BE STRONG
FAMILIES

Parent Café
Report 2019–2021

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Executive Summary

INTRODUCTION

Since Be Strong Families first pioneered the Parent Café approach in 2007, hundreds of programs in the United States and internationally have adopted the approach, reaching thousands of parents and families through deep, personal conversations designed to facilitate transformation and healing. In 2019, we began the National Parent Café Evaluation Project to help us better understand and share the impact of Parent Cafés. Since 2019, we've aggregated data from over 96 participating agencies that collectively hosted over 869 Cafés. We have analyzed data from 13,977 individual evaluation surveys filled out by parents in those Cafés. Through the process, we learned much about the agencies, individuals participating, and our evaluation tools and processes. We see this effort as the beginning of a process in which we engage a wider pool of partners and collectively build a knowledge base on the impact of cafés. Over time, we hope to build a database that can allow us to compare Café impacts across different populations. In addition to this aggregated report, we are producing individualized reports for each Café partner, allowing us to share feedback on their results compared to our national data.

ABOUT PARENT CAFÉS

Parent Cafés are structured, small group conversations that create physically and emotionally safe spaces where parents and caregivers talk about the challenges and victories of raising a family. Parents gather around small tables, set up to feel like a café, and respond to specific question prompts designed to promote mutual support and parent-to-parent learning.

PARENT CAFÉS AND PROTECTIVE FACTORS

Protective factors are characteristics or strengths of individuals, families, communities, or societies that act to mitigate risks and promote positive well-being and healthy development. Across the country programs serving families with children have adopted five protective factors used in **the Strengthening Families framework** as an approach to working with families in a strengths-based way. In cafés, through individual deep self-reflection and peer-to-peer learning, participants explore their strengths, learn about the Protective Factors, and create strategies from their own wisdom and experiences to help strengthen their families. Each site hosting Parent Cafés chooses the Protective Factors that are the focal point of each Café. Parent Café card decks provide discussion questions for each Protective Factor. Participants leave Parent Cafés feeling inspired, energized, and excited to put into practice what they have learned.

DATA HIGHLIGHTS

This first-ever report looks at trends based on data from 2019, 2020, and 2021:

Over the three years 96 partner programs participated in the National Café Evaluation, 869 cafés were hosted and close to 14,000 individuals filled out evaluation forms.

- Over the three years, 96 partner programs participated in the National Café Evaluation, 869 Cafés were hosted, and close to 14,000 individuals filled out evaluation forms.

- Café partners adapted quickly to the COVID-19 pandemic, moving from all in-person Cafés in 2019 to virtual Cafés in 2020 and 2021.

- In 2019, about 33% of those who filled out Café evaluation forms identified as Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC). By 2021, that percentage was over 60%.

- By adapting Café questions to specific parenting populations, Café partners could engage many participants with complex parenting identities. These included foster and adoptive parents, grandparents raising grandchildren, teens or youths with children, and parents of children with special needs.

- Many participants return to Cafés repeatedly, demonstrating the value they place on the Café experience. Over 20% of individuals reported that they had participated in more than six Cafés, and almost 12% of participants reported that they had participated in over 10 Cafés.

- Participants were asked questions to assess the specific Café experience on specific protective factors. Overwhelmingly, participant evaluations reflected growth in protective factors in all three years.

- Participants were asked a series of questions about the Café environment to assess whether the café was a safe space where they could learn from each other, promoting self-reflection among the participants. Again, the responses were overwhelmingly positive for all three years.

- Café participants reported deepening their relationship with the host agency and willingness to step into Café leadership roles.

In this report we will dig deeply into the makeup of the participating agencies, how and when Cafés were delivered, and differences in reported impact across participant type. The takeaway from this level, however, is that Parent Cafés work.

National Parent Café Report

1. CONTEXT

1. The Parent Café model

Parent Cafés are structured, small-group conversations that create physically and emotionally safe spaces where parents and caregivers discuss the challenges and victories of raising a family. Parents gather around small tables, set up to feel like a Café, and respond to specific question prompts designed to promote mutual support and parent-to-parent learning. Each Café table has a trained host who moderates the conversation. Conversations between the participants occur in 20-minute rounds, after which they move to new tables, deepening their conversation and engaging with new parent peers.

