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Florida Circle of Parents Evaluation Report

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Introduction

The Florida Circle of Parents is part of a national network of support groups led by parents for parents with the help of a trained group facilitator. The Circle of Parents model is based on principles of shared leadership and family support offered in a non-judgmental atmosphere. The groups also offer a children's program or childcare services during parent support group meetings to enable parents to attend and provide children with developmental opportunities.

Circle of Parents has been facilitating the formation and participation of parent support groups in Florida since 2004. The number of groups in Florida has ranged from 12 to 57 with the number active during the 2010-2011 fiscal year being 41. Circle of Parents groups are active in several regions in Florida and serve a diverse group of parents. Circle of Parents groups are held in local communities by partnering agencies. Agencies, organizations, associations or programs voluntarily host the Circle of Parents groups for their program participants because they recognize the benefit of bringing parents together to form social connections and share the successes and challenges of raising children.

The purpose of this evaluation was to assist the Department of Children and Families to comply with the CBCAP federal regulations, by reinstating an evaluation component for this CBCAP funded program. An objective of the evaluation was to administer the Protective Factors Survey (PFS) with participants in Florida Circle of Parents support groups. Depending on the number of new participants recruited for Circle of Parents during the 2010-2011 fiscal year, an additional objective was to document response similarities between a conventional pre-post test administration of the PFS and administration of a retrospective pretest format.

Methodology

In the evaluation of Circle of Parents during the FY 2010-2011, both quantitative and qualitative methodologies were used. Mixed methods approaches are helpful for a number of reasons. The combination of data collection methods provide a more comprehensive set of data that can be used to supplement and inform our understanding of program performance (Creswell & Clark, 2007). The approach also provides an opportunity to replicate and confirm findings across methods. The quantitative method used in this evaluation was a survey of participants in parent support groups that volunteered to be included in the evaluation. This method was consistent with past evaluations of Florida Circle of Parents. The qualitative method administered was a guided interview of a parent support group to assess comprehension and value of items on the survey tool. The guided interview also provided an opportunity for participants to share their views of their parent support group in an open response format.

In the quantitative method or participant survey in this evaluation, the survey tool was a modification of the Protective Factors Survey (PFS). See Appendix A for a copy of the survey tool. It included questions addressing several participant characteristics to be recorded on "how they learned about" and reasons "why they were interested" in participating in a parent support group. The tool also includes twenty questions on the Protective Factors Survey that are designed to collect measures of protective factors for preventing child abuse and neglect. The protective factors are included in a model

developed at the Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP, 2004). The PFS is endorsed and recommended by Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention (CBCAP) for evaluating programs funded through CBCAP. The PFS was developed and validated by a grant funded by the Office of Child Abuse and Neglect in the Administration for Children, Youth and Families, US Department of Health and Human Services. The development and validation of the tool relied on a partnership between the FRIENDS National Resource Center for CBCAP and the University of Kansas Institute for Educational Research and Public Service in the School of Education (Counts, Buffington, Chang-Rios, Rasmussen, & Preacher, 2010). The tool measures change in several protective factors for preventing child abuse and neglect, including family functioning, emotional support, concrete support in times of need, knowledge of parenting and child development, and nurturing and attachment. Likert scales with 7 response points were used for measuring the level of agreement/disagreement or frequency of occurrence.

For purposes in this evaluation, a retrospective format in the Protective Factors Survey was used. This format allowed the measurement of comparisons between participant responses “before” participating in a parent support group and during their participation “today” with one administration of the tool. This format has several advantages for programs that have voluntary participation, do not mandate participation in a set number of sessions due to variation in the need for support, and have variations over time in the number of parents participating. Program participants can complete the tool at any point in time during their participation with a pretest tool administration not being required. Based on research that has used and tested retrospective formats, there is the possibility of over or underestimation of program effects (Hill & Betz, 2005; Pratt, McGuigan, & Katzev, 2000; Taylor, Russ-Eft, & Taylor, 2009; Nimon, Zigarmi, & Allen, 2011). The measured effects can also be different depending on whether the survey items are measuring knowledge, behavior, or attitudes. The wording of survey items has also had an impact on these effects with an example being wording that is interpreted as socially undesirable.

