

Testimony of Dev Myers, Center Manager
East River Family Strengthening Collaborative, Inc
before the
Committee on Human Services
Regarding the
CFSA Performance Oversight Hearing
February 25, 2021

Good Morning Chairperson Nadeau and members of the Committee on Human Services. My name is Dev Myers and I serve as the Center Manager of Benning Terrace/Benning Park Family Success Center that is operated by East River Family Strengthening Collaborative and located in Ward 7. It is an honor to share my experience and perspective of the Family Success Center with you all today.

East River Family Strengthening Collaborative is among the 9 grantees of the Families First DC Initiative grant, and is the only agency awarded two grants. These two grants fund the Benning Terrace & Benning Park and the Benning Road & Minnesota Ave Family Success Centers. The Families First DC Initiative's approach is to provide preventative services and neighborhood driven resources to empower families in the Ward 7 and 8 community.

Since our official openings in October, both Family Success Centers have engaged with over 600 families and have assessed 143 families for their needs. We are very proud of our engagement because both Centers have conducted several

community events such giving out PPE, produce, and hot meals to families. Our biggest challenge thus far has been determining the best way to provide services to families during the global pandemic. To combat this, we have invested in our social media strategy, relationships with community leaders, and informational pop-ups in the neighborhood to bring awareness about our centers and the services that we provide.

Our most successful event has been the Thanksgiving Day Turkey Giveaway that served 352 families with a turkey, PPE, and canned goods. Another successful event was the Christmas Angel Tree donation that provided assistance to families during the holiday, through gift cards and children's toys. We served over 200 children. Last week, on the President's Day Holiday, both Family Success Centers conducted a produce giveaway that touched over 100 families.

We have participated in other engagement practices such as hosting events that discuss strategies on dealing with stress during the holidays, weekly game nights, and providing care packages to the community. We also hold a robust weekly programming schedule that engages with multi-generational families. Our programming between both grants consists of job training and mental health sessions. Furthermore, we also have recreational and educational activities such as dance, fitness, tutoring, and art. All of our programs are virtual and have received participation from the community.

We know the work we are doing embodies our mission for the Family First Initiative and East River Family Strengthening Collaborative because the feedback from our community is generally positive. For example, a single mother reached out to my Community Support Specialist and gave us positive feedback about how she was worried about the lack of social emotional skills her child expresses as a result of the

pandemic and virtual learning. However, she appreciates that the Family Success Centers offer recreational activities to the youth because it gives them the space to interact with their peers and it strengthens their social emotional development.

We understand that serving the community is not a one-person or one-agency job, and one of the aspects of this work that we are very proud of is our strong partnership with our community leaders and organizations. We continue to strengthen our relationships with organizations like Donatelli Management, DC Housing Authority, 7E/7F ANC Commissions, St. Luke Catholic Church, and Ward Memorial Church. We also work very closely with our Community Advisory Councils who provide us input and advice on our community outreach strategies and programming. This network of community stakeholders has helped us with community engagement and given us much needed resources to ensure our community's success.

In closing, East River Family Strengthening Collaborative is honored to receive these two grants through the Family First DC Initiative. We are grateful to all of the community leaders who partner with us and assist in providing resources to the Ward 7 community. We want to give a special thanks to Director Donald and Mayor Muriel Bowser for trusting our agency with this work. We are also thankful to Ms. Best for her leadership through this initiative and we will continue to be innovative and strategic in working with our community stakeholders to ensure we are providing resources to families who are most in need.

Thank you.