

# Olmsted Family Resource Center Assessment Findings: Executive Summary

## Introduction

To complement a community co-design process, Family Service Rochester contracted with North Sky Health Consulting to review existing data, assessments, and availability of resources<sup>i</sup> relevant to a potential FRC. The findings are intended to help determine the feasibility of and considerations for a potential FRC. They are organized using the protective factors from the [Center for the Study of Social Policy's framework for Strengthening Families](#).

## Demographics

Olmsted County (population 164,000) has a strong economy built around health care, computer technology, manufacturing, food processing, and convention and tourism. In comparison to Minnesota and the broader United States, Olmsted has lower poverty rates, higher levels of educational achievement, and lower average home prices.

While Olmsted's largest city, Rochester (population 122,000), regularly receives accolades for its high quality of life and health outcomes, significant and important disparities in access and opportunity exist for many residents. The area is experiencing growth and increasing diversity with younger residents more racially and ethnically diverse than older residents. As seen in many communities across the state and US, Black residents of Olmsted *continue* to experience worse health outcomes, lower homeownership, lower educational attainment, and higher rates of unemployment and poverty than White residents.

When compared to the broader county, residents of Rochester are more racially and ethnically diverse, experience slightly higher poverty rates, and have significantly higher percentages of students eligible for free and reduced-price lunch. Within Rochester, Southeast Rochester (zip code 55904) has lower homeownership rates and higher percentages children living in poverty as well as both single family and Limited English Proficiency households.

## Findings by Protective Factor

**Parental Resilience:** Top among factors influencing parental resilience are mental health and drug use. These issues were identified as two of the top three priorities in the latest Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA) and mental health was indicated as a top concern in ECFE program data. Data indicate at least 1 in 3 residents report having a mental health issue with higher rates among adults with a disability, unmarried adults, and non-heterosexual adults. Of the 1 in 6 adults who report using drugs within the month, disparities exist for unmarried adults, renters, and those who are non-heterosexual.

Additionally, residents indicate:

- Stigma, disconnectedness, and a fragmented service delivery system negatively impact core dimensions of mental wellness.
- Need for more diverse providers to meet the needs of our increasingly diverse community.
- Lack of awareness of recovery services offered and need for more marketing reflective of diverse community members.
- Lack of coordination of mental health and chemical dependency services, leading to silos.
- Need for increased access to peer support programs to help reduce stigma felt by going through substance use treatment.

Other factors influencing parental resilience include having a history of incarceration, being a single parent, living in a safe and resilient environment, and being a recent immigrant or refugee. Because of other stressors that families have going on (single parent, transportation challenges, etc.) things get in the way of accessing resiliency resources or building resiliency.

**Social Connections:** In Olmsted, besides faith-based organizations, educational institutions, and some government programming, there is a need for spaces for families to gather for leisure and recreation activities. This is especially true with the recent loss of the YMCA as many of the remaining resources are inaccessible due to cost. Additionally, staff supporting families find that even when families request resources to make social connections and are presented with options, some do not follow through for reasons such as self-doubt, worry, language barriers, etc.

The likelihood of feeling socially connected varies significantly by several factors. Some data points include:

- About two-thirds of adults feel socially connected with lower rates among adults with fair/poor health, renters, and those who make < \$35k annually.
- Some families feel isolated with very small networks. This includes recent immigrants with an estimated half of all families who immigrated to US less than 3 years ago reporting they have no one in their close social network and no one to call on for practical help. This point and other feedback point out a need for more events for families that are inclusive on non-English speaking residents so families from many cultural backgrounds build trust with institutions to better access services.
- About one in three adults report being in situations where they felt unaccepted with disparities existing among unmarried adults, non-heterosexual adults, and adults with a disability.

**Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development:** Community-based organizations like Families First MN and the Intercultural Mutual Assistance Association (IMAA) along with government entities like Rochester Public Schools and Olmsted County are providers of parent education through group, individual (consultations or parent coaches), or home-based settings. Unfortunately, many current programs do not always reach those experiencing the greatest need for support for reasons such as program eligibility, transportation, and long waiting lists. Immigrant and refugee families indicated the following barriers to supporting their young children: food security, housing, transportation, lack of awareness of resources, and paying for childcare. The ECFE program identified groups that are most underserved by their programming:

- Families with one or more home languages that are not English;
- Communities of color; and
- Low-income (at or just above poverty level), single parents, and young parents.

Numerous conversations and reports show a need for more opportunities for parent education delivered in a way that best suits different family needs and circumstances such as more:

- One-on-one parent education consultations to connect to right programs;
- Evening classes;
- Classes focused on fathers; and
- Language options for young children including sign language and Spanish.

**Concrete Support in Times of Need:** The Rochester-area has numerous resources but families continue to experience needs in accessing concrete supports. Local reports and data identify top needs include health care, housing, financial resources, transportation, affordable childcare, and food. While there are several pathways to connect families with resource such as Guiding Partners to Solutions, RPS Community Schools, community health

workers, and many other government and nonprofit staff, access to some resources remains a challenge. Barriers to access include location, transportation, cost, lack of availability, lack of awareness of consumer or agency staff, and eligibility requirements.

For concrete goods like food, diapers, and cleaning and hygiene products, not only are costs of goods rising due to inflation but there is very limited funding available only as a stop-gap measure. These funds can only be accessed when families have exhausted all other options.

**Social and Emotional Competence of Children:** Data related to the social and emotional competence of young children in Olmsted County is limited. Early Childhood Screening is an opportunity to connect parents with resources and gauge learning needs, yet only 42% of children aged 3 participate in screenings with disparities among gender identities and racial and ethnic groups. When ECFE families were asked to share the biggest impacts on their child's learning and development, they reported:

- Opportunity to socialize,
- Space where their child is seen and welcomed,
- Exploration time, and
- Time to play in class and outdoors.

Formal programming that supports parents and children is available through RPS, Olmsted County, health care providers, and community-organizations including private and nonprofit childcare providers. Other formal and informal opportunities for children are offered through youth sports organizations, faith-institutions, arts and culture organizations, free/low-cost community play areas (Pipsqueak's, Apache Mall play area, public playgrounds), fee-based play areas (Rochester Athletic Club, Boundless, etc.), and civic programming. However, limitations in awareness and access continue to exist.

## Recommendations

Based on the findings from the review, the following recommendation should be considering when developing a Rochester-based FRC:

1. **Focus on communities and/or geographies experiencing significant disparities in access and opportunity.**
  - Consider a focus on residents in SE Rochester or on those who identify as Black or as recent immigrants.
  - Authentically engage identified communities to design a space and programming responsive to their needs.
2. **Strengthen collaboration among organizations and across sectors to more efficiently utilize resources to meet complex needs of families in our community.**
  - Work with other organizations and agencies engaged in work related to Protective Factors to find opportunities for synergy and connection and to avoid duplication.
  - Differentiate FRC from other similar or emerging models like Community Schools and Neighborhood Resource Centers. This could be through programming, geography, or community served.
3. **Build on extensive foundation of existing resources** but enhance awareness of and connections to these resources.
4. **Create or enhance culturally responsive supports** as there are cultural differences in needs, perceptions, and resources.
5. **Lean into learning and be flexible.** Be willing to adapt as conditions change or new information becomes available.

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<sup>i</sup> Information sources: Olmsted County, Rochester Public Schools, US Census, City of Rochester, Cradle 2 Career, Intercultural Mutual Assistance Association (IMAA), YMCA of the North, United Way, Family Service Rochester, and Channel One Regional Food Bank.