

Family Resource Centre Program Review

Summary Report

Prepared for:

Department of Education

Prepared by:

Goss Gilroy Inc.
Management Consultants
401 Empire Avenue
St. John's, NL A1E 1W6
Tel: (709) 754-2065
Email: ggi@ggi.ca

June 2024

Contents

1.0 Introduction	1
2.0 Overview of Approach.....	1
3.0 Profile of the FRCs.....	1
3.1 Philosophical Framework.....	2
4.0 Relevance - Findings and Recommendations.....	3
5.0 Efficiency - Findings and Recommendations	7
5.1 Administrative Systems and Organizational Structures	7
5.2 Reporting and Accountability	11
5.3 FRC Funding Model	15
5.4 FRC Governance	17
5.5 Partnerships	21
5.6 NLFRP	22
5.7 Relationship Between EDU and FRCs	23
5.8 The FRCs Place on the Early Learning and Child Care Continuum.....	25
6.0 Effectiveness - Findings and Recommendations.....	25
6.1 Potential Improvements to the FRC Model	25
6.2 FRC Locations and Expansion.....	26
6.3 Satisfaction with the FRCs.....	27
7.0 Conclusion	27

1.0 Introduction

Goss Gilroy Inc. (GGI) was engaged by the Department of Education (EDU), Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, to conduct a review of the Family Resource Centre (FRC) Program. The review examines best practices, governance models, reporting and evaluation systems, current/future resource requirements and the placement of FRCs within the broader early learning and child care continuum.

2.0 Overview of Approach

The review was informed by the following methodologies. A range of stakeholders were consulted through interviews and surveys including: parents/caregivers/foster parents¹ /pregnant moms, Board Members, FRC Executive Directors (EDs) and staff, FRC partner organizations and government representatives.



Document Review



Effective Practices Review



Jurisdictional Review



966 Surveys



44 Key Informant Interviews



Financial Review



FRC Governance, HR and Administrative Template

3.0 Profile of the FRCs

The first FRC in the province was established in St. John's in the early 1990s - funded under the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC). In 1995, PHAC developed funding streams directly in response to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. In consultation with the Government of NL, it was determined that funds would be used to support an FRC model in the province. At that time, PHAC funding supported

¹ For the purposes of this report, any references to 'parents' is understood to include 'parents/caregivers/foster parents'.

establishment of nine FRC sites – three in Western Newfoundland, three in Central and three in Eastern. Sites were determined based on applications received from interested communities citing a need. It did not, however, represent coverage across the province.

A few years later, the province launched the Healthy Baby Club (HBC). Established under PHAC’s Canada Prenatal Nutrition Program funding stream, HBCs were attached to FRC sites. A Joint Management Committee made up of Federal and Provincial representatives was created and continues to provide oversight to such funds today. Two PHAC staff in the province also provide support to these sites including conducting site visits.

Based on the success of the nine PHAC-funded sites, the Government of NL established its own funding stream to establish FRCs in all regions of the province. While they have different funding sources, both federally and provincially funded sites form the provincial FRC Program.

Currently, there are 32 FRCs in the province, with approximately 112 active satellite sites at the time of the review.

3.1 PHILOSOPHICAL FRAMEWORK

Guiding Principles and Values

Guiding principles provide all stakeholders with a snapshot of what an organization believes, and values frame how an organization approaches its work. Given all FRCs have the same intent, and are focused on the same outcomes, their guiding principles and values should not differ.

Recommendation 1: It is recommended that a core set of principles be developed for all FRCs. The starting point should be FRP Canada’s guiding principles and the Principles of Family Support Practice (from the 2021 Standards of Quality for Family Strengthening and Support, which is discussed in Section 6.0), as it is easier to work from established lists. Guiding principles provided by the Child Care Coordinating Council of North Country Inc. (New York) also could be reviewed.

As well, core values should be developed which reflect the FRCs’ focus, and their supportive and welcoming nature – e.g., inclusive/accessible, strengths-based, community-based, collaborative, flexible. Examples are available from the South Shore

Family Resource Association's (Nova Scotia) and Family Dynamics's (Manitoba) jurisdictional reports.

Development of principles and values should be led by the FRCs (e.g., a representative Committee or the Newfoundland and Labrador Association of Family Resource Programs [NLFRP]), with support from EDU, as needed. (Of note, recommendations for supporting NLFRP's role, structure and potential are discussed in Section 5.6.)

Vision, Mandate and Mission

A vision statement is forward looking; it provides an organization with a shared understanding of what they ultimately want to achieve and a sense of direction for moving forward. A mandate should set out what an organization is required to do based on contractual obligations, which in the case of the FRCs would be the FRC Contribution Agreements with EDU. Mission statements should provide an overview of why an organization exists/its purpose, and explain its values, culture and fundamental goal.

It is evident, based on the current Review, that FRCs' visions, mandates and mission statements vary significantly across sites.

Recommendation 2: It is recommended that FRCs have the same vision statement as they are all focused on achieving the same ultimate outcome. The FRCs should develop the vision statement in collaboration with EDU as this must be a shared view. Additionally, as the FRCs have a mandate from government, it is recommended that there be a single mandate statement for all FRCs and that this be stated in Schedule B of their Agreements. FRC mission statements can vary but must be appropriately written.

