



FIRST 5 SANTA CRUZ COUNTY



ANNUAL EVALUATION REPORT



July 1, 2022 - June 30, 2023

October 2023

Families Together

Program Description

Families Together provides an alternative, voluntary and prevention-focused way for Santa Cruz County to respond to reports of abuse and neglect received by Family and Children’s Services (FCS). Of all the referrals to the child welfare screening unit, only about 8% meet the necessary criteria to receive services from FCS. However, many of the families that don’t qualify for services from FCS still have needs and circumstances that place them at risk for future incidents of child abuse and neglect. By assisting these families, Santa Cruz County can intervene early, before family difficulties escalate to the point of maltreatment, in order to increase child safety, engage families in decision-making, and support healthy child development.

Encompass Community Services is the lead agency for Families Together. Other partners, such as First 5 Santa Cruz County, Behavioral Health Services, Family and Children’s Services, and CalWORKS also play critical contractual roles in the program.

Most families are referred through the Child Welfare System, but they participate in Families Together voluntarily. Beginning in 2012-13, Families Together also began accepting a limited number of “community-referred” families (e.g., through Head Start, Early Head Start, or public health nurses) when space allowed.

Families Together’s home visiting program includes comprehensive intake and risk assessment, development of a tailored case plan, parent support and education, child development activities, and periodic assessments. Using a strengths-based approach, participating families are encouraged to identify goals and objectives that will support healthy family relationships, child health and safety, positive parenting, family literacy and school readiness.

One client’s story

“Allison” was referred to Families Together due to domestic violence between herself and her partner. Allison is a mother of four, with children ranging from ages 3 to 19. The children in the home would often witness the abuse of their mother. Allison reported she was overwhelmed with parenting and wished she could do more with her children.

Since starting services with Families Together, Allison is no longer engaged with her partner and he has moved out. She meets with her clinician weekly, who provides her with strategies on how to parent her young adult child, her teenagers, and a toddler who is on the autism spectrum.

Allison was also provided with education about Autism Spectrum Disorder, which has helped her understand her child’s behavior better, and was provided with a safe toddler table to help the child build skills. Families Together was able to provide yearly family passes to Gilroy Gardens, which not only helps build the relationship between Allison and her three year old, but also promotes prosocial behavior.

Allison reports that she is much more confident in her parenting, and is not as overwhelmed with parenting a child who is on the autism spectrum. She feels empowered in her parenting and more prepared for the day-to-day struggles of raising all of her children.

- Families Together, Annual Progress Report

Population Served

	Families Together Pathway*				“Pathways” Subtotal ¹ <i>All Pathways</i>	“Triple P-only” Subtotal ² <i>Additional clients who received Triple P services</i>	2022-2023 Total <i>Pathways + Triple P-only</i>
	Brief	Intensive	Pending	Exited early			
Parents/Guardians	28	16	3	1	48 <i>(with children ages 0-5)</i>	24 <i>(with children of all ages)</i>	72
Children	42	20	1	3	<i>(ages 0-5)</i> 66	<i>(ages 0-5)</i> 2 <i>(ages 6+)</i> 5 <i>(unknown age)</i> 32	<i>(ages 0-5)</i> 68 <i>(ages 6+)</i> 5 <i>(unknown age)</i> 32

Source: First 5 CCD database for July 1, 2022 – June 30, 2023.

* The risk assessment results guide the pathway assignment decision: families who score *Low* or *Moderate* work within the Brief Pathway with a Family Support Specialist for 3-6 months. Those who score *High* or *Very High* work within the Intensive Pathway for up to 12 months, also with a Family Support Specialist. If both parents are participating in their own services, their children are assigned the most intensive pathway of the two parents.

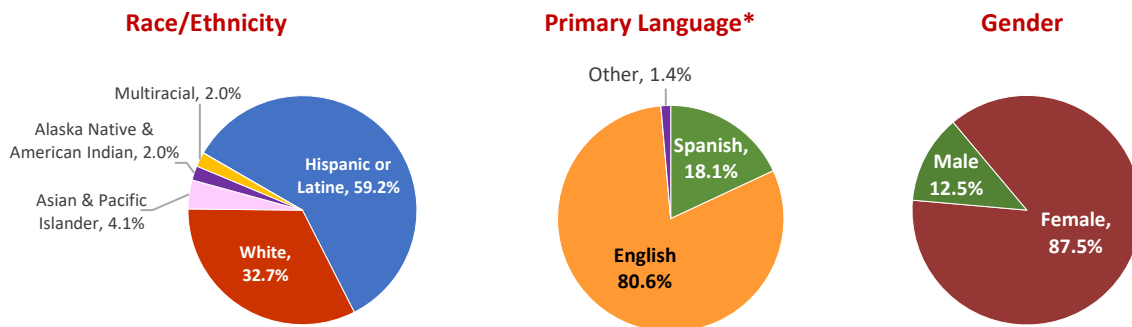
¹ The “Pathways Subtotal” reports the number of Families Together clients who are primary caregivers and who have a child under 6 years old, who worked within one of the Pathways and may also have received Triple P services.

