

Aligning Cultural Responsiveness in Evaluation and Evaluation Capacity Building:
A Needs Assessment with Family Support Programs

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ABSTRACT

Family support programs serve vulnerable families by providing various forms of support, such as education, health services, financial assistance, and referrals to community resources. A major feature of evaluation involves assessing program effectiveness and learning from evaluation findings (Mertens & Wilson, 2012). Collaboration and cultural responsiveness are important topics in evaluation which remain largely distinct in the literature. However, evaluation capacity building provides a context for exploring possible intersections.

Data about seven programs were collected via semi-structured interviews and document analysis. This study revealed that the program leaders feel that their programs are unique, complex, and misunderstood. The findings also suggest that program leaders believe that evaluation is important for program improvement and funding. Although participants did not anticipate evaluation capacity building and did not readily express a desire to develop their own evaluation skills, participants from all seven programs enthusiastically expressed interest in evaluation capacity building once explained.

Although participants did not discuss cultural responsiveness as it relates to race, they expressed a need to overcome a community culture of reluctance to participate in programs and aversion to educational pursuits. Given the programs' shared population of interest, similar outcomes, and common challenges, evaluation capacity building in a group setting may give Roanoke family support program leaders the evaluation knowledge, skills, and peer support to engage in program evaluation that is both collaborative and culturally responsive.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Background

Throughout the United States, there are countless programs at the federal, state, and local community levels that use a considerable amount of resources to reach out to parents in “fragile” or “at-risk” families. These family support programs work to do some combination of parent education, family empowerment, parent self-sufficiency, child and family advocacy, family health care and mental health services, and referrals to community resources and agencies. Program evaluation can help assess the effectiveness of such programs, which is important in understanding how to best serve families and how to leverage program resources, which may be limited, to do the most good.

Evaluation

Evaluation is a term with many definitions—an evaluation can be a data collection tool, a report on findings, an interdisciplinary field, a profession, or an assessment element of some project. In many settings, *an* evaluation often refers to a survey or other instrument. However, evaluation is much larger than a single data collection tool. Evaluation is also an interdisciplinary *field*, engaging fields like Education, Public Health, Business, and Social Work.

The field of Evaluation is characterized by both research and applied work, ranging from a singular evaluation of some program to academic inquiry about some social or programmatic phenomenon. Evaluation is also a *profession*, in which evaluators can work in a variety of roles, such as an independent consultant, internal evaluator for an organization, or an evaluation specialist for a firm. Some professors may also conduct evaluations as part of their academic position, whether in an evaluation of a course or pedagogical strategy, or an assessment of

something implemented within a project. Trochim (2006) described evaluation as a “methodological area,” a form of social research, and a type of “systematic assessment.”

Evaluation as a methodological area. Evaluation employs multiple methodological strategies, including qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods. Although surveys are the most commonly noted evaluation tool, there is a plethora of diverse data collection strategies, from randomized control trials to Most Significant Change stories and other narratives to ranking exercises, mapping, appreciative inquiry and network analysis (Mertens & Wilson, 2012).

Recently, visual and participatory methods have become more popular, as they facilitate engagement with youth and can be adapted to be used across contexts (such as various geographical settings or age group). There is also research *on* evaluation itself, in which researchers explore various topics, ranging from the evaluation process, to the use of different methodologies, to questions about how to build evaluation capacity, or how to promote evaluation utilization.

Purposes for evaluation. According to Mertens and Wilson (2012), there are four purposes for evaluation endeavors. These four purposes are “to gain insights or to determine necessary inputs;” “to find areas in need of improvement or to change practices;” “to assess program effectiveness;” and “address issues of human rights and social justice” (p. 263-264). Mertens and Wilson (2012) explained that although more complex and challenging, evaluations may have multiple purposes. Thus, evaluators and their clients are not forced to ‘pick one,’ but rather to identify the true needs of the program or evaluand, that which is being evaluated. Identifying the purpose of an evaluation is also not about which purpose is ‘the best,’ but rather, which is most appropriate based on the program’s stage or circumstances.

Evaluation claims and evidence. A major component of program evaluation is the ability to make claims based on evaluation findings. Early regard for the claims to be made based on an evaluation is crucial in evaluation planning, as it informs evaluation questions, design, data collection, analysis and reporting. Earning the right to make claims based on evaluation data requires careful thought and planning on the part of the evaluator/ evaluation team. As Scriven (2008) articulated, the “causal wars are still raging,” and the issue of what counts as credible evidence is still being debated (p. 11).

Regarding the notion of what counts as legitimate evidence, Donaldson (2009) discussed the issue of whether experiments are required for the production of credible evidence. Donaldson (2009) eloquently stated that we need

to improve our understanding of deeply entrenched disagreements about evidence, move ... toward a common ground where such can be found, enhance the capacity of evaluation practitioners and stakeholders to make sensible decisions rather than draw allegiances to a side of the debate based on superficial considerations, and ultimately provide applied researchers and evaluators with a useful framework for gathering and using credible evidence to improve the plight of humankind across the globe as we move further into the 21st century. (p. 17)

This suggests that in building on our understanding of credible evidence, we must question our assumptions about evidence, support evaluators in making pragmatic decisions, and guide evaluators in collecting and utilizing credible evidence. Thus, whether we like it or not, we must confront our own assumptions, paradigms, epistemologies, and ontologies as we grapple with what counts as credible evidence.

Establishing causation may be a difficult feat for a program evaluation to accomplish—particularly one of for a program that is relatively new. This may be a concern for an evaluator working with a pilot or early lifecycle program that is determined to make major claims about causality. However, for evaluations in which establishing causation is appropriate, it is important to note that there are multiple ways of establishing causality—regularity frameworks (recognizing frequent links), counterfactual frameworks (countering alternative explanations), comparative frameworks (establishing ‘configurational’ links), and generative frameworks (identifying explanatory links) (Mayne, 2012).

It is important for those working on evaluation to consider their own paradigms, assumptions about knowledge, truth, and evidence, and the claims they would like to be able to make based on evaluation findings. It is also important for those embarking on evaluation projects to realize the fallacy of “gold standard evaluation.” Like in other spheres of research, randomized control trials have an unwarranted reputation of being the “real” way to “prove” program effectiveness. While experiments may be appropriate for some evaluation endeavors, they should not be regarded as the *best* way, as they are sometimes not feasible, and further, not appropriate.

Community Profile

Since context is central to research in both Evaluation work and Human Development & Family Studies, this brief profile of Roanoke, VA is provided to contextualize the present study. Although Roanoke is a vibrant, dynamic region of Southwest Virginia, here I discuss the community’s needs, so as to help elucidate the issues family support programs seek to address as well as to describe the context in which this needs assessment has taken place.

Child and family well-being data for the city of Roanoke, Virginia indicate that Roanoke children and families, particularly those of color, are struggling in several areas, including health, education, safety, and financial security. Although urban communities in northern Virginia may be targeted for outreach more often, there is evidence that children and families in the city of Roanoke are also in great need of support. According to Kids Count data from 2014, children and families across the state of Virginia are faring well, as Virginia ranks ninth in the country for overall child and family well-being (Kids Count, 2014).

However, children and families in the city of Roanoke are not doing as well as those in other cities in Virginia (Kids Count, 2014). In 2011, the unemployment rate in Roanoke was 8.2%, which was higher than the state of Virginia's unemployment rate of 6.2%. This suggests that Roanoke parents were more at risk of being unemployed than parents in other parts of the state. In 2012, the proportion of Roanoke children living in poverty was 30.3%, almost double the Virginia rate of 15.5%. In 2012, the overall poverty rate was 20% in Roanoke and 12% in Virginia, indicating that there was a higher incidence of poverty in Roanoke than other parts of the state.

Data from public schools in the city of Roanoke also indicate that Roanoke public school students were lower income and lower achieving than public school students in other parts of the state (Kids Count, 2014). In the 2013-2014 school year, 20.8% of Roanoke kindergarteners scored below readiness levels, compared to 12.5% of Virginia children. In 2014, 83% of Roanoke high school seniors graduated on time, compared to 89.9% of seniors statewide. In the 2013-2014 school year, nearly three quarters (73.4%) of public school students in Roanoke qualified for free/ reduced school lunch, compared to less than half (41.2%) of public school

students across the state, further indicating the high incidence of child and family poverty in the city of Roanoke.

Kids Count (2014) data also reveals that teen pregnancy, single motherhood, child abuse and neglect, and foster care are issues of concern in the city of Roanoke. Roanoke's teen pregnancy was double that of Virginia in 2010 and triple Virginia's in 2009. In 2012, 81% of Black children and 47.3% of White children were born to single (non-married) mothers in Roanoke, compared to 67.2% of Black children and 26.6% of White children across the state of Virginia. The 2012 rate of child abuse and neglect in Roanoke (8.5/1000) was nearly triple that of Virginia (3.0/1000). Roanoke's 2008 foster care rate (18.2/1000) was triple that of Virginia (3.7/1000).

Although there is much room for improvement in the well-being indicators for Roanoke children and families, there is an abundance of community-based as well as governmental support programs working to improve the lives of Roanoke families. Working collaboratively on addressing issues related to family self-sufficiency as part of a coalition can be instrumental in ensuring that programs are doing the best they can with the resources they have to support Roanoke children, parents, and families.

Program Profiles

This needs assessment study includes seven family support programs in Roanoke, Virginia. A brief description of each program is included here to facilitate orientation to the present study. The programs are represented here with pseudonyms in an effort to honor the confidentiality of each program's identity.

Christian Youth & Family Resource Center. The Youth & Family Resource Center, established in 1967, leverages resources from Christian churches, volunteers, and donors to

support families and individuals in need. The center serves about 30 families in the Southeast region of Roanoke. A major part of the Youth & Family Resource Center's work is its afterschool program for youth. The center's afterschool program provides youth from third to twelfth grade with on-going academic support, service learning opportunities, counseling, and spiritual guidance.

Save Smart. The Save Smart Program is a partnership between banking, government, and nonprofit institutions in Roanoke. The program seeks to help families pursue financial stability by providing them with access to bank accounts that have no or low costs, no minimum balance requirements, an ATM or debit card, free online access, free check cashing and bill payment, unlimited teller transactions, and direct deposit. The program also offers participants workshops to build their knowledge about money management.

Youth Enrichment Center. The Youth Enrichment Center was established by a community coalition in 1979 to buffer children from the issues of poverty, crime, and drug in Roanoke. Today, the Youth Enrichment Center serves about 200 youth by offering programming around academic enrichment, leadership skills, non-violence education, and fitness and nutrition education. The center also provides seasonal support, such as back-to-school supplies and holiday gifts.

Pathways to Employment. Pathways to Employment is a federally-funded program that seeks to assist families living in a public housing community with skill-building, employment, and financial literacy. This place-based program is situated in the neighborhood of the public housing community and offers rent incentives to participants. Participants can receive rent incentives for referring another household member to the program. Additionally, participants

have the benefit of not facing rent increases due to increases in their earned income, affording participants the opportunity to alleviate their debt and establish savings.

Family Ark. Family Ark provides temporary housing and meals for homeless families with children, as well as full-time case management. Through a network of 31 churches and 1,000 volunteers, families in the Family Ark program are able to find shelter in local church buildings. The program works with four families at a time to pursue employment, housing, education, and self-sufficiency.

Social Justice Mission. The Social Justice Mission is part of an international organization that works to assist those in need by providing food, clothing, financial assistance, shelter, spiritual support, and case management. It also runs special seasonal programs, such as back-to-school drives and Christmas drives to provide children in need with gifts. On a case-by-case basis, the Social Justice Mission also provides emergency assistance and disaster relief. In addition, the organization offers special programs for youth and seniors.

Roanoke Community Outreach. Roanoke Community Outreach is housed in a political office in Roanoke. Roanoke Community Outreach seeks to address community issues such as access to quality early childhood education, housing, employment, transportation, and access to healthy food. Roanoke Community Outreach works to identify issues and pilot outreach initiatives that can be scaled up and developed into established programs.

Statement of Problem

Tailoring an evaluation capacity building effort to the needs of those participating in it is an important precursor to engaging in evaluation capacity building activities (Labin et al., 2013).

Conducting a needs assessment and tailoring ECB efforts to the particular population and context can affect the selection and implementation of the ECB strategies. The existing

characteristics of an organization have also been hypothesized to affect the type of strategies utilized and their efficacy. Some of these specific factors noted in the literature include attitudes toward evaluation, availability of resources for ECB (staff, time, and financial), internal evaluation expertise, and organizational practices and capacities such as support for evaluation and ECB from leadership, from the organizational culture, and through mainstreaming or making evaluation a routine part of the organization (Labin et al., 2013, p. 310).

Thus, taking the time to conduct a needs assessment *prior* to embarking on an evaluation capacity building project is crucial to understanding and addressing participants' evaluation capacity building needs.

Purpose of the Project

The purpose of this study was to conduct a needs assessment to learn the evaluation capacity building needs of family support programs in Roanoke. The findings from this needs assessment will also inform the planning of an evaluation capacity building project that will be part of my dissertation work.

Research Project Objectives

There were three main objectives of the needs assessment study. The first goal was to gain an understanding of *whom* each of the participating programs serve and *how* each program serves families. The second was to gain insight into each program's evaluation perceptions, based on the program's history and/or experience with evaluation. The third objective was to ascertain each program's perceived evaluation needs and goals.

Assumptions

Several assumptions informed this study. My primary assumption was that program leaders have invaluable insights about their programs. I assumed that their program knowledge, combined with my evaluation knowledge, would generate important insights about their evaluation capacity building needs. Secondly, since I employed an online recruitment strategy, I was operating under the assumption that there are family support programs in Roanoke with an online presence, and that I would be able to communicate with program staff electronically. Thirdly, I assumed that the staff of at least *some* family support programs in Roanoke would be willing to participate in an interview about their program. I was not, however, operating under the assumption that program leaders are interested in evaluation.

Significance of the Problem

Participatory approaches to research and evaluation are becoming increasingly popular, particularly when related to addressing social issues like family self-sufficiency (Rodríguez-Campos, 2012). Although the importance of parent engagement has been a topic of interest to family researchers and practitioners, there is more opportunity for participatory research involving parents in the research and evaluation process.

Like participatory methods, cultural responsiveness has also become a leading concern of the evaluation community, and the American Evaluation Association (2011) has published a statement addressing this issue. Although participatory approaches and cultural responsiveness are both increasingly prevalent in the field of evaluation there is more opportunity for exploration of how these may intersect. “As a fairly new and emergent construct, there remain many gaps in our knowledge about how to integrate notions of culture and cultural context into evaluation theory and practice” (Chouinard & Cousins, 2014, p. 457). That is, there is a need for intentional

evaluation research on how participatory methods to evaluation capacity building can build cultural responsiveness in evaluation. Insights from this project may contribute to the evaluation community's knowledge about using stakeholder participation to build cultural responsiveness in evaluation capacity building.

Chapter 2

Review of the Literature

Family Support Programs

Types of family support. Though varied in their approaches to supporting families by providing educational, preventative, and intervention services, family support programs seek to support families with limited resources in positive relationships and healthy lifestyles.

McWilliam and Scott (2001) described “support” as having three integral parts: informational support, material support, and emotional support. While the authors focus on support services for families with special needs children, their conceptualization of comprehensive support can also be applied to serving families with other challenges and stressors, including chronic poverty.

McWilliam and Scott (2001) described informational support as providing relevant educational information, including information about resources, strategies, and child development. Material support includes basic resources like food, housing, medication, and money. Lastly, emotional support includes informal social networks, parent groups, and parent or family advocates. To provide these various types of support, there are multiple approaches to family support program delivery, such as parenting education, nutrition education, youth tutoring, and home visiting, which may work independently or in collaboration to serve the families with whom they work.

