

# Family Justice Center Sonoma County: Polyvictimization Demonstration Initiative

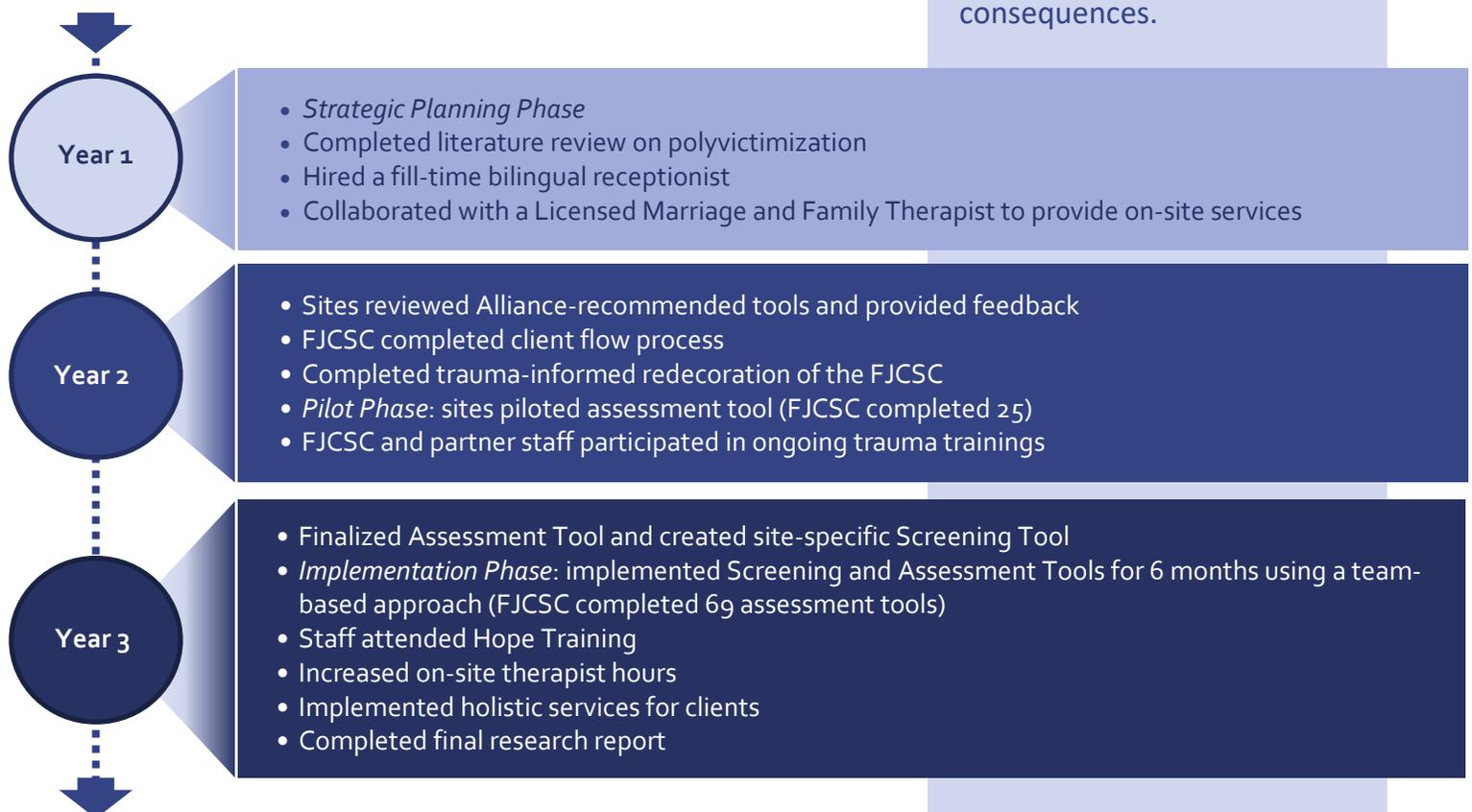
In October 2016, the Family Justice Center Sonoma County (FJCSC) began a three-year project funded by the U.S. Department of Justice, Office for Victims of Crime called the Polyvictimization Demonstration Initiative (Initiative). Along with the other five sites nationwide and the technical assistance provider, Alliance for HOPE International, the FJCSC and its partners worked to develop, pilot, and implement a Polyvictimization Assessment Tool designed to identify polyvictim clients, learn more about their experiences with traumatic events, improve services, and reduce their risk of re-victimization.

