

Massachusetts Family Resource Center Network

2021 Program Evaluation Report

March 2022



The Massachusetts Family Resource Centers (FRCs), overseen by the Department of Children and Families (DCF), are community-based, culturally competent centers that provide a wide array of services to families. FRCs connect families to needed resources and supports; offer parent education classes and support groups; provide school-related educational support; and offer recreational and other activities. FRCs work to strengthen relationships between children and their families so that both can thrive. The first 18 FRCs were launched in 2015; there are now 27 FRCs across the commonwealth, with at least one in each of the state's 14 counties.

Ongoing Evaluation of the FRCs

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

Pursuant to Line Item 4000-0051, Chapter 24 of the Acts of 2021, the FRC Annual Evaluation Report describes activities across the FRCs during the calendar year January 1 to December 31, 2021. The report tells the story about the families and family members served in 2021, the types of services provided, and includes notable changes in FRC activities since their launch in 2015. The report also highlights innovative FRC practices as well as efforts undertaken by DCF and UMass Chan to support FRC operations, particularly in the face of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.



www.frcma.org

FRCs are a Key Part of the Community

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 fulfill many basic needs with equipment, clothing, food, and other material supports to families.

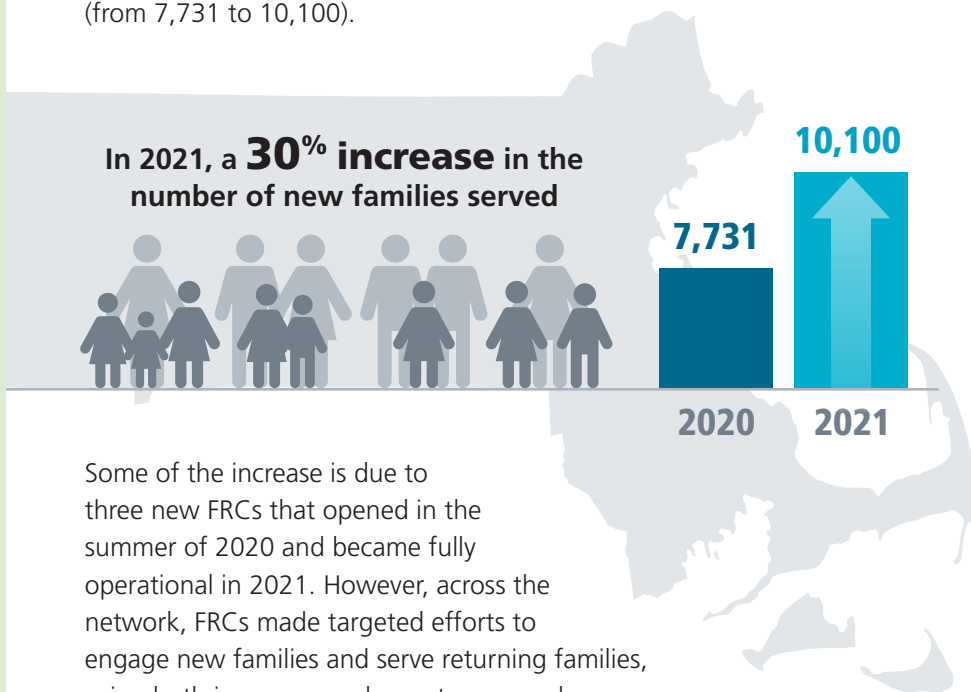
FRC Programming and Supports include:

- 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 Family Resource Center Network

The figure on page 3 shows the continued growth in the number of families served by the FRCs network since 2015.

In the context of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, 2021 saw a 30% increase in the number of new families served compared 2020 (from 7,731 to 10,100).



Some of the increase is due to three new FRCs that opened in the summer of 2020 and became fully operational in 2021. However, across the network, FRCs made targeted efforts to engage new families and serve returning families, using both in-person and remote approaches.



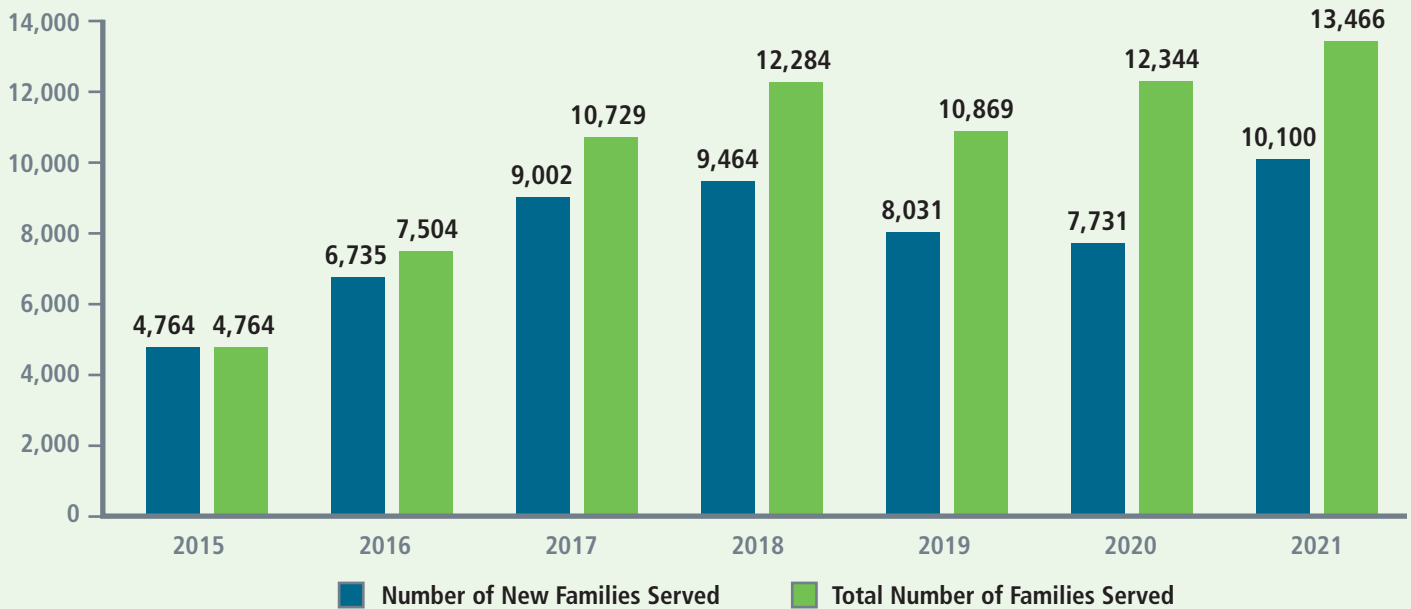
On average, the **27 FRCs across the state served almost 500 families each in 2021, a 10% increase over the average number served in 2020.**