Since the initiation of social services, as well as prevention and intervention efforts, families have had access to in-person family support programs (Kadushin & Martin, 1988). However, there may be reasons that in-person program delivery is not feasible or may require more resources than a program can accommodate. Such examples may include reaching rural families or home-bound parents. Further, although home visiting programs have shown success,

they are expensive and require a great investment of time from both the practitioner and the family. Thus, program staff and administrators must constantly balance the need to provide support to families with the constraints of time and tangible resources.

Evaluations of family support programs. In the literature, programs that provide family support in the form of a structured intervention are primarily evaluated quantitatively, using an experimental or quasi-experimental design (Cross, Jaycox, Hickman, Schultz, Barnes-Proby, Kofner, & Setodji, 2013; Dishion, Brennan, Shaw, McEachern, Wilson, & Jo, B., 2013; Ingoldsby, E. M., Baca McClatchey, Luckey, Ramsey, Loch, . . . Olds, 2013; Campbell, Koszewski, & Behrends, 2013; Anderson, Symoniak, & Epstein, 2013; Owen, Manthos, & Quirk, 2013). While this trend in evaluation design may be in response to funding requirements, qualitative evaluation studies may provide deeper insights that could reveal how low-income parents feel about family support programs in general, what they see as the most helpful forms of support, how their participation in such programs affect the way they view themselves and, other information about their realities as low-income parents. Likewise, qualitative approaches can be used to gain insights from professionals and paraprofessionals who work “in the field” with families.

While there is great value in the work professionals do to provide families with services, there is also great opportunity to better support parents and their families. A collaborative approach would advocate for engaging parents, service providers, and other key stakeholders in an effort to collaboratively address community issues has the potential to effect positive social change for families in need. This needs assessment will inform a culturally responsive evaluation capacity building project with family support programs, which will be part of my dissertation research.

Cultural Responsiveness in Evaluation

The construct of culture has become increasingly salient in evaluation discussions and publications. However, “as a fairly new and emergent construct, there remain many gaps in our knowledge about how to integrate notions of culture and cultural context into evaluation theory and practice” (Chouinard & Cousins, 2014, p. 457). Although potentially challenging and perhaps at times uncomfortable, intentionality and theoretical grounding can support evaluators as they continue to grapple with this complex construct that is critical to evaluation work.

Culture is an undeniably integral part of the diverse contexts of evaluation, and therefore an integral part of evaluation. Culture is present in evaluation not only in the contexts in which programs are implemented but also in the designs of these programs and the approach, stance, or methods evaluators choose to use in their work. A common thread between culture and evaluation is the concept of values. Culture shapes values, beliefs, and worldviews. Evaluation is fundamentally an endeavor of determining values, merit, and worth (SenGupta, Hopson, & Thompson-Robinson, 2004, p. 6).

Regardless of a specific evaluation project or a particular approach to evaluation, culture is always, necessarily, a relevant matter in evaluation work. Thus, it is worthwhile to discuss the nuances associated with various conceptualizations of cultural competence and to strive for more intentional operationalization of cultural responsiveness as a construct in the field of evaluation.

Responding to culture. Cross (1989) articulated that cultural competence in health and human services involves systems, agencies, and practitioners with the capacity to respond to the unique needs of populations whose cultures are different than that which might be called "dominant" or "mainstream" American. As a shared goal in the evaluation community, cultural

competence is a constantly revisited construct with multiple layers (American Evaluation Association, 2011).

The discourse around the importance of cultural awareness in the field of evaluation has included concepts like cultural sensitivity, cultural competence, multicultural competence, cross-cultural competence, cultural appropriateness, cultural responsiveness, cultural humility, and so on. I refer to cultural *responsiveness* because it is the way this concept is being addressed in the literature right now, and because it acknowledges the need to *respond* to the ongoing, dynamic phenomenon that is culture.

Unlike some settings, where cultural competence may be regarded as having translated materials and multilingual staff, in the field of evaluation, cultural competence does not tend to have a simple a definition or checklist. However,

cultural competence in evaluation can be broadly defined as a systematic, responsive inquiry that is actively cognizant, understanding, and appreciative of the cultural context in which the evaluation takes place; that frames and articulates the epistemology of the evaluative endeavor; that employs culturally and contextually appropriate methodology; and that uses stakeholder-generated, interpretive means to arrive at the results and further use of the findings (SenGupta, Hopson, & Thompson-Robinson, 2004, p. 5).

Hopson (2004) added to this discussion the notion of the sociocultural perspective. He explained that

those who attempt to study and advance knowledge of multicultural and culturally competent evaluation inevitably find that the central issue is to move beyond narrow culture-bound assumptions toward diverse sociocultural perspectives and experiences (Hopson, 2004, p. 1).

Hopson's attention to the benefit of a more *sociocultural* perspective is noteworthy and calls us to recognize that culture captures diverse social experiences, not just limited "cultural features," which may at times, contribute to the development of stereotypes.

Principles of culturally responsive evaluation. Hopson (2004) described five foundational principles involved in culturally responsive evaluation. The first principle is that "the social location of the evaluator matters," capturing the significance of the evaluator's own background in the lens through which s/he works, implying that positionality is important on the part of the evaluator (p. 12). The second tenet is that "evaluators play a role in furthering social change and social justice," as "evaluators 'are more than technicians'" and have the ability, if not the obligation "to recognize asymmetric power relations to challenge systems and mechanisms of inequity and injustice in hope of dismantling oppression against cultural groups on the fringes of our larger society" (p. 12). This suggests that regardless of evaluators' own paradigms, the *work* of evaluation is critical and transformative in nature.

The third principle is that "avoiding ethnocentrism means embracing multiple cultural perspectives" (p. 12). Hopson (2004) articulated that "the culturally competent evaluator is able to shift between diverse perspectives, recognizes the limits of narrow culturocentric standards and ideas, and values reciprocal cultural understanding (p. 12). Thus, through reflexivity, an evaluator may recognize ethnocentrism present in her or his own work. The fourth tenet is that "culture is central to the evaluation process" because of "the profound way in which culture (including racial and ethnic identity, social origin, class background, etc.) shapes worldview, values and norms, and thereby impacts the uses of, reactions to, and legitimacy of, any evaluation" (Hopson, 2004, p. 13).

The fifth principle is that “culturally and ethnically diverse communities have contributions to make in redefining the evaluation field” (p. 13). It is crucial to recognize that “the contributions of these diverse and culturally, and often marginalized groups ultimately triggers alternative ways for responding to evaluative processes of change and transformation both locally and globally” (Hopson, 2004, p. 13). As attention to the concept of cultural competence rises in the field of evaluation, these elements of cultural responsiveness in the field can help evaluators pursue this goal in their work.

While it may not be immediately obvious given the sensibility of attention to culture in evaluation work, cultural responsiveness is not a priority in all evaluation work. Ironically, some of the most “rigorous” evaluation work may completely disregard culture, or may only include it as another variable. Such evaluations may assert that culture was “controlled” for, or that cultural responsiveness was achieved by translating program materials in multiple languages and including pictures that “looked like” program participants. While these considerations are useful, they are more surface-level cultural accommodations than they are intentional considerations towards cultural responsiveness.

This is why the collaborative approach may provide a unique opportunity to strengthen cultural responsiveness in evaluation work—because as co-researchers, participants bring *with* them what works *for* them, not only linguistically (such as language and slang) and logistically (what is viewed as appropriate for meeting times, locations, etc.), but also socioculturally (such as what is regarded as important, valuable, etc.).

Joining an interdisciplinary conversation on culture. The field of evaluation has made great strides in addressing the importance of acknowledging culture in evaluation work. However, the field of evaluation would move even further in the “right direction” by more

intentionally operationalizing the construct of cultural responsiveness, borrowing from conceptualizations articulated in the social science and broader academic community. Further, I argue that some commonly used terms like “cross-cultural competence” may have unintended “othering” effects, which need to be reframed by developing an “intercultural ethos” (Tarozzi, 2014, p. 128).

Although this may ostensibly seem to be “just semantics,” this shift may actually be more paradigmatic than simply linguistic. Fries (2009) asserted that “the issues of terminology, philosophy and politics ... meet and sometimes collide,” suggesting that the terms used are carry more than simply linguistic consequences (p. 1). I would argue that there are similar linguistic and conceptual politics in the field of evaluation, as in other social science fields, and that these need to be reflected upon and confronted.

Cross (1989) was one of the first to articulate the importance of cultural competence in health and human services. He explained that cultural competence involves systems, agencies, and practitioners with the capacity to respond to the unique needs of populations whose cultures are different than that which might be called "dominant" or "mainstream" American. The word “culture” is used because it implies the integrated pattern of human behavior that includes thoughts, communications, actions, customs, beliefs, values, and institutions of a racial, ethnic, religious, or social group. The word “competence” is used because it implies having the capacity to function in a particular way: the capacity to function within the context of culturally-integrated patterns of human behavior as defined by the group. While this article focuses on ethnic minorities of color, it has important implications about the need to acknowledge and respond to culture when working with clients.

Cross's (1989) rich monograph included a discussion of cross-cultural issues, which "include such things as historic distrust, ... culturally-biased assessment techniques, ... and value conflicts" such as "punctuality, work, achievement, and independence" (p. 24). Although assumingly well-intended, Cross's comment about cross-cultural value conflicts may imply to some readers that ethnic minorities do not value punctuality, work, achievement, or independence the way that White Americans do. This begs the question of when cultural awareness becomes stereotype, which can undoubtedly lead to "othering."

From the framework of cross-cultural competence, evaluators may be charged with the task of figuring out how to adapt their work to "fit" some "other" culture. However, shifting from a cross-cultural to an *intercultural* approach to cultural competence can reframe the notion of cultural adaption as a "normal" part of the necessarily social interaction involved in evaluation work. Based on etymological and linguistic considerations and the emphasis on the interpersonal aspect of culture, the interculturalistic seems promising.

Fries (2009) explained that "culture is learned through interaction, and shared by the people interacting. In this definition, there is the suggestion of an ongoing process, of culture as a group creation rather than a solidified object" (p. 3). This perspective would urge evaluators to engage in ongoing critical reflection on the role of culture in their practice as opposed to performing cultural adaptations that consist of one-time modifications to instruments or curricula.

The concept of intercultural competence is prevalent in the field of English as a Foreign Language, which prepares English language educators to teach learners of different cultures.

Fries (2009) explained that

in French the only possible adjective for this field is “*interculturel*”, whereas in English we have both “intercultural” and “cross-cultural”. Many English speakers favor “crosscultural”, some almost avoiding “intercultural” as if it were a case of vocabulary interference with French. Others use the terms interchangeably (p. 2).

Whereas the term “*cross-cultural*” may connote that there are distinct cultural entities separated by some tangible or intangible boundaries that need to be “*crossed*,” the term *intercultural* alludes to the *interpersonal, interactive* nature of cultural relations.

Although the interculturalistic approach seems promising for conceptualizing cultural responsiveness, this approach is not without limitations. Fries (2009) noted that “many of us ‘share’ more than one culture with different groups of people we interact with” (p. 6). “The intercultural approach hypothesizes that there are useful generalizations to be made at any of these levels, as long as people are aware of the great appeal and the great danger of stereotyping” (Fries, 2009, p. 8). The latter remark is of monumental importance, as it reveals a major potential limitation of the interculturalistic approach—something of which evaluators and evaluation capacity building facilitators ought to be cautious.

Contrary to the interculturalistic approach to cultural responsiveness, “the dominant threads of discussion about multicultural/culturally competent evaluation have focused on attending to cultural differences among the diverse racial and ethnic groups in this country” (Hopson, 2004, p. 6). Attention to cultural differences has some really appealing qualities. For example, making note of cultural differences can help evaluators identify areas for modification, facilitate more effective cross-cultural communication, and avoid major cultural clashes. However, concentration on cultural differences may exaggerate the extent of *difference* that is actually present, which may contribute to unintentional “othering.”

[Unintentional] “Othering”

Like in other fields of social science, such as Anthropology, hyper-attention to “other” cultures can lead to exoticization and perhaps unintentional degradation of the “other.” Emphasizing the interpersonal, social aspects of culture rather than focusing on the task of working across cultures can reduce the “othering” that may result as an unintended outcome of the cross-cultural approach. Further, recognizing that all humans, not just immigrants, indigenous communities, or other seemingly exotic people-groups, “are cultural beings and have a cultural, ethnic, and racial heritage,” can reduce the challenges evaluators face to practice “deliberative democratic evaluation” (American Psychological Association, 2003, p. 380; Greene, 2000, p. 27).

This is not only significant in certain evaluation approaches, such as the transformative paradigm. Rather, across paradigms, “the challenge for evaluator is to understand how awareness and knowledge of cultural differences in evaluation work can contribute to different kinds of understandings about what evaluation is and what it can be” (Hopson, 2004, p. 2). Additionally, this is not only relevant theoretically, but also methodologically.

Canales (2000) offered “a theoretical framework for analyzing how we engage with Others, those perceived as different from self. This engagement, termed Othering, is presented as two particular processes: Exclusionary and Inclusionary” (p. 16). Canales (2000) explained that conceptualizing Othering as both exclusive and inclusive processes expands the boundaries for understanding and interacting with those perceived as different. Exclusionary Othering often utilizes the power within relationships for domination and subordination, whereas Inclusionary Othering attempts to utilize power within relationships for transformation and coalition-building.

The latter, Inclusionary Othering, is the type that may help evaluators work towards cultural responsiveness in their evaluation capacity building endeavors.

Canales presented a conceptualization of “othering” that is not immediately harmful. In this framework, Exclusionary Othering includes the exploitation of those perceived as “other.” On the other hand, Inclusionary Othering recognizes difference but attempts to leverage interrelationships for social good. Thus, “othering” may not be an indisputably harmful phenomenon.

From Canales’ (2000) framework, “othering” can be understood as a social phenomenon, capturing how we interact with those whom we perceive as “other.” Although this understanding of “othering” would conflict with the interculturalistic approach, which focuses on cultural similarities, this conceptualization of “othering” may be a realistic approach that encourages evaluators to honor and address cultural differences without ascribing to stereotypes or overgeneralizations.

Approaches to cultural responsiveness. The field of evaluation has made great strides in addressing the importance of acknowledging culture in evaluation work. However, the field of evaluation would make further progress by more intentionally operationalizing the construct of cultural responsiveness. It is also important to beware of some terms like “cross-cultural competence,” which are pervasive in both academic settings and service delivery settings. Although these terms are enticing to use, they may have unintended “othering” effects. For example, emphasizing the “cross” implies the need to work *across* distinct groups, which may actually have much in common. Rather than focusing on working across differences, it may be more beneficial to try working within them, which Tarozzi (2014) described as “intercultural ethos” (p. 128).

Although this may ostensibly seem to be “just semantics,” this shift may actually be more paradigmatic than simply linguistic. Fries (2009) asserted that “the issues of terminology, philosophy and politics at the point where language teaching and culture meet and sometimes collide” (p. 1). I would argue that there are similar linguistic and conceptual politics in the field of evaluation, as in other social science fields, and that these need to be reflected upon and confronted. Critical reflection about working with the “other” can help evaluators build working relationships with stakeholders and facilitate the development of collaborative relationships.