4.0 Relevance - Findings and Recommendations

4.1 PROGRAMMING AND TARGET GROUPS

Programming

Some FRCs identified that their key programs are 'off-the-shelf' (standardized) programs (for example, Nobody's Perfect and Handle with Care, Baby and Me, Mother Goose, and Home again – Gone again). However, upon review, there is wide variation in the extent

to which sites are delivering this type of programming. The majority of FRCs cited that most of their programming was developed in-house. EDU identified value in continuing to offer standardized, evidence-based programming; however, it will be important that FRCs are appropriately supported to do so.

Activities are also delivered under the HBC Program, including weekly sessions (e.g., peer support and information/education), support from Public Health Nurses (PHNs) and/or Resource Mothers, supplements, breastfeeding awareness and support, focus on healthy eating/nutrition/cooking, home visits, clothing exchange, and/or referrals to other resources, as needed.

Recommendation 3: It is recommended that EDU identify which, if any, standardized programs should become a province-wide offering as well as the needed resources in terms of funding and training.

Specific to programs developed in-house, EDU should implement a process to assess whether such programs are developed and implemented in line with effective practices and within the context of any standards of practice adopted for the FRCs. Regional Child Care Consultants could play a key role in such an assessment, given their experience in early learning and child development.

Frequency of programming

As set out in Contribution Agreements, FRCs are required to provide three types of programs (parent-child interactive, parent-focused and community/family support). However, there is wide variation in the frequency that each type is offered. For example, some survey respondents spoke to the need to ensure that parent programs respond to diverse circumstances (e.g., parents who work Monday-Friday and the need for weekend and evening options).

Program types are also not defined in the Contribution Agreements; therefore, FRCs could be reporting their types of programming differently. As such, more guidance is needed as to whether one program type carries more weight than another. It will be important for EDU to consider whether they wish to be more prescriptive in identifying where the primary program focus should be, ensuring that any such direction would not conflict with the existing flexibility to tailor programming to the unique needs of each FRC's target population.

Recommendation 4: The Contribution Agreements should clearly articulate the three types of programs required and provide definitions and examples of each to ensure there is a clear understanding of programming objectives. It will be important for EDU to determine whether it wishes to prescribe that a certain percentage of programming would be required per week.

It is strongly recommended that FRCs also establish regular and ongoing parent programs. In addition to what may be offered during the day, evening and weekend time slots must be available, to ensure they are open and responsive to the needs of working parents. The frequency of such programming would be contingent on demand and having sufficient staff resources to open at those times.

All FRC staff should have a set portion of time each week dedicated to planning (e.g., 2-3 hours a week).

Target Group

FRC's target group includes families with pregnant moms and/or who those who have children ages 0-6 years; a few FRCs families with older children (0-11 or 0-12 years). Traditionally, the target groups are those needing additional support (e.g., single parents, families needing extra support in navigating pregnancy or parenthood; families who feel isolated - culturally, geographically, and/or financially).

There was consensus that over the years, in particular since the COVID-19 pandemic, there have been significant shifts in those accessing the FRCS. Changes include shifting demographics, more complex needs among parents, increased poverty, more children presenting with exceptionalities, changes in family dynamics and an increased newcomer population.

There is evidence that the FRCs, are responding in a positive way to the needs of their target groups, and more generally to any family which is struggling with pregnancy or parenthood or related issues, regardless of economic status or circumstances. However, it is equally clear that there are many and varied barriers impacting the degree to which families can access programs and services (e.g., transportation, confidence, isolation), as well as wide variation in the extent that each individual FRC is able to meet the needs of families – depending on, for example, the regularity of needs assessments, funding, staff training, and site capacity.

For example, about half the HBCs are open to all pregnant moms in the community/region. Others reported that their program is open to all women, but some prioritize women living on low income; take into account whether services are otherwise available in the area; and/or only provide supplements to those living on low income.

In relation to needs assessments referenced above, some FRCs noted that they identify needs through formal processes (e.g., parent surveys, focus groups, program reviews/evaluations, strategic planning) and adjust their programming accordingly, while others adapt their offerings based on more informal feedback and results.

It is stated in Schedule B of the Contribution Agreements that 'Centre programming must reflect the best interests of children, parents and all stakeholders' and 'be universally available to all people wishing to take part in family programming'. It also is noted in Schedule B that to ensure accessibility, 'this may include targeting vulnerable families by providing services in communities with demonstrated need, offering programs for families at risk and collaborating with service providers who work with vulnerable families.'

An important consideration in today's complex and diverse world, and in very tough economic times, is who constitutes a 'vulnerable' and/or 'at-risk' family. The number of factors which contribute to such a definition are vast – e.g., economic status, violence in the home, mental health and addictions, chronic illness, disability, newcomer status, and/or literacy levels. Who the FRCs target within the continuum of families, and where they are located, must be determined by regular needs assessments, with changes dictated as needs evolve.

Recommendation 5: It is recommended that FRCs be mandated to undertake regular and formal needs assessments (e.g., every three years) to ensure they have an up-to-date profile of who is in their area/region and their related needs. This supports effective planning in all regards – e.g., staffing, programming, and funding. EDU should provide training and/or a template to support such processes. Needs assessments would be submitted to EDU upon completion. NLFRP could potentially be tasked with developing a template based on the review of existing FRC needs assessments.