Early childhood centers, schools, and family support/resource centers implement Parent Cafés. Child welfare and mental health departments have also adopted the model seeking strength-based methods for engaging parents and communities. Across the country and around the world, thousands of programs are utilizing cafés. Some have participated in a Be Strong Families training or Café experience and are adapting the model to their environments. Others use Be Strong Families materials and tools but without a formal connection to us. Finally, Be Strong Families and our certified training partners provide training for Café host teams and ongoing technical assistance to ensure that groups hosting Cafés have everything they need for a successful effort. These organizations ensure that the fidelity of the model is maintained.

2. The Café Evaluation Project

In 2019, Be Strong Families began the Parent Café Evaluation Project, a partnership between Be Strong Families and agencies implementing Cafés nationwide. Be Strong Families took on creating a consistent set of Café evaluation tools and a process for storing and analyzing data.

Through the Parent Café Evaluation Project, we wanted to gather and understand the data from those implementing Parent Cafés with the highest level of fidelity. The invited and participating programs are supported and connected to Be Strong Families or one of its certified training partners.

Individual agencies committed to collecting participant data from the Cafés they implemented. These data are available to the individual partner agencies to help them monitor their Café efforts and integrated into a national database where they are aggregated and analyzed to understand

- who participates in Cafés, and

- whether cafés are achieving their expected short-term outcomes reflected in the **Parent Café logic model.**

As part of the Parent Café fidelity model, Café hosts are trained to guide participants in completing the feedback form at the end of every Café. In 2020, with the introduction of online Parent Cafés, participants submitted their feedback data directly through the survey website. (For in-person events, Café hosts submit the responses on paper copies of the Parent Café feedback Form to Be Strong Families electronically.)

As we aggregate more data over time, we expect to be able to perform more complex analyses, which can help tease out more information about how differences in Café implementation or participants affect short-term outcomes.

3. The Café Feedback Form

The Café Evaluation instrument is an anonymous self-report tool in English and Spanish. It gathers participants' feedback through a user-friendly survey that extends the reflective learning experience of the Parent Café. The questions on the survey were formulated based on the Parent Café logic model developed in consultation with Be Strong Families staff, partner agencies, and our evaluation and measurement advisors. Our tools measure the short-term outcomes that happen during and immediately after the Café as the foundation for more long-term outcomes that are best measured with other tools.

Research is underway for Parent Cafés to move toward designation as an evidence-based practice. In partnership with research partners in two states (Washington, DC, and California), we use validated tools to gather data on intermediate and longer-term impacts on participants to augment data collected through our Parent Café Feedback Form.

II. AGENCIES PARTICIPATING

Over the three years, 96 partner programs participated in the National Café Evaluation, 869 Cafés were hosted, and close to 14,000 individuals filled out evaluation forms.

** Map showing the location of participating agencies across the country and some discussion of program makeup based on the map—how widely spread across the country, urban versus rural, clustering with certified training partners, etc.

- Although the number of participating agencies dropped during the pandemic, the move to virtual Cafés meant that those agencies that did participate reached more individuals. As we leave the pandemic, some Cafés will return to occurring in person, and some will be held online. This should allow us to explore the differences in participant experience across the two models.

- The three-year total of 96 agencies reflects the unduplicated count of agencies, meaning that an agency that participated over all three years would only be counted once.

	2019	2020	2021	3-Yr Totals
Number of Hosting Agencies	55	46	74	96
Total number of cafés	153	245	471	869
Café Participants Participating in the Evaluation[1]	3,539	4,958	5,480	13,977
Average number of individuals reached per hosting agency	64	108	74	246

Data are based on the number of agencies that signed up and completed and provided data for at least one Café. Eleven agencies were certified training partners. These agencies hosted Cafés and were certified to provide training and support to other implementing agencies on Café implementation. Seventy-six agencies signed up to participate but submitted no evaluation data for Cafés.

