

Massachusetts Family Resource Center Network

2023 Program Evaluation Report



March 2024

The network of 32 Family Resource Centers (FRCs) in Massachusetts serves the needs of the families in their communities through various resources, supports, events, and programming. The FRCs connect families to needed supports, offer evidence-based parent education classes and support groups, provide school-related educational support, and offer recreational and other community-focused activities.

As established by the legislative requirements of Chapter 240 of the Acts of 2012 to support Children Requiring Assistance (CRA), the FRCs provide a low barrier, free resource for families with children at risk of a CRA filing or with an existing filing with a juvenile court. FRCs work to strengthen relationships between children and their families so that both can thrive. The FRC Network is overseen by the Department of Children and Families (DCF), with administrative support provided by ForHealth Consulting at UMass Chan Medical School, including data collection and reporting, marketing and communication support, evaluation, and technical assistance.



www.frcma.org

FRC Network Expansion

The first 18 FRCs were launched in 2015; there are now 32 FRCs across the commonwealth with at least one in each of the state's 14 counties.

From 2019-2023, the FRC network grew from 22 FRCs to 32 FRCs—with five new FRCs added in 2023. Thirteen of the sites started as "Micro" FRCs (FRCs that operate at reduced staffing and caseload levels) and all expanded to "Full" FRCs by the end of 2022. The employee base of the FRC network has increased by about 35% in the past four years.

Ongoing Evaluation of the FRCs

An evaluation team from ForHealth Consulting at UMass Chan Medical School, which serves as the Administrative Services Organization (ASO) to the network, has partnered with DCF to understand how FRCs work with families, to document FRC services, and to assess outcomes for families served by FRCs. Staff at each FRC enter data into a secure, cloud-based database managed by ForHealth Consulting. The data captured includes characteristics of child and adult family members receiving services, the reasons families come to the FRCs, and the types of services families receive.

FRC Network Training

- The ASO provided ongoing training and technical assistance to FRC Staff. In 2023, approximately 30 trainings were offered on the CRM database that maintains critical data, and 10 site visits to provide technical support. The ASO also conducted a review of the data collected for services and worked with FRC staff to update service options to be rolled out in 2024.
- DCF and the ASO surveyed Program Managers and Program Directors to ask them for feedback on the 2023 Workplan process. The survey was followed up by a focus group to further discuss feedback provided in the survey. Findings were presented to the Program Managers and Directors and helped to inform changes to the Workplan for 2024.
- Current training efforts focus on ensuring that FRC staff have a strong base of knowledge and skills with which to provide services to families, including the new Orientation and Foundational Training Series, facilitator trainings in a variety of Evidence-Based Parenting Education Programs that are a core service of the FRCs, and additional supplemental trainings that provide staff with the capacity to address the range of challenges faced by FRC families.
- In 2023, 116 individual trainings were offered to FRC staff; all were conducted virtually except for one in-person training (evidence-based parenting program, "Parenting in America.") These included:
 - 6 cycles with a total of 45 individual Orientation and Foundational trainings
 - 38 Evidence-Based Parenting Education Program (EBP) facilitator trainings
 - 33 skill-building trainings
- 171 FRC staff have graduated since launching the orientation series in Spring 2021, with 45 staff in 2023.
- A series of workplan trainings, technical assistance sessions, and an orientation for managers of newly implemented sites, was launched; eight trainings designated for new sites:
 - 2 trainings for workplan development
 - 6 trainings for new site manager orientation

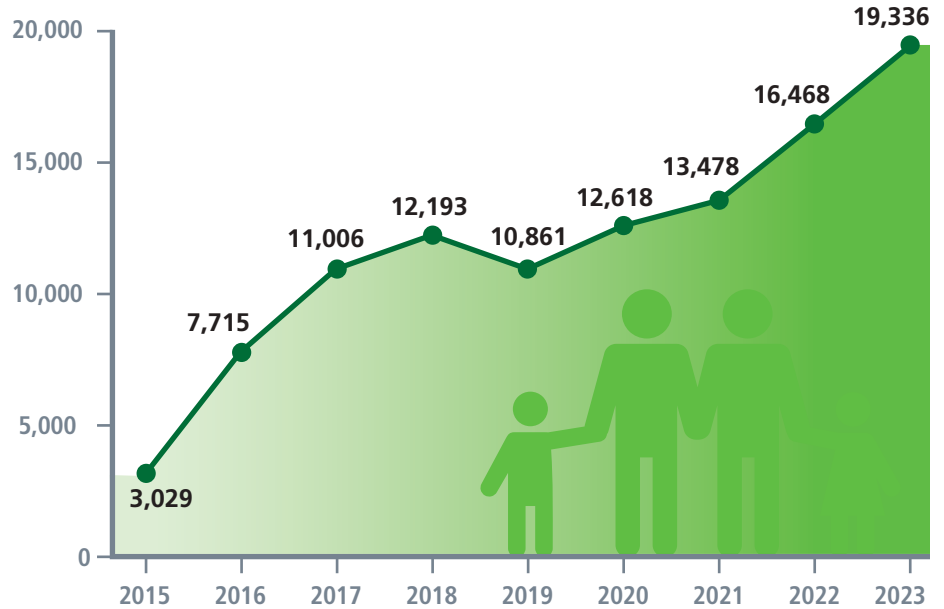
Pursuant to Line Item 4000-0051, Chapter 28 of the Acts of 2023, the FRC Annual Evaluation Report describes activities across the FRCs during the calendar year Jan. 1 to Dec. 31, 2023. The report tells the story about the families and family members served in 2023, the types of services provided, and includes notable changes in FRC activities since their launch in 2015. The report also highlights the response of the FRC network to the new arrivals emergency in Massachusetts, successful FRC practices, and efforts undertaken by DCF and ForHealth Consulting to support FRC operations.