5.0 Efficiency - Findings and Recommendations

5.1 ADMINISTRATIVE SYSTEMS AND ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURES

Roles and Responsibilities

Understanding of, and agreement on, roles and responsibilities is critical to employee engagement, performance management and organizational effectiveness. To accurately assess and evaluate an employee's performance, both the employee and employer must have a clear understanding of the expectations for the role. The evidence would imply that while staff feel clear on their roles, this may not always be based on current, updated job descriptions, but rather emanate from simply carrying out the same role for a period of time.

There is no consistency in FRC staff titles across sites. Examples of staff who appear to be doing the same roles include - Family Resource Facilitator, Family Resource Worker, Program Coordinator/Facilitator, and Resource Mother, Resource Mother/Facilitator, HBC Facilitator.

The review concluded that, similarly, FRC lead staff can be referred to by different titles – the majority are referred to as EDs, with a few being titled Coordinators or Program Managers.

Recommendation 6: Given FRCs will have the same mandate, job titles should be standardized across FRCs, when staff are undertaking the same role/duties. In particular, we recommend that where possible, the lead staff be termed the ED.

FRC Staff Training and Qualifications

FRC management and staff likely have a myriad of backgrounds and experiences – both formal and informal, which they bring to their positions. It is important to reflect on the fact that some FRCs have been in place for 20+ years, with diverse staff drawn from local communities. Processes for hiring may have changed significantly during that period, in particular in relation to whether formal education was required.

It also is understood that some EDs moved into their positions arising from their knowledge and expertise in community development, and/or their years of working in a centre, which bring considerable value from a program delivery, relationship building

and partnership development perspective. However, a deficit for some is in relation to the key administrative and management skills which are equally critical for ensuring efficient and effective operations.

There is need to bring some level of consistency to the background, experience and/or expertise which will be required for each FRC ED and staff position, and for the job descriptions and training needed to ensure management and staff have the core competencies required to respond to the evolving nature of their target groups.

Required staff structures (number of positions, areas of focus) would flow from the results of the FRC needs assessments, ensuring there is sufficient flexibility within such a structure to respond to emerging and evolving needs.

Recommendation 7: It is recommended that EDU and the FRCs (e.g., a committee of FRCs; NLFRP) review a representative sample of existing job descriptions for EDs and staff to identify potential core competencies and responsibilities for each role. The latter would form the basis of job descriptions to be employed by all FRCs, with options to add duties which ensure positions are responsive to the unique needs of their target groups.

Of note, it will be important that existing staff are not negatively impacted by adoption of core competencies. Rather, they should be provided opportunities to demonstrate which competencies they have and to upskill in areas of deficit.

It is recommended that FRCs implement training plans, based on having to respond to local/regional needs, staff performance reviews and organizations' strategic plans. Training plans should ensure sites have the appropriate funds and time dedicated to staff training priorities.

Performance Reviews

The large majority of FRCs indicate having a formal process for staff performance reviews, but about half lack formal documents to support the process, and some undertake a more informal process in instances where staff are longer-term, and/or they address issues as they arise. Annual ED performance reviews are conducted for approximately half the FRC sites.

A well-developed performance planning and review process is designed to provide opportunities for all involved to take an in-depth look at past and current performance and to set new goals and objectives for the coming year. In addition to the annual or bi-annual performance review meeting, a performance management process should include ways for supervisors to collect data on performance over time. This includes providing timely feedback on positive and negative aspects of performance and maintaining documentation to recap specific examples in the formal performance review.

Recommendation 8: It is recommended that all FRCs move to a formal and consistent annual performance review process. This would include having a self-assessment form for staff, a performance review form for EDs (relevant forms could be standardized across FRCs), a one-on-one meeting between staff and their ED, and development of goals for the upcoming years. A focus on ensuring ongoing and timely feedback during the year is also recommended.

It is strongly recommended that a proper and formal annual performance review process be instituted for the EDs as well. While a Board/Chair may be satisfied with the performance of an ED, it is important that time be dedicated to providing regular and consistent feedback, both to encourage continued performance and as recognition of the positive work of the ED.

Policies

A comprehensive set of policies is critical for any organization as this guides all aspects of their operation, provides a clear framework within which authority is exercised by their Board and management, and details accountabilities as well as consequences if policies are contravened. It is positive to see that FRCs have a focus on policies, e.g., having a handbook and approach to policy reviews. However, there are policy gaps and variations as to when and how policies are developed and reviewed.

Recommendation 9: It is recommended that a set of core policies be developed for the FRCs, both for operations and Board governance. As needed, procedures could vary to respond to unique circumstances. Shared policies provide a consistent framework within which FRCs can operate.

This process is not without challenges, including when considering key personnel policies related to, for example, leave and sick days, which vary across FRCs and may be longstanding practice. FRC EDs will have to be integrally involved in the review as consensus will be needed on resulting policies. It is understood that EDU will lead this process, in collaboration with the FRCs.

It is recommended that on completion of the policy manual, it be available in print and online, so it is readily available to staff. It should be initially reviewed with all EDs and subsequently reviewed with all FRC staff, and then become a component of onboarding new staff. This will ensure a shared understanding of the intent of these policies and reinforce the importance of consistent application. FRC staff should also be required to sign a form acknowledging that they have reviewed and understand the contents of the policy manual applicable to them.

It is strongly recommended that the policy manual include a Fit for Work (drug and alcohol) policy governing the acceptable use of prescription drugs and recreational drugs in their workplace. This was identified as a gap for some FRCs and has been of particular concern since cannabis was legalized in 2019. Additionally, a formal complaint process related to harassment and violence should be developed as soon as possible. This process is required under legislation as part of the WorkplaceNL harassment and violence requirements, effective January 2020.

