



Neighborhood House Basic Needs Family Center program evaluation

Evaluation results for 2013

M A R C H 2 0 1 4

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Acknowledgments

The author wishes to thank the staff of the Family Center program and Neighborhood House for their extensive work (including data collection) and guidance in preparation of this report. Staff members who contributed to this report include:

Amber Birchem
Judy Davis
Joan Schlecht
Malena Vang

Wilder Research staff who contributed to the data collection, analysis, and production of this report include the following:

Jenny Bohlke
Cheryl Bourgeois
Ben Bushee
Rena Cleveland
Marilyn Conrad
Thalia Hall
Monica Idzelis Rothe
Miguel Salazar
Lue Thao
Kerry Walsh

Introduction

The Neighborhood House's Basic Needs Family Center program supports children, families, and neighborhoods on the East Side of Saint Paul by providing education, support, and referrals to community resources. The Family Center operates out of offices at six sites, including Bruce F. Vento Elementary, Dayton's Bluff Achievement Plus Elementary, John A. Johnson Achievement Plus Elementary, Saint Paul Music Academy, Highland/Sibley Manor, and The Wellstone Center.

Overview of Family Center services

The Family Center provides ongoing case management and crisis services, with the exception of individual Life Skills education courses, the topics of which vary from year to year.

Crisis services

Crisis services are provided to those with children attending one of the Family Center schools, as well as to other families in the community. The goal is to assist these families in meeting basic food, clothing, shelter, medical, and mental health needs.

Case management services

The Family Center also supports clients through three different case management programs: the Housing Trust Fund program, Family Community Partnership, and Refugee Resettlement program.

Housing Trust Fund: The housing program works to stabilize the housing situations of families with children attending Johnson Elementary. These families often need assistance with house repairs, utilities, finding housing, or resolving conflicts with neighbors or landlords; they may also need referrals to services not related to housing. Wilder Research conducts a separate evaluation of the housing program.

Family Community Partnership: The Family Community Partnership is a voluntary program that assists low-income families (who have minor children) with basic needs and provides information on community resources. Family Center staff work with families to address basic needs, connect to community resources (including mental health supports), and offer general support and guidance to families.

Refugee Resettlement program: The Refugee Resettlement program helps newly-arrived refugees navigate their community by helping families secure food and housing. Case workers also connect participants to community services and provide information on employment, life skills, education, and parenting. Participants are also connected to other Neighborhood House programs, including food support and English classes.

Food shelf

In addition to the crisis and case management services described above, the Neighborhood House operates two food shelves – one in The Wellstone Center on Saint Paul’s West Side and the other at Francis Basket in Highland Park. Both locations provide food to those seeking assistance and connect participants to critical community resources that help them move “from survive to thrive.”

Evaluation methods

As part of its ongoing research and improvement efforts, Neighborhood House contracted with Wilder Research to conduct an independent evaluation of the programs and services provided during 2013. This section provides a brief description of the evaluation methods used by Wilder. Copies of the data collection tools are provided in the Appendix, and findings from each method are detailed throughout the report.

ClientTrack database and program records

Each year, Neighborhood House staff collect data on programs and services through the ClientTrack database, which houses descriptive information about the clients served overall, as well as those who received crisis or case management services. Staff then pull the necessary data and send them to Wilder for reporting.

Client exit surveys

In addition to database records, Neighborhood House staff send Wilder data collected from client exit surveys. In January 2012, program staff began administering a brief survey to all clients exiting services each month. 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, as well as their attainment of outcomes and changes in knowledge, behavior, and circumstances.

Focus groups

Finally, in February 2014, a proportion of families from the case management programs participated in discussions about the Family Center – there was one English-speaking focus group, as well as conversations with Hmong- and Spanish-speaking participants. (There were too few participants in the latter two groups to conduct focus groups. Instead, moderators conducted individual interviews). Participants shared how involvement with the Family Center had impacted their lives and their children’s lives and offered recommendations for improving programming going forward.

Family Center program

The Family Center served a total of 5,605 clients in 2013, providing both crisis and case management services through the Housing Trust Fund, Family Community Partnership, and Refugee Resettlement programs.¹ Clients tended to be female (55%), over 18 years old (57%), and living below the poverty line (61%). The majority of clients served were from Ramsey County (95%). Clients also represented diverse racial and ethnic groups, particularly Asian/Pacific Islander (47%) and Hispanic/Latino (27%) (Figure 1).

It is important to note that in 2013, the Family Center distributed significantly more culturally-specific food boxes to both Asian and Latino communities (200 per month) than in 2012. Therefore, the total number of clients served, as well as the number of Asian and Latino clients served, is significantly higher than in previous years.