Families and Households Served by FRCs

The number of families served by the FRCs has increased every year since their opening in 2015.

In 2023, the FRC network served **19,336 families**, reflecting a **17% increase** from the number of families served in 2022. Furthermore, a striking **68% (13,183) of the 19,336 families served in 2023 were new to the FRC network**. This number is likely impacted by the expansion of the network through the addition of five additional FRCs as well as the increased need related to the housing crisis and new arrivals emergency. It is also a testament to the value of the FRCs to the communities they serve that 32% of the families served in 2023 were returning families.

Total Families Served by FRCs, by Year



Among the new families served in 2023, 13% were homeless (sheltered and not sheltered) when they were first served by the FRCs.

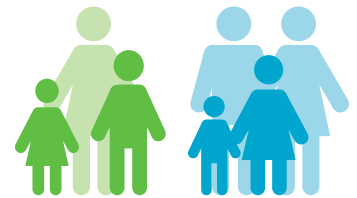
Most families (9,079) were living in their own apartment or home (owned or rented). About 18% of new families were missing data on their housing status.



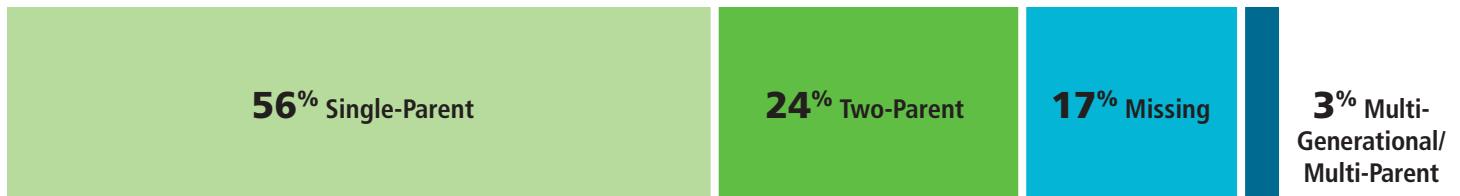
Family Composition among New Families Served by FRCs

Most families served by the FRCs continue to represent single-parent households.

In 2023, 56% (7,325) of new families were from single-parent households; 24% (3,185) were from two-parent households.



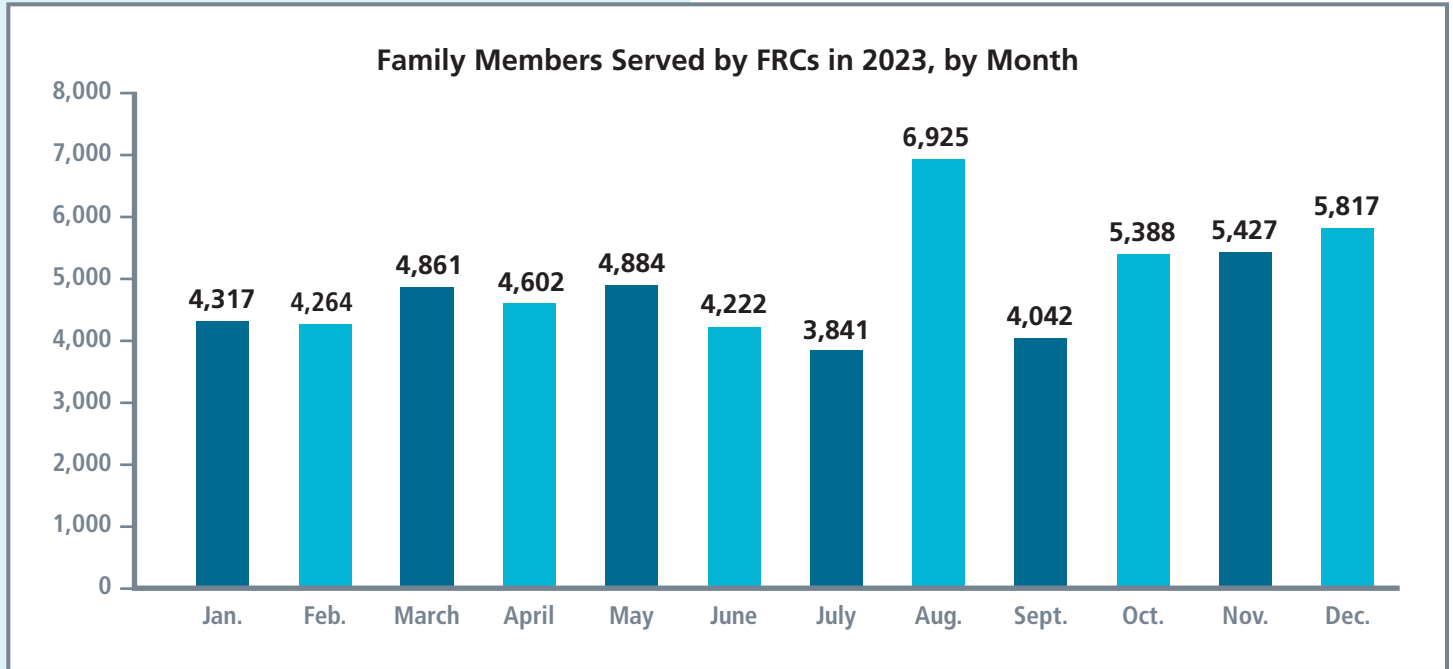
Household Type of New Families Served in 2023



Most of the **13,138 new families served in 2023 had at least 1 child (11,067)**. The number of new families served by FRCs in 2023 without minor children (18 years old or younger) in the home continued to decrease compared to prior years. In 2023, 16% (2,116) of families did not have any children compared to 21% in 2022 and 31% in 2021.

