of clients
<b>Age (N=3,133)</b>	
0-59 months	378 (12%)
5-9 years	484 (15%)
10-14 years	358 (11%)
15-17 years	156 (5%)
18-22 years	178 (6%)
23-54 years	1,395 (45%)
55 years and older	184 (6%)
<b>Race/ethnicity (N=3,133)</b>	
African	493 (16%)
African American	1,231 (39%)
American Indian	62 (2%)
Asian/ SE Asian/ Pacific Islander	335 (11%)
Caucasian White	288 (9%)
Hispanic/ Chicano/ Latino	548 (17%)
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	0 (0%)
Multiracial	166 (5%)
Other/Unknown	10 (<1%)
<b>Poverty level (N=2,604)</b>	
Below 100% of Poverty Line	1872 (72%)
Between 100%-200% of Poverty Line	427 (16%)
Above 200% of Poverty Line	57 (2%)
No data/missing	248 (10%)
<b>Area/County (N=3,128)</b>	
Anoka County	6 (<1%)
Chisago County	3 (<1%)
Dakota County	22 (1%)
Hennepin County	12 (<1%)
Isanti County	0 (0%)
Ramsey County	3,056 (98%)
Scott County	6 (<1%)
Washington County	20 1%)
Other	0 (0%)
No Data (missing)	3 (<1%)

---

#### 4. Family center map



## ***Clients receiving case management***

In 2012, 54 clients received case management services through the Family Center's three case management programs. Case management clients were more likely to be below the federal poverty rate, compared to clients receiving food shelf support or crisis services (93%) (Figure 5).

---

### **5. Characteristics of client served: Case management**

	<b>N (%) of clients</b>
<b>Gender (N=54)</b>	
Female	52 (96%)
Male	2 (4%)
<b>Age (N=54)</b>	
18-22 years	4 (7%)
23-29 years	11 (20%)
30-39 years	22 (41%)
40-49 years	12 (22%)
50-54 years	5 (9%)

---

**5. Characteristics of client served: Case management (continued)**

	<b>N (%) of clients</b>
<b>Race/ethnicity (N=54)</b>	
African	0 (0%)
African American	16 (30%)
American Indian	0 (0%)
Asian/ SE Asian/ Pacific Islander	18 (33%)
Caucasian White	6 (11%)
Hispanic/ Chicano/ Latino	14 (26%)
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	0 (0%)
Multiracial	0 (0%)
Other/Unknown	0 (0%)
<b>Poverty level (N=44)</b>	
Below 100% of Poverty Line	41 (93%)
Between 100%-200% of Poverty Line	2 (5%)
Above 200% of Poverty Line	1 (2%)
<b>Area/County</b>	
Anoka County	0 (0%)
Chisago County	0 (0%)
Dakota County	0 (0%)
Hennepin County	1 (2%)
Isanti County	00 (0%)
Ramsey County	53 (98%)
Scott County	0 (0%)
Washington County	0 (0%)
Other	0 (0%)
No Data (missing)	0 (0%)

# Crisis services results

Family Center staff work one-on-one with individuals facing crisis situations. Many families receiving crisis services are struggling to meet basic needs such as food, clothing, shelter, medical, or mental health needs. Crisis services are provided to families with children attending one of the six Family Centers schools as well as to other families in the community.

In 2012, 2,173 clients received crisis services through the Family Center. Clients ranged in age from children to older adults (55+); however, most clients were between 23-54 years of age (44%). About one in three clients served was African American, 22 percent were Hispanic or Latino, and 21 percent were African. The majority of clients (78%) receiving crisis services were below the federal poverty line. Most clients resided in Ramsey County (Figure 6).

Nine hundred clients who received crisis services received assistance specifically related to housing and utilities. The characteristics of those clients is described in Figure 7.

Figure 8 describes, in detail, the specific assistance clients received related to each crisis episode.

---

## 6. Characteristics of client served: Crisis services

	N (%) of clients
<b>Gender (N=2,173)</b>	
Female	1,264 (58%)
Male	909 (42%)
<b>Age (N=2,173)</b>	
0-59 months	258 (12%)
5-9 years	342 (16%)
10-14 years	247 (11%)
15-17 years	102 (5%)
18-22 years	120 (6%)
23-54 years	964 (44%)
55 years and older	140 (6%)

---

**6. Characteristics of client served: Crisis services (continued)**

	<b>N (%) of clients</b>
<b>Race/ethnicity (N=2,173)</b>	
African	449 (21%)
African American	638 (29%)
American Indian	36 (2%)
Asian/ SE Asian/ Pacific Islander	284 (13%)
Caucasian White	181 (8%)
Hispanic/ Chicano/ Latino	481 (22%)
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	0 (0%)
Multiracial	95 (4%)
Other/Unknown	9 (<1%)
<b>Poverty level (N=1,627)</b>	
Below 100% of Poverty Line	1,269 (78%)
Between 100%-200% of Poverty Line	317 (19%)
Above 200% of Poverty Line	41 (3%)
<b>Area/County (N=2,168)</b>	
Anoka County	6 (<1%)
Chisago County	3 (<1%)
Dakota County	20 (1%)
Hennepin County	11 (<1%)
Isanti County	0 (0%)
Ramsey County	2,111 (97%)
Scott County	3 (<1%)
Washington County	14 (1%)

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## 7. Characteristics of client served: Housing/utilities services

