



CULTURALLY SPECIFIC SERVICES AT NETWORK FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHILDREN OF AFRICAN DESCENT (NdCAD) EVALUATION REPORT

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Executive Summary

Ramsey County provides Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP) employment services internally through its Workforce Solutions (WFS) department and in partnership with other community organizations that provide employment services.

Ramsey County recognizes that African American families are experiencing much poorer MFIP service outcomes than white families. The county also recognizes that it alone cannot reduce racial disparities in outcomes without engaging the communities experiencing the disparities.

As part of the county's effort to address racial disparities in MFIP outcomes, Ramsey County Workforce Solutions established a strategic partnership with the Network for the Development of Children of African Descent (NdCAD) to provide a combination of culturally specific family literacy-based services to individuals and cohort groups to support African American families as they participate in MFIP employment services.

Through its Parent Power Workshops and Sankofa Reading Programs, NdCAD provides a variety of literacy and cultural enrichment services. The services at NdCAD are aimed at strengthening families and communities while preparing children for success in school and life.

Purpose and objectives of the evaluation: The purpose of this evaluation was to collaboratively learn (co-learn) about the role of culturally specific service model towards ensuring economic self-sufficiency and family stabilization. This was achieved by engaging with service partners and families participating in the program to share their experience about the services and use the learning to improve services for the future.

The objectives of this evaluation were to learn and understand the extent to which the culturally specific services at NdCAD positively impacting parents and their children are to take charge of their own personal development and contribute towards building a more connected community. This evaluation aimed to assess outcomes based on participant's education and employment activities pertaining to their current service intervention in and engagement with culturally specific workshops, cohort-based learnings and support services offered by NdCAD to keep stakeholders informed about the progresses made.

Methods: A mix of qualitative and quantitative methods was used to collect and analyze service-related information from program participants, employment counselors from employment service provider organizations namely: WFS, AVIVO, Hired, Goodwill-Easter Seals and YWCA of St. Paul, NdCAD staff and leadership, and WFS leadership.

Qualitative data was collected by focus group discussion, survey, and semi-structured interview methods. Quantitative program outcome data was collected from the Workforce One (WF1) database, which is a case management system used by employment service providers in Minnesota.

Results: Responses were received from a total of 31 respondents: 15 parents participating in programs at NdCAD, seven employment counselors from five different employment service provider organizations, five NdCAD staff and leadership, and three WFS leadership. In addition, quantitative service outcome data for 191 parents was collected from the WF1 database. The following are some of the findings:

- There was overall positive response from parents who participated in the focus group discussion and from those who completed the Sankofa reading program survey about the services they received and the changes they have observed in their children's behavior and attitude because of participating in the Sankofa program at NdCAD.
- Parents experience of services at NdCAD was positive in the areas of developing and building greater self-awareness, knowledge of cultural identity and heritage, exercising self-determination and strengthening family interactions including parenting skills development.
- There was a positive response from MFIP employment counselors, NdCAD staff and leadership and WFS leadership about the partnership efforts.
- Parents were better motivated to engage in employment and education activities since they began participating in the culturally specific services at NdCAD.
- Compared to the total enrollment record of 2019, Parent Power enrollment has increased by more than three times during the three subsequent program years (2020, 2021 and 2022).
- The pre-and post-enrollment hours comparison result shows that parents have done better than they were doing prior to participating in NdCAD's culturally specific services.
- There was an increasing enrollment trend during all of the listed program years, except the slight decline in 2022. However, the target to enroll 120 parents in the Parent power program was not met each year as planned either before, during or after the pandemic. And enrollment numbers were low.
- There has been limitations in communication between employment counselors and NdCAD staff in the referral process including sending last minute referral of MFIP participants to programs and also not keeping up with referral status once referrals are made.
- Parents described the referral process to NdCAD as "limited to only email correspondence and no other forms of communication was used to reach them "and the interactions between participants and their employment counselors need improvement.
- The majority of surveyed employment counselors stated that MFIP participants motivation to engage with NdCAD (71%), and their request for to enroll in the culturally specific services (71%) are the main factors in their determination of making referrals.

Recommendations

- **Strengthen program promotion and participant outreach strategy:** Even if there are a large number of African American families on MFIP in Ramsey County (2,903 families per year on average) from 2019-2022, only a very small portion of the families (2.5% per year on average) of the total were enrolled for the culturally specific services with NdCAD. Further outreach to these families is necessary.
- **Establish participant referral and tracking mechanism within the WF1 system:** This ensures effective, efficient, and transparent referral process and help to track the list of participants referred for culturally specific services with basic information necessary to identify who is referred by whom and when.
- **Utilize more options of communication for MFIP participant referral:** The current referral method is limited to sending email and or completing formal referral paperwork.
- **Track participants progress:** While it is an important practice to capture the pre-and post-enrollment total cohort activity hours that parents have achieved, it would also be important to track progresses or success stories of family's because of participating in the programs at NdCAD.
- **Establish a clear and consistent communication plan:** There were limitations mentioned in this survey about maintaining consistent communications between employment counselors and NdCAD about MFIP participant referrals and follow-up. When going through staff transitions, have a back-up to maintain communication with families to conduct follow-up calls and emails. Return call of family's promptly due to wanting to attend the current classes or sudden schedule changes.
- **Increase MFIP participant's referral and enrollment numbers:** Enrollment in both Parent Power and Sankofa reading programs was low. It is critical to increase enrollment numbers in both programs to reach and serve as many deserving families as possible. This can be achieved by strengthening engagement efforts with partner organizations, devising, and putting actionable outreach, recruitment, and referral plan in place.
- **Advocate for an in-person program delivery platform:** NdCAD staff suggested that the in-person platform for both Parent Power and Sankofa program could result in a higher number of enrollments.
- **Adapt a flexible cohort activity schedule:** Personal or family crises was listed as one of the main factors that significantly interfere with successful referral of participants to services at NdCAD. Inconvenience in the Parent Power schedule was also listed as a challenge. Therefore, adapting to a flexible cohort activity schedule that fits both parents and their children's availability will help mitigate the family's employment or personal schedule challenges and achieve better employment and other related outcomes.

Introduction

This evaluation process was a learning-oriented participatory approach collaboratively designed by Ramsey County Workforce Solutions, the Evaluation, Research and Reporting Unit and Network for the Development of Children of African Descent (NdCAD). The design team engaged regularly and shared experience about the aspects of the service operations, and the process in place in providing the culturally specific services. The team has also identified the purpose and objectives of this evaluation and co-created the key questions that this co-learning task has addressed. The co-creation approach has provided partners the opportunity to work together closely and share institutional knowledge.

Background:

Ramsey County provides Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP) employment services internally through its Workforce Solutions department and in partnership with other community organizations that provide employment services. MFIP is a jointly funded, federal-state program that provides income assistance to eligible low-income families.

The overarching goal at Ramsey County Workforce Solutions (WFS) is to maximize economic self-sufficiency. This goal is reached through strengthening participant's essential skills, personal agency, and self-determination to choose and pursue the activities that matter most to them on their path to gaining and retaining employment at higher wages and utilizing the support that MFIP provides during the process of reaching self-sustaining income.

Ramsey County recognizes that African American families are experiencing much poorer MFIP service outcomes than white families. The county also recognizes that it alone cannot reduce racial disparities in service outcomes without engaging the communities experiencing these disparities.

As part of the county's effort to address racial disparities in MFIP outcomes, Ramsey County Workforce Solutions established a strategic partnership with NdCAD to provide a combination of culturally specific family literacy-based services to individuals and cohort groups to support African American families as they participate in employment services.

NdCAD provides two key programs as part of WFS's racial disparities reduction strategy:

- Parent Power Literacy and Advocacy Workshops.
- Sankofa Reading Program (for K-8th grade children).

Parent Power Literacy and Advocacy Workshops: Parent Power is a series of hands-on workshop sessions designed to help parents help their children improve in reading and achieve school success.

Sankofa Reading Program: The Sankofa program focuses on teaching mastery of independent critical thinking, which is taught through reading skill development so that children grow and develop with a clear sense of purpose for themselves in relationship with their families and community.

Target population: African American families who are currently active on MFIP and enrolled in culturally specific services at NdCAD.

In this report abbreviations and various technical terminologies such as: “culturally specific services”, “Partners for Equity”, “racial disparity”, “self-determination” and more are used. Definition for each term is attached (**see Appendix 1**).

Purpose and objectives of the evaluation:

The purpose of this evaluation was to collaboratively learn (co-learn) about the role of culturally specific service model towards ensuring economic self-sufficiency and family stabilization by engaging with service partners and program participants to share their experience about the services and use the learning to improve services for the future.

Moreover, this evaluation assessed outcomes based on participant’s education and work activities as related to their current service intervention in and engagement with culturally specific workshops, cohort-based learnings and support services offered by the service agency to keep stakeholders informed about the progresses made.

The objectives of this evaluation were to learn and understand:

1. The extent to which the culturally specific services are positively impacting parents and their children participating in the culturally specific service at NdCAD:
 - In attaining self-determination at economic, intellectual, and spiritual levels as determinants of self-sufficiency and family stabilization.
 - In developing and building greater self-awareness and exercise self-determination.
 - In building a more connected community.
2. The overall changes that the culturally specific services have brought to family’s living situations by addressing the following specific evaluation questions:
 - A. How are the culturally specific services helping families to:
 - Enroll in education/training activities and take charge of their own personal development and that of their children?
 - Participate in skills and work readiness activities and retain employment?
 - Engage in cultural enrichment programs?
 - Learn about their cultural heritage and making better connections with other parents and support independence by helping one another?
 - B. How do families feel about:
 - The referral process to NdCAD’s services?
 - Their interactions/ engagement with their employment counselors?
 - C. Do families feel better off because of participating in the culturally specific service?
3. What lessons can be learned from providing culturally specific services in achieving economic self-sufficiency and family stabilization in these communities? And, how the lessons can contribute towards a ‘systems change’ at organizational levels?

Methods

A mix of qualitative and quantitative methods was used to collect and analyze service-related information from 15 parents participating in the program, seven employment counselors from five employment service provider organizations, five NdCAD staff and one executive leadership, three WFS senior leadership and program outcome data for 191 participants from Workforce One (WF1) database, which is a case management system used by employment service providers in Minnesota.