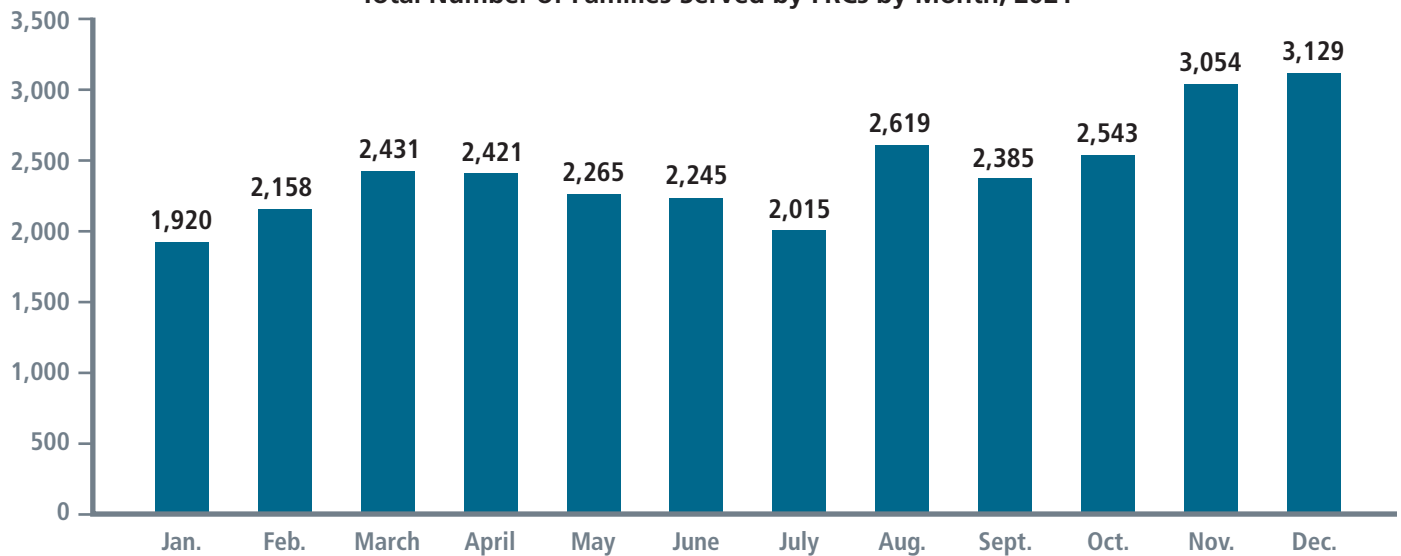
**In total, FRCs served
55,287
unique families
between
2015 and 2021**



Number of Families Served by FRCs Each Year from 2015 to 2021



Total Number of Families Served by FRCs by Month, 2021



The number of families served by the FRC network typically varies month-to-month, with numbers decreasing in summer months and increasing as children begin to return to school.

The notable increase in families served from October to December 2021 corresponds to the surge in COVID-19 cases due to the Omicron variant, reflecting efforts the FRCs made to meet the needs of families during this challenging time.



Households Served by FRCs

Overall, the majority of FRC families come from single-parent households. In 2021, 67% of new families served by FRCs were from single-parent households, while 28% were two-parent households.

In the past several years, FRCs have continued to serve a substantial number of families without minor children in the home.

In addition, over the years, FRCs have seen an increase in the number of families who are insecurely housed or experiencing homelessness, and FRCs provide significant housing-related services and supports to families.

In 2021, about **13%** of new families were homeless (sheltered and unsheltered) when first served by the FRCs.

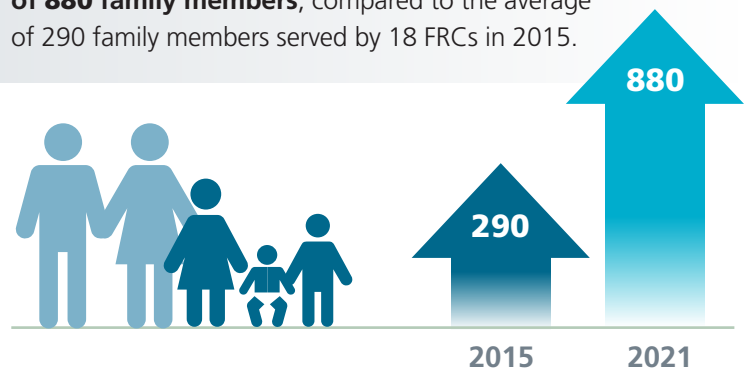


Adults and Children Served by FRCs in 2021

The number of family members – adults and children – served by the FRCs continues to grow every year.