It is also recommended that NLFRP establish a process of annually reviewing policies and ensuring consistency in the review. The review should consider any new policies required under provincial legislation as well as any desired changes in existing policy over time. This process would not require a full review every year; rather, specific policies would be reviewed each year on a rotational basis so that a full review is completed every 2-3 years. The review process would seek feedback from FRC EDs as needed.

Strategic Planning

The majority of FRCs reported undertaking regular strategic planning for their overall organization, while others do so sporadically. The approach to strategic planning also varied – e.g., formally with an external consultant and/or with Board and staff; informally at staff meetings; individually by the ED.

A non-profit Board's role in strategic planning is a responsibility that falls under its fiduciary duties. A strategic plan also informs an organization's annual workplans. Having clarity of vision, delineated values, a focused mandate, and relevant and attainable strategic directions, provide an organization a road map for success.

Recommendation 10: It is recommended that FRC Boards regularly engage in strategic planning, optimally creating three-year frameworks for action. Critical elements of a strategic planning session would include, for example - an environmental scan and/or a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis, identification of strategic directions and short- and long-term goals, indicators of success, and a process for monitoring and accountability.

5.2 REPORTING AND ACCOUNTABILITY

FRCs are required to submit a number of reports to EDU each year. Some required reporting components, such as quarterly cashflow reports and statistics, are outlined in the Provincial Contribution Agreements.

Workplan

Every organization needs a well-developed and well-articulated workplan, with overarching goals/strategic directions, stated objectives, and indicators of success to enable outcome reporting. Currently, there is no standardized format for FRC workplans, resulting in a high degree of variability in terms of the identified goals and the level of information provided; as well as in how workplans are developed.

Annual Report

A detailed annual report is required from each FRC as part of the budget approval process. Much of the information reported, however, is not directly related to the FRCs' achievement of goals and objectives and related outcomes. Some information currently reported in the annual reports should instead be reported in a workplan. While there is a "template" for presentation of the annual reports, there remains considerable variation in what is reported.

As currently structured, FRC annual reports and workplans are generally of little value to the authors or government, in particular in guiding an FRC's funding allocation.

Recommendation 11:

Workplan

It is recommended that EDU develop an effective FRC workplan template so as to facilitate more strategic yearly planning and to align with relevant internal policies and plans. At a minimum, workplans would set out clear goals and objectives, as well as indicators for success, and expected outcomes. Non-profit organizations typically have goals relating to operations/programming, HR (e.g., staff/Board capacity), Administrative/Financial, Communication/Awareness Raising, and/or partnerships.

While it is not expected that FRCs operating in different contexts would have the same goals, it will be important that their collective leadership know how to draft effective goals and objectives, with measurable outcomes. It is recommended that there be a training session held with the FRCs on developing effective workplans.

Annual Report

It is recommended that a clear annual report template be developed which would mirror the workplan to some degree – e.g., requiring detailed accounting of activities undertaken, achievement of goals and objectives and expected outcomes, and reporting on data (as set out in the Contribution Agreement).

There should be a section in the annual report that allows for reflection on key successes, as well as challenges in relation to, for example, program delivery, participant engagement, HR, governance, and solutions identified, or assistance needed. Should EDU identify concerns about specific issues, these could be added to the reporting template, as needed.

Other areas currently included in annual reports can be reported or identified elsewhere. For example:

- Some areas discussed in the current annual report should instead be enshrined in policy – e.g., volunteer recruitment and onboarding.
- HR issues such as staffing are internal to each FRC and do not need to be included in an annual report. As a component of each FRC's planning, they identify their own staffing complement based on the programs to be delivered, the number of satellite sites, and demand, within the context of funds available.

Regular discussions with the Regional Child Care Consultants and/or Boards would allow for strategizing around significant HR issues.

Data

Statistics are gathered from all FRC sites on a quarterly basis, using a standardized form. However, sites are not necessarily interpreting and reporting the data in the same way. HBC statistics are also gathered (e.g., number of births, birth weights, and the number of participants taking supplements).

While many FRCs see value in data collection, the current process is ineffective given the many inconsistencies, rendering the data unreliable and constraining the extent to which it can be used to inform current decision-making.

Recommendation 12: It is recommended that EDU develop a robust data framework for the FRC Program. With clearly defined data points and an effective mechanism for reporting, data can play an integral role in supporting evidence-based decision-making at the site and provincial levels, as well as informing funding requirements.

The key elements of a sound data system are reliability and validity. Reliability refers to the consistency of data, over time and across staff and FRCs. Validity refers to accurately capturing what you intended to capture. While it is anticipated that there will be some variation in what each FRC may want to collect to inform their own work, there should also be a common set of data to capture the activity of all FRCs in a coordinated and consistent way. Data requirements should be specified in Schedule B of the Contribution Agreement.

It is recommended that data definitions be developed to ensure FRCs are clear on what is being collected, as well as formal training to familiarize staff with the new data framework and any new tools used to capture the information, and to ensure consistency. It will also be important that EDU clearly articulate to FRCs how data will be used to inform decision-making.

EDU should implement a process whereby data is reviewed and validated on a regular basis to support consistency and completeness. It will be particularly important that data be monitored closely early in the implementation process to identify any required adjustments.

It is recommended that quarterly statistical reporting be discontinued and there be a shift to a process in which annual data reporting is incorporated in the FRCs' annual report.