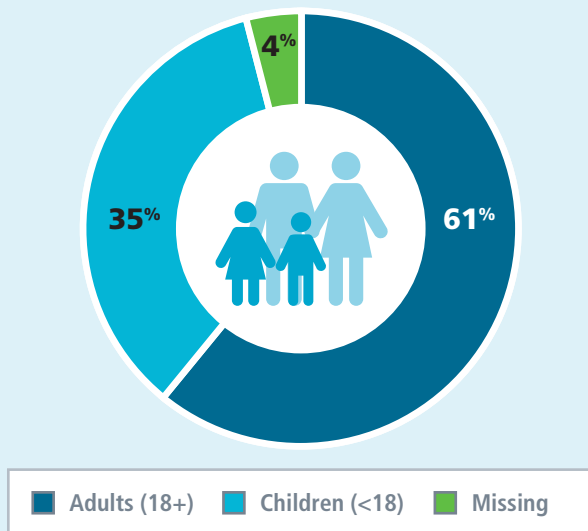
Family Members Served by FRCs

In 2023, the FRCs served a total of 30,616 individual family members, 20,228 (66%) of whom were new to the FRCs.



Among the 30,616 family members served in 2023, 18,646 (61%) were adults aged 18 and over and 10,742 (35%) were children under the age of 18.

Adults and Children Served by FRCs in 2023



Of the 7,987 children served in 2023 for whom the following data was available:

- 7% (523) had DCF involvement
- 6% (466) had court involvement

Among the 5,955 school age children, 67% (3,979) were enrolled in school, and 24% (1,408) had an IEP/504 plan.



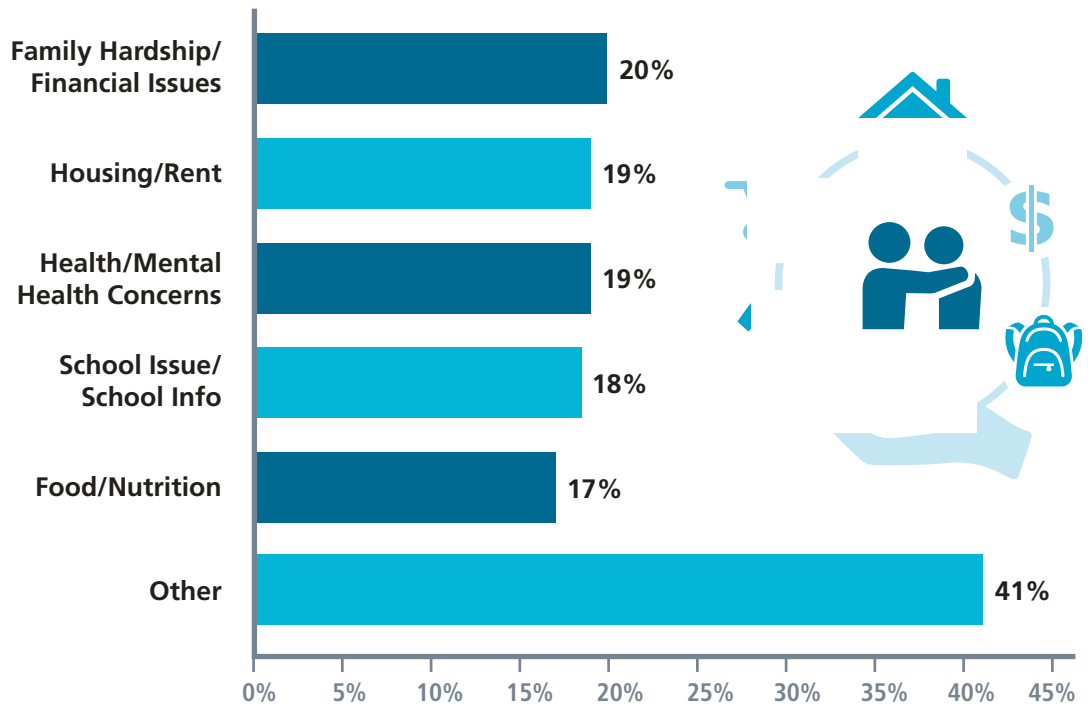
Needs of Families Seeking FRC Services

In 2023, new family members sought FRC services for a range of reasons.

The most common reason indicated for seeking FRC services was "other" (41%).