	N (%) of clients
<b>Gender (N=906)</b>	
Female	556 (61%)
Male	350 (39%)
<b>Age (N=906)</b>	
0-59 Months	120 (13%)
5-9 years	142 (16%)
10-14 years	111 (12%)
15-17 years	54 (6%)
18-22 years	54 (6%)
23-54 years	381 (42%)
55 years and older	44 (5%)
<b>Race/ethnicity (N=906)</b>	
African	44 (5%)
African American	577 (64%)
American Indian	26 (3%)
Asian/ SE Asian/ Pacific Islander	33 (4%)
Caucasian White	101 (11%)
Hispanic/ Chicano/ Latino	53 (6%)
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	0 (0%)
Multiracial	71 (8%)
Other/Unknown	1 (<1%)
<b>Poverty level (N=933)</b>	
Below 100% of Poverty Line	562 (60%)
Between 100%-200% of Poverty Line	108 (12%)
Above 200% of Poverty Line	15 (2%)
No data/missing	248 (27%)

---

**7. Characteristics of client served: Housing/utilities services (continued)**

<b>Area/County</b>	<b>N (%) of clients</b>
Anoka County	0 (0%)
Chisago County	0 (0%)
Dakota County	2 (<1%)
Hennepin County	0 (0%)
Isanti County	0 (0%)
Ramsey County	892 (98%)
Scott County	3 (<1%)
Washington County	6 (<1%)
Other	0 (0%)
No Data (missing)	3 (<1%)

---

**8. Services received: Crisis clients**

	<b>Services</b>	<b>Clients</b>	<b>Families</b>
Assistance with Housing Resources	1956	748	332
Assistance with Basic Needs	246	126	77
Assistance with Utilities	357	168	69
Assistance with Application	241	169	119
Culturally Specific Food Box - Asian	190	175	41
Culturally Specific Food Box - Latino	210	166	68
Advocacy	43	28	27
Advocacy – Other	7	7	7
Assistance with Appointment	9	9	9
Assistance with Child Health Resources	5	5	5
Assistance with Early Childhood	5	5	5
Assistance with Family Reunification	10	8	8
Immigration Consultation/Assistance	21	20	18
Assistance with Intervention Services	5	5	5
Assistance with Navigating Resources	12	12	6
Assistance with Taxes	3	3	3
Back Pack	4	4	4
Child Care Application Assistance	7	6	6
Child Support	1	1	1
Citizenship Assistance	2	2	2
Clothing	2	2	2
County Combined Application	28	28	18
County Emergency Assistance Application	1	1	1
County Food Support	2	1	1
Employment	5	4	3
Employment Related Consultation	14	13	13
Energy Assistance I/R	1	1	1
Field Trip	1	1	1
Frances Basket/ Clare's Closet NH	40	37	29
Furniture	1	1	1
Health Care Application Assistance	30	22	14

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**8. Services received: Crisis clients (continued)**

	<b>Services</b>	<b>Clients</b>	<b>Families</b>
Home Visits	16	16	16
Household Report Form	1	1	1
Housing Resources	18	15	12
K-12 Education	9	8	2
K-12 School Assistance	4	4	4
Legal Services	6	5	3
Medical/Dental Appointment	4	3	3
Other Resources/Services	3	2	2
Prenatal Assistance	2	2	2
Preschool	2	2	2
Recreational and Sports Activities	1	1	1
Resource Table and/or Information	6	6	6
Resources	1	1	1
Social Security - SSI Application Assistance	1	1	1
Tax Assistance	3	3	3
Telephone Use	1	1	1
Translation Services	57	36	35
Transportation Resources	7	5	3
Unemployment Application Assistance	4	2	2
Adult Education	1	1	1

## Requests for services

While the Family Center was able to provide services to more than 2,000 clients representing approximately 800 families, the Center received nearly 4,000 requests for assistance. Common requests for assistance included rental assistance, Xcel or other utilities, damage deposits, and other issues related to housing and homelessness (Figure 9). Figure 10 describes the zip codes where families were living at the time of the request.