Financial Reporting

Budget submission

In the fall, each FRC submits a budget covering the upcoming fiscal year. Regional staff then check to ensure calculations are correct and at the end of the year, the information is reconciled based on the amount of funding spent under each category.

Quarterly cashflow report

These are prepared every three months to identify the extent that each site's annual budget has been expended. However, quarterly cashflow documents were described as being cumbersome for sites to complete.

Currently, Regional Child Care Consultants review cashflow reports and support FRCs through the process despite having no formal training in this area. The current fiscal reporting requirements were felt to be extensive and time-consuming, in relation to the amount of funding provided.

Overall accountability

The need to strengthen accountability to the Division was noted, including clearly articulating reporting expectations and how these align with funding allocations.

Recommendation 13: It is recommended that the cashflow and financial review process be centralized within EDU, with the FRCs having access to the requisite staff resource as questions arise. Regional Child Care Consultants could still be available to FRCs for day-to-day questions regarding financial reporting.

It is recommended that, as needed, fiscal reporting requirements be revamped to facilitate ease of completion by FRCs. Training should be provided to EDs on quarterly cashflow and budget submissions. This will ensure that there is a shared understanding and consistent application of such practices.

More generally, it is strongly recommended there be a renewed focus on accountability wherein the various reporting structures – workplans, annual reports, data and financial reports – be reviewed, updated, streamlined and linked to ensure a more accurate assessment of FRCs’ activities and achievement of Program outcomes.

Evaluation

Overall, formal evaluation does not appear to be a focus of the FRCs. Most reported gathering feedback from program participants, although how and when differed. The value of evaluation cannot be overstated. It can support assessment of the FRCs’ ongoing relevance, effectiveness, and efficiency; satisfaction of its target populations and communities, and external partners; and support informed decision making in relation to resources for current and potential programs and services. At the same time, it is important to ensure that evaluation processes do not overburden parents or discourage them from attending.

Recommendation 14: It is recommended that FRCs develop evaluation plans to more formally gather feedback from participants. Approaches may include an annual parent survey and/or the continued use of end-of-session evaluation forms. EDU may also wish to work with NLFRP toward the development of a standardized annual evaluation tool that could be used by FRCs across the province and respond to the diverse capabilities of the parents who would be participating. Such a tool could be developed based on reviewing existing tools used by FRCs in the province and by seeking feedback from FRC EDs and EDU in terms of key areas to capture.

5.3 FRC FUNDING MODEL

Funding Overview

Existing funding allocations were based on needs identified by each site when they were first established (20-30 years ago for most). Funding to FRCs has remained static for many years, despite the ensuing evolution of the Centres and the significant demographic, socioeconomic, and geographic shifts in the population of NL.

Further, funding is inconsistent across the program. The variability and inequity in FRC funding is further evidenced when one reviews the overall funding in the context of the number of staff per FRC, as well as the average number of programs they offer per week.

Sufficiency of Funds

Almost all FRCs identified that they have insufficient funds to support program delivery, resources/supplies, training, administration, salaries, insurance, nutritional snacks/HBC supplements and/or to institute/adequately fund benefit programs. Inflation, particularly the increased cost of food has further constrained budgets.

This funding deficit is reported to contribute to low staff morale; waiting lists for/caps on programming because of lack of staff and/or lack of resources; and recruitment and retention challenges. Overall, the ability of sites to support their target populations is challenged.

Despite the inefficient funding model, some FRCs are offering more programs, serving more families, and/or are trying to address more complex needs among their target group.

Salaries and Benefits

ED Salaries

ED salaries range considerably, leading to inequity across FRCs. This inequity is further demonstrated when combined with other factors across FRCs – the number of satellite sites and number of staff. Almost all salaries reported by FRC EDs fall well below the average salary for an ED position in the province.

Staff Salaries

Salaries for staff who appear to have the same or similar roles also vary widely. Salaries among related occupations like staff within child care centres have increased over the years, while those of FRC staff have remained relatively unchanged with some earning \$15-\$17 per hour. The low pay was also felt to contribute to challenges with recruitment and retention.

Benefits

FRCs differ significantly in whether they have or provide bonus/variable pay; employee health benefit plans; and RRSP/pension benefit, including how these are structured. Other benefits such as annual leave allotments, paid personal days and sick days also differ across sites.

Improving the Funding Model

The review identified a number of opportunities to improve the current funding model (e.g., increased funding, provided on a multi-year basis; and standardized salary parameters). However, a key consideration is establishing a funding model that is equitable and considers the variances across sites (e.g., number of staff, number of families served, number of satellite sites, extent of programming delivered, increased rent).

The identification of the target population, as well as their specific program and service requirements, is fundamental to any determination of the resource levels required and their distribution throughout the province.

Recommendation 15: The FRC Program should be “re-based” financially. Going forward, funds should be determined based on the regular needs assessment process discussed earlier.

A new FRC funding model will also be based on the objectives of the overall FRC Program, the establishment of service standards, and available resources. Such a re-base should also resolve concerns around variances in staffing levels, programming levels and salary scales.

To support such a funding shift, however, strong administrative oversight and review will be needed. It will be imperative that any reporting required of FRCs (e.g., workplans, annual reports) be validated and assessed by EDU to ensure strong accountability.

5.4 FRC GOVERNANCE

Board Focus

The majority of FRC Boards are advisory in nature and focused on policy, key decision making, undertaking strategic planning and overall monitoring, while other Boards were described as being involved in day-to-day operations and decision-making.

