



FIRST 5 SANTA CRUZ COUNTY



ANNUAL EVALUATION REPORT



July 1, 2023 - June 30, 2024

October 2024

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.

What is your agency is most proud of?

“Families Together is incredibly proud of our ability to serve children aged 0-5. We are grateful that we can open our doors to all families regardless of what their needs are.

Whether they come to us seeking aid with basic needs, connections to essential medical or preventive care, breaking cycles of generational trauma, empowerment, system education, or parenting support, we are able to help them on their path to self-defined family goals.”

- 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>	2023-2024 (Unique) <i>Pathways + Triple P-only</i>
	Brief	Intensive	Pending	Exited early			
Parents/Guardians	19	10	3	2	34 <i>(with children ages 0-5)</i>	33 <i>(with children of all ages)</i>	67
Children	28	22	1	2	<i>(ages 0-5)</i> 53	<i>(ages 0-5)</i> 1 <i>(ages 6+)</i> 1 <i>(unknown age)</i> ³ 119	<i>(ages 0-5)</i> 54 <i>(ages 6+)</i> 1 <i>(unknown age)</i> 119

Source: First 5 CCD database for July 1, 2023 – June 30, 2024.

* This population only includes clients who received services at Families Together with funding by First 5. When clients begin services at Families Together, they complete a risk assessment and their results are used to 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.

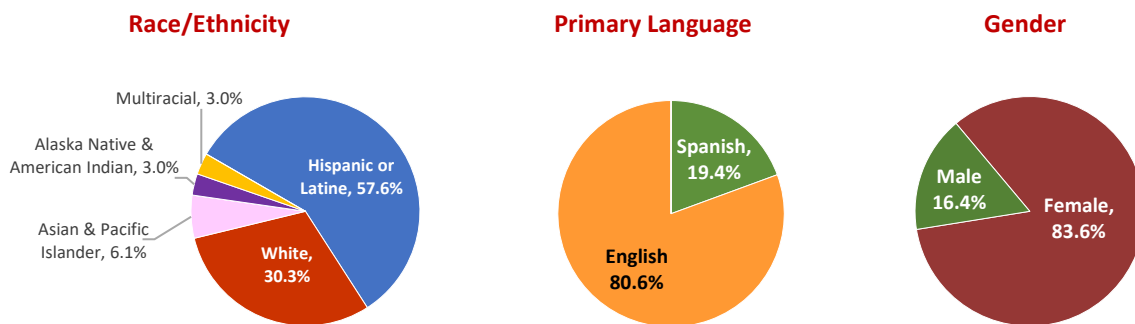
¹ The “Pathways Subtotal” reports the number of Families Together clients who are primary caregivers and who have a child under 6 years old, who worked within one of the First 5-funded Pathways and may also have received Triple P services.

² The “Triple P-only Subtotal” reports Families Together clients who received Triple P services funded by First 5, 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.
- The client participating in Triple P is someone who was engaged in Families Together through a Referral and/or Pathway that was not funded by First 5 (e.g., via CalWORKs/Thrive by 5).

³ 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 37: Demographics of Parents/Guardians participating in Families Together (2023-24)