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1   We are reporting only on those individuals who both attended a café and filled an evaluation. Many more cafés were hosted that were not part of our evaluation and, within the evaluation, some individuals participated who did not complete evaluations.

III. TYPE OF CAFÉ EXPERIENCE

We asked some basic questions to learn more about the type of Cafés participants were engaging. The highlights in our data include the following:

- **Adapting to the pandemic by moving to a virtual experience:** When we started the National Café Evaluation project, the world was unaware of COVID-19 and how it would affect our lives. When stay-at-home orders took effect in 2020, many participating Parent Café Partner Agencies, previously hosting in-person Cafés, continued delivering Cafés. Throughout the pandemic, Café participation moved from in-person to almost entirely virtual. Total participation fell in 2020 as programs adapted. By 2021, participation bounced back and significantly increased—though almost all Cafés were virtual. Future participation will reflect both online and in-person participation.

- **Growing participation in Spanish language Cafés:** the number of individuals participating in Spanish language Cafés increased by six-fold over the three years, representing over 12% of participants in 2021.

PARTICIPANT BY CAFÉ TYPE
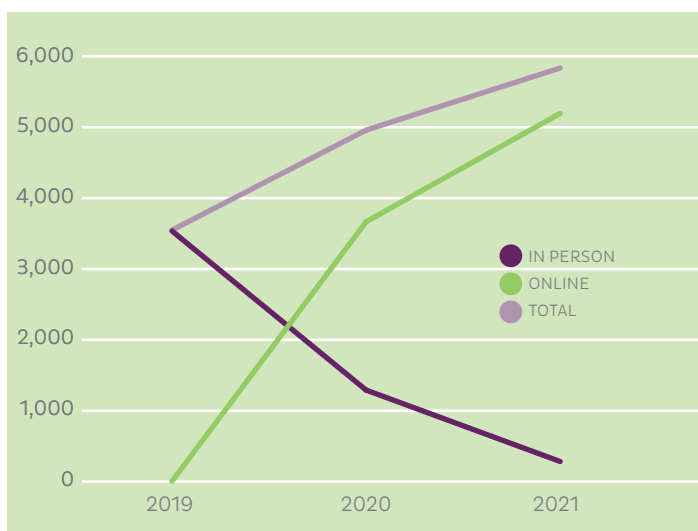
SPANISH LANGUAGE CAFÉ PARTICIPANTS
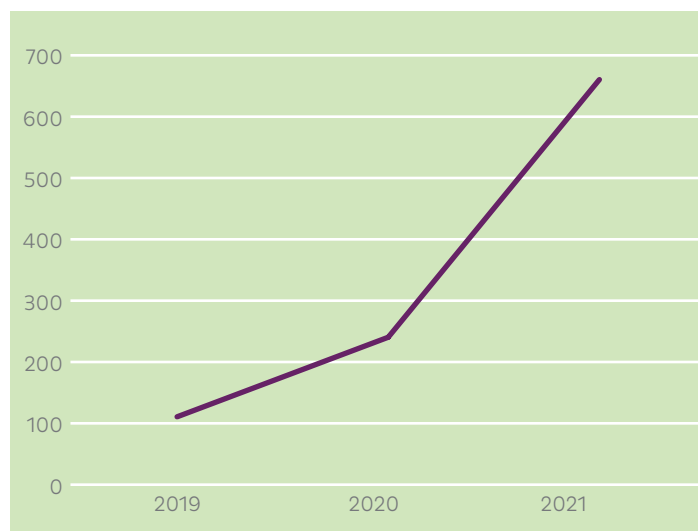
	2019	2020	2021	3-Yr Totals
Café participants	**N = 3,539**	**N = 4958**	**N = 5,480**	**N = 13,977**
Online	NA	3,669 (74.0%)	5,201 (94.9%)	8,870 (63.4%)
In-person	3,539 (100%)	1,289 (25.9%)	279 (5.0%)	5,107 (36.5%)
Language				
English	3,429 (96.8%)	4,718 (95.1%)	4,819 (87.9%)	12,966 (92.7%)
Spanish	110 (3.1%)	240 (4.8%)	661 (12.0%)	1,011 (7.2%)