The qualitative method was a guided interview focused on interpretations and perceptions of each statement or item on the PFS pretest and posttest, not on their actual responses on the Likert scales on the PFS. The questions posed were intended to capture comprehension of terms used on the PFS, values, internal standards of measurement, social desirability, commitment or motivation, and other constructs that assist in ensuring the validity of the measures by understanding responses and changes in responses over time. The emphasis in the group interview validity constructs conducted for this evaluation included comprehension and values. The questions posed are listed below by protective factor categories:

Family Functioning and Resiliency

1. What does it mean to have family members listen to each other? (comprehension)
2. Is it important in your family to “pull together”? (value)

Social and Concrete Support

1. How would you describe a crisis? (comprehension)
2. Is talking to others important? (value)
3. Do you feel comfortable seeking assistance for food and shelter? (value)

Child Development and Parenting Knowledge

1. What does it mean to discipline a child? (comprehension)
2. Is praising someone a way to make that person feel special? (value)

3. How important is helping a child to learn? (value)

Nurturing and Attachment

1. What does it mean to be “close to your child”? (comprehension)
2. What does a parent do when they soothe their child? (comprehension)
3. Is being close to your child important to you? (value)

Additional questions at the end of the session:

1. Were you trying to impress anyone with your answers on the pretest PFS?
2. Was there anything in the statements that made you uneasy when you completed the pretest PFS? If yes, what made you uneasy?
3. Were the response scales easy to use? Did the points on the scales include your desired responses?
4. Do you think this parent support group will help you? If yes, how? How long do you think it will take for you to experience these benefits?

At the end of the guided interview, there was an opportunity to ask participants whether they think the support group experience was helpful and how it was helpful. Responses to this question were appropriate for supplementing or explaining findings based on the responses to items on the PFS.

Characteristics of Circle of Parents Study Participants

The evaluation included 26 Circle of Parents participants from five different groups. The number of sessions these participants attended ranged from 1 through 18 with 4 participants attending 8 or more sessions prior to responding to the survey. There were 4 (15.4%) males in the evaluation. Table 1 displays the frequencies for several demographic categories among the evaluation participants.

Table 1. Selected Demographic Characteristics of Study Participants

Demographic Characteristics	Percentage (#)
Marital Status	
Married	50.0% (13)
Partnered	11.5% (3)
Single	23.1% (6)
Divorced	7.6% (2)
Widowed	0
Separated	7.6% (2)
Age	
18-25	19.2% (5)
26-35	30.8% (8)
36-45	42.3% (11)
>45	7.6% (2)
Education	
Up to 11 th Grade	11.5% (3)
High School or GED	23.1% (6)
At least 1 year of college	65.4% (17)
Income	
Up to \$25,000	42.3% (11)
\$25,000-\$39,999	15.4% (4)

\$40,000-\$59,999	7.6% (2)
>= \$60,000	33.3% (8)
Missing	.04%(1)

Among the participants in this evaluation, 69.2 percent (18) were white and 19.2 percent (5) were African American. There was one Hispanic participant and another participant described him or herself as Caribbean Islander. One participant did not respond to the question addressing race.

Learning about Circle of Parents

Understanding how parents learned about Circle of Parents and why they decided to participate is important for improving and expanding the services. Among those in the evaluation, Table 2 lists the frequencies for the ways that were checked for how they learned about Circle of Parents. Each participant was permitted to check more than one response to this question.

Table 2. How Participants Learned about Circle of Parents

Ways to Learn about COP	Frequency
Healthy Families Florida	11
Family Member or Friend	2
CPS Case Worker	3
Current Support Group Member	10
Therapist Counselor	1
Other (MAPP training)	1

Table 3 lists the frequencies for the reasons participants became interested in Circle of Parents. Each participant was permitted to check more than one response to this question.

Table 3. Why Participants Are Interested in Circle of Parents

Reasons for being Interested in COP	Frequency
Want Parent Tips/Ideas	22
Want to Meet Other Parents	12
Want to be More Active in the Program	6
Felt Isolated	2
Single Parenting Demands	2
Frustrated	3
Step Family Challenges	1
ADD/ADHD Child	1
Activity Free	4
Child Care Provided	1

Previous Experience with or Exposure to Child Abuse and Neglect

The relationship between prior child abuse and neglect and the need for services that help prevent subsequent child abuse and neglect or long-term health problems has been highlighted in research (Stith, et al., 2009; Felitti, et al., 1998; Refer to www.acestudy.org). While eligibility to participate in Circle of Parents does not universally require previous exposure to or experience with

being abused or neglected, it can be important to know the past experience of participants. With a sufficient number of participants in the evaluation, it can also be an appropriate indicator for subgroup analyses. One of the questions asked on the survey tool used in this evaluation addresses experiences with child abuse and neglect growing up in their home. The experiences described and listed in the question include the following:

- Insulted or used foul language to hurt a child
- A parent did not emotionally support their child
- A parent/caregiver inflicted physical injury
- A parent/caregiver did not meet child’s basic needs or a parent/caregiver did not protect a child from a dangerous situation
- A parent/caregiver did not protect a child from inappropriate sexual behavior or invasion of privacy; or
- Domestic abuse between adults or parents

After the respondent looked at the list, they were asked to check if they did or did not grow up in a home that had any of these experiences. They also have a choice to check “unsure.” For the respondents in this evaluation, the number having at least one of the experiences listed for this item in the questionnaire was 13 or 50 percent of the sample.