Data collection and analysis: Qualitative data about the families' experiences with the referral process, interaction with employment counselors and their views of the changes that have come about in their family's living situation because of the services provided at NdCAD was collected using focus group discussions and survey methods. Parents participating in the program were randomly selected and a total of eight parents took part in the focus group discussion and seven parents completed Sankofa program survey questions. The discussion was facilitated by two experienced cultural conversation facilitators hired from within the African American community. A \$25 gift card was provided to focus group participants as a thank you for participating in the focus group discussion and sharing their experience about the program.

In addition, service-related data was collected from MFIP employment counselors from five different employment service provider organizations, namely: WFS, AVIVO, Hired, Goodwill-Easter Seals and YWCA of St. Paul by survey method. Employment counselors who made MFIP participant referrals to the culturally specific services at NdCAD were purposively selected. A link containing mainly open-ended survey questions was sent to each of the selected employment counselors via email and seven of them completed the survey. Responses were organized, summarized, and analyzed by descriptive and content analysis methods in the context of the identified ¹SPICED indicators (**see Appendix 2**). For close ended questions, which yield responses that require numerical interpretation, descriptive statistical tools such counts, percentages, average and percentage points were also used as appropriate to interpret and explain results.

A focus group discussion was held with five NdCAD program staff and they shared their experiences. A semi-structured one-on-one interview was also conducted with three WFS senior leadership and NdCAD's executive leadership and heard about their vision and approach about the strategic partnership with culturally specific service providers and future partnership efforts with community partners.

Service outcome data on 191 parents enrolled in culturally specific services program at NdCAD was collected from the Workforce One (WF1) database on the identified program outcomes/activity hours namely: engagement, education, and employment. Results were analyzed using descriptive statistical methods namely: counts, average, percentage, and percentage points computed with Microsoft Excel spreadsheet and presented using tables and graphs.

¹**SPICED:** SPICED stands for (Subjective, Participatory, Interpreted & communicable, Crosschecked & compared, Empowering, Diverse & disaggregated). SPICED are qualitative indicators where the subjective interpretation and opinion of different stakeholders are very important.

Limitations

The following conditions were among the limitations in this evaluation:

- **Limited participation and small data:** Participants turnout to take part in the focus group discussion was very low. Out of the total of 48 MFIP participants randomly selected from the WF1 database and communicated with to take part in the focus group discussion, only eight former and current program participants showed up in both the virtual and in-person engagement options. There was also a very low number of responses from employment counselors from “Partners for Equity” organizations, who were purposively selected to complete the survey and share their experience. From a total of 19 employment counselors selected to complete the survey, only seven responses were received.

Therefore, the information about the importance of Parent Power and Sankofa was collected from total of 15 parents and cohort outcome data was collected for 191 parents enrolled in the culturally specific services at NdCAD. This is not a large enough number to generalize about the impact of the culturally specific services model. It does, however, allow us to learn from the experiences of these people, a lesson necessary to act on the identified program improvement needs.

- **Covid 19 pandemic:** Unlike the previous service years, it was not possible for NdCAD to follow-up with positive impacts of Sankofa Reading program on children’s performance at school during the 2021 and 2022 program years; because schools were closed due to COVID19 pandemic.

Results and Discussion

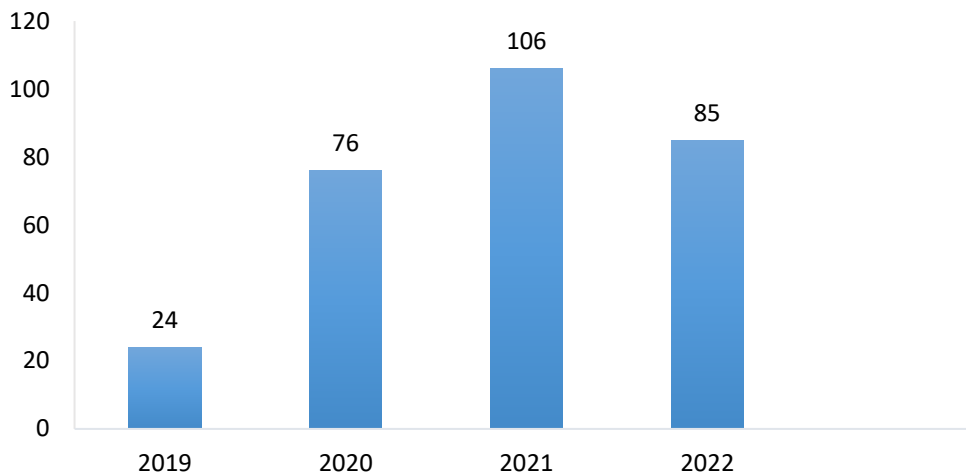
Responses were received from a total of 31 respondents :15 parents, seven employment counselors from five different employment service provider organizations, five NdCAD staff and executive leadership and three WFS senior leadership.

There was positive response from parents who participated in the focus group discussion and completed the Sankofa Reading program survey about the services parents have received and the changes they have observed in their children’s behavior and attitude because of participating in the Sankofa program at NdCAD. Parents have also indicated some areas of improvement for the future.

The response from MFIP employment counselors, NdCAD staff and leadership and WFS leadership about the collaborative efforts in the culturally specific services program was also positive. In addition, quantitative service outcome data collected from WF1 database on the total number of participants enrollment in Parent Power, engagement, education, and employment activity hours show improvement across the years.

Compared to the total Parent Power enrollment record of the 2019 program year, which was right before the COVID 19 pandemic, Parent Power enrollment has increased by more than three folds in all the three program years during and after the pandemic; which means, total number of participant enrollment in Parent Power cohort has increased from 24 in 2019 to 76 in 2020, to 106 in 2021 and to 86 in 2022 (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Parent Power enrollment from 2019-2022



Source :[Workforce One \(WF1\)](#)

Irrespective of the increasing enrollment trend observed across the above listed program years, except the slight decline in 2022, the enrollment goal of 120 parents per year in the Parent Power program was not met each year as planned either before, during or after the pandemic. This might mainly be attributed to low MFIP participant referrals for culturally specific services and

many other factors that require multiple factor analysis including the direct or indirect impacts of the COVID 19 pandemic on overall program operations.

The responses from parents and employment counselors and the program outcome data on engagement, employment and education hours show that the culturally specific services at NdCAD are positively impacting families on MFIP. This compliments the efforts of the MFIP-employment services providers. However, the extent to which these outcomes contribute to participants success in transitioning parents from welfare to work cannot be directly determined from these data because of several other contributing factors.

The Workforce One (WF1) data shows that 2,903 African American residents participated in MIFP on average in Ramsey County per year from 2019-2022. This is a large number and shows that there is no shortage of MFIP participants who can be eligible for culturally specific services in Ramsey County. The low number of enrollments to programs could be attributed to several other factors including inefficiencies in the referral process, participant's lack of interest in the program, or prioritizing other things over enrolling in these services.

These factors can be mitigated by ensuring an effective referral process, educating MFIP parents about the benefits of culturally specific services and presenting success stories with practical examples of the meaningful changes that these services have brought to other families and their children through continuous engagement and relationship building.

Responses from MFIP participants:

Parents shared their experiences with the culturally specific services at NdCAD. Overall, there were positive responses in all the services that they have accessed through NdCAD's Parent Power and Sankofa reading programs.

Discussion participants said that they have received information regarding NdCAD via multiple emails from their employment counselors. All of them stated they each received emails regarding NdCAD's services.

When asked about the helpfulness of their MFIP employment counselor in deciding to enroll with NdCAD programs, participants in this focus group mentioned limitations from their employment counselors stating "the MFIP employment counselors could have helped families with more resource lists and connections such as membership groups, class opportunities rather than just filling out log of participant activity hours".

Participants experience/ interaction with MFIP employment counselor after enrollment to NdCAD:

All participants stated that they received mass emails from employment counselors regarding NdCAD and that method seemed to be the best way for many; but three participants said that they would have appreciated to receive a call or informed at an appointment meeting. Interaction was limited.

Participants view of the referral process to NdCAD:

Participants described the referral process to NdCAD as “limited to only email correspondences and no other forms of communication was used to reach them”. This shows that there is a need to use more options of communication to reach out, follow-up and engage with participant to educate them about the service benefits.

Strengths of the referral process and areas of improvement:

Each participant said that they only received email communication regarding NdCAD services. Utilizing various forms of communication by employment counselors to reach out to program participants will likely increase participants engagement and overall program participation. Respondents also said:

- *The intake person at NdCAD did not always follow-up. One participant stated that when they missed one class, they felt cut off from the program entirely and really had a hard time with no one contacting her back- as she enjoyed being a part of NdCAD.*
- *Communication has fallen through that I haven’t heard from NdCAD after the Parent Power (PP1) to work on the Parent Power (PP2).*
- *When going through staff transitions, have a back-up plan to maintain communication with participants to conduct follow-up calls and emails. Contacting participants when they miss a class is greatly appreciated and desired. Return calls from participants promptly due to wanting to attend the current classes or sudden schedule changes.*

When asked about their experience with NdCAD programs, participants responses were consistently positive. They felt that attending programs at NdCAD “created a full connection to the self and a fulfillment of a void” within themselves. Parents expressed their positive experience:

- *I experienced a full spiritual renewal by attending the workshops. NdCAD helped me in my spiritual transitioning. The person helped me, even though she was on a different religion, she was able to relate with me and reduce my isolation.*
- *I learned to modify my parenting style to fit the various ages of my children.*

Experience from two discussion participants who identified as “bi-racial” and raised in families who were not introduced to the “black culture”, yet through NdCAD began to understand “black culture” and felt very welcomed. They said that they began to live life differently in honor of “black culture” with such things as: “learning how to comb children’s hair, cooking soul foods, finding identity in self and a feeling of pride”. In addition, participants expressed their learning from the Parent Power program positively stating:

- *I am not alone in my struggle to raise my children.*
- *The power of loving yourself.*
- *Don’t give up on your children and yourself.*

- *The importance of reading to your children at an early age.*
- *I went through a spiritual awakening during the workshops, everything on the inside of me came alive.*
- *During the pandemic, I counted on NdCAD to keep my mind regular and a connected to the greater community.*
- *With autistic children, mental health, and being black I felt picked on and isolated while working with other organizations, but NdCAD made me, and my children feel welcomed.*
- *I was inspired to teach myself about black culture after being raised in a white home that was racist...I learned so much about myself and my people. Proud to be a part of the black culture.*
- *I was adopted into and raised by white parents that do not have any idea of African heritage and I was acculturated to white culture growing up. NdCAD has done a recall for me-has introduced me to the African heritage.*

Some of the positive changes that came about families because of participating in NdCAD's programs:

Participants said that they have learned how to adjust their parenting style to fit their children's behavior and "became a better mother" and also said that they have "built true respect for the struggle black people have experienced".