The Collaborative Approach to Evaluation

Stakeholders like community members can provide invaluable insights about the phenomena they are experiencing and should therefore be included as “experts” in evaluation projects. For example, community members may be integral in revealing nuanced explanations, such as stigma around participation in a specific community program or the shared history of some community issue. Program staff members, who are responsible for program delivery, also have rich understanding of the program through their work “in the trenches.” This emphasis on community knowledge, which can be collected via qualitative and mixed methods (such as interviews, focus groups, observations, photos, and surveys) in addition to academic knowledge, is essential to participatory approaches. Participatory approaches are useful because they are “aimed at guiding collective thinking and ensuring that relevant interventions are developed on the basis of the perceived needs and problems of beneficiaries and on local capacities and lessons from experience” (Lefevre et. al, 2000, p. 1).

Like participatory approaches to research, there are also various participatory approaches to evaluation, such as collaborative evaluation, which

systematically invites and engages stakeholders in program evaluation planning and implementation. Unlike “distanced” evaluation approaches, which reject stakeholder participation as evaluation team members, Collaborative Evaluation assumes that active, on-going engagement between evaluators and program staff, result in stronger evaluation designs, enhanced data collection and analysis, and results that stakeholder understand and use (O’Sullivan, 2012, p. 518).

This approach to evaluation leverages the expertise of the program participants, staff, and the evaluator to generate knowledge about the assets and needs of the programs and program participants, as well as recommendations for program improvement.

Collaboration is rooted in an understanding of the interdependence among children, youth, families, and the professionals who serve them, such as program staff (Anderson-Butcher & Ashton, 2004). Professionals, community members, families, and students, therefore, must work together to communicate, cooperate, coordinate, and be held accountable for the healthy development of children, youth, and families (Anderson-Butcher & Ashton, 2004). Collaboration among family programs provides opportunities for stronger program development, implementation, and evaluation.

Further, collaboration among various types of family programs acknowledges the interconnectedness of issues which families face. Collaborative evaluation is an approach that offers, among others, many advantages in terms of access to information, quality of information gathered, opportunities for creative problem-solving, and receptivity to findings. In the last decade, collaborative evaluation has grown in popularity along with similar participatory, empowerment, and utilization-focused evaluation approaches. Increasingly, it has brought together evaluators and stakeholders

from different sectors, disciplines, and cultures to exchange knowledge on how collaboration can be used as a strategic tool for fostering and strengthening evaluation practice (Rodríguez-Campos, 2012, p. 523).

At the “crux of the knowledge generation process is the encounter between local insights and the understanding that the outsider brings to the table and the fusion of these insights into a shared understanding that serves as the basis for solving practical problems” (Greenwood & Levin, 2007, p. 102).

As Gaventa and Cornwall (2008) articulated, “participatory knowledge strategies can challenge deep-rooted power inequities...in order to address embedded social and economic inequities” affecting their communities (p. 172). This qualitative, transformative approach to evaluation “intentionally incorporates program stakeholders into the evaluation process and views their participation as essential for generating evaluation findings that are meaningful, useful and effective” (Askew, Beverly, & Jay, 2012).

Further, this approach contributes to the field’s goal to practice “deliberative democratic evaluation” by meaningfully engaging diverse stakeholders in the evaluation process (Greene, 2000, p. 27). Since “evaluators aim to generate inclusive, emancipatory knowledge,” deep consideration of the significance of culture, oppression, and social justice is *necessarily* the work of an evaluator (Hopson, 2004, p. 12). Thus, evaluators ought to critically reflect about their relationships with stakeholders, acknowledging the inevitable power dynamics at play.

Power and Relationships in Evaluation

Stakeholders play a critical role in programs and should therefore be considered throughout the program development and evaluation process. It can be easy to think of the powerful as program funders and perhaps administrators, and to forget the power possessed by

those who are not in leadership positions, like participants. All stakeholders have some form of power, all of which must be acknowledged in concert, so that the program can function. The notion of relationships is significant in evaluation work as it relates to issues of trust, capacity-building, utilization, and sometimes even social change.

According to Bryson Patton, and Bowman (2011), “power affects stakeholders’ ability to pursue their interests” (p. 6). Just as there are different types of stakeholders at different levels of a program, there are also different types of power at various levels. Oxfam’s work on power analysis suggests that “power takes different forms” (visible, hidden, and invisible), “power is acted out in different spaces” (closed, invited, and created), and “power occurs at different levels” (household, local, national, and global) (p. 1). Oxfam also articulates that power can be “power over,” as in “the power of the strong over the weak,” “power to,” as in the power to have agency in decision-making and behavior, “power with,” such as “collective power, and “power within,” as in self-efficacy (p. 1).

Thus, multiple stakeholders have differing forms of power in program evaluation. Evaluators may have the power to select which projects they work on, what methods they use, and what analysis tools to use, in tandem with the various other roles the evaluator has (Skolits, Morrow, & Burr, 2009; Mertens & Wilson, 2012). Program administrators have the power to ‘hire and fire,’ and members of the program staff may have the power to choose whether to implement the program as proposed. Volunteers have the power to choose how much of their time they give, as do, in many cases, the participants, on whom the program *depends*.

In this way, even if a program targets, for example, ‘delinquent’ youth who seemingly have no power, they still do—even if their attendance is mandatory, they have the power to choose whether to be active, engaged, and truly *present*. They also have the power to decide

whether or not to complete program measures, and even if mandated, they have the power to choose whether or not to be thoughtful and honest in their responses. In programming and evaluation alike, various stakeholders may or may not be aware of their power, and they consciously or subconsciously make decisions and negotiations based on their position.

Empowerment Evaluation

Empowerment evaluation is an approach that was coined by David Fetterman. Contrary to what the name may connote, though, empowerment evaluation is not necessarily about empowerment—depending on how one conceptualizes the construct. Based on the name alone, one might assume empowerment evaluation prioritizes social justice, or perhaps values (Mertens & Wilson, 2012). However, according to Mertens and Wilson (2012), this approach actually prioritizes *use*. Empowerment evaluation, as Fetterman (2010) named it, focuses on evaluation skill-building. Although evaluation skills are undoubtedly useful in program work, this approach is not truly focused on *empowerment*, but rather on helping clients build their own evaluation skills as part of the evaluation process.

Evaluation Capacity Building

Similar to the work of empowerment evaluation, evaluation capacity building is the “intentional process to increase individual motivation, knowledge, and skills, and to enhance a group or organization’s ability to conduct or use evaluation” (Labin et. al, 2013). Appropriately named, the purpose of evaluation capacity building work is to increase individual and organizational evaluation capacity, such that evaluation informs the individual’s work and is infused within the organizational culture, extending beyond the period of the program’s work with the evaluator.

Strategies for evaluation capacity building. According to Preskill and Boyle (2008), there are ten main strategies for evaluation capacity building. Some of these are strategies that focus on the individual, such as an evaluation internship, while others happen at the organizational level, such as holding evaluation meetings. Preskill and Boyle's (2008) list of ten strategies includes (1) internships, (2) written materials, (3) technology, (4) meetings, (5) appreciative inquiry, (6) communities of practice/ learning circles, (7) training, (8) involvement in an evaluation process, (9) technical assistance, and (10) coaching or mentoring. Preskill and Boyle (2008) explain that in selecting one or a combination of evaluation capacity building strategies to use, evaluators ought not to focus on what strategy is the "best," but rather which is the best fit for the program's needs.

The present study seeks to inform a collaborative evaluation capacity building effort that emphasizes cultural responsiveness in evaluating family support programs. Thus, it is important to draw from theory in the evaluation, family studies, and organizational learning literature.

Theoretical Frameworks

Cultural responsiveness and collaboration. This study draws on the intersection of two significant conceptual frameworks in the field of evaluation: cultural responsiveness and collaborative evaluation. Central to this project is Askew, Beverly, and Jay's (2012) conceptualization of the interplay between collaborative evaluation and cultural responsiveness, in which "the intentional application of collaborative evaluation techniques coupled with a culturally responsive stance enhances the responsiveness, validity and utility of evaluations, as well as the cultural responsiveness of evaluators" (p. 552). This conceptualization is relevant because it couples collaboration with cultural responsiveness. Although it does not include evaluation capacity-building, it emphasizes that having a culturally responsive stance enhances

the evaluation process, particularly when paired with intentional collaboration. Future work from this lens may move this conceptualization forward by *operationalizing* this intentional coupling of collaboration and a culturally responsive stance.

Collaborative evaluation, which “has grown in popularity along with similar participatory, empowerment, and utilization-focused evaluation approaches” in the past decade, is “an approach that offers, among others, many advantages in terms of access to information, quality of information gathered, opportunities for creative problem-solving, and receptivity to findings” (Rodríguez-Campos, 2012, p. 523). This approach to evaluation “intentionally incorporates program stakeholders into the evaluation process and views their participation as essential for generating evaluation findings that are meaningful, useful and effective” (Askew, Beverly, & Jay, 2012). This approach contributes to the field’s goal to practice “deliberative democratic evaluation” by meaningfully engaging diverse stakeholders in the evaluation process (Greene, 2000, p. 27). As previously described, culturally responsive evaluation recognizes that culture influences programs throughout their lifecycles, from the design phase, through implementation and evaluation (SenGupta, Hopson, & Thompson-Robinson, 2004). Even more broadly, culture influences values and evaluation is fundamentally concerned with values, merit, and worth.

In addition to the evaluation-related framework, this study also draws on theories from the fields of Human Development & Family Studies and Organizational Development, which are also relevant to this interdisciplinary project.

Ecological Systems Theory. Given the dynamic lives and complex contexts in which low-income families live and family support programs operate, an ecological approach is useful in examining the multiple layers of factors that contribute to program development,

implementation, and evaluation. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, often depicted pictorially with concentric circles or nested cylinders, provides a framework through which the influences of these multiple layers may be explored (Bronfenbrenner, 1992).

At the center of this schema is the individual, with all of her personality traits, behavioral tendencies, preferences, cognitive abilities, and genetic predispositions. In this study, the individual is important because she inevitably brings in her personal story, experiences, motivations, and attitudes. The individual is at the center of the *Microsystem*, the individual's immediate environment, including her family and close friends. The next level in Bronfenbrenner's model is the *Mesosystem*, which is comprised of interactions between the individual's various microsystems, at home and at work, for example. In this study, the mesosystem may consist of possible interactions that may occur between different programs in the same community.

The *Exosystem*, the third layer in the model, describes the indirect influences on the individual. In this study, the exosystem may be understood as what is going on beyond Roanoke that affects the programs and their participating families, such as across the state of Virginia. The *Macrosystem*, represented by the outermost ring, contains within it, all the previous layers. The Macrosystem consists of society, politics, social norms and expectations, and culture. The *Chronosystem* represents the historical timing, at which the other layers exist, including era, economic conditions, and funding priorities. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems theory is an invaluable lens through which to understand the experiences of the program leaders participating in this study, as well as the families participating in their programs.

Family Resilience Practice Framework. Family resilience is an important construct, as it is central to the work of family support programs. According to Walsh (2013), "family

resilience can be defined as the ability of families to withstand and rebound from disruptive life challenges, strengthened and more resourceful” (p. 66). Family resilience framework shifts from viewing families as *withstanding* stressful conditions to undergoing *relational transformation* as a mechanism of experiencing adversity together (Walsh, 2002). Walsh (2013) explains that “the concept of resilience entails much more than managing stress, shouldering a burden, or surviving an ordeal” (p. 66).

This is relevant to the work of family support programs such as those represented in this needs assessment because the goal of their work is not manage family crises, but more importantly, to address some of the underlying factors contributing to adversity, such as lack of education, un(der)employment, chronic poverty, family stress, and strained family relationships. In thinking about program staff’s needs to develop evaluation skills to understand how their programs are addressing these issues, it is important to use the lens of a family resilience practice framework.

Organizational Learning. Organizational learning promotes organizational development and adaptation. According to Senge (1990), there are five core components of organizational learning: personal mastery, mental models, shared visioning, team learning, and systems thinking. In this study, participants essentially spoke on behalf of the programs and/or organizations with which they work. An organizational learning framework can help contextualize program staff’s perceptions of what their program does, what it is doing well, what needs to be improved, and where the program should head in the future. Thus, organizational learning offers an important lens through which each program’s evaluation capacity-building needs can be assessed.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Recruitment of Participants

To recruit potential study participants, I conducted a Google internet search with varying combinations of the terms “Roanoke,” “family,” “children,” “youth,” “parents,” “support,” “services,” “assistance,” “help,” and “program”. For each relevant result, I viewed the program’s website. Once I arrived at a program’s website, I perused the site to ensure that the program was related to some form of family support.

After verifying the relevance, I scanned the program website for staff contact information. If several staff members were listed, I looked at their titles (if provided) to see who would be an appropriate contact (such as a program director, manager, or leader). I then electronically sent the IRB-approved project recruitment letter to 20 recipients from 15 programs. When listed, I sent the recruitment letter to staff email addresses. If there was only a program email listed, I sent the invitation letter to that email address. In cases where no email addresses were listed, I searched the website for a place to send a message directly from the website, in which case I pasted the approved project invitation letter in the appropriate place.

Of the recruitment messages I sent, I received messages from nine program leaders. Two of the program leaders from whom I received messages were not included in the study. One individual was not included because he declined, explaining that he was presently inundated with research-related projects. The other individual was excluded because she indicated that she did not believe the Roanoke site of her project was in a position to participate presently. While she offered to participate representing a different program location, I explained that only Roanoke programs were being included in the current study. The remaining seven program leaders from

whom I received messages did participate, representing the seven the programs in this needs assessment.

Data Collection

For this needs assessment, I collected data using semi-structured interviews. Interview participants were Roanoke family support program staff and administrators who were interested in participating in the needs assessment study and responded to my invitation email. All interviews were conducted in-person, at the program site or office.

Although I anticipated one-on-one interviews, there were two cases in which the interviewee brought an additional staff member or two to participate in the interview as well. All participants received and signed an IRB-approved consent form just prior to beginning the interview. In all, I conducted seven interviews: one group interview, one pair interview, and five individual interviews. Each interview was audio recorded on two password-protected Apple iPhone 5 devices. I also reviewed each program's website and collected any available program documents, such as recruitment materials, participant handouts, and program publications for possible document analysis or triangulation.

Limitations

The primary limitation of this project was its reliance on participants' ability and motivation to participate in the needs assessment, such as the interview process. Although the interview was framed as an opportunity for me to learn about the program, including its strengths and challenges, some participants still may not have felt comfortable revealing some of their program's weaknesses. An underlying limitation of this project is also any latent negative perceptions participants may have about evaluation in general, such that they may fear judgment of their own work or their program's work.

There are also some limitations related to sampling. I identified potential interview participants by conducting an internet search of Roanoke family support programs and scanning program websites for staff contact information. I then sent the IRB-approved project recruitment letter to individual staff members, using their listed email address or their program website's internal messaging service. Thus, I was limited to programs that had active websites listing staff contact information or allowing for messages to be sent directly from the program website. Further, since I used email as the method of contact for recruitment, staff members who do not actively check their email may have missed the opportunity to participate in the study. Staff members who received and responded to my invitation may therefore be characteristically different from those who did not. For example, they may not have access to a work email account or they may be technologically savvy, which may or may not be related to the program with which they work.

Analysis

After the data were collected, they were analyzed for emergent themes. The audio data from each interview was partially transcribed, excluding the parts of the responses that were not directly relevant to the study. Qualitative researchers have discussed the value of balancing feasibility and precision, and partial transcription enabled me to hone in on the participants' insights about their programs (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Tessier, 2012). Responses were included if they in some way alluded to the program's work in Roanoke, the program participants, the staff roles, the program's strengths and challenges, and the program's goals for evaluation, improvement, and future program development.