IV. INDIVIDUALS PARTICIPATING

We looked at three demographic factors for those participating race, gender, and age. Some takeaways from this data include:

- Café participants were overwhelmingly female. The underrepresentation of males is consistent with what is seen across parenting and child and family programs.[2]

- A rapidly growing proportion of BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and People of Color) participants. Overall, about half of all participants over the three years identified as BIPOC.[3] Interestingly, the proportion of participants that were BIPOC grew over time with the greatest growth being for Hispanic/Latino participants that grew from just over 10% to almost a third of participants. This partially reflects a strong growth in the number of Spanish Language Café's which grew from just over 100 participants to close to 700 participants over the three years.

- Over the three years over 75% of participants were over 30.

	2019	2020	2021	3-Yr Totals
Café Participants Participating in the Evaluation	**3,539**	**4,958**	**N = 5,480**	**N = 13,977**
Race of Participants	**N = 3,107**	**N = 3,519**	**N = 4,631**	**N = 11,864**
Caucasian/White	2,060 (64.3%)	2,096 (50.8%)	1,823 (39.4%)	5,979 (50.3%)
Hispanic/Latino	307 (10.1%)	538 (13.0%)	1,354 (29.2%)	2,199 (18.5%)
African- American/Black	492 (15.8%)	1,110 (26.9%)	1,025 (22.1%)	2,627 (22.1%)
Multiracial	55 (0.1%)	117 (2.8%)	187 (4.0%)	359 (3.0%)
Asian/Pacific Islander	22 (0.7%)	130 (3.1%)	86 (1.9%)	238 (2.0%)
Native American/Alaska Native	30 (9.9%)	21 (0.5%)	54 (1.2%)	105 (0.8%)
Other	87 (2.8%)	56 (1.3%)	102 (2.0%)	245 (2.06%)
Gender of Participants	**N = 3,353**	**N = 4,089**	**N = 4,902**	**N = 12,769**
Female	2,503 (74.6%)	3,835 (84.5%)	4,164 (84.9%)	10,502 (82.2%)
Male	823 (24.5%)	670 (14.8%)	675 (13.8%)	2,168 (17.0%)
Other	27 (0.8%)	34 (0.7%)	63 (0.8%)	124 (1.0%)
Age of Participants	**N = 3,338**	**N = 1,847**	**N = 4,870**	**N = 12,577**
21 or younger	164 (4.9%)	150 (3.3%)	110 (2.3%)	424 (3.3%)
22–30	714 (21.3%)	932 (20.5%)	1,024 (18.7%)	2,670 (20.9%)
31–54	1,774 (53.1%)	2,827 (62.1%)	3,124 (57.0%)	7,725 (60.6%)
55 or older	686 (20.5%)	640 (34.7%)	612 (11.2%)	1,938 (15.2%)

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2   https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4002003/#R44

3   2021 US Census data has the percent of the US population that self-identifies as White alone and not Hispanic or Latino at 59.3%
https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/US/PST045221

V. PARTICIPATION OVER TIME

Large numbers of participants return to Cafés over and over, demonstrating the value they place on the Café experience. Over 20% of individuals reported that they had participated in more than six Cafés, and almost 12% of participants reported that they had participated in more than 10 Cafés.

	2019	2020	2021	3-Yr Totals
Number of Cafés Attended	**N = 3,348**	**N = 4,694**	**N = 4,916**	**N = 12,958**
First Café	1,326 (39.6%)	2,116 (45.1%)	2,112 (42.9%)	5,554 (42.8%)
2–5	1,207 (36.1%)	1,647 (35.1%)	1,790 (36.4%)	4,644 (35.8%)
6–10	328 (9.8%)	397 (8.5%)	489 (9.9%)	1,214 (9.3%)
10+	487 (14.5%)	534 (11.4%)	525 (10.6%)	1,546 (11.9%)

NUMBER OF CAFÉS ATTENDED (TOTAL)

