"It was established very early. If you need me, I am here. I will drop anything they know as far as my priority list. They are on the top. If anything needs to happen, it's, "Stop, drop and roll." They got my attention." *Caring Adult*

Background

In Summer 2023, the NYC Office of the Deputy Mayor for Strategic Initiatives (DMSI), via its Children's Cabinet, launched the "Every Child and Family is Known" (ECFIK) initiative. Designed to support families experiencing homelessness, the initiative partners students living in DHS shelters and their caregivers with NYCPS school staff (called a 'Caring Adult') to collaboratively address the needs of families. Caring Adults meet regularly with students and their families to build strong relationships and identify needs, then work in partnership with families to access resources aligned to those needs. ECFIK is an inter-agency effort, bringing together the New York City Public Schools (NYCPS), the Department of Social Services/Human Resources Administration (DSS/HRA), Department of Homeless Services (DHS), and Administration for Children's Services (ACS). In its pilot year, ECFIK partnered with 63 schools in the Bronx and supported over 700 of the City's most vulnerable students.

In order to gather insights about the first year of this initiative, the NYC Center for Innovation through Data Intelligence (CIDI) contracted Barrow Street Consulting, LLC to conduct an evaluation of the pilot year of ECFIK from the perspective of key stakeholders. In this report, we summarize insights gathered from surveys of and focus groups with Caring Adults to surface successes, challenges and opportunities. This report is organized around five key learning questions surfaced with the ECFIK leadership team (below), followed by recommendations.
1. How did school communities implement the ECFIK initiative?
2. How did Caring Adults build relationships with students and families?
3. What do we learn about the needs of students in shelter from Caring Adults?
4. What training and support do Caring Adults need in order to be successful in supporting students?
5. How do key stakeholders describe the impact of the ECFIK initiative?

To answer these learning questions, we invited all Caring Adults to participate in both surveys and focus groups. 96 Caring Adults responded to the survey, for a response rate of approximately 30%[1], and 12 participated in focus groups. Survey respondents and focus group participants were mostly reflective of the experience in elementary schools. Just over three-quarters (76%) of Caring Adults respondents on the survey and 10 of 12 focus group participants supported elementary school students. This mirrors the overall population of ECFIK schools.

In addition to engaging Caring Adults, we conducted four interviews with six community leaders with extensive experience working with families in shelter to expand our knowledge and gather recommendations they might have. Insights from these conversations are summarized in Appendix A and their insights helped shape recommendations outlined below.

In advance of sharing findings, we want to note two key limitations of our learning:

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[1] The response rate is calculated using the total number of Caring Adults that signed up to participate at the beginning of the school year. It does not account for any attrition of Caring Adults during the school year.

- The insights shared below primarily reflect the experience of Caring Adults. In future years, we hope to engage caregivers and students to hear voices of those being served by this work.
- While we invited all Caring Adults to participate in these learning activities, we expect that participants (i.e. those who took the time to respond) were more active in this work.

With that in mind, we believe the insights shared with us by Caring Adults will offer meaningful suggestions for how ECFIK can continue to evolve in future years to best support students and families in DHS shelters.

Key Insights & Recommendations

Based on the data gathered from Caring Adults and interviews with community leaders, we summarize key insights below. Detailed findings organized by key learning question start on page 5.

Insight #1: Most Caring Adults who participated in our evaluation built strong relationships with students and families, and addressed immediate or academic needs of students and families in shelter.
- Most Caring Adults (55%) were in **daily contact with their Primary Students**[2] and almost all (98%) spoke to them at least once a week. Over 70% of Caring Adults were in **weekly contact with Primary Caregivers.**
- To build relationships with students, Caring Adults found informal conversations, such as seeing students at drop off or in the cafeteria during the school day, as most impactful. Caring Adults reported engaging families most frequently via phone (45%), text (21%) and in-person conversations (21%).
- The vast majority of Caring Adults agreed or strongly agreed that their Primary Student (96%) and their Primary Caregiver (88%) **communicates honestly and transparently** with them. Caring Adults established these trusting relationships by sharing a language and/or cultural background with their families, helping them address immediate needs, and creating welcoming environments for students.
- In their work with students and families, **Caring Adults most often addressed immediate or academic needs.** On the survey, Caring Adults reported most commonly helping families find clothing (74%), connect students with academic support (69%), and find food (59%). In focus groups, Caring Adults also spoke about meeting needs related to laundry, busing, academic support and vaccines.

Insight #2: Almost all Caring Adults described positive impacts on students and families as a result of participation in ECFIK. In particular, Caring Adults spoke about the benefits of having a trusted, go-to person at school.
- 92% of Caring Adults reported **positive impacts on students' sense of belonging** and **relationships with adults** at the school as a result of ECFIK. They shared:
  - "...I feel like we're being that bridge. So that's why it's so important... we're always there for them and I think that alleviated a lot of the runarounds and hurdles that they already come to the school with and helped them get through those so that they can focus on trying to get better."
  - "...when you ask them if you need someone to talk to in the school, who would you talk to? And most of them will say their Caring Adult would be the first one that they would reach out to."
- The vast majority of Caring Adults reported **positive impacts on parents/caregivers** in terms of their awareness of how students were doing at school (92%), feeling supported in difficult circumstances (90%),

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[2] On the survey, Caring Adults were asked to share how often they communicated with the student they had developed the strongest relationship with through this program. For clarity, we identify that student as the "Primary Student" and their parent/caregiver will be identified as the "Primary Caregiver."

creating or strengthening connection to the school community (87%), and the ability of parents/caregivers to support their students' academics (86%).

- In focus groups, Caring Adults elaborated, and spoke about what the support has meant for parents/caregivers.
  - "It has strengthened their relationship with the school. They feel more comfortable reaching out when they need support."
  - "They feel more confident. We have a parent on the school leadership team... he's in the shelter and we are mentoring one of his kids. So that's amazing, because I was like, 'Wow.' Usually they don't want to participate. They don't feel adequate to participate. So one of 'em is on the SLT [school leadership team]."

Insight #3: Families are not the only ones impacted by this work. Caring Adults reported positive impacts on school culture and community because of ECFIK, noting increased empathy and collective responsibility for students and families living in shelter and greater awareness of their needs.

- On the survey, over 90% of Caring Adults reported a **positive impact on the school community's awareness of the needs of students and caregivers** in shelter. As one Caring Adult shared in a focus group:
  - "I think I have become aware of the needs that sometimes aren't being met for these kids. I feel like anything I can do to help them, I will. Definitely more empathetic to the students in my community. Gave me a true insight as to what their life is like."
- Over 85% of Caring Adults reported a **positive impact on empathy for students and caregivers** in shelter.
  - "I tell my principal all the time, I'm like, I'm glad that I get to know the story behind all of this because had I not been a part of this, I would not have known and nobody else would've known…"
- In focus groups, Caring Adults spoke about the **collective nature of this work**. All different types of staff - from teachers to paraprofessionals to social workers to parent coordinators - were invited to serve as Caring Adults. Indeed, only about 20% of Caring Adults were teachers. As a result, many people in the school community were responsible for working closely with families in DHS shelters this year to address basic needs.
  - "My principal never was involved in busing, and this year she was involved in busing because… her child [through ECFIK] had a busing issue. So now she's like, 'Tell me what to do…' So, see, those little things, I was glad because they were able to see another side of what the children are instead of just seeing them as a number and academics."

Insight #4: Staff in both DHS shelters and NYCPS public schools are dedicated to supporting families in the shelter system. Although ECFIK intended for these two communities to engage regularly to enhance the experience for these families, these communities did not consistently connect during the pilot year.

- On the survey, Caring Adults were asked to describe how often they spoke with the DHS shelter staff for their students. Over half (59%) of Caring Adults either never spoke with the DHS shelter staff for their student or did not know who the shelter staff were for their student.
- In interviews with community leaders, **participants recognized the value of communication between Caring Adults and Shelter staff**. And they acknowledged that both of these communities are already expected to do a lot to support families. Interviewees wondered how best to encourage collaboration when - and only when - it would be valuable for families.

Insight #5: Caring Adults offered a number of areas for programmatic improvement. Most notably, Caring Adults shared challenges in describing the program to families and others within the school building, using STH funds, and ensuring Caring Adults are paid for their work with families.

- Across interviews and focus groups, Caring Adults were asked for suggestions in terms of how to improve ECFIK. Across the board, **Caring Adults needed more support in explaining the initiative to families** in DHS shelter. Additionally, community leaders suggested it would be helpful to more consistently orient shelter staff to the initiative.
- The most consistent challenge articulated by Caring Adults across all focus groups was the **issue of payment**. Caring Adults shared that DC 37 staff and teaching staff had different union rules regarding payment, creating inconsistencies within a school building. They named that documentation and/or requirements for Per Session were too onerous. And they worried how this issue would impact their ability to enroll more staff as Caring Adults in the future.

As the ECFIK initiative shifts into its second year, we offer the following recommendations based on our findings, conversations with the ECFIK Program Team, and interviews with community leaders. More detail can be found in the Conclusions & Recommendations section of this report.

For the ECFIK program team's consideration, our recommendations include:

- **Continue the work of ECFIK** to support students and families living in DHS housing. In particular, continue to foster the collective nature of this work by thoughtfully pairing school staff with students and leveraging promising strategies that build trust. ECFIK's intentional decision to engage staff in a variety of roles - from principals to paraprofessionals - not only serves students and families directly, but also creates a collective responsibility within schools for supporting these communities.

- Provide **more guidance and tools to introduce the ECFIK Program** to Caring Adults, families and shelter staff.

- Design family outreach and communication **with migrant communities in mind**.

