Who Leaves Services and Why?

How Evaluation Can Help Programs Improve Service Retention

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FIRST 5
MONTEREY COUNTY

About

Harder+Company

Harder+Company Community Research is a comprehensive social research and planning firm with offices in San Francisco, Davis, San Diego, and Los Angeles, California. Our mission is to help our clients achieve social impact through quality research, strategy, and organizational development services.

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About

First 5 Monterey County

First 5 Monterey County (F5MC) allocates approximately $7 million annually to support local organizations and programs working with young children and their families. F5MC serves as a catalyst to create sustainable change in systems, policies and practices that enrich the development of children in their FIRST 5 years of life.

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Overview

Today's Presentation

+ Brief background and context

+ Program attrition study approach

+ Key findings & recommendations

+ Lessons and insights

Goals

At the end of this session, you will be able to…

✚ Articulate the stages of service engagement

✚ List effective strategies for participants who have disengaged

✚ Describe how program providers can improve service retention

Background and Context

Why do a program attrition study?

First 5 Monterey County

Funded services
    Parent education & support activities
    Provider support & technical assistance
    Mental well-being

Target populations
    Children ages 0-5 & their families
    Lower levels of income & education

Essential characteristics
    Culturally & linguistically appropriate
    Community-based
    Family-centered
    Flexible hours
    Coordinated

Disengagement Data

Even within equitable and accessible programs, some people who enroll quickly disengage.

Data is typically collected from regular participants – but what about those who disengage?

While often left out, they can provide valuable insights.

F5MC Program Attrition Study

Approach

Research Questions

What factors contribute to program attrition?

What are the internal and external barriers that prevent people from continuing their engagement?

Defining Disengagement

Three Stages of Service Engagement

Intent to enroll	→	Enrollment	→	Retention

Study Sample

Playgroup participants

Disengaged (n=25)
   Exactly 1-2 playgroups
   No more than 2 F5MC services total
   Participated in past year

Engaged (n=25)
   3+ playgroups
   Additional F5MC services possible

Approach

Data from participant MIS
(Persimmony)
    Service history
    Demographic data
    Contact information

Participant interviews

Challenges

The reasons participants disengage
from services also make it difficult to
include them in typical data
collection activities:

Housing instability
Transportation barriers
Inflexible work schedules
Etc.

Solutions

Primary data collection approach
    Culturally responsive field staff
    Staffing hours (i.e., evenings)
    Multiple follow-ups
    Involving providers when possible