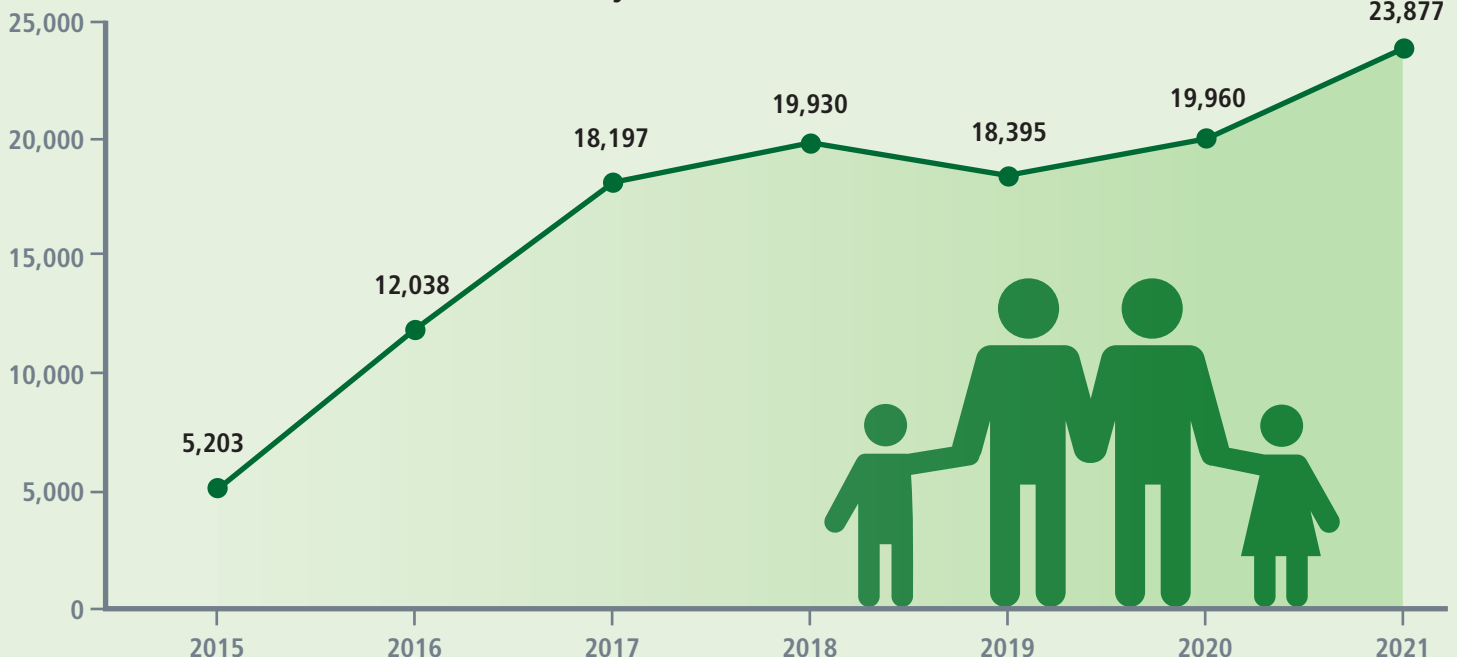
In 2021, FRCs served over **23,000** individual family members, a 20% increase over the number served in 2020.

In 2021, the 27 FRCs across the state served an average of **880 family members**, compared to the average of 290 family members served by 18 FRCs in 2015.



FRCs are now serving, on average, three times the number of family members they served in 2015. These growing numbers show the critical role FRCs play in meeting the needs of vulnerable adults and children in their communities.

Number of Family Members Served from 2015 to 2021



In the context of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the number of family members served monthly by the FRCs was at an all-time high in 2021. **In 2020, the 27 FRCs served over 3,100 individual family members monthly; in 2021, the number climbed to over 3,600.**

Characteristics of Adults and Children Served by the FRCs in 2021

FAMILY PROFILE

Of the 23,000 individuals served by the FRCs in 2021, about 58% were adults, ages 18 and over, and 42% were children, ages 0 to 17.

Most adults were parents (84%)
and about **4% were also grandparents**

77% were women,
57% were single parents and
63% were ages 40 and under

41% identified as Latinx and
22% said Spanish was their
primary language

66% identified as white;
14% as Black

16% were involved
with DCF; 35% are
enrolled in MassHealth

29% of new families
had one minor child
in the home, while
40% had two or
more minor
children

31% of new families
had no minor children
living in the household

Among children:

- **60% were ages 0 to 10** and
40% were ages 11 to 17

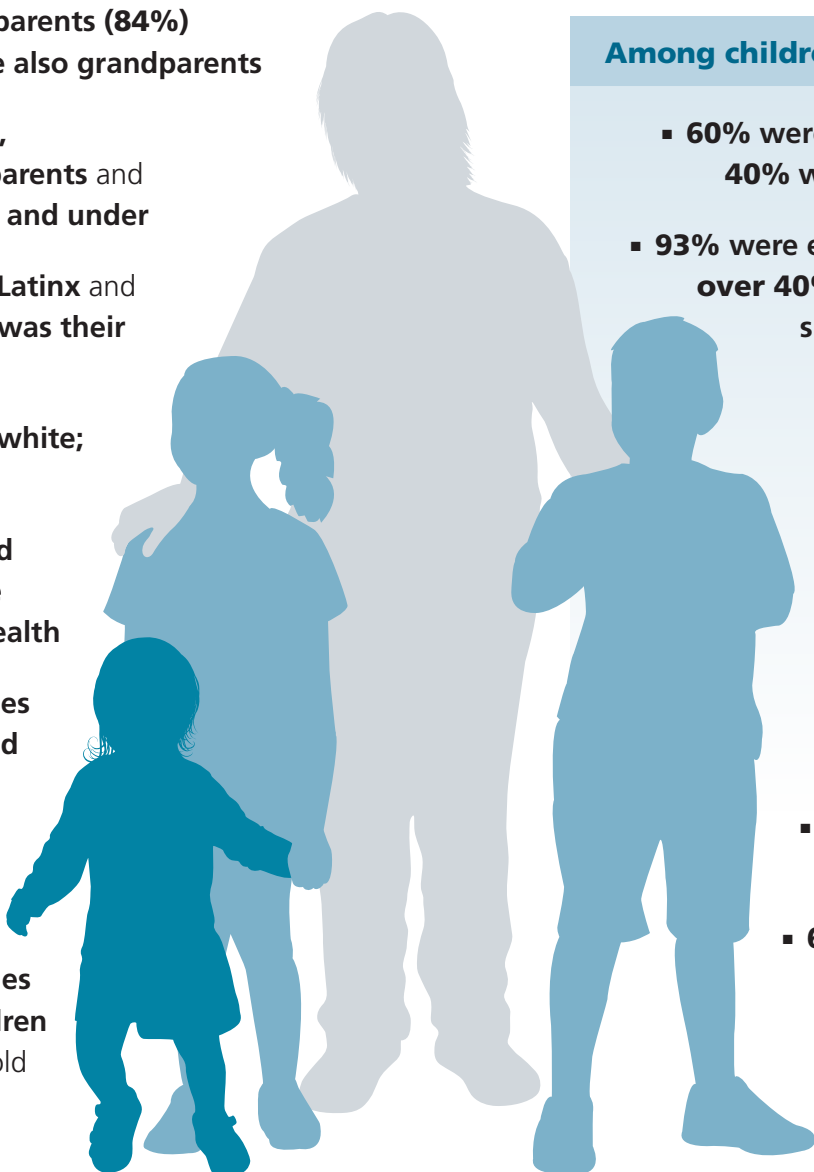
- **93% were enrolled in school;**
over 40% received school
supports such as an
IEP or a 504 plan

- **60% identified**
as white;
18% as Black

- **38% identified**
as Latinx and
11% said Spanish
was their primary
language

- **25% are enrolled**
in MassHealth

- **6% were involved**
with the courts

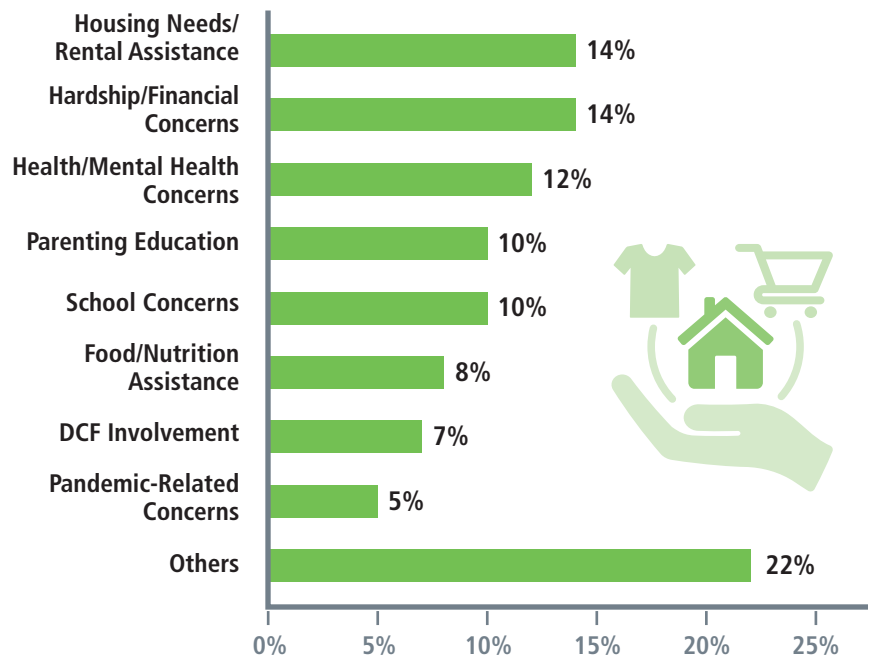


Meeting Families' Needs

Families may be referred to an FRC by DCF, other state and/or social service agencies, or their local schools. Friends and family, as well as social and other media, have become more common sources of referral to FRCs over the years.

In the communities they serve, FRCs are now the “go-to” places for families to receive help with a range of basic needs. Housing and related financial concerns have consistently been among the most common reasons for families to seek help from the FRCs. Families also come to the FRCs for parenting education and support and/or help with a child’s school concerns.

Main Reasons New Families Sought FRC Assistance in 2021

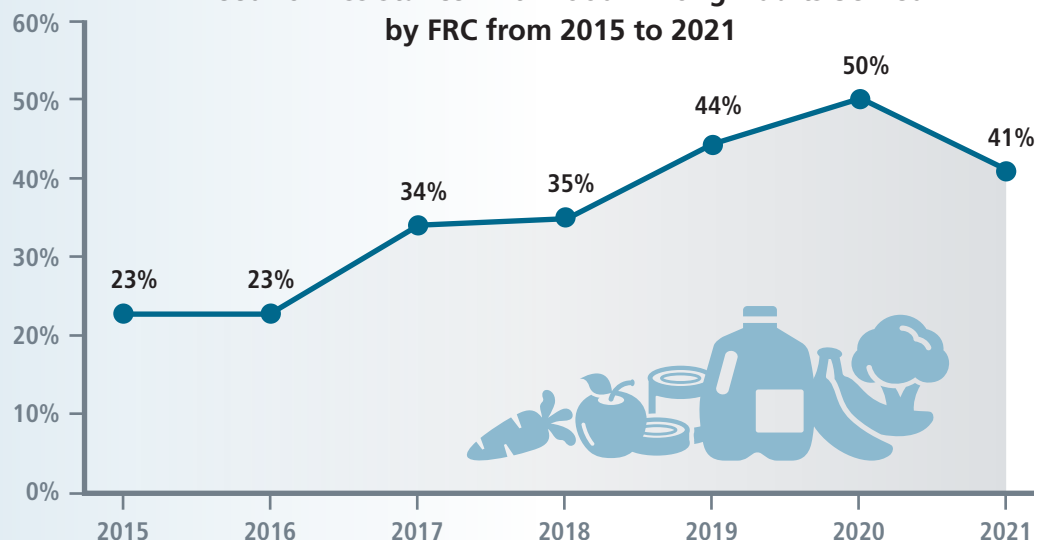


Food Insecurity is Still a Major Concern

With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020, FRCs saw a **significant increase in the number of families needing basic food/nutrition assistance**, with 16% of new families coming to the FRCs for this type of assistance. Although this pressing need seems to have lessened somewhat in 2021 and the second year of the pandemic, food insecurity continues to be a critical area of need among FRC families.