Importance of the Parent Power skill development, workshops, and group-based activities in learning about your African heritage, setting goals, practicing self- determination, tackling individualism and self-doubt:

Parents described the importance of Parent Power workshops in learning about African heritage ,tacking individualism and self-doubt stating:

- *I only request to work with black community-based organizations due to the way white organizations treat me and my kids.*
- *The love and support I receive from organizations like NdCAD helps me to know I have help and encouragement when I need it.*
- *Black or cultural programs make you feel wanted and celebrated not just tolerated.*
- *I came from Hennepin County, and they didn't have anything like this for black people.*
- *I prefer to work with organizations and counselors who look like me.*
- *The NdCAD's services made me feel free from depression and loneliness...I don't have family that are close and NdCAD filled that void for me.*

- *My love for self has blossomed and now I can be a better person.*
- *Culturally specific services make all the difference when you can see what you can achieve. We need more services that specialize in black folk.*

Discussion participants have also offered the following suggestions for future program service improvement :

- *Introduce and inform all participants about all of the services that are provided by NdCAD (Nia, Parent Power 1 and 2, Saturday book giveaway, Sankofa program K-8th).*
- *Expand the Sankofa age groups.*
- *Increase various forms of communication to recruit for new participants.*
- *Have focus groups twice a year while the information is fresh on the minds of participants (many participants could not recall in detail what was taught).*

Responses from Sankofa Reading program parents:

Parents whose child(ren) participated in the Sankofa reading program with NdCAD were asked if they have noticed improvement in their child's behavior or attitude since participating in the program on some selected indicators. They said that they have noticed positive behavioral changes in their child(ren) since participating in the Sankofa reading program. All of the surveyed parents said that they have noticed improvements in their child's behavior. They said that their children were able to read without being told, do efforts to read even when it might be difficult, positively interact with other children. Six out of the seven respondents (85%) said that their child had developed confidence in reading. Five out of the seven parents (71%) parents also said that they noticed improvement in their child's knowledge of and respect for African culture and heritage / African pride and homework completion. Four out of the seven parents (57%) said they have noticed that their child enjoys schools since participating in the Sankofa reading program; whereas the remaining 43% said that they have not noticed improvement in this aspect (**see Appendix 3**).

In addition to the above-mentioned positive impacts of the Sankofa reading program on students' behavior, parents in this survey stated that their child developed more patience and loves to research about culture, become more excited about spelling and learning words, begun to point out letters everywhere, shows openness to learning about what is not taught in schools, is happier, learning sounding outwards, more vocal while reading and enjoys reading.

Some of the parents also indicated that their child has developed a stronger connection in the family as well as in the community as a result of having participated in Sankofa reading program. Six out of seven respondents rated their satisfaction level with the Sankofa program as "very satisfied" while one respondent rated "satisfied" (**see Appendix 4**). All of the respondents in this survey stated that they would recommend the Sankofa program to others.

When asked about the reason why they are “very satisfied” or “satisfied” with the Sankofa program, some of the parents said that their child’s motivation in homework and peers has drastically changed. They believe that this level of motivation could have not been achieved if it wasn’t for the Sankofa program.

Total enrollment in the Sankofa reading program has increased from three students in 2021 to 25 students in 2022. The lower enrollment number in 2021 was mainly due to COVID-19 pandemic (see Table 1). The NdCAD report shows that students who graduated from the Sankofa reading program made gains in areas such as-alphabet knowledge, reading levels, comprehension and/or fluency levels.

Table 1: NdCAD Sankofa reading enrichment program outcome from 2021-2022

Year	Total number of students enrolled	Total number of students completed program	Total number of students that did not complete program	Grades K-3	Grades 4-8	Completion rate by year
2021	3	3	0	3	0	100%
2022	25	12	13	14	11	48%
Total	28	15	13	17	11	54%
Percent				61%	39%	

Source: NdCAD program report(2023)

Responses from employment counselors:

The majority of employment counselors who completed a survey (57%) have served in their current role from five to twelve years while 14% of them have served from two to five years, 14% served for more than a year but less than two years and the remaining 14% served for less than a year in their current role. This data shows that these employment counselors have served long enough in their roles to have had the relevant experience with MFIP parents and program operations as a whole, to share the necessary inputs for continuous service improvement.

When asked about their level of familiarity with NdCAD, a majority of the employment counselors (57%) stated that they have “basic understanding” of the NdCAD programs while 43% stated that they have “a deep understanding”. This shows that there is a need to strengthen engagement efforts between NdCAD and employment counselors from “Partners for Equity” organizations to enhance employment counselors’ understanding of the significance of the culturally specific services so they can better help MFIP participants understand the benefits of such services and take advantage of it.

Regarding caseload in the past six months,72% of the employment counselors who completed this survey stated that they worked with less than 60 MFIP participants and the other 14% worked with 75 to 90 participants, and the remaining 14% have more than 90 participants on their caseload. This is not a large enough data to conclude that the optimum caseload that employment counselors

carry throughout all partner organizations is uniformly lower than 60 participants . Practically, with lower caseloads, employment counselors can have sufficient time to regularly follow-up and engage with participants and help them achieve better employment outcomes.

Frequency of MFIP participants referral to NdCAD:

The majority of the MFIP employment counselors (72%) stated that they make MFIP participant referrals to NdCAD “frequently” while 14% said they make participant referrals “sometimes” and the remaining 14% have never referred a participant to NdCAD. This shows that the frequency of referrals to NdCAD is good, and this might have contributed to the increased enrollment count during the 2021 and 2022 program years compared to the previous years. However, there is still a need to devise an actionable plan to enhance collaborative efforts between Partners for Equity organizations providing MFIP employment services and NdCAD. This can help to increase the number and frequency of MFIP participant referrals to NdCAD for culturally specific services to benefit more parents and their children to get connected to culturally relevant resources to better serve them and improve outcomes for their family.

When asked about the ways they connect MFIP participants to NdCAD’s culturally specific services, 34% of MFIP employment counselors stated that they “engage the participant in an in-depth discussion about their values, the philosophy and approach of NdCAD, and share at-length about their personal experiences with the program and develop and maintain an active relationship with the NdCAD engagement and recruitment specialist” and 25% of them stated that they “share details with participants about NdCAD including their personal experiences with the program and with other participants they have worked with” and only 17% said they connect participants to NdCAD’s services by providing a formal referral (paperwork) for participants **(see Appendix 5)**.

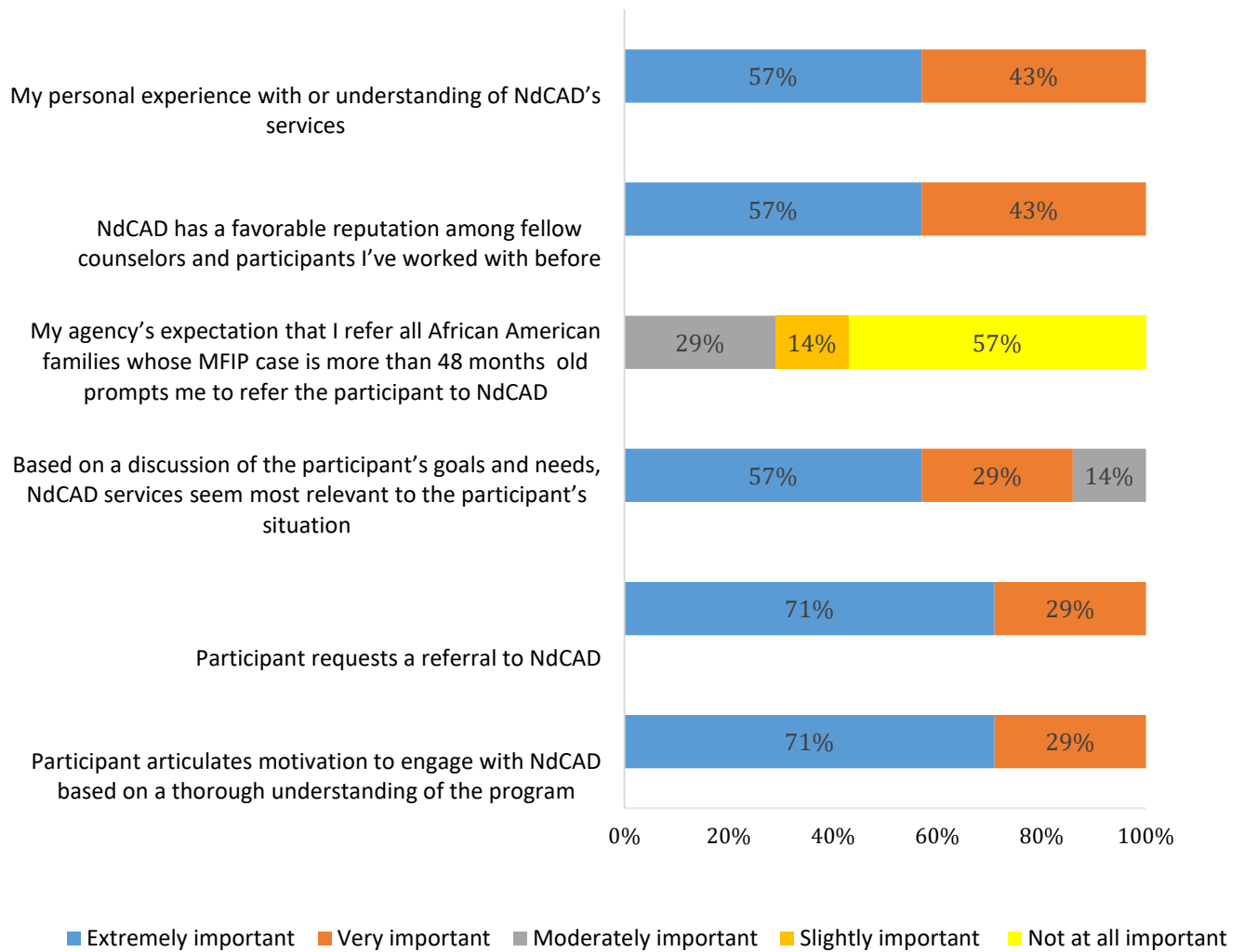
The combination of all methods and efforts that employment counselors said they are using to connect participants to access services at NdCAD are very important steps in the referral process that needs to be strengthened. The response from program participants in this survey, however, contradicts the responses from employment counselors in this regard. Because participants described the referral process to NdCAD as “limited to only email correspondence and no other forms of communication was used to reach them...And, they would have appreciated to receive a call or informed at an appointment meeting”. The differing views of program participants and employment counselors about the connection methods/referral process used indicates that there is communication gap that can be addressed by keeping referral records of participants referred and establishing regular follow up pattern and documenting case notes of interactions between employment counselors , program participants and NdCAD intake staff. This can positively contribute towards a clear and effective referral process, ensuring accountability.