As each FRC has an ED who is primarily responsible for operations, it is important that the Boards be policy/strategy focused. Simply stated, it is the role of the Board to envision the future direction of their FRC, and the ED is responsible for turning that strategy into reality. When a Board spends time working at an operational level, they not

only undermine the work of the ED, but they also fall short of their responsibilities to the organization.

Recommendation 16: It is recommended that each FRC who identified their Board is engaged in day-to-day operations undertake governance training to redefine roles and responsibilities to be policy/strategy focused going forward. These sessions should be facilitated by an external expert and/or FRCs can avail of the resources of the Community Sector Council.

Board Size and Structure

In terms of the size of FRC Boards, the minimum and maximum number of members varied across sites. The ideal size of a Board depends on the needs and challenges of the organization and the number of people needed to carry out its fiduciary responsibilities. While a Board can continue to operate with as few as three members, it is suggested that the minimum number of members be set at five to ensure a level of succession and difference in perspectives. Similarly, the maximum number should be set to a functional level to ensure effectiveness.

Recommendation 17: It is recommended that the minimum number of FRC Board members be set at a functional level of five and the maximum number of FRC Board members be set at a functional level of nine to 12. We recognize that attracting nine Board members may prove challenging for some rural and/or remote Boards. However, efforts should be ongoing and as per recommendation 18, membership could include Board members outside of any given community who could join remotely.

Board Composition

FRC Board members' skills, backgrounds and affiliations range significantly. It is important for FRC Boards to be comprised of members with skills needed to fulfill the responsibilities of the organization. This would include those who have experience and/or expertise in areas relevant to the organization's primary mandate, as well as those with skillsets in areas such as legal, finance, HR, and policy.

To properly serve in their role, a Board needs to be free of any potential conflicts of interest. The duty of every Board member is to act in the best interest of the

organization they are serving. It was identified that, in a few instances, FRC Boards include staff as members. While this is legal, it is not usual, given it blurs the lines between a staff person carrying out their day-to-day operational role and having a governance role. Further, given significant funding (e.g., salary scales) and HR issues come to Boards for review and solutions, it creates a conflict of interest when staff have membership to the Board as they are involved in decisions which could impact their day-to-day job.

Two-thirds of the FRC Boards have unlimited terms for their Chairpersons. In short, static membership results in a Board being overly dependent on skills and abilities of longer-term members, with less opportunity for infusion of new blood and perspectives.

Recommendation 18: In the context of changes which FRCs may implement arising out of this review, it is recommended that they assess what, if any, new skills and expertise would be required at their Board level and fill related gaps, by either upskilling current Board members or seeking external expertise (for example, Boards should strive to have members with backgrounds and/or expertise in legal, finance, HR and/or policy). For those who struggle to attract members, they could consider having representatives with the needed expertise from outside the community join the Board remotely. Of note, each Board should have a defined process for recruiting and screening nominations to facilitate members who bring needed skills.

It is recommended that FRC staff not be eligible to serve on their respective Boards.

It is also recommended that every Board have a defined length of term (1-3 years) for their membership – Directors and Executive. Variability can exist in the number of times a Board member can seek to be re-appointed; however, this should not be unlimited. Boards who generate higher interest in membership can set a maximum number of consecutive terms, commonly set at two.

It is suggested that each Board (of sufficient size) have core functions covered under Standing Committees. Typical Standing Committees include Executive, Finance, and Governance, with the Executive Committee often also serving as the committee addressing significant HR matters. Each committee should have Terms of Reference guiding their purpose and should bring recommendations forward to the whole Board for ratification. This process creates efficiency in decision making and can serve to

reduce the amount of work that has to be done by the Board. It also provides a more secure structure for dealing with complaints and issues of a sensitive nature.

Parent Representatives

The current review also identified that FRC Boards can be comprised primarily of parents, 50% parents, or a combination of parents and Ex-Officio members, community partners and/or other professionals. Parent representation was felt to bring both value and constraints.

Recommendation 19: Parents provide a critical perspective to inform the direction of their FRC. It is recognized that some parents come with professional backgrounds (e.g., social workers, lawyers), while others may be bringing the value of their lived experience. It is recommended that parent representation be set at a minimum of two individuals, up to a maximum number of less than 50%.

FRCs must also identify ways and means to support parents in terms of understanding their role on the Board, which is separate from their role as a parent attending programs; the value of their voice; and how they can best contribute at the Board level.

Board Bylaws

FRCs' bylaws differ in terms of content, providing different levels of detail and focus areas. In any non-profit organization, bylaws are required under incorporation. The bylaws are used to guide the Board's actions and decisions, including to prevent or resolve conflicts and disagreements. They protect the organization from potential problems by clearly outlining Board members' key fiduciary duties and the rules around authority levels, rights and expectations.

Recommendation 20: It is recommended that there be a core set of bylaws established for all FRCs – these would be comprehensive in nature and serve as the minimum standard on which individual FRCs can build as their unique circumstances require. This core set of bylaws would include, for example, definitions, guiding principles, and clauses relating to code of ethics, Board/Executive/Ex-Officio members' roles/responsibilities, removal of Board members, signing authority, dissolution, indemnification/liability insurance, and an amendment process. These bylaws would

not, for example, set out minimum and maximum number of Board members or a meeting schedule – as this would be specific to, and delineated by, each FRC. This review could be undertaken by, for example, e.g., a committee of FRCs or NLFRP.