- Consider strategies to **streamline and tighten communication with Caring Adults**. For example, send biweekly emails with 3-5 curated, vetted resources for students and families that align with the flow of the academic year.

For the broader interagency team, our recommendations include:

- Given the constraints of overtime policies and expectations for documentation, investigate whether there are **more effective ways to compensate Caring Adults**.

- **Define** and clearly communicate **how Caring Adults and shelter staff should engage with one another** to maximize the impact of their collaboration and reduce duplication of efforts, while minimizing the ongoing time required to do so.

- Consider **expanding the NYCPS Central ECFIK team**. With its current staffing model, there is not enough capacity to ensure all school communities are able to implement the initiative with fidelity. With more resources at the Central office, ECFIK can conduct more vetting of resources, complete more site visits, and offer more personalized training and support.

Learning Question #1:
How did school communities implement the ECFIK initiative?

When ECFIK launched, school leaders in the Bronx were approached about participating in the initiative. Principals who agreed to join were asked to recruit staff to serve as Caring Adults and identify one Point Person, who would manage administrative tasks related to implementation and serve as a liaison between the initiative and the Caring Adults at their school. By design, principals were asked to recruit a sufficient number of Caring Adults so that each could support 3 or fewer students living in DHS shelter. Below, we outline the insights gathered around how principals recruited Caring Adults, how Caring Adults were assigned to students, and how those Caring Adults collaborated with one another.

Recruiting Caring Adults

On the survey, Caring Adults were asked how they were recruited to participate in ECFIK (see chart below). The majority of Caring Adult respondents were asked to serve by their principal or a colleague (70%). Almost a quarter indicated they volunteered for the position. In focus groups, when participants were asked to reflect on their reasons for becoming Caring Adults, many (n=6) spoke about the joy they find in serving others. Participants talked about how they already do all they can to address the needs facing families in their community, so signing on to serve as a Caring Adult was a natural next step.

- "I really enjoy helping others and especially the students... to me it was a no-brainer to join and I was very excited about it and it's something that I already do, it's my day to day, so I was just taking it to the next level."

- "When the principal sent out an email, I was like, 'Oh, just put me on, because I already do those things. I already support our kids beyond the classroom in more than one way.'"
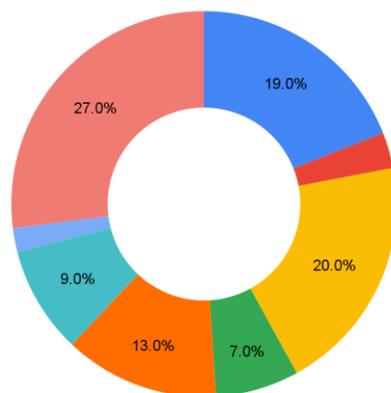

How did you become a Caring Adult?
- I volunteered to be a Caring Adult. — 24.3%
- I was asked by my colleague to serve. — 12.7%
- I was asked by my principal to serve. — 58.0%
- Other — 5.1%
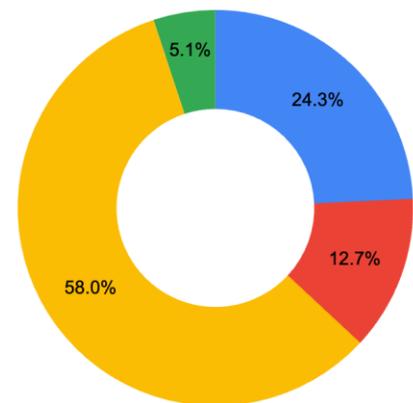
Roles of Caring Adults
- Teacher — 19.0%
- Assistant Principal
- Guidance counselor — 20.0%
- Paraprofessional — 7.0%
- Bridging the Gap Social Worker — 13.0%
- STH School-Based Staff — 9.0%
- Payroll Secretary
- Other* — 27.0%

Several (n=3) Caring Adults in focus groups described the importance of having volunteers in this role. As one stated, "...not everyone, even if we want to, not everyone is able to go out of their way and do whatever they need to do to make sure that the kids have what they need."

Of note, in both the survey and in focus groups, participants were overwhelmingly non-teaching staff within their school community. The majority of survey respondents were guidance counselors, social workers and community support specialists (see chart[3]). Teachers represented only a fifth (19.0%) of survey respondents,

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[3] Roles provided under "Other" included Social Worker (11%), Family Worker (3%), School Aide (3%), and Parent Coordinator (2%).

which aligns to the percentage of Caring Adults who have teaching roles according to programmatic data (18%). Similarly, all but two of the focus group participants were non-teaching staff. As one Caring Adult put it, "For myself, the school social worker, parent coordinator, it's easy. This is the work that we do. The teachers who want to do it, it's a little overwhelming…"

Additionally, in focus groups, four of the participants spoke about signing up or being asked to participate in ECFIK because they already engage families with attendance-related responsibilities.

Assigning Students
When asked in focus groups how school communities matched students with Caring Adults, participants shared the following were considered:
- **Existing Relationships with Students**: Whenever possible, Caring Adults partnered with students with whom they had existing, positive relationships. For example, one Caring Adult shared that he had worked closely with a student during summer school, so it was natural for him to deepen his connection with that student and her family as a Caring Adult.
- **Language:** Language was a critical component of the matching process. School communities did their best to ensure Caring Adults could speak the language of the family they were supporting.
- **Keeping Families Together**: Caring Adults said their schools distributed families, not students. So, the Caring Adults made sure one person was assigned to a family, rather than assigning siblings of one family across multiple individuals. As one shared, "…. in the past we had something similar and the school and the parents used to get calls from three different people because we did not put [siblings together]."
- **Existing Structure that would Facilitate Connection:** Where possible, Caring Adults tried to support students who were in their classrooms or whose schedule naturally coincided with their existing responsibilities. For example, one Caring Adult described selecting a student who was in the 3rd grade because she was required to call 3rd grade families for attendance monitoring.

ECFIK expected Caring Adults to support no more than three students and their parents/caregivers at any time. On the survey, 72% of Caring Adult respondents began the school year supporting three or fewer students. Notably, by the end of the year, the percentage supporting three or fewer students dropped to 56% (see chart below). 25 Caring Adults shared a decrease in the number of students they were supporting from the beginning of the year to the end of the year.

How many students were you supporting as a Caring Adult?
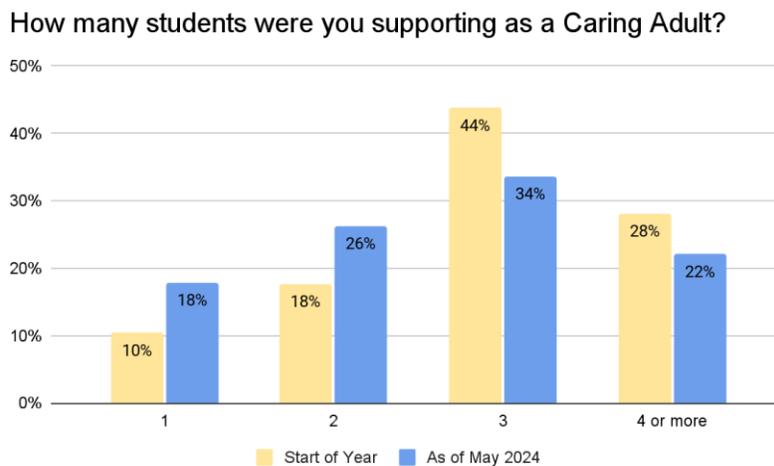
In focus groups, three Caring Adults explicitly named that they currently support fewer students than they did at the start of the year, explaining that these students unenrolled from their school. One discussed staying in touch with her student, while the others had not been in contact since the students left the school.

- "So that's another thing that has been going on. A lot of them came in, a lot of them go move out, then other families come in."

Collaborating with other Caring Adults
Since the number of students in shelter varied widely across the different schools, so too did the number of Caring Adults within a school community vary (see chart below).

How many other Caring Adults are there in your school?

- 1 - 2
- 3 - 4
- 5 or more
- I don't know.
- None

12.5%
29.2%
54.2%
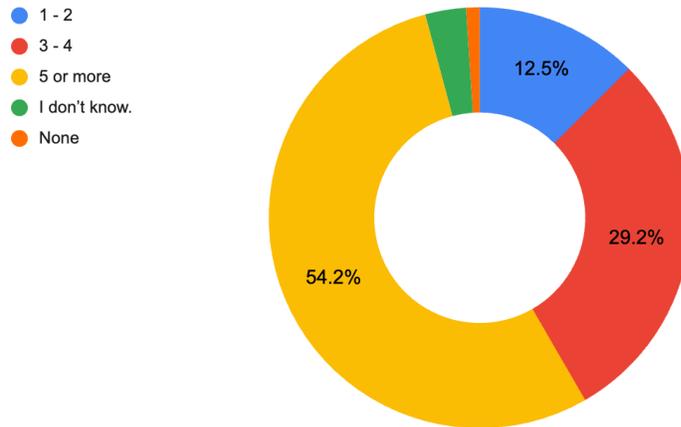
While the ECFIK team did not require collaboration among Caring Adults within a school building, about two-thirds (64%) of survey respondents reported collaborating at least once a week with the other Caring Adults in their school community. In focus groups, Caring Adults reported many different modes of collaborating. Some schools took advantage of existing structures to talk about the ways they supported families. Others relied on less organized ways of engaging with one another.

- One school shared that the people who signed up to be Caring Adults met regularly as part of the school leadership team. Every week they would share an update on their families and speak to the work they were doing to support them.
- One Caring Adult named that she regularly printed out resources that were shared from ECFIK and left them in the office for other community members to see.
- Another Caring Adult spoke about her principal asking her for guidance on how to help the principal's student with a busing situation.