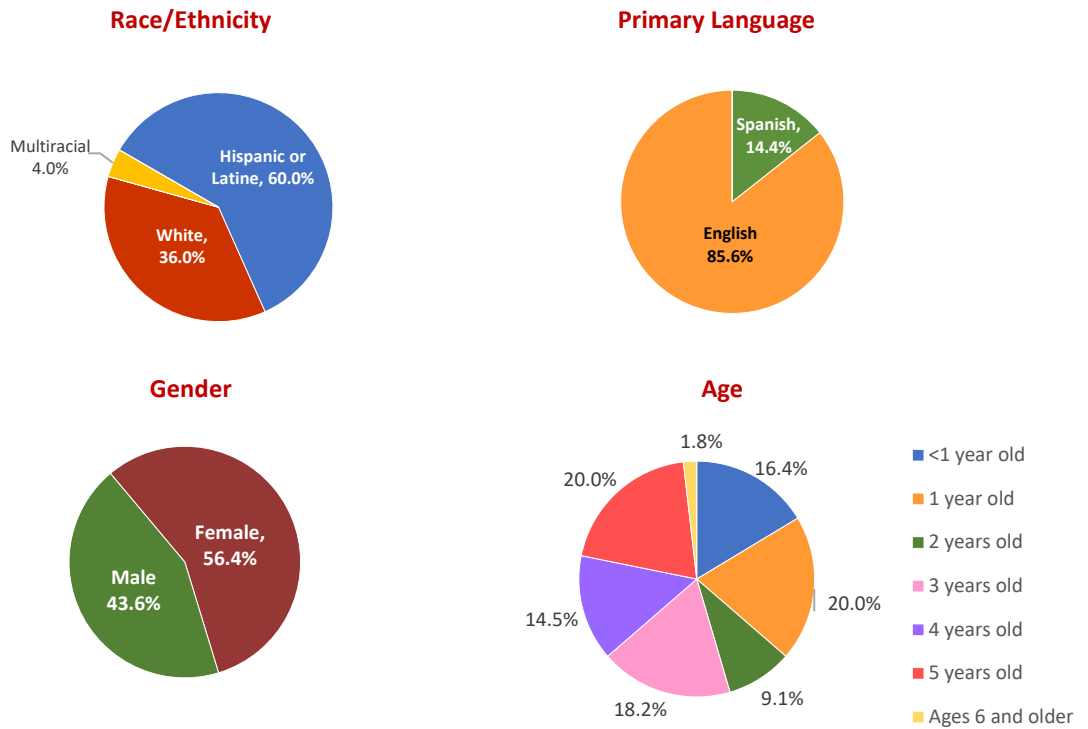


Source: First 5 CCD database for July 1, 2023 – June 30, 2024.

Note: Clients with missing or unknown data for a demographic are excluded from that demographic’s analysis.

N: (Race)=33; (Language)=67; (Gender)=67.

Figure 38: Demographics of Children benefiting from Families Together (2023-24)



Source: First 5 CCD database for July 1, 2023 – June 30, 2024.
 Note: Clients with missing or unknown data for a demographic are excluded from that demographic’s analysis.
 N: (Ethnicity)=50; (Language)=174; (Gender)=55; (Age)=55.

Additional clients referred: In addition to the services funded by First 5 that are described in this section, Families Together received 57 referrals for service from CalWORKs in FY 2023-24 (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	2023-2024
<p>By June 30, 2024, accept referrals for at least 130 families per year (with at least one child prenatal – age 5) who will be referred from Family and Children’s Services (FCS) to the Differential Response Program.</p> <p>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.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 64 FCS referrals • 17 Community Referrals • 57 CalWORKs / Thrive by 5 initiative <p>138 referrals from all sources</p>

Measurable Objectives	2023-2024
<p>Of families who agree to a referral to Families Together (with at least one child prenatal – age 5),</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 100% will have attempted contact with a Family Support Specialist <p>and</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 50% of clients approved for Families Together services (e.g., clients who were not denied services) will connect with a clinician for an initial meeting by June 30, 2024. 	<p>Of families who agree to a referral to Families Together (with at least one child prenatal – age 5),</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 100% had attempted contact (N=138) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 55 had an initial meeting ○ 25 are still pending ○ 27 not successfully contacted ○ 31 denied services • 51.4% of families approved for FT services had an initial meeting (N=107)
<p>By June 30, 2024, at least 90 primary caregivers per year (with at least one child prenatal – age 5) will receive from Differential Response individualized services emphasizing child development, safety, and parent-child relationships.</p> <p><small>Note: These individualized services included (but were not limited to) ASQ assessments, safety screenings in the home, Raising A Reader services, case management to relevant resources, counseling, client assistance, and Triple P services.</small></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 67 primary caregivers received these individualized services

Source: Families Together Annual Progress Report, 2024.

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	2023-2024
<p>Between July 1, 2023 through June 30, 2024, 70% of primary caregivers who participate in Families Together (with at least one child prenatal – age 5) will demonstrate decreased risk based on their final assessment.</p>	<p>50.0% N=16</p>