I listened to each interview at least twice, making notes of patterns, interesting quotes, and contradictions. I also reviewed my notes from during the interviews to see if I had noted

additional insights. The notes that I found most striking were those which I wrote after my interview with the program leaders of the Youth Enrichment Center, who happened to be the only two participants of color, based on my observation. Although I initially felt ‘refreshed’ that I would have the opportunity to speak with other folks of color, I realized that I was having trouble code-switching, as I struggled to balance wanting to be accepted as an ‘insider’ and being approachable with seeming knowledgeable and professional.

The transcripts of each interview were first coded individually, in the order in which the interviews were conducted. Each transcript was coded using multi-colored highlighting, whereby each color represented a different code. After each interview was coded, codes were compared across interviews, to look for similar codes and unique codes. Codes that were very similar were combined and unique codes remained distinct. Ultimately, the major codes were UNIQUE (participants describing their program as distinct from other programs), EVALHOPE (what participants hope evaluation could do for their programs), ECBYES / ECBNO (whether the participant expressed interest in ECB), CONTRADICTION (when a participant said something that contradicted something s/he said previously), STORY (if the participant shared a story about the program), EVALTOOL (if the participant named an evaluation method or instrument), FUNDING (if the participant mentioned funding as part of their interest in or need for evaluation), MISINFO (if something the participant seemed to be misinformation) and EVALTHINK (if the participant said something that suggested s/he had evaluation in mind).

Finally, I reviewed the two unsolicited program pamphlets I was given at the time of the interview, especially for information related to program theory of change or rationale, past evaluations, program successes, and participant stories. I examined both the interview and

document data for emergent themes to gain insight into each program's goals, assets, and needs, as related to program evaluation.

Chapter 4

Results

After learning about each of the seven programs represented in this needs assessment, I have learned that they are all truly family support programs, and that they were, therefore, appropriate to include in the study. The seven participating programs include the Christian Youth and Family Resource Center, Save Smart, the Youth Enrichment Center, Pathways to Employment, Family Ark, the Social Justice Mission, and Roanoke Community Outreach. All seven programs, which are presented under pseudonyms in an effort to honor their confidentiality, are Roanoke-based and serve communities in Roanoke.

Christian Youth and Family Resource Center

The director, middle school coordinator, and high school coordinator described the Christian Youth & Family Resource center as a program that supports Southeast Roanoke youth and their families with educational, material, social, and spiritual support. They are currently serving 29 families, which includes 39 students. The program leaders identified the comprehensive wrap-around services, which work together to meet the families' different needs, as the program's major strength. They would like to improve their program by increasing parent engagement in the program activities. The program director explained, "there's a lot of different things that we touch on with the kids but in reality a lot of that also needs to be touched on with the parents as well."

The program director explained that the center does both internal and external reporting, which helps them understand what is going well, what is not, and what needs to be increased or decreased. She explained that reporting helps them to identify "what needs to be increased/decreased, what we need to add, what we need to take away from it. Each coordinator provides

units of service each month. So, we look and evaluate what each student is getting and how many units of service they are getting as well.” However, when asked about how past evaluations have helped or hurt the program, she responded,

I don’t necessarily see a particular way that they’ve hurt. Sometimes, I guess I could say that sometimes it doesn’t always fully show the magnitude of what we do or— We don’t fit into a category of afterschool programs. We’re not a typical afterschool program. So sometimes it’s difficult to ... to... to fit into those categories and to really show on paper what we do with the families so I feel like that is probably the only down side. I really like evaluations cause it— especially with the parents— because it shows what—where they are and what they need.

Although the program director and coordinators are used to reporting, they still feel limited by existing paper measures, which they do not feel fully captures all of the work they do with families.

Something that really stood out from this group interview was their hope that future evaluation work would help them understand how others, such as the City, the school system, and parents, perceive the program. Not only did they express being misunderstood by these important stakeholders, but they also expressed hope that evaluation would help them identify and *repair* any misconceptions about who their program is and what it does.

The program director also enthusiastically described her frustration with Likert scale surveys.

Just the questionnaires that say—somewhat likely, not likely—They’re so—I mean when I’ve had to do them, I’m just like, “Somewhat? Kinda? I don’t know?”. [Laughter] yeah—yeah. I just feel like some of those are redundant and – not helpful – I don’t think

they're helpful. I've also seen surveys that use double negatives, and I'm like, "Why are you using double negatives, cause that's like—what answer do you want?"

She revealed that surveys with Likert scales are confusing, even to her, and that she believes that families tend not to complete them because they "do that cause they do not want to feel inadequate in any way," or sometimes because they have low literacy skills. The director explained that they have had more success with data collection when they

had people come in and just talk to them to get information. It's been—they've been very open to just talking. They can talk and let you know. They like to talk and share. And once—[they've] got a couple of parents and once they get started the others will finally come in and get a huge discussion going.

Save Smart

The Community Impact Manager of the Save Smart program, who was dressed in a costume for Halloween, described the program, which "was a national movement that was brought to Roanoke," as a program that serves un- or under-banked families in Roanoke. She said that low-income families tend not to use banks or credit unions, but rely on informal money management methods, like storing money "under their mattress" and using "payday lenders." She said that "there are clients of programs—social workers tell us, case workers tell us—they have clients that can really benefit from understanding the financial system." She explained that families can spend about \$1,000 per year on cash advance services and cash checking fees when they do not use a bank account.

The Community Impact Manager described that this was a pilot program that has "been wildly successful." The program "goals were 1,000 checking accounts opened for the un- or under-banked and 200 hours of education offered." She also explained, however, that being able

to count the number of checking accounts opened and hours of education delivered is not sufficient for her to demonstrate community impact. She stated very intently, “we need to be able to track and prove that *lives* were changed. And that, that, we really need to strengthen our ability to do.”

Thus, although her title of Community Impact Manager and her existing milestones demonstrate program success, she would like further evaluation work to “kinda figure out what is the most important aspect that we can change for them that we can measure.” She further explained that the outcomes are multileveled—“We like to look at things in two tracks. One is like at the individual level and one is how we’re moving the needle in the community.” The Community Impact Manager is in the process of planning the second edition of this program, which will be “more intensive ... and more expensive” than the original pilot. She explained that as she thinks about the next iteration of this program, she knows that she needs to think about the outcome measures early on. She said, “we need to build that piece into this new program. So there will be outcome measures documented.” Later, she explained that because participants are in different circumstances and have different goals for themselves, “the measures are a little bit complicated.” She said that a major challenge “is figuring out what data metrics are really gonna demonstrate success.”

One concrete change the Community Impact Manager described between the current Save Smart program and the second iteration she is planning, is that classes and workshops will be offered as part of a series, rather than individual stand-alone classes, which she expects to facilitate better tracking of program participants.

We think and we understand from our partners from the pre-planning work that we’ve done, that [offerin a series, rather than independent classes] is gonna be more successful.

It also allows us to then ... track behavior, knowledge, over time. Whereas right now, sometimes we get post-test out of our random classes, but sometimes we don't and we're not really tracking that data really well. So we wanna get to a point where we can track the folks who are coming and be able to prove that, hey we are making a difference. So that is the shift—that is the main shift.

Here, the Community Impact Manager demonstrates an understanding of data collection, pre-/post- tests, and tracking participants, which may suggest that she has some working knowledge of evaluation. However, in another instance, she says,

So that's one of our challenges with [the second iteration's] evaluation—is figuring out what data metrics are really gonna demonstrate success. 'Cause you want some that are across all your clients. Everybody *x*, everybody *x*, everybody *x*, everybody *x*. 'Cause you *don't* wanna say, “Well some people this, and some people that.” You know, that's not a good reporting mechanism.

It is unclear why she believes that reporting intragroup differences is undesirable, as these may still reveal important information about how Save Smart is working, but this suggests that there is room for her to further develop her foundational understanding of evaluation.

Youth Enrichment Center

The Youth Enrichment Center serves about 120 Roanoke city children, “99% African-American,” in grades Kindergarten through twelfth grade. The center offers an academic enrichment program, which includes tutoring, and evidence-based non-violence education program, a leadership program, and a fitness and nutrition program. The leader of the social programs explained that their programming at the Youth Enrichment center is different from other afterschool programs. She said, “we're not just a typical afterschool program, where your

kid comes and hang out. We actually offer programming and we actually have a schedule where they transition in 45-minute blocks from one group to the next from the time they get here until the time they go home.” The leader of the fitness and nutrition program shared that a major strength of the program was that they “are very diverse in what [they] all bring to the table. And from staff, all the way up to [their] board members, [they’re] all from different walks of life.”

The social program leader shared some of their challenges:

I mean, our challenges, honestly speaking, is always trying to find more ways to get parents engaged and getting more parents hands-on because even with us, you know, having Parent Meetings and different ways to engage our parents we don’t always get a large um, large rate of participation. Um, and with any program, we always have a constant need to improve our services by updating our facilities, providing the necessary supplies and things like that. That’s a ongoing need.

Although the staff did not know much about program evaluation, the social program leader asserted

I know that it’s important and it drives—it drives funding. If you really wanna be funded you know like for instance, with us being a partner with [a local nonprofit] now, um, one of the biggest things we have to do is to track our outcomes in order to show them that we’re— our programming is effective. Um, so, when looking for the most effective ways—cause like I mentioned to you, [the fitness and nutrition program leader] and I, we both have to track, you know, our tutoring program kind of speaks for itself cause you look at test scores, you look at, report cards, and you can kind of collect information from that data. However, measuring social skills and fitness and nutrition in such a short time frame is a little bit different, so we—He and I have been brainstorming some ways of

being more creative and we haven't quite figured out what's the best strategy yet, because we been—I been at it for a few years, he's pretty new on board. So, but we know it is important in order to maintain sustainability.

Although past evaluations have been limited, the staff seem very open to learning about evaluation and developing the skills to evaluate various types of programs—beyond simply relying on school report cards, which may not capture the holistic youth development that this center seeks to foster.

Pathways to Employment

The Community Support Services Director of the Pathways to Employment program described it as a program that primarily serves low-income, African-American single mothers, though there are male participants and participants of other races. She described three components of the program as assistance finding a job, training and/or education to help transition from an entry level job to a career, and wrap-around services that include other forms of assistance, such as childcare and mental health services.

Pathways to Employment is a place-based program, located in a public housing community. The director explained that there is an “I’m not gonna get involved” culture in the community, which challenges participation in the program. She explained, however, that Pathways to Employment seeks out those who may seem unmotivated, because they may be facing barriers that are surmountable. She said,

If you perceive people as not being motivated, and not gonna do anything, then why waste your time? You know, people have that attitude a lot of times. [Pathways to Employment], I think one of the strengths is, we go after those folks. In that, if they appear not motivated, they may well not be motivated, *but*, there may be some kinda

factor that has played into that. Or it could be that they just, run up a wall so often that they just found out it hurts and they just stop. You know, you hit so many barriers and you just wanna give up—or you think it’s hopeless. We found with alotta folks that they don’t have confidence in themselves. They don’t believe that they can do anything, even other than work at a Burger King, you know—nothing against Burger King. But if a single mom works at Burger King and has to pay for childcare at the same time, she might as well hand her paycheck over to them. Even if they get help from [Social Services], they still end up having to pay, their rent goes up, they lose their Medicaid—so they just throw their hands up and say “Forget it.” ... It’s the system that’s broken. It’s not our folks. It’s the system.

The director also said that she has found success in going into the community for “personal contact and outreach.” She says that this type of active recruitment has helped to build trust in the program’s reputation and has begun to help more people inquire about the program.

Although her evaluation activities are limited to the funder’s metrics, she is also interested in capturing people’s stories. She told the story of a welder who has received training and will make \$20 per hour, which is a huge story of success for the program. She hopes to capture more stories like that of the welder. Although funding is secure until 2019, the director would like to measure other outcomes to help secure more sustainable funding and expand the program to other public housing programs.

Family Ark

The Executive Director of Family Ark explained that a network of churches works together to provide shelter for homeless families. Family Ark works with four families at a time, not only coordinating their shelter in local church buildings, but also to provide full-time case

management. She explains that the program is really well supported and has over 1,000 volunteers. However, she would like to expand the program to actually own housing that participants can live in for set periods of time.

The director says that their evaluation data is limited to statistics on how many participants are “able-bodied” and how many are able to secure permanent housing. She thinks that further evaluation work will “absolutely” help the program “to focus more strategically.” She also said that having evaluation support would be helpful because “outside eyes are always useful” because program staff can “get so entrenched.” She also expressed that evaluation could help to “more clearly see where are opportunities.”

Social Justice Mission

The director of the Social Justice Mission explained that he sees the work of the organization as “ministry.” He explained that his organization is “very unique” because of its “holistic” approach—it seeks to support the “whole person,” with both “physical needs” and “spiritual needs.” The organization offers multiple programs, including two shelters (one for men, who are an underserved segment of the homeless population, and one for victims of domestic violence, who tend to be women and their children), emergency financial assistance to help families pay rent and utilities, cases-by-case help, and seasonal programs like a back-to-school drive and a Christmas gift drive for children.

In addition to being unique because of their holistic approach, the director also explains that the domestic violence shelter is one of the only secure facilities in the region. These unique qualities are what the director described as strengths of the organization. Interestingly, he described the culture of the staff as an area for improvement. He explained that he would like the staff to be comfortable with questioning, “Are there aspects we need to stop? Are we willing to

stop?” Although he did not articulate this as building a culture of evaluation, his responses refer to promoting critical reflection and openness to change.

Roanoke Community Outreach

The politician leading Roanoke Community Outreach began the interview by talking about a program that seeks to provide low-income Roanoke families with access to “quality early childhood education.” However, near the (initial end) of the interview, he introduced the other programs he is working on to address community issues of housing, employment transportation, lack of access to healthy food.

Unlike the other programs represented in this study, Roanoke Community Outreach is still in the planning phase—the politician and his office are working to establish partnerships in the community to get to the phase of actual implementation. Thus, the politician was not able to speak about participant demographics, program strengths and areas for improvement, etc. Yet, his interest in evaluation from this early on in the process suggests that he is aware that evaluation should be (at the very least) *considered* during the program planning process. Something remarkable from this interview was that the politician was very clear about what he needed (or rather, thought he needed). When I asked him whether he thought Roanoke Community Outreach would benefit from evaluation, he quickly declared, “Yes—100%.”

We would be interested in working with you ... to take our data and objectively analyze it— put it in presentable format. So we can then say this is a success, hopefully—right?

So if that’s what you would do as part of your work, then that’s what we would need.

Although the politician described intently that he needed an external evaluator to objectively analyze program data, he became receptive to the idea of evaluation capacity building.

When I explained that I am interested in building evaluation *capacity* such that program staff can develop evaluation skills that will inform their current and future program work, he responded, “I think that’s fantastic.” He explained that the program partners “need to get their act together—right? I’m just speaking loosely...and so you could be working with them on how to evaluate internally, produce this report, that way that report can go out—um—and they can use that to justify their funding etcetera.” Thus, although he had not anticipated evaluation capacity building, he seemed to embrace the concept once I explained it to him.

Chapter 5

Discussion

Overall, this needs assessment indicated that program leaders understood their program's mission and description, though they sometimes were not clear on their program boundaries. Sometimes, for example, a respondent would talk about their center or organization, then zoom in on the program, and then zoom back out to the larger organization, without clarifying what was in the program scope.

Respondents from all seven interviews expressed that their programs were unique compared to others doing similar work, saying that they were “not a typical program.” Although there can be value in program leaders believing their program makes unique contributions to the community, an intense perception of uniqueness may inhibit program leaders' confidence that their program can be appropriately or adequately evaluated. Like the director of the Christian Youth & Family Resource Center mentioned, program staff may feel limited in their evaluation opportunities if they do not feel that there are measures that can do their work ‘justice.’ Similarly, another theme that emerged from the interviews was perceived complexity. Like the Save Smart Community Impact Manager described, measuring outcomes for both individuals and the community can be difficult, especially when indicators cannot be interpreted the same for all participants.