One Caring Adult noted, "If the [school] administration recognizes the importance of it, then it kind of becomes an expectation for the staff to follow, not just solely on me. I'm just their colleague, so it's not the same thing when it's coming from me then if it's coming from an administrator."

Learning Question #2: How did Caring Adults build relationships with students and families?

In surveys and in focus groups, Caring Adults described many strategies for building relationships with families. At a minimum, ECFIK expected Caring Adults to connect with students daily and parents/caregivers once per week. On the survey, Caring Adults were asked to share how often they communicated with the student they had developed the strongest relationship with through this program. For clarity, in the section below, we will identify that student as the "Primary Student" and their parent/caregiver will be identified as the "Primary Caregiver."

Frequency & Method of Contact

Just over half (55%) of Caring Adults reported connecting with their Primary Student daily; a quarter connected 2-3 times per week, and almost 20% connected weekly. Almost all Primary Students, then, received at least one interaction with their Caring Adult every week (see chart below).

On the survey, Caring Adults were asked to reflect on what ways of engaging students were the most impactful. The most common response was informal conversations with students during the school day (89%). Formal meetings were useful for almost half of survey participants (46%). Less commonly cited were attending student's afterschool activities (14%) and visiting the student at their shelter (7%).

Caring Adults who completed the survey were also asked how often they engaged the Primary Caregiver. Over 70% of Caring Adults reported connecting with their Primary Caregiver at least once per week. Most often, they did so via phone (45%), followed by text and in-person visits (both 21%). Only 1% of Caring Adult respondents said they communicated most frequently by email. This may be important when considering how best to connect with parents/caregivers. Notably, the fact that Caring Adults found informal conversations and phone-based outreach most impactful complicates efforts to pay school-based staff for these efforts.
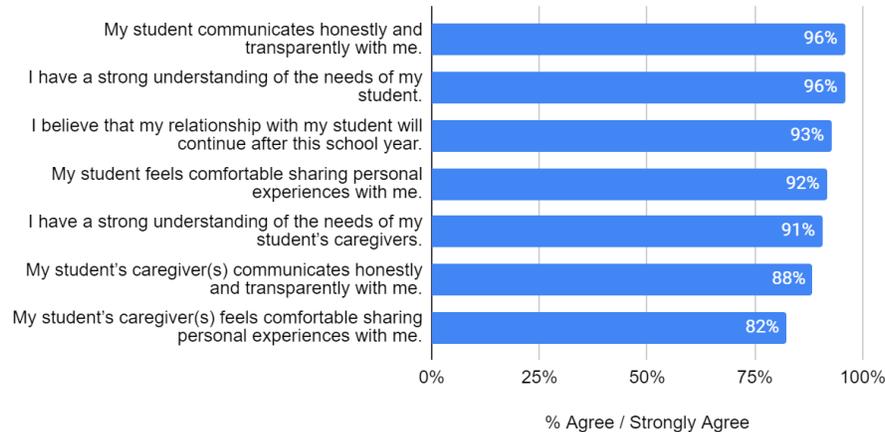
On average, how often did you connect with your student and their parent/caregiver in your role as a Caring Adult?
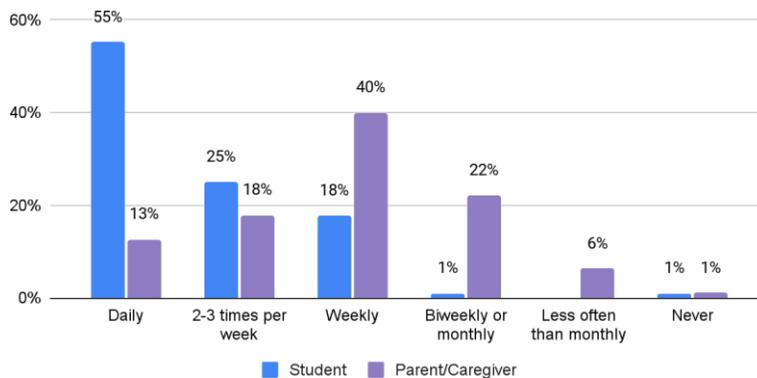
Depth of Relationship

On the survey, Caring Adults were asked to reflect on and assess their relationships with the Primary Student and Primary Caregiver (see chart below). This self-reported data is encouraging. Almost all Caring Adults (96%) agreed or strongly agreed that their Primary Student communicates honestly and transparently with them and believes they have a strong understanding of the needs of their Primary Student. Perhaps unsurprisingly, Caring Adults were less likely to agree or strongly agree with reflections on their relationships with the Primary Caregiver. 88% of Caring Adults agreed or strongly agreed that their Primary Caregiver communicates honestly and transparently with them, and 82% agree or strongly agree that the Primary Caregiver feels comfortable sharing personal experiences with them.

How much do you agree with the following statements about your relationship with your student?

Statement	% Agree / Strongly Agree
My student communicates honestly and transparently with me.	96%
I have a strong understanding of the needs of my student.	96%
I believe that my relationship with my student will continue after this school year.	93%
My student feels comfortable sharing personal experiences with me.	92%
I have a strong understanding of the needs of my student's caregivers.	91%
My student's caregiver(s) communicates honestly and transparently with me.	88%
My student's caregiver(s) feels comfortable sharing personal experiences with me.	82%

Notably, in focus groups, a few Caring Adults (n=4) discussed the challenge of engaging families at the start of the year because of existing anxiety or fear related to immigration status and/or cultural barriers to asking for help.

- "We only have eight children because the parents, a lot of them are migrants... they're afraid, so they're not going to say yes, all right, because they are undocumented... Now out of 50 children, I only got eight parents to say yes..."
- "Sometimes I think that the parents are too proud to even ask for help."

Strategies to Support Relationships

In focus groups, three Caring Adults spoke about the ability to address needs as a strategy to strengthen relationships with families. Once Caring Adults were able to help a family solve a problem, the family was more willing to be open and transparent about other challenges they faced.

- "They didn't know where to get clothes. They didn't know where to get food... At the beginning it was like, okay, but then when they saw that we started sharing more and more resources... so the more they see you, the more you build those relationships."

Three Caring Adults spoke to the value and importance of sharing a language and/or cultural background with the families they supported.

- "Being able to speak their language... [the student being served] was able to feel more at ease because when you speak a different language and you don't see that everybody in the classroom speaks your language, you're a little bit more shy and more quiet. So it was nice to see her, that she was able to know that she could speak her language in a small group."
- "...even having somebody in your own language that was critical."

Two focus group participants talked about how Caring Adults offered incentives to support student engagement and attendance. Caring Adults purchased rewards or treats to encourage students to come by their classrooms and visit their Caring Adults. Others used treats as rewards for improved attendance.

- "She buys them little snacks in the morning...You don't get the snack unless you're here all week...she meets them and gives them little trinkets for Christmas...they pay for them themselves."

Caring Adults consistently discussed the challenge of introducing the program to families and helping those families understand the goals and boundaries of the program.

- "I think that a more detailed workshop should have been offered to the families in their language of preference, so they have a better understanding of what the program entails."
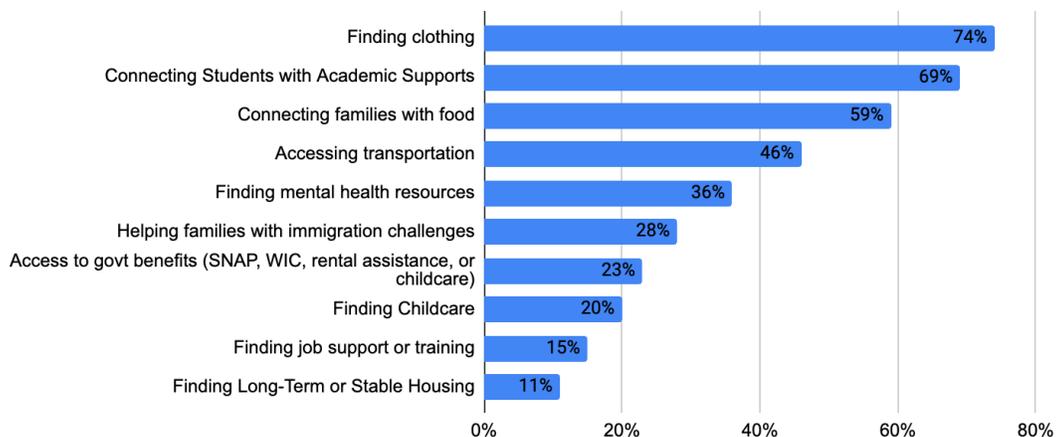
- "… they understand the program as, 'I need something so I ask for it.' And it might not be a need-based thing. It might be, 'Oh, I don't have an umbrella'. That is really not a dire need at the moment… more communication with the parents as to what this is about, what is our role here… I would like them to have a better understanding of what they're signing and what they're agreeing to and what our roles are, what their roles are, and how we work together in terms of that…"

Learning Question #3: What did we learn about the needs of students in shelter?

One of the goals of the ECFIK initiative is to understand what challenges students living in DHS shelter face. As a reminder, the data collected through this evaluation comes from the perspective of the Caring Adults. In this section, we reflect on the data provided by Caring Adults about the work they did to support families as a way to understand the gaps that exist within NYC systems and structures. In future years, ECFIK staff may be able to gather input from students and families directly to understand their needs more clearly.

On the survey, Caring Adults were asked to identify the types of support they offered to their students and families (see chart below). Most commonly, Caring Adults helped families find clothing (74%), connect with academic supports (69%), and find food (59%). The least reported areas of support provided were finding long-term or stable housing (11%) and finding job support or training (15%). Of note, just 23% of Caring Adult respondents reported providing support to families in accessing government benefits such as SNAP, WIC, or rental assistance.

