

Massachusetts Family Resource Center Network

Program Evaluation Report

March 2021



The Massachusetts Family Resource Centers (FRCs) are community-based, culturally-competent centers that provide a wide array of services to families. FRCs work to strengthen relationships between children and their families so that both can thrive, connecting families to needed resources and supports. Established in 2015 and overseen by the Department of Children and Families (DCF), there are now 27 FRCs across the Commonwealth, with at least one in each of the state's 14 Counties. Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, all FRCs not only continued to serve families but also expanded, opening three new locations in Great Barrington, Plymouth and Ware in the summer of 2020.

Ongoing Evaluation of the FRCs

Since 2015, an evaluation team from UMass Medical School (UMMS) has partnered with DCF to better understand how FRCs work with families, document FRC services, and assess outcomes for the families served. Data are collected by FRC staff at each site and entered into a secure, cloud-based database managed by the UMMS team. The information captured include characteristics of family members receiving services, the reasons families come to the FRCs, the types of services received, and families' participation in FRC classes, groups, recreational and other activities.

Pursuant to Line Item 4000-0051, Chapter 227 of the Acts of 2020, this 2020 FRC Annual Evaluation Report describes activities across the 27 FRCs during the calendar year January 1 to December 31, 2020. The report tells the story about the families and family members served in 2020, the types of services provided, and includes notable changes in FRC activities over time since 2015. The report also highlights the innovative efforts undertaken by the FRCs to respond to the needs of families during the COVID-19 pandemic that began in March 2020 and continued throughout the year.



www.frcma.org

FRCs Fill a Vital Community Need

Many families come to an FRC during a crisis or needing help urgently. The FRCs work swiftly to evaluate the specific situation and figure out how best to help.

The FRCs help families access a wide range of resources, such as housing and employment supports as well as health and mental health services. They also provide school supports, assistance with childcare and transportation, and equipment, clothing, food, and other material supports to families.

FRC Programming and Supports include:

- Parenting skills workshops
- Self-help groups
- Grandparents groups
- Financial workshops
- Stress management workshops
- Education programs
- Family events and activities
- Playgroups and youth groups
- Arts, cultural, and sports events
- Help with accessing other services



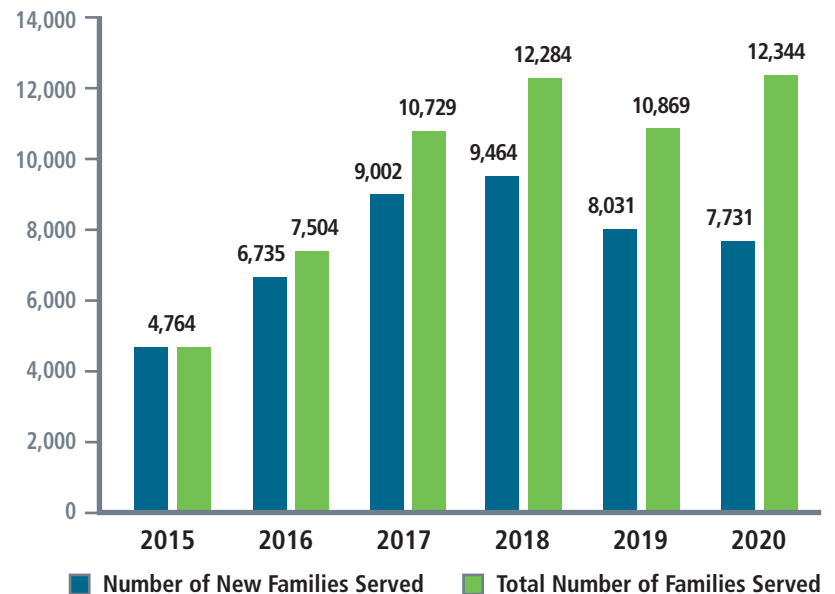
Families served by the FRC Network

Since the FRCs launched in 2015, the number of families served by the FRC network continues to grow.

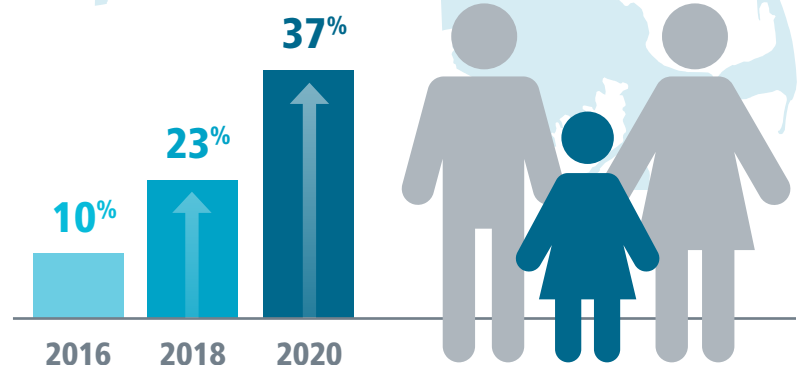
FRCs have served 45,727 unique families since 2015.

In 2015, the original 18 FRCs each served an average of 256 families; in 2020, the 27 FRCs across the state served an average of **457 families each.**

Number of Families served by FRCs each Year from 2015 to 2020



The FRCs are seeing an increase in families returning for services, showing the positive impact the centers have made for these families.



