SPAN Parent Advocacy Network (SPAN)
Empowering Women in Community Leadership for
Healthier Families
Year Three Evaluation Report

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July 2022
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Overview and Methods

This summary presents key findings from Year Three of the SPAN Parent Advocacy Network (SPAN) Empowering Women in Community Leadership for Healthier Families (“Empowering Women”) program, a three-year initiative funded through a grant from the New Jersey Office for the Prevention of Developmental Disabilities (OPDD). The overarching goal of Empowering Women is to enhance state and community efforts to reduce the risk of preventable Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IDDs), specifically fetal alcohol syndrome (FAS)/fetal alcohol spectrum disorders (FASD) and those caused by lead poisoning, by: a) providing peer support groups for diverse women of childbearing age, particularly those from underserved communities; and b) training women of childbearing age to be peer leaders who educate and advocate in their communities to reduce the risk of preventable IDDs. The program’s key activities include the following:

- Develop a training curriculum with input from community focus groups, with content that includes: IDDs, FAS/FASD, Lead poisoning/prevention, Social Determinants of Health (SDoH), Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), peer leadership, education, and community advocacy.
- Recruit and train women to become peer leaders, educators, and advocates using the Serving On Groups curriculum (WI FACETS, 2015).
- Conduct ongoing regional peer support groups for women of childbearing age who are at risk and/or have children at risk of FAS/FASD and/or lead poisoning.
- Conduct outreach to engage new community partners and strengthen existing partnerships.
- Plan and implement two Women’s Leadership Mini Summits.

The evaluation employed a mixed methods design to collect quantitative and qualitative data, including a leadership training survey; a training follow-up survey; and a peer support group survey (for more details, refer to the full report).

Key Findings

- In all three grant years, participants in the SPAN Empowering Women leadership training reported higher levels of knowledge in all seven of the program’s key content areas after participating in the training compared to before.
- Leadership training participants rating their experience with the training similarly high for all three grant years, with total scores on a 5-point scale of 4.4 in Year Three and 4.5 in Years Two and Three (both).
- Feedback from Leadership Training participants affirmed valuable takeaways that included support and connections made among the training participants; learning about the core
training topics; learning and/or strengthening leadership skills; tools and resources; and learning about cultural competence.

- Leadership Training participants expressed plans to use what they learned with responses that reflected a sense of confidence and optimism about becoming more involved in their communities with themes that included plans to participate in community groups; use skills gained in their professional roles; for advocacy; cultural competence; and self-improvement. Many reported plans to share what they learned with family and friends.

- Results from a follow-up survey suggest additional positive impacts three months following the Leadership Training, including a majority of 65% who reported that they are more involved in their local communities by participating in group/s working to make a change.

- Follow-up survey participants reported additional important training impacts, including improved leadership skills; increased confidence; motivation to participate in community groups; helping others; improved advocacy skills; and networking.

- Three-quarters of follow-up survey respondents reported that since participating in the leadership training, they have helped family members and/or other interested individuals learn about serving on groups.

- Peer support group participants reported moderate to high learning in the program’s key content areas, including risks of alcohol use while pregnant; risks of drug use; lead poisoning prevention; social determinants of health; where to find help in their community; how to advocate to improve their community; oral health; and stress management as a result of their participation.

- Aspects of the peer support groups that participants liked best included information and learning about specific topics; feeling supported by the other people in the group; hearing about other people’s experiences; and group interaction. These best-liked aspects were reported consistently across all three grant years, suggesting that the supportive peer group setting is an effective way for participants to learn the Empowering Women core content.

- Evaluation limitations include small sample sizes, convenience samples, lack of a comparison/control group, self-reported data, and modifications and adaptations made to the program and evaluation instruments due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all of which may limit the extent to which the results may be generalized.

**Next Step Recommendations**

- Discuss strategies for increasing evaluation response rates.

- Consider expanding the program’s reach to include additional populations and subgroups, for increased inclusivity and diversity in addition to women.
Introduction

Background
This report presents the final evaluation results from Year Three of the SPAN Parent Advocacy Network (SPAN) Empowering Women in Community Leadership for Healthier Families (referred to in this report as “Empowering Women”) program, a three-year initiative funded through a grant from the New Jersey Office for the Prevention of Developmental Disabilities (OPDD).