Based on the needs of your families, did you provide support in any of the following ways? Check all that apply.

Category	Percentage
Finding clothing	74%
Connecting Students with Academic Supports	69%
Connecting families with food	59%
Accessing transportation	46%
Finding mental health resources	36%
Helping families with immigration challenges	28%
Access to govt benefits (SNAP, WIC, rental assistance, or childcare)	23%
Finding Childcare	20%
Finding job support or training	15%
Finding Long-Term or Stable Housing	11%

In focus groups, Caring Adults spoke about supporting families through a variety of needs in response to specific situations in which families found themselves. Caring Adults assessed the needs of their families and offered targeted and specific support.
- Almost all Caring Adults (n=10) helped students and their families with clothing or laundry.
- Four Caring Adults described challenges related to busing students to school from shelter. For some, this occurred because families were moved around across several shelters. As one Caring Adult shared, "With the asylum seeking families…the 60 day rule, and we have one family has been changed three times and keep up with that busing. That was something like, wow, so difficult."
- Two Caring Adults spoke about how staff helped their students move into better matched classrooms. Both Caring Adults observed students in their initial classrooms to understand why they were struggling

behaviorally. One was identified as not sufficiently challenged while another student needed a smaller classroom.

- ○ "The student said [to his Caring Adult], 'I'm coming in like this because I was bullied in my other school… Once [his Caring Adult] analyzed him, observing him in the classroom… he observed that the child, that the student was super intelligent in the classroom with math, he could do math problems that we can't. So when he noticed that, he said, 'Oh, he's not in the right classroom setting…'"
- ○ "I'm just like, 'Wow, how things have really changed'. Just by him changing from one classroom to another classroom really made a big difference with the student…"
- ● Other supports named by a Caring Adult included helping families with vaccines; calling realtors to find permanent housing; trying to find a therapist for a student; creating a morning program for students so they could arrive to school earlier and parents could get to work; and seeking legal counsel to support special education advocacy.

Additionally, one of the challenges that many (n=7) Caring Adults named was the frequency with which they had to jump through hoops to access resources. Caring Adults spoke about calling many places to access a resource, or being transferred multiple times before getting an answer to a question. One Caring Adult reflected on what this meant for families:

- ● "One of the challenges that we're seeing is that when the parents do call, if we're not sitting with them calling… They get frustrated because now they're being rerouted. They're rerouted. It's good, it looks good on paper. But when it comes to actual action, when it comes to really the people on the other side that are receiving those calls, they're not us. They're not us. They're like, okay, what do you do, and they just, well, you got to go here, you got to go there. And now the parents are like, why did you give us this?"

A challenge that surfaced in focus groups with Caring Adults was the way in which students are labeled within school buildings. Over the past several years, NYCPS and other agencies have targeted more resources on students in shelter and temporary housing. While this work is imperative, implementation of these initiatives can sometimes create a sense that students in shelter or temporary housing are only the responsibility of the adults working on these initiatives, rather than understanding the shared responsibility to support families in the community.

- ● "So the wording sometimes is, 'one of *your* students, one of *your* students.' I hate when they say that one of *your* students are… acting out…. Or I can't take the smell of one of *your* students."
- ● "Like a little while ago, one of the teachers came to me and she goes, 'Oh, one of the shelter kids needs a book bag.'… You don't have to tell me she's a shelter kid. All you had to tell me was [the student's name] needs a book back. I already know she's my kid and I know she's in a shelter, so I don't need you to emphasize that."

Learning Question #4: What training and support do Caring Adults need in order to be successful in supporting students?

In its pilot year, ECFIK offered a variety of support to Caring Adults. Below we reflect on the Year 1 offerings, share feedback on the New Visions portal, describe challenges related to payment, identify additional training and support opportunities and briefly articulate insights pertaining to the Caring Adult's engagement with DHS staff.

Feedback on Year 1 Supports
The ECFIK team offered a number of training and supports for Caring Adults throughout the school year. On the survey, participating Caring Adults were asked to rate the helpfulness of these offerings (see chart below). Respondents were very positive about the ECFIK toolkit, weekly email blasts and kick off training; over 80% of Caring

Adults said these were somewhat or very helpful. Notably, one fifth or more of Caring Adult respondents did not receive or were unaware of the Benefits Access Workshop, routine calls or visits, school-based professional development, and the Change Impact training platform.

How helpful were the following in preparing and supporting you in your role as a Caring Adult?
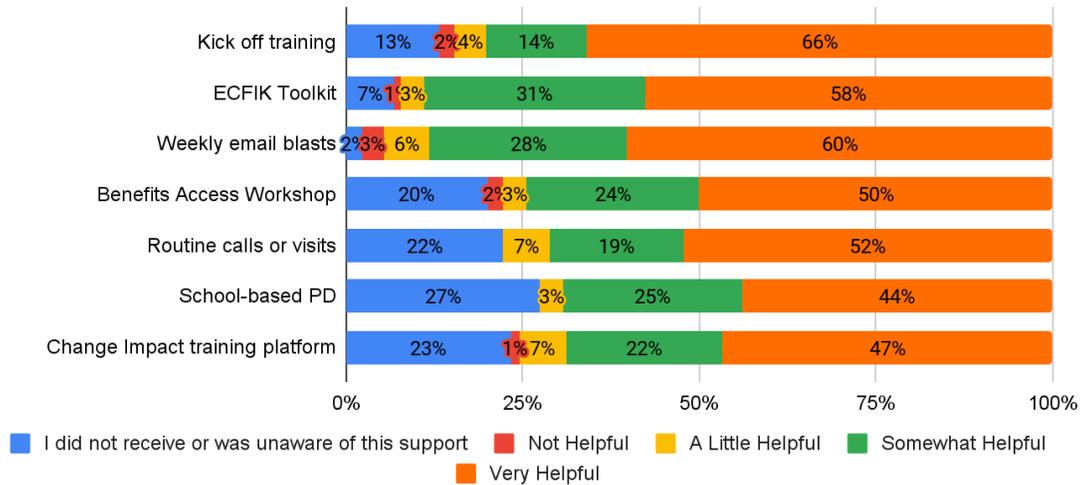
Focus group participants offered similar reflections. Most (n=8) had attended the in-person training at the start of the year and spoke highly of the information shared in those meetings. Four participants also spoke about the consistent and regular flow of emails and resources that were shared. While some said the email cadence was a bit overwhelming, others were grateful for resources that could be shared with community members beyond just those supported by a Caring Adult.

- "I love the training in August. The presenters were very engaging… honestly, they send out a lot of emails and I don't get to go through half of them…"
- "No, I felt like every training, even down to the emails that just the initiative overall really went above and beyond. If anything, for me, it was just more like, okay, these are resources I can hold onto, but considering we don't have an extensive list, they're not resources that all of our kids will need right now."
- "It was overwhelming information to be able to retain and know, but I think even though it was a lot of emails going to you, at least you knew that you could go to one of those emails and find the information."
- "You have those resources and you could use it also moving forward, not only for those families but for everyone in the school community."

New Visions Portal

At the start of the initiative, Caring Adults were required to log interactions with students and families in an Excel document. As the school year progressed, ECFIK launched the ECFIK New Visions portal. Caring Adults were then asked to log transactions within the new platform. Just over half of Caring Adult survey respondents (56%) found the New Visions portal very or extremely helpful. Only 6% reported not using it.

In focus groups, three Caring Adults spoke about the challenge of entering notes into the New Visions portal. Caring Adults mentioned both the challenge of time and the technological issues some teachers face in entering the data.

- "I think the part that was a little bit difficult for us was the notes, remembering to go in the system and put in the notes. So I think at the beginning, because it was a spreadsheet, it was a little bit easier. But once they put New Visions, it was like everybody was trying to figure out when and how we were going to make the time."
- "I think, while I feel like we picked great Caring Adults, their roles were also very busy. And with that, that also kind of prevented a lot of notes from being taken. So I can even think of one Caring Adult and I can be transparent. I don't think any notes are in, but I know that they have had their interaction…"
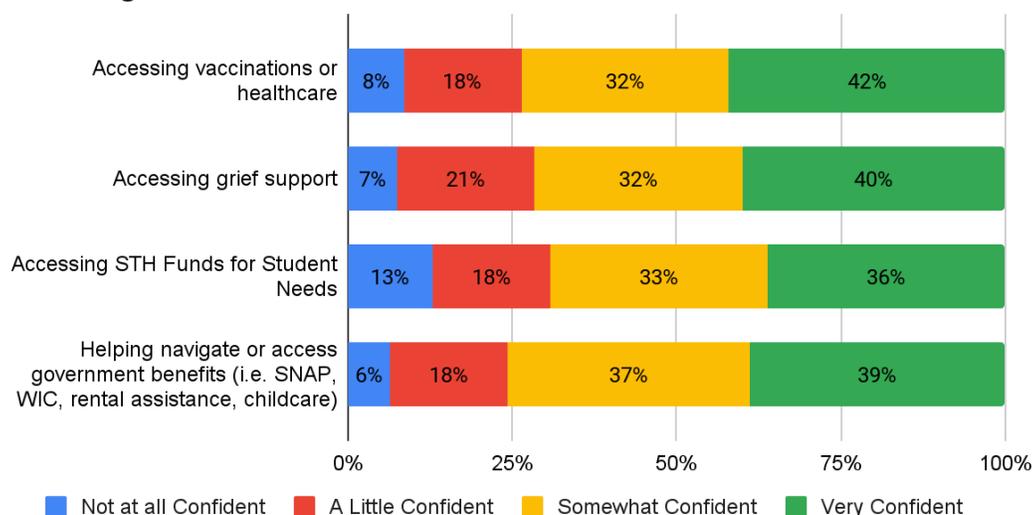
Challenges related to Payment

The most consistent challenge articulated by Caring Adults across all focus groups was the issue of payment. Caring Adults shared that DC 37 staff and teaching staff had different union rules regarding payment, creating inconsistencies within a school building. They named that documentation and/or requirements for Per Session were too onerous. And they worried how this issue would impact their ability to enroll more staff as Caring Adults in the future. As noted in a prior section, survey findings showed that Caring Adults found informal check-ins to be most impactful for working with students, and that they most frequently checked in with caregivers/parents via phone calls and text. These types of activities may be more challenging to document for payment purposes.