² The “Triple P-only Subtotal” reports Families Together clients who received Triple P services, but who don’t fall into the “Pathways Subtotal” for various reasons, such as:

- The client participating in Triple P is a “secondary caregiver.”
- The client participating in Triple P is a primary caregiver with no child under age 6 (Triple P is one of the only funded partners that reports the number of children ages 6+ who received services).
- The client participating in Triple P is a family member or friend of a Families Together client.
- The client participating in Triple P is a primary caregiver from a previous fiscal year who only received Triple P services during the current fiscal year.

Note: Many “Triple P-only” children are of unknown age, as their parents participated in a brief level of Triple P where children’s ages are not collected.

Figure 36: Demographics of Parents/Guardians participating in Families Together (2022-23)

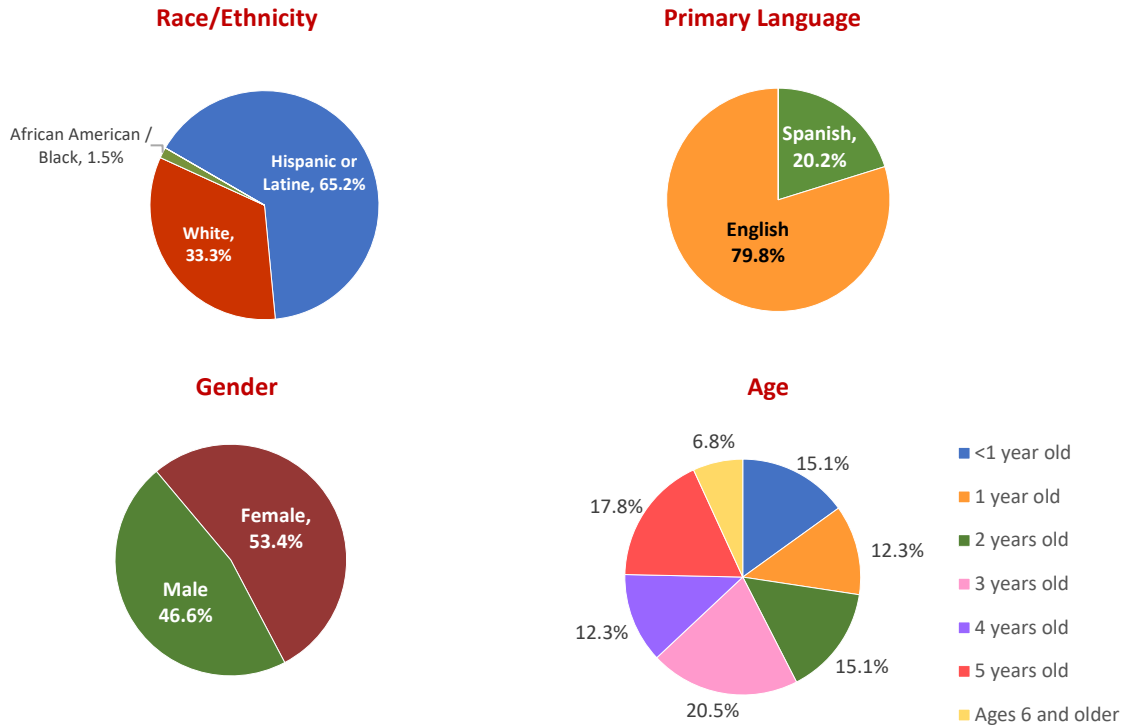


Source: First 5 CCD database for July 1, 2022 – June 30, 2023.

* “Other” language options include Bilingual-Other, or Other language.

N: (Race)=49; (Language)=72; (Gender)=72.

Figure 37: Demographics of Children benefitting from Families Together (2022-23)



Source: First 5 CCD database for July 1, 2022 – June 30, 2023.
Note: Includes all children with known ages.
N: (Ethnicity)=66; (Language)=104; (Gender)=73; (Age)=73.