1. Characteristics of clients served: Family Center

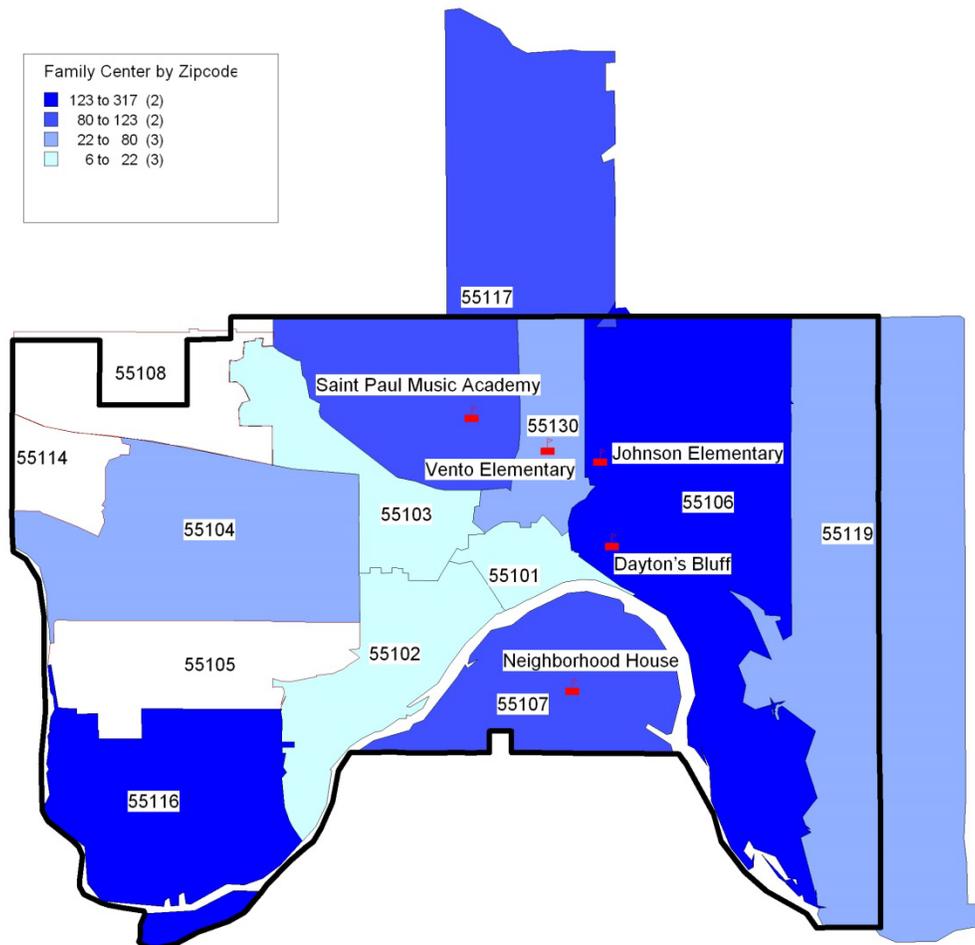
	Number	Percent
Gender (N=5,597)		
Female	3,101	55%
Male	2,496	45%
Age (N=5,600)		
0-4 years	522	9%
5-9 years	751	13%
10-14 years	714	13%
15-17 years	382	7%
18-22 years	584	10%
23-54 years	2,248	40%
55 years and older	399	7%
Race/ethnicity (N=5,603)		
African	126	2%
African American	754	13%
Asian/ SE Asian/ Pacific Islander	2,646	47%
Caucasian/White	230	4%
Hispanic/ Chicano/ Latino	1,528	27%
Native American/American Indian	56	1%
Multiracial	225	4%
Other/Unknown	38	1%

¹ This number is not unduplicated and therefore may be an overestimate, as clients could have received multiple services. The following sections break down the total numbers of clients by type of service.

1. Characteristics of clients served: Family Center (continued)

	Number	Percent
Poverty level (N=5,837)		
Below 100% of poverty line	3,566	61%
Between 100%-200% of poverty line	445	8%
Above 200% of poverty line	253	4%
No data/missing	1,573	27%
County (N=5,605)		
Anoka County	2	<1%
Carver County	1	<1%
Dakota County	178	3%
Hennepin County	14	<1%
Ramsey County	5,338	95%
Washington County	36	<1%
No data/missing	36	<1%

2. Family Center map



Crisis services: ClientTrack data

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.

In 2013, 5,420 clients received crisis services through the Family Center. Clients ranged in age; however, most were between 23 and 54 years old (39%). The majority identified as either Asian/Pacific Islander (47%) or Hispanic/Latino (28%). The proportion of individuals from these racial/ethnic backgrounds is substantially higher than in 2012, because of the greater distribution of culturally-specific food boxes in 2013. Six in ten clients (61%) receiving crisis services were below the federal poverty line; nearly all resided in Ramsey County (Figure 3).

Over 700 clients received crisis assistance specifically related to housing and utilities. In this subset of clients, there were notably more women (72%) and African Americans (55%); demographic characteristics are described below in Figure 4.

3. Characteristics of clients served: Crisis services

	Number	Percent
Gender (N=5,420)		
Female	2,980	55%
Male	2,432	45%
Age (N=5,420)		
0-4 years	516	10%
5-9 years	746	14%
10-14 years	710	13%
15-17 years	381	7%
18-22 years	553	10%
23-54 years	2,116	39%
55 years and older	393	7%
Race/ethnicity (N=5,420)		
African	96	2%
African American	733	14%
Asian/ SE Asian/ Pacific Islander	2,555	47%
Caucasian/White	214	4%
Hispanic/ Chicano/ Latino	1,511	28%
Native American/American Indian	55	1%
Multiracial	219	4%
Other/Unknown	35	1%

3. Characteristics of clients served: Crisis services (continued)

	Number	Percent
Poverty level (N=5,637)		
Below 100% of poverty line	3,458	61%
Between 100%-200% of poverty line	438	8%
Above 200% of poverty line	242	4%
No data/missing	1,499	27%
County (N=5,420)		
Anoka County	1	<1%
Carver County	1	<1%
Dakota County	177	3%
Hennepin County	13	<1%
Ramsey County	5,157	95%
Washington County	36	1%
No data/missing	35	1%

4. Characteristics of clients served: Housing/utilities services

	Number	Percent
Gender (N=709)		
Female	509	72%
Male	200	28%
Age (N=709)		
0-4 years	37	5%
5-9 years	68	10%
10-14 years	50	7%
15-17 years	28	4%
18-22 years	39	6%
23-54 years	436	61%
55 years and older	51	7%
Race/ethnicity (N=709)		
African	19	3%
African American	393	55%
Asian/ SE Asian/ Pacific Islander	39	6%
Caucasian/White	111	16%
Hispanic/ Chicano/ Latino	49	7%
Native American/American Indian	28	4%
Multiracial	63	9%
Other/Unknown	7	1%
Poverty level (N=748)		
Below 100% of poverty line	366	49%
Between 100%-200% of poverty line	78	10%
Above 200% of poverty line	10	1%
No data/missing	294	39%
County (N=709)		
Anoka County	0	0%
Carver County	1	<1%
Dakota County	4	<1%
Hennepin County	2	<1%
Ramsey County	695	98%
Washington County	4	<1%
No data/missing	3	<1%

Figure 5 describes, in detail, the specific assistance clients received related to each crisis episode. The most common services received were culturally-specific food boxes (which, again, increased dramatically in 2013), assistance with housing resources, initial intake and assessment, and assistance with utilities.