- Within a school building, there are multiple types of staff working as Caring Adults, and the systems to compensate those employees differs. Three participants explained that DC 37 staff do not get paid until they have completed at least 5 hours of overtime in a week; instead, they accrue comp time.
  - "I mean, I don't even think he gets paid for it. He just does it … it's complicated with DC 37."
  - "So I'm not sure how much impact you would have on this, but I know for my school, some staff, they were family assistance, family workers, so they weren't able to be compensated… So I think that was a little concern for some of the family workers because everybody wants a little extra cash."
- In addition to the challenge of paying H Bank / DC 37 employees, several Caring Adults spoke about unclear or inconsistent requirements for documentation in order to receive compensation. Some payroll secretaries required school staff to literally clock in and out of the school building in order to submit per session dollars. Some considered notes to be sufficient documentation for payment while others did not.
  - "When they [the other Caring Adults in my building] put in the time they were told that they needed evidence of what they did. And so they were like, 'My notes are in there.' And they were like, 'No, how do we know you did it or you didn't?' … I don't even think any of us got paid for that because when people submitted the paperwork, we were getting pushback. So at that point I was like, 'Pay me maybe, you want to not, it's fine.'"
  - "Here's a confusion with pay: our secretary said, 'You can stay and you can work, but you need to clock in and clock out… So for us, we just gave up. We just gave up… We didn't even get paid what we should have with the work we've done because it's so complicated…"
- A couple of Caring Adults voiced concern about how the complications with payment will impact school staff engagement in 2024-25.
  - "I don't know how to present this year to our new recruits. If they have to do the clocking in, clocked out, if it gets complicated and they're, 'Oh, you know what, I'm not going to do it because it's too complicated and I don't want to?'"
  - "Our H Bank employees are a little bit discouraged about rejoining the program."

Additional Training & Support Needs

On the survey, Caring Adults were asked how confident they would feel supporting families in a few important ways (see chart below). Interestingly, the highest percentage of Caring Adults responded feeling somewhat or very confident supporting a family to navigate or access government benefits (76%), even though only about a quarter provided this support. The area Caring Adults felt the least confident was using STH funding to address student needs.

How confident would you feel supporting a family in the following:

Category	Not at all Confident	A Little Confident	Somewhat Confident	Very Confident
Accessing vaccinations or healthcare	8%	18%	32%	42%
Accessing grief support	7%	21%	32%	40%
Accessing STH Funds for Student Needs	13%	18%	33%	36%
Helping navigate or access government benefits (i.e. SNAP, WIC, rental assistance, childcare)	6%	18%	37%	39%

Focus groups offered more insight into the challenge of using STH funds within the school building. Title 1 funds are available for all students in temporary housing, regardless of whether they are in a DHS shelter. Caring Adults were trained on Title 1 funds because their students were eligible to receive support with these monies. Challenges named by Caring Adults included confusion about who within the school building had authority to use STH funds, a lack of clarity as to the purpose of those funds, and uncertainty about where to actually use that money to purchase items families need. On the survey, five Caring Adults who responded to an open-ended question asking about additional support (5/36, 14%) mentioned needing more support in navigating how to pay for items for families.

- "More clarity with identifying places where we can buy items that the family actually needs."
- "I don't know if people realize that admin, they don't share, they're very protective with the Title 1 money. They don't want us telling them what to do with the Title 1 money. So they feel they know what's best to do with the Title 1 money… in that training, the presenter was saying, you must go to your admin and say, we need such and such. And I'm looking at them. Are they kidding? I'm not putting myself in that predicament and kind of force the hand of my principal to use the Title 1 money for the Caring Adult students. I can't do that…"
- "[spending the money] that's always a challenge for us. This year, what we did was we would order hot meals and give it out at the end of the day. But if it's just easier if I could have give our family a ShopRite gift card, and that's like the red tape and the DOE and myself, I'm community coordinator DC 37, so I don't get actual per session money…"
- "Is it for supplies? Is it for Caring Adults? What is that money for?"

As mentioned previously, Caring Adults appreciated the resources compiled by the ECFIK team. In focus groups, a few Caring Adults (n=4) spoke about the importance of sharing resources with specific people or contacts who could support the work they did with families. Caring Adults described reaching out to organizations (for example, pro bono immigration attorneys and realtors) only to be transferred multiple times and sometimes to be told the resource was unavailable. Caring Adults asked ECFIK to identify the specific point people within local CBOs, government agencies or other organizations who would actually help families.

- "You guys gave us a lot of resources. But… we have to vet them first before we send these families out to them… Resources really didn't work… So resources have to be vetted… I know life is not easy, but at least it could be a flow to it that they know that they already have a point person giving a number to call and not having a point person into that CBO…Within my work, I vet certain community centers and I make sure they have a contact person to go to. Not just a number, not just go show up…"

Critically, in focus groups, two Caring Adults emphasized the importance of sharing resources for parents that were in Spanish. As one stated, "A lot of the information has to be in Spanish because most of our parents do not dominate the English language."

One of the most difficult components of the program shared by Caring Adults in focus groups is that there are some needs that Caring Adults simply cannot address. For example, immigration policies that result in families being moved to new shelters every few months are outside the zone of influence for Caring Adults and their families. Yet these forces were very impactful for their families.

- "…So even us as Caring Adults, we're putting a little extra ointment on the bandaid, but it's not really taking care of the roots of what's happening, which is we're helping them, but it's just bigger than what we can even handle."
- "It is very rewarding, but it could be heartbreaking at times because you get to know what they're going through. And I come from very humble beginnings and a lot of stuff that was happening also you can relate to sometimes. So understanding and respecting, trying to put things separate sometimes is a little bit challenging."

On the survey, 13 Caring Adults (out of 36 who responded to a question asking about additional support needed) requested more training, guidance or resources, including providing clearer expectations of their role (3). In focus groups, while most of the Caring Adults spoke highly of the initiative, two had a more difficult experience with the work. Most notably, the Caring Adults described a lack of clarity about the initiative and shared that their principal lacked a clear understanding of the work.

- "More structured and guided information for caring adults and point people."
- "Clear roles and responsibilities at the beginning of the year."
- "It's like none of us that are involved really knew what the hell we were doing. We just took it day by day and went with the flow. So it's kind of hard to, okay, we're going to put this program in your school and you either sink or swim… There was no communication with the principals."
- "I have these three kids and I really don't have that interaction with them. I check up on them to make sure they're here, conversations with the parents maybe once every three months or maybe once a month. But I feel like if this program was going to be offered in the school, that workshop should have been given so we have a better idea of how to make the program better so that way we have a better relationship with the families."

Additional ideas that were shared by 1-2 Caring Adults in the survey or focus groups included:

- Offering an event before or close to the first day of school to introduce families to Caring Adults and the program.
- More opportunities to collaborate with other Caring Adults.
- Site visits to introduce the program to the school community
- Celebrations with kids and families
- Support groups for parents/caregivers
- Trauma-informed training for schools
- Support for families who leave the school during the year.
- More connection to shelter staff.

Connection to DHS Staff

Initially, ECFIK envisioned shelter staff, Caring Adults and families meeting regularly to support students and families. In practice, in the pilot year this was very rare. On the survey, Caring Adults were asked to describe how often they spoke with the DHS shelter staff for their students. Over half (59%) of Caring Adults either never spoke with the DHS

shelter staff for their student or did not know who the shelter staff were for their student. Just under a third (29%) reported connecting with the DHS shelter staff for their student weekly or more often (16%) or monthly (13%).

How often did you speak with the DHS shelter staff for your student, if at all?
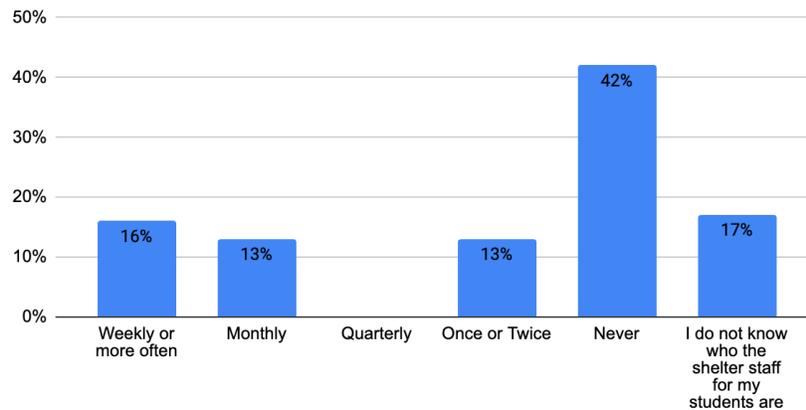
In focus groups, two Caring Adults spoke about the disconnect or lack of communication with DHS shelter staff.

