
WEST VIRGINIA FAMILY RESOURCE NETWORKS

Building Community Capital



Who We Are

Family Resource Networks (FRNs) have existed in the state of West Virginia since the early 1990s. Since this time, FRNs have been faced with numerous challenges and changes that have affected the way they function and operate. However, FRNs have overcome these obstacles and remained constant in their work to address growing needs, in their local communities, by developing innovative projects and providing necessary resources and support for the area. Currently, 47 FRNs serve each of West Virginia's 55 counties.

What We Do

FRNs can have a wide and varied scope of work and often chose to focus efforts on the issues most pressing and relevant to their local areas. FRNs do not provide direct services, but rather work collaboratively with partner agencies to implement and support new or existing programs or projects. Additionally, FRNs are often involved in assessing, planning, and coordinating efforts related to resources or services in the community. All FRNs are tasked with the same primary objectives, however, they have flexibility in how they choose to address and meet these objectives. This flexibility in function serves FRNs well by allowing them to be responsive to the needs and opportunities of their communities and residents. Some examples of FRNs primary work areas include: substance abuse prevention, community development, early childhood, child abuse prevention, economic development, foster care placement, resource development, and food or non-food essentials assistance. These are only a small sampling of the many diverse efforts in which FRNs are engaged. How they choose to address these issues can also vary greatly; one FRN may choose to address food insecurity by coordinating a weekend food backpack program while another works to organize a community garden or food drive. Even though FRNs may have many differences, they all share a commonality: a vision to improve the quality of life for all West Virginians.

Measuring Our Impact

The impact of the work FRNs do can be difficult to concretely measure because they work to affect change on a local level by increasing the capacities inherently present in the community. Increasing community capacity leads to increased well-being for community residents and provides greater opportunities and additional resources. The FRNs' ability to collaboratively build community and affect change can be measured by using the "Seven Capitals Model." This model was developed by Cornelia and Jan Flora, Professors Emeritus at Iowa State University, to analyze the components of healthy sustainable communities.

TYPES OF COMMUNITY CAPITAL

Natural Capital – The environment, natural beauty, lakes, rivers and streams, forests, wildlife, soil, the local landscape.

Cultural Capital – Ethnicity, generations, stories and traditions, spirituality, habits, and heritage.

Human Capital – All the skills and abilities of people, leadership, knowledge, and the ability to access resources.

Social Capital – Groups, organizations, networks in the community, the sense of belonging, bonds between people.

Political Capital – Connections to people in power, access to resources, leverage, and influence to achieve goals.

Built Capital – Buildings and infrastructure, schools, roads, water and sewer systems, and main streets in a community.

Financial Capital – Money, charitable giving, grants, access to funding and wealth.

Research shows that communities which invest in all seven capitals (natural, cultural, human, social, political, financial, and built) show greater increases in community wealth and economic development returns. All seven capitals are interconnected, with each one impacting the other; an investment in one of the seven capitals creates opportunities for assets to be built in all of the capitals.

FRNs have the unique capability to work on issues related to all seven capitals and believe that a holistic approach needs to be taken to build community wealth leading to a healthy sustainable community. Rather than compartmentalizing community needs and opportunities, FRNs understand that in order to best affect community change, all community capitals may need to be considered. A community will thrive when each type of capital is working in cohesion with the others. A healthy sustainable community is one in which the quality of life of its residents is maximized. When FRNs strive to improve the quality of life for West Virginians, they also work towards building a thriving community by addressing issues affecting each of the seven capitals. Overall, FRNs are catalysts for strong community development and sustainability.

One way FRNs increase capital and maximize investment in their communities is through leveraging funding opportunities and donations. For the 2016 fiscal year, FRNs secured \$10.5 million in funding for their organizations and partner agencies. In addition, \$3.8 million in donations of resources and volunteer time were generated by FRNs. These are substantial amounts that can greatly affect the health, well-being, and economic opportunity in West Virginia communities. FRNs provide a very valuable return on investment and it is clear that the work they are able to accomplish with this funding is of value to the residents of the communities they serve.

If FRNs ceased to exist in the state of West Virginia, numerous programs and resources would also cease to exist. FRNs are often responsible for the coordination and implementation of health and social service programs, education initiatives, or other needed projects that serve local residents. They are instrumental in developing and facilitating early childhood and health and wellness programs that may not otherwise be available in the community. For some areas in the state, the FRN is one of a few or the only social or community support agency people can access. In addition, the millions of dollars in funding and donations generated by FRNs, that support West Virginians, would also be lost if FRNs were not in existence. FRNs are vital in providing needed community programs and resources that have a direct impact on improving local conditions for residents. Yes, West Virginia FRNs do build community capital and wealth leading to healthy sustainable communities.