Quantitative Analysis and Findings: Protective Factors Survey

For this analysis, the number of evaluation participants with valid responses for “before,” “today,” or both “before” and “today” was 21. Within this group, there were responses missing for either the “before” or the “today” time points which meant that the Ns for the comparison of the “before” and “after” was limited to between 18 and 20 cases. Descriptive statistics for the “before” and “today” responses for each item on the PFS are listed in Table 4.

**Table 4. Descriptive Statistics for Florida Protective Factors Survey Items
(Paired Samples Statistics for the t-test)**

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	BeforeItem1	5.2632	19	1.44692	.33195
	TodayItem1	5.6316	19	1.11607	.25604
Pair 2	BeforeItem2	4.9474	19	1.17727	.27008
	TodayItem2	5.3684	19	1.06513	.24436
Pair 3	BeforeItem3	5.0000	19	1.05409	.24183
	TodayItem3	5.6316	19	.89508	.20535
Pair 4	BeforeItem4	5.2105	19	1.03166	.23668
	TodayItem4	5.5263	19	1.02026	.23406
Pair 5	BeforeItem5	5.1579	19	1.38497	.31773
	TodayItem5	5.4737	19	1.21876	.27960
Pair 6	BeforeItem6	5.0000	19	1.63299	.37463
	TodayItem6	5.4211	19	1.77375	.40693

Pair 7	BeforeItem7	5.2105	19	1.58391	.36337
	TodayItem7	6.0526	19	1.12909	.25903
Pair 8	BeforeItem8	3.1579	19	2.38661	.54753
	TodayItem8	2.7368	19	2.55695	.58661
Pair 9	BeforeItem9	3.4737	19	2.29416	.52632
	TodayItem9	3.0000	19	2.33333	.53530
Pair 10	BeforeItem10	5.3684	19	1.53516	.35219
	TodayItem10	6.0526	19	1.39338	.31966
Pair 11	BeforeItem11	3.5500	20	1.95946	.43815
	TodayItem11	3.4500	20	2.23548	.49987
Pair 12	BeforeItem12	4.0556	18	1.66176	.39168
	TodayItem12	3.9444	18	2.26150	.53304
Pair 13	BeforeItem13	5.2222	18	1.16597	.27482
	TodayItem13	5.8333	18	1.33945	.31571
Pair 14	BeforeItem14	3.6667	18	1.49509	.35240
	TodayItem14	3.6111	18	1.75361	.41333
Pair 15	BeforeItem15	6.0556	18	.99836	.23532
	TodayItem15	6.3333	18	.84017	.19803
Pair 16	BeforeItem16	2.0556	18	1.25895	.29674
	TodayItem16	1.7778	18	1.06027	.24991
Pair 17	BeforeItem17	6.0526	19	1.31122	.30081
	TodayItem17	6.2105	19	1.13426	.26022
Pair 18	BeforeItem18	5.6667	18	1.68034	.39606
	TodayItem18	5.9444	18	1.55193	.36579
Pair 19	BeforeItem19	5.3684	19	1.67367	.38397
	TodayItem19	5.7368	19	1.44692	.33195
Pair 20	BeforeItem20	5.2105	19	1.61861	.37133
	TodayItem20	5.8421	19	1.34425	.30839

Notes: The highlighted pairs (with gray) refer to items that were worded such that the numeric value of the means should be lower in the “today” response compared to the “before” response in order to indicate improvement.

In Table 4, the highlighted pairs were worded in a manner that shifts the desired or expected response from a higher to a lower number on the response scale. In all of these pairs, the mean values are lower for the “today” response compared to the “before” response. This shift is consistent with the expected direction of the responses. If the difference between these means is statistically significant, the result is a favorable finding for the program. The statistical significance of the differences between

the “before” and “today” responses for all of the items on the PFS are displayed in Table 5 by protective factor categories and individual items.