5. Services received: Crisis clients

	Services	Clients	Families
Culturally-specific food box – Asian	3,672	2,550	559
Culturally-specific food box – Latino	2,469	1,605	510
Assistance with housing resources	1,281	491	355
Initial intake and assessment	902	889	396
Assistance with utilities	447	232	142
Bridge to Benefits screening	203	197	187
Assistance with application	148	117	75
Furniture	130	54	38
Assistance with basic needs	95	40	33
Clothing voucher	81	81	26
Advocacy	72	40	30
Assistance with navigating resources	47	39	34
Transportation resources	30	25	20
Food shelf I/R	29	28	15
Phone calls	27	16	9
Translation services	26	18	18
Attendance – baby shower	24	24	11
Back packs	17	16	16
Housing resources	15	14	11
Mortgage foreclosure assistance	15	7	3
Assistance with appointment	13	11	11
County combined application	13	13	11
Mortgage	13	4	4
Health care application assistance	11	11	7
Assistance with parenting	10	7	7
Assistance with finances	9	8	8
Assistance with intervention services	9	9	9
Employment	8	7	4
Case management	7	7	3

5. Services received: Crisis clients (continued)

	Services	Clients	Families
MNSure	7	6	3
County food support	6	6	2
Energy assistance	6	6	6
Assistance with early childhood	5	5	3
Child care application assistance	5	4	4
Resource table and/or information	4	4	2
Field trip	3	1	1
Prenatal assistance	3	3	3
Social Security - SSI application assistance	3	3	3
Assistance with child health resources	2	2	2
Childcare support	2	2	2
Employment-related consultation	2	2	2
Household report form	2	2	2
K-12 education	2	2	2
K-12 school assistance	2	2	2
Assistance with family reunification	1	1	1
Car seats	1	1	1
County emergency assistance application	1	1	1
Food shelf – regular	1	1	1
Home visits	1	1	1
Immigration consultation/assistance	1	1	1
Legal services I/R	1	1	1
Life Skills	1	1	1
Medical/Dental I/R	1	1	1

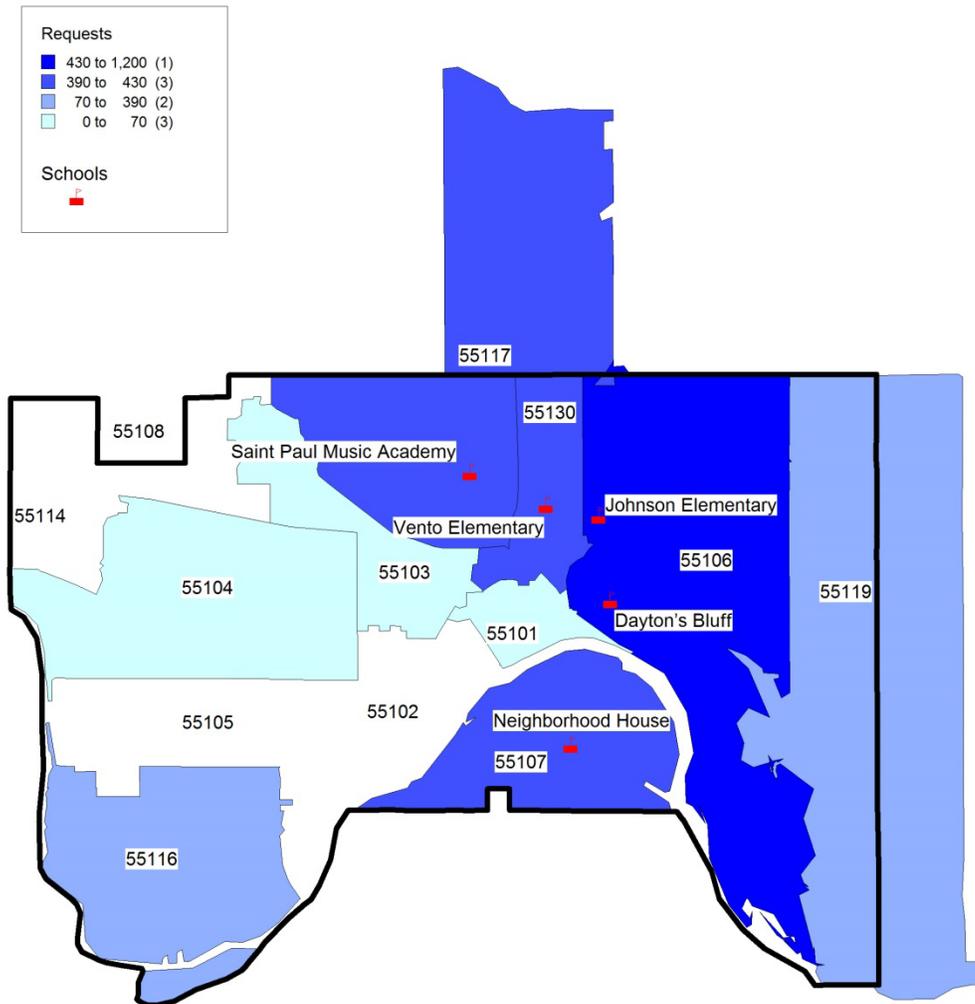
The Family Center received over 3,000 requests for assistance. Common requests included assistance with rent, utilities, damage deposits, and other issues related to housing (Figure 6). Figure 7 describes the zip codes where families were living at the time of the request.