Additional clients referred: In addition to the services funded by First 5 that are described in this section, Families Together received 38 referrals for service from CalWORKs in FY 2022-23 (see table below) that were a result of the county-wide Thrive by 5 initiative that First 5 serves as the backbone agency for in partnership with the County of Santa Cruz’s Human Services Department and Health Services Agency. For more information on Thrive by 5 see the “Equitable and Sustainable Early Childhood Systems” section later in this report.

Outcome Objective: Families receive referrals, initial assessments, and assigned services

Measurable Objectives	2022-2023
Accept referrals for at least 130 families per year who will be referred from Family and Children’s Services (FCS) to Families Together. Referrals will also be accepted from other community sources, and at any given time, up to 15 families referred from the community will be offered services. FCS families will receive priority and community referrals will be monitored and reviewed prior to the provision of Families Together services.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 140 FCS referrals <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 64 families with children ages 0-5 ○ 76 families with children ages 6-17 • 3 Community Referrals • 38 CalWORKs Welfare-To-Work referrals 181 referrals from all sources

Measurable Objectives	2022-2023
<p>Of families who agree to a referral to Families Together, 50% will connect with a clinician for an initial meeting.</p> <p>Note: For this analysis, only families with children ages 0-5 referred by FCS are included.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 53.1% of families with children 0-5 referred by FCS accepted an initial meeting N=64
<p>At least 90 primary caregivers per year will receive from Families Together individualized services emphasizing child development, safety, and parent-child relationships.</p> <p>Note: This analysis includes all caregivers with children ages 0-5—and caregivers with children of any age who participated in a Triple P service—who received a service this fiscal year and were referred to Families Together via any First 5-funded pathway.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 48 primary caregivers with children ages 0-5 received services this fiscal year 24 additional clients received only Triple P services. <p>Note: These “Triple P-only” clients were either a “secondary caregiver,” a primary caregiver with no child under age 6, a family member or friend of a Families Together client, or a primary caregiver from a previous fiscal year who only received Triple P services during the current fiscal year.</p>

Source: (Referrals and meetings) Families Together *Annual Progress Report*; (Number of clients receiving services) First 5 Apricot and Triple P databases, 2023.

Outcome Objective: Families demonstrate decreased levels of risk

In Families Together, risk assessment serves a variety of purposes. Every family participating in Families Together is given a baseline risk assessment at the beginning of their services, and reassessments are administered in 6-month intervals (or at closing, if the case is open for less than 6 months). The assessments help staff link parents with the appropriate service pathways, such as brief or intensive services. Follow-up assessments help assess whether risk has been reduced.

Measurable Objective	2022-2023
<p>70% of primary caregivers who participate in Families Together will demonstrate decreased risk based on their final assessment.</p>	<p>65.5%</p> <p>N=58</p>

Source: First 5 Apricot database, *Structured Decision Making: Family Prevention Services Screening Tool (SDM:FPSST)* data, 2022-23.

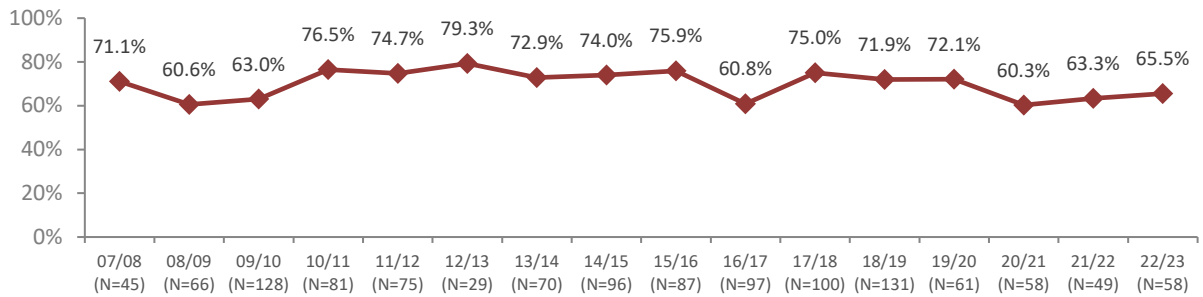
Notes:

- Although very few families had a “low risk” score at baseline, these families were omitted from these analyses so that only those who could demonstrate reduced risk on the tool remained in the analysis.
- Clients who had at least one reassessment given during the fiscal year (1st, 2nd, or 3rd reassessment) were included in this analysis. Assessments completed after the end of the fiscal year were not included.