Need for Assistance With Food Among Adults Served by FRC from 2015 to 2021



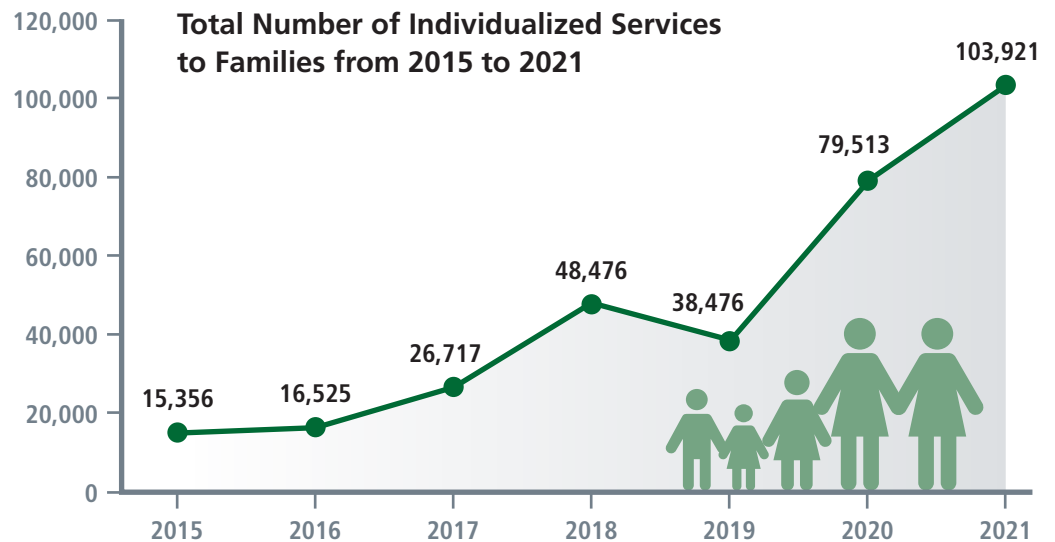
Need for assistance with food among FRC families reached an all-time high in 2020, and addressing this need was a major focus for FRCs in the early phase of the pandemic. Although dropping a bit in 2021, the percentage of families experiencing food insecurity has grown over time and continues to be **almost double the percentage seen in 2015**.

FRC Services and Supports to Families in 2021

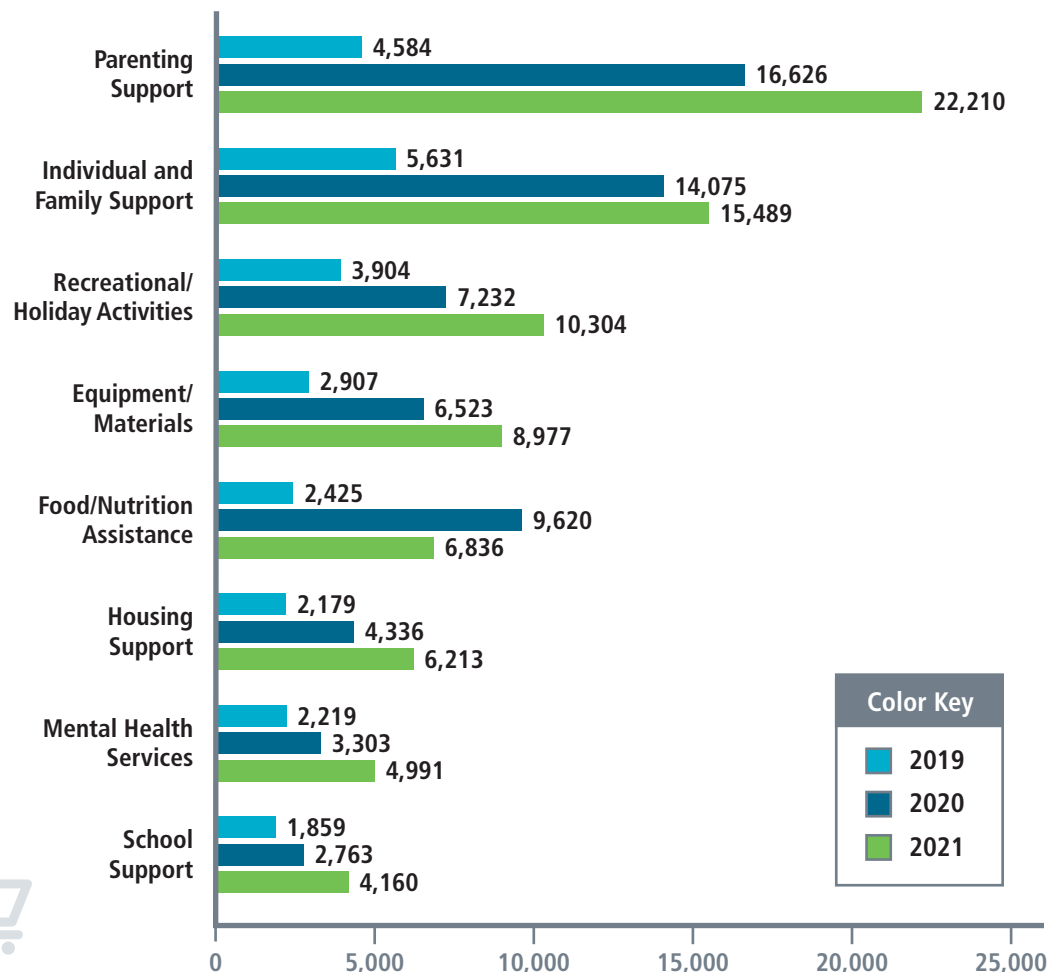
FRCs provide direct services and supports to families and connect families to other resources in their communities.