6. Requests for crisis services: 2013

Crisis calls	Number of calls
Rental assistance	1,286
Utilities (Xcel Energy)	742
Damage deposit	497
Furniture (Bridging)	185
Housing/shelter	109
Car seat	73
Water bill	63
Food	34
Mortgage foreclosure	25
Baby items	20
Transportation/bus card	18
Employment	13
Clothing	12
Medical/health insurance	12
Household items	12
Car repair	11
Gas	10
Budgeting	9
Homeless	8
Moving expenses	7
Resources	6
Schooling	6
Storage	6
Public housing paperwork	6
SNAP (food stamps)	6
Section 8	5
Other*	47
Total number of calls	3,228

**Note: Categories with fewer than 5 calls were coded as "other." "Other identified needs included assistance with: medical bills, medical and dental needs, mental health referrals, SSI applications, license/identification, legal issues, child care, parenting classes, child resources, school supplies, school payment, child support, family events, house repairs, taxes, landlord issues, bankruptcy, auto insurance, application fees, bus tickets, and crisis management.*

7. Requests for crisis services map



Crisis services: Exit survey

Clients receiving crisis services are asked to complete an exit survey addressing their satisfaction with program and changes in their knowledge, behavior, and circumstances. This section presents results from the 50 exit surveys completed during 2013. It should be noted that the number of completed surveys is very low relative to the total number of people who exited the in 2013 (n=1,032). As a result, caution should be used in interpreting these results as these findings may not represent the experience of all clients.

Types of services provided

Participants most frequently indicated rental assistance as an area of need (48%), followed by assistance with utilities (38%). Ten percent, or fewer, of clients indicated that they needed help in each of the other areas of service.

The services that participants 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, and vice versa. Figure 8 illustrates the total number of clients who needed help from the Family Center, those who received assistance (of those who said they needed it), and the total number of clients who received services or referrals, regardless of whether they indicated a need.

8. Types of service needed and received (N=50)

Areas of service	Needed help from the Family Center	Clients who received services or referrals, of those needing help	Clients who received services or referrals, regardless of need
Rental assistance	24 (48%)	8 (33%)	14 (28%)
Utilities assistance (e.g., Xcel Energy, water)	19 (38%)	9 (47%)	10 (20%)
Food	5 (10%)	2 (40%)	6 (12%)
Employment	4 (8%)	2 (50%)	2 (4%)
Mortgage foreclosure	4 (8%)	1 (25%)	3 (6%)
Clothing	2 (4%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Conflict with neighbors	2 (4%)	0 (0%)	2 (4%)
Domestic abuse	1 (2%)	0 (0%)	1 (2%)
Landlord/tenant problems	1 (2%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Medical needs	1 (2%)	0 (0%)	1 (2%)
Chemical dependency	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Mental health needs	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Other ^a	3 (6%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

^a Other services not specified.

Satisfaction with services

Overall, survey participants were satisfied with the Family Center program. Most were “highly satisfied” with the services they received (94%), as well as the Family Center’s ability to help them with their needs when they first came into the program (92%) (Figure 9).

9. Satisfaction with the program (N=49-50)

	Highly satisfied	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Highly dissatisfied
Services received from the Family Center	94%	6%	0%	0%
The Family Center’s ability to help you with the needs you had when you initially came to the program	92%	8%	0%	0%

Participants were also satisfied with Family Center staff. A majority strongly agreed that staff were knowledgeable and skilled (75%) and that they were available to clients when needed (67%) (Figure 10).

10. Satisfaction with Family Center staff (N=48)

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	N/A
Family Center staff were knowledgeable and skilled.	75%	23%	0%	0%	2%
Family Center staff were available to me when I needed them.	67%	31%	0%	0%	2%

Changes in situation

Most participants (92%) reported that their situation had changed since receiving services from the Family Center (Figure 11a). When asked how their circumstances had changed, most talked about improvements in rent or housing. Several also reported that their situations had improved due to help with their other bills and financial issues, as well as reduced stress (Figure 11b).

11a. Situation has changed since receiving Family Center services (N=49)

	Percent
Yes	92%
No	8%

11b. Ways in which participants' situations have changed (N=30)

If yes, in what ways has it changed?

Housing and rent

Relocated. Changed my residence from problem landlord. My children and I are in a better environment and housing.

I can keep my apartment.

Stay in my apartment

I was able to move in my place.

I found housing for my family.

My rent is caught up to date.

Able to pay rent on time

I was able to pay the majority of my rent and I just had to pay the balance.

Well, I received help and did not have to worry about backed up rent.

I was able to have help with late rent.

I get help on my rental assistance.

Was very grateful to receive rent assistance for the month of October

I am able to have my rent paid and I am not going to lose my apartment.

I was able to pay my August rent.

Because my rent is now paid up and I am back on track with my rent and utilities.

It's helped me prevent eviction and hopefully next month I can do without.

Other financial changes

Allows me to catch up on additional bills and food.

They paid my whole Xcel bill, which helped me out a lot so I can pay other bills that I am behind on.

My bill got lower.

Helped me get current with my bill

Less stress/better life

Yes, I have become a little stress free.

I was stressing over my Xcel bill. Now that we have been helped I'm at ease...

Better my life

Starting to get a little better with your help

Other

Will begin working for the school

Yes, it changed because I really needed the help at this time.

I was able to get help from Family Center.

Things are OK, good

My car will be repaired. I can attend employment training.

Getting better in health with new meds

When asked specifically if their situation had changed for the better, most participants agreed that it had improved since seeking services from the program (Figure 12), and 57 percent “strongly agreed”. In a separate question about the helpfulness of services, all survey participants indicated that the services they had received from the Family Center were at least “somewhat helpful” in improving their situation, with the vast majority (98%) reporting that they were “very helpful” (Figure 13).

12. Improvements in situation (N=49)

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	N/A
My situation has improved since I began receiving services from the Family Center.	57%	33%	2%	0%	8%

13. Helpfulness of Family Center services in improving situation (N=50)

	Percent
Very helpful	98%
Somewhat helpful	2%
Not at all helpful	0%

Basic needs

As shown in Figure 14, participants generally felt that their family’s basic needs were being met when they exited the program, and nearly a quarter (73%) “strongly agreed” that Family Center services contributed to these needs being met.