The overarching goal of Empowering Women was to enhance state and community efforts to reduce the risk of preventable Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IDDs), specifically fetal alcohol syndrome (FAS)/fetal alcohol spectrum disorders (FASD) and those caused by lead poisoning, by: a) providing peer support groups for diverse women of childbearing age, particularly those from underserved communities; and b) training women of childbearing age to be peer leaders who educate and advocate in their communities to reduce the risk of preventable IDDs. The program’s key activities included the following:

- Develop a training curriculum with input from community focus groups, with content that includes: IDDs, FAS/FASD, Lead poisoning/prevention, Social Determinants of Health (SDoH), Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), peer leadership, education, and community advocacy.
- Recruit and train women to become peer leaders, educators, and advocates using the Serving On Groups curriculum (WI FACETS, 2015).
- Conduct ongoing regional peer support groups for women of childbearing age who are at risk and/or have children at risk of FAS/FASD and/or lead poisoning.
- Conduct outreach to engage new community partners and strengthen existing partnerships.
- Plan and implement two Women’s Leadership Mini Summits.

Evaluation Overview
During an initial evaluation planning meeting, the evaluation consultant and Empowering Women program leadership met as a team to review the purpose of the evaluation and the program’s informational priorities. The discussion was guided by evaluation best practices, particularly the evaluation standards of utility feasibility, propriety, and accuracy. The team agreed that the purpose of the evaluation is to assess progress towards the program’s expected outcomes and to provide information for making any needed program improvements.

Evaluation Questions
Guided by the logic model (Appendix A), the evaluation consultant and program leadership developed the following broad questions that the evaluation would be designed to answer

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1 For a good overview of the evaluation standards, see the CDC program evaluation webpage: https://www.cdc.gov/eval/standards/index.htm
Processes/Implementation Questions

1. What were the experiences of training participants? To what extent did participants find the training engaging, useful, and well-organized?

2. What were the experiences of peer-to-peer support group participants? To what extent did participants find the support groups useful, engaging, well-organized, and an effective way to learn?

3. What suggestions do program participants have for improving the trainings and support groups?

Outcomes Questions

1. To what extent did the leadership training for program staff increase participants’ knowledge in the program’s core content areas, including the risks of alcohol use, risks of drug use; lead poisoning prevention; and community resources; as well as leadership and advocacy?

2. How well did the leadership training prepare participants to help others in their communities become leaders and advocates?

3. To what extent did the peer support groups increase participants’ knowledge in the program’s core content areas, including the risks of alcohol use and risks of drug use during pregnancy; lead poisoning prevention, and community resources?

4. To what extent did women from target communities who participated in trainings delivered by the program’s trained educators experience increased knowledge related to leadership and advocacy?

5. To what extent did women from target communities who participated in program trainings use what they learned to participate in local and/or state leadership and advocacy opportunities?

Methods

The evaluation employed a mixed methods design to collect quantitative and qualitative data using the following tools which were developed through a collaborative process by the Empowering Women program leadership and evaluation consultant:

**Leadership Training Tool:** An 11-item online survey tool designed to assess the effectiveness of the program’s training curriculum for increasing participants’ knowledge and skills to be peer leaders, educators, and advocates in their communities. The tool included a retrospective pretest to measure change in knowledge of the core training content, measures of participants’ experience with the training process; and open-ended items to capture most valuable takeaway; how participants’ think they will use what they learned; and requested topics for additional training. After each of the four training sessions, the training facilitator emailed a link to the tool to each training participant. The tool was available in both English and Spanish versions.

**Peer Support Group Questionnaire:** To assess the effectiveness of the peer support groups, participants were asked to complete a brief, anonymous, online questionnaire at the end of each group session. The
questionnaire used a multiple-choice format to assess the extent to which the peer support group helped participants learn about the program’s key content, including the risks of alcohol use during pregnancy; risks of drug use; lead poisoning prevention; social determinants of health; where to find help in their communities; and how to advocate to improve health in their communities. In Year Three, oral health and stress management were added. The questionnaire also asked participants to rate a series of five indicator statements to assess their experiences with the peer support group, including perceptions of the group’s usefulness and effectiveness. Additional questions asked participants what they liked best about the group and an open-ended question asking for feedback and suggestions for how to improve the support groups. The survey was available in both English and Spanish versions.