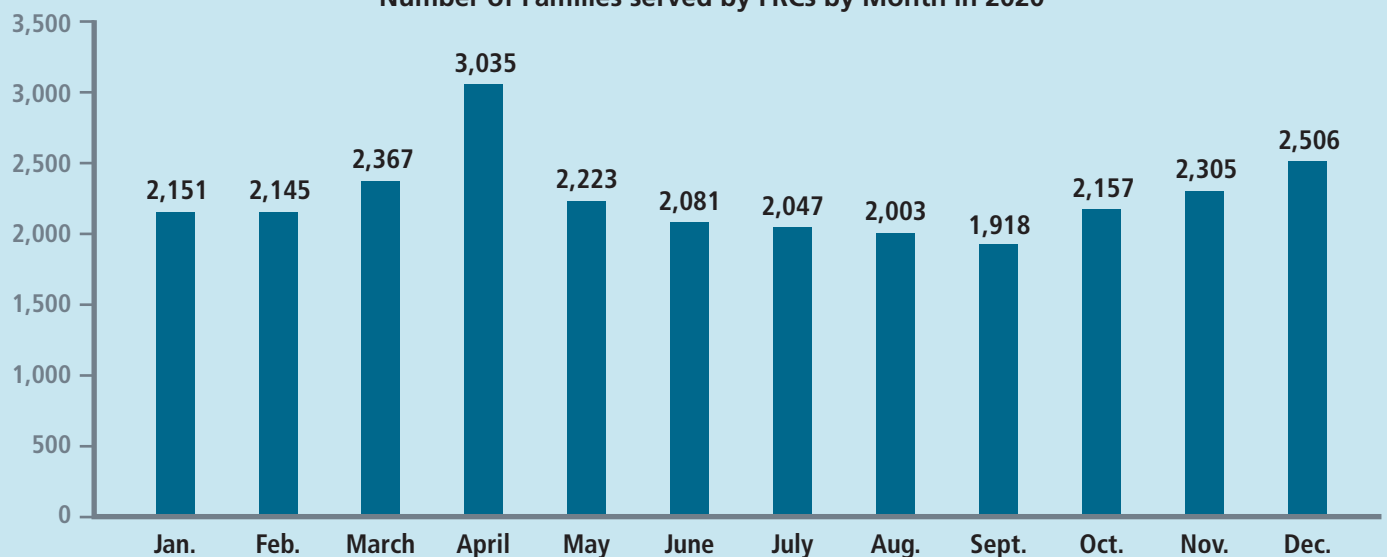
With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020, several FRCs were required to shut down in-person services to follow local guidance, while others remained open and reduced direct contact service delivery.

However, FRC staff quickly pivoted and continued to support vulnerable families. With the state of emergency in Massachusetts and throughout the country, the number of families served in 2020 substantially increased.



The number of families served by month shows a marked increase in April due to FRC efforts to outreach to families immediately following the state of emergency. As COVID-19 cases surged towards the end of the year, the FRCs saw a corresponding increase in families needing services.

Number of Families served by FRCs by Month in 2020



On average the
FRC network served

250
more families
per month

in the 10 months following
the onset of the pandemic
compared to the same
months in 2019.



Family Profile

In 2020,* the 27 FRCs across the Commonwealth provided services to over 12,000 families, including over 7,700 new families.

Of the 20,000 individuals served by the FRCs in 2020, about 63% were adults while 37% are youth and children from ages 0 to 17.

Most adults who use the FRCs are parents

Just under one-third (27%) of new families had one minor child living in the household and 40% had two or more children.

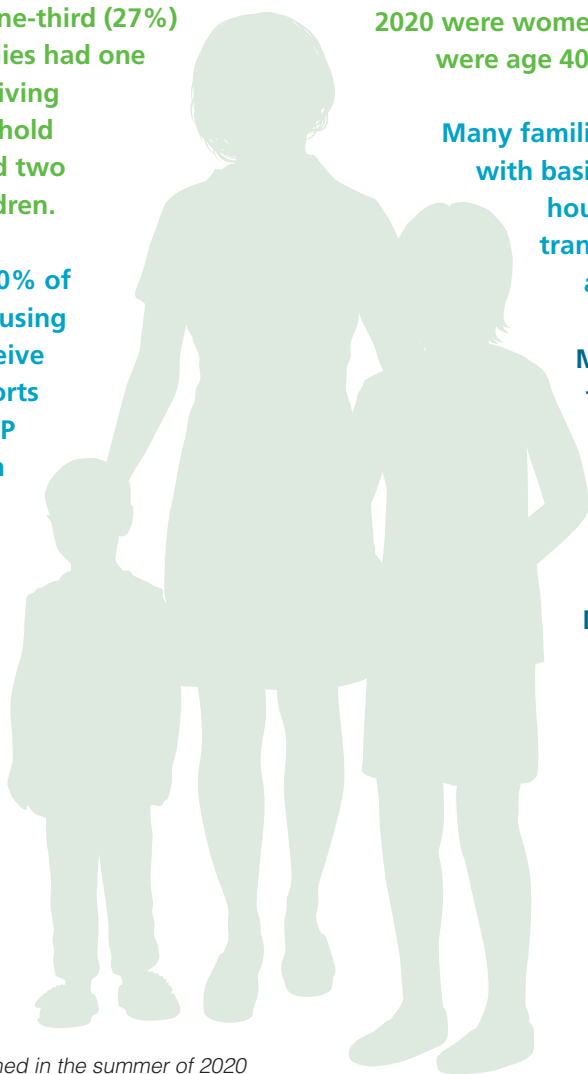
More than 40% of the children using the FRCs receive school supports such as an IEP or a 504 plan