Another theme that emerged from the interviews was that programs, such as the Christian Youth & Family Resource Center and Pathways to Employment, are misunderstood and evaluation can help repair stakeholder perceptions about the program. The interview participants also clearly articulated that they need credible evidence that demonstrates their program's value. The program leaders participating in this needs assessment tended to talk about gathering

credible evidence as “tracking outcome data.” Although some participants, such as the directors of Save Smart and Pathways to Employment, also mentioned the value of stories, they tended to pair their need for “credible evidence” with the need for “sustainability” in program funding—suggesting that they may feel more confident in quantitative data to help them justify their program’s worth.

Participants from all seven programs discussed in some way, using evaluation for program improvement. The social program leader at the Youth Enrichment center emphasized that they “don’t anticipate *changing* [the] programming—[they] just wanna improve it and make it better.” Participants from both community centers expressed that they hoped evaluation would help them “find more ways to get parents engaged...and more hands-on.” This commonality provides the rationale for the community of practice/ learning circle approach to evaluation capacity building, as opposed to one-on-one coaching. Program leaders doing similar work are facing similar challenges and share in their hope for evaluation to help them make the improvements they think they need to strengthen their programs.

In addition to looking for commonalities and anomalies in the interview data, I also considered what was *not* said. The first “missing” idea was the need for cultural responsiveness, appropriateness, or competence (recognizing the plurality of this construct). Although some participants explicitly discussed their participants’ race, only one actually mentioned the need to acknowledge culture in their program delivery or evaluation. The Community Impact Manager of the Save Smart program acknowledged the need to understand her participants’ ideas about money and saving, which may be informed, at least in part, by their culture. She discussed the importance of beginning financial education by talking with participants about their backgrounds. So, a financial coach needs to think “about [participants’] understanding of money,

culturally, and in [the participants'] family, and where did that come from and how did [the participant grow up]." Two participants mentioned that the communities their program serve have a culture of "I'm not gonna get involved" or "hesitation ... for further education".

Intentional work around cultural responsiveness may help program leaders address aspects of community culture like what the leaders allude to as apathy and lack of motivation for education.

In all seven interviews, it was not until I explained evaluation capacity building that the participants expressed interest in it. That is, none of the participants initially expressed the desire to develop their own evaluation skills as part of their goals or areas for improvement. However, all seven of the participants expressed enthusiastic interest in evaluation capacity building after my explanation, making comments like, "This is gonna be awesome!" and "I'm excited." Thus, I believe they will be motivated to participate in an evaluation capacity building project. Since many of them mentioned other staff members, and in two cases brought other staff members to the interview with them, I am hopeful that evaluation capacity building with these participants has the potential to foster organizational learning within their programs.

Conclusion

Although this project focused on family programs in Roanoke, Virginia, the insights learned from this project may inform future evaluation capacity building efforts—particularly with social programs that work with low-income youth and families living in underserved communities. The findings can also help evaluators and evaluation capacity building facilitators to think about how to get participants to think critically about the role of culture, paradigm, and context, in their work. Further, the individual needs assessment participants who decide to be a part of an evaluation capacity building project as part of my dissertation may gain the evaluation knowledge and skills to improve their own programs and better serve Roanoke families in need.

Beyond this study, there remains much to be explored about the possible relationships between evaluation capacity building, collaboration, and cultural responsiveness. Though there is no shortage of literature on these topics, the evaluation community has yet to deeply explore how they intersect and influence one another.

One intersection of interest may be an exploration of how to make evaluation capacity building efforts more culturally responsive—developing and adapting strategies and practices that are relevant to the evaluation capacity building participants. For example, an evaluator may be doing, or better, *planning* to do an evaluation capacity building project with a certain group. By doing some research and consulting with community members, the evaluator may surmise that a community of practice or learning circle may be an appropriate approach for the group. To develop this example further, consider that this group shares a cultural script which suggests that sharing a meal before working together is the way to foster the trust needed to engage in collaborative work. The evaluator is charged, then, with working to not only respectfully honor culture, but also intentionally weave it into the work, which is really *their work together*—hence the importance of the collaborative approach.

Not only should the evaluator explore how s/he might be able to respond to this cultural precursor to collaboration, but s/he might also intentionally build this practice into part of the learning. In the spirit of collaboration and cultural responsiveness, the evaluator would not then proceed to devise what s/he may believe is an illustrative activity around the cultural practice. Rather, s/he would engage the participants to help design the activity—offering both the evaluator and the participants the opportunity to learn, to teach, and, as Greenwood and Levin (2007) suggest, to build knowledge.

Another possible intersection may be an evaluation capacity building approach which focuses on instilling cultural responsiveness in the evaluation capacity building participants, throughout the course of their work together, as opposed to in a single session or workshop on cultural responsiveness. This *transformative evaluation capacity building*, as I would call it, could foster the training that enables participants to develop the motivation, knowledge, skills, *and community*, to think critically about the social justice issues that affect themselves personally and/or affect the participants in their programs—disenfranchised families, in the case of this study. Either, or better yet, *both* of these directions, which I may have the opportunity to explore in my dissertation research, have the potential to contribute to the field of evaluation’s knowledge about the intersection of collaboration and cultural responsiveness in evaluation capacity building.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: IRB-Approved Recruitment Letter

Dear [Name],

I am Natalie Cook, a graduate student studying Community Education and Program Evaluation at Virginia Tech. I am writing you to find out whether you may be interested in a program development and evaluation project. By participating, you will have the opportunity to figure out how to learn more about your participants, document program success, learn from challenges, and develop the evaluation section of future funding proposals or program reports. Since I am providing these services as part of my research on cultural responsiveness and evaluation capacity-building, participation is available to you at no cost.

To help develop this project, I am conducting a needs assessment to find out how to best serve family support programs in the Roanoke area. As part of this research project, you are invited to participate in a thirty to sixty minute audio-recorded interview about your program's goals, activities, and outcomes. Your participation is voluntary and confidential. The results from this study will only be presented under a program pseudonym (false name) to protect your identity, as well as the identity of your program.

If you are interested in participating and would be willing to meet to discuss this project further, please feel free to email me at necook@vt.edu or call me at (607)227-6702.

Thank you,

Natalie E. Cook
Ph.D. Student | Agricultural, Leadership & Community Education
Virginia Tech
necook.weebly.com

APPENDIX B: Interview Protocol

“Getting to Know Your Program” Interview Protocol

1. Thank you!
2. Review of interview purpose
3. Consent form signing
4. Interview overview

Program Description

1. Would you please tell me about your program?
 - a. Who does the program serve? What are your participants like?
 - b. What is your role in the program? How long have you worked with the program?
 - c. What services does the program provide?
2. What are some of the strengths of your program?
3. What are some of the needs of your program?
4. How do you know about the program’s strengths and needs?

Program Evaluation

1. Would you please let me know what you know (if anything) about program evaluation?
2. Has your program been evaluated in the past?
 - a. “Yes” – How?
 - i. Who conducted the evaluation?
 - ii. What did the evaluation show?
 - iii. How was the evaluation helpful and/or harmful to your program?
 - b. “No”
 - i. Why not?

Program Visioning

1. Are you hoping your program will improve in any particular areas?
2. Do you think evaluation may help improve your program? If so, how?
3. Would you be interested in free help planning an evaluation of your program as part of an evaluation research project?
 - a. “Yes”
 - i. Great – why do you think that would be useful to you or your program?
 - ii. What would you hope to get out of it?
 - b. “No”
 - i. That’s okay – would you mind sharing why you’re not interested?

APPENDIX C: Partial Transcripts

Christian Youth & Family Resource Center

We serve Southeast Roanoke and the students that we serve are from third to twelfth grade. Students can enroll from third grade all the way up to eighth grade but they must age into our high school program. The things that we provide is spiritual guidance, life skills, devotions, service learning opportunities and then we also provide tutoring and academic help as well and also case management for parents, we help with IEPs, 504 Plans, so a large array of academic help as well.

Well [the families] are actually quite a bit involved. There is a piece that parents sign when they first enroll their student—their child. And it is basically a contract between all three of us—the child, the parent, and staff. So parents actually come to family nights once a month and we provide parent education, from financial education to nutrition, so a lot of things we discuss their needs for their lives and the needs in the community as well.

This is my first year as the director—six years' experience though as the Middle School Coordinator. So, I started here several years ago but this is my first year in the director's position. – Fourth year? Yeah. Fourth year. It's my fourth year in the high school [program].

Definitely Wrap-Around services. We look at the family. We don't just look at the student. We look at the family's needs as well. We also have counselors from [another organization] that come in and provide counseling for our students. We have community counseling, individual counseling, group counseling. So we provide a lot of Wrap-Around services, and we provide a lot of resources. Here at the center we also have a food pantry and emergency services for aid of utilities, food, and things of that nature. So there's a lot of places that we can direct our families and help to provide them with things, you know including donations of clothes and shoes and things for their kids and themselves. We also offer access to our computer labs and try to help them as a family.

I would say that more time with parents is needed. A lot of, uh. We are actually really interested in having a Parent Resource Center dedicated to parents and their needs, for their families, because often what we see is we have the students and somewhere between you know, 3 – 3 ½ hours a day, 5 days a week, but the real need comes to help the parents—parent education, parent involvement, social aspects. So there's a lot of different things that we touch on with the kids but in reality a lot of that also needs to be touched on with the parents as well.

We actually do reporting. We do have reporting that we provide, not just for grants and things of that nature but for ourselves to look at where our goals and things are. We are continually evaluating ourselves and our program, what needs to be increased/ decreased, what we need to add, what we need to take away from it. Each coordinator provides units of service each month.

So, we look and evaluate what each student is getting and how many units of service they are getting as well.

So program evaluation as in speaking with parents?

In the past, we've had a couple of different ways to evaluate. We've had interns come in, where they provide a program and then there's you know questionnaires or things that are given to students and/or parents and then those are taken up and use the data that we collect from those. Sometimes in parent meetings we will pose a question and give them a pre-test and a post-test, just to see where they are and what they need. So there's a couple different ways in the past that we've used evaluation.

It depends. Coordinators, director, [another organization] surveys the kids semi-annually—beginning and end—so they do a pre-test and a post-test. [That organization] also provides [our teen program]. They provide that aspect to our program and they do evaluations as well.

I don't necessarily see a particular way that they've hurt. Sometimes, I guess I could say that sometimes it doesn't always fully show the magnitude of what we do or ... We don't fit into a category of afterschool programs. We're not a typical afterschool program. Right. So sometimes it's difficult to ... to... to fit into those categories and to really show on paper what we do with the families so I feel like that is probably the only down side. I really like evaluations cause it especially with the parents because it shows what—where they are and what they need.

[Laughter] How many hours do you have—because ... you want our DREAMS? Or just stay realistic?

I think parent involvement is something that we continue to want to provide—is parent education and parent involvement. So I feel like that's somewhere—that is definitely a piece of our program where we want to expand and to provide more of. Not that there can't be areas where we provide more for the students as well, but in particular right now we feel that more parent involvement, more parent education, more parent understanding, in general and resources, is definitely where we need to expand our program.

Because we can do all we want with the kids—but if we can't change the home environment, we can't change the way parents look at the kids...

The perspectives? The perspective—absolutely—then we can't really make any major changes.

I think one other piece to that is helping the parents form a better bond with the schools.

With the schools—absolutely.

And helping *us* form a better bond with the schools.

In particular, in our experience, Roanoke City is not always as cooperative as we would like sometimes, so we're not sure how they view us. We want to advocate and help in any way possible. Sometimes it's not always perceived as we would like. So that is another area.

Typically administration. I feel that sometimes they think we're coming in and ... in an adversarial role almost. And we're not adversarial. Right. We just want to make the bond—the connection—better with the parent and the school.

And sometimes I feel that they kind of shy away from that or kind of not want us to step on their toes or feel like we're going to step on their toes. And that's not our role—not what we intend to do. So I think that a better relationship with the school system in some areas would be helpful and to show—we are a small program. We serve a fairly small community as far as the grand scheme of things. Currently we have 29 families and a total of 39 students in the program.

I definitely think that evaluation with parents and even the school system would—I would like to see what the school system thinks that we do, versus what we actually do. I would also like to see what the parents think that we do versus what we actually do. It could be very informative and very interesting to see that and also to see how we can change our image of it's coming across in any other way and so I think that that would be very helpful.

I think that we could definitely be interested in that. Absolutely.

You know, for me personally, and I guess this is just a personal—I do, I'm really interested in where the parents are and what the parents think we do. And I want to see how we can improve our relationship with them to help their child, help their families, and help them personally. Because often times, what we see is parents are dealing with personal issues that then reflect upon their child and, and, you know, again, I sometimes I feel like we—we're putting a Band-Aid on a gaping hole and, you know, if we could get to the root of the real issue—that's, that's what I would like to see from it.

I think we're gonna see a range. Parents who have known us for a long time are going to know what we do, and trust us. But we had a big influx of new parents this year, and even some of our older parents, I wonder if they really do understand. It's gonna be the gamete—we're gonna see the gamete.

You have parents who aren't as involved with us, as we feel that they should be, and even for long term parents as well.

I'd like to see the schools to though; I think that's important. I'd like to see the schools.

I'd like for teachers to see us as a resource for them, which is what we see ourselves as. That's what we hope to be, and what we like to see ourselves as, but I believe there's a breakdown of communication, and maybe it is on our part, maybe we need to see that, but I don't feel like it's in that part. I think it's—a lot of times when we contact a school system we don't get responses.

We understand they're very busy, but there's somehow a breakdown of communication and that's what I would like to see—the bond back together.

You know, I got this feeling that all think of us is daycare, or after school, or just a tutoring program—that's it.

They don't see that we have so much to offer—the components to our program.

And, the long term benefits for the student, versus only the short term. If a family commits to the program, we have so many benefits to it, including scholarships when they graduate with us, you know, continual support from staff, and counseling—so that's, that's kind of where we are.

Just the questionnaires that say—somewhat likely, not likely—They're so—I mean when I've had to do them, I'm just like, “Somewhat? Kinda? I don't know?”. [Laughter] yeah—yeah. I just feel like some of those are redundant and – not helpful – I don't think they're helpful. I've also seen surveys that use double negatives, and I'm like, “Why are you using double negatives, cause that's like –what answer do you want?”

So your mindset is one way and all of a sudden it's like, what? Right—I know they're trying to trick'em up.

“Can I take it home and do it?” And then you never see it again.

And I think sometimes they hesitate to put—especially if it's about information that they may not quite understand. I think that they hesitate to do that 'cause they do not want to feel inadequate in any way. And, um, a lot of time there is hesitation in this community for further education, um... just based upon the community itself. So I think that if we talk about things that they do not understand, they hesitate—to not disclose information.

I don't know the numbers—I could probably actually get those—you know, I would say that probably at least 30% of our parent have less than a High School education. There are several families where the parents dropped off 10th/11th grade or before that—or maybe they got their GED, you know.

[Data collection methods that don't require much reading and writing would be helpful] would be the best in those particular situations. Absolutely—yes.

And we've had people come in and just talk to them to get information. It's been—they've been very open to just talking. They can talk and let you know. They like to talk and share. And once—we've got a couple of parents and once they get started the others will finally come in and get a huge discussion going.

I think that trust is a huge issue with them as well. So if they feel that they're in a trusting situation, they're more likely to share. And I don't think that a piece of paper can provide a trusting foundation. So, I think that definitely other means, you know, is much more helpful for

them. It could be a jump-off—well, starting point for discussion—simple, very simple type paper, just to get them thinking in certain areas and go forward.