In addition to the Polyvictimization Assessment Tool, which all six sites used, the FJCSC created a seven-question Screener that clients could fill out along with their intake paperwork. The intention of this Screener was to help identify who may be a polyvictim and therefore eligible for the full Assessment.

The FJCSC discovered that the vast majority of its clients are experiencing polyvictimization. As a result, the Center created new policies and practices to better serve its polyvictim clients, including creating a more trauma-informed space and implementing new holistic services for clients.

## What is Polyvictimization?

Polyvictimization does not have a single definition, but refers to the cumulative effect over time of multiple victimizations of different types and adverse life events. Polyvictims are defined as experiencing at least three of victimizations or events within a time-frame of one year to a lifetime. Polyvictims are one of the most vulnerable populations served by the FJCSC due to their elevated risk for future victimizations and long-term health consequences.



# Accomplishments

## Screening Tool

With the goals of pre-identifying possible polyvictims and lessening burden on staff, clients completed an optional seven-question Screener along with their intake paperwork. The Screener consisted of both victimization and adverse life event items.

## Assessment Tool

Completed using a team approach by FJCSC Navigators and partner staff, the Assessment asked clients about:

**Part A:** 26 adverse event types/victimizations experienced during childhood, adulthood, and in the last year

**Part B:** 18 mental health/trauma-related symptoms experienced during childhood, adulthood, in the last year, and currently



## Trauma-Informed Transformation



Coffee Station for Clients



Lobby



Soft Room



Coloring Materials for Clients

## New Holistic Services

- Increased on-site counseling hours
- Day of nurturing
- Empowerment group
- Coping skills group
- Massage therapy
- Yoga
- Parenting Classes

Throughout the three-year Initiative, the FJCSC began the process of transforming from a crisis-intervention model to trauma-informed holistic service provision, and has been successful in doing so. The physical space, including the lobby and Soft Rooms within the Nest, were redesigned using trauma-informed principles to create a warm, welcoming, and calming environment.

The FJCSC also implemented a number of holistic services aimed at providing polyvictim-specific therapeutic services and with the goal of creating a space that clients want to return to for continued care.