46% of the adults identified as Latinx, and nearly 25% said Spanish was their primary language

67% of families were single-parent households; more than three-quarters of the adults using FRC services in 2020 were women and 61% were age 40 and under

Many families struggle with basic needs for housing, food, transportation, and income

More than a third of the adults and children using the FRCs are enrolled in MassHealth

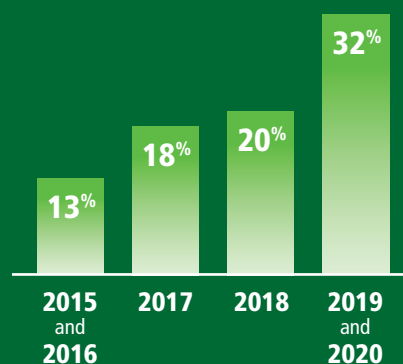


*Three FRCs opened in the summer of 2020



The percentage of families reporting no children living in the household has been increasing since 2015.

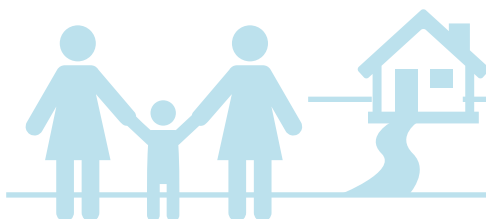
The percentage of new families reporting no children living in the household was 13% in 2015 and 2016, 18% in 2017, 20% in 2018, and 32% in 2019 and 2020.



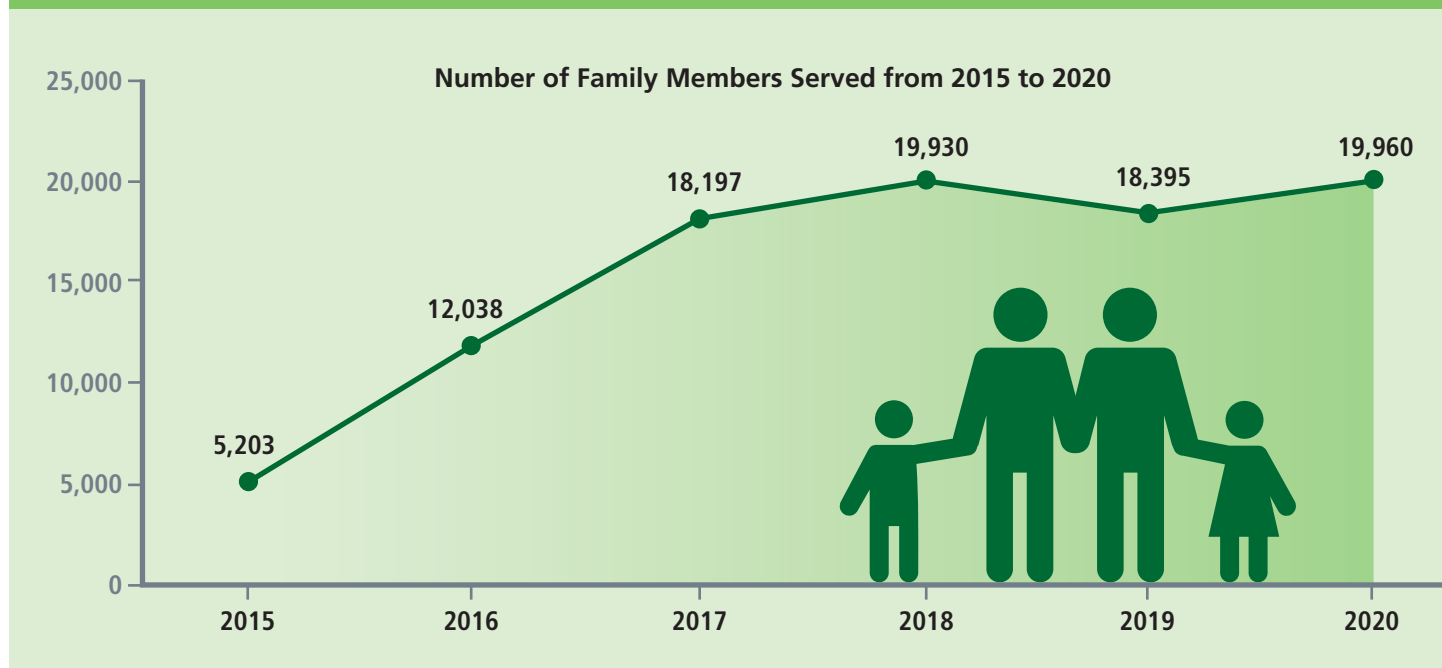
It may be that FRCs are increasing serving families comprised of non-custodial parents, parents with adult children, or adults without children.

Over the years, FRCs have seen an increase in the number of families who are insecurely housed or have experienced homelessness. Today, FRCs provide significant housing-related services and supports to these families.

In 2020, about **13%** of new families were homeless (sheltered and unsheltered) when first served by the FRCs.