Table 5. Results (T-Test) for PFS Items by Protective Factor Categories

PFS Protective Factor Categories and Items	T-Test Value	95% Confidence Interval	Significance (2-tailed)
Family Functioning/Resiliency			
1. In my family, we talk about problems.	-2.348	-.6980-.03875	.031**
2. When we argue, my family listens to “both sides of the story.”	-3.024	-.71361-.12850	.007**
3. In my family, we take time to listen to each other.	-3.076	-1.06299-.20016	.007**
4. My family pulls together when things are stressful.	-1.837	-.67693-.04535	.083*
5. My family is able to solve our problems.	-1.837	-.67693-.04535	.083*
Social Support			
6. I have others who will listen when I need to talk about my problems.	-2.650	-.75482--.08729	.016**
7. When I am lonely, there are several people I can talk to.	-3.024	-1.42721--.25700	.007**
10. If there is a crisis, I have others I can talk to.	-3.153	-1.14012- -.22830	.006**
Concrete Support			
8. I would have no idea where to turn if my family needed food or housing.	1.035	-.43387-1.27597	.315
9. I wouldn’t know where to go for help if I had trouble making ends meet.	1.184	-.36681-1.31418	.252
11. If I needed help finding a job, I wouldn’t know where to go for help.	.418	-.40131-.60131	.681
Nurturing and Attachment			
17. I am happy being with my child.	-1.837	-.33846-.02267	.083*
18. My child and I are very close to each other.	-1.176	-.61052-.05496	.096*
19. I am able to soothe my child when he/she is upset.	-2.689	-.65629--.08055	.015**
20. I spend time with my child doing what he/she likes to do.	-2.721	-1.11917- -.14399	.014**
Child Development/Knowledge of Parenting			
12. There are many times when I don’t know what to do as a parent.	.316	-.63020-.85242	.756
	-2.085	-1.22938-.00716	.052*
13. I know how to help my child learn.	.270	-.37838-.48949	.790
14. My child misbehaves just to upset me.	-2.051	-.56348-.00792	.056*
15. I praise my child when he/she behaves well.	1.761	-.05496-.61052	.096*
16. When I discipline my child, I lose control.			
Notes: ** <i>p value</i> = < .05 or significant at 95% level of confidence;* <i>p value</i> = <.10 or significant at 90% level of confidence.			

Based on the results displayed in Table 5, four of the five protective factor categories had statistically significant differences between the “before” and “today” responses for more than one item. These protective factors were family functioning/resiliency, social support, nurturing and attachment, and child development/ knowledge of parenting. The protective factor categories that had statistically significant differences between the “before” and “today” responses for all of the items in those

categories were family functioning/resiliency, social support, and nurturing and attachment. Statistically significant differences for all items in three of the protective factor categories were favorable in evaluating the program's performance. Among these three protective factor categories, the strongest results ($p < .05$) were in social support which corresponds closely with the purpose and objective of parent support groups.

Qualitative Analysis and Findings: Guided Group Interview

Consistent with the description of the methodologies earlier in this report, there were two guided group interviews for this component of the evaluation. The objective was to learn more about respondent interpretations of items on the PFS tool with an emphasis on comprehension and value. Because the two guided interviews were conducted with groups composed of different participants with the exception of two members, these interviews were not useful for comparing pre and post program participation responses. There were 7 participants in the first group interview conducted on July 13, 2010 and 9 participants in the group interview conducted on June 14, 2011. It is also important to note that this support group was for foster parents. Several of these parents had a higher level of education and were knowledgeable about child development and parenting skills. The questions posed in the guided interviews referred to several items for multiple protective factors. The responses are summarized by protective factor survey category, question and group.

Family Functioning and Resiliency

Question: What does it mean to have family members listen to each other? (Comprehension)

Group 1: Listening to each other was described by the participants as being attentive, displaying some form of body language, sitting down and taking the time to ask questions, listening before interrupting, and being non-judgmental. An additional comment referred to the importance of learning how to listen.

Group 2: According to one member, it is not just hearing the words but also actively understanding the words coming out of a mouth. A related description was just not giving lip service. Taking an active role that indicates you understand and listen was mentioned. Another member added that it is giving an opportunity to speak even if you don't agree. Hearing all sides was another description. Clear acknowledgement of a child was used to describe listening to each other. A final description was when a member added that setting up communication in a way that makes it clear you are being listened to and helped to build respect and a level of trust.

Question: Is it important in your family to "pull together"? (Value)

Group 1: Pulling together was described as going in the same direction. According to another description, it was an indication of the family members supporting each other and a support group, which was also mentioned, could be good or bad. Another member described this as knowing support is going to be there. It was considered very important.

Group 2: The initial response was "yes." One member of the group explained that when everyone is working together, it is much easier (both people pedaling on a bike). Another member described her parenting situation as one in which one of us starts to fail or panic, the other has to step up and pick up the slack. The same member elaborated by stating that sometimes we have to figure out how to circle the wagons and replace the flat tire. The final comment of this member recognized that without that, there would not be any forward progress.

Social and Concrete Support

Question: How would you describe a crisis? (Comprehension)

Group 1: A crisis was described as an unplanned event that can have dramatic or serious consequences. Then members described crises, such as a child having a seizure or young female teen saying she is pregnant.

Group 2: A crisis was described as a moment when everything that has been tried fails and there are no more answers or options. Another description was when there is not anyone to fall back on. Members agreed that a crisis is when they need help and it is not there. The result of not getting the help was described as a chain reaction and panic starts to occur. It was also declared that it takes a lot to get the crisis to stop.

Question: Is talking to others important? (Value)

Group 1: Group members said that it depends on what you are talking about or the situation which can determine whether you need to have others involved. Members mentioned the importance of talking to others in most situations and learning by talking even if the responses are different. One member mentioned that another member of the group might not want to hear what others have to say. There was acknowledgement that there might be disagreement but also that there is help getting through a situation together.