As seen in the following figure, the *Structured Decision Making: Family Prevention Services Screening Tool* used in the Families Together program is helping to show that families reduce their level of risk while in the Families Together program.

- In 2022-23, 66% of parents were found to have lower levels of risk at their final reassessment than at baseline.
- Although there was a dip in percentage of clients who showed decreased risk during the COVID-19 pandemic (which may have reflected the impact of living with the coronavirus pandemic), since then the percentage of participants showing decreased risk of child maltreatment has been rising.

Figure 38: Percentage of Families Together participants who showed decreased risk of child maltreatment (2007 - 2023)



Source: First 5 Apricot database, *Structured Decision Making: Family Prevention Services Screening Tool (SDM:FPSST)* data.

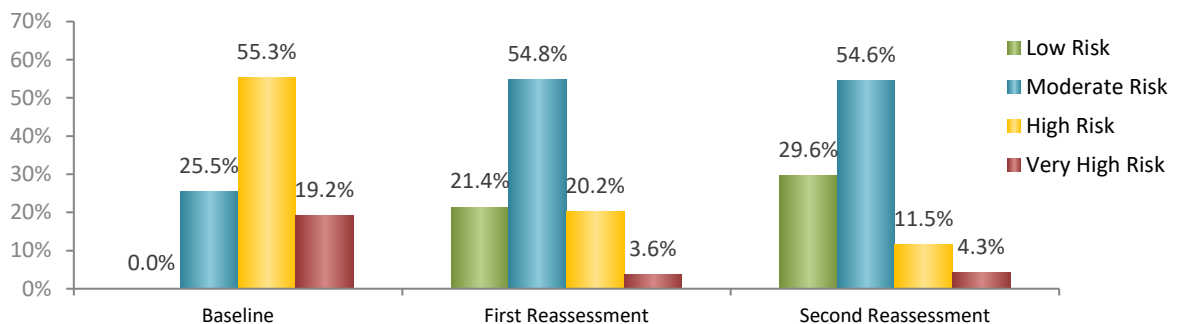
Notes:

- Although very few families had a “low risk” score at baseline, these families were omitted from these analyses so that only those who could demonstrate reduced risk on the tool remained in the analysis.
- Clients who had at least one reassessment given during the fiscal year (1st, 2nd, or 3rd reassessment) were included in this analysis.
- Due to inaccuracies in data entry in 2006-07, clients with baseline assessments before 7/1/07 were omitted from this analysis.
- In 2008-09, the risk assessment included both families receiving intensive services and those receiving brief intervention services. Long-term clients were assessed at intake with reassessments at 6-month intervals, or at closing if the case was open for less than 6 months. Clients receiving brief interventions were assessed at intake and the end of services.

A second view of these risk assessment data looks at *how much* families improved over time, as they moved from “Very High Risk” to “Low Risk.” In this analysis, the same set of families are analyzed at each assessment period (at baseline, 1st reassessment, and 2nd reassessment). Several years of data have been aggregated in order to present a more robust portrait of the extent to which Families Together participants are reducing their risk for future involvement with the child welfare system.

- Results indicate that the program is helping families reduce their level of risk. Of all the families that completed three assessments between 2007-2023, **75%** of families were assessed as being “high risk” or “very high risk” upon intake, and this dropped to **24%** six months later (1st reassessment). The percentage assessed as being “high” or “very high risk” dropped to **16%** for families who stayed in the program a full year (2nd reassessment).

Figure 39: Change in families’ risk levels during participation in the Families Together Program (2007 - 2023)



Source: First 5 Apricot database, *Structured Decision Making: Family Prevention Services Screening Tool (SDM:FPSST)* data, 2007-2023.

Notes:

- Although very few families had a “low risk” score at baseline, these families were omitted from these analyses so that only those who could demonstrate reduced risk on the tool remained in the analysis.
- Due to inaccuracies in data entry in 2006-07, clients with baseline assessments before 7/1/07 were omitted from this analysis.
- In 2008-09, the risk assessment included both families receiving intensive services and those receiving brief intervention services. Long-term clients were assessed at intake with reassessments at 6-month intervals, or at closing if the case was open for less than 6 months. Clients receiving brief interventions were assessed at intake and the end of services.
- The same set of families is analyzed at each assessment period.

N = 416.

Additional analyses by First 5 Santa Cruz County in past years have confirmed that the improved levels of risk by the 1st and 2nd reassessments were the result of the impact of the Families Together program, rather than the result of a changing population of clients.