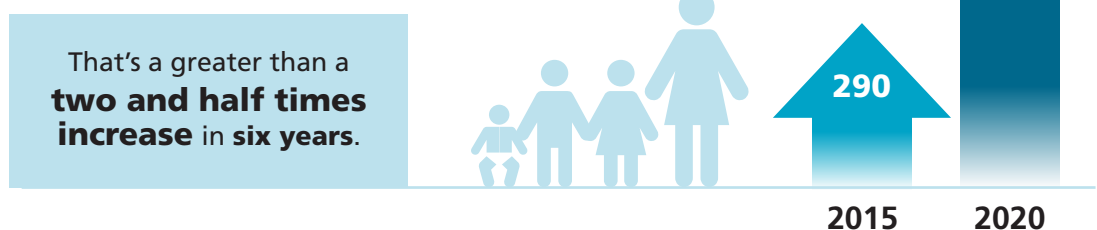


The number of individual family members – adults and children – served by FRCs has grown substantially since 2015, with almost **20,000** family members served in 2020.



Over the years, the average number of family members served by each FRC has increased dramatically.

In 2020, the 27 FRCs across the state served an average of 740 adults and children, up from the 290 family members served by 18 FRCs in 2015.



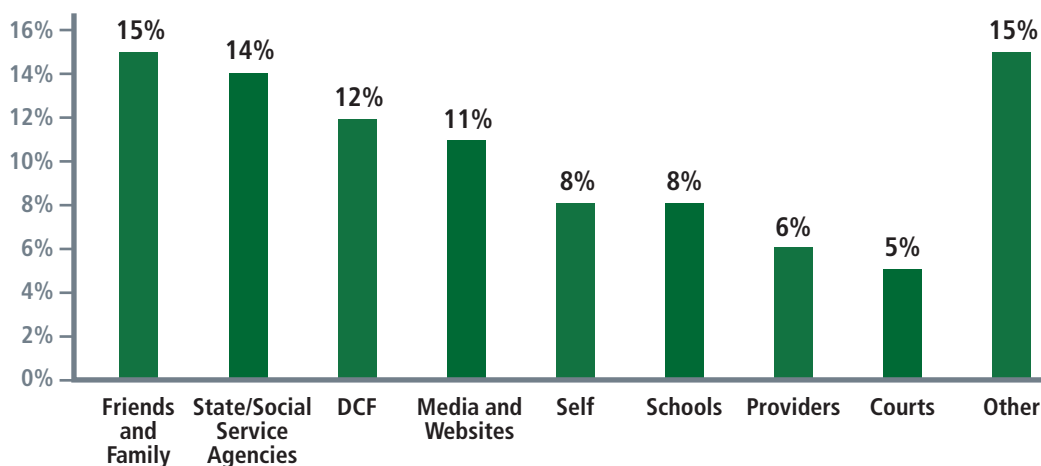
Helping Meet Family Needs

Families learn about FRCs in a variety of ways. In 2020, 15% of adults were referred to the FRCs by friends and family members, which has become increasingly common over the years.



Others were referred by DCF, or other state/social service agencies. Social and print media and FRC websites were also a common source of referrals in 2020.

Sources of Referral to RFC's for New Families in 2020

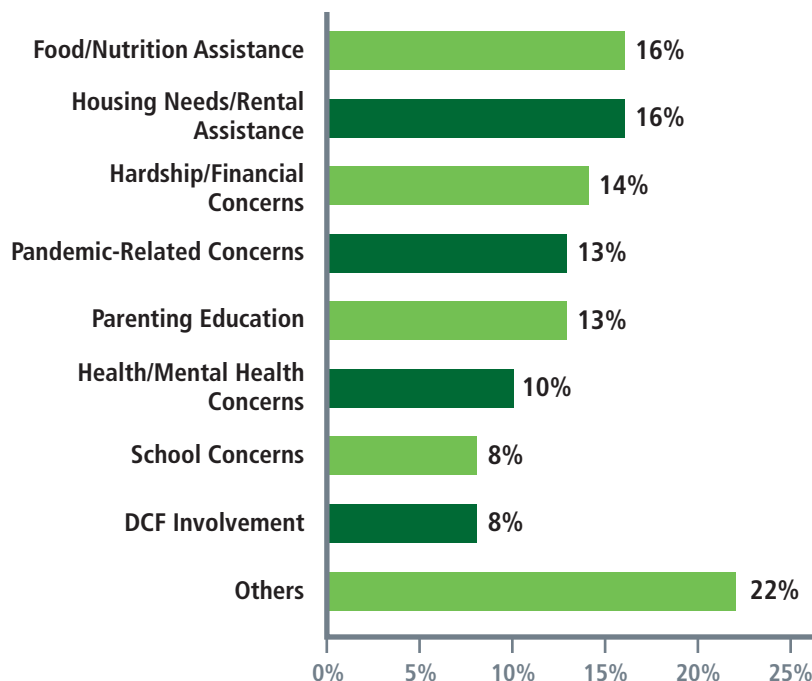


Families look to the FRCs for help for a variety of reasons.

Since their launch in 2015, the centers have been increasingly called on to assist families with basic needs. This was especially true in 2020 – as many families faced hardships with the onset of the pandemic. Help with food, housing, financial concerns, and other pandemic-related concerns were among the most common reasons new families sought FRC assistance in 2020.