- "And maybe also sharing the communication with some of the workers at the shelter ... how we communicate with people in the shelter to make sure that our clients are getting the support that they need when they are there, because I think we care for them, that's part of our job, advocating to make sure that they're getting everything they need, not only in the school building but also outside."
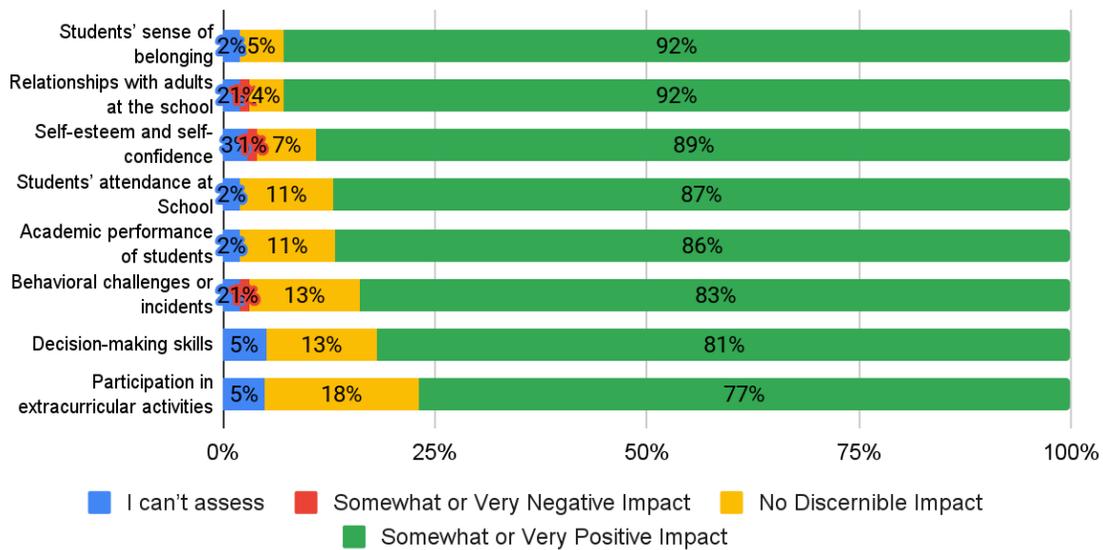
Learning Question #5: How do key stakeholders describe the impact of the ECFIK initiative?

In its pilot year, the ECFIK initiative supported students and families across 63 schools in the Bronx. Ultimately, ECFIK aims to improve students' academic outcomes by increasing their sense of belonging, improving attendance, and addressing basic needs that families in shelter experience. Below we share some of the early indicators of impact, as identified by Caring Adults, for students, families and school communities.

Students

On the survey, Caring Adults were asked to reflect on a number of potential impacts of this work on the students (see chart below). On the whole, Caring Adult respondents reported somewhat or very positive impacts across all items, with the highest percentage of Caring Adults reporting positive impacts on students' sense of belonging and relationships with adults at the school (both 92%). Caring Adults were least likely to report positive impacts in students' participation in extracurricular activities (77%).

To what extent have you observed any impact, positive or negative, on your students as a result of participating in this program?

Category	I can't assess	Somewhat or Very Negative Impact	No Discernible Impact	Somewhat or Very Positive Impact
Students' sense of belonging	2%		5%	92%
Relationships with adults at the school	2%	1%	4%	92%
Self-esteem and self-confidence	3%	1%	7%	89%
Students' attendance at School	2%		11%	87%
Academic performance of students	2%		11%	86%
Behavioral challenges or incidents	2%	1%	13%	83%
Decision-making skills	5%		13%	81%
Participation in extracurricular activities	5%		18%	77%

Legend: ■ I can't assess   ■ Somewhat or Very Negative Impact   ■ No Discernible Impact   ■ Somewhat or Very Positive Impact

In addition to asking about potential impacts ECFIK envisioned, Caring Adults were also asked an open-ended question on the survey about how this experience affected their students. Sixty-two (62) offered responses and those answers reflected a positive experience for students' relationships with adults at the school and sense of belonging.

- Most Caring Adults (n=36) described the benefit of students having a trusted, "go-to" person at the school.
    - "The students know that they can come to me anytime. I think that alone makes them feel safe, supported, and happy."
    - "They look forward to coming to school on the days I am meeting with them. They enjoy speaking with me and knowing they have me as a #1 fan and supporter of someone on their corner."
    - "The impact was strong, my students felt a sense of security knowing that there was another adult to confide in when faced with difficult situations."
- One fifth (n=13) of respondents mentioned an increase in students' feelings of belonging in their school community and improved relationships with adults in the school building.
    - "I believe that students are more engaged in the school community and they feel more welcome knowing that there are caring adults monitoring and providing support when they needed."
- Caring Adults also mentioned improvements in students' self-esteem (4), behavior (2), and academics (2).

In focus groups, four Caring Adults described an improvement in attendance with their students. While this data will be available for quantitative analysis across the cohort, the Caring Adults in focus groups spoke about working directly to improve student attendance.

Two Caring Adults described an impact on student behavior. The reasons for this improvement varied - one named that the students were working on emotional regulation with their Caring Adult, while the other was moved to a classroom that was more appropriate for his skills.

- "We had about two… heavy hitters. These are students that we had from a previous school year that they fought a lot. They just got into a lot of conflicts and that was also contributing to why they didn't come to school - more for safety or just not wanting to be around certain people. But through them having a caring adult, it was also another space of support, another way to do mediations, another way to let them know you are safe here. And thinking about it now, I don't think anyone on our list got into a fight this year."

Parents/Caregivers

On the survey, most Caring Adults reported somewhat or very positive impacts on parents/caregivers in terms of their connection to the school community, awareness of how students were doing at school, ability to support academics, and feeling supported in difficult circumstances. Of note, and similar to findings in prior sections, Caring Adults were least likely to report positive impacts in parent/caregiver access to benefits (44% reported no discernible impact, a somewhat negative impact, or unable to assess). This may in part be due to the fact that most Caring Adults reported that they had not provided support to families in this area, or that some ECFIK families were not eligible for these benefits.

To what extent have you observed any impact, positive or negative, on your caregivers as a result of participating in this program?
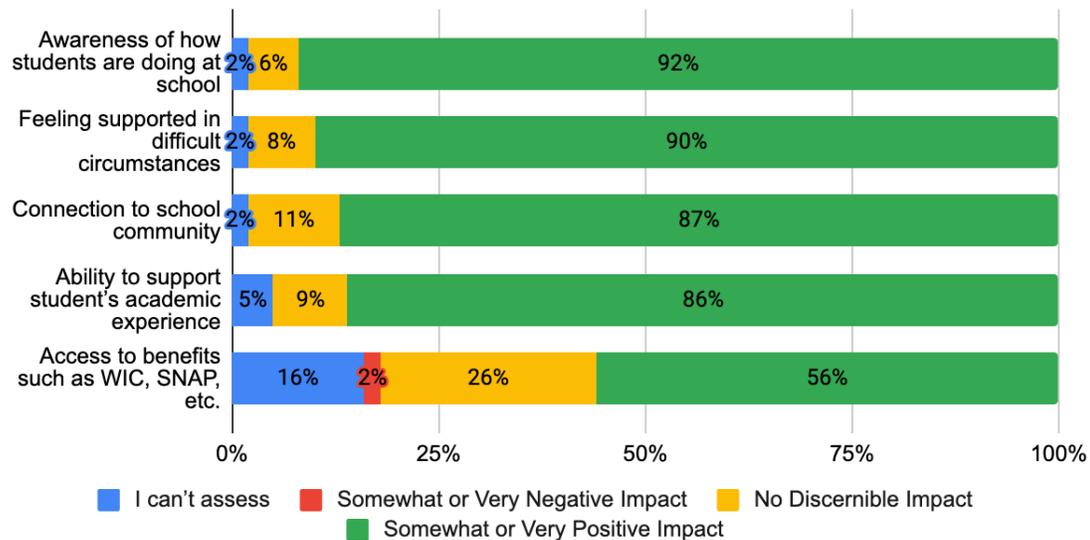
Similar to the benefits for students, when asked in an open-ended question on the survey how this experience affected the parents/caregivers, Caring Adults most frequently discussed the impact of having a dedicated person who is there for families and their children (65%; 31/48). In focus groups, five Caring Adults echoed this impact and that offering a single point person for families reduced the overload for parents and simplified outreach to families. Caring Adults on the survey (25%, 12/48) and in focus groups also mentioned parents/caregivers feeling more comfortable and confident engaging with schools and more connected to the school community as a result of ECFIK.

- "...That's the first name they say when you ask them if you need someone to talk to in the school, who would you talk to? And most of them will say their Caring Adult would be the first one that they would reach out to, and then the parents have one point person to reach out to when they need it."
- "...I feel like we're being that bridge. So that's why it's so important... we're always there for them and I think that alleviated a lot of the runarounds and hurdles that they already come to the school with and helped them get through those so that they can focus on trying to get better."
- "The caregiver expresses that she feels comfortable with me and grateful to have a person she can count on in the school to have her back."
- "The caregiver is so appreciative and always points out how wonderful we all are for helping. She always answers the phone in such a cheerful manner when she realizes it is me. She says she feels heard and supported."
- "She feels very confident in reaching out to me for anything big or small. She always lets me know if they aren't catching the bus, if they are ill etc."

- "It has strengthened their relationship with the school. They feel more comfortable reaching out when they need support."
- "They feel more confident. We have a parent on the school leadership team... he's in the shelter and we are mentoring one of his kids. So that's amazing, because I was like, 'Wow.' Usually they don't want to participate. They don't feel adequate to participate. So one of 'em is on the SLT [school leadership team]."