Outcome Objective: Families do not experience a high rate of recurrence of abuse

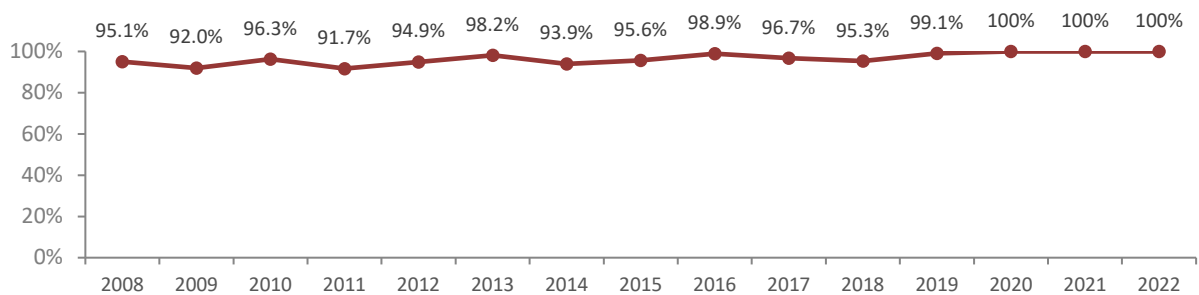
Measurable Objective	2022
At least 95% of families who participate in Families Together will not have a substantiated allegation of abuse at least 6 months after case closure.	100% N=55

Source: Santa Cruz County Human Services Department and Children’s Research Center. *Families Together: Substantiated Child Abuse Study, 2022, 2023.*
Note: Data are for each calendar year, in order to allow at least a 6-month period after case closure.

- Of the 55 families who received services from Families Together *and* had their cases closed in the 2022 calendar year:
 - **No families** had a substantiated allegation of maltreatment within six months after case closure. This figure is similar to what was observed in previous years.
 - An additional study found that 80% of families **did not** have a re-referral to child welfare within six months after their exit from Families Together, following a multi-year trend.

These results indicate that although some families are re-referred to child welfare after exiting from Families Together, the rate of substantiated abuse is low. This suggests that even though families are still experiencing high risk factors that lead to a child welfare report, they may have gained skills and resources during their participation in Families Together that prevent court-mandated involvement with child welfare.

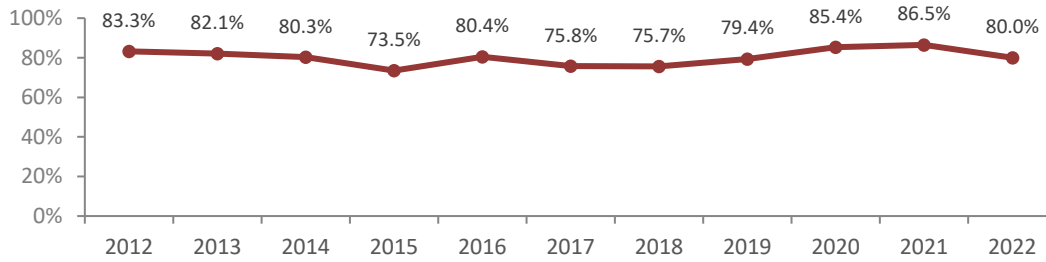
Figure 40: **Percentage of Families Together participants who did not have a substantiated allegation of maltreatment within 6 months after exit from Families Together**



Source: Santa Cruz County Human Services Department and Children’s Research Center. *Families Together: Substantiated Child Abuse Study, 2022, 2023.*

Note: Data are for each calendar year, in order to allow at least a 6-month period after case closure.
N: (2008)=61, (2009)=74, (2010)=82, (2011)=72, (2012)=78, (2013)=56, (2014)=66, (2015)=68, (2016)=92, (2017)=120; (2018)=107; (2019)=107; (2020)=61; (2021)=52; (2022)=55.

Figure 41: Percentage of families without a re-referral to Child Welfare within 6 months after exit from Families Together



Source: Santa Cruz County Human Services Department and Children’s Research Center. Families Together: *Substantiated Child Abuse Study, 2022, 2023.*

Note: Data are for the calendar year, in order to allow at least a 6-month period after case closure.

N: (2012)=78, (2013)=56, (2014)=66, (2015)=68, (2016)=92, (2017)=120; (2018)=107; (2019)=107; (2020)=61; (2021)=52; (2022)=55.