Main Reasons New Families Sought FRC Assistance in 2020



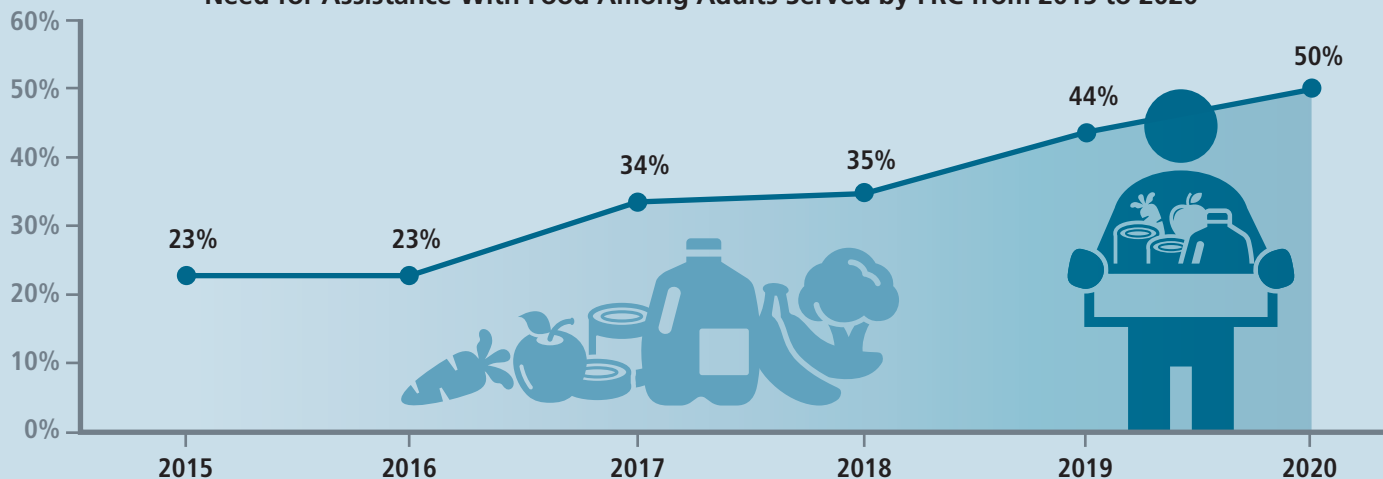
Food Insecurity – A Growing Trend

Over time, there has been a notable increase in the percentage of family members seeking FRC assistance who need help with food.

Among all adults, **this percentage has doubled between 2015 and 2020**; a similar increase has been seen in children served by the FRCs.



Need for Assistance With Food Among Adults Served by FRC from 2015 to 2020



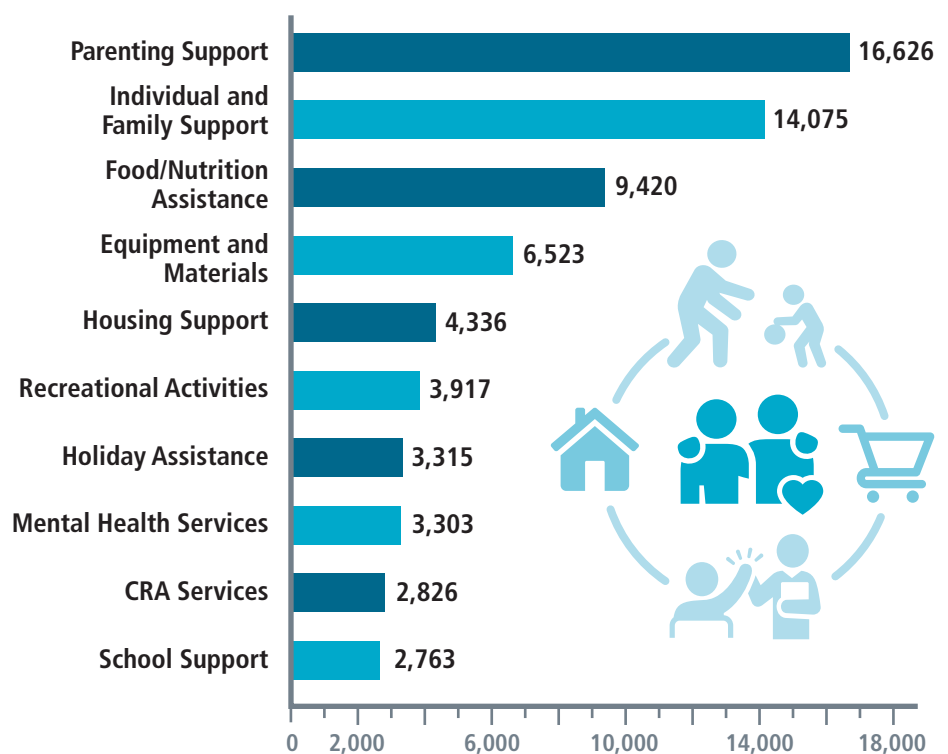
FRC Services and Supports to Families in 2020

Since 2015, the FRCs have provided direct services and have connected families to other community services.

While there has been significant growth in the number of services and supports to family members, the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in a dramatic increase in the number of services and supports FRCs provided to families, more than doubling the number from 2019 to 2020.