Leadership Training Follow Up Survey: A 19-item online survey designed to assess the program’s impact on participants’ leadership activities in their communities one to three months after completing the program leadership training. The survey collected information on participants’ involvement in community groups; group experiences; topics addressed, and successes and barriers to being involved in the community. Both English and Spanish versions were available.

Results

Leadership Training

Total Enrollment
During the three-year grant period, the leadership training was delivered to a total of **108** women, with registration showing an increase each year, from **15** in Year One; to **41** in Year Two; to **52** in Year Three. While the COVID-19 pandemic-related restrictions on social gatherings resulted in lower-than-expected registration during Year One, the SPAN Empowering Women leadership team pivoted to address this challenge by adapting the original in-person curriculum for delivery in a virtual environment, which put program enrollment back on track for Years Two and Three.

Evaluation Response
Of the 52 leadership training participants in Year Three, 32 submitted an evaluation tool for at least one of the four training sessions, for a response rate of **62%**. As shown in the table below, evaluation response rates ranged between 51-100% across the three grant years. In general, a response rate of over 50% is considered good for an online survey, while 30-40% is considered average.²

| Empowering Women Leadership Training Evaluation Response by Grant Year |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|----------------|---------------|
| Session           | Number of Participants | Number Who Submitted Tools | Evaluation Response Rate |
| Year One          | 15              | 15              | 100%           |
| Year Two          | 41              | 21              | 51%            |
| Year Three        | 52              | 32              | 62%            |
| Total             | 108             | 68              | 63%            |

Participant Region of Residence
Across the three grant years, Leadership Training participants (N=68) reported counties of

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² For a good summary see A Primer on Survey Response Rate (2012). Saldivar, M.G. (p. 9).
residence located in Northern New Jersey (55%); Southern New Jersey (39%); and Central New Jersey (6%).

### Leadership Training
Participants’ Region of Residence (N=68)

- **North, 55%**
- **South, 39%**
- **Central, 6%**

**Participant Language**
Across the three grant years, all 68 of the training participants submitted the English version of training evaluation tool.

**Change in Participant Knowledge**
After each of the four training sessions, participants were asked to complete an online evaluation tool that asked them to compare their knowledge before and after the training on the core curriculum topics presented during the session using a five-point scale, where 1=Low Knowledge and 5=High Knowledge.

In Year Three, a total of **11** participants completed all four evaluation tools. The following analyses are based on the responses of these 11 participants.

Year Three participants’ knowledge ratings were **higher after the training compared to before in all seven core topic areas**, with average ratings for each topic area that ranged from **3.3 to 3.7** before the training and from **4.3 to 4.7** after the training. Across all seven core content areas, average knowledge ratings increased from **3.6** (before training) to **4.4** (after training), suggesting that **participants’ perceived level of knowledge increased as a result of the training by nearly a full scale point**. This translates to an **80% increase in knowledge**.
Comparison by Grant Year
Leadership Training participants’ average knowledge ratings were consistently higher after the training compared to before for all three grant years, suggesting that the Empowering Women training was successful in increasing participants’ knowledge in the program’s seven core content areas.
Participants’ Training Experience
At the end of each training session, a survey question asked participants to rate their experiences with the training by indicating how much they agree or disagree with six indicator statements using a scale where 1=Strongly disagree and 5=Strongly agree. The responses for the four sessions were then averaged to create a total score. During Year Three, average ratings were high for all six indicator statements, which ranged from 4.2 to 4.6. Across all six indicators, the total score was 4.5, suggesting that on average, participants’ experience with the training was very positive.

The participant experience ratings were similarly high for all three grant years and differed by only one-tenth of a scale point, suggesting that, overall, participants’ experiences with the Empowering Women Leadership Training were consistently positive, with total scores that ranged from 4.4 (Year Three) to 4.5 (Years Two and Three) on the 5-point scale.
Training Feedback - Open-Ended Responses

Most Valuable Takeaways

Across the three grant years, participants’ responses reflected a diversity of valuable takeaways, with key themes that included support and connections made among the training participants; learning about the core training topics; learning and/or strengthening leadership skills; tools and resources; and learning about cultural competence.

Notable Quotes

- My most valuable takeaway from the training was hearing other participants' stories of strength and advocacy.
- Organization and communication are key elements of leadership.
- Time management and leadership information/perspective.
- Community and support from other women.
- I would say inclusion and representation.
- How to become a leader in your community.
- The most valuable takeaway from this training would be the empowering words we have shared with one another as women.
- The reminder that advocacy and leadership are something that are both our task and are achievable by anyone.