Outcome Objective: Children have health insurance and a medical home

Measurable Objectives	2022-2023
At least 98% of children ages 5 and under will have health insurance <i>by exit</i> from the program.	100% N=51
At least 98% of children ages 5 and under will have a medical home <i>by exit</i> from the program.	100% N=51

Source: First 5 Apricot database, *Medical Home & Insurance Status at Closure report, 2022-23.*

Outcome Objective: Families will have access to parenting support services structured by the Triple P curriculum

Measurable Objectives	2022-2023
Of families who engage in Families Together services— demonstrated by at least seven weeks of services —at least 70% will receive parenting support through the Triple P curriculum.*	43.5% N=85
Of these families, at least 50% of those who participated in higher-level programs (e.g., L3-Individual/Brief Group, L4-Standard/Group) will complete the curriculum, as indicated by documentation of completed curriculum.	60.0% N=5
Of families who engage in less than 7 weeks of services (but at least 2 face-to-face sessions), 40% will receive parenting support through Triple P Level 2 tip sheets.	5.3% N=19

Source: Families Together *Annual Progress Report, 2023.*

* Of the parents and caregivers at Families Together (with children of any age), who received at least seven weeks of service, this analysis reports the percentage who engaged in any program level of Triple P.

Triple P Outcomes

In the following Triple P analyses, several years of data have been aggregated (based on the number of years that each assessment has been in use) in order to present a more robust portrait of the extent to which Families Together clients are demonstrating improvement in their parenting knowledge and skills.

Level 2: Individual

This brief form of Triple P is giving Families Together parents an opportunity to be introduced to Triple P and is providing easy access to general parenting support through one-time consultations.

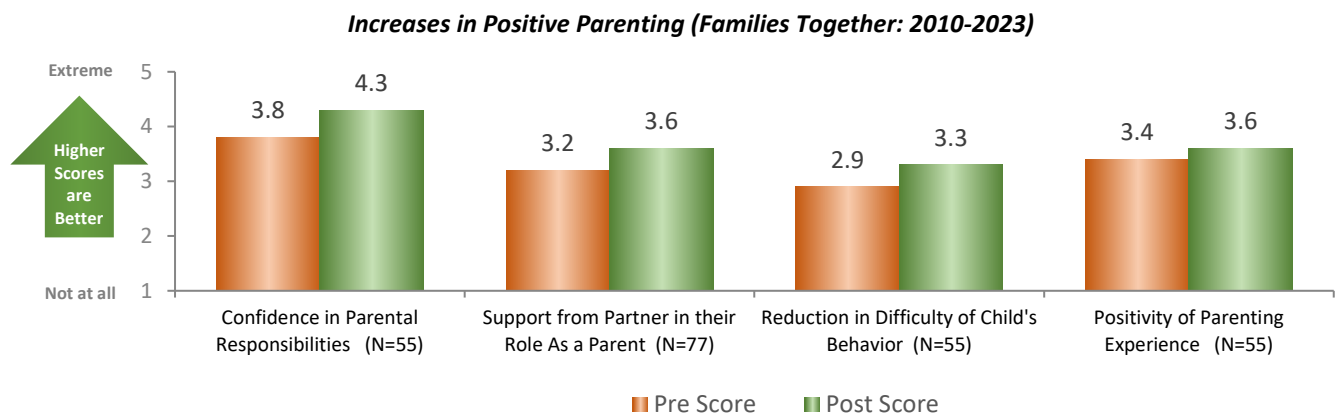
- Between 2010-23, **262** unique clients have received Level 2 Individual services.

Level 3: Primary Care (Individual or Brief Group)

Brief consultations about specific parenting concerns are resulting in increased positive parenting experiences.

- Families Together participants received support for specific parenting challenges.** Families Together clients who participated in brief Triple P services (Level 3) reported *statistically significant* improvements in their parental confidence, number of difficult child behaviors, and enjoyment of the parenting experience. Of special note, on average, parents who demonstrated improvements in parental confidence also experienced a moderate to large magnitude of change, indicating that these observed differences were not only *statistically significant* but also *meaningful*.

Clients at Families Together who participated in both brief sessions (Level 3) and in-depth Triple P sessions (Levels 4 and 5) also reported *statistically significant* improvement in the support from their partner in their role as a parent.



Source: Triple P data from the *Parenting Experience Survey*, Questions 3, 6, 1, and 2, Jan. 2010 - June 2023.

Note: The Level 3 *Parenting Experience Survey* measures issues related to being a parent, and each question is analyzed separately. For Q1-6, scores could range from 1 to 5. There are no clinical cut-offs for this assessment. The analysis of question 6 (Support from Partner in Their Role as a Parent) includes data from parents in Levels 3, 4, and 5, as this question was expanded to all of these levels of service in 2011-12.