Important factors for employment counselors to connect MFIP participants to NdCAD:

Participants motivation to engage with NdCAD (71%), participants request for referrals (71%) employment counselors personal experience with and understanding of NdCAD services (57%) and goal-oriented discussion with participants needs (57%) are found to be very important determinants for employment counselors to refer African American MFIP participants to NdCAD.

All of the employment counselors in this survey said that MFIP participants motivation to engage with NdCAD and making referral requests to participate in the program are among the important factors in their determination to make participant referrals to NdCAD. This shows in the positive note that referral services are based on participants needs. It can also be an opportunity where employment counselors can assess participants needs in more depth and help them make plans to attend services (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Important factors for employment counselors to connect MFIP participants to NdCAD



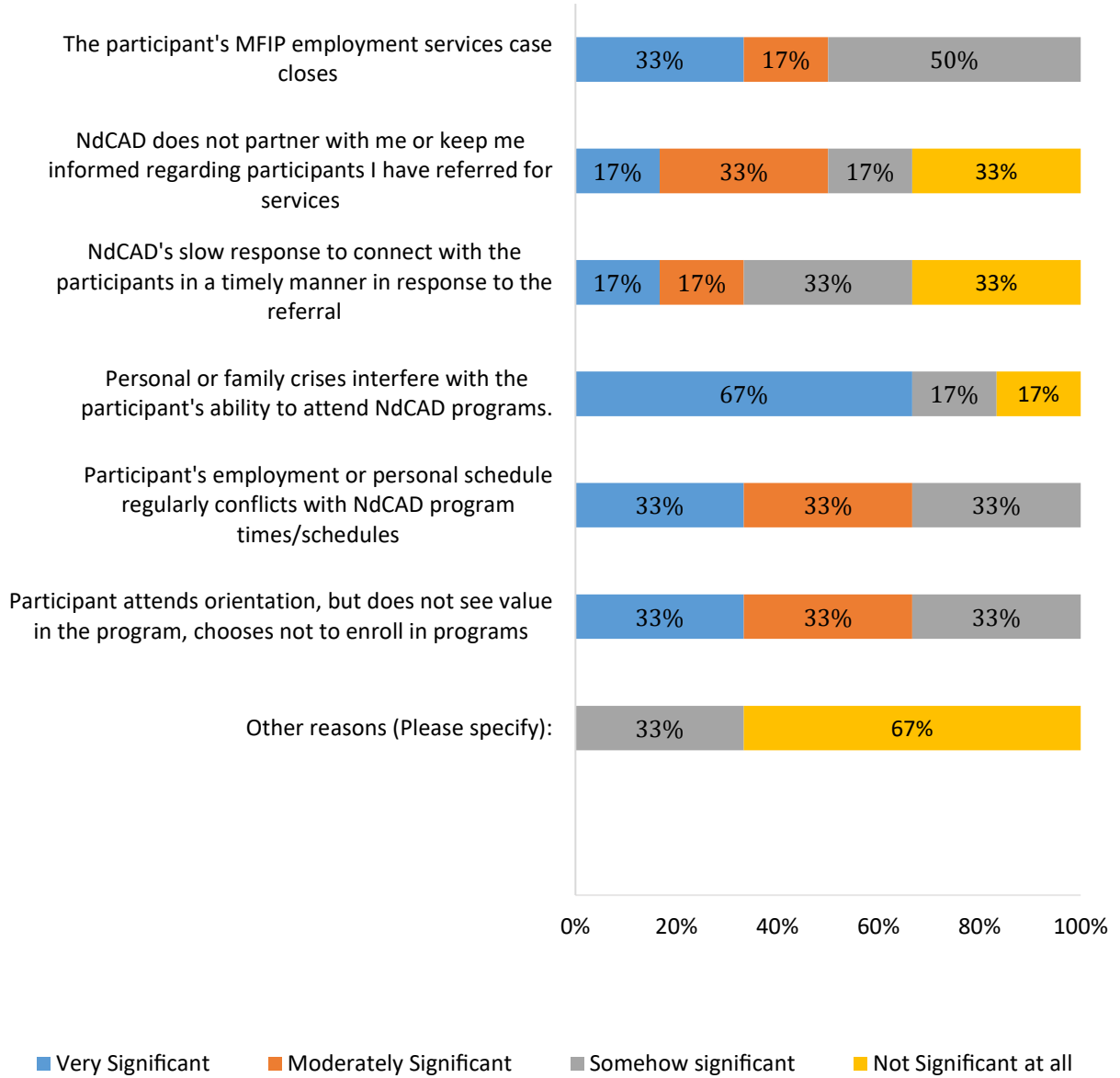
Reasons that interfere with successful participant referral:

A majority of the employment counselors in this survey stated that personal or family crises (67%) and MFIP employment services case closure (50%) are factors that significantly interfere with successful referral of participants to services at NdCAD **(see Figure 3)**. Similarly, parents who took part in the focus group discussion said that “the Parent Power class time is mostly during the daytime which makes attendance difficult for people...to accommodate people who are working during the daytime, and will not be able to attend daytime classes, it would be good if classes are arranged during later hours of the day like after five pm”. This shows that there is a need to engage with participating families to identify the time and attendance format that fit their personal or family situations and adapting a flexible service schedule to accommodate their needs will help mitigate the work hour or personal schedule conflicts which are affecting their ability to attend programs.

Successful referral is a key to connect with families and provide the services they need before their MFIP case closes and help them to achieve better employment and other related outcomes that lead to financial stability.

There were also limitations indicated in this survey in relation to maintaining communication between employment counselors and NdCAD about participant referrals. For example, 50% of the employment counselors said that “NdCAD does not partner with me or keep me informed regarding participants I have referred for services” and the other 50% said, “participant attends orientation, but does not see value in the program, chooses not to enroll in programs” **(see Figure 3)**. According to them, these factors interfere with successful MFIP participant referrals from “very significant to moderately significant” levels. This calls for the need to establish clear communication and engagement plan between NdCAD intake staff and employment counselors to connecting families to services and help them gain better knowledge and understanding of the program and see the value in the services. This in turn can positively contribute towards effectiveness of the referral process and benefit many deserving families.

Figure 3: Employment Counselors responses on the reasons that interfere with successful participant referral.



A majority of the employment counselors (86%) believe that their active participation in NdCAD’s programing (past or present) is “very important that-it almost always makes the difference” to successfully engage participants in NdCAD services. The remaining 14% believe that the relationship is–“somewhat important - on occasion, it could make the difference”.

In addition to sharing experience with NdCAD staff, 57% of the employment counselors believe that sharing experiences with parents through dialogue, is “a very important factor that it almost always makes a difference” in successfully enrolling participants to NdCAD services, 29% said “moderately important” and the remaining 14% said “somewhat important”.

Similarly, (57%) the employment counselors believe that connection to and relationship with NdCAD staff is “very important that- it almost always makes the difference”, while 43% believe that it is “moderately important – that it often makes a difference”. This shows that all employment counselors in this survey believe that connection to and relationship with NdCAD is an important factor to successfully engage participants in services. NdCAD staff also share this view of employment.

Employment counselors in this survey believe that relationship with and connection to both NdCAD and program participants are very important factors for successful participant engagement in the culturally specific services and make a difference. Some employment counselors attested to the importance of communication among partners and shared their personal experience stating:

- *The communication with Terrica Pledger of NdCAD has been great and the entire NdCAD family that I have been introduced to have been a pleasure to partner with. I continue to try and share the benefits to participants of enrolling in NdCAD for their families.*
- *The timely sharing of first day attendance makes a difference in graduation. If NdCAD lets us know every time who does and does not attend, then we can reach out to participant. If they miss the second day, it's too late for that cohort. I have also found that if the employment counselor reaches out the first day of class with an encouraging text people are more likely to attend. I would appreciate if we got a quarterly list from Ramsey County with our clients who have not done Parent Power one or two.*
- *I wish NdCAD programs will open wide to other communities rather than just black African/American in the twin cities.*

Employment counselors observation about participants overall motivation to engage in employment and education activities since they began participating in the culturally specific services at NdCAD:

MFIP employment counselors in this survey had positive observation about participants' overall motivation to engage in employment and education activities since they began participating in the culturally specific services at NdCAD. They described participants overall motivation stating:

- *Participants not only talk about their values in education and employment, but also, they put it to action.*
- *Less concerns with their child's learning and positive relationships with their family.*
- *I have noticed that participants who complete NdCAD are likely to be more engaged and motivated.*
- *One participant completed both Parent Power courses and became a tutor for Sankofa; and NdCAD representatives informed me that they did well and were great to have them as part of the NdCAD family.*
- *NdCAD programs is very important to all black African and American families they should take the opportunity to learn and explore it.*
- *Participants have the tendency to greater understanding of their specific background. They have a great and in-depth motivation to learn their own history.*

Responses from NdCAD staff:

A focus group discussion with NdCAD program staff with different levels of responsibility in the organization including program managers, training coordinator, outreach specialist -staff who connect with parents to programs at NdCAD was held. Staff members who participated in this discussion identify themselves as "African American" and one of them identified themselves as "multi-racial". These staff have worked in their current roles from a little less than a year to over seven years. They stated that they are engaging with staff from "Partner for Equity" organizations on a weekly or monthly basis and communication is going well and engagement frequency was sufficient. While the frequency of engagement was sufficient, they stated that it lacks consistency, "it was not consistent sometimes and needs to happen consistently because consistency is important". NdCAD staff also believe that mutual sharing of experience, connection to and relationship with partner organizations staff/employment counselors is "very important—that it almost always makes the difference" in successfully engaging participants in NdCAD's services.