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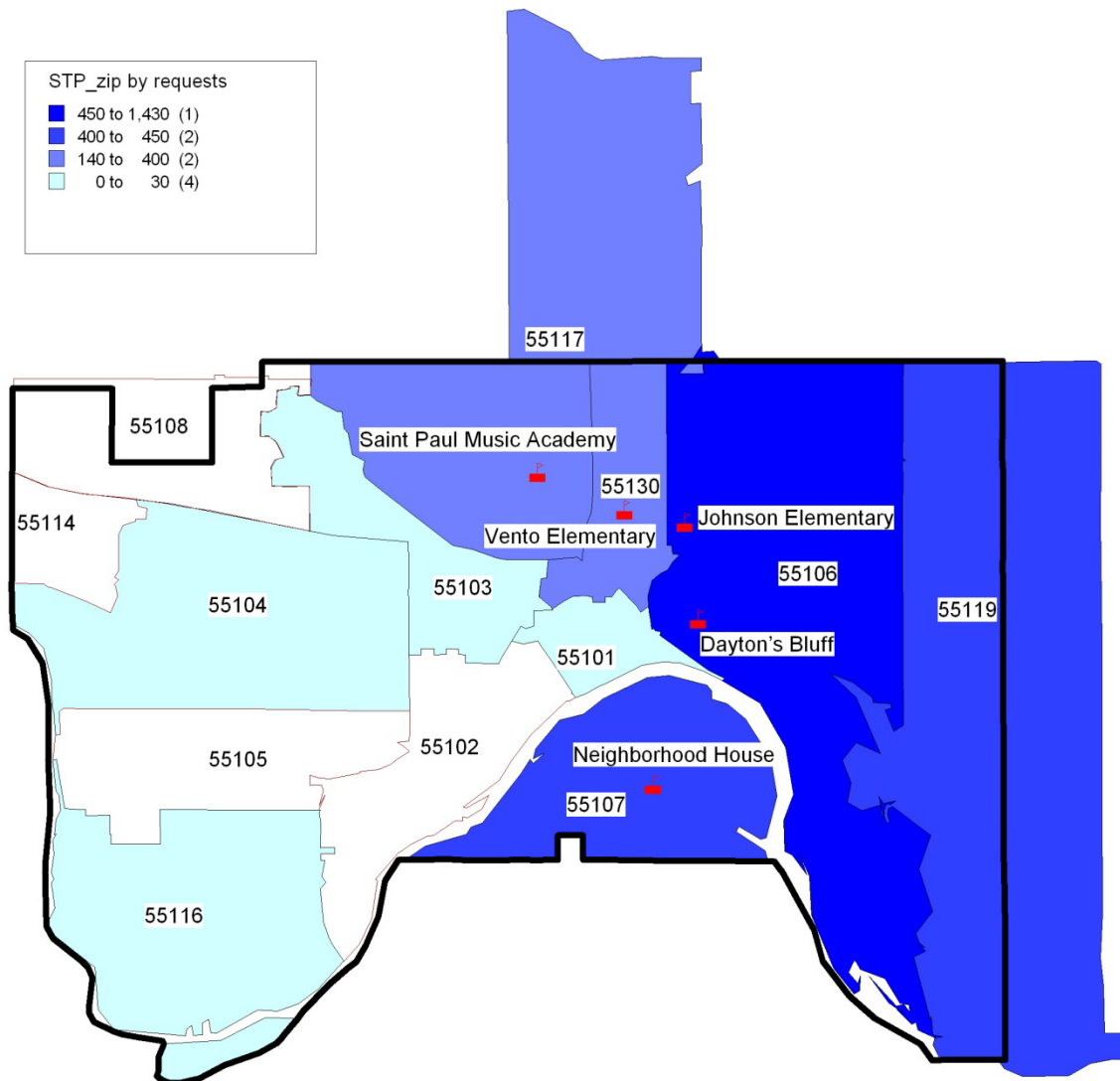
### 9. Requests for crisis services: 2012

Crisis calls/Requests for services	Number of calls
Rental assistance	1,428
Xcel/other utilities	843
Damage deposit	484
Homeless	239
Housing/shelter	218
Furniture (Bridging)	197
Bridge to Benefits screening	125
Car seats	62
Mortgage foreclosure	52
Food	37
Clothes	28
Employment	21
Medical bills	14
Transportation/bus card	14
Total number of calls	3, 878

*Other identified needs included legal assistance, gasoline, phone, child care, school supplies, air conditioner, storage units, auto insurance, parenting, moving expenses, mental health referral, and others.*

---

## 10. Requests for crisis services



## *Exit survey*

Clients receiving crisis services are asked to complete an exit survey addressing their satisfaction with program services and changes in their knowledge, behavior, and circumstances. This section presents results from the 13 exit surveys completed during 2012. It should be noted that the number of completed surveys is quite low relative to the total number of families served. As a result, caution should be used in interpreting these results as these findings may not represent the experience of all clients served.

### **Types of services provided**

Participants most frequently indicated rental assistance as an area of need (76%). In addition, participants identified utilities assistance (31%), clothing (23%) and food (23%) as other areas of need. Other areas of service were indicated less frequently, although it is possible that some participants did not feel comfortable noting issues such as domestic abuse.

As shown in Figure 11, service participants indicated the services they received did not always match the services they needed. Some respondents who did not indicate a particular area of need received services in that area. This discrepancy may reflect differences between client and staff perceptions of areas of need.

---

#### **11. Types of service needed and received (N=13)**

<b>Areas of service</b>	<b>Needed help from the Family Center (% of all respondents)</b>	<b>Those who received services or referrals from Family Center (of those needing help)</b>	<b>% of all clients who received services or referrals, regardless of need at time of crisis survey</b>
Rental assistance	10 (76%)	6 (46%)	10 (76%)
Employment	0 (0%)	1 (8%)	1 (8%)
Utilities assistance (e.g., Xcel, water)	4 (31%)	1 (8%)	4 (31%)
Clothing	3 (23%)	1 (8%)	3 (23%)
Food	3 (23%)	1 (8%)	3 (23%)
Landlord/tenant problems	1 (8%)	0 (0%)	1 (8%)
Medical needs	0 (0%)	1 (8%)	1 (8%)
Mental health needs	0 (0%)	1 (8%)	1 (8%)
Conflict with neighbors	0 (0%)	1 (8%)	1 (8%)
Domestic abuse	0 (0%)	1 (8%)	1 (8%)
Chemical dependency	0 (0%)	1 (8%)	1 (8%)
Mortgage foreclosure	0 (0%)	2 (15%)	2 (15%)
Other <sup>a</sup>	1 (8%)	2 (15%)	2 (15%)

<sup>a</sup> Other services not specified.

## Satisfaction with services

Participants generally indicated high satisfaction with the program. All participants were “highly satisfied” with services received from the Family Center, and most (92%) were “highly satisfied” with the Family Center’s ability to help them when they initially came into the program (Figure 12).