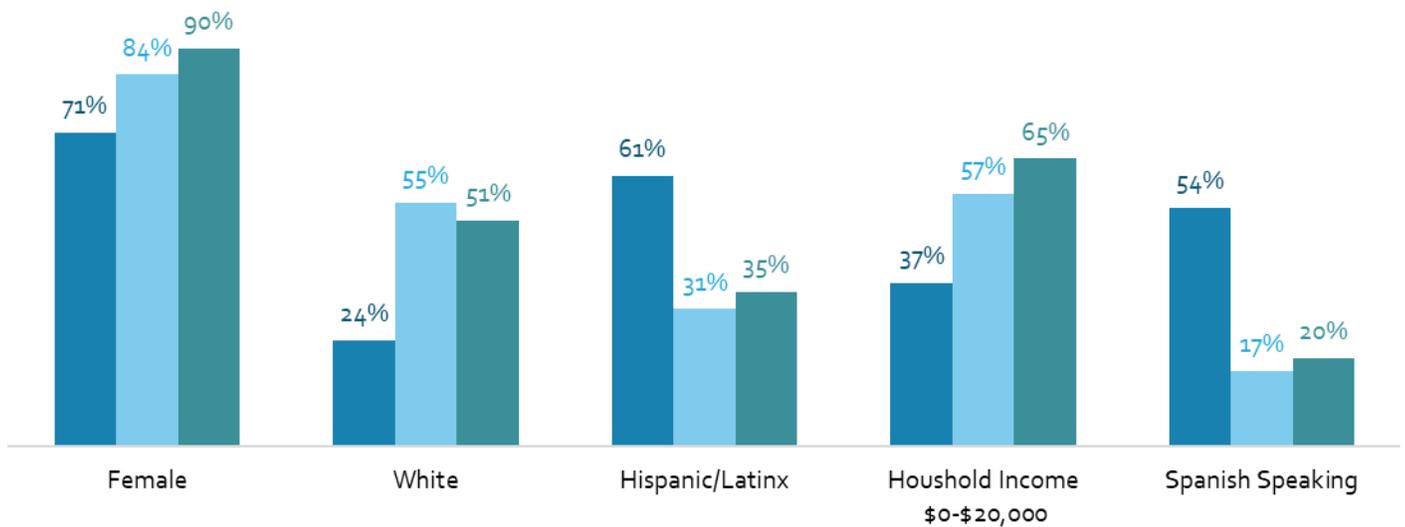
# Participation and Demographics



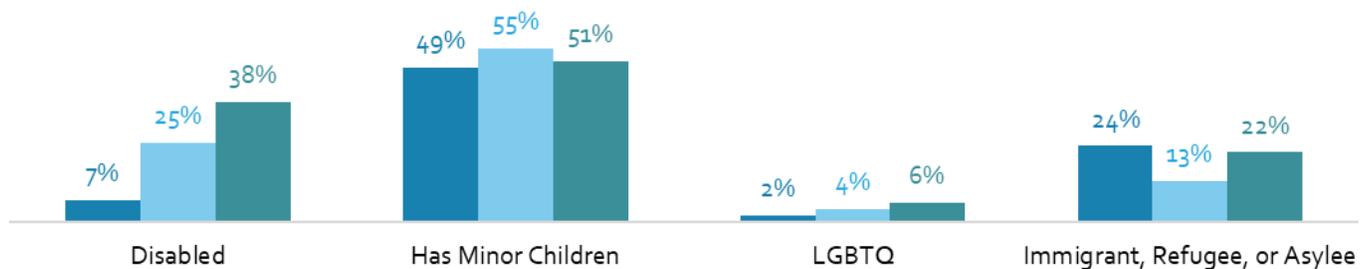
**91%** of clients who completed a Screening Tool screened in as a potential polyvictim



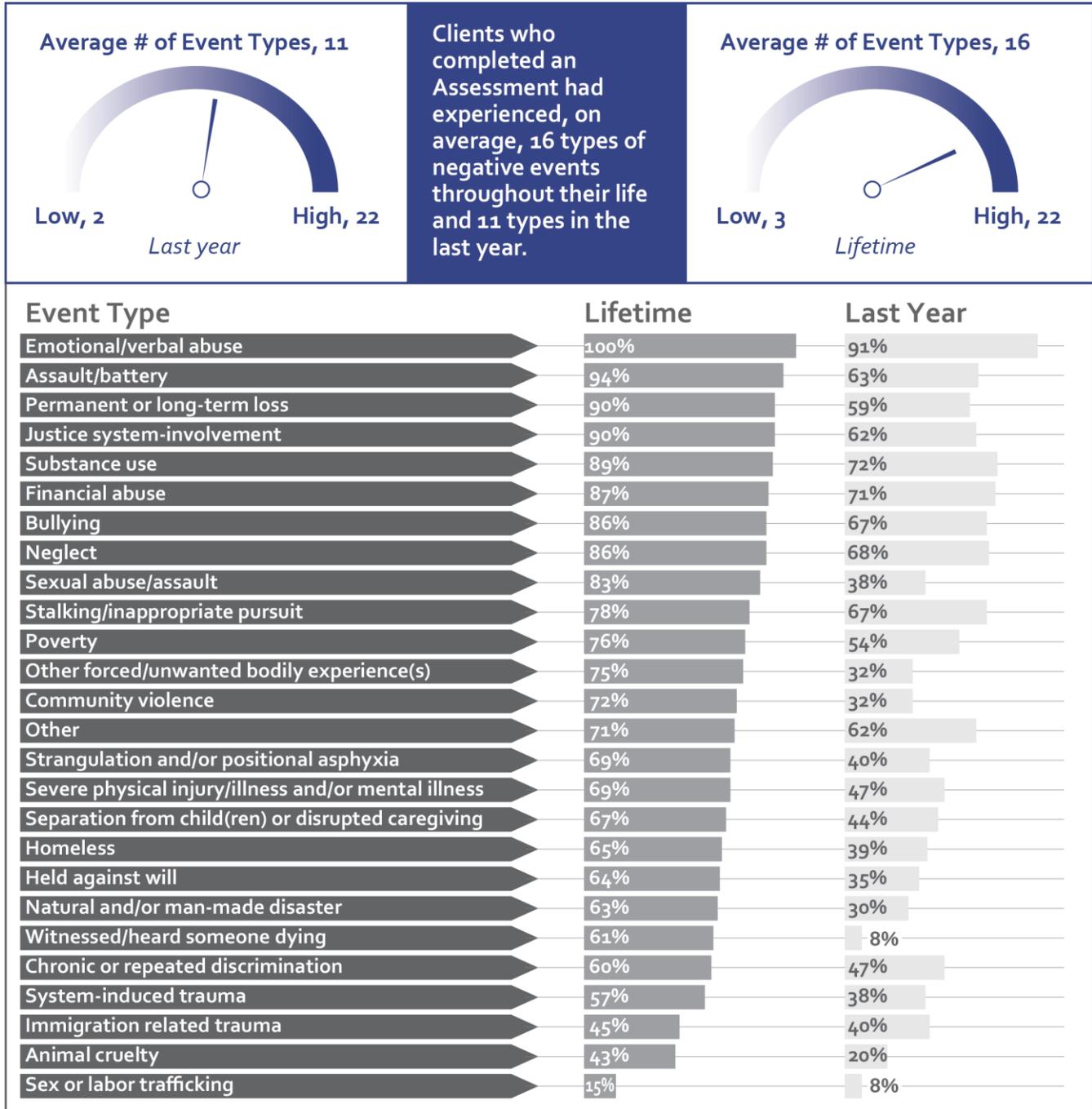
**64%** of participants completing an Assessment Tool returned for 2 or more visits during the Implementation Phase. In contrast, only 34% of polyvictim participants with no Assessment came back to the Center for 2 or more visits.