2-3 questions maybe, to let them see where they are, that's ok. And yes/no questions—not you know, maybe, somewhat likely, kind of likely, likely to not—

Leave the “I don't know” in there—Yes/No/ I Don't Know – depends on the question. Keep it simple.

Family Ark

We are a program that works with families with children that are homeless. We work with local congregations to provide shelter and meals and then we do case management and um, skill-building. Help them find employment and housing. And then we do an after-care program.

We work with families with children. So they have to have a child with them. We let *them* define “family.” So we don't say that it has to be a male and female—anything. If they're living as a family and identify as a family, we take them as a family. Most of our families are—I actually have some demographics on them. If you don't mind, I'll pull those. I did um, like race, if you want to know like that kind of stuff, how many veterans we serve, um—well, maybe not that.

I am Executive Director. I've been here for 4 and a half years. I've been a volunteer for —off and on—for 17 years. We opened in '97 and I was one of the first volunteers. I'm very honored to work here.

The way our program works is the families go to a congregation—we only serve four families at a time, with a maximum of 14 people. So, um, they go to a—we provide transportation to a congregation, they stay in a congregation for a week at a time, all four families—from Sunday to Sunday. So Sunday evening we take them—they're at the church or temple by 6 and they stay until 7am. And we coordinate recruiting the congregations—the congregations then recruit volunteers. So that's all volunteer-driven. And then at 7am we pick them up and bring them back here, or the kids go to school, or the parents, if they're employed, go to work. While they're here, they're expected to work on finding employment, if they're able-bodied—and then finding housing.

We also do skill-building. We help them with resumes, and how to do a job search, and how to keep a job, through case management. Um, you know if they need child care, helping them determine where they could go for childcare, providing resources, that type of thing. And then, um, we offer skill-building classes, and how to look for an apartment, how to talk to landlords, what your rights are as a renter—you know those types of things. And then there are—we also offer Budgeting classes, Financial Management, Nutrition, and Parenting. Very comprehensive.

I think one of the strengths is the number of volunteers. We have over 1,000 volunteers who provide the shelter and the meals. And you know,, with that, the families get to meet, they

develop a support system, they get to meet people that can help them find jobs, help them find housing, that type of thing. So they're exposed to a wider network.

We're very successful. 87% of our families move into housing on exit. Um, and um, 86% of able-bodied adults are employed when they exit, so I think it's a strength that we have. We're small enough to offer individualized case management. The average length of stay is 57 days. So we tell them when they come into the program that it's a 60 day program. If they're employed we try to encourage them to move within 30 days, if they're able—to rapidly rehouse them. But some of our folks have higher barriers.

We don't take—the qualifications for entry: they have to be sober, free of drugs and alcohol, they cannot have a violent criminal history, and if they have a mental health issue, it has to be well-managed. We don't have skilled case managers in the evening. And then if they're escaping domestic violence, we ask that they be screened by the local domestic violence center to make sure that they're safe in our program. Because we're not a secure facility, so—You asked me demographics. I [found] those if you want them.

Let's see. Most of them are single parent families—female head of household. Most of our families are—I can't read the numbers. In the entire time we've served, 425 or something were Caucasian, and then about half that were African American. We had a few, um Latinos and then some other races. We've served 1,419 people since we opened. 764 of those were children. That was 3/2014, so that does not include our 2015 numbers.

The challenges are, gosh, we'd really like to be able to help more folks. Capacity. We always have a waiting list. We stay full most of the time, or maybe like a couple weeks ago we had three families move into permanent housing the same weekend. So just sort of timing of getting new families in makes it a little hard sometimes. So we know the capacity is larger. I think that just like for any nonprofit, funding is always an issue. I think because we depend so heavily on congregations, sometimes encouraging congregations to participate in seems overwhelming, and when they think homeless....they're hesitant to be involved.

We participate in the Homeless Management Information System—we're required to do that to receive any kinda federal funding. So, um, we have good data on who we serve and what their special needs are—all that. And we measure that internally also for other things. Like they don't measure how long they stay in permanent housing after they leave. So we measure those things internally.

What do you mean [by past evaluations]?

We do use it for improvement, particularly things like decline reports because we've had to turn away, and what were the reasons? We use it if we realize we're serving a lot of children under the age of 5, you know the Parenting class would be different than if we're serving, you know,

all teenagers. So, we do use it for program evaluation. We also use it for grant funding. And um, also to sell our program.

Well, I used to work for [a nonprofit organization]. I was the Community Impact Manager and my responsibility was to oversee the programs that were funded by [the nonprofit organization] and to develop an evaluation tool that was used by volunteers. And then oversee the process of how that was done.

It was very intensive. It was almost like writing a grant. They had to submit information. And we had a committee that would meet for um, that were broken up. Certain committees oversaw certain things... That committee would review the applications, data, site visit, and do follow up questions, and we had a score sheet for funding, and we determined what their score was, whether they passed, that type of thing. And funding was determined based on that.

I've been here four years. I'm not sure that a lot of data has been collected prior to that, other than the key things of able-bodied adults (number of) and number of people exiting into permanent housing. One of the things that we've, you know realized, is that we could serve a lot more families. One of the things, um, we learned at one point, that we needed to extend the program from 60 days to 90 days, because housing was not available, it was during the recession. Now once things started to clear up from that we were able to go back to 60 days. You know, it sorta keeps us on target when we look at how many families we've served, how quickly they're moving. If they're not moving, are we not offering the services that they need, or is there something going on in the community? So...

We're real excited. We just did a strategic plan. And so, um, we are hoping to expand our grant. Not so much the number of people we serve and the... shelter. We realized that there are not enough congregations—so that part of the program probably will not expand. But we're hoping to own some housing so that we can move them into permanent housing more rapidly and do some follow-up with them, so then we can get more people then through the program. So our goal is to have six housing units by the end of 2018. So...

I'm really stressed! [laughter]

Oh definitely [think evaluation might help improve the program]. Well I think it helps us evaluate what we really need to do so that we can more strategically focus. But I think it also helps us um, recognize what we may not be doing well, and determine whether we still need to do that, or whether we need to change how we're doing it. Um, I think it also keeps the Board and the volunteers excited, as well as the staff. It also helps us serve our clients better. You know. They know when things are changing. They sense it—not that they're here for too long. They're only here for two months, at the most, so.

Yes! [I am interested in the ECB project that this needs assessment will inform.] I think outside eyes looking at our program is always going to be useful. We get so entrenched that we think we're doing something well, or we think we're addressing a need, when maybe we really aren't.

I would hope that I would be able to more clearly see what's going on and where our areas of um opportunity are.

Oh wonderful! [The ECB project] will be fun! Okay, that's great, I like that. So it'll be a group of us working together? Oh this'll be fun! Okay great! Alright!

Pathways to Employment

Sure. The program here is called [Pathways to Employment]. It's a pilot program from [the housing authority]. We received it on April 1st or April 2nd. It is a three-million-dollar grant over the next four years, so it'll end the first of April in 2019. It's specifically focused on jobs and wrap-around services for the folks at [the public housing community here]. There are 300 units here.

[We offer] supportive services— and I can talk a little more about what all that entails. But there are 300 units here. In order to qualify for the grant we needed to have at least 250. They had to be located in a quarter mile radius circle. They're trying to do a study on place-based services and to see the impact of when the services are located smack dabbed in the middle of where the residents live.

So we were one of nine cities in the country to be awarded the grant. There are three components to the grant. The first component is called [Pathways to Employment] Earned Income Disallowance. And what that means is there's a financial incentive for participating in the program. In that, normally in public housing, when you go out and get a job and you have earned income coming in, your rent goes up based on that earned income. As participants in the [Pathways to Employment] program, residents here can go out and get a job.

Let's say they're not working now and they're paying the minimum rent, which is \$50 a month. They go out and get a job. Let's say that normally their rent would go up to \$250. For the next four years, [Pathways to Employment] will pay that extra \$200 a month. So they get to stay at \$50 rent and they get to either pay off debt, or save money, or use it for child care or use it for transportation to work. So it's supposed to give them a helping hand to get where they need to be where they want to be. So that's the first step— component.

The second component is the employment component and that's job placement services, education services, training. Let's say they don't have their GED we have GED classes going on in the lab. We have Microsoft office classes going on basic computer classes, soft skills, job skills, interviewing skills— you name it, it's over there. Hiring events— we got HR folks coming over that are onsite and doing hiring events.

So it's really focusing in on that employment piece of it and not only just entry level jobs. I mean we're trying to encourage folks to get entry level jobs right now, so that they can pay their rent, so that they can meet their everyday needs that they have— but even past that, we're trying

to encourage them to develop a skill. Like for example, we have a gentleman now who is gone into welding. So he has a month left in his welding training, and then he'll be eligible to make prolly 20 something dollars an hour as a welder. So he's extremely excited. Um, and he's been one of our best PR people. Cause he's told everybody about it. I mean seriously it's a great program and folks are—if they're working in the program, they're really starting to benefit from it—which is exciting.

The third piece is the wrap-around services. That's the supportive services piece, in that we have many community partners that have joined us to provide supportive services. Anything you can think of that would affect someone either getting a job or keeping a job, that's what we want to help with. Whatever they may need—it's just so individualized. Which is the good thing about [Pathways to Employment], is that normally when programs are set up, it's kinda like a – you build a box, and then the client has to fit into that box. There is no box for [Pathways to Employment]. The box is built customized for the client, so whatever they need, that's what they get.

So it's a really, really good program. We're really excited about it. Like I said, we started in April. We were a little overwhelmed, in that we never thought we would have the response that we've had. And here at [this public housing community] there's always been kind of a “I'm not gonna get involved, not gonna participate.” We struggled with that—even to the point that—we have a community meeting every year and we invite the residents so they can tell the housing authority what they would like to see or issues that they've had or things they need fixed in their apartment—we might have three people show up, for the last three or so years that I've been here.

We thought, we're gonna go ahead and get started with the promotion of the program, so that come time when we're ready to really kick-off, we'll have a good basis. And we never anticipated that people would come outta the woodwork. I mean people started talking—we were going around and knocking on doors and having people fill out like a pre-enrollment form, and then people started coming to us, which *never* happens. So, we had a little bit of momentum going there. It's kind of slowed down since then, but we have about 140 individuals who have filled out a pre-enrollment form, and about 70 of those have completed the enrollment process so far.

Yes, once they finish the enrollment process, they're official participants. Yes this is the first cohort...so when I got your email, I thought, “This is gonna be awesome!”

Low-income, majority African-American, majority female, and a lot of single moms. We do have several young men in the program as well but the majority of the population here at [this public housing community] are single moms. [Participants are ages] 18 to 62.

I think the strengths—one of the strengths has been the personal contact—the outreach. You get so busy a lot of times—you don't really— If you perceive people as not being motivated, and not

gonna do anything, then why waste your time? You know, people have that attitude a lot of times. [Pathways to Employment], I think one of the strengths is, we go after those folks. In that, if they appear not motivated, they may well not be motivated, *but*, there may be some kinda factor that has played into that. Or it could be that they just, run up a wall so often that they just found out it hurts and they just stop. You know, you hit so many barriers and you just wanna give up—or you think it’s hopeless. We found with alotta folks that they don’t have confidence in themselves. They don’t believe that they can do anything, even other than work at a Burger King, you know—nothing against Burger King. But if a single mom works at Burger King and has to pay for childcare at the same time, she might as well hand her paycheck over to them. Even if they get help from [Social Services], they still end up having to pay, their rent goes up, they lose their Medicaid—so they just throw their hands up and say “Forget it.”

It’s the system that’s broken. It’s not our folks. It’s the system.

One of the biggest challenges we have is transportation. And I don’t know what we can do about it—cause that’s just Roanoke.

There has been a little bit of a challenge ... keeping up [with the influx of participants].

I think as we go through and people start talking about success stories—our welder, for example. Once he goes out and gets a job and starts telling people, “Hey, my life changed. This is how it happened. Then, those other people may come and say, “Hey, tell me more about this.”

I think we’re in the twenties [in the number of participants working]. Most of those are just kind of survival jobs to help them pay their current bills, and then we can try to get them on a career path.

[Our funder] always gives us some kind of evaluation tool. For our other grants it’s a logic model, this one, they just call it a metric chart. Which, basically, they send us a list of things that they would like to measure and we send them numbers back—a guesstimate of how many we were gonna be able to reach in the next four years. So, that’s the big scope as far as evaluation. We do have to send those in every quarter, and we know that, so we’ve got our eyes on that, trying to meet those metrics. On a smaller scale, I think we evaluate as we go. In terms of, “Okay, is this working?” And if not, “Okay, what needs to be changed?”

I am the Community Support Services Director. I guess ultimately I am the one that evaluates. I am the one that keeps my eye on what’s going on. We do have a manager—she’s in the thick of it. She does the day-to-day kind of stuff—and the forest and the trees type of thing—I’m looking at the forest. To see, okay, is this working? She kinda gives me the ins and outs of what’s going on. I am over there on a daily basis but I don’t know everything that goes on there on a daily basis.

I have been here about 3 and a half years I think. This has been probably the biggest challenge I have faced since I've been here. In that, just the scope of it, and starting from nothing to building it up. Everything else had been running when I got here—it was already going. But this is quite the undertaking.

[Our funder metrics tend to show us] things like how many people have gotten a job, how many people are in GED classes, basic stuff like that—basic stuff—it's not anything like—percentage who have gotten employment—things like that.

That's one of the things we've been talking about—are there things that we want to measure that aren't on the [funder metric] because we'd like to sustain this program. We only have this funding till 2019. This is an awesome program—I would love to see it sustained past that, so we're looking at what kind of things do we need to record, so what when it comes time to apply for other grants, or argue funding from the city officials, that we have the statistics to show that this is a really good program that we can't afford to see let go. So we were kinda looking at what we need to collect and we were starting to brainstorm ideas—but we haven't gotten there yet. ...I would [also] like to expand it to other public housing sites. It is a lofty goal at this point, but that's my vision, so.

There's lots of improvements that need to be made, but I think it's just natural—the growth process.

Yes, yes—your email was perfect timing 'cause we had just had that conversation in the executive team, so I think that's awesome.

Well, I would like to have the metrics to show that this is a viable program, but even further than being viable, that it's too good to let go. Because like I said, when we go for other funding, I wanna be able to show them black and white—we need this program, 'cause we do. Honestly, there's nothing out like this. There really isn't.

Yeah, I love the success stories, because I think those are often more effective than metrics. They really are, they touch people's heart. People can see a number, but they hear somebody's life who's changed—it gives me goosebumps, you know?

Roanoke Community Outreach

Um, so as a member of the Virginia House Delegates General Assembly, I am very concerned about the whole gamete as far as education is concerned, but one thing in particular is early childhood development. And one program that we have here is called the [early childhood] program.

And one program we're trying to get off the ground is the [early childhood] program. And one problem we found is that the very poor have access to funding for daycare, but as far as early

childhood, the working class have a problem affording it. There's a fiscal cliff there and so what we are trying to figure out is how we can kind of help people climb out of poverty and climb the economic ladder and not be so penalized along the way. So that's what we're pretty interested in.

This program— we're wanting to start a pilot program, which would be out of [a local school] in partnership with [a local housing and development agency] and [another nonprofit program]. So we would start there, then anybody that would fit into a certain income bracket— working class income bracket— would be able to have a sliding scale support structure for early childhood development.

Mine— I'm a facilitator and public servant as somebody who's trying to bring together the resources and break down some of the silos and barriers to make early childhood development more accessible for folks.