---

### 12. Overall satisfaction with program (N=13)

Please circle the number in the category that best describes your opinion:	Highly satisfied	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Highly dissatisfied
How satisfied are you with the services that you received from the Family Center?	100%	-	-	-
How satisfied are you with the Family Center's ability to help you with the needs you had when you initially came to the program?	92%	8%	-	-

Participants were also satisfied with Family Center staff. All participants expressed satisfaction with the knowledge and skills of staff and indicated staff were readily available when needed (Figure 13).

---

### 13. Satisfaction with Family Center staff (N=13)

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements:	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Family Center staff were knowledgeable and skilled.	69%	3%	-	-
Family Center staff were available to me when I needed them.	77%	23%	-	-

## Changes in situation

Almost all participants during the grant period (92%) “strongly agreed” that their situation had improved since seeking services from the program (Figure 14). Further, all (100%) indicated that the services were “very helpful” in improving their circumstances (Figure 15).

---

### 14. Improvements in situation (N=13)

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements:	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
My situation has improved since I began receiving services from the Family Center.	92%	8%	-	-

---

### 15. Helpfulness of the Family Center in improving situation (N=13)

Overall, how helpful would you say services from the Family Center have been in improving your situation?	Percentage of participants
Very helpful	100%
Somewhat helpful	0%
Not at all helpful	0%

Most participants (92%) reported that their situation had changed since receiving services from Family Center (Figure 16). A majority reported that their situations had improved due to help with rent or housing. Participants also reported that their situations had improved due to help they received in general, their financial situation improving, and help with stress and other daily needs (Figure 17).

---

### 16. Changes in situation (N=12)

Has your situation changed since you began receiving services from the Family Center?	Percentage of participants
Yes	92%
No	8%

---

## 17. Open-ended question: Ways participants' situations changed (N=12)

### If yes, in what ways has it changed?

---

Back to work. Will receive check at the end of the month.

---

I and my family will be moving into a beautiful home. Peaceful for all of us.

---

I feel lightened. I worry a lot about things around me or what might be.

---

I wasn't evicted from my house.

---

I'm getting caught up on my bills.

---

I'm not going to get a UD (Unlawful Detainer) filed against me.

---

In my situation, it helped me from getting put out of my apartment because I didn't have the money to pay all of what I owed.

---

It changed a whole lot.

---

It has changed because my rent is paid now.

---

It helped alleviate the stress regarding my landlord and gave me hope that someone cares.

---

No longer owe back rent or late fees.

---

The water bill was paid.

---

**Note:** This follow-up question was asked of respondents who answered "yes" in response to the question in Figure 9. Some respondents described more than one way their situation has changed.

Asked in an open-ended question to describe ways the Family Center could improve its services, most respondents indicated they had no suggestions for improvement. Figure 18 provides a complete summary of their responses.

---

## 18. Open-ended question: Ways services could be improved (N=7)

### How could services provided by the Family Center be improved?

---

Don't know/no suggestions (2 respondents)

---

I don't feel there is need for improvement. [Staff person] helped me out a lot.

---

It's really good.

---

No improvement needed. Thanks very much for all of your help.

---

[Staff person] is a very knowledgeable person. She doesn't talk down to us. She looks at us equally and fairly.

---

They helped me and I don't see any room for improvement. They returned my calls in time.

---

They just right as far as helping others, in my opinion.

---

## Basic needs

Participants agreed that services are helping them meet their family's basic needs. As shown in Figure 19, all indicated they "strongly agreed" or "agreed" that their basic needs were

being met when they exited the program, and almost all felt that the Family Center helped them meet those needs.

## 19. Family's basic needs (N=13)

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements:	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
My family's basic needs are being met.	46%	54%	-	-	-
Services I received from the Family Center helped me meet my family's basic needs.	46%	54%	-	-	-

## Connections with community resources

All respondents felt that Family Center staff helped connect them with other organizations and agencies, although fewer (82%) indicated that they had actually received services from outside organizations (Figure 20). Thirty-nine percent of participants reported that they had sought referrals on their own, and an additional 39 percent reported that they would feel comfortable doing so (Figure 21).

## 20. Connections with community resources (N=12)

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements:	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Family Center staff helped connect me with other community organizations, agencies, or classes that could help me with my situation.	58%	42%	-	-
I have received help for my situation from other community organizations, agencies, or classes since I first came to the Family Center.	45%	36%	10%	10%

## 21. Efforts to contact community agencies without Family Center assistance (N=13)

Since you started receiving services from the Family Center, have you contacted any other community agencies for help on your own, without the assistance of Family Center staff? This could include agencies staff referred you to, but that you contacted on your own.	% of participants
Yes, I have contacted other community agencies on my own for help with my situation.	39%
No, but I would feel comfortable contacting other community agencies on my own.	39%
No, and I do not feel comfortable contacting other community agencies on my own.	23%

## Informal sources of support

All participants (100%) felt that they had learned new strategies or obtained new resources that would help if they faced a similar crisis situation in the future. While all “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that Family Center staff helped them build a closer relationship with friends, family, and/or neighbors, only 75 percent reported that friends, family, and/or neighbors provide support to them during times of need (Figure 22).