When asked about how the referral process is going and the aspect of the referral process that needs improvement, discussion participants said that they enroll parents to the Parent Power after the referral is confirmed. "The referral process is becoming smoother since Terrica come onboard". The staff also mentioned that communication with employment counselors regarding referrals is challenging sometimes and it would be better if employment counselors who send referrals to

NdCAD show up in the first day of the Parent Power session to better understand the program and connect with families they referred and will be able to see who showed up and who didn't. This will help them to reach out to those parents who didn't show up and motivate them to attend the program. They also emphasized that newer employment counselors should know the parents and what is asked of them. Employment counselors should also need to be knowledgeable about the benefits that parents can get from the program and educate parents about the benefits of culturally specific services more than just telling them things as you will get a gift card if you attend. During partners engagement meetings NdCAD staff said that they let employment counselors know that contacting families and providing more detailed information about NdCAD programs during referral will allow better communication. "Because, when I contact families to take them through the referral process, I start off the information families already have, then I provide additional more information".

The limitation in communication is consistent with the responses from parents who took part in the focus group discussion. This shows that there a room for improvement around communication efforts between employment counselors, parents and NdCAD staff to make the referral process more effective.

When asked about the reasons that significantly interfere with successful referral of MFIP participants to NdCAD's services, staff said that lack of clarity while completing the referral form , lack of clarity about incentives and limited information about the program services , lack of contact to reach parents either by phone or email ,and delayed referrals have been some of the main reasons that determine successful referral. They said "sometimes we receive last minute referrals to Parent Power program, and the time will not be sufficient to mail out course materials. Ideally, making parent referrals one week before the Parent Power class begins is good".

Similarly, when asked about some of the major challenges they are facing in the Sankofa program, NdCAD staff said:

Online Parent Power has changed the dynamics of people and we are not getting enough Sankofa students. Since parents are taking Parent Power classes online, they do not have the chance to see NdCAD in-person. We need orientation in-person for parents to come and see. In the Pre-COVID-19 pandemics times, both Parent Power and Sankofa Reading programs were happening at the sometime , but now, Parent Power is online and Sankofa is in-person. The pandemic has impacted the whole dynamics and parents may not be motivated to come in-person as they were during the pre-pandemic time. We do need to find ways to walk them through the door. Another barrier that is affecting parent's ability to attend Parent Power classes in-person is lack of transportation. If Ramsey County can provide transportation support for parents who enroll to attend Parent Power classes in person, it can make a difference. Moreover, the in-person platform is better and helpful to get people out.

NdCAD staff's observation about participants overall motivation to engage in employment and education activities since they began participating in the culturally specific services at NdCAD:

NdCAD staff shared closely similar observation with employment counselors about program participants overall motivation to engage in employment, education activities and beyond since they began participating in the culturally specific services at NdCAD stating:

- *I have seen parents' confidence boosted and learned what specific questions to ask and ways to talk to teachers. There have been parents who have been able to go back to school, graduated from commercial driver's license (CDL) the same day they graduated from Parent Power. Others were motivated to finishing the Parent Power courses.*
- *There are parents who became entrepreneurs–blossoming in all sorts of things in their lives . Steers things up for them. Fulfilling their dreams and aspirations working in the jobs they like to work. Getting a job that aligns with their dreams and aspirations. That is why some of them become entrepreneurs.*
- *Saw parents who were able to see the talent in their child and nurture that talent. Children and parents are more engaged. I have observed that parents learned the understanding that children learn differently, and this helps them to know about their children. Parents and children share a learning from each other. The relationship between parents and children has changed in a better way.*
- *Connectiveness to the community- they find a place to learn that the school system works for them. Saw parents being advocates of their children.*
- *Knowing their culture ,knowing they are not alone , better parent to parent connection. They feel a sense of belonging. We have a fellowship program that is helping who we are as people and where we come from. Parents who never shared anything about who they are because they didn't feel that it was a safe space were able to share. They began to work and research with their community about their heritage -figuring it out for them all.*

NdCAD staff also mentioned some of the resource they need to help improve the efforts of program service operations. They said that having multi-purpose van and a driver would help to resolve transportation issues hindering families from attending programs and events at NdCAD. They suggested an in-person engagement meetings with employment counselors/specialists at NdCAD at least quarterly to have in-person experience and learn from each other.

Staff have spoken highly of the family event WFS hosted this past summer and suggested to hold such event twice a year instead of once. This will help parents to have real time experience to connect with NdCAD staff and employment counselors.

Responses from NdcAD leadership:

Compared to the previous partnership challenges that you are aware of ,what worked well in the overall partnership in the past four program years (2019-2022) and what needs improvement?

The partnership and interactions we had with WFS leadership at all levels and staff was great. NdcAD and WFS started the discussion about the co-creation practice in 2019 when there was a transition of roles in WFS leadership. There has been a meaningful institutional knowledge transfer. It is important to continue to commit and lift up the efforts of co-creation practice in real time for better learning and service improvement.

Expanding efforts of institutional knowledge transfer that we are practicing with WFS to other leaders across Ramsey County was part of plan we put forth during our 2019 partnership engagement. The COVID-19 pandemic has interrupted the plan and “now we want to keep the button going” because resuming that level of discussion and sharing our stories and the valuable lessons we learned from the co-learning practice and its implications in other county system would help strengthen our relationships. NdcAD believes that fostering smooth relationship provides the opportunity to transfer institutional knowledge and leverage the power of community institutions to strengthen systems in the larger public sector institution in its efforts of reducing disparate service outcomes and ensuring equity.

What changes would you like to see happen at the systems level with WFS and other partners for Equity organizations to strengthen the partnership ?

We would like to see regular convening of “Partners for Equity” organizations. Connecting with other cultural providers and elevating discussions by sharing cultural lessons from each other and finding ways in which those lessons can be shared with other parts of the county would help to reinforce systems change and see the values of culture, as a resource, operationalized.

Understanding the power of language in the process of systems change is very important. Because it impacts the lens with which we see the people that we work with. This in turn, has implications on systems level policy changes and how it is embracing institutional knowledge coming from communities. Therefore, reinstating those equity partners to producing cultural knowledge will help inform systems.

What do you envision for future partnership of NdcAD with “Partners for Equity” organizations ?

Over the past five years or so, we have been trying to describe our guiding principles that are touching the heads and hearts of the families we serve, and we are looking for better ways to share our principles with “Partners for Equity” organizations providing culturally specific services in other cultural communities and also learn from them in return.

We envision to connecting literacy with identity and finding ways we can learn from each other and strengthen the equity partnership. Learning the cultural service models, standards, and values, that other partners are using to establish the foundation that connect between generations on a sustainable basis . We are teaching the values that our families have passed on to us and we share

what we learn. Navigating ways in which our principles can help to lift up the significance of cultural work in other cultures as well as our own.

Responses from Workforce Solutions leadership:

What system change/s or approaches to partnership have taken place within Ramsey County WFS and/or the MFIP program to support the partnership efforts of culturally specific services such as NdCAD and other providers?

In September 2019, WFS and NdCAD have held an engagement session to discuss about the current reality of the partnership and conducted a SWOT analysis. During this SWOT analysis, the WFS and NdCAD identified key elements of a successful partnership and important next steps. This effort of collaboratively identifying strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats(SWOT) through dialogue and reflection about the strategic partnership shows the willingness of partners to work together to strengthen partnership efforts **(see Appendix 6)**.

WFS believes in culturally specific services and is intentional in supporting and promoting relational than transactional approach to working with community partners and determined to enhance the spirit of collaboration with all service providing partners for value driven community-based solutions.

What would be the implication of such change for future partnership efforts?

We care about the community, and we are doing the best we can even during the unforeseen circumstances. We will hopefully be able to serve our residents with authenticity because of the relationship and trust we built with community partners. And co-design service processes where partners will have the opportunity to reflect and make service improvements while preserving accountability and contractual requirements.

What do you envision for future partnerships with culturally specific service providers?

WFS envisions a stronger partnership based on relationship ,trust and mutual respect with existing partners and continue to intentionally diversify the culturally specific services among multi-culturally communities by exploring changes and disaggregating service outcome data along demographic markers (race) to identify cultural communities that have been disproportionately impacted and experiencing much poorer service outcomes in Ramsey County.

Program outcome data:

Service outcome data of 191 participants enrolled in the Parent Power program from January 1,2021 to December 31,2022, was considered for this assessment. The total number of participants enrolled in program activities namely; education, engagement, and employment and corresponding activity hours completed one quarter before enrollment (“pre-enrollment”) and one quarter after enrollment (“post-enrollment”) to NdCAD services in each activity category was collected from the Workforce One (WF1) database and presented in the form of tables and graphs.

Successful cohort activity completion rates were computed, pre-and post-enrollment activity hours were also compared.

Total number of African American families on MFIP in Ramsey County from 2019-2022:

Data from four consecutive years from 2019-2022, shows that there are a large number of African American families on MFIP in Ramsey County (on average 2,903 families per year) across all the years listed. In addition, the information collected from parents enrolled in NdCAD programs and MFIP employment counselors in this survey consistently show that these services are impacting families positively. However, only a very small portion of this population (only a maximum of three and half percent of the total) were enrolled in the culturally specific services (Parent Power) that NdCAD is providing (see Table 2).

While the low enrollment rate could be attributed to several contributing factors that might be beyond the control of service providers, factors such as inefficiencies in the referral process, participants limited or lack of information about the culturally specific services, limited or lack of understanding about the benefits and values in the program could also be among those factors that service partners need to address to increase enrollment numbers for better services outcome for many deserving families.

Table 2:Total number of African American families on MFIP in Ramsey County and percent of enrollment to NdCAD from 2019-2022

Year	Total number of African Americans on MFIP by year	Total number of African Americans enrolled for culturally specific services with NdCAD-Parent Power	Percent of enrollment to NdCAD by year
2019	3061	24	0.78%
2020	3122	76	2.4%
2021	2900	106	3.6%
2022	2528	85	3.3%

Source: [Workforce One \(WF1\)](#)

A total of 414 MFIP participants were referred to NdCAD for culturally specific services from January 2021-December 2022; out of which a total of 191 participants were enrolled in the Parent Power cohort. From the total participants enrolled in the 27 Parent Power cohorts, 155 of them have successfully completed the program. More than 50% of the referred participants for culturally specific services were not enrolled in Parent Power cohort. This can be attributed to several factors including participants choice not to enroll, which can be due to lack of sufficient information about the program benefits, work schedule conflict, communication gap to follow-up with participants after referrals were made and many other factors that need an in-depth analysis to identify specific factors thereby increase enrollment numbers for future (see **Tables 3**).