The number of individualized services provided increased dramatically in the context of the ongoing pandemic. In the early days of the pandemic, most FRCs shut down or significantly reduced in-person center-based services. In response, FRC staff quickly adapted to continue to serve families via telephone and virtual meetings. Consequently, FRCs have been able to provide more individualized services to families than ever before – more than doubling from 2019 to 2020, and then increasing again by 30% from 2020 to 2021.

There was dramatic growth across all FRC service types in 2020 and 2021, particularly in comparison to pre-pandemic 2019, with parenting and individual/family support showing the largest increases. The only service type showing a decrease from 2020 to 2021 was food/nutrition assistance, with this pressing need abating somewhat in 2021.



Number of Individualized Services Provided by FRCs from 2019 to 2021

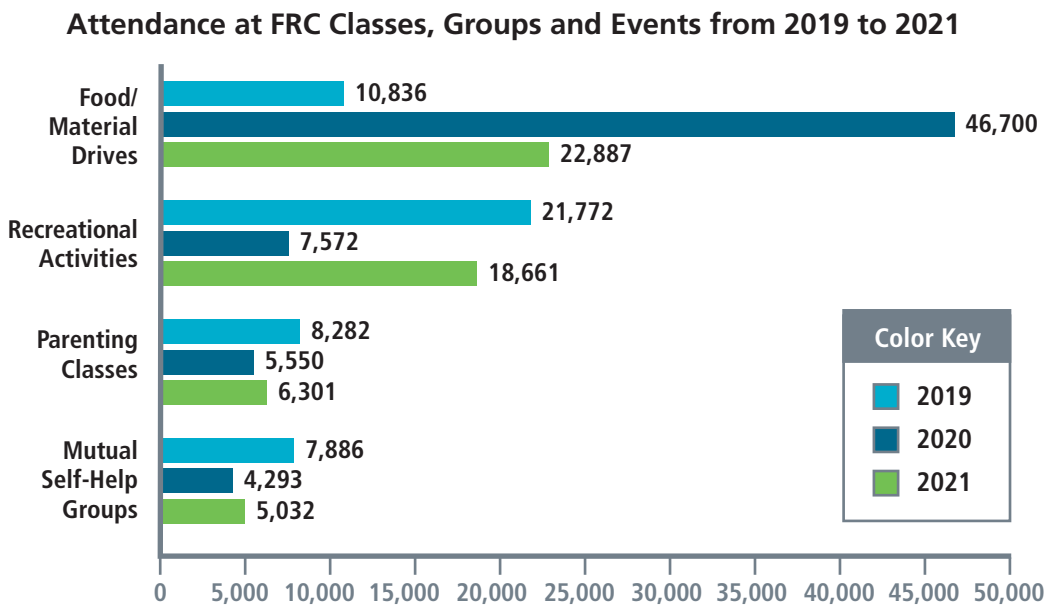


Parent and Family Classes and Activities at FRCs

In addition to individualized services, FRCs offer parenting classes and support groups, as well as recreational and other activities.

With the pandemic, the FRCs adapted their approaches and offered parenting classes and other programming through Zoom, WebEx, social media, and other remote means. This fostered greater collaboration across FRCs and allowed families greater access to programming.

If a parenting class is not available from a local FRC, parents are able to join a virtual class offered by an FRC in a different part of the state. Attendance in group programming activities increased in 2021 as a result of the many remote classes and groups available.



During the pandemic, the FRCs partnered with other community organizations providing basic resources to families, participated in food drives, operated food pantries, and delivered food and other necessities to families. While the need for these basics seems to have decreased somewhat in 2021, it is still notably higher than in pre-pandemic 2019.

Success Stories

Taunton FRC: Promoting Mental Health

Taunton FRC staff are members of the Southeastern Massachusetts Infant Mental Health Task Force.



The task force works to raise awareness of infant mental health needs and child development, and strengthen the bonds between child and caregiver. The task force

created a public service announcement (PSA) in partnership with a local radio station, and a PSA video via YouTube for communities. The theme of the PSAs is that it takes a village to raise a child, it's okay to ask for help, and that the FRCs can assist with family needs and concerns. Both the radio and video PSAs promote the FRC network statewide. The video is available at <https://youtu.be/95Dn5q-RY4g>.

In addition, the Taunton FRC, Taunton YMCA, and New Hope, a local community organization

that serves those impacted by domestic and sexual violence, are collaborating on a Holistic Healing group. The group supports individuals who have experienced trauma to heal the mind, body, and spirit from within. Shedding light on the fact that trauma looks different for each individual and impacts entire communities, the group incorporates education about trauma, exercise, and mindfulness into each meeting.

Everett FRC: Helping Kids Get Back to School

As summer ended and the new school year started, the Everett FRC hosted their 2021 Back-to-School Event.

The FRC provided more than 900 families – including almost 1,800 children – with backpacks, school supplies, gift cards and other resources to help with the transition back to school. The event also provided parents with personal protective equipment (PPE) and information about COVID-19 vaccinations for their children. Multiple community partners joined in the event, which was attended by Everett Mayor Carlo DeMaria, State Representative Joe McGonagle, and other city leaders and school committee councilors. This successful event was featured in a Boston25 news story.

Boston FRC: Helping Teens Learn More About Social Justice

The Boston FRC Summer Social Justice Group gives youth an opportunity to expand their knowledge.