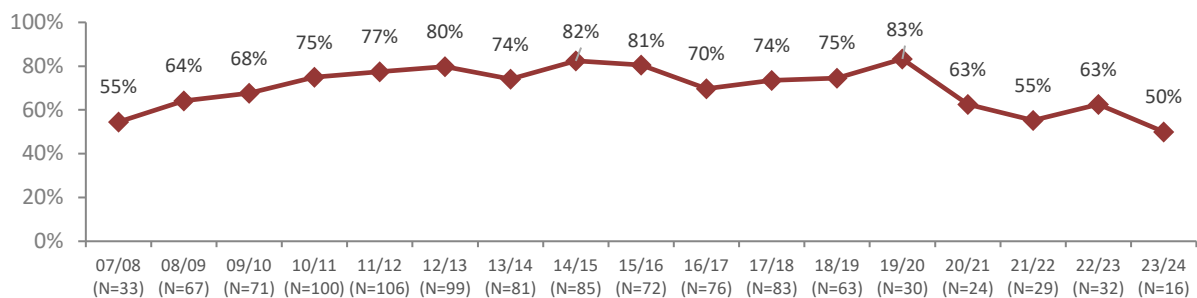
Source: First 5 Apricot database, *Structured Decision Making: Family Prevention Services Screening Tool* (SDM:FPSST) data, 2023-24.
Notes:

- 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.
- Only includes clients who exited the program and have at least one child ages prenatal – age 5.

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 2023-24, 50% of parents (with at least one child prenatal – age 5) were found to have reduced their levels of risk by the end of program.
- The percentage of clients (with at least one child prenatal – age 5) who showed reduced levels of risk by the end of the program has been trending lower, from a high of 83% in 2020 to 50% in 2024.

Figure 39: **Percentage of Families Together clients (with at least one child prenatal – age 5) who showed decreased risk of child maltreatment based on their final assessment**



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

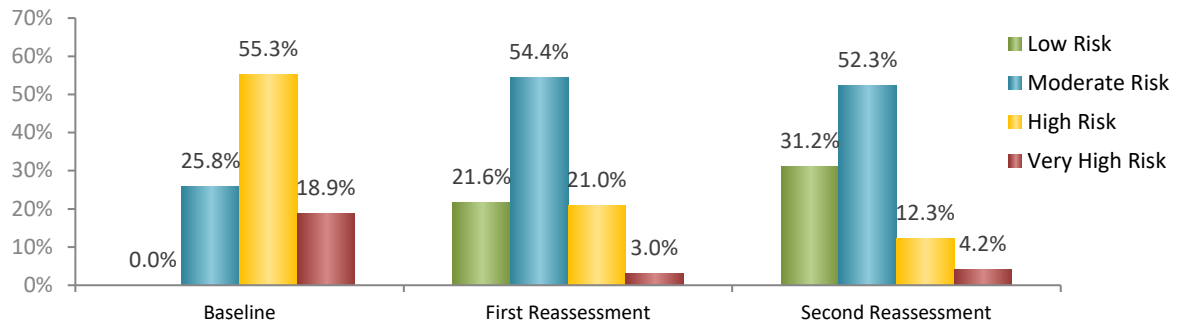
Notes:

- 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.
- Only clients with at least one child prenatal – age 5, who exited the program and had at least one reassessment during the fiscal year (1st, 2nd, or 3rd reassessment) were included in this analysis. Previous years’ results have been modified to include this same population, and may also include additional data that weren’t available when that year’s results were initially calculated.
- 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, only clients who exited the program after their 2nd Reassessment, and who had at least one child prenatal – age 5, were included, and the same set of families were 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 exited the program between 2007-2024 and completed three assessments, **74%** 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 **17%** for families who stayed in the program a full year (2nd reassessment).

Figure 40: **Of Families Together clients (with at least one child prenatal – age 5), change in risk levels during participation in the program (2007-2024)**



Source: First 5 Apricot database, *Structured Decision Making: Family Prevention Services Screening Tool (SDM:FPSST)* data, 2007-2024.

Notes:

- Only clients who exited the program after their 2nd Reassessment, and who had at least one child prenatal – age 5, were included in this analysis. The same set of families is analyzed at each assessment period.
- 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.

N = 333.

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	2023
At least 95% of families who participate in the Differential Response program will not have a substantiated allegation of abuse at least 6 months after case closure.	98.0% N=51

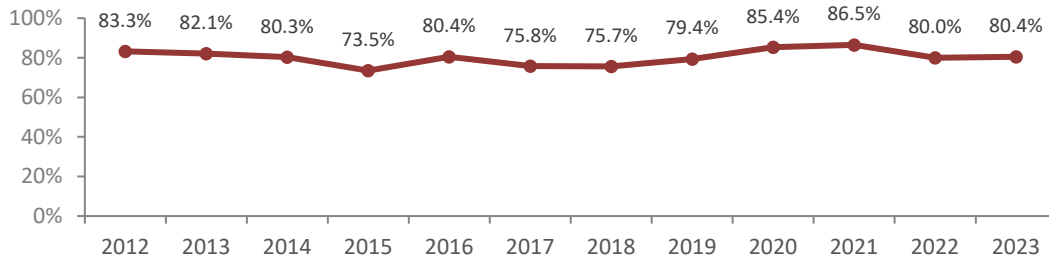
Source: Santa Cruz County Human Services Department and Children’s Research Center. *Families Together: Substantiated Child Abuse Study, 2023, 2024.*

Notes:

- Data are for the calendar year, in order to allow at least a 6-month period after case closure.
- This analysis includes families with children of any age.