3 Quotations presented in this section are exemplars selected from participant responses for each grant year.
» Being proactive in the planning of meetings by both sending out agendas ahead of time and asking for the input of other members before the meeting begins so that the concerns of the entire group are being addressed. My other takeaway was to always be intentional and purposeful about representation. This is something I was aware of and already doing, but I saw ways I can even improve in that area.

» I learned so much about how to conduct trainings, listening to others about their experiences.

» The most valuable takeaway for me would be the Smart Goal map.

» My most valuable takeaway from the training was learning more about different cultural norms.

» Learning about different cultures and how to have effective meetings. Having differences, experiences we can educate each other and show respect.

» How powerful your leadership skills are and the more knowledge you gain the more effective you become to help others.

» The most valuable takeaway from the training was the how to get involved section. It was very interesting and the dialog was great.

» Change has many components and we cannot do it alone.

Participants’ Plans to Use What They Learned
Across the three grant years, participants responses about how they plan to use what they learned from the training reflected confidence and optimism about becoming more involved in their communities and sharing what they learned with others, with themes that included plans to participate in community groups; use skills gained in their professional roles; for advocacy; cultural competence; and self-improvement. Many reported plans to share what they learned with family and friends.

Notable Quotes
» Leaders are not born; I can be a good leader. With my family my friends and others.

» Utilizing my voice and seeking opportunities to join with other women (and men) in order to bring strength to voicing issues that need to be addressed.

» From what I learned, I will be more patient, understanding, and work harder to have families understand their position not only for themselves, but for children they are connected to and their community.

» I will use what I learned to help me when joining groups regarding leadership tools.

» I would like to be part of a group in my community.

» Learning more about different community organizations to join and deciding which align best with my purpose.

» Being more aware of someone's culture and understand how and why one does things a certain way depending on their cultural beliefs.

» Being opened and understanding to culture differences.

» I will be more mindful of other cultures when in practice and also ensure that I obtain a level of cultural competency before engaging members of varying cultures when applicable.

» I will use what I learned to improve myself and how I work in groups.
» I will be able to use what I learned to be able to join a group or lead a group effectively.
» Prepare for future leadership roles.
» I feel like I will be able to more relate and organize myself to deal with different types of groups.
» Understanding the very importance of being prepared for meetings and coming prepared. This not only means with "a listening ear but also a voice to add information and also to ask questions.

Participants’ Requests for More Training and Information
Participants’ responses to a question that asked for any topics in which they would like more information reflected enthusiasm and motivation for learning more about serving on groups. Across the three grant years, participant responses included the following topics:

- Public speaking; Effective speaking
- How to start a group
- New Jersey groups; organizations; and community meetings
- Knowing when to delegate
- How to effectively close a group meeting
- Mental health wellness and life coaching
- Deeper dive into multicultural communication skills
- Deeper dive into using data for decision making

Empowering Women Leadership Training: Follow-Up Survey

In Year Three, the Leadership Training Follow Up survey was implemented three months following the training, in June 2022. Invitations containing an anonymous link to the survey were emailed to 23 individuals with valid email addresses who completed the training. Of the 23, a total of 19 responded (response rate = 83%). All 19 submitted the English version of the survey.

Of the 19 responses, two were excluded due to their responses of Uncertain/Don’t remember to a screening question that asked if they participated in the Leadership Training, thus leaving a total of 17 surveys for analysis.

Involvement in Local Community

To assess whether the leadership training influenced participants to become more involved in their communities, a survey question asked, “Since participating in the Serving on Groups Leadership training, are you more involved in your local community by participating in any community groups, advisory groups, parent or professional groups, faith-based groups, or any other group working to make a change?”

Of the 17 respondents, a majority of 65% reported that they are more involved in their local communities, while 35% reported that they are not more involved. Thus, three months after completing the Empowering Women Leadership Training, the majority of participants reported
being more involved in their local community by participating in groups working to make a change.

More Involved in Local Community after Leadership Training

Of the 17 respondents, 31% (n=8) reported that they are currently participating in 3 groups and 8% (n=2) reported they are currently participating in one group. Meanwhile, 27% (n=7) reported participating in 0 groups and no participants reported participating in two groups. This finding suggests that those who reported participating in groups tended to participate in more than one group.