Since March 2020, the FRCs made dedicated efforts to outreach to families to assess their needs in the face of the pandemic, and collectively made over 7,500 family outreach efforts.

Number of Individualized Services Provided by FRCs in 2020



Innovating to Meet Needs During the COVID-19 Pandemic

With the onset of the pandemic in March 2020, FRCs quickly adapted their approaches to serving families.

Suspending walk-in services and in-person group programs, the FRCs shifted to serving families by telephone and virtual meetings, or by individually scheduled appointments at the center location or other places in the community.

Initial efforts focused on outreaching to engaged families to reassure them that services were continuing and to assess families' needs in the face of the pandemic. As families faced food insecurity, housing instability, schools closing, and job loss, **the FRCs provided much needed resources and supports to already engaged families – as well as over 7,700 new families.**

Because of the state of emergency and social distancing requirements, for most of 2020 FRCs were unable to offer the substantial in-person classes, groups and recreational activities typically offered. However, FRCs developed creative substitute programming to continue to meet families' basic needs, provide supports to parents, address needs of children and teens, and keep family fun going.

The FRCs expanded their community collaborations in 2020, partnering with new housing services and authorities, community centers, health and human service agencies, mayors' offices, and local school districts and police departments. In addition, FRCs have seen family members reach out to help mentor, advocate for, and support other families.



Meeting Basic Needs

Partnering with other community organizations, the FRCs participated in community food drives, operated food pantries, arranged for families to pick up food packages at FRC locations, and/or directly delivered food to families.

FRCs assisted families with accessing PPE, such as masks, gloves and hand sanitizer, held drives for infant and baby items such as diapers and car seats, and provided families with gift cards so they could purchase needed supplies. These efforts were in addition to the individualized services FRCs provided to families to help them access basic resources.

In 2020, the recorded attendance at FRC food drives, baby item drives, and related events and activities exceeded 46,000, more than four times the attendance for similar events in 2019.

In November and December, FRC staff delivered Thanksgiving and holiday meals to families.

Supporting Parents

Parenting education classes and support groups have been a core component of FRC programming since 2015.

During 2020, most FRCs were able to offer some or all their parenting program through virtual means, such as Zoom or WebEx. FRCs collaborated to make virtual groups and classes accessible for families from different communities: if a parenting class is not available at one FRC location, but offered by another, parents were referred to that class and were able to start the program sooner.

Attendance at parenting classes and groups exceeded 5,500 in 2020.



Addressing Needs of Children and Teens

With schools moving to on-line or hybrid learning models in 2020, FRCs worked to address school-related needs of children and teens. FRCs:

- Helped families access technology for remote learning and offered virtual tutoring opportunities
- Delivered school supplies, backpacks and kits to families to support educational activities
- Worked with local schools and parents to set up “learning hubs” for students attending school remotely
- Participated in school district reopening teams to plan for students’ return to school in the fall

Several FRCs expanded their programming for teens in 2020. In particular, FRCs offered teen activities focused on social justice issues. For example, one FRC offered a social justice reading group, with teens meeting twice weekly with FRC staff to read and discuss “Stamped: Racism, Antiracism, and You” by Ibram X. Kendi and Jason Reynolds. FRCs also offered programs like LEADS groups and Stand Up! Junior Corp for Teens.

Supporting Teens Addressing Racism and Social Injustice in Greenfield

COVID-19 wasn’t the only public health issue in 2020 – several events brought racial and social injustice to the forefront.

The Greenfield FRC developed the Stand Against Racism (STAR) workshop series that will be rolled out in Greenfield High School during the 2020-2021 school year. The program is led by FRC staff and members of their Stand up! Youth program, a social support and empowering group for youth of color ages 14-21.

STAR aims to provide youth with the strength and confidence they need to explore, express, and celebrate their racial identity without perpetuating racial dominance, racism, or collusion. Participants are encouraged to discover, practice, and forecast their individual and communal roles in interrupting racism in school and beyond.

Keeping Family Fun Going

Since launching, FRCs have offered families countless recreational and social activities, playgroups and holiday parties, and these have been some of the most highly attended FRC activities over the years.

These important social gatherings, which support child-parent relationships and families’ connections to their communities, were particularly impacted because of the pandemic. The FRCs creatively developed other ways to continue to offer fun activities to families.

Through Facebook and Zoom, FRCs held reading groups and story time sessions, sponsored family “scavenger hunts,” offered virtual play dates and art nights. Some FRCs also delivered “kid fun kits” to families to use at home.

Athol FRC Makes Science Fun

Each week, the Athol FRC hosts an interactive class for families, STEM Fun with Miss Aimee. It’s a chance for kids to explore the sciences with different experiments.

After families register each week, the FRC delivers the supplies for each kid in the home. At 10 a.m. on Wednesdays, Miss Aimee goes live on the FRC’s Facebook Live and shows them the experiment. The video is then archived so families can access it at any time.

Check out this video to learn more about what the FRCs have done to support families during the pandemic:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yZAVTAMPoM&feature=youtu.be>



Success Stories

Quincy FRC “LEADS” Youth Toward Success

In July 2020, the Quincy FRC launched **LEADS – Learning Everyday Applied Skills** for Success.

Led by the FRC clinician for students ages 11-17, the eight modules cover topics like resiliency, positive decision making, improving family relationships, and goal setting/identifying strengths.