■ Participants Screening Out (N=41) ■ Participants Screening In (N=417) ■ Participants Completing Assessment (N=68)



# Event Types Experienced



Every client (100%) who completed an Assessment experienced emotional or verbal abuse at some point in their life, and 91% experienced it in the last year, making this event type the most common for participants. The second most common event type experienced over the lifetime was assault or battery by a parent, caregiver, partner, or relative, with 94% of clients experiencing this at some point in their life.

While the FJCS is primarily a place for people who have been victimized, learning about the adverse life experiences that clients have experienced is key to the intentional shift from crisis intervention to holistic service provision. **Three adverse life experiences – substance use, permanent or long-term loss, and justice system involvement – were found to be in the top five most prevalent lifetime events types among those clients who completed an Assessment.**

# Symptoms Experienced

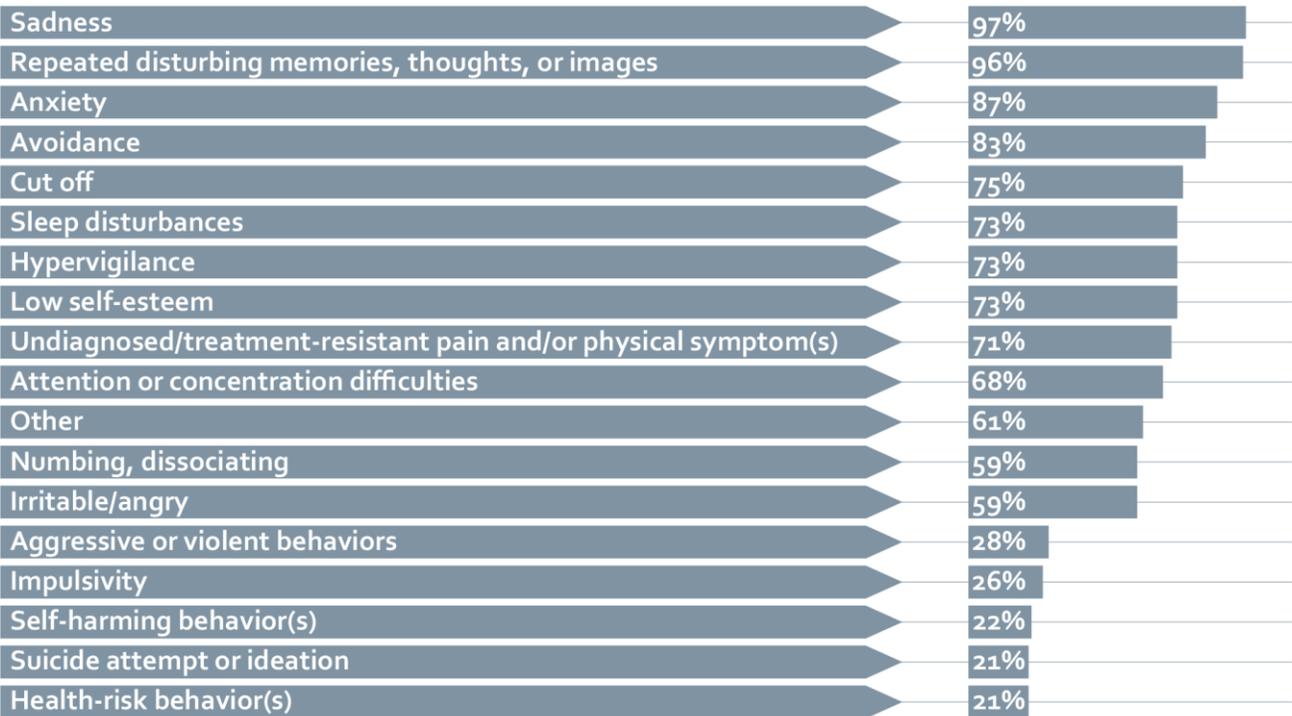
Average # of Symptoms, 9



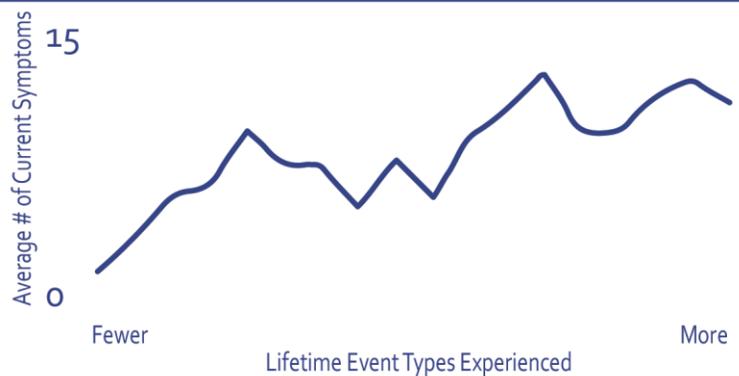
All clients who completed an Assessment were experiencing at least one trauma-related symptom at the time of the Assessment, with an average of 9 symptoms.

## Trauma-Related Symptom

## At Time of Assessment



As the number of event types experienced over the lifetime increases, so does the average number of trauma-related symptoms that a client was experiencing at the time of assessment.



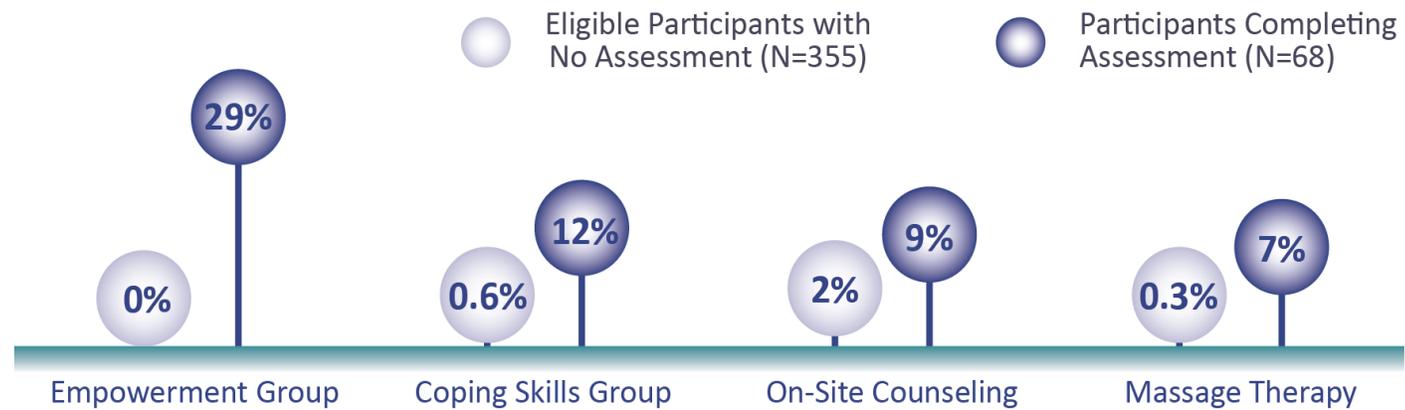
# Service Delivery

Initiative participation had a positive impact on service delivery.