Perspectives on FRC governance

FRC EDs and Board survey respondents identified that, while some ‘tweaking’ is necessary, they are satisfied with their Board’s operations and effectiveness. The review did not reveal overarching challenges with having Boards for each FRC.

It is anticipated that changes emanating from the recommendations around FRC governance will further enhance Boards’ functioning and effectiveness, including the type and level of support provided to their ED and FRC.

Recommendation 21: It is not recommended that there be a move to a regional or even a provincial FRC governance structure at this time. While this could have benefits, it also can be fraught with difficulty – e.g., being too far removed from FRCs to provide effective oversight; leaving EDs feeling a key support is no longer available to them. While FRCs are similar in many respects, there is an inherent flexibility to respond as required to needs of their target groups and communities. Having a Board which is well-attuned to these needs is critical for the ED and the FRC more generally. Of note, however, it is recommended that the idea of amalgamating Boards be raised with the FRCs, as a future opportunity, should this be considered amenable to those who may be in closer proximity in specific regions.

5.5 PARTNERSHIPS

Community Partners

Partner organizations generally spoke to the value of the FRCs, with most identifying opportunities to build on their positive relationships (e.g., joint promotion of services and/or program delivery).

Public Health Nurses

PHNs have a critical role to play with FRCs, primarily in relation to HBC and post-natal programming. They are considered vital for HBC moms, particularly during prenatal and

post-partum phases, and they work closely with Resource Mothers. PHNs also provide education and support around areas such as sexual health, safe sleep, and parenting.

It was noted, however, that some FRCs have had decreasing contact or no support from PHN resources for a period of years, in particular during and following COVID-19.

Recommendation 22: It is recommended that EDU engage with the Division of Public Health to identify strategies to re-establish and/or strengthen PHNs' engagement with, and support to, the FRCs.

5.6 NLFRP

The FRC network in the province could be well-supported by a strong, representative, provincial Association with a mandate to be the voice of FRCs to government on challenges they face; to help build their capacity to operate efficiently and effectively (e.g., through a well-defined training plan); and, particularly, in relation to the review findings, to be a partner with EDU in change management moving forward. This would be critical should EDU develop standards of practice for the FRCs. It is clear, however, that the existing Association, as currently structured and operating, cannot demonstrate its value or meet needs in this regard.

Recommendation 23: Following EDU's implementation of priority actions detailed herein, it is recommended that EDU invite NLFRP to submit a funding proposal for resources to support and build on their (EDU's) efforts. The proposal would include a plan identifying:

- the process the Association would undertake to ensure sufficient and effective Board membership;
- key activities it would implement to strengthen the FRCs individually and as a network;
- how it would engage, as well as inform, the broader FRC network over the course of the two years; and
- how it would evaluate its success at the end of the two-year period.

5.7 RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EDU AND FRCs

Both EDU and FRC informants acknowledged the need for more focus on, and support for, FRCs going forward. Currently, support from EDU largely consists of reviewing reporting, data, budgets and quarterly cash flows submitted by FRCs. Otherwise, it was noted that there are no clear guidelines or processes in place to clearly articulate how the Division is to support them.

The Review revealed that there is an openness on both the part of EDU and the FRCs to strengthen collaborative efforts for the benefit of the shared target group. It equally is clear that an effective working relationship will be founded on both clear and comprehensive Contribution Agreements which detail roles, responsibilities, and accountabilities, and sufficient resources and support provided to the FRCs.

Recommendation 24: It will be imperative that there be clear and accessible channels of communication established between EDU and the FRCs – with an assigned ‘go to’ person at the Departmental level, who is sufficiently knowledgeable about the FRCs to be an effective support.

The relationship with the Regional Child Care Consultants also must be realigned to ensure sufficient ongoing support to the FRCs - discussed in the section below.

It is recommended that EDU continue to bring the FRCs together for at least an annual meeting to continue to deepen the relationship. These meetings should be well-structured with agendas and objectives. Regional meetings also might be considered to further focus on key issues at that level.

Relationship with Regional Child Care Consultants

Regional staff include two managers and four Child Care Consultants tasked with supporting licensed child care centres and homes, as well as FRCs. Roles include ensuring sites have submitted the required documentation, entering statistics into the internal government database system and reviewing quarterly cashflow for payment. Consultants are also encouraged to visit FRCs onsite on a regular basis. However, visits occur sporadically or not at all, as staff do not have capacity and/or the bulk of their time is dedicated to child care centres due to legislative requirements. Some are also challenged due to the rural and/or remote nature of FRC locations.

It is recognized that the Regional Child Care Consultants should be integral to the operations of the FRCs. However, it is clear that they have been constrained in this regard due to factors cited above as well as because they lack clarity on their role and expectations regarding FRCs, and they may not have the needed skills to support the FRCs with their budgeting and financial reporting.

As previously noted, the FRCs will need significant support as changes emanating from the review are prioritized and operationalized. Regional level resources must be an essential component of this support and be well-aligned with the FRCs which fall under their purview.

