

## DHS Family Resource Centers (FRCs) Overview

### Goals:

- Increase student achievement and attendance
- Increase parental engagement
- Improve student behavior
- Enhance school improvement efforts
- Help families move toward self-sufficiency

*FRCs reduce barriers to students' academic success by helping families access resources immediately – before the barriers cripple the learning process. These barriers include insufficient transportation, child care, housing instability, food insecurity, limited access to health care and health maintenance equipment and other emergency needs that can interfere with learning for both children and adults.*

### How FRCs work:

- FRCs are special service units that have been established in “priority” elementary and middle schools throughout the state. The Department of Human Services has stationed Family Independence Specialists in these school sites to assist eligible families in obtaining DHS services such as cash assistance, food-stamps, WIC benefits, Medicaid, subsidized day care, emergency assistance and other DHS programs aimed at helping families become self-sufficient. Additionally, most sites serve as a point of contact for other DHS program staff including child welfare and prevention services.
- FRCs also serve as conveners of collaborative partnership groups aimed at increasing service delivery integration – making the most out of existing relationships with families in need rather than requiring families to establish numerous contacts.

*FRCs build on the fact that DHS is an essential connector for families in need and make it easier for service providers to work together.*

- The Family Resource Centers are open year-round at most sites; some FRC workers return to DHS local offices when school is not open. All families with students attending school are eligible to access the Family Resource Centers. In some cases, single older adults in the neighborhood of a Family Resource Center can access DHS services through the school site as well. Teachers, administrators and staff can make referrals for assistance and services for students and families at the Center.
- Selection criteria for the sites include AYP status, high free and reduced lunch counts and tangible community support. Private foundations and businesses support FRCs through covering start-up costs to set up new facilities, donating items to support families, and providing incentives for families to participate in school programs. Non-profit groups, including faith-based groups, provide in-kind support, coordinate volunteers for tutoring and mentoring projects and many other activities.

*FRCs provide leadership and organize ways for communities to be more effective and efficient in responding to the needs of families.*

### **Impact of Family Resource Centers:**

- In September 2003, this program began with 19 sites that were situated in “priority” schools around the state. By December 2008, there will be 74 FRC sites around the state.
- Qualitative and quantitative evidence has demonstrated success toward achievement of established goals. Families report improved communication and new partnership with their DHS worker and with other helping agencies.

*Sharai Lindow, 26, has three children enrolled at Grand Rapids’ Harrison Park Elementary School. When her daughter Janay started school three years ago, she was absent 40 times in one semester. Family Resource Center Specialist Karen S. Bowen requested a meeting with Ms. Lindow and showed the young mother evidence of how attendance can affect the performance of young students.*

*“She really inspired me to want to do better,” Ms. Lindow said. “She truly cared about me and my kids. I made it my one of my primary goals that I will have my kids in school every day.”*

*Now, Ms. Lindow has her three oldest children in the school and they all have near perfect attendance. She has even enrolled her youngest child in Head Start. She says her children look forward to seeing Ms. Bowen at school.*

*“She visits with them and helps them and talks to them,” Ms. Lindow said. “I’ve never had a social worker who cared about me as a person so much. I could share anything with her.”*

- Community partners are better able to provide services to families. Outcomes in a Michigan State University Extension nutrition program aimed at improving health habits among families and children were significantly improved due to the service being linked to FRCs. More children adopted essential health habits such as eating vegetables daily, eating breakfast, and getting regular exercise due to linking the program to FRCs.
- Comparisons of school performance at FRC-linked and non-FRC-linked schools revealed a significant advantage to schools related to FRCs. 40% of priority schools with a FRC were able to move off the priority schools list compared to 10% of schools without a FRC. Moving off the priority schools list means that the school is making adequate yearly progress in a number of areas including student achievement, parental involvement, attendance, and overall school improvement.
- The achievement gap between children in schools with high concentrations of poverty and their peers around the state is being closed more quickly at schools where there are FRCs compared to statewide averages.

***FRCs have measurable positive impact on families, community partners, and schools.***

**How FRCs are funded:**

- Initial start-up costs for setting up new FRCs are supported by local partners, usually by private foundations or community agencies but sometimes by Intermediate School Districts (ISDs). These expenses are related to the cost of setting up the required work space for DHS employees and other partners who will serve families at the center, and communications and technology expenses.
- Ongoing expenses for new centers are covered one of two ways: the local DHS office absorbs the cost as part of their field operations allocation for staff and related expenses, or a local revenue agreement supports the addition of DHS staff to serve at the center(s) within that county.
  - When DHS local office directors are able to do so, they can assign staff to work at a FRC site and carry a full caseload and/or re-allocate caseloads to facilitate operating a smaller caseload at the FRC site. In some cases, directors also choose to keep caseloads equal but make changes in the distribution of duties to facilitate service provision via FRCs within their county.
  - When local revenue agreements support ongoing expenses related to FRCs, the expense of the new positions is shared 50/50 between DHS and the local partner agency, usually an ISD. This agreement covers all staff and related expenses including communications and technology, facilities expenses, etc. DHS local office directors are advised that, when executing these agreements, the staff involved should take at least a 50% caseload to be serviced via the FRC. This ensures that the net effect on DHS budget will be neutral.

***FRCs have a neutral impact on DHS budget.***