No, no, we've been forming it and the community has run into a challenge recently. I don't know how much Roanoke- specific stuff you're interested in, but [a local childcare center] abruptly closed about two months ago and that put everything on hold as everyone was trying to figure out what to do with these 60 children, and so that kind of put a little bump in the road. But we have a good now—consensus as to what it would look like.

Um, just making early childhood *quality*. So there's a difference between daycare and early childhood development. Early childhood education, you know, it's a quality—VSQUI (Virginia Star Quality Initiative) rated program at [a local public school], which is 3-star rated, solid program, and it's going to make it more accessible for working class folks.

Yes, so [mentions student]—it would be interesting for you to meet [this student] who's working with [this professor] who's tied to Virginia Tech. Have you heard of [this professor]? Well he's been a leader in early childhood development for the last 40 years. So we would be working with someone out of Virginia Tech to gather some of the objective and subjective data for the pilot project—so that way we have some information to present back to supporters to try to grow the project throughout the City and/or Valley.

Yes, 100%! Got to have it—Planning, Implementation, Control. So we're in Planning, transitioning into Implementation, and the Control is the monitoring and evaluation. It's important for us to grow and take the next step, so it's very important.

I think that you can definitely be involved here and so what is, you know— what I think we can do is sit down with [this other student]. We need to get you to meet [this other student] very soon because she's working on— I don't know if your focus is on early childhood or education in general.

So that could be anything. So she's really early childhood on this. But this could be an excellent way to circle you in and to be involved, because they're literally doing program evaluation right now for some other projects—some early childhood projects in Roanoke, but you know one thing that we could be. So [the local school partner] fundraises and funds a few of these sliding scale slots, but that's been the extent of it— it's only been sliding scale slots. What we've been trying to do is to integrate beyond just the funding of the slots. In other words, families encouraged to take classes. The deal is we'll give funding for half your expense –you pay the other half. It's a quality program—the center must maintain the quality of program.

But you need to be taking classes to improve yourself either— and it can be throughout the community— Nutrition, Parenting, Financial Literacy— whatever it may be. So it would be really interesting even before this starts— there's actually a group of folks that are receiving some funding but they haven't been formally enrolled in any program just yet. And then what we want to do is have this kind of new cohort, but that can all kind of be put in together. And it's just a matter of getting those families then to agree moving forward –you need to be doing x to improve—whatever.

That are already existing right? We were going to subsidize even more slots, but in this new program we could potentially do that. So there's lots of possibilities. Now [the local housing and development agency] has a program [helping people find employment]. Are you familiar with that? So that focuses on [one public housing community]. And so the initial pilot— which, [the local school partner] is next to [this public housing community]. The initial pilot is to work with them to provide classes and support for these families through the grant money they have. Things would be well on their way had the next closest to [the public housing community, the center I mentioned before], had not closed down two months ago putting everyone in crisis mode. So that's where we're at now.

Oh ok—any program. I'm just describing education projects to you. I got a bunch of other projects. But what I need to figure out— you need staff to train? So it may be that, not necessarily for me. So what I do, is I convene. I take all these resources and try and get things done, you know. So you know, all these things are in their infancy. I'm a newly-elected person. In infancy— an anti-violence thing, housing thing for ex-offenders, a small business project, another small business idea, a— transportation issues, there's a straight homeless project. Some of them are ideas some of them are well on their way.

The ex-offender housing project is already happening. So what I want to do is use you and people like you to, you know, I want to scale things. Take ideas and make them work and scale them. And many times to scale them we need data. So I got to think through this.

Yes we do, but I'm trying to understand where you're coming from. Because what we want is program outcome data. We would be interested in working with you ... to take our data and objectively analyze it— put it in presentable format. So we can then say this is a success,

hopefully—right? So if that’s what you would do as part of your work, then that’s what we would need.

Sure, I agree. Yeah—so something to think through. Are you from—do you live in Roanoke now?

I think [the ECB project sounds] fantastic.

And the reason why that is also interesting— because we’re conveners, we are going to bring in other partners that are going to do this work. Because those partners need to get their act together—right? I’m just speaking loosely...and so you could be working with them on how to evaluate internally, produce this report, that way that report can go out—um—and they can use that to justify their funding etcetera.

Yeah that’s always a problem. There’s another project—so there’s an issue of food desserts. And I think a big part of alleviating food desserts is corner store initiatives—coming up with a program to facilitate healthier corner stores. It just doesn’t make sense to me— people giving away food—fruits and vegetables—there’s nothing sustainable about it, right? Everyone wants to help and do their thing, but that doesn’t alleviate the food dessert *itself*.

Save Smart

I’ll tell you what we know. We’ve been operating [Save Smart] for 2 years It’s been wildly successful— we’re very pleased. The goal was to focus on the un- and underbanked population—folks may be relying on a payday lender instead of using a bank.

[Save Smart] was a national movement that was brought to Roanoke... banking partners were convened by [nonprofit organization]. Almost everyone is on board. Banks sit together to make this happen... It’s awesome.

The plan was to offer free financial education and promote these accounts that would be very entry level, accessible for folks. Maybe they could have low or no fees, etc. We also offer free education to the community. Those [financial education workshops] have been attended with varying success.

We set two year goals. The goals were 1,000 checking accounts opened for the un-or under-banked and 200 hours of education offered. We’ve already met both of those goals, so we’re very proud. We’ve done very well. So the plan is, once we get sort of to the end of a phase to kinda think about, “Okay, what do we want to edit, and tweak, and adjust?”

So, what we noticed as a community is that there are other players in the sandbox for random education classes. There are other folks that offer you know, now and then, come do this class at the library—where ever. Other folks are doing that. None of us are very successful.

We know there are clients of programs—social workers tell us, case workers tell us—they have clients that can really benefit from understanding the financial system. So beyond that they're offering programming to these clients, and a lot of times they don't have the ability to say, "If you want my service, you have to go to a class." A lot of times they cannot do that—legally, or just in their program rules. The plan is to say, what if we could incentivize them to come to financial education...with good attendance [and] participation.

We think and we understand from our partners from the pre-planning work that we've done that that is gonna be more successful. It also allows us to then ... track behavior, knowledge, over time. Whereas right now, sometimes we get post-test out of our random classes, but sometimes we don't and we're not really tracking that data really well. So we wanna get to a point where we can track the folks who are coming and be able to prove that, hey we are making a difference. So that is the shift—that is the main shift.

The secondary shifts will be, we're gonna do more from a marketing kind of community promotion of the accounts. So how do we kind of promote this idea of banking in a kinda fun cheeky way through a, you know, not an expensive, but a fairly focused marketing campaign—bus ads, radio ads, you know that just talks about the importance of just not keeping your money in the mattress—or how you can save by keeping your money in a bank account.

So that's of where we've been and where we're going—and that's the simple version

Oh sure. We did—I didn't say this, but we did some research before kicking off the program. We planned Save Smart for almost a year before we kicked it off. And part of that was a neighborhood survey. We went into several neighborhoods with surveys and we heard all kinds of reasons why people won't use banks. Surprisingly to us, the main one being, they don't feel like they have enough money to use a bank. So maybe they're on benefits or something and they literally don't make it through the month, so there's not gonna be anything left over to leave in the bank, so there's a lot of that sense. But we do know sure, that there are folks out there that have been burned, that probably can't get bank into a bank because they owe another bank money. Um, so there's all sorts of reasons, from "I'm not comfortable with it," to "My parents never did it," to "I literally can't because I've messed up" to just "I don't have enough money to use a bank. But the problem with some, not all of those statements, is that it costs folks an incredible amount of money to not use a bank. And we have that data. They can spend, I mean, data shows up to \$1,000 a year if they're not using a bank, and wasting their *very* hard-earned money on these other services. And so our banks and our partners are interested in getting folks in the door, which I think is admirable because these are not—probably not clients that they're gonna make money off of—um, to save them the *heartache* that comes with some of these alternative lenders.

So, we know there's multiple reasons and we certainly know that probably the ad campaign won't be able to address all of those, but when you just start to address these sort of discomfort,

or make it seem cool, or um, make it seem like a normal part, then you start to get at least that piece and then you can get at the others on an individual basis through our education.

Partnership. That's a big [strength]. We have incredible partnerships, primarily just because this just doesn't happen. Almost every financial institution in your, in your community contributing money, contributing volunteer time. Staff of all of those institutions teach those classes, we don't pay educators. Um, and then they can, you know. Their staff time goes into all the planning, all the committee work. So that is an incredible network that we have to continue to leverage.

Um I would say the second strength is because we're at [this organization], a lot of partners know and recognize us, and I think trust us. ... So the non-partners, other nonprofits in the community who don't get funding from us are now partnering with us because of [Save Smart].

So I think people in the community really want financial education. People in the community really want it for their clients. Clients need it—may not want it. It's not fun to go and learn about checking accounts. Like, that's just not a sexy thing to do. So what we know now, or what we're realizing now is we need to incentivize that behavior. We cannot offer it, gleaming and posters and everything else and just expect folks to show. Um, and it's not fair, you know. We know that our clients have extremely busy lives. And, you know when they don't come, it's not because they think, Oh I don't need that. Um it's because it's not enticing enough for them to pick that over their busy life. So, um. How do we make it as easy as possible for them to come. So I think we got a couple strengths.

We need to be able to track and prove that *lives* were changed. And that, that, we really need to strengthen our ability to do.

We certainly know right now—'cause the banks have been reporting data to us that, that folks are opening new accounts. And we know that our financial education works because we—our curriculum is an evidence-based curriculum. So when we teach we have *some* indication to know that that works, but we need to be able to track that. We need to be able to influence people at a sort of saturation level. You know, one class—you come to one class and you never come back again? But I'm not tracking even if you do come to more than one. I need to be able to know that Kristin started here, here's maybe her pre-test, here's maybe her credit score before, her debt-to-income ratio, and here's where she was six months later, when she graduated from the program. And the ideal thing to be able to say, another six months, where are they? And that gets tricky to track data *that* far out, but you know, we can do that. We do anticipate launching this new—we're calling it [Save Smart 2]—with a fairly limited number of folks. We are not gonna go out and say, like we did a thousand checking accounts—we're gonna reach a thousand people in the first year. We want small cohorts, focused individuals who really wanna do it. Then we're able to demonstrate that success then we build on that in future years. But especially 1—2 years in, we're not talking about a huge number of people because it's gonna be more intensive...

We want them on a tablet, using their bank app, using an Excel sheet to budget. So that's gonna be more expensive.

At this point we plan to recruit—right now it's open to the public. For the new series, with all these incentives, we plan to recruit from our partners. So they may not be employed. Target populations we might look at include...folks who are showing up to get rent or mortgage assistance...or utility assistance to get through the month. Folks who are in our employment programs...folks who are in some of our residential programs...So, one of the other things that we know about leveraging something like education is when we can do it at a time in their life when something else is changing, something big is going on, you know, that's a time in your life when you're thinking ahead. Okay, did I just have a kid, maybe I'm thinking about my financial future, am I getting a job, now I have an income, I need to think about how I'm gonna manage that cash flow...

For the first two years, we've really been tracking against those goals that we set. So 1,000 new accounts and 200 hours of education. That's really what we set as our goal and that's really the benchmark against which we tracked ourselves. What we've not done is to really promote this.

How do we make it so that the amount of work we're expecting them to put in is incentivized with a decent reward? We need to build that piece into this new program. So there will be outcome measures documented. Um, they will probably be on an individualized basis, because of the small number of folks that we have. And we have financial goals—for example, you could think of the reduction of debt as being a very simple goal that you'd wanna track across all 10 of your clients. If your clients goal is to get a car to go to work, they're prolly gonna increase their debt. And if they're in a place, after working with the, you know financial coach, and getting all that information, that they're ok to do that. We're okay with them actually increasing their debt.

While we want to bump their credit score, we have to realize that there could be good reasons why it would go down ... So what I mean about individualized outcomes is, if that person's goal is decreasing their debt, then I'm gonna track that for them. And we're not gonna not track it for the other person, but if that's not their goal, we're not gonna report that as a failure, cause that's actually a win for them.

So as we think through, Okay, what does evaluation look like? The measures are a little bit complicated. We've thought about using credit score as a measure. It's a fairly complex score to move in six weeks or six months, depending on how quickly we move that. And it's a, you know, to think about if they do and get a car loan. Is that gonna bump their score down?

So that's one of our challenges with [round 2's] evaluation—is figuring out what data metrics are really gonna demonstrate success. Cause you want *some* that are across all your clients. Everybody X, everybody X, everybody X, every X. Cause you don't wanna say, “Well some people this, and some people that.” You know, that's not a good reporting mechanism.

We did a really good job of pulling together all of this data about the accounts for the first two years, and I have a beautiful sheet. I should have pulled that for you, but I will get it for you. Um, but, what I've not done is – or what we've not done is to really promote this in a—To me it just makes sense that this is something that we can cheaply and easily get out to the whole community. I can't invite the whole community to an intensive six part financial education course with a cash incentive—you know, I just can't.

We like to look at things in two tracks. One is like at the individual level and one is how we're moving the needle in the community. So as a community, if we wanna drive, you know, un-banked rates down, and get ore of our pop using mainstream organizations, and some of these have obviously turned over—How do we do that in a way that encourages folks to get out there and sign up for an account? And that might be a more community-level strategy through marketing that we get that, while we're also getting that person-to-person change.

The other thing that we should talk about that I haven't mentioned is that we've been using the FDIC curriculum called *Money Smart*. It is a very intensive, multi-session, and right now we're implementing it like, okay—We'll teach the Savings class then, the Checking Account class then, the Keep Your Money Safe class then, so—If you get a *series*... and if you get the same clients each time instead of random folks, you start to—you can tie it back to their experience.

I studied education. So you know, I'm big on—I can't just start teaching you Calculus if you need Algebra. You know, like you have to start—you have to meet a person where they are in their education—whatever it's about. You know to sort of bring them along with a person-focused um, or client-focused driven.

So right now the curriculum is very kind of intense. Dry is not the word, I mean they have built in things like activities and discussion starters. It's not completely lacking those things, but it doesn't at all start with you, and your goals and your financial need, and then let me respond to that.

So, with this we what we hope to do is to sort of merge the *Money Smart* curriculum... We've talked about the term financial wellness and financial empowerment—so kind of shifting from “financial education” to that type of language. Another organization has a curriculum called *Your Money, Your Goals*, and it's not really a classroom curriculum like *Money Smart* is. So it's not really a classroom curriculum, but it's more one-on-one focused. So the committee that's working on planning the education, they're working on a way to kinda merge those two styles. So how does it start with, so let's talk about your understanding of money, culturally, and in your family, and where did that come from and how did you grow up, and then, you know—How do we talk about your goals and where do you wanna be, and then how do we drive the rest of the education from that? And that's hard to do in a group setting, and that's every educator, every where's, you know, conundrum, but how do we get at a better balance of that?

So, um, I put together two main committees. One is sort of an Education and Coaching Committee, and one is the Referrals and Incentives Committee. The Education Committee has been kinda brainstorming what kinda topics we wanna cover, fitting that together with the two curriculums. But we had to halt that, cause we said, we sort of through out that list of outcomes we might measure, but then we just went into curriculum. And I said, Okay, we gotta go back. We gotta know what we wanna measure. Cause our curriculum, I don't have it printed I don't think, is probably two pages typed. There's literally so much you could cover and I've sorta worked through that and put it in eight-ish categories. Honestly, I'd rather have six. I think that's a little more reasonable.

How do we decide what to teach and what not to teach? It needs to be driven by what we intend to measure. So we need to go back to that. And I need to do that fairly quickly. We need to kinda figure out what is the more important aspect that we can change for them that we can measure. Let's identify that and make that clear...