Recommendation 25: To ensure the FRCs have the needed support at a regional level, it is recommended that:

- As possible, there be a dedicated staff resource to the FRCs, as opposed to this role being an add-on to existing resources.
- The roles, responsibilities and expectations for these regional positions are clear and shared with the FRCs. This is critical to ensure there is a shared understanding of the regional staff's 'authority' to identify concerns and propose solutions.
- The regional staff receive the needed training to ensure they provide optimal support to their FRCs, including in the areas of program development and delivery.
- The regional staff be sufficiently resourced to undertake regularly scheduled visits to their sites. This should include a mid-year, in-person visit wherein they undertake an 'intentional' check-in with the FRCs' EDs to explore, for example:
- Are they seeing new or emerging needs in their region – e.g., more or fewer families, more pregnant moms, increases in children's developmental needs? Has the FRC adjusted its programming to meet these needs. If yes, how? What else is needed?

5.8 THE FRCs PLACE ON THE EARLY LEARNING AND CHILD CARE CONTINUUM

It is acknowledged that FRCs have long been overlooked by EDU, and they lack recognition and a strategic role to effectively support the Division's objectives. However, it is understood that the FRCs are a necessary component of the early learning and child care continuum, given they engage hundreds of staff and Board volunteers and touch thousands of individuals and families.

Recommendation 26: Going forward, it is recommended that EDU promote, internally and externally, the role of FRCs on the continuum. The Division should develop a three-year plan outlining how the role of FRCs will be elevated and recognized in the near future. It is recognized that this plan would be developed once other key recommendations outlined herein are implemented.

6.0 Effectiveness - Findings and Recommendations

6.1 POTENTIAL IMPROVEMENTS TO THE FRC MODEL

Currently, there are no standards of practice identified for the NL FRCs, as per any defined provincial legislation or regulatory requirements. Yet, standards of practice convey a collective vision of professionalism for an organization. Standards also serve as a baseline from which an organization can measure, and as a guide by which an organization can navigate - holding it accountable to operate transparently, prudently, and ethically, thereby helping to ensure families are supported and strengthened through quality practice.²

Recommendation 27: It is recommended that standards of practice be developed for the FRCs and that a key resource be the US National Family Support Network's (NFSN's) Standards of Quality for Family Strengthening and Support (the

² Information for this section was garnered from the following: <https://www.oct.ca/public/professional-standards/standards-of-practice>; <https://infocentral.infoway-inforoute.ca/en/news-events/spotlights/3872-the-importance-of-standards-in-health-care>; <https://www.councilofnonprofits.org/running-nonprofit/governance-leadership/principles-practices-best-practices-nonprofits> and Standards of Quality for Strengthening Family Support – (NFSN) 2021.

'Standards')³, which have a long history of development and implementation. These Standards create common language and expectations in the Family Support and Strengthening field across different kinds of programs, such as FRCs, home visiting, and child development.

In 2020, the NFSN conducted a comprehensive review and revision process to update the Standards, to reflect an enhanced focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion and addressing community conditions that impact families' healthy development. The Principles of Family Support Practice and the research-based, evidence-informed Strengthening Families Protective Factors are also uniquely integrated and operationalized in the Standards.

Implementing standards of practice for the FRCs will be a developmental process. It will be important, however, to ensure that whatever standards are implemented, these are not so all encompassing that they become burdensome and overwhelming for FRCs.

6.2 FRC LOCATIONS AND EXPANSION

The Review considered the extent that FRC locations respond to the needs of stakeholders. Hub and satellite sites were initially established based on an identified need. Communities conducted an assessment and submitted a request to government for funding, as previously discussed.

In some cases, further assessment has led the FRCs to adjust the number or location of satellite sites over the years as needs have shifted, most often in terms of the number of families in an area. The availability of appropriate space was another key factor identified. Opportunities may exist to add or shift satellite site locations to better meet population needs.

Recommendation 28: Earlier in the report, we recommended the implementation of FRC needs assessments on a three-year cycle, to support a basis for the funding model. EDU may also wish to conduct further needs assessments in areas believed to

³ The Standards of Quality for Strengthening Family Support are available to be downloaded from <https://www.nationalfamilysupportnetwork.org/standards-of-quality>.

be less resourced and where an FRC is not currently located, to identify the extent of need.

6.3 SATISFACTION WITH THE FRCs

All EDs expressed satisfaction with the way FRCs are operating in the province, citing the flexibility of the overall Program and the community-development focus. However, some acknowledged that adjustments are needed to the FRC Program, and there are opportunities to build on the work that has been done to date.

Almost all Board and parent survey respondents (95%) also expressed being 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied' with their FRC. Respondents' comments were overwhelmingly positive, highlighting key themes including staff are welcoming, friendly, kind, caring and helpful; the environment is safe, non-judgemental and inclusive; respondents and their children enjoy attending, and they have had great experiences within programs; and/or the FRCs create communities. Additionally, it was stated that FRCs encourage connection and networking for parents, facilitate development and socialization for children, and support positive mental health.

Challenges impacting satisfaction have been identified and discussed herein.

7.0 Conclusion

The purpose and objectives of the FRCs' remain priorities of EDU and communities. The FRC network has matured over the 30 years of its evolution and represents a solid base through which government can deliver needed services to often vulnerable segments of the population. Whether the current level of program is maintained or enhanced; there is a need to consider the overall funding model. This would involve a comprehensive process of program development or modernization through the recommendations identified throughout the report.

A roadmap will be required to ensure, going forward, the needed steps are well-delineated within practical timelines and conveyed to the FRCs so there is a shared understanding of the implementation plan. Further, this roadmap must be developed to respond to the FRCs' capacity to undertake needed change. A change management process will be critical.