School Community
On the survey, Caring Adults were overwhelmingly positive about the impact of ECFIK on their school community (see chart below). Almost all felt there was a somewhat or very positive impact on the school community's awareness of the needs of students and caregivers in shelter and their empathy for students and caregivers in shelter.

To what extent have you observed any impact, positive or negative, on your school community as a result of participating in this program?
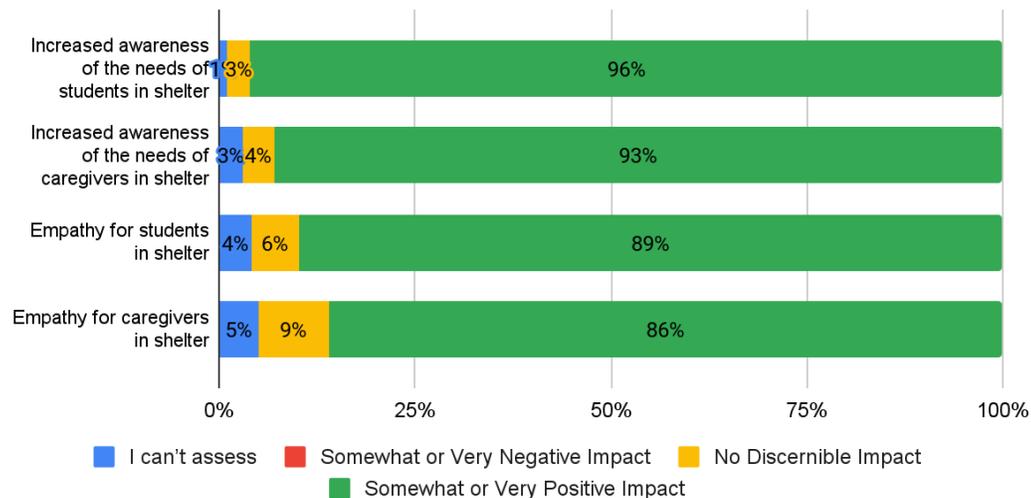
Caring Adults also spoke profoundly about the impact this work was having in their school community. Seven of the Caring Adults in the focus groups discussed the ways in which ECFIK built empathy among teachers about the experiences of these families in living in DHS shelters. Indeed, some named that without ECFIK, the school would not know all the struggles that student is experiencing and therefore would not know how to sufficiently support that student.
- "I tell my principal all the time, I'm like, I'm glad that I get to know the story behind all of this because had I not been a part of this, I would not have known and nobody else would've known…"
- "There's more of an understanding because, when you listen to the needs of the students and the different things that happened, like, 'Oh no, now they're in temporary housing, now they're doubled up.' You get to know the terminologies and what it means and what's going on. And there's definitely a big show of empathy with... most of our teachers that are participating in [ECFIK]."
- "My principal never was involved in busing, and this year she was involved in busing because... her child [through ECFIK] had a busing issue. So now she's like, 'Tell me what to do…' So, see, those little things, I was glad because they were able to see another side of what the children are instead of just seeing them as a number and academics."
- "This year, because of the program... the principal made it her business to buy essential items for these families with the Title 1 STH funds…She said, tell me what they need…And that was amazing. I've never had any admin ask me that."
- "The teachers were a little more understanding for some of our newly migrants that came, they were definitely more compassionate... if they needed a uniform, we made sure the students had uniforms. If they needed detergent, we made sure they had detergent, things like that."

On the survey, Caring Adults also described how this experience affected them. Many reflected on a deeper understanding of the needs of students and families in shelter. They shared the following:

- "I think I have become aware of the needs that sometimes aren't being met for these kids. I feel like anything I can do to help them, I will. Definitely more empathetic to the students in my community. Gave me a true insight as to what their life is like."
- "I began to further realize how being in a shelter can impact the child. I have also realized how many students are in shelters! I did not expect so many families to be without homes."
- "This experience informs me we have more work to do. All our families are impacted occasionally by homelessness, food shortages and a safe space to decompress."

Relatedly, one Caring Adult described how the initiative gave staff members license to get to know - and help - families on a deeper level. Within this school community, the Principal, Assistant Principal and other leaders served as Caring Adults. The focus group participant named that the ECFIK initiative gave the leadership team the right and the responsibility of taking care of students in a different way. She shared, "Everybody's about data, data, data. Everybody's about attendance, everybody. So these little things that came up were, we kind of justified it. Where we're a caring adult, we have to go above and beyond."

Two Caring Adults in focus groups expressed a desire to expand the ECFIK initiative to students outside of those in shelter.

- "I wish it could be opened up for a bigger population if anything. Because I feel like not just DHS is not just the community that needs this... I wish [this program] was school-wide..."
- "Some of the parents feel like their children should not be excluded [from ECFIK] just because they're in a shelter or double up or hotel. Whatever the situation, the living arrangements are...Kids shouldn't be treated differently because they're in a shelter."

On the survey, Caring Adults were asked to reflect on whether they would want to continue in this role for another year. The vast majority of Caring Adult respondents (77%) said yes, they would continue. 10% said they would not and 13% were unsure.

- "It is important that all students feel welcomed, cared for and that they know that staff is here for them. I see how much of a positive impact I and other caring adults have had with the students in our school building, for these reasons I will totally do it again."
- Of the Caring Adults who indicated that they were unsure or would not want to serve as a Caring Adult again, 10 provided explanations, including:
  - "I want to know that if I do it we have more info and support to make change."
  - "I already have a relationship with my STH families."
  - "I never had time to claim my hours due to my busy schedule."
  - "In addition to my regular workload, this is an extremely demanding position. "

Conclusions & Recommendations

Overall, the data presented above from Caring Adults and insights from community leaders suggest that the ECFIK Initiative completed a successful pilot year. The design of the initiative engages a broader community within the school to support students experiencing homelessness and offers a personalized bridge between these families and the school. Many Caring Adults worked with families to address both immediate and academic needs, and built lasting, trusting relationships. Given the dramatic increase in migrant families arriving in New York City, ECFIK is addressing an unmet need among vulnerable populations. And early self-reported data suggest impacts for students, families and school communities as a whole.

As the ECFIK initiative shifts into its second year, we offer the following programmatic recommendations based on our findings above, conversations with the ECFIK Program Team, and interviews with community leaders.

● **Continue to invest in ECFIK.** In its pilot year, ECFIK has already impacted students, families and school communities. While there are programmatic opportunities to strengthen the work, the initiative provided positive benefits and should continue into a second year. In particular, continue to thoughtfully pair Caring Adults and students to foster strong relationships and leverage promising strategies used by Year 1 Caring Adults to build trust, serve families and impact the broader school community.

● **Thoughtfully and clearly articulate how Caring Adults and shelter staff should engage with one another.** In feedback from Caring Adults and conversations with community leaders, interviewees articulated the value of a family-focused relationship between shelter staff and school staff. And both communities are generally stretched thin. Consider and then clearly communicate what their engagement with one another should be to maximize the impact of their collaboration and reduce duplication of efforts, while minimizing the ongoing time required to do so.

● **Streamline and tighten communication strategies.** On the survey, one fifth or more of Caring Adult respondents did not receive or were unaware of the Benefits Access Workshop, routine calls or visits, school-based professional development, and the Change Impact training platform. In focus groups, Caring Adults described resource-filled, lengthy emails from the ECFIK Program Team. We suggest the following:
    ○ Rather than a lengthy weekly email that offers a variety of resources, training opportunities and other information for school teams, streamline communications to biweekly emails with 3-5 vetted resources that align with the flow of the academic year.
    ○ Continue efforts to centralize resources in an online platform or list to ensure they can be easily accessed.
    ○ Clearly articulate what types of communication will go to principals, to ECFIK Point People and to all Caring Adults. How will those communications differ? How frequently will they go out?
    ○ Improve resources and support related to navigating the systems and processes for getting services to families. Who are the go-to people in the Bronx and within social service agencies for the top areas of need?

● **Provide more guidance and tools to introduce the ECFIK Program to Caring Adults, families and shelter staff.** Caring Adults shared that families - and even some Caring Adults - did not know what to expect from the ECFIK initiative. Offer more bilingual resources (i.e. decks, 1-pagers, videos) that introduce the program to families and explicitly assure caregivers that receiving support does not impact immigration status. In addition, consider ways to engage Point People in training other staff within their building to become strong Caring Adults. Provide Point People and shelter staff with a curated deck that can help them introduce the initiative to others in their buildings.

● **Design family outreach and communication with migrant communities in mind.** Many of the families working with Caring Adults this year were migrants facing language barriers, cultural barriers and immigration challenges. Indeed, community leaders spoke about the value of ECFIK in the context of the recent increase in immigration. In the design and curation of resources for Caring Adults, deeply consider the migrant experience. For example, ensure that all communication for families is in Spanish. Prioritize resources that will work with families regardless of immigration status. Consider deprioritizing services that won't work with undocumented community members.

- **Consider expanding the NYCPS Central ECFIK team.** During the 2024-25 academic year, the ECFIK initiative will work with over 100 schools and almost as many shelters to support families experiencing homelessness. With its current staffing model, there is not enough capacity to ensure all school communities are able to implement the initiative with fidelity. With more resources at the Central office, ECFIK can conduct more vetting of resources, complete more site visits, and offer more personalized training and support.

- **Given the constraints of overtime policies and expectations for documentation, investigate whether there are more effective ways to compensate Caring Adults.** In its first year, many Caring Adults were not able to get paid for their work because of challenges pertaining to per diem documentation and / or union policies. The program may also want to: (1) offer targeted training to payroll staff, (2) explore other, more streamlined ways for Caring Adults to document their time, and (3) advocate for new H Bank / DC 37 policies.