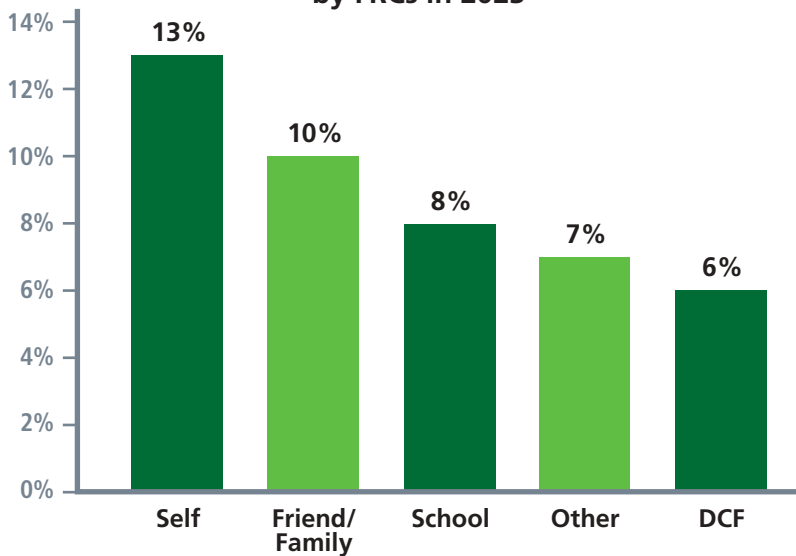
The most common needs indicated in the other category included diapers, clothing, and other basic needs/material goods.

Most Common Reasons New Family Members Sought FRC Services in 2023



Illustrating the integration of the FRCs into their communities, the most common referral source for new families served by the FRCs in 2023 were self-referrals (13%) or were referrals from a friend or family member (10%). The other most common referral sources included schools (8%), other sources (7%), and DCF (6%).

Most Common Referral Sources for New Families Served by FRCs in 2023

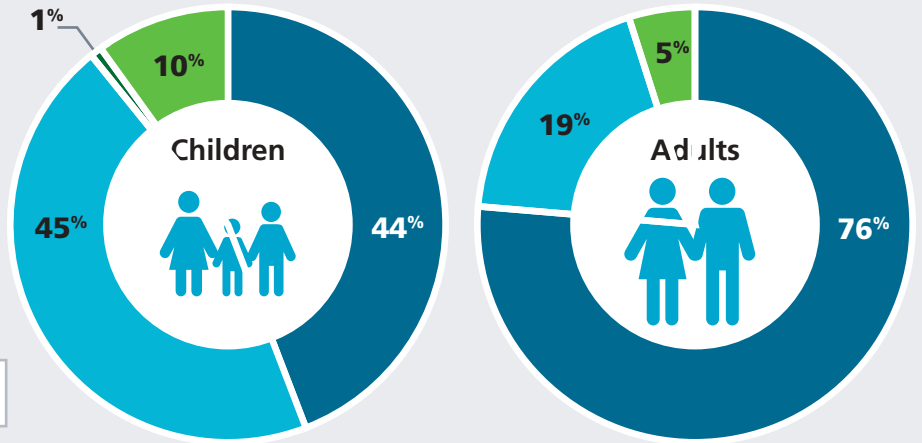


Characteristics of Adults and Children Served by FRCs

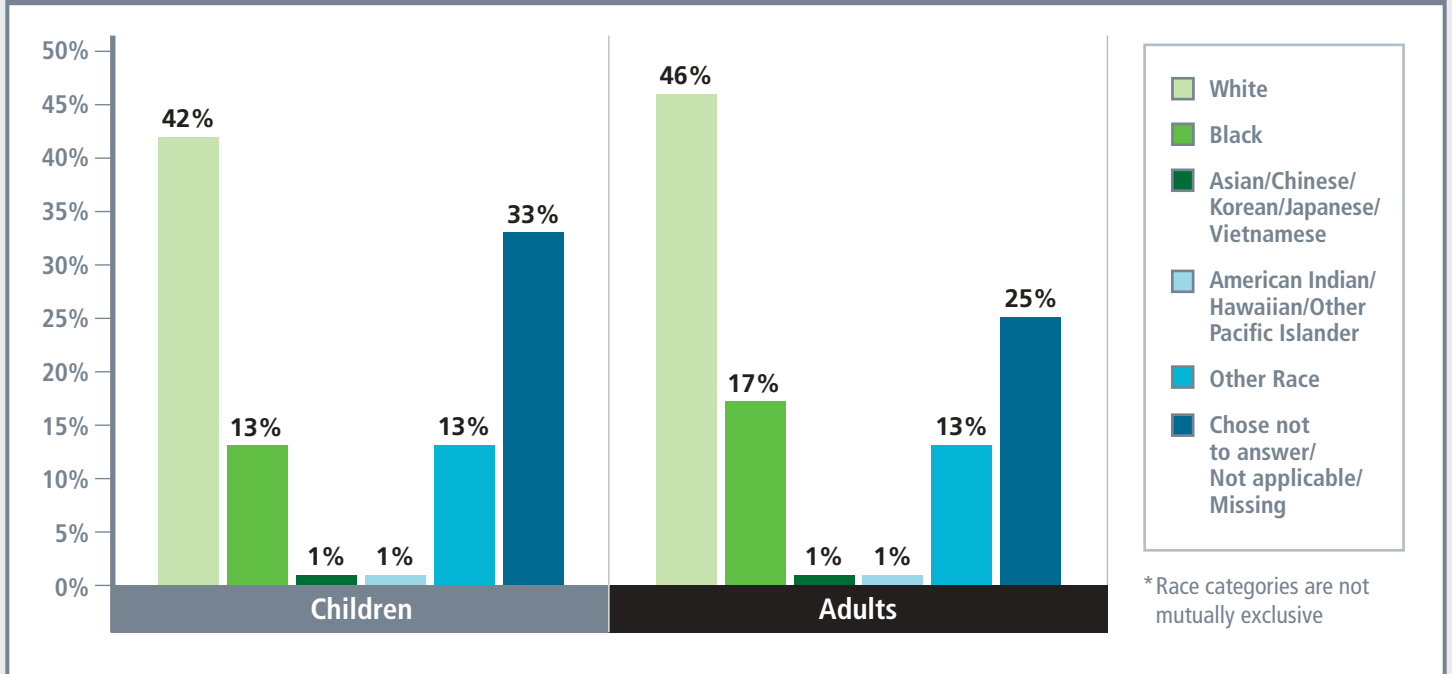
Among the 18,646 adults served by the FRCs in 2023, 46% identified as white, 39% identified as Hispanic/Latine, 76% identified as female, and 25% spoke Spanish as their primary language.

