



July 2024

How Virginia used the Community Opportunity Map to build a Family Resource Center network

“Behind every data point, there is a living, breathing person. We wanted to make sure that the FRCs could make that connection Using the map gave us a clear path to visualize the need in a way that everyone could understand.”

—Traci B. Jones, Assistant Director of Protection and Prevention Programs, Virginia DSS

[Thriving Families, Safer Children](#) is a first-of-its-kind national partnership of the U.S. Children’s Bureau, Casey Family Programs, the Annie E. Casey Foundation, Prevent Child Abuse America, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The effort works across public, private and philanthropic sectors to promote the health, well-being and economic stability of families to help strengthen communities and end the harmful practice of family separation in child welfare systems. [Families Forward Virginia](#), the Prevent Child Abuse America chapter in the state, leads this effort with the public child welfare agency. A cornerstone of the [project](#) is to provide equitable access to resources and support by developing a network of Family Resource Centers (FRCs) across the state. They’re engaging people with lived experience, community organizations, civic groups, and nontraditional service providers to shift their communities from a child welfare system to a child and family well-being system.

Why the Community Opportunity Map

Casey Family Programs' [Community Opportunity Map](#) allows anyone to find child and family well-being data for any neighborhood across this nation to analyze, plan, and act alongside others to build Communities of Hope. The Community Opportunity Map has 30 indicators across five topic areas: child and family well-being, education, economy, housing, and accessibility (of food, internet, and transportation). The tool uses data from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey and several other sources, covering states, counties, Congressional districts, cities, and ZIP codes in all 50 states as well as the municipios of Puerto Rico. Two-thirds of the indicators can be disaggregated by race and ethnicity. Using the tool, public-private partnerships like Virginia's can create precise, local strategic plans to invest in hope.

The team maps community well-being

Early on, Families Forward Virginia heard from families that they wanted a physical location to access support such as concrete resources and help with utilities, job applications, or other needs. After training from the National Family Support Network, they began with a pilot program of seven centers across the state. To understand which neighborhoods might be prioritized, the team analyzed data on child and family well-being from the Community Opportunity Map, local data from child welfare and the health department, and the [Child Opportunity Index](#). Using data for individual neighborhoods was critical. "The Community Opportunity Map helped elucidate the need," said Jamia Crockett, CEO of Families Forward Virginia. "At the county level, everything looks great, but when you go to the Census tract level, you see the socioeconomic drop-off. We wanted to make sure we could target those communities to show the efficacy of the FRCs."

Local data supports community engagement

Based on their analysis, they released a [request for applications](#) and supported FRCs in seven communities. During the application process, potential providers used the Community Opportunity Map to understand and demonstrate lived experience and local community needs through data from child welfare, home visiting, the health department, and the Child Opportunity Index. The data answered how proposed services would match community conditions. Once funded, each FRC undertook a six month planning and development process to engage residents. Providers created a community-led planning committee, hosted community events, conducted surveys and feedback sessions, and analyzed neighborhood data with residents. Each planning committee synthesized the information to decide on a location for the resource center, how to make the space inviting to families, and which resources to offer.

A commitment to hope unites the sectors

Families Forward Virginia combined in-depth mapping of local data on child and family well-being and the voices of neighborhood residents to build a network of Family Resources Centers led by and tailored to specific communities. A rigorous evaluation is planned to demonstrate impact and provide proof-of-concept toward the goal of expansion and sustainability. At Casey, we believe that hope is an action word and that every one of us from each of the five sectors of community — government, business, nonprofit and faith-based, philanthropic and the community members themselves — must play our role. In this initiative, Families Forward Virginia and partners from across the sectors came together to build Communities of Hope.

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Casey Family Programs

Casey Family Programs is the nation's largest operating foundation focused on safely reducing the need for foster care and building Communities of Hope for children and families in the United States. By working together, we can create a nation where Communities of Hope provide the support and opportunities that children and families need to thrive. Founded in 1966, we work in all 50 states, Washington, D.C., Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands and with tribal nations across North America to influence long-lasting improvements to the well-being of children, families and the communities where they live.

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