- Of the 51 families who received services from Families Together *and* had their cases closed in the 2023 calendar year:
 - Results showed 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.
 - An additional study found that **98%** of families who received services from Families Together **did not have a substantiated allegation of abuse** for at least 6 months after case closure. This figure is similar to previous years’ results.

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



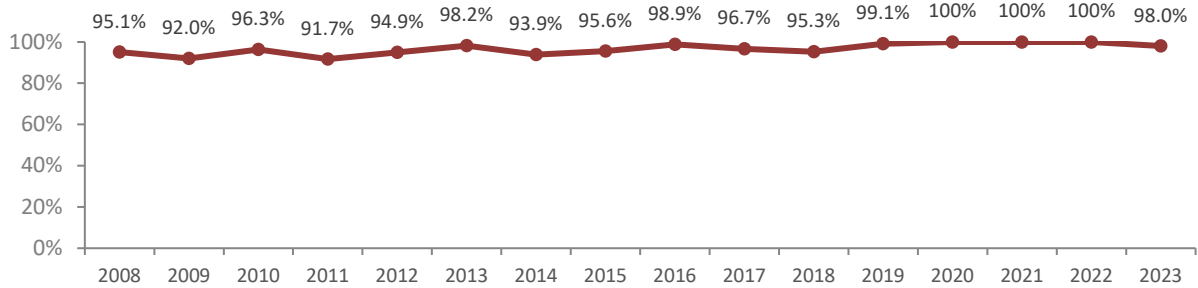
Source: Santa Cruz County Human Services Department and Children’s Research Center. *Families Together: Substantiated Child Abuse Study, 2023, 2024.*

Notes:

- Data are for the calendar year, in order to allow at least a 6-month period after case closure.
- This analysis includes families with children of any age.

N: (2012)=78, (2013)=56, (2014)=66, (2015)=68, (2016)=92, (2017)=120; (2018)=107; (2019)=107; (2020)=61; (2021)=52; (2022)=55; (2023)=51.

Figure 42: 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, 2023, 2024.*

Notes:

- Data are for the calendar year, in order to allow at least a 6-month period after case closure.
- This analysis includes families with children of any age.

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; (2023)=51.

Outcome Objective: Children have health insurance and a medical home

Measurable Objectives	2023-2024
At least 98% of children ages 5 and under will have health insurance by exit from the program.	100% N=46
At least 98% of children ages 5 and under will have a medical home by exit from the program.	100% N=46

Source: First 5 Apricot database, *Medical Home & Insurance Status at Closure report, 2023-24.*

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

Measurable Objectives	2023-2024
Of families with at least one child age 0-5, who engage in Families Together services— demonstrated by at least seven weeks of services —at least 70% will receive parenting support through any level of the Triple P curriculum.	57.4% N=68
Of these families with at least one child age 0-5, at least 50% of those who participated in in-depth levels of Triple P (e.g., L3-Individual/Brief Group, L4-Standard/Group) will complete the curriculum, as indicated by documentation of completed curriculum.*	33.3% N=3
Of families with at least one child age 0-5 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.	80.0% N=5

Source: Families Together Annual Progress Report, 2024.

* Only clients who began their in-depth services early enough to be able to complete the program by the end of the fiscal year are included in this analysis.

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 2010-24, **302** unique clients have received Level 2 Individual services.