Table 3: Total participant enrollment data at NdCAD by year

Program year	Total number of referrals by year	Number of participants enrolled in Parent Power at NdCAD	Number of participants successfully completed Parent Power cohort	Participants referred but not enrolled in Parent Power
2021	216	106	83	110
2022	198	85	72	113
Total referral and enrollment in 2021 and 2022	414	191	155	223

Source: NdCAD program report (2023) and [Workforce One \(WF1\)](#)

Parent Power enrollment has increased from 78% in 2021 to 85% in 2022 and the overall completion rate was 81% (see **Table 4**).

Table 4: Parent Power (PP) cohort completion rate by year

Year	Cohort enrollment by year	Number of participants completed cohort	Number of participants who did NOT complete cohort	Annual PP completion rate
2021	106	83	23	78%
2022	85	72	13	85%
Total	191	155	36	81%

Source: [Workforce One \(WF1\)](#)

Achievements from program year 2021 and 2022 shows that Parent Power graduates do better than they were doing prior to enrolling with NdCAD. Employment hours increased by 126% in 2021 and 143% in 2022, education hours increased by 43% in 2021 and 20% in 2022 and engagement hours increased by 4% in 2021 and 6% in 2022. There was a 69% cumulative increase in employment, education, and engagement hours in 2021 and 2022. The increase in the employment hours in particular and cumulative increase of all cohort activity hours during the two programs years show two interrelated positive factors about parents’ employment situation. It could mean that they were motivated to engage in activities leading to finding gainful employment and were able to retain their employment. These increases would not be expected for parents without receiving NdCAD’s services (see Tables 5 and 6).

Table 5: Total pre-and post-enrollment hours comparison PY 2021

Activity	Pre-enrollment hours record	Post-enrollment hours result	Percentage change
Education	566	809	43.0%
Engagement	2387	2489	4.0%
Employment	2995	6781	126%
Total activity hours	5948	10079	69%

Table 6: Total pre-and post-enrollment hours comparison PY 2022

Activity	Pre-enrollment hours record	Post-enrollment hours result	Percentage change
Education	956	1150	20%
Engagement	3429	3640	6%
Employment	3582	8707	143%
Total activity hours	7967	13497	69%

Compared to the “pre-enrollment” participants’ activity hours record, there was an increase in participants’ total activity hours result across all the activity types in the two program years “post-enrollment” to NdCAD (see Table 7 and 8).

Table 7: Total pre-enrollment activity hours record PY 2021 and 2022

Year	Activity type			
	Education	Engagement	Employment	Total pre-enrollment activity hours record
2021	566	2387	2995	5948
2022	956	3429	3582	7967
Total pre-enrollment hours	1522	5816	6577	13915

Source: [Workforce One \(WF1\)](#)

Table 8: Total post-enrollment activity hours in 2021 and 2022

Year	Activity type			
	Education	Engagement	Employment	Total post-enrollment activity hours by year
2021	809	2489	6781	10079
2022	1150	3640	8707	13497
Total post-enrollment hours by activity type	1959	6129	15488	23576

Source: [Workforce One \(WF1\)](#)

Percent of cumulative activity hours achieved in 2021 and 2022 programs years was 69% (see Table 9).

Table 9: Total pre-and post-enrollment activity hours comparison by year and activity type

Activity type	Total pre-enrollment activity hours record in 2021 and 2022	Total post-enrollment activity hours result in 2021 and 2022	Percentage change in activity hours
Education	1522	1959	29%
Engagement	5816	6129	5%
Employment	6577	15488	136%
Total pre-and post-enrollment activity hours	13915	23576	69%

Lessons learned

- The co-creation process has provided practical learning opportunities for partners through active and direct engagement that involved critical reflection of diverse ideas, perspectives, and experiences in the design of culturally appropriate methods and data collection tools.
- Fostering smooth relationship between partners provides the opportunity to transfer institutional knowledge and leverage the power of community institutions to strengthen systems in the larger public sector institution in its efforts of reducing disparate service outcomes and ensuring equity.
- Listening to parents stories and lived experiences on how the culturally specific programs have positively impacted them and their family in such a qualitative and meaningful ways; and hearing relevant stakeholders' perspectives, and experiences in the service process has presented an opportunity to learn and understand about the complex challenges families encounter .The need to develop resources and made support systems available for parents to mitigate barriers such as transportation that interferes with parent's ability to attend programs, and engage in skills development opportunities are some of the important steps. And this can improve parents' ability to actively engage in programs and services that can help them achieve better employment and other related outcomes leading to economic stability.
- Active participation of service providing partners and families participating in programs in the process of co-creation is critical for continuous learning and program improvement.
- The co-creation of the evaluation plan and implementation was a long process and requires the need to set perceptions of community partners, the willingness and commitment of partners to adjust to changing circumstances and accommodate a reasonable pace that aligns with the speed of partners in order to meet the shared and agreed up on goals and purposes of the evaluation undertaking.
- Adapting to a flexible service schedule and attendance platform that considers family's availability to attend required program activities for themselves and their children can make a difference.

Recommendations

- **Strengthen program promotion and participant outreach strategy:**
 Even if there are a large number of African American families on MFIP in Ramsey County (2,903 families per year on average) across the past four years, only a very small portion of the families (2.5% per year on average) of the total were enrolled for the culturally specific services with NdCAD. This calls for an effective and consistent program outreach, promotion, and recruitment strategy to educate MFIP participants about the benefits of the culturally specific services in helping parents and their children achieve better employment goals by sharing practical experiences and success stories.
- **Establish client referral and tracking mechanism within the WF1 database system:**
 This ensures effective, efficient, and transparent referral process and help to track the list of MFIP participants referred for culturally specific services with basic information necessary to identify who is referred by whom and when. This enables partners to see the status of the referral process and avoid any potential delay of participant's enrollment for services and minimize the chance of missing participant's application in the process. Moreover, this ensures accountability and timely communication between service partners as well as with participants.
- **Utilize more options of communication for participant referral:**
 The current method is limited to sending email and or completing formal referral paperwork. Thus, if employment counselors utilize additional communication options to engage with MFIP participants and establishing follow-up procedure between employment counselors, NdCAD intake person and participants whose referral is in the process, can help improve the referral process and could result in increased enrollment.
- **Share Parent Power attendance with employment counselors in a timely manner:**
 Some of the employment counselors in this survey believe that timely sharing of first day attendance of participants in the Parent Power class makes a difference in graduation rate. They shared their experience stating "If NdCAD lets us know every time who does and does not attend the Parent Power, then we can reach out to participants immediately. If they miss the second day, it's too late for that cohort". They assert that "if the employment counselor reaches out the first day of class with an encouraging text people are more likely to attend".
- **Track participants progress:**
 While it is an important practice to capture the pre-and post-enrollment total engagement, employment, and education cohort activity hours that participants have achieved, it is also helpful to track progresses made and specific success stories or impacts that have come about in the living situation of families because of participating in the program cohort activities at NdCAD. This can be accomplished by embedding a 'progress tracking function' in the existing employment counseling activity in WF1 that employment counselors complete during every follow-up and engagement meetings with each family by documenting in the form of a case note on the progresses they see and hear that families on their caseload are making. This effort can also help to assess (know) the extent to which

those positive impacts as a result of participating in the culturally specific services and motivation thereof, has contributed to the social and economic well-being of families.

- **Establish a clear and consistent communication plan:**
There were some limitations indicated in this evaluation in relation to maintaining communication between employment counselors and NdCAD about participant referrals. Therefore, it is very important to establish and implement a clear and consistent communication and follow-up plan between partners to alleviate the communication gaps and positively contribute towards the effectiveness of the referral process and benefit many deserving parents. When going through staff transitions, have a back-up to maintain communication with families to conduct follow-up calls and emails. Return call of family's promptly due to wanting to attend the current classes or sudden schedule changes.
- **Increase participant referral and enrollment numbers:**
Participant enrollment in Parent Power and Sankofa reading program was low. It is critical to increase enrolments in both programs to reach and serve as many deserving families as possible. This can be achieved by strengthening engagement efforts with partner organizations, devising, and putting actionable participant recruitment plan in place. It was also suggested by program participants to expand the Sankofa reading program to more additional days.
- **Advocate for in-person program delivery platform:**
NdCAD staff suggested that the in-person platform for both Parent Power and Sankofa program could result in higher number of enrollments. Thus, advocating for the in-person platform through continued engagement with both employment counselors and parents so that both parents and their children can attend classes at the same time would be beneficial.
- **Adapt a flexible cohort activity schedule:**
Adapting to a flexible cohort activity schedule that fits both parents and children's availability will help mitigate the participant's employment or personal schedule challenges, which regularly conflict with NdCAD service schedules and interfere with their ability to attend programs. This will allow parents to attend programs and receive services that will support them achieve better employment and other related outcomes that lead to financial stability. Moreover, providing opportunities for those enrolled parents to make-up missed Parent Power classes and avoid the need to repeat the entire course all over again, which could be a source of discouragement not to show up and proceed to the next level, can help them keep the momentum of motivation.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Definition of terms and abbreviations

Culturally specific means:

- The mission of the contracted agency is rooted in the culture(s) and cultural identity(ies) of the families served.
- The majority of the board and key executive leadership of the contracted agency represent the race(s), ethnicities, and culture(s) of the families served.
- Employs, or intends to employ, management and direct service staff who, in part, reflect the race(s), ethnicities, and culture(s) of the families.
- The agency delivers services to increase families' employability in a manner that both acknowledges and responds to the legacies of historical trauma, racism, inequality, and poverty that have negatively affected access to, and success with, education and employment opportunities.
- Agency services incorporate and build on families' values, beliefs, worldviews, and traditions, many of which are rooted in or informed by culture and experience (Ramsey County Request for Proposals "RFP" Document, 2018).

Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP): Minnesota's welfare reform program for low-income families with children. MFIP helps families move to work.

Partners for Equity: The services that the Contractor(s) ("Contractor") will deliver to assist the County will be referred to as Partners for Equity ("PE") as a strategy to reduce racial disparities in program outcomes.