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### 22. Informal sources of support (N=10-12)

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements:	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Friends, family, and/or neighbors provide support to me during times of need.	25%	50%	17%	8%
Family Center staff helped me build a closer relationship with friends, family, and/or neighbors.	50%	50%	-	-
I learned new strategies or obtained new resources since I first visited the Family Center that will help me if I face similar problems in the future.	67%	33%	-	-

# Case management

## *Overview/Methodology*

Two focus groups were conducted at Johnson Elementary school with clients of the Family Center. One group consisted of three Spanish-speaking women and was conducted in Spanish with a bilingual Wilder Research staff. This staff both conducted the focus group and took notes. The other group consisted of 12 adults—three men and nine women—with Wilder Research staff facilitating and note taking. Both groups' discussions were recorded after receiving verbal consent from the participants. The focus group transcripts and notes were then compiled, coded, and analyzed using Atlas Ti qualitative analysis software.

## *Introduced to the Family Center*

After each participant introduced themselves, they were asked about how they originally learned about or got connected to the Family Center. Of those that responded, three respondents said they learned about Family Center through their child attending Johnson Elementary; three respondents learned about Family Center through a friend or family member; and two respondents were connected to the Family Center by a social worker.

## *Initial reason for coming to the Family Center*

The participants were asked about what needs they and their family had when they came to the Family Center for the first time. By far, the most frequently cited need was housing assistance/ support. For example, one respondent described the reason for her family's need of housing support as "...because we were living with my brother in law and he was being foreclosed on so we did not know where to live." The situations giving rise to the need for housing support varied greatly, as shown by another respondent's explanation: "...We were living in a basement that was extremely cold in the winters and needed help finding affordable and a good condition place to live." Several others described living in shelters and other inadequate forms of stable housing, such as their automobiles.

Another frequently cited need that led the respondents to come to Family Center was mental health treatment and support, both for the parents and the children. Some other cited needs were support with their child's education, legal assistance, medical assistance, clothing support, family crisis support, and a need for overall stability in their family's lives.

## ***Improvements/Changes in their lives from the Family Center***

In accordance with their cited reasons for receiving services from Family Center, the most frequently cited improvements and/or changes in the respondents' and their families' lives were related to housing, support for their children, mental health treatment, and general overall support and assistance. Some other important and frequently cited improvements pertained to family/marriage support and parenting skills help, school support for the child and parent (acting as a liaison to school), personal empowerment, and helping to achieve personal goals. Each of these is described in more details below. It is also important to note that when asked which service that they received from Family Center was the most important for them and their families, housing support was also the most frequently cited, followed by parenting/family support, mental health support, and legal assistance.

### **Housing**

Issues and needs related to housing were the most frequently cited reasons for coming to Family Center, and also the most frequently cited improvement in the respondents' lives. As one participant noted, "Without the Family Center, none of us would be here today. Without the Family Center and Wilder, it would be really tough. We would be homeless. It would be tough." This support comes in many different forms, including rent assistance, helping to find available adequate housing, utilities assistance, etc. One respondent cited the support she received for paying utilities and rent when she said, "They [Family Center] paid my Xcel Energy utility bills for a whole year. They also paid my rent for six months until me and my husband found steady employment. After we found work they continued to help us pay our rent with a percentage according to our monthly income."

Not only do the housing support services provided by Family Center help keep families out of homelessness, but it also helps provide an important sense of stability which allows families and parents to focus their energy toward other areas of their lives and planning for their futures. For example, "They help us pay our rent every month, so we can do what we need to do without a lot of extra stuff and stress. It alleviates a lot of stress out of our life. It's helping us plan for when we get off our housing support, then we both can be successful." One mother described how important the housing support was for her family after her husband passed away in an accident and they lost their home within a couple months: "If you're bouncing back and forth, you're a mess and your kids are a mess. My son used to say to me, 'I want to go home.' And I would say to him, 'Me too, buddy.' They just want to go home...Once we got our [new] house, our kids made friends right away. My kid said, 'Mom, this is going to be our new house.'" The following example illustrates the impact of the housing support for providing stability in the lives of this mother and her children when they were homeless:

I had to up and leave my house with no place to go. I spent time at a shelter, sleeping in the car. I tried every shelter and every place. We couldn't get anything. We were literally sleeping in my van... Then I just went through it step by step with them [staff]. Now it's really about the stability of the housing. The stability helps because it helps set the pace for getting the other things into place. It helps to know where you're going to lay your head in a safe place and your children are secure before you can get all the other things going. Then everything else can be full circle... The stability of shelter made the circle full circle, because then I was able to do other important things then. I started to go to college again. Now things are well today. I'm learning to let go, and the stability of the housing gave me that. It gives you the sense that you're not less than. You know, you feel okay, and it gives you the encouragement.

The importance of the housing support that Family Center provides to its clients appears to have a significant impact on the overall stability of the families that they serve, from which they can then begin rebuilding other aspects of their lives.

### **Support for children**

The second most frequently cited improvement and change in the respondents' lives was due to the increase in support for their children from Family Center staff. This support and assistance included educational support, behavioral support, and other general assistance. For example, one respondent describes the comprehensiveness of the educational and behavioral support that Family Center provided for her son when she said:

I'm getting more help for my son now. He used to get kicked out of school almost every day. [Family Center staff member] would call me and say, 'What's going on?' And then I'd go in and she'd work with me and go over this, this, this, and that. And help me with this, this, this, and that. She really worked with me and helped me, not only with the situation, but also with him [son]. She was doing whatever she could to help me be able to go to work. She's a good role model, a good provider... They go above and beyond. They didn't have to do all of this with my son, but she did help him to get where he is now. When he would run away from school, she would run after him and bring him back. When he'd fight with teachers, she would go and get him and calm him down before he got into too much trouble.