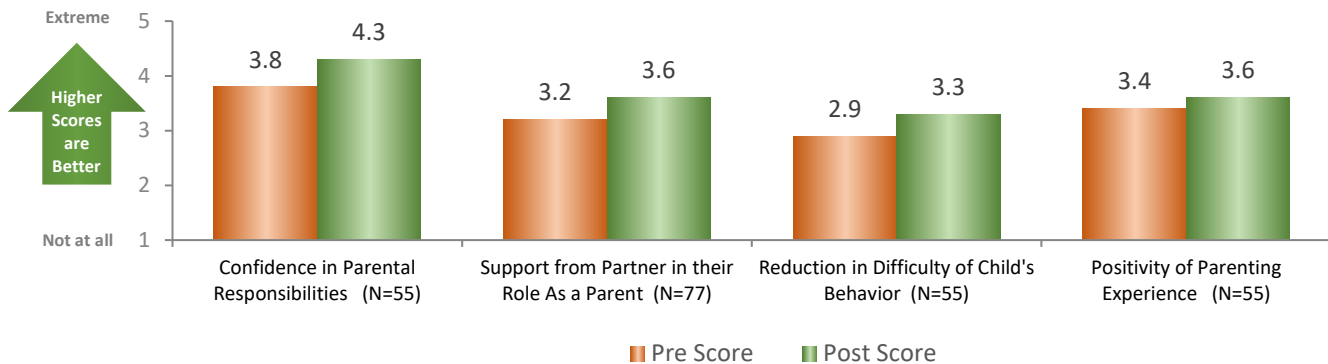
Level 3: Primary Care (Individual or Brief Group)

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.

Increases in Positive Parenting (Families Together: 2010-2019)



Source: Triple P data from the *Parenting Experience Survey*, Questions 3, 6, 1, and 2, Jan. 2010 - June 2019.

Notes:

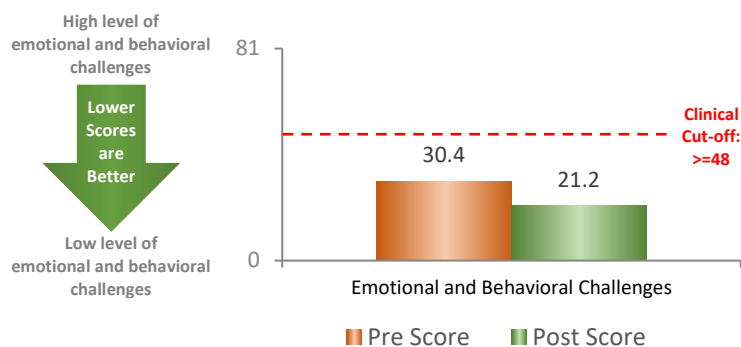
- The Level 3 *Parenting Experience Survey* measures issues related to being a parent, and each question is analyzed separately. For Q1-6, scores could range from 1 to 5. There are no clinical cut-offs for this assessment. The analysis of question 6 (Support from Partner in Their Role as a Parent) includes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

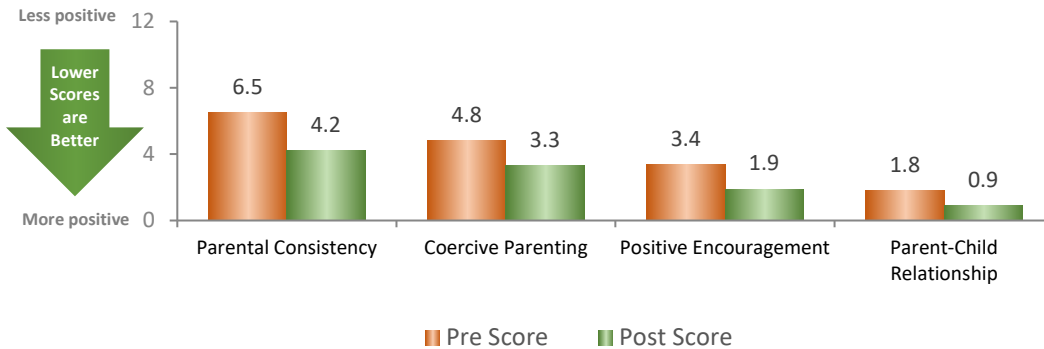
Notes:

- Results should be interpreted with caution, as the sample size is relatively low.
 - No new Families Together clients have completed this assessment since FY 2022-23.
- 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.