- FIRST CAFÉ: 5,554 (42.8%)
- 2–5: 4,644 (35.8%)
- 6–10: 1,214 (9.3%)
- 10+: 1,546 (11.9%)
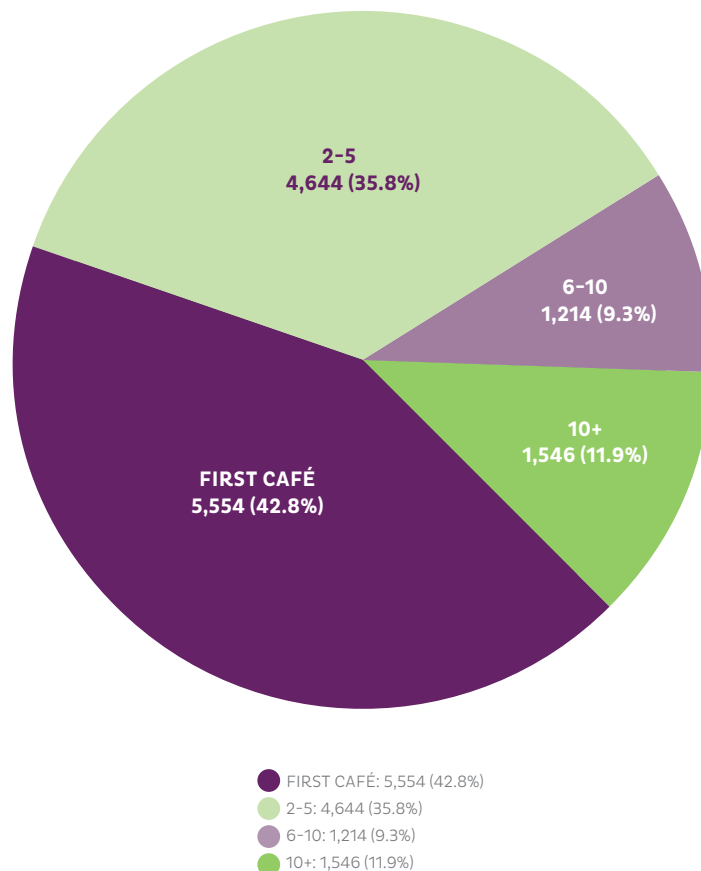
VI. PARENTING STATUS