Initiative participants received, on average, 3.29 referrals, while non-participants received only 2.8. When considering only Initiative participants who were eligible to complete an Assessment, those who completed an Assessment received on average one additional referral compared to those with no Assessment.



Referral/Service Category	% of Participants Completing Assessment	% of Eligible Participants with No Assessment
On-Site Partner	100%	95%
Domestic Violence Service	81%	84%
Legal Service	69%	68%
FJCSC Polyvictim Service	52%	3%
Elder Support	21%	15%
Public Benefit	18%	12%
District Attorney Service	16%	16%
Adult Mental Health	15%	6%
Homeless Services	13%	11%
Financial Support	12%	9%
Child or Youth Service	10%	11%
Housing/Shelter	7%	5%
Vocational/Life Skills	6%	5%
Substance Use Disorder	0%	0.6%



Percentage of Initiative Participants Referred to FJCSC Polyvictim Services

# Final Findings



## Key Lessons Learned

- The vast **majority of FJCSC clients are likely polyvictims**, having experienced more negative events and symptoms than previously screened for by FJCSC staff
- Both the Screener and Assessment were useful for guiding conversation with clients, gaining a deeper perspective on the client's experience, and learning about additional service needs, **which in turn informed and positively impacted service delivery**
- Though the Assessment could be time consuming, **a team-based approach to completing the Assessment allowed for closer working relationships** between staff and took pressure off of the individual staff member
- The Assessment process helped staff build stronger rapport and relationships with clients, something that may have led to the **increase in return visits among clients who completed the Assessment Tool**
- **The power of hope is strong and can foster change for vulnerable polyvictim clients**

## Client Perspective

- Talking about events and symptoms experienced over time creates connections, reduces feelings of isolation, and validates the client experience
- Clients reported that the Assessment Tool and process was beneficial, even though it also brought up negative emotions
- There is a desire for more support groups at the FJCSC, especially informal or client-led groups
- There is a need for increased follow-up services in the form of ongoing case management



## Next steps

1. Continue to offer holistic services including yoga, massage therapy, the day of nurturing, coping skills groups, and empowerment groups
2. Continue to improve data collection and electronic tracking of referrals provided by Navigators and FJCSC partner staff
3. Work towards closing gaps identified during the Initiative including case management, bilingual on-site and follow-up, and additional navigation staff

*"It [the assessment tool] has actually helped a lot because I get to learn more about their story, not specifically just one case or one incident and so it makes me, it actually pushes me to provide them with better services or the most services needed."*  
- FJCSC Partner Staff

*"There was one client in particular who was really intrigued by the [assessment] questions...that we were talking about, and who after having gone through them, she kind of put the dots together and realized that she needed to go back to therapy because she had stopped going to therapy. But after doing the tool she actually said that she wanted to go back to therapy and really does need it."*  
- FJCSC Partner Staff

*"I am not a victim, I am just a person that learns lessons within the relationships. I learned my worth, I learned how to love myself. Everything I went through had its purpose. It helped me to grow and evolve and to get to know myself on a more deeper level. I am more aware of life, of who I really am and of my power to be able to control my life. I was in darkness, but throughout everything I had been through, the pain, I overcame all of it. It taught me to stay strong and keep breathing and keep going. I now see the light, finally, after so many years. There are still obstacles and I will overcome them all. So, thank you to you. You helped me find myself again."*

- FJCSC Client and Initiative Participant

**Thank you to everyone involved with this initiative including:**

Participating clients; frontline staff implementing the Initiative (Bianca Ambriz, Jeanie O'Neill, Nallely Ramirez, Jessica Ramirez, Anthony Roselli, Teresa Rodriguez, and Maria Thomas); the participating FJCSC partners (Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Santa Rosa, Council on Aging, Legal Aid of Sonoma County, YWCA Sonoma County, and Verity); Kelsey Price; Fabiola Espinosa; DA of Sonoma County Jill Ravitch and all who work in the DA's office; FJCSC Foundation Board of Directors; Sonoma County Board of Supervisors; Wes Winter; Diane Traversi; FJCSC administrative staff; FJCSC leadership; FJCSC partner organizations and their staff; Dr. Chan Hellman; Alliance for HOPE International; Office for Victims of Crime, U.S. Department of Justice; Glen Price Group; Hatchuel Tabernik and Associates



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