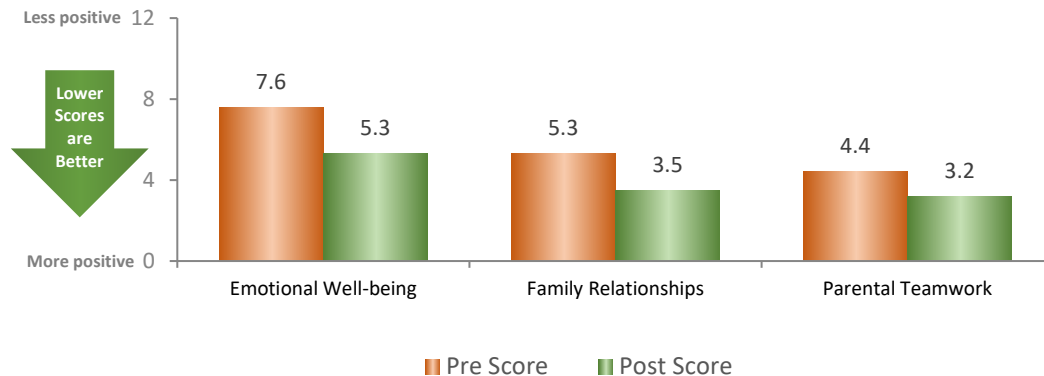
Notes:

- Results should be interpreted with caution, as the sample size is relatively low.
- No new Families Together clients have completed this assessment since FY 2022-23.

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)



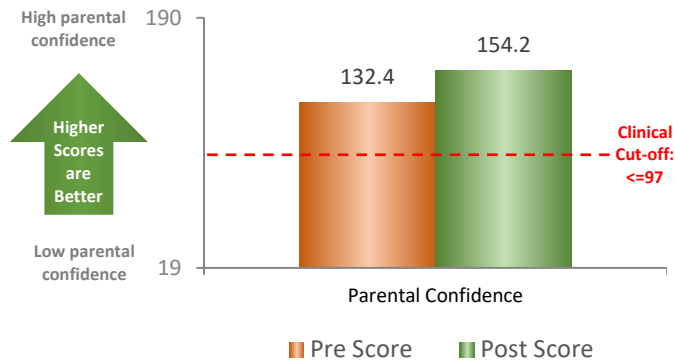
Source: Triple P data from the *Parenting and Family Adjustment Scales (PAFAS)*, all Family Adjustment Subscales, July 2018 – June 2023.

Note: No new Families Together clients have completed this assessment since FY 2022-23.

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.

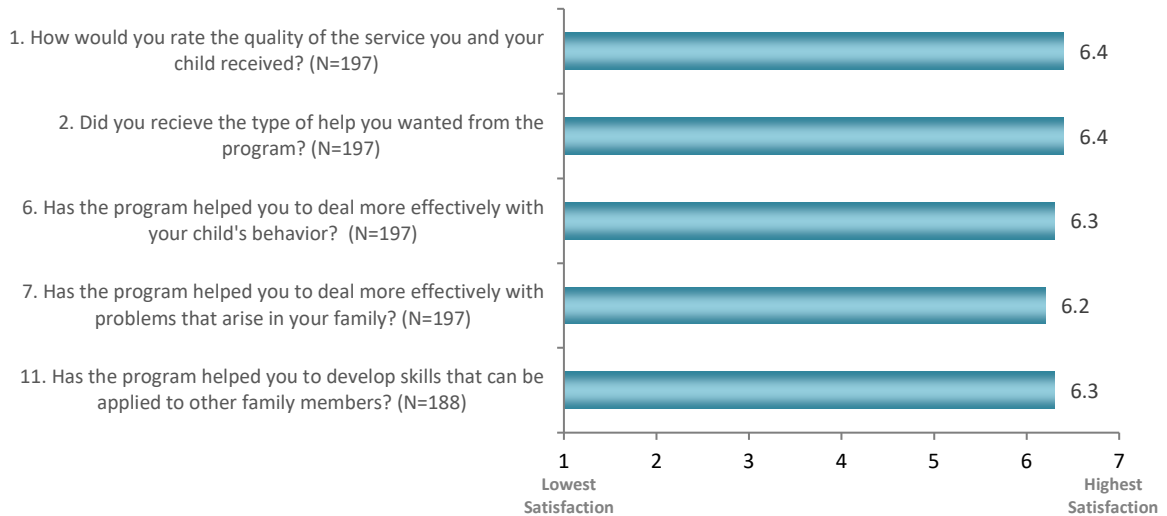
Improvement in Parental Confidence (Families Together: 2018-2023)



Source: Triple P data from the *Child Adjustment and Parent Efficacy Scale*: Parent Confidence subscale, July 2018 – June 2023.
Note: No new Families Together clients have completed this assessment since FY 2022-23.
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.
Notes:

- All items were on a 7-point scale. Higher scores indicate greater satisfaction.
- No new Families Together clients have completed this assessment since FY 2022-23.