The other piece is that we don't do now...we need to be able to complement classroom style education with individual help. Some of those goals may need to be more of a "If you face this"—like really bad debt triage. But until we find out who's in the class, then we can figure out what we need to teach. Until we know who's in the class, then we can formulate, ok what do we teach, and what do we coach?

While we are focused on that community-level, move the needle of un-banked folks, we also need to know that when they became banked, that that meant something to them and their family.

I think that's great because like I said, we have to have that mix of, here's some standard measures that we can look at across participants, but then here's this other piece that we need to understand on an individual basis. How did this person—how successful were they? And it may mean that their debt went up, and it may mean that their credit score went down—I mean, I hope it doesn't actually mean that in a lot of cases, but it certainly could and that could actually be a very good thing for them.

So my job—my day job—this, is really my, I'm taking this on cause we don't have staff. My day job is I run the process that we evaluate everybody that we fund—[for the past] two years. And so I've been doing [Save Smart] since this summer. We wanted to wait to hire staff until we did this planning process so we could say, my goal is to be able to say we need full-time staff. We had part-time staff before. Um, but, I also need to be able to show and look at other programs to be able to say—we expect them to be able to show demonstrable outcomes across participants. I don't just accept, you know, "I just *know* they did better." I wouldn't accept that. So we expect that and we expect, anyway—that's just part of what we're looking at for others and we need to hold ourselves to that very same, if not additional standards.

This [ECB project] is perfect—don't you think? I mean this is perfect 'cause it's like in a miracle outcome that a positive may be a good thing a negative could be a good thing, how do you deal

with that? How do we also use—how do we understand their stories and all of the ways... You talked about using those qualitative methods, you know, that's not the traditional way that we measure outcomes, but it may be a supplemental value-add to our—okay.

Okay so where I am with Save Smart, well, even that's fuzzy. So my initial goal was to finish this planning by December—launch something in January. Budget-wise and staff timing wise, it'll prolly be that we're still planning into the beginning of next year and start recruiting late winter—February, March. So this committee is gonna keep meeting and if they sorta outline things, then we'll provide that to your project and then we'll keep working with the project to say, You know, can we make this better, can we tweak this? Because you know even if we start with one cohort with one set of measurements, we can tweak it. Okay, yeah! Then I think this sounds good. ... Consider us interested then. I think it would be helpful.

Social Justice Mission

Um, well, um...the [Social Justice Mission] has a variety of programs here in the Roanoke area. We do, out of our main facility here, we do emergency assistance, and that varies from rent and utilities, we have a small food pantry here. Um, we actually during the winter time, we have, I guess it's called a wood program, for people that need firewood. We accommodate those folks. And then we'll get people come in for different requests, different assistance. And sometimes if it's outside the norm of what we do, it's sorta done on a case-by-case basis. You know, during um, before the school year, we actually partner with folks to do Back-to-School Blasts, you know backpacks and things like that. But after that then we had people come in asking for school supplies. We had some resources available that we were able to provide families on a case-by-case, if they actually came in and asked. So that sorta covers what we do here.

I do have two shelters that we operate. One is an all-men's facility, and we have 58 beds. We're not at capacity right now, but we're pretty much full throughout the year. And it's a fluctuation of men from all walks of life. You know there's guys that have been pre-released from prison, there's homeless men, men dealing with different types of addiction—just a variety of aspects where no matter where they find themselves, there's an opportunity for them to kinda work through a program to get them re-established. And work with a variety of agencies to get them stable again so they can move back to being on their own. And kinda move past their situation. And we work with a lot of different partners in the Valley. So that sort of takes care of that population of homeless men.

And we also have a domestic violence shelter. Both shelters are staffed 24 hours, 7 days a week, in some regard. But the domestic violence shelter, it's a secure facility and it's for women and children that are in immediate danger as it relates to domestic violence. If for some reason we had a male with kids that was in a domestic violence [situation], then we would figure out a way to find some sort of housing for them or some sort of protection for them. It's anybody dealing with domestic violence. But the shelter itself is designed for women and children. And they can

house a max of 60 women and children in that facility, and it varies from month to month and throughout the year, how many people are in that shelter. Some months we may not have a whole lot and then there's different times where—we never get to capacity cause I couldn't imagine being at the shelter where there were 60 women and children all in one facility—it gets crazy as it gets higher, and people can only imagine what—just having that amount of people in that facility.

So those are two of our big programs. And then there's other things that we partner with in the community to be able to address certain needs. You know as we're coming into this time of year, the Holiday Season, Christmastime. We do our [holiday gift] program, where families would come in in October and sign up for the [holiday gift] program. This year, we'll have between 11 to 12 hundred families and between 25 to 26 hundred kids that will be on the [holiday gift] program. ... [Donors] will go and shop for those kids and provide the Christmas [gifts], and then we distribute those to the families later on into as we get closer to Christmas. Its's one of the—I don't get to um, be that hands-on with [that program] because we're also running the [curbside money donation program]. So I do more hands-on with that.

Ultimately, my wife and I are the [Social Justice Mission] Officers for us—the [Social Justice Mission] here in the Valley. So ultimately the responsibility of everything that [we] have here is our responsibility. That it ultimately falls on our shoulders. We have been here since June of 2014. With [Social Justice Mission] Officers, we are what we consider commissioned and ordained ministers. Because the [Social Justice Mission] is a faith-based, Christian organization and our ultimate mission statement for all [Social Justice Mission sites], I'm gon' find it here [in this *Holy Bible*] and read it for you. Because in some way, all of the [Social Justice Mission sites] are tied together. Um, well...[flips through *Holy Bible*]. Well. The mission of all [Social Justice Mission sites] is um, that we are part of the Universal Christian Church. Um, that our message is based on the Gospels, based on the *Bible*. That our ultimate mission is to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and to meet human needs in His name without discrimination. And so how that plays out in where the [Social Justice Mission] is in every community could be somewhat different.

There are aspects that [Social Justice Mission sites] have in other communities that are similar to what we do here, but it's not all the same. Um, but all of our mission and what we do through our programs and everything ties back to who we are as an organization. So what's interesting is, what's interesting for the [Mission] ... The [Mission] itself, this particular year, 2015, celebrated its 150th Anniversary...

[The founding preacher] really believed that for people to really understand the message that he was preaching, during that time, that they need to *feed* the folks that were listening to the message. ... So he would go and serve food and soup and sandwiches and a variety of stuff to fill their bellies, and then be able to share and kinda get them cleaned up and kinda shared that. And it has just expanded over the years, where the work of the [Mission] just opened in its 127th

country around the world. And so ultimately we are a very worldwide organization, but we are also a very grassroots organization. The [Mission] in the Roanoke Valley has had some sort of presence here in some degree since 1884. It has evolved over the years.

I think both of our shelters are huge strengths. Because it's an opportunity—with [the domestic violence shelter], we are one of the few, not [only] in the Valley, but in the region, we're probably one of the few, or maybe the only, secure facility for domestic violence. With the [men's shelter], for us, it's basically trying to work with men and working with them holistically. That we're just not trying to house them, or feed them, but we're trying to work with them to address a variety of things in the whole person, and approach it with a holistic ministry. Sorta living out our faith without having to speak words—to live it through our actions. ...We try to live it out in the services that we conduct.

We also conduct mid-week services. We have a women's group that meets every week. We do a Bible study. We have character-building programs on Sunday for kids. We also have weekly worship services on Sunday.

I think part of the struggle is, some folks, or some people, don't wanna let go of what they're doing. That sometimes I think that we as service organizations tend to perpetuate the problem instead of trying to address it—or getting to the root cause. Because I think if we were to get to a root cause in addressing certain needs, and let say that need is no longer there, then there's certain group and businesses and nonprofit and a variety of things that basically they've worked themselves out of a job. And I think it may be a little harsh to say, but some people wanna hold onto what they do because they don't wanna lose, because in some respect, it is their job. But I think the opportunity is if we address the needs, and the needs are being met, its and opportunity to say, “Okay, what are needs that have popped up now and need to be addressed? It's the willingness to adapt to the situations that sometimes it has to change over the years. That we can't keep doing the same thing year after year, and we need to adapt to the needs.

I really can't answer that on the past evaluations, 'cause one of the things with us as officers is that we move every three to five years. And when you come into a new appointment, and start looking at the programs and start asking questions, and then you have employees and volunteers, and other people that have worked alongside us for a very long time... We start asking questions and people say, “Well, we've always done it this way. We always have served in this manner. To me, that's not a good answer. To me that's an opportunity to say, “Okay, why have we always done it this way? Is there something else we need to be doing that's better? Are there things that we should be stopping?”

Yes, I absolutely believe that it will be a help. I think it will open the eyes of a lot of folks—what I would consider—I don't wanna say stakeholders, but when I think about stakeholders, you have employees, I've got what I consider the congregational folks...that make us their church home and sort of have a stake in different things. Then we have a group of volunteers, what we

call an Advisory Board—they bring their expertise to kind of help us further the mission along. I think all those individuals will have an opportunity to look at, okay, to give some good evaluation of our programs. And the [Mission] itself in the community—how people view us, and maybe how we can do a better job of—and maybe how we present ourselves, and how we carry out our mission. Are there aspects of our programs that we need to stop? And are we willing to stop them and be able to address things that we need to focus on.

One of the struggles we have—and my wife and I have sorta noticed it right away, and try to get people to understand, is people's view of the [Mission] in the community is—they're missing pieces of it. They recognize [our shelters] and our programs—these things that we do, but don't always associate them with the [Mission].

Youth Enrichment Center

I'll just generalize the whole scope of the organization as a whole because he and I both do two separate programming within the organization, but um... The [Youth Enrichment Center] serves approximately 120 youth, and their age ranges are from kindergarten and we serve all the way up to twelfth grade. Um, let's see... Our demographics, I mean we're open to Roanoke City residents, and even some—yeah, all Roanoke City residents. They can go to school in the County, however they do have to be Roanoke City residents. Um, so we get all um, four of the middle schools, that we are feeder schools, um, PH is our primary high school that we get our high school students from, and then we pretty much cover the majority of the elementary schools here, so 99% of our population here are African-American children. I can't really get into specifics about like incomes and things like that but we primarily serve children from lower income households and single parent households.

So the organization as a whole, we have a Leadership program, a Social Skills program, and that's tied into Leadership, so we do a evidence-based program called *Peace Builders*. We use *Leadership for the 21st Century* as our foundation for our leadership program. We have a fitness and nutrition program. We also have a literacy-based program, as well as a tutoring component here at the center. So my particular role is the Social Skills, so I do the Peace Builders program and the leadership program. [My colleague here] does our fitness and nutrition program.

We have a –we mostly deal with the children. However, we do have Parent Meetings. So we do have some level of engagement with the families.

Some of the strengths of the West End Center is that we are very diverse in what we all bring to the table. And from staff, all the way up to our board members, we're all from different walks of life, so gives our children and our parents a wide range of help that we can provide their—or support that we can provide their child.

Yeah, we're not just a typical afterschool program, where your kid comes and hang out. We actually offer programming and we actually have a schedule where they transition in 45-minute blocks from one group to the next from the time they get here until the time they go home.

2:30 up until 6:00 is the pick-up time. And then in the summer time we have a full-day program so it's 8:30 to 4:30. And it's not free. The tuition is very low and affordable. It's a \$15 a week tuition, even in the summer when they get to come for all day for 8 hours.

I mean, our challenges, honestly speaking, is always trying to find more ways to get parents engaged and getting more parents hands-on because even with us, you know, having Parent Meetings and different ways to engage our parents we don't always get a large um, large rate of participation. Um, and with any program, we always have a constant need to improve our services by updating our facilities, providing the necessary supplies and things like that. That's a ongoing need.

We apply for grant funding. I think a large percentage of our money may come from private donors—however, not grants. However, we recently became a partner with the United Way, so it helped us out some.

Well, I guess one is through observation, of course. And then we also look at um, like, one thing that we do here is that we collect data to see how our kids perform in school so that we know what—you know what we need to implement here at the Center. So, like SOL scores. If we see that we have children that struggle in a particular area in school, then we wanna provide those services. So we wanna have outreach to individuals in the community that can come in and tutor in certain subject areas.

I know that it's important and it drives—it drives funding. If you really wanna be funded you know like for instance, with us being a partner with the United Way now, um, one of the biggest things we have to do is to track our outcomes in order to show them that we're—our programming in effective. Um, so, when looking for the most effective ways—cause like I mentioned to you, Kinley and I, we both have to track, you know, our tutoring program kind of speaks for itself cause you look at test scores, you look at, report cards, and you can kind of collect information from that data. However, measuring social skills and fitness and nutrition in such a short time frame is a little bit different, so we—He and I have been brainstorming some ways of being more creative and we haven't quite figured out what's the best strategy yet, because we been—I been at it for a few years, he's pretty new on board. So, but we know it is important in order to maintain sustainability.

I've been here 4 years, I believe? Well close to 4.

I've been here...I think this is going on...Month 7, I think? 7 or 8? Just since the beginning of summer.

In previous years we've tracked fitness and nutrition outcomes by measuring how effective a child can complete certain types of exercises. Um, for like our social skills. Like for our Peace Builders program—the whole concept behind that is to um, decrease the level of negative and violent interactions that our kids have with other individuals. So, not, you know, not bullying and things like that. So alotta that is observational. However, we do have a pre and post-test. I don't really—and like I said, if you look at it, it's simple but for alotta outcome driven programs, that's usually what they do to measure outcomes. Our director is trying to get us to get a little bit more innovative with regards to going beyond pre-and post-tests, but a lot of it is observational, so it's like how do you take the observational—you know what you see—and tie it into an outcome, in terms of measurement so that it is able to be articulated to someone who comes from the outside.

I think it, personally, I think it's been helpful cause it just shows us where we need to keep working at—what areas we kinda have it figured out and if we can take those strategies and skills and apply it to another area to improve that—so I think it's been helpful.

Like I said earlier, programming is always a area that we're trying to improve in—we don't anticipate changing our programming—we just wanna improve it and make it better. So we want it to be able to teach our young people here skills that they can—that they *can* and *will* carry over into the community or at home when we're not here. You know, so, and we also have internal things that we wanna improve—our building, you know, and things like that that add different curriculums.

It'll fine tooth comb the things we need to improve. Alotta people think you improve by addition, and that's not always the case. Sometimes we improve by just like going back over it and re-tooling things. For instance with physical or fitness and nutrition, there was always a big fitness part about it, but nutrition's just as important, so fine tooting and being able to help kids identify more nutritional values other than the fitness is a way that I've found, just for my program, that is adding to the program, by not even really adding anything new—just re-tooling, yeah.

We tried something with our middle school. It's not so much easy to do that with the elementary school, but with the middle schoolers they're able to articulate themselves a lot better so when you ask for feedback and things like that you kinda can see what's working. 'Cause a middle schooler can tell you why they don't like to come to an afterschool program, right? Because they're at the age where sometimes they don't have to come—maybe they can go home some days. So, um that's definitely a way—a direction that I see being able to evaluate program outcomes through participatory methods. I think they are definitely effective. So it's getting—but we also have to have our funders take that into consideration.

I would be definitely [interested].

Our programming—school-based programming—starts August through May, when school lets out. And then we have like a 2-week off- period where we get ready for the summer. And then

our summer program always lasts for 8 weeks. The start date can fluctuate, it depends on when school gets back, but it's always an 8-week program, so that's why I asked that. And the sooner that we know, we can get some other ideas about how to do assessments and you know, collect data pertaining to outcomes—the better and the more strength that we can be in our programming even in seeking other grants, so that's—yeah.