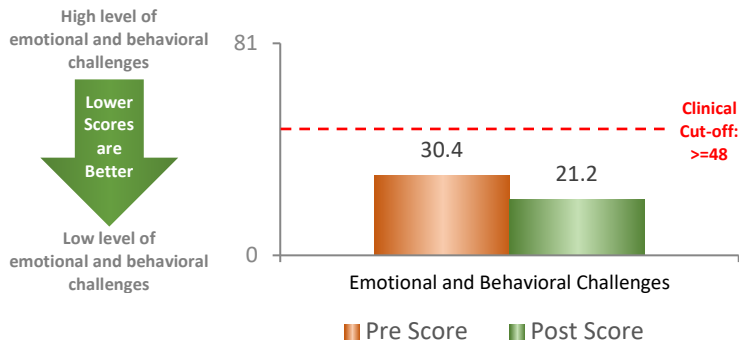
Note: No new Families Together clients have completed a Level 3 Individual/Brief Group service since FY 2018-19.

Level 4: Standard & Group

Through more intensive services, families are receiving in-depth support for moderate to severe behavioral and emotional challenges.

- Parents reported improved child behavior.** On average, Families Together clients who completed Triple P Level 4 reported fewer emotional and behavioral challenges with their children. Notwithstanding the small sample size, this was calculated as being a *statistically significant* improvement.

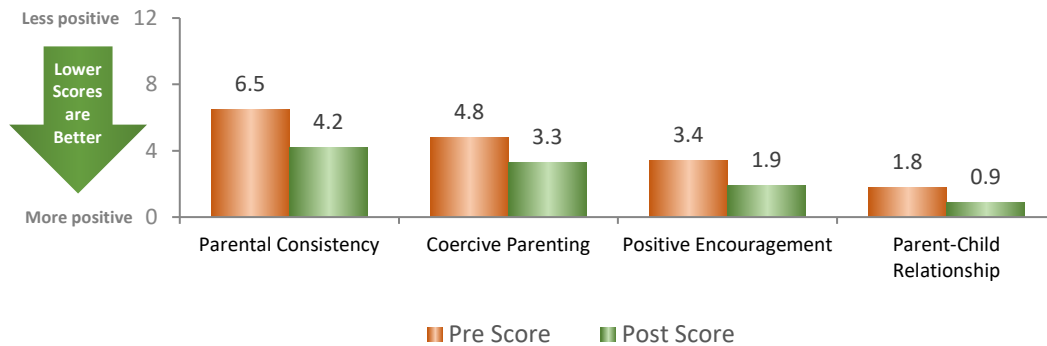
Child Emotional and Behavioral Challenges (Families Together: 2018-2023)



Source: Triple P data from the *Child Adjustment and Parent Efficacy Scale*: Total Intensity subscale, July 2018 – June 2023.
Note: Results should be interpreted with caution, as the sample size is relatively low.
N=12.

- Parents increased their use of positive parenting styles.** On average, there were improvements in Families Together parents’ parenting styles, in that they became more consistent, less coercive, more encouraging, and more positive. Of special note, parents on average demonstrated *statistically significant* improvements in parental consistency, coerciveness, and encouragement, which is particularly remarkable due to the small number of participants.

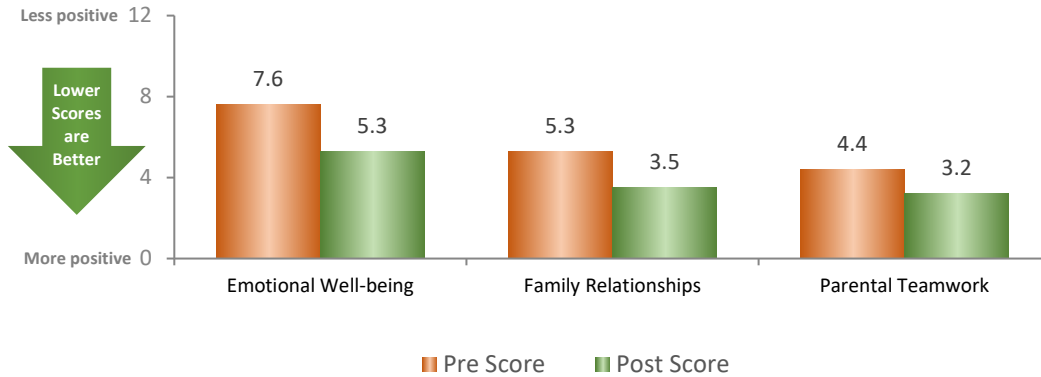
Decrease in Inconsistent, Coercive, Discouraging, and Negative Parenting (Families Together: 2018-2023)



Source: Triple P data from the *Parenting and Family Adjustment Scales (PAFAS)*, all Parenting Scale subscales, July 2018 - June 2023.
Note: Results should be interpreted with caution, as the sample size is relatively low.
N=13.