Instrument
    Culturally appropriate measures
    In English and Spanish
    Mostly closed-ended questions
    Pilot tested
    Short collection time
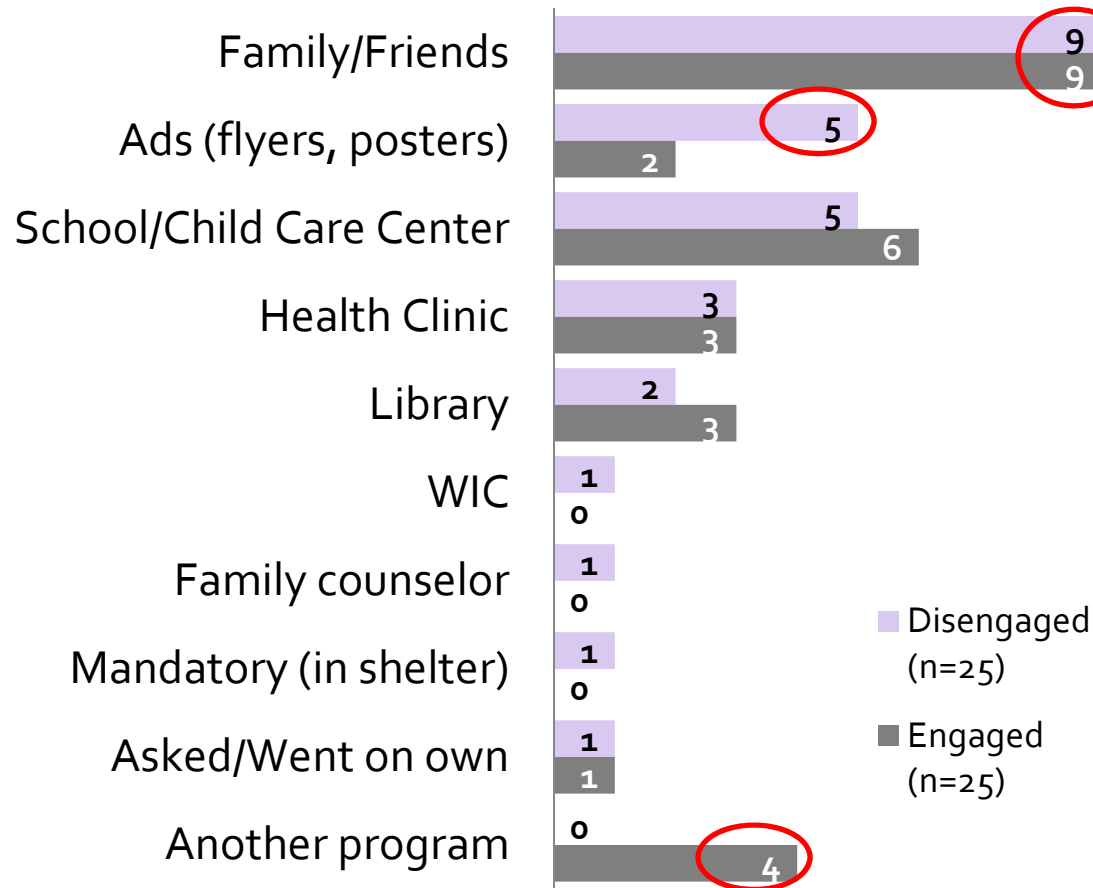
Findings and Recommendations

Findings: Families

Notable Similarities	Disengaged	Engaged
Latino	84%	100%
Speak Spanish only	64%	68%

Notable Differences	Disengaged	Engaged
Single parents	25%	4%
Annual household income < $20,000	81%	32%
Moved in past year	44%	16%

+ These findings about **family characteristics** were shared with funded agencies, followed by focused group discussions

Findings: Programs

How Participants Heard About Playgroup

Source	Disengaged (n=25)	Engaged (n=25)
Family/Friends	9	9
Ads (flyers, posters)	5	2
School/Child Care Center	5	6
Health Clinic	3	3
Library	2	3
WIC	1	0
Family counselor	1	0
Mandatory (in shelter)	1	0
Asked/Went on own	1	1
Another program	0	4

Legend:
- Disengaged (n=25)
- Engaged (n=25)

✚ These findings about **programmatic factors** were shared with funded agencies, followed by focused group discussions

Findings: Disengagement

Top factors cited as **reasons for disengagement** :

+ Not enough flexibility in schedule (11 people)

+ Program didn't follow up with or contact me (9)

+ These findings about **reasons for disengagement** were shared with funded agencies, followed by focused group discussions

Hours of Operation Made It Easy to Participate

Disengaged	**64%**
Engaged	**88%**

Recommendations

Developed in collaboration with funded agencies, including:

Breaks in service. Look into how programs reach out to clients once services have resumed and potential improvements

Building relationships and expectations. Identify steps to orient new clients, increase their understanding of programs, and connect them with other parents

Lessons and Insights

Lessons & Insights

Create clear definition of disengagement

Adapt expectations for response rates

Work with service providers

Use culturally-based approach

Compare with "engaged" participants

Share findings with providers
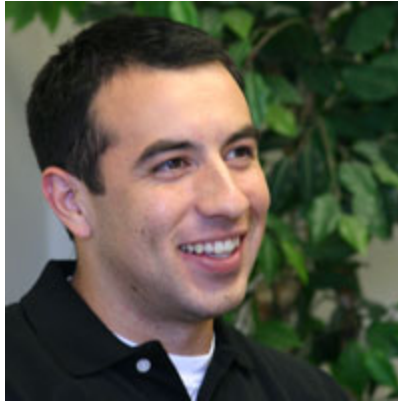
Consider implications on other evaluation activities

Audience Questions

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