Group 2: The initial response was yes, particularly when there are other people who understand what you are going through. Members of the group mentioned how friends and family members might not understand the role they had accepted as a foster parent. It was shared that having others to listen is helpful but it was also stated that they do not always get an empathetic response or appropriate advice. Members also mentioned the challenges with disabled or special needs children. Assistance with the system was also important and a benefit of talking with each other.

Question: Do you feel comfortable seeking assistance for food and shelter? (Value)

Group 1: Most members agreed that they would not have problems with this. One member mentioned that she might not be comfortable but if needed, she would do it for her children. It was also acknowledged that this might be a question of pride and needing to put that on the back burner.

Group 2: Most members said yes, if you had to and that it depended on the circumstances. One member said it might depend on what can be done as a foster family but if it is for my children, there would be no hesitation.

Child Development and Parenting Knowledge

Question: What does it mean to discipline a child? (Comprehension)

Group 1: Members referred to this as correcting a mistake. One member elaborated by mentioning that it was telling them what is wrong but then what is expected. Redirecting was another description used. It was commented that sometimes a parent will not know what is correct and that punishment for one child might not be the same for another child. It was also declared that the parent needs to be comfortable with the discipline and make sure it is interpreted consistently.

Group 2: Corrective action was the description used for the initial response to this question and getting a child to modify their behavior. It was also explained that this technique for correcting can be nonverbal. For teens, one member described an appropriate discipline as access to items being discontinued. This same member elaborated by stating that she likes to make sure the child understood why the access was withdrawn.

Question: Is praising someone a way to make that person feel special? (Value)

Group 1: The answer was a convincing yes. However, this response was qualified based on frequency and how praise is given. One member shared that if the amount of praising is too much then that is not as important or effective. One member mentioned that it is a gentle way to affect behavior and help them do the right thing.

Group 2: The group members responded with yes. Additional comments noted that if you praise or compliment a person the right way, it can be very effective. Another member referred to children having self-esteem issues and why it is important to focus on the positive to build the self-esteem.

Question: How important is helping a child to learn? (Value)

Group 1: There was agreement in this group that this was extremely important. One of reasons for this view was that children absorb so much so fast. There was admission that children can learn good and wrong ways but they want them to learn the correct ways. It was also acknowledged that it is important to encourage children to be life-long learners with ongoing modifying in order to learn and become more well rounded.

Group 2: This group agreed that it was extremely important. One member described a child who did achieve at a higher level (based on the FCAT) and how impressive it was. Teaching children using different techniques was also mentioned as an important part of learning. Learning occurs during play was another point made. A final comment referred to the importance of explaining why it is important to learn to children.

Nurturing and Attachment

Question: What does it mean to be “close to your child”? (Comprehension)

Group 1: The initial response in this group was being attentive and spending time with a child. Showing a child that there is interest in him/her and valuing the child were additional descriptions. Two more were recognizing the child and loving a child no matter what. Final comments shared explained that close is when a child can come to you. It was added that they trust you and you trust them.

Group 2: One group member referred to the genuine display of affection as important (hugs) and knowing they feel safe and comfortable. When children admit they made a mistake and share something that they would not normally share and want to talk about it was another description of being close.

Question: What does a parent do when they soothe their child? (Comprehension)

Group 1: Members referred to talking softly. Reading to a child every night was an example of soothing a child. Singing a song was another description of how to soothe a child.

Group 2: Did not ask this question.

Question: Is being close to your child important to you? (Value)

Group 1: All agreed it is very important.

Group 2: The response shared was it is how you measure success.

Additional questions about the PFS asked at the end of the session (Group 1 only):

Question: Were you trying to impress anyone with your answers on the pretest PFS?

Group 1: Resounding no.

Group 2: Did not ask this question.

Question: Was there anything in the statements that made you uneasy when you completed the pretest PFS? If yes, what made you uneasy?

Group 1: Referred to confusion about an item addressing whether you are comfortable going to get help or asking for help.

Group 2: Did not ask this question.

Question: Were the response scales easy to use? Did the points on the scales include your desired responses?

Group 1: One member mentioned that the frequency scale did not qualify her response enough and did not include an opportunity to explain more fully their responses. It was mentioned that some of the items might have been more appropriate with an agree/disagree scale instead of a frequency scale (#15-praise, #18-close to your child) or an NA or neutral when you don't really have a clear preference. Some of the questions might have been better as a yes/no.

Group 2: Did not ask this question.

Final Question in the Guided Interview

Question: Do you think this parent support group will help you? If yes, how? How long do you think it will take for you to experience these benefits?

Group 1: This group agreed that the support group will help them and acknowledged that it had already been beneficial even though the group had not been meeting long (first or second time). One member had already learned more about ADHD, bi-polar children and how other parents are addressing these challenges. Sharing parenting strategies and approaches was identified as helpful for the other parents. It was also mentioned that it was helpful to have someone to talk to even if those in the group are addressing different problems and children of different ages.