As expected, over 90% of participants were parents. Many individuals who identified as parents reported aligning with one or more complex parenting identities, reflecting the fact that Cafés are often targeted towards groups that face parenting challenges as a way of providing peer-based support and guidance. We view the ability to reach individuals with these complex parenting identities as a success of our efforts.
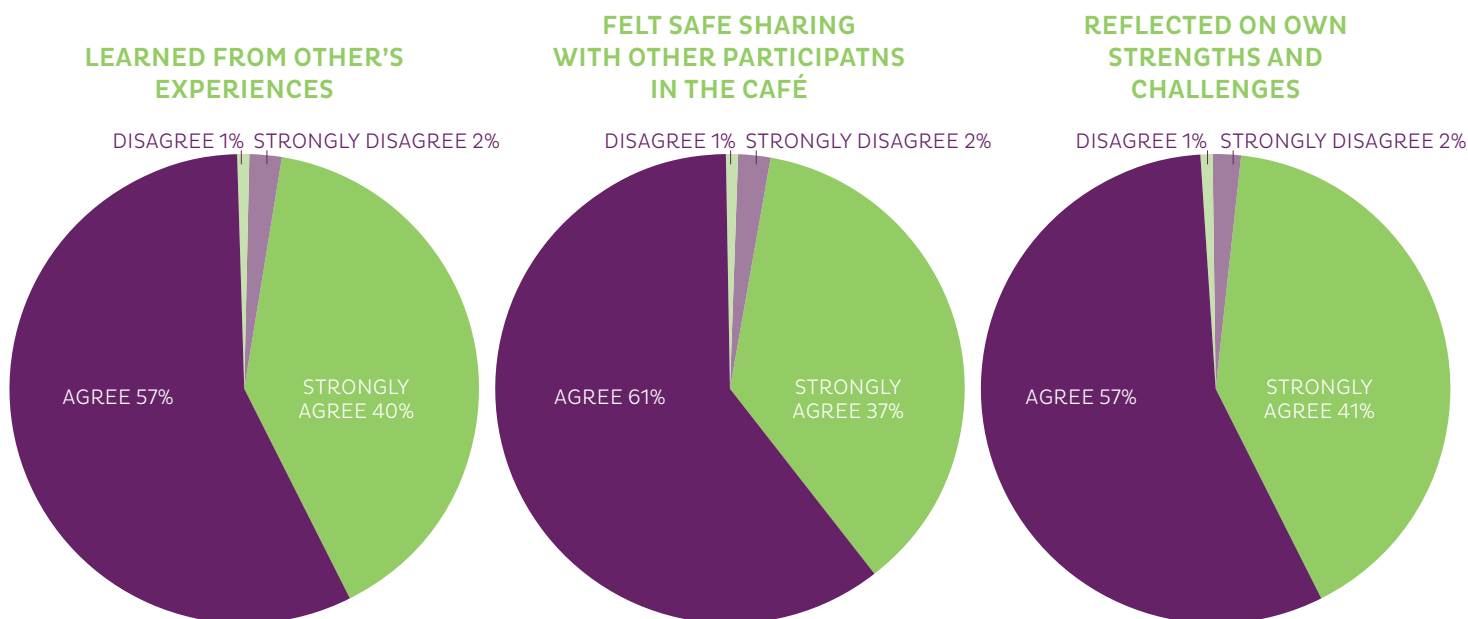
	2019	2020	2021	3-Yr Totals
Parenting	**N = 3,367**	**N = 4,585**	**N = 4,904**	**N = 12,856**
Yes	3,062 (91.0%)	3,946 (86.1%)	4,278 (87.2%)	11,286 (87.8%)
No	305 (9.0%)	639 (13.9%)	626 (12.8%)	1,570 (12.2%)
Complex Parenting Identity[4]				
Foster P arent	704 (23.0%)	894 (22.7%)	629 (14.7%)	2,227 (21.4%)
Adoptive Parent	264 (8.6%)	430 (10.9%)	200 (4.7%)	894 (8.6%)
Grandparent Raising Grandchildren	780 (25.5%)	505 (12.8%)	237 (5.5%)	1,522 (14.6%)
Teen/Youth with a Child	708 (23.1%)	625 (15.8%)	550 (12.9%)	1,883 (18.1%)
Parent of Child with Special Needs	567 (18.5%)	591 (15.0%)	786 (18.4%)	1,944 (18.7%)
Parent of an LGBTQ+ Child	84 (2.7%)	181 (4.6%)	204 (4.8%)	469 (4.5%)
LGBTQ+ Parent	42 (1.4%)	162 (4.1%)	83 (1.9%)	287 (2.7%)
Other	268 (8.8%)	516 (13.1%)	351 (8.2%)	1,135 (10.9%)
Age of Child[5]				
0–4	953 (31.1%)	1,639 (41.5%)	1,838 (43.0%)	4,430 (39.3%)
5–12	989 (32.3%)	1,987 (50.4%)	2,154 (50.4%)	5,130 (45.5%)
13–17	573 (29.1%)	1,199 (30.4%)	1,275 (29.8%)	3,047 (27.0%)
18+	567 (28.8%)	1,276 (32.3%)	1,338 (31.3%)	3,181 (28.2%)

4   Note: Parents can hold multiple parenting identities. Percentages on this item should total over 100%.

5   Note that many parents have multiple children. Percentages of parents with children in each age group should total over 100%.

VII. LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

The Café's questions and experiences are designed to promote individual deep self-reflection and peer-to-peer learning in a safe environment. We formulated three evaluation questions to assess this aspect with participants.