- Parents reported improvements in emotional well-being and family relationships.** After completing the program, Families Together clients on average reported improvements in their emotional well-being, relationship issues, and parental teamwork after participating in the program. Of special note, clients also reported *statistically significant* improvements in Family Relationships.

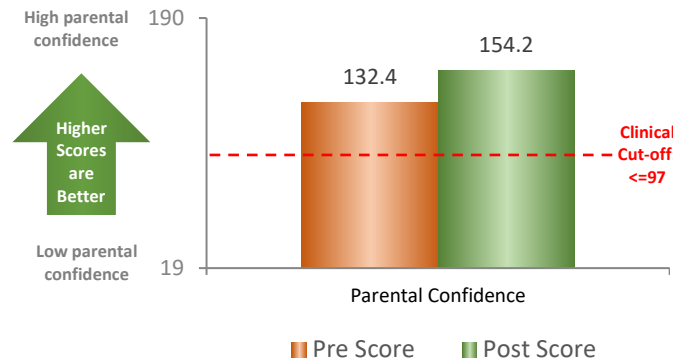
Improvements in emotional well-being and family relationships (Families Together: 2018-2023)



Source: Triple P data from the *Parenting and Family Adjustment Scales: All subscales*, July 2018 - June 2023. N: (Well-being)=13; (Relationships)=12; (Teamwork)=11.

- Increased parental confidence.** On average, Families Together parents reported improvements in their confidence through the course of the Triple P program.

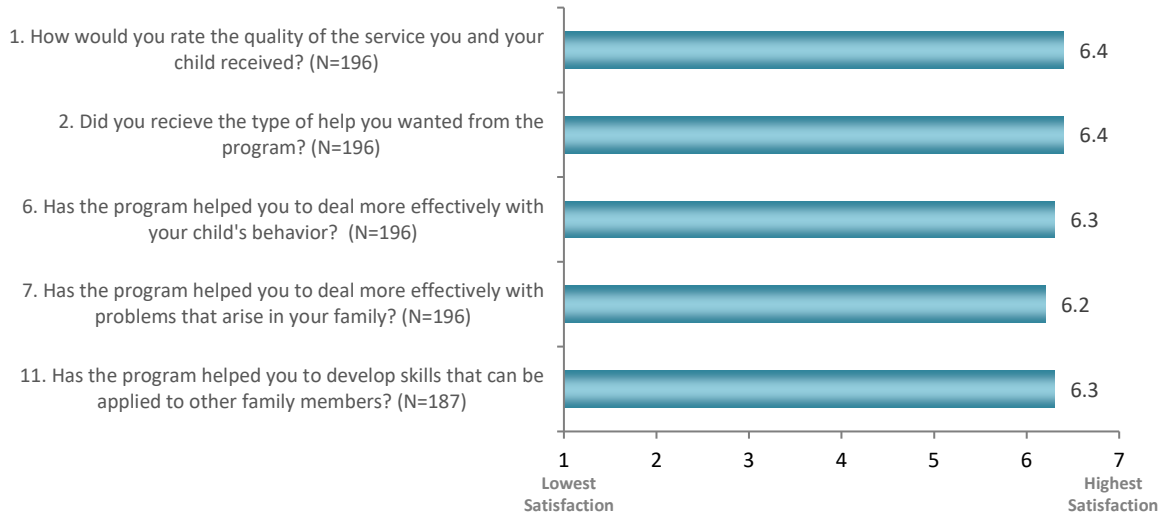
Improvement in Parental Confidence (Families Together: 2018-2023)



Source: Triple P data from the *Child Adjustment and Parent Efficacy Scale: Parent Confidence subscale*, July 2018 – June 2023. N=12.

- **Client Satisfaction with Triple P Services.** Families Together parents receiving Triple P services reported high levels of satisfaction with the program.

Parents' Satisfaction with Various Aspects of the Triple P Program (Families Together: 2010-2023)



Source: Triple P data from the *Parent Satisfaction Survey*, Jan. 2010 - June 2023.
Note: All items were on a 7-point scale. Higher scores indicate greater satisfaction.