14. Basic needs (N=48)

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	N/A
My family's basic needs are being met.	58%	35%	2%	2%	2%
Services I received from the Family Center helped me meet my family's basic needs.	73%	23%	0%	0%	4%

Connections with community resources

Most respondents (81%) felt that Family Center staff helped connect them with other organizations and agencies, although fewer (57%) indicated that they had actually received services from outside organizations (Figure 15). Forty-one percent of participants reported that they had sought referrals on their own, and an additional 50 percent reported that they would feel comfortable doing so (Figure 16).

15. Connections with community resources (N=47-48)

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	N/A
Family Center staff helped connect me with other community organizations, agencies, or classes that could help me with my situation.	48%	33%	6%	0%	13%
I have received help for my situation from other community organizations, agencies, or classes since I first came to the Family Center.	40%	17%	15%	6%	21%

16. Contacting community agencies without Family Center assistance (N=46)

	Percent
Yes, I have contacted other community agencies on my own for help with my situation.	41%
No, but I would feel comfortable contacting other community agencies on my own.	50%
No, and I do not feel comfortable contacting other community agencies on my own.	9%

Informal sources of support

Nearly three-quarters of participants (73%) felt that they had learned new strategies or obtained new resources that would help them if they faced a similar crisis situation in the future, although 21 percent felt this question did not apply to them. While 77 percent said that they have friends, family, and/or neighbors to provide support during times of need, fewer (50%) felt that Family Center staff had helped them build closer relationships with these informal supports; however, one-third said that this question did not apply to them (Figure 17).

17. Informal sources of support (N=47-48)

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	N/A
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.	43%	30%	4%	2%	21%
Friends, family, and/or neighbors provide support to me during times of need.	31%	46%	8%	6%	8%
Family Center staff helped me build a closer relationship with friends, family, and/or neighbors.	21%	29%	10%	6%	33%

Improvements to Family Center program

When asked how the Family Center could improve its services, most of those who responded said that they would not change anything. Of those who offered suggestions, the most common were providing a greater amount of support to staff, and responding more quickly to clients. Figure 18 provides a complete summary of responses.

18. Ways Family Center services could be improved (N=39)

How could services provided by the Family Center be improved?

No change needed/current services are good

They did a really good job.

N/A, did great!

Services were great. Can't think of any changes needed.

No improvement needed, just fine.

N/A

The services I received couldn't be any better.

I think they were good.

They don't need to, they were very helpful and they were able to help me the same day I came in and applied. They worked very fast and I really appreciate all the help.

Can't, they are good.

All the services were great.

I think they understand about what's going on and are willing to step up and help. If they can't, they will refer you to other services and that is important.

I'm satisfied with the services.

They were great to me and my family.

I believe they're doing an excellent job.

She helped me right away and was very caring about me and my family.

18. Ways Family Center services could be improved (N=39) (continued)

How could services provided by the Family Center be improved?

No change needed/current services are good

The Family Center is very helpful in my problem. Thank you!

Everything was OK. Thanks.

I think the services provided are very helpful to my family and our community. You all are doing a great job.

I have no complaints.

I was extremely happy with the amount of friendly and helpful service I received. [Staff] made me feel comfortable and made the process easy, would not change a thing.

No need for improvements. The staff is wonderful.

Keep doing what you do for the community and people in need of resources and help.

Everything was just fine and handled well for my situation.

Services were fine.

No improvement needed.

It was good services, nothing really to improve. It was great!

They were very helpful. Thank you.

They are doing just fine to me.

Give more help to staff

[Staff] needs more help.

Only if you give your staff more money

Maybe more workers to help caseloads.

More money needs to be raised or donated to keep with the demands of the community and more staff so the workers are not in overload.

Getting faster/easier help

[Staff] could make herself more available.

If they could assist people faster instead of having to wait a few weeks before you even hear back.

A little bit easier to get a hold of and meeting them when needed.

I think when leaving messages to the Family Center they should reply a lot quicker than they do.

Other

To be more funded by all organizing parties so Family Center can help many more.

Job leads

The portion I had to pay was a little difficult to do.

Case management services: ClientTrack data

In 2013, 185 clients received a variety of case management services through the Housing Trust Fund, Family Community Partnership, and Refugee Resettlement program.² The majority of those served was female (65%), between the ages of 23 and 54 years old (71%), and living in Ramsey County (98%) (Figure 19).

19. Characteristics of clients served: Case management

	Number	Percent
Gender (N=185)		
Female	121	65%
Male	64	35%
Age (N=185)		
0-4 years	6	3%
5-9 years	5	3%
10-14 years	4	2%
15-17 years	1	<1%
18-22 years	31	17%
23-54 years	132	71%
55 years and older	6	3%
Race/ethnicity (N=185)		
African	30	16%
African American	21	11%
Asian/ SE Asian/ Pacific Islander	91	49%
Caucasian/White	16	9%
Hispanic/ Chicano/ Latino	17	9%
Native American/American Indian	1	<1%
Multiracial	6	3%
Other/Unknown	3	2%
Poverty level (N=200)		
Below 100% of poverty line	108	54%
Between 100%-200% of poverty line	7	4%
Above 200% of poverty line	11	6%
No data/missing	74	37%

² Again, this may be an overestimate as clients are not unduplicated and could have received services from more than one program.

19. Characteristics of clients served: Case management (continued)

	Number	Percent
County (N=185)		
Anoka County	1	<1%
Dakota County	1	<1%
Hennepin County	1	<1%
Ramsey County	181	98%
No data/missing	1	<1%

The number of services received varied by program. In the Housing Trust Fund program, clients most often received advocacy and assistance with housing resources; in the Family Community Partnership, the most common services received were assistance navigating various resources, especially with regards to housing; and in the Refugee Resettlement program, clients were most likely to have an initial intake and assessment and receive assistance getting backpacks for their children (Figures 20-22).