The day after the first meeting, the clinician received the following text from a 16-year-old participant: “I wanted to reach out and thank you for the amazing first class and teaching us about the primary and secondary emotions. It will really come in handy when my friends are upset but won’t admit it. The flower and root was a great analogy. Again I just wanted to reach out and say thank you and have a great weekend!”

Since July, 28 youth have graduated the program, and 13 are currently enrolled.

Everett FRC hosts Halloween

Halloween is an event that children and families look forward to celebrating, but this year the celebration looked a little different.

With the amazing collaboration and support of different partners, including the City of Everett, Everett Police, Joint Committee for Children and Family, Foster Parents/DCF and volunteers, the FRC was able to celebrate with 100 children and their families.

With the Halloween station at the entrance, children visited all the decorated tables where they received a Halloween bag, candy, playdough, Halloween toys – in addition to snacks like mac and cheese and apple sauce.

Families were extremely appreciative about having the opportunity to attend an event where they felt welcome and safe.

Cape Cod FRC makes the Holiday Season Special

COVID-19 meant that the holiday celebrations changed this year, and the Cape Cod FRC wanted them to be fun and special for their families.

With “Gifts of Comfort and Joy,” the team encouraged and helped families make holiday memories together by snuggling up with a blanket, easy bake cookies and milk, and some good books. Then, “DIY Family Fun Kits” included gingerbread house kits and hot cocoa for the week of school break.

They also offered “Holiday Breakfast Bags” – packed with eggs, butter, pancake mix, syrup, turkey sausage, easy bake cinnamon buns, fresh oranges, juice and milk – for families to cook together, hoping for special memories to be made, and perhaps the start of a new tradition!

Parent Testimonials

"Thank you so very much!!! I will definitely enjoy my holidays now! Thanks to you! You're an angel!!! I'm beyond grateful for you and the crew!!! I'm literally in tears right now! Tears of joy and hope thou!!! Thank you again for everything! Happy Thanksgiving to you too!!!"

"I also would love to help out and volunteer anytime I can to the Resource Center! If you are ever in need of volunteers, please email me as I would love to repay any and all the help you have blessed our family with."

"Thanks for all you guys do! We love all the groups!! Can't wait to get back to in person playgroups whenever that may be."

"As a mom that is going to be homeschooling for my first time, I very much appreciate receiving the STEM bags and playgroup bags, they have been great practice for me to help get myself and kids into a school flow. Thank you so much for providing this service and for helping us build our library!"

Supporting Family Resource Center Operations

The FRC Network is overseen by DCF; UMMS serves as an Administrative Service Organization supporting FRC operations.

Together, DCF and UMMS carry out a variety of activities to enhance FRC services and promote sharing of effective approaches across FRCs, including meetings, site visits, trainings, and information sharing and dissemination.

FRC Oversight and Support

DCF has four Community Support Managers (CSMs) to support FRCs in regions of the state: Western/Central, Northeast, Boston, Southeast/Cape and Islands.

The CSMs convene regional quarterly meeting with FRC leadership, attend FRC staff meetings as requested, provide program guidance and contract management, and identify and facilitate training needs. CSMs also collaborate closely with the UMMS team.

Sharing Best Practices Across FRCs

The Program Management and Practice Development (PMPD) bi-monthly meetings provide an opportunity for FRC Program Directors and Managers to come together and share best practices.

These meetings also feature DCF and UMMS news and updates, and host featured guests that can speak to special topics that strengthen and support the FRC mission.

DCF and UMMS implemented three special initiatives in 2020 to support FRCs serving their families:

- Bi-weekly meetings to discuss challenges and share best practices in response to COVID-19.
- A collaboration with the MA Department of Housing and Community Development to streamline family referrals to the RAFT (Residential Assistance for Families in Transition) Program.
- A partnership with Health Law Advocates' Mental Health Advocacy Program for Kids (MHAP for Kids) to embed specially trained attorneys in FRCs across Massachusetts. This effort launched in seven communities with plans to expand in 2021.



Providing Web-based Resources

UMMS manages web-based resources to support FRC operations. A public-facing website – www.frcma.org – provides information and resources for families and links to each of the 27 FRCs around the state.

FRConnect is a password-protected site accessible only to FRC, DCF, and UMMS staff sharing information such as FRC and DCF news, training opportunities, resources, event calendars, and success stories.

Ongoing Training of FRC Staff

Training efforts focus on ensuring that staff are skilled in offering evidence-based parenting education programs that are a core service of the FRCs, as well as the capacity to address the range of challenges faced by FRC families.