Racial disparity: According to the Minnesota Department of Human Services ("DHS"), differences between white families and families from other racial/ethnic groups on specific MFIP outcome measures that are greater than five percentage points constitute a racial disparity.

Self-determination: is believing you can control your own destiny. It is a combination of attitudes and abilities that lead people to set goals for themselves, and to take the initiative to reach these goals. Self-determination involves many attitudes and abilities including self-awareness, assertiveness, creativity, and pride, and problem solving and self-advocacy skills. To take charge of your own life, you must be able to set goals, evaluate options, make choices, and then work to achieve your goals (<https://www.pacer.org/transition/learning-center/independent-community-living/self-determination.asp>).

Co-creation: Is a strategy to transform value propositions working with customers or complementary resources (Kambil, et al 1996).

Co-learning/Collaborative learning: An approach of learning through working together or participatory learning-oriented method. "Learning involves reflecting on project experiences and using the lessons from that reflection to improve future actions" (Kolb's 1984 cited in ICCD 2009, P.5). "Collaborative learning is based on the model that knowledge can be created within a

population where members actively interact by sharing experiences”. The process of collaborative learning allows participants to achieve higher levels of thought. According to Lev Vygotsky’s social development theory, “community is an important factor in the process of creating meaning and knowledge.” (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Collaborative_learning).

Semi-structured interviews: methods used to collect detailed information from a small number of people.

Open ended questions: These are questions where respondents are free to express themselves in their own words. Provide insights that would have otherwise not received.

Successful: is used to refer to participants that did complete one of the NdCAD’s cohorts.

Not successful: is used to refer to participants that did not complete any of the NdCAD’s cohorts and exited from program.

SPICED indicators: SPICED stands for (Subjective, Participatory, Interpreted & communicable, Crosschecked & compared, Empowering, Divers & disaggregated): SPICED are qualitative indicators where the subjective interpretation and opinion of different stakeholders are very important. These indicators relate to the changes in perception and help to capture qualitative difference than countable items. Indicators need to be Clear, Realistic, Economical, Adequate, and easily Monitored (Institute for International Development and Communication, 2009).

Workforce One (WF1): is a case management system used by employment service providers in Minnesota.

Appendix 2: Outcomes and indicators

Performance criteria	SPICED indicators
<p>Engagement:</p> <p>-Employment: Families are motivated to take charge of their own personal development/success.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Increased engagement in employment activities. ▪ Increased participant’s employability. ▪ Increased employment retention. <p>-Education: Increased engagement in educational activities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Parents are actively involved in their children's education and socio-cultural development to prepare children for success in school and life. ▪ Parents have the access to necessary information about the education that meets their child's needs. ▪ Children actively participate in Sankofa reading program. ▪ Parents actively participate in cohort (group)-based learnings and workshops/Parent Power. ▪ Community engagement through parent-to-parent/family-to-family networking and support groups. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Families’ engagement in services leading to increased skills and work readiness activities increased. ▪ Families enrolled in educational, job skills enhancement, employment, and training activities. ▪ Families were able to find gainful employment. ▪ Families were able to retain their job. <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Children developed improved reading and problem-solving skills. ▪ Children have stronger connections with their families and with their community. ▪ Children developed positive interaction skills with other children. <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Families feel supported and more connected. ▪ Parents support independence by helping one another: peer-support enhanced. ▪ Peer connections enhanced and families feel better connected with other families in their community. ▪ Families feel less isolated: Isolation reduced amongst families and in their community.
<p>Cultural competency enhancement:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Families are “consciously engaging” in cultural enrichment activities and practices. ▪ Parents impart positive teaching into their children. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Knowledge of parents and children about their African cultural heritage increased. ▪ Parents and children developed greater self-awareness and take pride in their African identity. ▪ Relationships within families, households, and other important people in their lives improved.

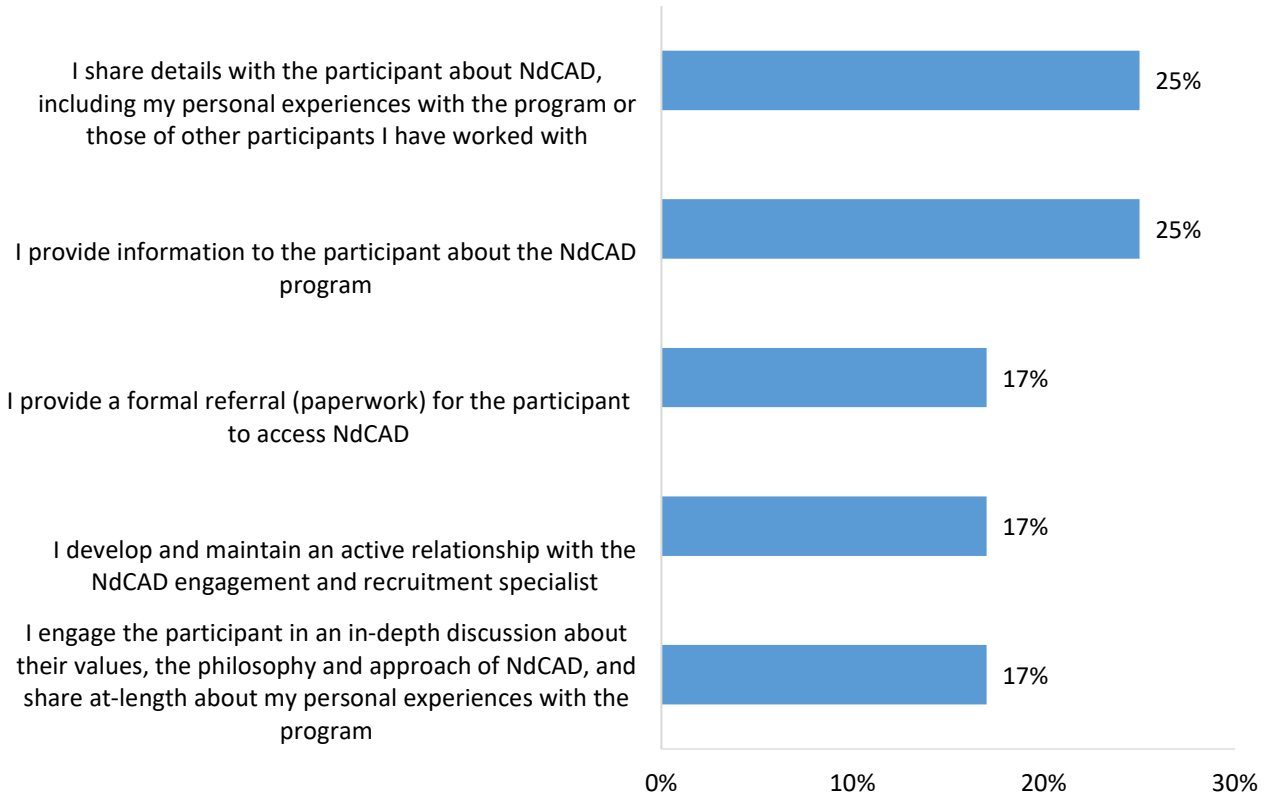
Appendix 3: Parents survey responses on the impacts of the Sankofa reading program on child's behavior

Child behavior /attitude change indicators	Yes	No	Didn't know/Haven't observed	Percent
Sounds outward/ noticeable	7	0	0	100%
Reading without being told to (able to independently read)	7	0	0	100%
Reading to others	6	0	1	86%
Reading for fun	5	2	0	71%
Continuing to try even if reading may be difficult	7	0	0	100%
Confidence in reading	6	1	0	86%
Enjoyment of school	4	3	0	57%
Homework completion	5	2	0	71%
Knowledge of and respect for African culture and heritage	5	0	2	71%
African pride	5	0	1	83%
Positive interaction with other children	7	0	0	100%

Appendix 4 : Parents satisfaction rating of Sankofa Reading program

Sankofa Reading program	Response on level of satisfaction				
	Very satisfied	Satisfied	Not sure	Dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied
Please rate your overall satisfaction with Sankofa reading program	6	1	0	0	0
Response count	6	1	0	0	0

Appendix 5: Employment counselors approach to connect MFIP participants to NdCAD



Appendix 6: NdCAD and Ramsey County Workforce Solutions (WFS)- SWOT analysis

September 11, 2019

The following are responses to “What are some key elements of a successful partnership that we want to see?” for NdCAD and WFS staff:

- Authenticity
- Translation (language)
- Developing common language
- Recognizing expertise
- Mandatory Recruitment
- Building trust
- It is something we can share
- Risk-taking
- Process to reflect and make improvements
- Document the journey

The following are responses to a SWOT analysis of the current reality of NdCAD and WFS partnership and where we want to go:



Date: _____
Facilitator: _____
Note Taker: _____

Appendix 7: Focus group discussion and survey questions

**Network for the Development of Children of African Descent (NdCAD)
Culturally specific services participants focus group discussion questions.**

Facilitator’s note:

- Welcome and thank everyone for coming to attend today’s group discussion.
- Provide overview of the focus group discussion and what we are using the information for.
- Explain that we are interested in their experience about culturally specific services, the referral process, and their engagement with employment counselors.
- The conversation will take no longer than 120 minutes unless someone wants to stay longer.
- To thank you for your time, you will receive a gift card at the end of the discussion (Get participant’s signatures for receipt).

The purpose of this group discussion:

We want to hear your experience about:

- The interactions/engagements you had with your employment counselor related to referral for services at NdCAD to better understand what the referral process looked like for you and how the employment counselor described the programs and services at NdCAD to you.
- The importance of the culturally specific services you have received or currently receiving at NdCAD.

The feedback will help NdCAD and Ramsey County Workforce Solutions to make services better in the future.

Participation in the discussion is voluntary and will not affect the services you receive. Your name and personally identifying information during this discussion will not be connected with your responses or views.

Discussion Participants:

Parents that are currently active on MFIP, and those who already have completed the program. Asking participants about their experiences while they are in the program and or after completing the program services and assess the changes that have come about in their lives as perceived by themselves will help all stakeholders to learn about the impacts of services.