Among the 10,742 children served by the FRCs in 2023, 42% identified as white, 29% identified as Hispanic/Latine, 44% identified as female, and 44% identified as female.

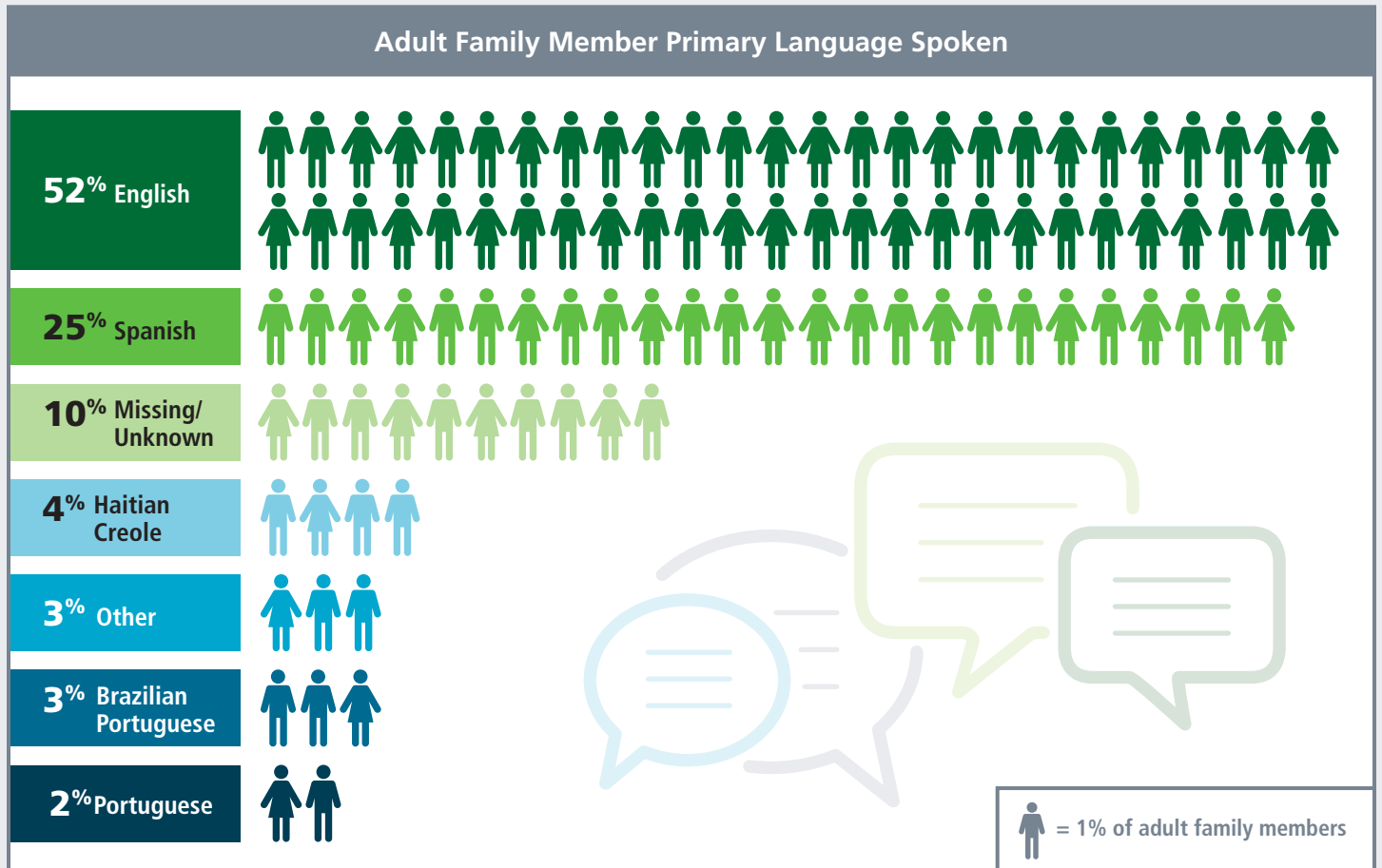
Family Member Gender



Family Member Race*



Characteristics of Adults Served by FRCs

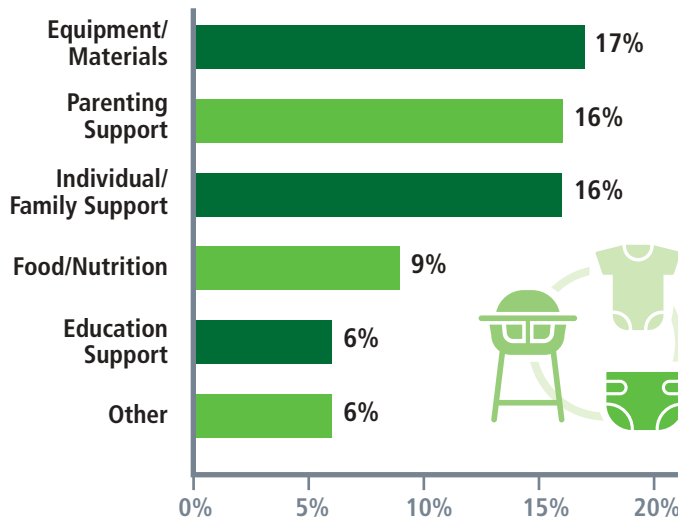


FRC Services and Supports to Families in 2023

In 2023, the FRCs logged a total of **130,129 instances** of service provision to FRC family members.

The most common services provided by FRCs in 2023 were for equipment or materials (17%) such as car seats, clothing, diapers, furniture, baby items, and toiletries. Other common services included parenting support (16%), individual or family support (16%), food/nutrition support (9%), education support (6%), and other supports (6%).

Most Common Services/Supports Provided by FRCs in 2023

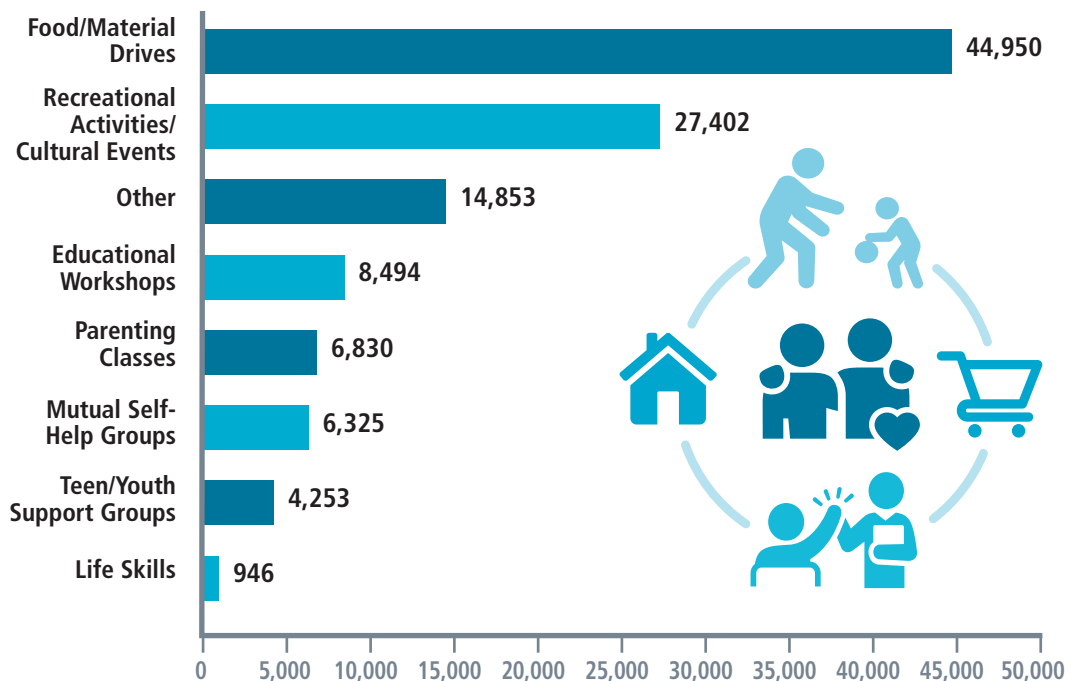


Across the FRCs in 2023, the number of unique days of service was split relatively evenly between **family members who received only one day of service (12,808)** and **family members who received two or more days of service (14,237)**. Some family members (4,146) had six or more days of service.

Attendance at FRC Events in 2023

In 2023, attendance was highest at food and material drives, followed by recreational activities and cultural events.

Attendance at FRC Classes, Groups, and Events in 2023



Children Requiring Assistance (CRA) in the FRC Network

At the time of service, there were 7,261 children ages 6-17 (i.e., eligible by age to be a Child Requiring Assistance (CRA) served by the FRCs in 2023. Of those, the FRCs indicated that 595 (8%) had a CRA application filed and 1,329 (18%) met the guidelines for being at risk for CRA; 4,334 (60%) neither had a CRA application filed nor were deemed at risk for CRA, and 1,003 (14%) were missing data on CRA status.



Families with Children Requiring Assistance

New Arrivals to Massachusetts

In 2023, there were 19,336 families served, 28% (5,465) of which had at least one child ages 6-17 years old, making them age-eligible for CRA.

Of those 5,465 families, 33% (1,796) had at least one age-eligible child that met a CRA designation, 68% of which were deemed at risk for CRA, and 32% that had a CRA application filed.