20. Services received: Housing Trust Fund program

	Services	Clients	Families
Advocacy	171	16	13
Assistance with housing resources	165	16	13
Life Skills	34	13	12
Case management	32	15	12
Assistance with navigating resources	22	14	11
Attendance – Life Skills	18	13	12
Phone call	11	8	7
Culturally-specific food box - Latino	10	8	3
Assistance with application	7	4	4
Assistance with utilities	7	1	1
Food shelf I/R	7	7	7
Culturally-specific food box - Asian	6	3	3
Assistance with intervention services	4	4	4
Housing resources	4	3	3
Assistance with appointment	3	2	2
Assistance with parenting	3	2	2
County emergency assistance	3	1	1

20. Services received: Housing Trust Fund program (continued)

	Services	Clients	Families
Assistance with finances	2	2	2
Employment	2	1	1
K-12 school assistance	2	1	1
Legal services I/R	2	2	2
Assistance with child health resources	1	1	1
Attendance – Parent group	1	1	1
Home visits	1	1	1
K-12 education	1	1	1

21. Services received: Family Community Partnership

	Services	Clients	Families
Assistance with navigating resources	85	36	27
Assistance with housing resources	72	24	24
Non-billable service	55	22	23
Assistance with parenting	46	14	14
Billable service	30	20	20
Advocacy	20	12	12
Initial intake and assessment	20	19	19
Assistance with applications	18	12	12
Assistance with finances	17	17	9
Assistance with utilities	12	7	7
Bridge to Benefits screening	12	11	11
Food shelf I/R	7	7	7
Furniture	5	5	3
Assistance with intervention services	4	4	4
Back packs	4	3	3
Employment	4	4	4
Assistance with early childhood	3	3	3
Housing resources	3	3	3
Recreational and sports activities	3	3	3
Transportation resources	3	2	2
Clothing voucher	2	2	2

21. Services received: Family Community Partnership (continued)

	Services	Clients	Families
Legal services I/R	2	2	2
Adult education	1	1	1
Assistance with appointments	1	1	1
Assistance with child health resources	1	1	1
Assistance with taxes	1	1	1
Child care application assistance	1	1	1
Childcare support	1	1	1
Culturally-specific food box - Latino	1	1	1
Energy assistance	1	1	1
Immigration consultation/assistance	1	1	1
K-12 education	1	1	1
K-12 school assistance	1	1	1
Social Security - SSI application assistance	1	1	1

22. Services received: Refugee Resettlement program

	Services	Clients	Families
Initial intake and assessment	42	41	24
Back pack	28	28	23
Employment	12	5	4
Advocacy	10	4	3
Assistance with application	9	7	5
Translation services	8	6	5
Bridge to Benefits screening	5	5	5
Information and referrals	5	4	2
Transportation resources	4	4	2
Adult education	3	2	2
Food shelf I/R	3	3	3
Assistance with housing resources	2	2	2
Energy assistance	2	2	2
Assistance with finances	1	1	1
Housing resources	1	1	1
Medical/Dental I/R	1	1	1
Unemployment application assistance	1	1	1

Case management services: Focus groups

On the evening of February 18, 2014, Wilder staff facilitated three discussions with case management clients of the Family Center – one English-speaking focus group (n=5) and two separate conversations with a few Hmong- and Spanish-speaking participants. (There were too few participants in the latter two discussions to conduct focus groups; therefore, the findings from all three groups are aggregated.) Even after combining participants, there were only 8 respondents; therefore, findings should be interpreted with caution, as they do not necessarily represent the views of all case management clients.

The discussions were led by Wilder staff and were held at Johnson Elementary School. Participants shared how involvement with the Family Center has impacted them and their children's lives and offered recommendations for improving programming going forward.

Introduction to the Family Center

At the beginning of the discussion, participants were asked how they originally learned about or got connected to the Family Center. Most said they knew about the Center because their child attends Johnson Elementary, or they learned about it through a family member.

The most common reasons for parents to become involved in the Center were housing-related – either getting help finding a place to live or assistance in paying rent.

We are poor, so we came [to the Family Center] and we needed help with housing so that our family has a place to live and be happy. We also needed help with rent.

[The Family Center] helped us get our rent paid and get into a place where we did not need a background check.

Participants needed housing support for a variety of reasons, including that they had previously been living in unsafe or unstable housing or that they were escaping an abusive relationship.

Other reasons that respondents cited for coming to the Family Center included mental health treatment and support (both for the parents and the children), help with chemical dependency issues, assistance paying utilities, and help getting basic needs, such as food and heat for their apartment.

Case management services provided

Although most respondents initially came to the Family Center for housing-related services, when asked about the overall case management services they have received, many talked about getting support for mental health issues. A couple of respondents

recounted experiences in which they had a confrontation with someone, such as a neighbor or school administrator, and how the Family Center helped connect them to the necessary services and treatments so that they could get a proper diagnosis for their untreated mental health issue.

[My wife] was able to meet with a therapist for her depression that the [Family Center] staff helped her set up; this therapy helped her get out of her depressed state.

I started seeing a therapist...but was told there was nothing wrong. But, through Johnson, I discovered the true diagnosis; through their guidance I got to the correct diagnosis.

[The Family Center] helped me to get to a doctor to see if I can get treatment.

Several parents also mentioned that the Family Center assisted with child protection issues, such as helping them to understand why child protection was in their lives and what was going to happen next. Other services mentioned included: help with setting goals for the family; English as a Second Language courses; school programs for children; help paying for utilities; help finding employment; Life Skills classes; transportation assistance; and help filling out paperwork.

When child protection was on their way to my house, [the Family Center] talked to the child protection worker and interpreted what was being said for me to understand. It feels good to have that kind of hand holding so I don't say the wrong thing; so I understand.

They helped us pay our Xcel Energy utility bill in our new apartment.

They teach us life skills, such as house cleaning and budgeting...They also help with rent and filling out paperwork for energy assistance.

When asked which Family Center service had helped them and their families the most, most parents said either housing or mental health support. A couple of parents mentioned that they also found the Life Skills classes to be valuable, as well as assistance in filling out paperwork.

Getting my mental health under control [helped the most], because no one could figure out was wrong. I got my diagnosis and got the right medication and then I could get my children back...My mental health condition was so bad that I was at the point of threatening other people's lives.