Group 2: Responses were all in the affirmative. One member responded immediately saying that help is not the word and instead declared that the support group "saved him and the kids." There was recognition that the group session is more than talking. It is camaraderie and feeling comfortable talking with the members in the group in other settings. The benefits were described as transcending the room. The group members develop relationships with each other and the experiences make it easier to address other challenges or try new options that are related to what they encounter as foster parents. The differences between the parents that care for younger and older children were mentioned but they still found it beneficial to share with each other. It was also explained that professionals and others have been able to come to the group to share resources and what they have learned. The comments ended with members agreeing that the group creates a feeling that they are not alone.

In the qualitative analysis, there are several observations that are noteworthy. The responses on the items addressing comprehension were consistent with the intent of the corresponding protective factor constructs. These responses referred to descriptions of listening to each other, a crisis, disciplining a child, and being close to a child. In addition, members of both groups were able to differentiate between behavior that was desirable and not desirable. Both groups also shared examples of their own experiences to illustrate a relevant concept. While elaborations of concepts varied, there were no examples in either group of members questioning or countering specifically another member's comments. Similar patterns were observed for the items addressing the value of a concept. These items addressed pulling together as a family, talking to others, comfort seeking assistance for food and

shelter, praising a child, and helping a child learn. With an exception to the item addressing seeking assistance for food and shelter, there was general support for or recognition of the importance of all of these. Their comfort seeking assistance for food and shelter was qualified by need and the appropriateness of asking for assistance as a foster parent. However, if the assistance was needed to help their children, there was consistent agreement that they would seek the assistance. Based on the responses in the guided interviews, the protective factors related to family functioning/resiliency, social support, child development/parenting knowledge, and nurturing and attachment were valued positively.

Comparing the responses shared across the groups, there were differences that provide insight on the progress made in a parent support group. The guided interview that occurred with group one was early in the formation of that group (second month). The second interview was conducted a year after the formation of this group and included members that had been meeting together for several months. There was evidence that responses to a few questions in group one had more differences of opinion. Three of these questions addressed praising a child, talking to others, and helping children learn. Group one shared more about the negative aspects associated with these items. For example, it was shared in group one that providing too much praise for a child can render that approach ineffective. Responses to the item asking about the importance of talking to others included mention of how some members of a group might not want to listen to another member. This comment could have been an indication that there were doubts or concerns about the benefits of this group in providing support for its members. Another example was the set of responses about helping children learn in group one which acknowledged that children can learn wrong ways as well as good ways. It was also noted that the responses to the question addressing a crisis were more consistent in group two. The importance of social support was reflected in the member comments by a universal acknowledgement that a crisis occurs when there is no support.

Aside from sharing comments in group one that were not as consistently strength based, the personal camaraderie evident in group two was not evident in group one. This is a finding consistent with what is expected for support groups and how attendance at more sessions with the same group members can lead to a more successful experience in the development of protective factors. Evidence of the bonds and relationships that had developed in group two surfaced consistently throughout the interview as members recognized the special personalities, challenges, and personal preferences of other members. Several quick and insightful responses of individual members in group two resulted in laughter among the group members to reinforce what had been said and express their appreciation of or respect for the member sharing the response. Responses to the final question on the benefits of the support group also indicated that a social connection had occurred among the members of group two that “transcended the room.” Other relevant comments indicated that the support group had helped the members face their challenges and pursue other opportunities to help them as foster parents. While group one expected the support group experience to be beneficial, group two had experienced those benefits and members were able to articulate them without any reservations.

Summary

Due to the strength of the findings based on both evaluation methods, the program is performing a service that engages participants and is successful in strengthening protective factors that are known to prevent subsequent child abuse and neglect. Based on the quantitative method and analysis, these protective factors were family functioning/resiliency, social support, nurturing and attachment, and child development/ knowledge of parenting. Quantitative findings related to the

protective factor, social support, were the strongest statistically and an indication of parent support groups meeting this expectation for improvement. The findings based on the qualitative analysis provided evidence that items measuring the protective factors were comprehended consistent with the intent of the protective factors and valued favorably. There was also evidence based on the qualitative method and analysis that after one year of meeting, the members of the second support group experienced several benefits related to the same protective factors that had positive findings based on the quantitative method and analysis. Across both methods, the strongest evidence was that social support improved with participation in the parent support group.