LEARNED FROM OTHER'S EXPERIENCES

DISAGREE 1% STRONGLY DISAGREE 2%

AGREE 57%

STRONGLY AGREE 40%

FELT SAFE SHARING WITH OTHER PARTICIPATNS IN THE CAFÉ

DISAGREE 1% STRONGLY DISAGREE 2%

AGREE 61%

STRONGLY AGREE 37%

REFLECTED ON OWN STRENGTHS AND CHALLENGES

DISAGREE 1% STRONGLY DISAGREE 2%

AGREE 57%

STRONGLY AGREE 41%

	2019	2020	2021	3-Yr Totals
Learned from others' experiences				
Weighted Average[6]	3.61	3.28	3.25	3.35
Percent Agreeing	97.9%	97.5%	96.6%	97.2%
Reflected on own strengths and challenges				
Weighted Average	3.58	3.31	3.27	3.36
Percent Agreeing	98.1%	97.4%	96.8%	97.3%
Felt safe sharing in the Café environment				
Weighted Average	3.63	3.21	3.18	3.31
Percent Agreeing	96.9%	97.6%	96.8%	97.1%

6   Weighted average is based on a four-point scale with 4 equaling strongly agreed

VIII. IMPACT ON PROTECTIVE FACTORS

As stated in our introduction, Parent Cafés were originally created as a peer-based resource to support the development of parental protective factors, in line with the Strengthening Families Initiative. Consequently, the Café evaluation tool includes distinct questions tailored to correspond with each protective factor. Once more, participants' self-reported experiences consistently indicated agreement with the statements related to each protective factor.

	2019	2020	2021	3-Yr Totals
I learned a new way to handle stress or challenges in my life. (Resilience)				
Weighted Average	3.42	3.33	3.31	3.35
% Agreeing	94.0%	91.4%	91.5%	92.1%
I learned something that will help me deal positively with a challenge I'm currently having with my child or a child in my life. (knowledge of parenting)				
Weighted Average	3.42	3.33	3.31	3.35
% Agreeing	94.0%	91.4%	91.5%	92.1%
I met a person (or people) I plan to stay in touch with. (Social Connections)				
Weighted Average	3.23	3.24	3.23	3.23
% Agreeing	85.7%	80.9%	81.7%	82.5%
As a result of my Café experience, I feel more comfortable going to a professional or seeking community resources for help. (Concrete Support)				
Weighted Average	3.39	3.34	3.32	3.3
% Agreeing	92.0%	91.2%	91.9%	91.7%
I practiced ways to talk with others that will improve my relationships (Social-emotional Competence)				
Weighted Average	3.47	3.36	3.33	3.4
% Agreeing				
I learned that I can use the Protective Factors to keep my family strong.				
Weighted Average	3.55	3.35	3.32	3.4
% Agreeing	98.1%	96.3%	95.9%	96.6%

IX. DEEPENED RELATIONSHIP WITH HOST AGENCY

The Be Strong Families Café model offers a leadership pathway for parents and community members to collaborate with agency staff, reweaving a relationship of trust among community members and between community members and host organizations. We asked two evaluation questions to assess this part of the theory of change.

	2019	2020	2021	3-Yr Totals
As a result of my Café experience, I want to get more involved with the host agency.				
Weighted Average	3.29	3.31	3.32	3.31
% Agreeing	87.7%	89.3%	90.1%	89.2%
I see myself being willing and able to be part of a Parent Café team.				
Weighted Average	3.33	3.26	3.32	3.30
% Agreeing	87.0%	89.1%	90.5%	89.1%

Once more, the majority of participants concurred with both questions.

X. CONCLUSION

In general, Parent Cafés has successfully achieved the goals that were set out for them:

• Building participant protective factors

• Creating safe spaces for participants for self-reflection and mutual learning among participants

• Enhancing the feeling of connection to host agencies

• Developing a cadre of leaders who are comfortable taking on the role of Café hosts

Furthermore, we see these results across a broad diversity of parents, including a high proportion of BIPOC parents and large percentages of parents with complex parenting identities. We also see consistency in the results, even as programs made a radical shift from in-person to virtual Café hosting. Finally, a participant's engagement in Café's is demonstrated by the large number of individuals returning to participate in multiple Cafés over time.