The Family Center staff also helps the clients' children get connected to the best schools, even if it is not Johnson Elementary. One respondent described how important it was for her son to enroll in preschool after her husband suddenly passed away in an accident: "She [Family Center staff] got my son into Head Start. I needed to get something for him; some structure or something for him. She introduced me to staff at Head Start. They made sure that my son got into the program and he started right away, and he loves it!"

Finally, one respondent described how important it was for her children to work with someone at the school who speaks Spanish when she said, “Yes, they look forward to coming to school. They know a worker at the Family Center that speaks Spanish.” Not only did Family Center staff help the children receive the necessary language support, but it also encouraged the children to want to go to school and succeed.

## **Mental health**

According to the respondents, the amount and type of mental health-related support for both the parents and the children is comprehensive, extending from intervention and diagnosis to treatment, referrals, and ongoing psychological support. In regards to her child, one mother described the diagnostic support that Family Center provided for her son: “She [Family Center staff] helped me get him [son] to the doctor and we’re in progress with getting him help with ADHD. It’s something I’ve been trying to do since he was in first grade, and he’s in third grade now.” Another mother said how important it was for both herself and her daughter to get diagnosed and begin treatment for mental health issues: “They got me diagnosed, and now they help with my daughter, who has high anxiety issues, which I just found out. We’re good now.”

One respondent described the intervention and referral that the Family Center did for her after an incident with the school administration: “I came in to the Family Center because I knew I wasn’t right. I had a confrontation with someone, and Family Center staff intervened and brought got me help.” Other respondents echoed a similar experience where the Family Center helped to diagnosis an untreated mental health issue, and then helped them to get connected to the necessary services and treatments.

## **General support & assistance**

Several of the respondents pointed out the importance of knowing that they can approach and rely on the Family Center with any need or problem. One respondent noted, “Yes, I know now that if we run into problems we can go there for help and information to resolve the problems.” The respondents often expressed how they feel comfortable asking Family Center staff for help with any issue that arises. One respondent described how responsive and helpful Family Center staff has been during her family crisis situation: “We experienced tragedy, and I feel that I can rely on the Family Center to help me with all the issues that are coming up, both legally and social.” The reliability and comprehensiveness of the Family Center services has been important for meeting its clients’ needs. In summary, as one respondent described, “They’re just helping me to keep my life on track and in the right direction now.”

## **Family/Marriage support, parenting skills**

The supports and assistance provided by Family Center to the clients pertaining to family and marriage related issues were also commonly cited. One client discussed the parenting skills assistance when she said, “My kids: their attitudes, talking back at me, trying to basically run me. I’m learning to put my foot down... They [Family Center staff] could tell that I would always give in to the kids. They taught me to put my foot down and be the mom. I still have issues, but I’m still trying and learning.” The parenting skills support was especially important for those respondents who received it because they too were receiving mental health treatment and support from the Family Center, and thus the need to correct some previously existing issues related to an undiagnosed mental health problem. The family and marriage support also was cited as needed crisis support after the death of a parent.

## **Personal support & empowerment**

During the focus groups, the respondents described improvements in their lives not only regarding direct services such as housing support and mental health treatment, but also more indirect care such as personal support and empowerment. These personal supports have resulted in a range of improvements, including an increase in self-esteem, an increase in one’s sense of personal empowerment, and one’s sense of reliability and availability to talk through personal issues with the Family Center staff. For example, “With every problem that you come here [Family Center] for, you feel like they’re [Family Center staff] giving you the resources so that you’re doing it for yourself, not just them doing it for you. But every time you do that, you realize that you can do more.” Not only does the Family Center staff provide the necessary supports, but they also empower the clients to believe in themselves to solve their issues. This sentiment was echoed by another respondent who said, “I left feeling like I could do something, after I went in there feeling helpless.”

The support provided by Family Center staff contributed not only to the clients’ empowerment, but also their sense that they can share with Family Center staff about any personal issues that they are facing. In the words of one respondent, “I just need somebody to talk to, and Family Center has been that for me. I feel way better. When you come here and you’re just feeling stressed and you talk it out with someone, that’s a lot of support right there.” Another respondent described how they have been able to overcome some behavioral issues because of the support provided by Family Center. The overall wellbeing of the parents is improved by having these personal supports which result in increased senses of empowerment. One respondent summarized this well when she said, “My self-esteem is now going back up a little bit.”

## **Helping achieve personal goals**

One of the most important outcomes from the supports that Family Center provides its clients and their families is the stability from which they can begin to plan their futures and begin achieving their goals beyond their immediate situations that they may be facing. This was expressed by several respondents describing how the services they received enabled them to begin achieving their personal goals. For some, it was finding/starting a career-type job. For others, it was obtaining their college degree: “It [Family Center housing support] helps to take the burden off our shoulders. As a result, I’m going to be the first person in family to graduate college. They helped out a lot by paying for the rent, so they took off that extra stress.”

## ***Unmet needs for families***

Despite all of the cited success stories of the Family Center meeting the most important and critical needs of its clients, the focus group participants nonetheless pointed out some unmet needs and areas of concern regarding the Family Center’s services, as well as providing some recommendations for improving its services.

The first recommendation involved offering more social skills and other non-academic classes to the children:

I think they should also have the life skills classes for the kids [several agree in response]. You know, different types of classes for them... Anger management, dealing with stress, dealing with bullying, helping teenagers with job search. You know, different types of things. They’re [staff] always so focused on the parents, but we want to set our children up to succeed, so I wish they had that extra help for our kids.