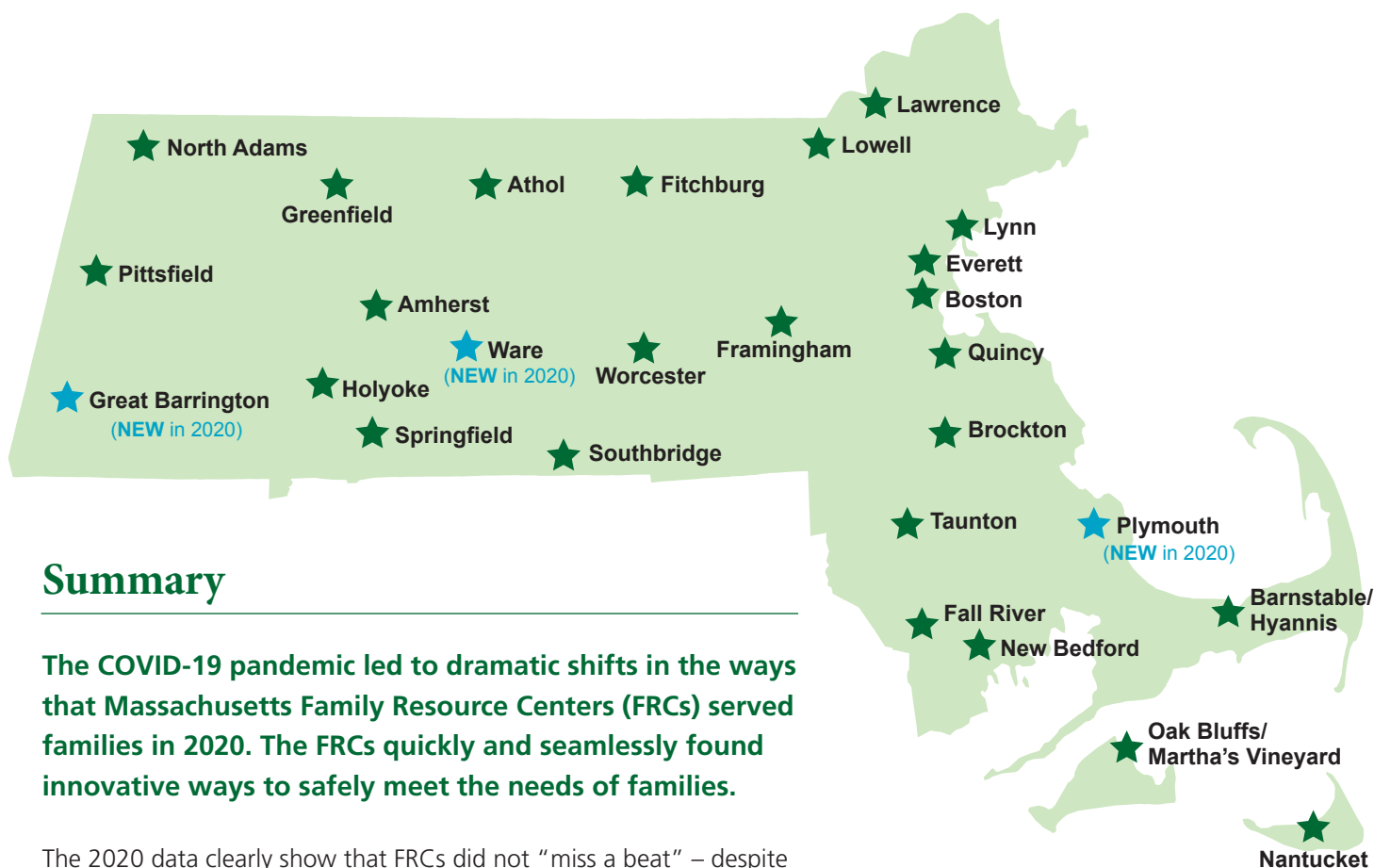
2020

98 individual trainings were offered to FRC staff – 12 trainings were offered as in-person learning sessions pre-COVID:

- 40 evidence-based parenting education facilitator trainings
- 58 other skills-building trainings were offered
- Over 1,000 staff attendances at trainings in 2020

Trainings in evidence-based parenting education included:

- Nurturing Parenting Programs (e.g. Nurturing Families, Nurturing Fathers)
- Parenting Journey I and II
- Active Parenting Programs (e.g. Active Parenting: The First Five Years, Active Parenting of Teens)



Summary

The COVID-19 pandemic led to dramatic shifts in the ways that Massachusetts Family Resource Centers (FRCs) served families in 2020. The FRCs quickly and seamlessly found innovative ways to safely meet the needs of families.

The 2020 data clearly show that FRCs did not “miss a beat” – despite the need to close or significantly restrict services within their centers. FRCs served more families overall and more families per month in 2020 than in 2019. Through determined efforts to reach out to previously served families, the FRCs saw a greater percentage of returning families in 2020 than in any prior year.

While the primary focus of services in 2020 was clearly on helping families with critical needs such as food and other necessities, the FRCs used creative approaches to virtually provide parenting support, school assistance for children, and family recreational activities. With the pandemic continuing for the foreseeable future, the FRCs continue to work with the Department of Children and Families to effectively meet the needs of vulnerable families in Massachusetts.

For more information on a particular FRC, including address, hours of operation, and services available, please visit www.frcma.org.

Recommended Citation:

Henry, A. D., Pratt, C., Tedesco, R., & Kamins, K. (2021, March). *Massachusetts Family Resource Center Program Evaluation Report: Calendar Year 2020*. Shrewsbury MA: Commonwealth Medicine, University of Massachusetts Medical School.

In 2020, UMMS evaluators also surveyed 688 family members to examine family outcome in six key areas and family perceptions of FRC helpfulness. Survey findings are reported in: Henry, A. D., Pratt, C., Miller, F., & Tedesco, R. (2020). *Assessing outcomes achieved by the Massachusetts Family Resource Network*. Commonwealth Medicine, University of Massachusetts Medical School.