Number of Current Groups (N=17)
**Group Names**

An open-ended survey question asked participants to provide the name of the group/s with which they are involved. A total of 24 unique groups were mentioned by 10 respondents.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Group</th>
<th>Frequency (n)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Connecting Dover</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Evolve Women of Color</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ali</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>CNA of Essex County</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Community board meetings</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dover Food Access Group</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Early childhood literacy group</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Empower women leadership</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fatherhood</td>
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<tr>
<td>Free Teens Youth.org</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Greater Newark</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Helping family</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hudson County Council for Young Children</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parent</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parents that care Leadership and Education</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Policy Council</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Safe conversation</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>School/community liaison</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>SPAN</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total Family Solution</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Volunteer in Kids Ministry</td>
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</table>
Topics Addressed by Groups
A survey question asked respondents (N=10) to indicate the topics addressed by any groups with which they are involved, by selecting all that apply from a list of 12 choices. The most commonly reported topics were Mental health (n=8), Community supports (n=8); and Racial justice (n=4).

Length of Time Involved with Groups
For each group listed, participants were asked to indicate how long they had been involved with the group. Of the 26 groups listed, respondents (N=10) reported 38% as 3 months or less; 12% as 4-6 months; 15% as 6-12 months and 35% as More than 12 months. This finding suggests that following the Empowering Women Leadership Training, participants continued to be involved with their existing groups and also joined new groups.
Group Experiences
Participants’ group experiences were assessed using a 5-point agreement scale to rate five indicator statements related to participants’ perceptions of the group’s productivity; extent to which participants’ opinions are represented and valued; whether the group is worthwhile; and whether the participant feels welcome at group meetings. Of the 10 respondents, 100% reported Strongly agree or Agree with each of the five indicator statements, suggesting their group experiences were extremely positive.

Helping Others Learn about Serving on Groups
Of 16 respondents, 75% reported that since participating in the Empowering Women Leadership Training, they have helped family members and/or other interested individuals learn about serving on groups, while 25% reported they had not done so.
Empowering Women Leadership Training Impacts

An open-ended survey question asked participants to describe their biggest achievements or successes as a result of participating in the leadership training. Those who responded (N=16) described **improved leadership skills; increased confidence; motivation to participate in community groups; helping others; improved advocacy skills; and networking.** Individual responses included the following:

- It has given me the tools to become an effective leader.
- Improved Communication Skills, More Adaptability, Improved Interpersonal Skills
- I have learned new ways of letting someone’s voice feel heard.
- I learned I can achieve anything I set my mind to. Always be positive and take care of your mental health.
- My biggest achievement I would say is being able have more confidence in myself.
- I'm more motivated to partake in community groups.
- We are able to provide services to people in need.
- My biggest achievement is that now I am able to help other to get involve in groups and meetings.
- I would describe getting the youth to open up and have a needed conversation has proven to be of great success.
- Being more outspoken.
- The training further supported me with the tools to take my advocacy work to the right spaces with the intent to ultimately have a seat at the decision-making table. I am now well equipped with the necessary tools when that time arises.
- My mind is more stable and less disturbed. I'm healthy and happy
- Connecting with people in the group, hearing other peoples' stories/experiences.
- Meeting other people.
- Learned a lot.
» I obtained information that I can use in the future.

Challenges and/or Barriers to Becoming More Involved
In response to an open-ended question asking participants to describe the biggest challenges/barriers to becoming more involved in community groups, responses (N=16) included the following themes (note some responses included more than one theme):

- Time (mentioned by 5)
- Trust (mentioned by 5)
- Cultural differences, understanding the language (mentioned by 2)
- Identifying appropriate groups; lack of awareness of groups and lack of opportunities to join groups (mentioned by 2)
- Dealing with the magnitude of community problems such as homelessness and mental health issues (mentioned by 1)
- Accepting challenges is an important part of parenting and community involvement (mentioned by 1)
- Government policies (mentioned by 1)
- Building healthy relationships (mentioned by 1)
- Helping people understand the importance of patience (mentioned by 1)

Participants' Final Comments and Suggestions
Participants who responded to an open-ended question asking for final comments (N=5) expressed appreciation for the training and the trainers, while some offered suggestions for improvement, such as ending sessions on time and conducting refresher trainings.