Teens don't always have the knowledge and confidence to advocate for themselves, especially when issues of social justice and equity are at the forefront. The Boston FRC ran a 5-week Summer Social Justice Group to help address this issue. Youth were introduced to various social justice topics such as housing equity, mass incarceration and prison reform, and LGBTQ+ rights. The facilitators incorporated discussions and activities around mental health awareness and self-care practices tailored for the teens. Participants completed the program with a presentation of their final projects, highlighting an issue they were passionate about.

With the help of the group, these young people were able to develop their understanding of social justice issues, identify their values, find their own voice to begin to raise awareness, and learn about the different ways they can take action in their own communities. Plans are in the works to continue the group as an afterschool program to benefit youth from all around Boston.



Worcester FRC: Feeding Families Impacted by COVID

The Worcester FRC collaborates with community partners to deliver food to families.

Since the onset of the pandemic, the Worcester FRC has been part of the Worcester Together Coalition, a collaborative effort of local social service agencies addressing food insecurity. With Community Development Block Grant funding, the Coalition launched a hot meals program – serving meals from local Black- and Brown-owned restaurants to COVID-positive low-income families. The program allows families to safely remain in their homes while quarantining and supports small businesses significantly impacted by the pandemic. The program also delivers other essentials such as PPE, cleaning supplies, formula, diapers, and feminine hygiene products.

By the end of 2021,
the program had delivered
over 37,000 meals
to local families.



In addition to the Worcester FRC, Coalition partners include Worcester Community Connection Coalition, United Way of Central MA, Community Legal Aid, YWCA, Healthy Greater Worcester, and the Main South Community Development Corporation.

The Worcester FRC serves as the gatekeeper to the program and the first line of contact when referring families to it. An FRC family support worker provides a holistic approach to the families seeking hot meals while in quarantine, connecting families not only to the meals but to other community resources, as food insecurity is often not the only need these families experience. Additional funding to sustain the program in 2022 has come from the Worcester County Food Bank and the United Way of Central MA.

Promoting Best Practices Across the FRC Network

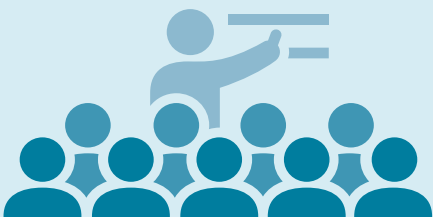
The FRC Network is overseen by the Massachusetts Department of Children and Families (DCF).

UMass Chan Medical School (UMass Chan) serves as an Administrative Service Organization supporting FRC operations. Together, DCF and UMass Chan carry out a variety of activities to enhance FRC services and promote best practices across the network. Training efforts focus on ensuring that FRC staff have a strong base of knowledge and skills with which to provide services to families.

FRC Orientation and Foundational Training Series

In 2021, DCF developed and launched a new Staff Orientation and Foundational Training Series for all FRC staff.

- This series is offered quarterly to all current FRC staff to ensure everyone is trained. Once all are trained, it will transition to a New Staff Orientation program as new employees are hired.
- Through the end of 2021, five training groups with 100 FRC staff participating have been started. Over 75 FRC staff completed the series and graduated in 2021.
- FRC Orientation and Foundational Training Series topics include:
 - Orientation to the FRC Network with DCF
 - Protective Factors/Strengthening Families
 - Trauma Informed Care
 - Motivational Interviewing
 - Cultural Humility in Child Welfare Practice
 - Secondary Traumatic Stress, Boundaries, and Self-Care
 - Child Development and the Adolescent Brain
 - How CRM Data Informs Reports for MA Legislators, DCF, and Your Agency



Assessing the Impact of Evidence-Based Parenting Programs

In 2021, DCF introduced the use of the **Adult-Adolescent Parenting Inventory – or AAPI-2.1** – within the FRC Network.

The AAPI-2.1 is used to assess the parenting and child rearing attitudes of parents participating in FRC evidence-based parenting education programs. The AAPI is a validated and reliable inventory and provides an index of risk for certain behaviors that evidence suggests are associated with child abuse and neglect.

DCF provided AAPI training to more than 120 FRC staff to help prepare staff to implement this new tool to parents participating in certain FRC evidence-based parenting classes. The UMass Chan evaluators will work with DCF and the FRCs to determine the usefulness of parents' responses to the AAPI in assessing impacts of the parenting classes. The use of the AAPI is expected to help:

- Improve fidelity to and assist in tracking success of evidence-based parenting education programs
- Inform parenting class facilitators about areas of concern and family needs within the program as they teach, allowing for focus on particular areas of concern
- Provide support around having positive, constructive conversations with parents about growth and change in parenting attitudes

The image shows two forms side-by-side. The top form is 'Adult-Adolescent Parenting Inventory (AAPI-2.1*) Form B' by Stephen J. Bavolek, Ph.D. and Richard G. Kohn, Ph.D. It includes a version statement and a scoring instruction. The bottom form is 'Adult-Adolescent Parenting Inventory (AAPI-2.1*) Form A' by the same authors. It includes a version statement, a 'PLEASE PRINT' section, and various demographic and employment questions. The questions are numbered 1 through 13 and include options for different responses. The forms are designed to be filled out by parents participating in parenting classes.

Testimonials

Ongoing Training of FRC Staff

Other core and supplemental trainings provided in 2021 help ensure that all FRC staff have the capacity to address the range of challenges faced by FRC families.

83 individual trainings
were offered to FRC staff (all virtual)

- **27 evidence-based parenting education program facilitator trainings**
- **56 other skills-building trainings** were offered
- **Over 1,000 staff attendances** at trainings in 2021



Trainings in evidence-based parenting education program included:

- **Nurturing Parenting Programs** (e.g., Nurturing Families, Nurturing Fathers, Nurturing Families in Substance Abuse Treatment and Recovery)
- **Parenting Journey I**
- **Active Parenting Programs** (e.g., Active Parenting: The First Five Years, Active Parenting of Teens, Active Parenting: Cooperative Parenting and Divorce)



"Thank you so much for the kind words, sometimes we lose sight of how much we do as parents, and balancing it all. I appreciate the shout out and have learned and realized a lot while taking this class."