Participants focus group discussion questions /guide

Focus areas and discussion questions	Responses
<p>Engagement with employment counselors and the referral process</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How did you hear about the services NdCAD is providing? 2. Was your MFIP employment counselor helpful in deciding to enroll with NdCAD? How or how not? 3. How would you describe your experience/interactions with your MFIP employment counselor before and after enrollment to NdCAD? <p>How would you describe the referral process to NdCAD?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. What strengths do you see in the referral process and what needs to improve? <p>Services and impacts:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Which NdCAD program/s did you participate in? ___Parent Power ___Sankofa ___ both, when? 2. Tell us about your experience with NdCAD programs. 3. What was most impactful about NdCAD programs? 4. What did you learn from Parent Power? 5. What are some of the positive changes that came about to you and your family because of participating in NdCAD' s programs? 6. If your child went through Sankofa, tell us about your child's experience in Sankofa and the changes you observed in your child's behavior because of the program. <p>Suggestions and additional information</p> <p>Please tell us anything else that you would like us to know to improve services for the future:</p>	

**Network for the Development of Children of African Descent (NdCAD)
Sankofa Reading Program survey questions to be completed by Parents**

This survey will help Ramsey County Workforce Solutions and NdCAD to improve services for the future. Completing this survey is voluntary and will not impact the services you receive. Your name and other identifying information will not be connected to your response. To thank you for your time, you will receive a gift card for completing the survey.

1. How many years has your child enrolled in the Sankofa reading program?
 less than a year 1-2 years 2-3 years greater than 3 years
2. Do you know about the Parent Power program at NdCAD? Yes No
3. If your answer is yes to Q #2, have you participated in the past or currently participating in Parent Power program ? Yes No, if no, why haven't you participated? _____
4. Have you noticed improvement in your child's behavior or attitude since participating in the Sankofa reading program in the following areas?

Behavior/Attitude	Yes	No	Didn't know/Haven't observed
Sounds outward			
Reading without being told to (able to independently read)			
Reading to others			
Reading for fun			
Continuing to try even if reading may be difficult			
Confidence in reading			
Enjoyment of school			
Homework completion			
Knowledge of and respect for African culture and heritage			
African pride			
Positive interaction with other children			

5. Does your child have a stronger connection to your family because of having participated in Sankofa reading program? Yes No Don't know.
6. Does your child have a stronger connection to their community because of having participated in Sankofa? Yes No Don't know.
7. Please describe any other changes you have noticed in your child's motivation about school and learning.

8. Were the following components of Sankofa helpful for your child?

Program component	Helpful	Somehow helpful	Not helpful	Not sure
Instruction on phonemic awareness				
Instruction on the 7 comprehension strategies				
Learning about African heritage				
Positive learning environment				
High expectations from Sankofa staff				
Low student to tutor ration				
Receiving a weekly note from the tutor				

9. Please list any other parts of the Sankofa program that you found helpful for your child.

10. Would you recommend Sankofa to family members or friends?

Yes No Not sure

11. Please rate your overall satisfaction with Sankofa reading program.

- Very dissatisfied
- Dissatisfied
- Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied.
- Satisfied
- Very satisfied.

Please tell us why you gave Sankofa this rating: _____

12. Why it is important to serve whole families-including children in the culturally specific services?

13. What else would you like us to know to improve the Sankofa program for future students?

**Culturally Specific Services evaluation: Survey questions to be completed by MFIP
Employment counselors.**

This survey will help Ramsey County Workforce Solutions and NdCAD to make services better for the future. Participation in this survey is voluntary. Participating or not participating will not impact your supervision or job performance. Your name and personally identifying information will not be connected to your response.

1. Name of your organization: _____
2. What is your role (Job title): _____
3. How do you identify yourself in terms of race/ethnicity? (Select all that apply)
4. African American American Indian Asian American Hmong
 Latino/Hispanic Multi-racial Other Asian Immigrant Other Black Immigrant White
5. How long have you been in your current role as an employment counselor.
 One to six months, Seven to 12 months Greater than one year but less than 2 years
 Two to five years, Greater than five years
6. Which of the following statements best describes your familiarity with the Network for the Development of Children of African Descent (NdCAD)?
 A. I have a deep understanding of the NdCAD program.
 B. I have a basic understanding of the NdCAD program.
 C. I don't know much about the NdCAD program.
 D. I have not heard of the NdCAD program.
7. How did you learn about NdCAD?
 Individual research /a participant told me about it.
 My supervisor or agency leaders informed me about it.
 A NdCAD specialist counselor told me about it.
 Another counselor told me about it.
 I interacted with NdCAD staff and/or the program person.
 Other (please specify): _____
8. Based on the past six months, about how many MFIP participants do you work with at any given point in time?
 Less than 60 Between 60 and 75 Between 75 and 90 More than 90

9. Based on the past six months, about what proportion of the MFIP participants you work with at any given point in time, identify as African American? (In sliding scale to select a percentage 0% to 100% in 10 percentage-point increments)

- 0-10% 11-20% 21-30 % 31-40% 41-50% 51-60% 61-70%
- 71- 80% 81-90 91-100

10. How often do you refer MFIP participants you work with to NdCAD?

- Frequently Sometimes Rarely I have never referred a participant to NdCAD.

If rarely or never referred participant, why? _____

11. How do you connect participants to the NdCAD program? (Select all that apply).

- I provide a formal referral (paperwork) for the participant to access NdCAD.
- I provide information to the participant about the NdCAD program.
- I share details with the participant about NdCAD, including my personal experiences with the program or those of other participants I have worked with.
- I engage the participant in an in-depth discussion about their values, the philosophy and approach of NdCAD, and share at-length about my personal experiences with the program.
- I develop and maintain an active relationship with the NdCAD engagement and recruitment specialist.

12. Which of the following factors are most important in your determination to refer a participant to NdCAD?

Factors	Very important	Moderately important	Somehow important	Rarely important	Not important at all
Participant articulates motivation to engage with NdCAD based on a thorough understanding of the program					
Participant requests a referral to NdCAD					
Based on a discussion of the participant's goals and needs, NdCAD services seem most relevant to the participant's situation					
My agency's expectation that I refer all Hispanic families whose MFIP case is more than 48 months old prompts me to refer the participant to NdCAD					
NdCAD has a favorable reputation among fellow counselors and participants I've worked with before					
My personal experience with or understanding of NdCAD's services					

13. Which of the following reasons significantly interfere with a successful referral of MFIP participants to NdCAD’s Services?

Reasons	Very significant	Moderately significant	Somehow significant	Not significant at all
Participant does not connect with NdCAD initially or attend the orientation				
Participant attends orientation, but does not see value in the program, chooses not to enroll in programs				
Participant’s employment or personal schedule regularly conflicts with NdCAD program times/schedules				
Personal or family crises interfere with the participant’s ability to attend NdCAD programs				
NdCAD’s slow response to connect with the participants in a timely manner in response to the referral				
NdCAD does not partner with me or keep me informed regarding participants I have referred for services				
The participant’s MFIP employment services case closes				
Other reasons (please specify):				

14. To what extent do you believe that your connection to and relationship with NdCAD staff is an important factor in successfully engaging a participant in NdCAD services?

- Very important – it almost always makes the difference.
- Moderately important – it often makes a difference.
- Somewhat important – on occasion, it could make the difference.
- Hardly matters at all – it rarely or does not make a difference.

15. To what extent do you believe that your active participation and experience in NdCAD programming (past or present) is an important factor in successfully engaging participants in NdCAD services?

- Very important – it almost always makes the difference.
- Moderately important – it often makes a difference.
- Somewhat important – on occasion, it could make the difference.
- Hardly matters at all – it rarely or does not make a difference.

16. To what extent do you believe that mutual sharing between you and the participant (sharing values and experiences through dialogue) is an important factor in successfully engaging participants in NdCAD services?
- Very important – it almost always makes the difference.
 - Moderately important – it often makes a difference.
 - Somewhat important – on occasion, it could make the difference.
 - Hardly matters at all – it rarely or does not make a difference.
17. What differences did you observe in program participants over all motivation to engage in employment and education activities since they began participating in the culturally specific services at NdCAD?
18. If you have any additional comment:

Culturally specific services evaluation: Focus group discussion questions with NdCAD program staff

This survey will help NdCAD and Ramsey County Workforce Solutions to make services better for the future. Participation in this survey is voluntary. Participating or not participating will not impact your supervision or job performance. Your name and personally identifying information will not be connected to your responses.

1. What is your role (Job title): _____
2. How long have you been in your current role? __One to six months __Seven to 12 months
__Greater than one year but less than two years __Two to five years__ Greater than five years
3. How do you identify yourself in terms of race/ethnicity [Select all that apply].
__African American __American Indian __Asian American __ Hmong
__Latino/Hispanic __Multi-racial __Other Asian Immigrant __Other Black Immigrant __White
4. How many times do you engage with relevant staff, such as employment counselors or planners, from partner organizations in a typical month? _____
5. Do you think the frequency of the partners engagement meetings are enough? __Yes__No.
If, no, what would be your recommendation? _____
6. How is the recruitment referral process going? What aspect of it need to be strengthened and what needs to improve?
7. What are the reasons most commonly interfere with a successful referral of MFIP participants to NdCAD's services in your experience?
8. Please describe your relationship with employment counselors that make MFIP client referrals to your organization.
9. How important do you believe that your connection to and relationship with partner organizations staff/employment counselors is an important factor in successfully engaging a participant in NdCAD services?
10. What differences did you observe in program participants overall motivation to engage in employment, education, and other important activities since they began participating in the culturally specific services at NdCAD?
11. What are the major challenges you are facing in the Sankofa program?
12. If you have any additional feedback/suggestion, please share:

Culturally specific services evaluation:

Discussion questions with WFS leadership

Leadership roles : Director Program Manager Planning Manger

Looking back to previous challenges of partnership efforts that Ramsey County and culturally specific service providers have experienced:

- A. What system change/s or approaches to partnership have taken place within Ramsey County WFS and/or the MFIP program to support the partnership efforts of culturally specific services such as NdCAD and other providers?
- B. What would be the implication of such change for future partnership efforts?
- C. What do you envision for future partnerships with culturally specific service providers?

Discussion questions with NdCAD leadership

Leadership roles : Executive Director Program Manager

Compared to the previous partnership challenges that you are aware of :

- A. What worked well in the overall partnership in the past four program years (2019-2022) and what needs improvement?
- B. What changes would you like to see happen at the systems level with WFS and other partners for Equity organizations to strengthen the partnership ?
- C. What do you envision for future partnership of NdCAD with Partners for Equity organizations ?