Regionally, the Southeast, Western, and Central regions have the highest proportions of families served with at least one age-eligible child with a CRA designation (at risk or has an application filed). The Central, Southeast, and Western regions have the largest proportions of families with at least one child who meets CRA at risk guidelines, and the Central, Southeast, and Boston regions have the largest proportions of families with at least one child who has a CRA application filed.

In 2023, FRCs continued to help the state support new arrivals and existing residents involved with the Emergency Assistance (EA) Shelter system.

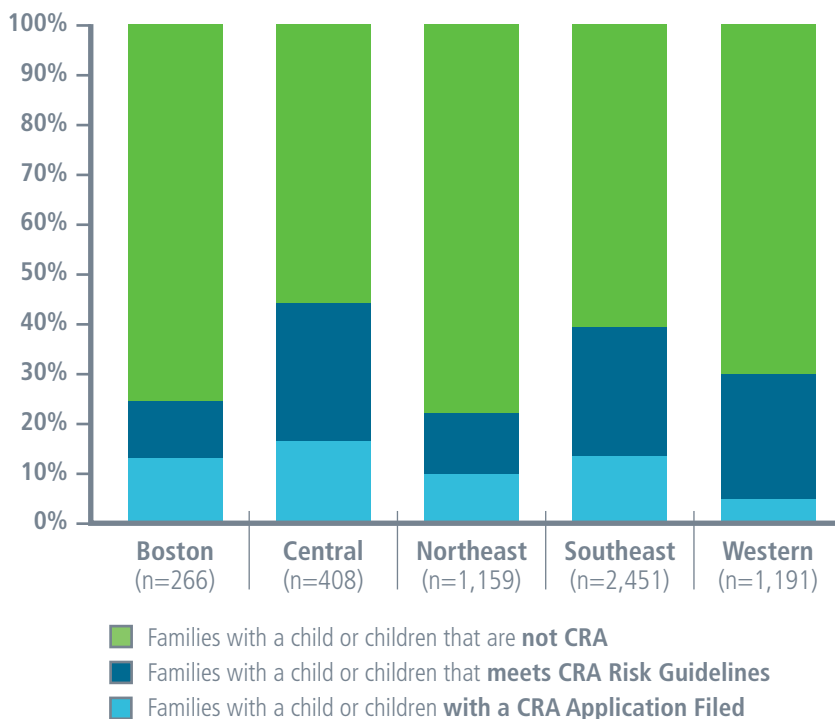
The state's EA system contracted with hotels across the Commonwealth to shelter new arrivals and their families. For hotels that did not yet have a provider assigned to them, the local FRCs stepped in to support the families in the hotel.

FRCs provided support for very needed basics: food, baby formula, clothing, tents, pack-n-plays, car seats, strollers, diapers, baby wipes, over-the-counter medicine such as ibuprofen, acetaminophen, cold medicine, etc.

The number of families in EA shelters varied geographically across the state, resulting in certain FRCs being more heavily impacted, including Attleboro, Taunton, Boston, Cape Cod, Fitchburg, Framingham, Greenfield, Holyoke, Lowell, Springfield, and Worcester, among others. In the summer of 2023, two Welcome Centers were opened to streamline the EA Shelter applications system. FRCs then helped the

Centers secure needed equipment for babies plus toiletries, shoes, and other material needs.

CRA Status* of Families with At Least One Age-Eligible Child (age 6-17) Served by the FRCs in 2023, by Region



*Note: These categories are not mutually exclusive; families may have multiple children with different CRA statuses



Success Stories: Serving Families and Communities in 2023

Coming together and collaborating to provide housing support

The FRCs have worked closely with the federally funded Community Connections Coalitions in their communities to provide enhanced support to families. For example, the **Holyoke FRC** was able to refer more than 60 families to their local Community Connections Coalition for assistance with rental and utility arrears. From these, more than 30 were able to obtain funds and prevent evictions and utility shut-offs.

The **New Bedford FRC** was awarded funding from the United Way of Greater New Bedford to support homeless families or families at risk of homelessness. Due to a lack of shelter placements, the FRC began providing support to families to help them stay in their apartments by paying for back rent or helping pay utility costs so that they would not have to choose between their utilities and the rent.

Children to teens to young adults: tailoring supports and resources as they grow

When the pandemic began winding down, the **Athol FRC** saw an increase in CRA-at-risk referrals, many of these children ranging in age from nine to 12 years old. With long waitlists for mental health services, the FRC began running a weekly Tween Group. This group focuses on social and emotional development, interactive activities, free play, community projects, games, and art. Along with the FRC's Teen Group, they also participated in art shows and social justice projects in the community. Several of the Tween and Teen Group participants started coming to the FRC when much younger, enjoying the various children's events over the years.

Understanding the needs of the community, the **Taunton FRC** began hosting Haitian/English Language Conversation classes. The format is designed to meet the needs of young adults, ages 18 to 25, who do not have enough school credits to enroll in high school and do not have enough English Language fluency to enroll in a GED program. These individuals were identified in collaboration with the Taunton public school system's Community Navigator Team.

With so many children and youth experiencing mental health challenges, the **Springfield FRC** hosts an emotional support group for teens. One family shared that their teenager learned how to understand their emotions better and was able to identify some of the triggers that caused her emotions to get to a place that was overwhelming to her. She can now open up more about what she is feeling and express herself in a healthier way.