In a similar vein, one respondent did not like that the Family Center stopped offering GED courses, and recommended that they reinstate the program:

They used to offer it [GED courses] here, but then they cut it off because I was the only one in it, but I still want my GED, and now I’ve got to look up other places nearby that can help me get it. I’ve been trying for the longest time, and I would go to the classes but then something would come up and I wouldn’t finish it. It would give me something else to do all day if I got a part-time job or something.

Another respondent pointed out her unmet need for immigration-related legal assistance saying, “I told them about that but they have not answered me or called me about it.”

Another area of unmet needs, which was cited by two different respondents, was assistance with utilities.

Finally, one respondent described how difficult it was going to be for her when the Family Center removes her from the program as her child reaches the age limit for support.

Although each of these respondents had described how important and beneficial the services they receive from the Family Center have been for them and their families, these concerns and recommendations pertaining to unmet needs are important for the Family Center staff to consider as they move forward with their services and attempt to best meet their clients' needs.

### ***Most important or useful things learned from participation in the program***

In addition to being asked about the greatest improvement or change in their lives from the Family Center, the focus group participants were also asked about the most important or useful thing that they have learned through the services and staff. Two respondents claimed that the most important thing they learned is how and where to connect to necessary resources in their community: "They've given me resources, showing me where to go and what to look for. Basically, just pick up the phone and call and you can find whatever you want or need." Another respondent cited learning about financial planning as the most useful thing they learned from the Family Center. One respondent referred to parenting skills as the most useful lesson they have learned. Finally, two respondents cited the general support they received from the Family Center as instilling in them a sense of personal empowerment in achieving their goals: "The biggest thing I've learned is that I can do it. They have given me the extra support and help when I need it. They're always encouraging me and push me that extra little bit that I needed."

### ***Looking to the future***

The last question that was posed during the focus group was about what the participants were most excited about with the future. The most frequently cited theme regarded having stable and consistent housing, either by owning a home or being able to feel confident in affording quality rental housing. For example, "[I look forward to being able] to provide a stable and comfortable place to live for my children/family." Another woman expressed a similar sentiment because of how difficult it is to maintain consistent and stable quality housing: "Just being able to keep a house. That's really tough today, it really is. You know, just being able to pay rent and keep everything in order so that you don't end up out on the street again." Several respondents also expressed wanting to own their home as a part of achieving their career goals. As one respondent described, "We're both planning on opening our own business and buying our own house. So, I'm very excited for that."

Several respondents discussed their excitement about being able to help their children achieve their goals and improve their lives. In the words of one respondent, “Be a better mom—I had problems with my spouse and I got discouraged and drove me away from my plans to be a good mom.” Now she is looking forward to better supporting her children. Similarly, another respondent said she was most excited for the future because she wants “To give my children a good education.” There is a clear pattern of the parents who receive the necessary support and assistance from the Family Center to then begin feeling more optimistic about their abilities to help their children succeed, thus showing the positive latent outcomes of the Family Center’s support for the entire family and not just the parents who directly receive the services.

Another frequently discussed area of optimism for the respondents’ future was mental health and wellbeing for both themselves and for their children. As one mother described, “I’m excited for my son to get on medication, calm down, and sit through class so that he can understand the meaning of getting his work done.” Another respondent described how she looks forward to being in an overall mentally healthy state and the positive effects that could have on other aspects of her life, saying:

I just want to get right. I want to be at a normal level; not being confused, not being so depressed all the time, not being so stressed all the time. I just want to be at peace. I want to be able to enjoy going to things with my child. You know, just be happy. Maybe get a part time job. I just want to be alright, to be content. I’m not asking for the world, but just to be alright. That’s all I want.

Being diagnosed and treated for mental health conditions has helped to provide a sense of optimism for the future for a few respondents. As one respondent summarized, “I look forward to mental stability.”

Respondents cited other aspects of the future that they are most looking forward to, including enjoying relationships with others, being happy, and having a greater level of stability in their lives. One noteworthy response described achieving their personal educational goals as a result of the support they received from the Family Center: “Graduating college! Walking across that stage! [I’ll be the] First one in my family.”

# Summary

The Family Center serves a large number of families who are experiencing economic distress in Saint Paul. The Center supports families facing eviction and homelessness, and works to connect families to needed community supports, including mental health supports.

Clients who received crisis services in 2012 were very satisfied with their experience at the Family Center, and reported that their situations had improved as a result of services received. In addition, clients felt they were better prepared now to seek services on their own, following support from the Family Center.

Families who participated in one of the Family Center case management programs also indicated that the services provided has had an important impact in their lives. Housing assistance, mental health support, and general overall assistance were the most frequently cited needs and received support, as well as the areas with greatest overall improvement for the respondents. The most pressing needs of the clients who attended the focus group appeared to have been successfully met by the Family Center, often with respondents saying that the Family Center went above and beyond for the clients and their families. As a result, there is a clearly high level of satisfaction with the Family Center amongst the clients who participated in the focus groups.

However, the clients also pointed out some unmet needs and some ways in which they believe that the Family Center could be improved. This includes more support for those clients transitioning out of the Family Center programs, providing more responsive support to legal issues that the clients face, and offering more assistance with paying utilities. Respondents also recommended that the Family Center offer non-academic, life skills-related courses to the children, rather than solely to the parents. Additionally, one client recommended that the Family Center offer GED courses to its clients.