– A mother after a parenting class

"Thank you for the tips and tactics (to help me) relationship-wise with my son and thanks to all you have given."

– A father

"I think you and your program should see this as quite a vote of confidence for the FRC - two separate organizations giving (me) your name as the organization to help. And "help" you did. Thank you so much."

– A community partner

"Our 4 year old is LOVING STEM Fun, and we are thrilled we found you guys! He gets excited each week to see what new experiment/challenge/learning experience he'll have. Thank you for all you do!"

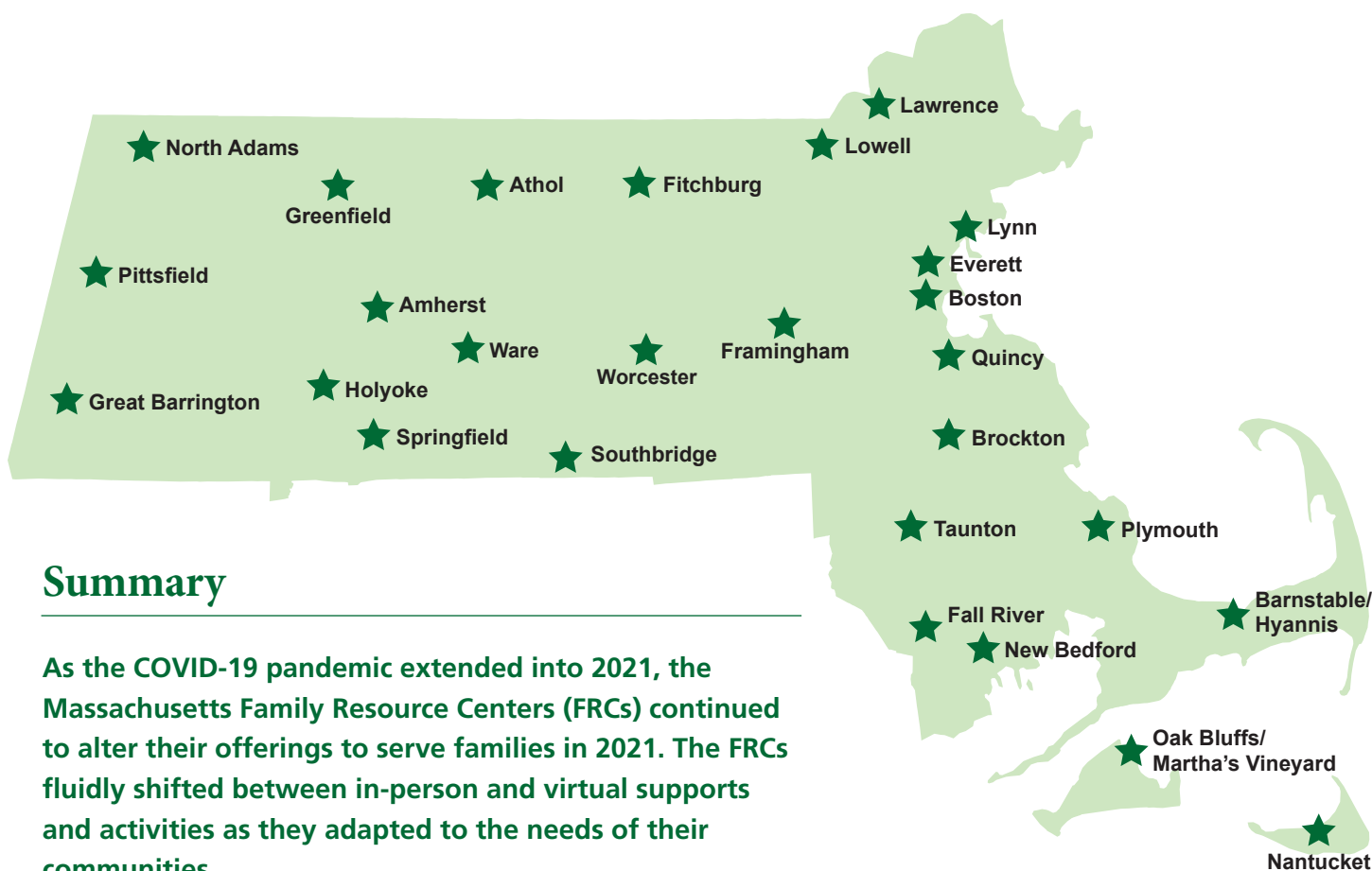
– A parent

"My biggest takeaway is how to be more positive, how to understand my child better, that I'm not the only one that has struggled and that we are all human and make mistakes. Another is that I have made some new friends and so has my child."

– A parent after a parent education program

"Just wanted to say that I am glad that I went to grandparents group today. It was nice to see everyone was there. Been a long year. This group is the most non-judgmental group ever. We are the best!! Glad we are back."

– A grandparent caregiver



Summary

As the COVID-19 pandemic extended into 2021, the Massachusetts Family Resource Centers (FRCs) continued to alter their offerings to serve families in 2021. The FRCs fluidly shifted between in-person and virtual supports and activities as they adapted to the needs of their communities.

The FRCs again served more families overall and more families per month in 2021 than in 2020 and 2019. 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 2022.

While basic needs are still paramount for many of the families served by the FRCs, more and more educational and social programming were available and embraced throughout 2021. With the pandemic becoming endemic, the FRCs will 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. (2022, March). *Massachusetts Family Resource Center 2021 Program Evaluation Report*. Shrewsbury MA: Commonwealth Medicine, UMass Chan Medical School.