[The Family Center] helped us move, because the landlord did not want to repair a leaking roof that was destroying our belongings. So the most helpful thing was helping us move, so that we would not have to go to a shelter or be homeless.

Life changes since connecting with the Family Center

The support that the Family Center provides to its clients appears to have a significant impact, not only through its direct services, but also through more indirect, emotional support.

Nearly all respondents said that, because of the assistance they have received from the Family Center, their lives had improved, particularly because they now feel happier and less stressed. Most often this reduced stress was related to the housing assistance they had received from the program.

You pay rent based on your income, so if you don't have a job you pay less on rent. You don't worry about how you would be able to afford to pay rent, so you can actually take more time to look for a better job.

We do not feel pressured and nervous and [we are] less stressed these days because of the assistance we are now receiving from the Family Center. I know that if I get laid off or there is no work for me, and I have no income, I can report that to the program and our monthly rent is reduced.

We have less stress, more stability, and the kids are happier.

The Family Center staff also provides an important sense of stability and empowerment for families, which allows them to focus their energy toward other areas of their lives and planning for their futures. Parents said that they feel more confident and better equipped to handle various problems or issues that may arise in their lives; this is related both to the education that they may have received, such as through Life Skills classes, as well as simply talking to staff about their problems. One client described the Family Center as her “backbone” or “support system.” She said that she looks to specific staff members when she is having a hard time and they make her feel better. Another parent said that staff “makes you feel like family.”

According to conversations with parents, one important area in which the Family Center impacts parents’ lives is by helping their children become more successful in school. Again, this might be because parents feel more confident and empowered to interact with school staff, or because children have experienced a more positive environment, which affects their work at school. Several parents mentioned that their children appear to be happier and more stable after receiving support from the Family Center.

The school staff was familiar with our family and...made us feel comfortable to talk to the teachers, principal, and any other staff. They would invite us all to the education events that showed us how to help out children with their homework.

They help make sure our kids go to school. We also have a place to stay and space for our kids to study. The kids are happier and they want to go to school every day because they don't have to worry about a place to study.

[Family Center services] give my children stability. They have kept my child in the same school; she is happy to go to school, because she is happy at home.

Unmet needs for families

Overall, participants were happy with their experiences at the Family Center and offered very few recommendations for change. When asked about unmet needs, a couple of parents said that they would like different or better housing options. In some cases, this was because they felt unsafe in their neighborhood, and in other cases, parents wanted more room for their children to play, either through a playground or a house with a yard. However, most of these parents also recognize that the program can only offer housing on the East Side of Saint Paul, so options are limited. One participant suggested that the Family Center should help parents find housing in other counties or cities.

Let us know when they find out that housing is open for other counties or cities. Once you hit your five years, you're on your own, so if you don't have housing by then, you can become homeless. They mostly work with Ramsey County, which is always full.

Looking to the future

The last part of the discussions focused on the future, both how the Family Center has helped parents plan and if they are excited for what lies ahead.

Most parents cited the specific, practical advice they had received as being the most helpful for future planning, such as support around budgeting, money saving, and general around-the-house tips.

They teach us about budgeting, house cleaning, parenting, and anger management. I learned about house cleaning and how to take care of my house.

[The program has helped me plan for the future by] learning how to conserve energy and being energy smart anywhere we live, such as learning how to install water-saving products like shower heads and faucets...that saves us on our utility bills.

Because of the help they have received, and the empowerment they have gained through Family Center staff, many of the parents said they are excited about the future, especially their housing situation.

Our family has a stable place to live and we don't have to keep moving all of the time. [I'm excited] that our children have a better life.

I will work hard and save money so that we can buy a house. That is what excites me the most.

However, many also noted that they are nervous, especially about what will happen to their families once they leave the Family Center program. Some mentioned that they worry about how their mental health will be affected, or if they might become homeless again. Given all that these families have been through, this trepidation is understandable. It is, therefore, important to ensure that families are well connected to other resources outside of the Family Center and to make certain they feel confident about their ability to access those connections. If the Family Center continues to provide its support and services, especially through contact with beloved staff members, as well as connect clients to other community resources, families will continue to become more confident and empowered, and this empowerment can go a long way in helping them succeed.

Food shelf

In addition to the services described above, the Neighborhood House also supports two community food shelves – one in The Wellstone Center and the other at Francis Basket in Highland Park. In 2013, the food shelves served a total of 11,220 clients.

Clients served represented diverse ethnic groups, with the largest proportion being Asian/Southeast Asian/ Pacific Islander (45%). Over six in ten (62%) were below the federal poverty guideline (Figure 23).

The majority of clients receiving food shelf support (94%) were from Ramsey County, and 5 percent were from Dakota County.

Figure 24 illustrates where the households that received food shelf support were located in Saint Paul. Readers should note that 553 households were excluded from the map, because they were either missing zip code data or were located outside of Saint Paul (in a zip code with fewer than 100 households served).