In this evaluation, there were limitations in the methods and analyses. The timing of the PFS administration was postponed. The original evaluation plan was to recruit new participants in parent support groups for inclusion in a national study. The plan also included a pre and post administration of the PFS with coding of the participants that required the collection of personal identifying information. The reliance on personal information for the method required a formal institutional review board (IRB) review and approval. The IRB was completed and approved. However, the number of new Circle of Parents participants was not sufficient in the sites selected for the study (Jacksonville and Tallahassee) for the intended analysis of the responses on the pre and post PFS tools. The alternative was to include participants (new and long standing) in existing support groups. The retrospective format was used to capture differences between “before” and “today” on the PFS. While positive program findings are often associated with the use of the retrospective format compared to a conventional pre/post administration of a survey tool, the metric allows the respondent to self-report changes in their level of agreement or in their frequency of an activity. This is also a format that allows more participants to be included because there is no required completion of a pretest administered months earlier. With the modification of the original evaluation plan, participants from five support groups were included in the quantitative method and analysis. An additional set of completed PFS questionnaires from another parent support group were received after the final quantitative analysis was completed and could not be included.

The qualitative method and analysis would have been more robust with additional parent support groups participating. While there was a set of valuable data generated with two guided interviews, the inclusion of other support groups would have expanded the range of responses and provided more data to measure consistency and replication of findings. Because Circle of Parents includes a diversity of parent support groups, a wider representation of this diversity was needed. Still, the observations gleaned from the guided interviews contributed to the current knowledge base regarding participation in Circle of Parents and strengthening the protective factors.

In the future, there is more that can be learned from participants in Circle of Parents support groups. Responses of participants on the PFS will continue to be of interest as a program funded with CBCAP. Changes across protective factors will assist in the identification of aspects of the program that could be modified or improved. While improvements in social support were convincing in this evaluation, it might be appropriate to examine ways to improve family functioning/resiliency and nurturing and attachment. Because the sample for this evaluation represented higher education and income levels, meeting concrete support needs was not as important and did not change with participation in the program. However, with a sample including participants with a lower economic status, success in addressing that protective factor might emerge. In a larger sample, it would be possible to analyze differences in the protective factors across number of sessions attended or across demographic characteristics, such as age and race. Guided interviews could be modified to learn more

about forming and sustaining a parent support group. With a high number of respondents indicating they learned about the parent support group from other members of the group, facilitating the creation of additional groups from existing groups might be a way to serve more parents in facilities that are currently hosting groups and are in convenient locations. Future opportunities to evaluate Circle of Parents support groups could allow continued use of the PFS and replication of findings.

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Appendix A
Protective Factors Survey
for the
Florida Circle of Parents Evaluation

PROTECTIVE FACTORS SURVEY

Florida Circle of Parents (COP) Study

Staff Complete Only Parent Support Group #: _____ Verbal Administration: yes
Please Enter Today's Date (month/day/year): _____ / _____ / _____

Please follow the instructions for answering each question below. Thank you so much!

1. How many COP support group meetings have you attended? _____
2. Are you male or female? (**check one**)
3. Are you married partnered single divorced widowed or separated?(**check one**)
4. What is your age? (**check one**) 18-25 26-35 36-45 46 or older
5. What is the level of education you have completed? (**check one**)
 Up to 11th grade High school/GED Vocational Training At least one year of College
6. How many children are living in your household? ____ (**please enter number**)
What are the ages of these children? _____
7. What is your family income? (**check one below**)
Up to \$25,000 \$25,000-\$39,999 \$40,000-\$59,999 \$60,000 or more
8. Referring to the following categories, how do you describe yourself? (**check one below**)

<input type="checkbox"/> Native American or Alaskan Native	<input type="checkbox"/> Asian
<input type="checkbox"/> African American	<input type="checkbox"/> African Nationals/Caribbean Islanders
<input type="checkbox"/> Hispanic or Latino	<input type="checkbox"/> Middle Eastern
<input type="checkbox"/> Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islanders	<input type="checkbox"/> White (Non Hispanic/European American)
<input type="checkbox"/> Multi-racial	<input type="checkbox"/> Other _____
9. How did you learn about your parent support group? (**check all boxes that apply**)

<input type="checkbox"/> Healthy Families Staff	<input type="checkbox"/> My child's school teacher
<input type="checkbox"/> Child protection worker	<input type="checkbox"/> TV or radio
<input type="checkbox"/> Member of current support group	<input type="checkbox"/> Therapist or counselor
<input type="checkbox"/> Member of other support group	<input type="checkbox"/> Friend/Family member
<input type="checkbox"/> Website	
<input type="checkbox"/> Other → please describe _____	
10. Why did you become interested in a parent support group? (**check all boxes that apply**)

<input type="checkbox"/> Frustrated with parenting	<input type="checkbox"/> ADD/ADHD child
<input type="checkbox"/> Wanted parenting tips/new ideas	<input type="checkbox"/> Single parenting demands
<input type="checkbox"/> Wanted to be more active in program	<input type="checkbox"/> Stepfamily challenges
<input type="checkbox"/> To meet other parents	<input type="checkbox"/> Required/mandated to attend
<input type="checkbox"/> Felt isolated	<input type="checkbox"/> Activity is free
<input type="checkbox"/> Transportation provided	<input type="checkbox"/> Child care provided
<input type="checkbox"/> Other → please describe _____	
11. Did you grow up in a home where any of the following occurred (**check one box below**):
 - insulted or used foul language to hurt a child;
 - a parent did not emotionally support their child;
 - a parent/caregiver inflicted physical injury;
 - a parent/caregiver did not meet child's basic needs, or a parent/caregiver did not protect a child from a dangerous situation;
 - a parent/caregiver did not protect a child from inappropriate sexual behavior or invasion of privacy; or
 - domestic abuse between adults or parents?**Check One:** No Yes Unsure

Part I. When you are completing this section of the questionnaire, please remember the following directions for each item:

First, please think back to the month you started this program. Answer these questions by describing how you felt **BEFORE** you started the program. *Circle* the number that describes how often the statement was true for you or your family when you started the program.