# Next steps

The findings from this program evaluation were shared with the Housing program Advisory Committee. The Advisory Committee identified the following priorities for the Family Center to focus on in the next program year:

- Continue to promote financial literacy of clients, including employment training.
- Emphasize connecting clients to needed mental health services in the community.
- Improve self-reliance related to negotiating landlord/tenant relationships.
- Identify and promote opportunities for clients to interact socially.
- Continue to encourage clients to connect with community-based services independently from Family Center staff.

# Appendix

## *Evaluation instruments*

Staff use only:

Membership No. \_\_\_\_\_ Initial intake date: \_\_\_\_\_ Case closure date: \_\_\_\_\_

### ***NEIGHBORHOOD HOUSE FAMILY CENTERS*** ***Client Survey***

Please answer these questions. Your responses are confidential and will help the Neighborhood House Family Center strive to provide the best possible services.

**For the following issues, please check the first box if you needed help in that area when you initially came to the Neighborhood House Family Center. If you needed help in an area, please check the second box if the Family Center provided services or referrals to you in that area.**

	a. Needed help from the Family Center	b. Received services or referrals from the Family Center
Q-1. Rental assistance	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Q-2. Mortgage foreclosure	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Q-3. Utilities assistance (e.g., Xcel, water)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Q-4. Employment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Q-5. Food	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Q-6. Clothing	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Q-7. Landlord/tenant problems	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Q-8. Conflict with neighbors	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Q-9. Medical needs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Q-10. Mental health needs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Q-11. Chemical dependency	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Q-12. Domestic abuse	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Q-13. Other (please specify): _____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**Q-14. Has your situation changed since you began receiving services from the Family Center?**

☐<sup>1</sup> Yes    ☐<sup>2</sup> No

**14a. If yes, in what ways has it changed?**

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**Q-15. We are interested in your experience with the Family Center. Please circle the number in the category that best describes your opinion (circle one number for each item):**

	Highly satisfied	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Highly dissatisfied
a). How satisfied are you with the services that you received from the Family Center?	4	3	2	1
b). How satisfied are you with the Family Center's ability to help you with the needs you had when you initially came to the program?	4	3	2	1

**Q-16. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements (circle one number for each item):**

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Not applicable
a). My family's basic needs are being met.	4	3	2	1	9
b). Friends, family, and/or neighbors provide support to me during times of need.	4	3	2	1	9
c). Family Center staff were knowledgeable and skilled.	4	3	2	1	9
d). Family Center staff were available to me when I needed them.	4	3	2	1	9
e). Family Center staff helped connect me with other community organizations, agencies, or classes that could help me with my situation.	4	3	2	1	9
f). I have received help for my situation from other community organizations, agencies, or classes since I first came to the Family Center (whether or not Family Center staff helped connect you with the resource).	4	3	2	1	9
g). Family Center staff helped me build a closer relationship with friends, family, and/or neighbors.	4	3	2	1	9
h). My situation has improved since I began receiving services from the Family Center.	4	3	2	1	9
i). Services I received from the Family Center helped me meet my family's basic needs.	4	3	2	1	9
j). I learned new strategies or obtained new resources since I first visited the Family Center that will help me if I face similar problems in the future.	4	3	2	1	9

**Q-17. Since you started receiving services from the Family Center, have you contacted any other community agencies for help on your own, without the assistance of Family Center staff? This could include agencies Family Center staff referred you to, but that you contacted on your own. (check the one that most applies)**

☐<sup>1</sup> Yes, I have contacted other community agencies on my own for help with my situation.

☐<sup>2</sup> No, but I would feel comfortable contacting other community agencies on my own.

☐<sup>3</sup> No, and I do not feel comfortable contacting other community agencies on my own.

**Q-18. Overall, how helpful would you say services from the Family Center have been in improving your situation? (check one)**

☐<sup>1</sup> Very helpful

☐<sup>2</sup> Somewhat helpful

☐<sup>3</sup> Not at all helpful

**Q-19. How could services provided by the Family Center be improved?**

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**Q-20. Additional comments:**

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**Thank you!**

## ***Focus group protocol***

December 17, 2012

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this focus group. The Family Center is interested in hearing from you about your experience in their programs. The organization I work for, Wilder Research, is gathering information from parents such as yourselves about how the program has impacted your families, and what, if any, changes you'd like to see to the program.

Your participation in this focus group is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relationship with any organization/agency your child receives services from.

If you prefer not to answer any of the questions I ask, it is okay to skip them. Your responses will be kept confidential. Only Wilder Research staff will have access to your individual responses. Please be respectful of everyone's comments today and keep their thoughts confidential as well. As a thank you for participating in this focus group, you will receive a \$20 gift card to Target.

### **Program impact**

- How did you hear about the Family Center?
- What kinds of things did your family need help with when you came to the Family Center?
- Do you feel like your family's life is different now than when you first started working with the Family Center? In what ways?

### **Case management**

- What kinds of things did the case management program help you, your children, or your family with? [Probe specific to each program]
  - (If needed): How did program staff help with this?
- Of the things program staff helped your child/family with, what one thing do you think helped the most? Why?
- Has the program helped your child(ren) be successful in school? How or how not?

### **Looking forward**

- What do you like most about the services you receive through the Family Center?

- Were there services your family needed that you did not get from the program? If yes, what else did you need?
- In what ways has the program helped prepare you and your family for the future? What were the most important lessons you learned through the program/staff?
- What are you most excited about for the future?