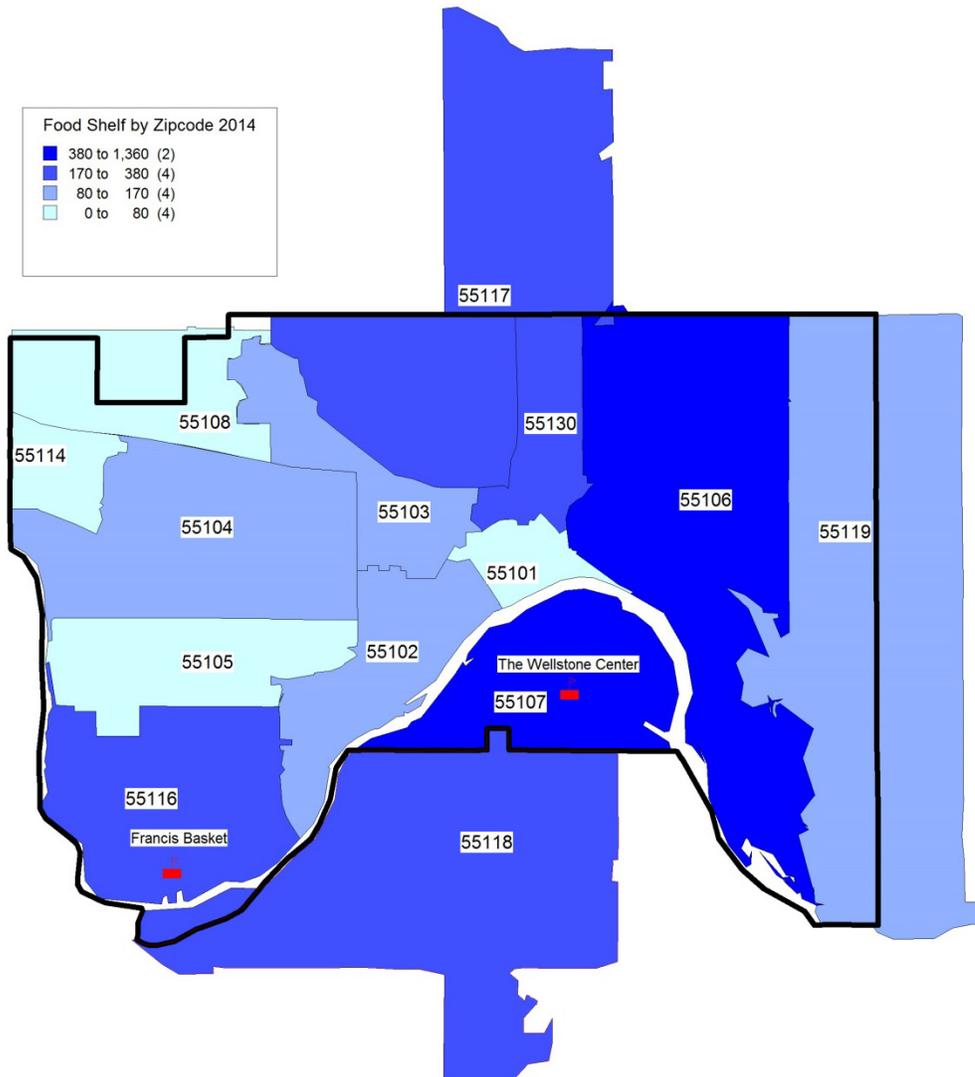
23. Characteristics of clients served: Food Shelf

	Number	Percent
Gender (N=11,206)		
Female	5,897	53%
Male	5,309	47%
Age (N=11,218)		
0-4 years	986	9%
5-9 years	1,408	13%
10-14 years	1,433	13%
15-17 years	778	7%
18-22 years	1,257	11%
23-54 years	4,318	38%
55 years and older	1,038	9%

23. Characteristics of clients served: Food Shelf (continued)

	Number	Percent
Race/ethnicity (N=11,218)		
African	563	5%
African American	1,191	11%
Asian/ SE Asian/ Pacific Islander	5,073	45%
Caucasian/White	944	8%
Hispanic/ Chicano/ Latino	2,694	24%
Native American/American Indian	211	2%
Multiracial	404	4%
Other/Unknown	138	1%
Poverty level (N=12,798)		
Below 100% of poverty line	7,877	62%
Between 100%-200% of poverty line	1,369	11%
Above 200% of poverty line	732	6%
No data/missing	2,820	22%
County (N=11,220)		
Anoka County	5	<1%
Dakota County	534	5%
Hennepin County	56	<1%
Ramsey County	10,491	94%
Scott County	5	<1%
Washington County	43	<1%
No data/missing	86	<1%

24. Food shelf map



Summary

The Family Center serves a large number of families who are experiencing economic distress, eviction and homelessness, poor mental health, and other serious issues. Generally speaking, clients tend to be very low-income women between the ages of 23 and 54 years old with a wide variety of needs. In 2013, the Family Center received over 3,000 requests for assistance, mostly for help with rent, utilities, damage deposits, and other housing-related issues.

Through its services, the majority of which are crisis-related, staff members work to connect families to community supports and provide them with a sense of stability and empowerment.

As seen in both the exit surveys and focus groups, clients of the Family Center are generally very satisfied with the services they have received, as well as the staff with whom they have worked.³ Staff members play a crucial role in helping families feel stable and empowered, and several clients mentioned how valuable Family Center staff members have been in helping them make improvements to their lives. In the focus groups, parents said that, because of the assistance they have received from the Family Center, their lives had improved, especially because they are happier and feel less stressed; most often this reduced stress was related to the housing assistance they had received from the program.

While most of the clients with whom we spoke were happy with the services they have received, several did mention ways they thought the Family Center could be improved. In the case of those receiving crisis services, the most commonly mentioned improvements were interrelated – they wanted to see a greater amount of support provided to Family Center staff and a quicker response time to clients’ issues. For case management clients, suggestions for improvement were also tied to staff. Parents would like more support when transitioning out of the Family Center programs; in large part, this is because they are nervous about life beyond Family Center services and worry that their mental health or housing situation might deteriorate. Finding the balance between supporting families and empowering them to thrive on their own, using the skills they have learned, is difficult, but something the Family Center should consider as it moves forward.

³ The number of clients who participated in the exit survey or focus groups is very small in proportion to those actually served by the Family Center; therefore, none of the responses should be considered representative of the whole population of clients.

Appendix

Client exit survey

Staff use only: Membership No. _____ Initial intake date: _____ Case closure date: _____

Family Center site: _____ Date survey completed: _____

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? ¹ Yes ² No

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

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)

- ¹ Yes, I have contacted other community agencies on my own for help with my situation.
- ² No, but I would feel comfortable contacting other community agencies on my own.
- ³ No, and I do not feel comfortable contacting other community agencies on my own.

Please continue questionnaire on following page. ➔

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

- ¹ Very helpful
- ² Somewhat helpful
- ³ Not at all helpful

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

Q-20. Additional comments: _____

Thank you!

Focus group protocol

February 10, 2014

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: What about housing-related needs, such as finding housing, help with utilities, or resolving a conflict with your landlord? What about help with keeping your children out of Child Protection?]
 - (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?