Second, please describe how often the statement is true **TODAY**. *Circle* the number that describes how often the statement is true for you or your family.

As an additional tip, the numbers represent a response scale. Each number from 1 to 7 is a different amount of time. The number 4 means that the statement is true about half the time.

	Never	Very Rarely	Rarely	About Half the Time	Frequently	Very Frequently	Always
1. In my family, we talk about problems.							
BEFORE	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
TODAY	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. When we argue, my family listens to "both sides of the story."	Never			About half the time			Always
BEFORE	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
TODAY	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. In my family, we take time to listen to each other.	Never			About half the time			Always
BEFORE	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
TODAY	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4. My family pulls together when things are stressful.	Never			About half the time			Always
BEFORE	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
TODAY	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5. My family is able to solve our problems.	Never			About half the time			Always
BEFORE	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
TODAY	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Please Go to the Next Page.

Part II. When you are completing this section of the questionnaire, please remember the following directions for each item:

Please *circle* the number that best describes how much you would have agreed or disagreed with each statement **BEFORE** you started the program and then circle the number that describes how much you agree or disagree with each statement **TODAY**.

As an additional tip, the numbers represent a response scale. Each number from 1 to 7 is a different level of agreement or disagreement. The number 4 means that you are neutral or have no strong opinion on the statement.

	Strongly Disagree	Mostly Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Neutral	Slightly Agree	Mostly Agree	Strongly Agree
6. I have others who will listen when I need to talk about my problems.	Strongly Disagree			Neutral			Strongly Agree
BEFORE	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
TODAY	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
7. When I am lonely, there are several people I can talk to.	Strongly Disagree			Neutral			Strongly Agree
BEFORE	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
TODAY	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8. I would have no idea where to turn if my family needed food or housing.	Strongly Disagree			Neutral			Strongly Agree
BEFORE	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
TODAY	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
9. I wouldn't know where to go for help if I had trouble making ends meet.	Strongly Disagree			Neutral			Strongly Agree
BEFORE	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
TODAY	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
10. If there is a crisis, I have others I can talk to.	Strongly Disagree			Neutral			Strongly Agree
BEFORE	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
TODAY	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
11. If I needed help finding a job, I wouldn't know where to go for help.	Strongly Disagree			Neutral			Strongly Agree
BEFORE	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
TODAY	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Please Go to the Next Page.

Part III. When you are completing this section of the questionnaire, please remember the following directions for each item:

This part of the survey asks about parenting and your relationship with your child. For this section, please focus on the child you hoped would benefit most from your participation in our services. Please write the child's age or date of birth. Then, respond to each statement with this child in mind according to your situation **BEFORE** you started the program and then **TODAY**.

Child's Age _____ or DOB ___/___/___

	Strongly Disagree	Mostly Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Neutral	Slightly Agree	Mostly Agree	Strongly Agree
12. There are many times when I don't know what to do as a parent.							
BEFORE	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
TODAY	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
13. I know how to help my child learn.	Strongly Disagree			Neutral			Strongly Agree
BEFORE	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
TODAY	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
14. My child misbehaves just to upset me.	Strongly Disagree			Neutral			Strongly Agree
BEFORE	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
TODAY	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Please Go to the Next Page.

Part IV. When you are completing this section of the questionnaire, please remember the following directions for each item:

Please tell us how often each of the following happened in your family **BEFORE** you started this program and then how often it happens **TODAY**.

	Never	Very Rarely	Rarely	About Half the Time	Frequently	Very Frequently	Always
15. I praise my child when he/she behaves well.	Never			About half the time			Always
BEFORE	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
TODAY	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
16. When I discipline my child, I lose control.	Never			About half the time			Always
BEFORE	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
TODAY	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
17. I am happy being with my child.	Never			About half the time			Always
BEFORE	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
TODAY	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
18. My child and I are very close to each other.	Never			About half the time			Always
BEFORE	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
TODAY	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
19. I am able to soothe my child when he/she is upset.	Never			About half the time			Always
BEFORE	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
TODAY	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
20. I spend time with my child doing what he/she likes to do.	Never			About half the time			Always
BEFORE	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
TODAY	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Thank you so much for participating in this study.