Fathers gain more parenting skills and confidence and share their knowledge

At the **Ware FRC**, a father was required to attend the Nurturing Fathers program; he reluctantly came just to get his graduation certificate. After experiencing a few classes, he began to actively participate and stayed late. The difference in his focus and goals from when he started is incredible! Another father was interested in learning more about what was available for support and education and continued to participate in the group. It's easy to see the FRC made a difference.

After needing her husband to take time off work to support her at a medical program, a mother asked her husband to join her at one of the **Lawrence FRC's** Parents Helping Parents meetings later that day since he was off; he was hesitant but then very impressed after attending. The FRC greatly appreciated having another male participant and perspective at the meeting too. He said he would take time off from work when he could to come again and share with the other parents. He also shared that he was very proud of his wife for putting into practice some of the techniques discussed in this group.

After tragically losing his sick wife, a new arrival became the sole parent to his 3-year-old son as well as homeless. He reached out to the **Lynn FRC** in need of housing, food, clothing, diapers, and grief services. The FRC staff worked for several months to support this client and his little boy, who are now living in a safe shelter.



Summary

The FRC network has continued to grow and expand throughout the Commonwealth. The network started with 18 FRCs launched in 2015; there are now 32 FRCs-five new FRCs were added in 2023 alone-with at least one FRC in each of the state's 14 counties. The employee base of the FRC network has increased by about 35% in the past four years. The FRCs again served more families overall and more families per month in 2023. They truly have become part of the fabric of their communities. Because of this success, there are plans to open more sites and expand services at some existing sites in 2024.

Basic needs remain paramount for many of the families served by the FRCs, and the FRCs continue to respond to the myriad challenges faced by the families and communities they serve. FRCs also serve as a critical resource in crisis situations for both families and communities, such as through the emergency support they have been providing for new arrivals.

The FRCs are an important resource for families with children requiring assistance (CRA). About a third of the families served in 2023 who had a child age-eligible for CRA had at least one age-eligible child that met a CRA designation, 68% of which were deemed at risk for CRA, and 32% that had a CRA application filed.

FRCs work to strengthen relationships between children and their families so that both can thrive.

 This location will open in 2024.

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

Recommended Citation:

Swan, H., Pratt, C., Fishman, J., Tedesco, R., & Kamins, K. (2024, March). Massachusetts Family Resource Center 2023 Program Evaluation Report. Shrewsbury MA: ForHealth Consulting at UMass Chan Medical School.

Table A1: Families Served by and Sources of Referrals to FRCs (January–December 2023)

	Western										Southeast-Cape Cod- the Islands										Boston		Northeast						Central				ALL FRCs
	Amherst	Athol	Great Barrington	Greenfield	Holyoke	North Adams	Pittsfield	Springfield	Ware	Westfield	Attleboro	Barnstable	Brockton	Fall River	Martha's Vineyard	Nantucket	New Bedford	Plymouth	Quincy	Taunton	Boston	Chelsea	Everett	Frammingham	Lawrence	Lowell	Lynn	Salem	Fitchburg	Gardner	Southbridge	Worcester	
Number of families participating	301	911	354	549	765	359	373	718	239	58	102	982	726	718	248	121	569	1,736	898	490	983	377	1,609	513	1,363	666	920	196	676	68	294	454	19,336
Number of new families participating	182	420	233	356	620	165	220	416	201	58	80	785	613	480	80	70	345	1,309	420	339	839	373	835	375	984	518	554	196	505	68	195	349	13,183
Referral Sources for New Families																																	
Self	16	71	4	79	242	12	33	44	70	15	14	17	57	64	20	33	18	115	13	31	11	59	29	5	358	40	15	6	90	18	47	29	1,675
Friend/Family	18	57	10	82	20	7	42	106	19	7	5	73	53	105	16	13	40	26	0	38	14	52	50	4	207	134	35	21	77	1	13	17	1,362
School	22	17	2	6	31	69	14	7	20	3	20	101	25	112	13	6	17	43	91	37	19	32	31	5	49	78	3	52	47	3	44	30	1,049
Other state or human/social service agency	30	41	1	44	11	5	22	33	25	2	6	79	26	51	11	9	28	45	26	54	16	26	28	0	104	92	34	54	76	2	10	17	1,008
DCF	34	36	16	28	5	13	16	25	19	0	4	15	9	32	5	4	38	74	13	75	43	14	28	0	29	45	4	22	61	6	18	15	746
Mental health/Health provider	21	27	5	11	5	11	5	19	22	1	10	11	22	47	6	4	2	27	25	36	31	25	30	5	13	60	1	18	34	30	11	18	593
Social/Print media	4	41	0	8	2	3	15	3	9	0	5	22	9	13	1	1	4	206	0	23	5	12	29	1	20	57	7	33	21	0	7	19	580
Court	1	5	4	6	3	6	2	6	2	0	2	1	8	37	0	0	10	11	166	31	12	2	7	0	26	43	2	8	31	10	9	12	463
Community agency	0	10	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	1	1	2	3	0	0	2	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	2	4	30
Faith based organization	1	3	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	5	2	1	2	0	0	2	0	28
Mass211	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	6	0	2	5	0	2	1	0	2	0	24	
Other	20	58	0	14	2	5	19	27	18	1	7	35	20	24	6	7	7	247	0	30	9	17	36	1	30	92	18	45	36	0	12	24	867