In addition, we want to offer the following recommendations for ongoing evaluation efforts:
- **If possible, start the evaluation process earlier in the academic year.** May and June are hectic times for everyone working in school buildings, making evaluation activities harder to prioritize. Consider drafting an evaluation plan in Fall 2024 and submitting an IRB application in January 2024. It may also be helpful to request permission for evaluation activities from principals at the launch of the initiative, rather than waiting until the end of the academic year.

- **Invest in efforts to gather student and caregiver perspectives.** In conversations with Caring Adults and the ECFIK Program Team, we recognize that engaging this population of families can be particularly challenging. Emails and text messages have limited reach; onsite interviews, though more time consuming, have more impact. As budget allows, consider prioritizing shelter-based onsite data collection activities with caregivers for the 2024-25 academic year.

- **Given what we learned in Year 1, adapt data collection tools and analytical methods to enable the program to quantify the encouraging qualitative outcomes gathered in this evaluation.** In addition, the program could utilize the New Visions portal to quantify the outputs from interactions between Caring Adults and the families they serve (i.e. providing support related to busing, employment, housing, etc.).

- **Consider case studies in Year 2 to illustrate more clearly what successful ECFIK schools look like.** With over 60 schools in the initiative in Year 1, and more to join in Year 2, help schools learn from one another by creating case studies of successful schools. It may be valuable to highlight how Caring Adults collaborate with one another, how schools and shelters work together, or how communities respond to families' needs.

Finally, in conversations with the ECFIK Program team, the following areas were discussed for further exploration in future evaluation:
- How do outcomes vary based on key program design decisions (i.e. number of Caring Adults in a school, how schools staffed Caring Adults)?
- What can we learn about which strategies or incentives were most impactful for improving attendance among ECFIK students?
- For supports that Caring Adults were less likely to report providing to families (finding long-term or stable housing and finding job support training), was this because these were actually lower needs among families or due to Caring Adults not knowing how to provide this support?
- How does engagement in ECFIK differ by whether a family is new to NYC from another country or has been living in NYC?
- How do these findings compare to similar programs that support students and families living in shelters?

Appendix A: Insights from Interviews with Community Leaders

In July and August 2024, the BSC team conducted four 20-30 minute interviews with six community leaders identified by the ECFIK Program Team who have extensive experience serving families living in shelter. Interviews were designed to gather context about the experience of families in shelter and provide additional perspectives on how to strengthen the ECFIK initiative.

Notably, five of the six individuals interviewed work in shelter or for DHS. Given ECFIK is an interagency initiative that relies heavily on a strong NYCPS-DHS partnership, community leaders offered valuable perspectives that complimented the experiences of Caring Adults in school buildings. Additionally, as discussed in the broader findings in the main report, the relationship between Caring Adults and shelter staff was nebulous during the 2023-24 academic year. Interviews offered an opportunity to explore some of these dynamics. Below we summarize insights from interviews with community leaders.

Value of ECFIK

Interviews began with key stakeholders sharing their reflections about the ECFIK model. Several spoke about the value of the initiative:

- "I thought that it was an amazing idea. I was a first generation student and I needed that additional assistance in regards to when I went to college, I had that person checking up on me. That helped me a lot throughout my process. So that's how I looked at it in regards to Caring Adults, having that DOE person follow up with the kids and the engagement and stuff like that. I think the model is great."
- "The concept of a Caring Adult is great, having a specific individual as the go to person, that is a beneficial thing."
- "The fact that the parents have some extra person they can speak to, that's also, it is definitely a benefit."

Notably, two stakeholders emphasized the importance of this initiative in the context of newly arriving migrant families. New York City experienced a significant increase in the number of migrant families during the 2023-24 academic year, and ECFIK helped shore up existing structures to support these families.

- "Because of the influx of newly arrived students has really, I don't want to say tripled, but has significantly impacted the amount of attention that a current STH staff can pay to students and families. We haven't received one additional staff person, despite the numbers ballooning to the point where they are… [ECFIK] provided more hands, more hands on deck."

Relationship between Shelter Staff and Caring Adults

Across interviews, community leaders wrestled with the ways in which shelter staff and Caring Adults could and should engage with one another. Several individuals pointed out that strong coordination and collaboration between shelter staff and Caring Adults would benefit families.

- "If the Caring Adult had a concern about the child's attendance and they wanted to ask the case manager, 'Hey, is this child stating that they're sick when they're not going to school? Can you help us figure out what's happening on the shelter end, since you guys are there with them?' So something like that on a situational basis would be really helpful."
- "How do we connect all the caring individuals that's working with this family? I include the shelter staff too as well, so they're aware of what those concerns are and not try to put additional services in place because sometimes a parent is already overwhelmed with services."

- "There's a lot of information that schools have on our kids that our shelter staff is not aware of… We sometimes re-traumatize the families by assessing them for things that are already in place… school might have that history, [know which] services are in place."
- "One of the areas for improvement is better facilitating connections between shelter staff and Caring Adults because that was an area that felt a little lacking this year…"

Community Leaders suggested some strategies to strengthen the relationships between shelter staff and Caring Adults. Several DHS staff noted that simply ensuring all shelter staff know which students are enrolled in ECFIK and all Caring Adults know where students are sheltered could help. Additionally, one community leader spoke about Caring Adults visiting students at shelter. This opportunity could both build relationships across schools and shelters and offer space for students to feel known and seen.

- "Now with year two and the portal, the Caring Adults will know where the families reside… we're hoping with having that information, that's going to make a difference."
- "I do think that part of our work is still going to be how to ensure that the Caring Adults and the shelter both know that there's families and kids in [ECFIK] that are participating, so it could just run smoother. There's going to be times that the Caring Adult may want to meet with the child outside of school because they take that initiative, but the shelter needs to be aware, and I think that's where our role is going to be. I think our role is going to be more shifting of doing more introduction and coordination to make sure people know that the family is enrolled in this program versus trying to get these consents."
- "It's very easy for a young person to have a personality in his home. It's very easy for him to have a different personality in school. I've had a lot of fantastic outcomes when I make their worlds collide…."

With that said, several community leaders also expressed some concern that universal policies about how frequently shelter staff and Caring Adults communicate might be too much. Interviewees explained that shelter staff are already overwhelmed with their current workload.

- "It would just have to be in a way that also doesn't feel burdensome to either party… they [shelter staff] already have a significant workload here… I think it should be on an as needed basis definitely. Because, like I said, the staff at the shelter already have such a volume of work that it would be difficult to include another mandatory meeting…"

One interviewee noted that while Caring Adults and shelter staff are all working with the same families, often they are measured against different outcomes. This can make collaboration difficult.

- "A lot of my work with the Department of Homeless Services… a lot of their measures towards success is how soon they move a family out of shelter, how soon they move them into permanency… [NYCPS staff] while that family is [in shelter], that young person needs to go to school and do well and explore post-secondary opportunities… Those two worlds don't meet, but we're asked to partner, so we're co-existing."

Title I Funds
Another challenge that surfaced among Caring Adults was the lack of clarity around how and where to spend Title I funds. In two interviews, stakeholders shared their perspective on this challenge and offered some ideas for improvement in year 2.

- "I know that there's administrators that want to spend it [Title I funds] however they deem, and I know that's not okay. …And also we know that with the vendors, the list is not as together as many of us would've liked for it to have been…."
- "One of the biggest challenges that schools and principals reported was that the procurement process was cumbersome. When you ask them to clarify, oftentimes it's that they have to get three bids. It's a competitive bid project, so you got to get three bids. Nobody wants to get three bids. So what we did was, and what we

are doing, we are training MWBEs, who are exempt from the three bid process. So training around 150 MWBEs next week."

One community leader emphasized the importance of school communities developing their own capacity to work through the procurement process.
- "Schools really need to develop their capacity to develop someone's capacity to be able to identify vendors, establish vendor relationships. You can't have somebody outside of the school building really supporting that on the level that's needed for you to meet all these unmet needs. Especially if you're in a school that has a high poverty index. You have to have relationships. You got all these community coordinators working in schools who are nurturing these...I... Each school is assigned a procurement expert. And they need to really nurture and develop that relationship and lean into, because it should not be an excuse. That's not an excuse. You get money and your excuse cannot be, 'I don't know who to spend it on.'"

Other Important Insights

In different ways, three community leaders highlighted the need to communicate more broadly and effectively about the ECFIK initiative.
- One interviewee did not understand the purpose of the initiative outside of attendance support. The interviewee shared, "Because we've already been monitoring our children's attendance regularly through meetings and all kinds of data, that's kind of why I don't have a lot of insight as to this program because it's not really something we're lacking at our site."
- Another shared, "The starting place would be a sharing of information. Nobody knows, and I know because I asked, but we haven't received a presentation about ECFIK, on the successes of ECFIK with supporting kids in school."
- A third noted, "One of the things that this is an inter-agency thing... It's also difficult with leadership now, trying to get their attention so they know what's going on... from the DOE side and the DHS side... one of the things that we don't have is more engagement with leadership."

One community leader spoke about the importance of expanding the central ECFIK staff.
- "We're lacking Caring Adults and we're lacking supportive staff... We need to engage Caring Adults. We need to engage the families... Now we have to engage the program directors... Now you've got to engage the superintendent, having them be on your side, having them to trust that this is the initiative that's going to make sense.... I think with this program, it's taking a long period of time to get things done because we do not have the support staff."

Finally, a few other ideas surfaced:
- STH has a family survey to help assess the needs of families in shelter. Consider how to integrate this tool more systematically into the work of the Caring Adult.
- Schools should give students 5 complete uniforms to reduce the laundry challenges for families.
- Schools should use laundry vendors (available on the MWB list) to take care of laundry.