Notable Quotes
» The sessions were wonderful. Since they were scheduled during the workday more attention could have been paid to the time, they typically went about 30 minutes beyond the scheduled time.
» More of such trainings should be done, there should also be like refresher courses for those already trained.
» I truly enjoyed and learned a lot from the leadership workshop and I will continue to use the skills I've learned. Although I have leadership skills by nature, I admire you ladies for taken the time out to create a space where people come together to discuss leadership and what leadership really is. Thank YOU.
» I love the training and I would like to be more involved in the meetings.
» I enjoyed the leadership training and would like to have another series in the near future.

Empowering Women Peer Support Groups
Evaluation Response
In Year Three, 39 Peer Support Group Feedback tools were completed by individuals from 12 virtual support groups. Due to the virtual format of the groups, the total number of participants cannot be determined; therefore, it was not possible to calculate a response rate.
Participants’ Primary Language
Of the 39 respondents, 97% completed the English version of the feedback tool and only one individual completed the Spanish version. This was different compared to Year Two, in which 46% of 50 participants completed the English version and 54% completed the Spanish version; and in Year One, in which 60% completed the English version and 40% completed the Spanish version.

Program leaders may wish to consider meeting with the evaluation consultant to discuss possible reasons for this Year Three difference and identify any strategies, if needed, to increase participation of Spanish speaking individuals in future evaluation activities.
Participants’ Region of Residence

In Year Three, participants reported residing in 16 counties located in the Northern (62%); Central (21%); and Southern (18%) regions of New Jersey.

![Pie chart showing participants' region of residence: North (62%), Central (21%), South (18%).]

Frequency of Peer Group Attendance

Of the 39 participants, slightly more than half (54%) reported that it was their first time attending a SPAN peer support group, while slightly less than half (46%) reported they have attended SPAN peer groups in the past. Of those who reported attending groups in the past (N=18), 50% reported they have attended more than five groups in the past; 22% reported they attended four to five groups in the past; and 28% reported they attended one to three groups in the past.

Peer Group Learning

A question on the feedback tool asked participants how much they learned about eight key program content topics, using five answer choices: 1=Nothing at all; 2=A Little; 3=A Moderate Amount; 4=A Lot; and 0=N/A—the group did not discuss this topic. For analysis, ratings of 0 (N/A) were excluded, leaving the 4-point scale.

Average ratings for each of the 8 indicators suggested that peer group participants perceived they had learned a moderate to high amount in all eight topics, with scores that ranged from 3.6 (highest) for Stress Management to 3.1 (lowest) for Oral Health and Lead Poisoning Prevention.
Comparison by Grant Year

Participants' perceived knowledge ratings were similarly high for each of the three grant years, with total average scores that differed by one-tenth of a percentage point between Year One and Year Two (both 3.4) and Year Three (3.3) on the 4-point scale.
Peer Group Experiences
Participants’ ratings of their experience with the peer support groups were high, with 97-100% of participants reporting Strongly Agree or Agree with all five indicator statements.
Comparison by Grant Year
Participants’ ratings of their experience with the peer support groups were similarly high across all three grant years, with 96-100% of participants reporting Strongly Agree or Agree with all five indicator statements.
Best-Liked Aspects of the Peer Group
The evaluation tool included a question that asked participants to indicate which aspects of the peer support group they liked best by selecting all that apply from a list of five categories. In Year Three, of the 39 participants, 74% reported Information and learning about specific topics; followed by 44% who reported Feeling supported by the other people in the group; 36% who reported Hearing about other people’s experiences; and 31% who reported Group interaction. Three (8%) participants who selected Other specified that “kindness” and “safe space” were additional aspects of the peer group that they liked best.

Note: Respondents could select more than one response, therefore percentages may sum to more than 100%.
Comparison by Grant Year

Across all three grant years, Information and learning about specific topics was consistently reported as the best-liked aspect of the peer group (reported by 80% in Year One; 71% in Year Two; and 74% in Year Three) compared to Feeling supported by other people in the group; Hearing about other people’s experiences; and Group interaction. This finding suggests that the supportive peer group setting is an effective way for participants to learn the Empowering Women core content.

What Participants Liked Best About the Peer Group

By Grant Year

Note: Respondents could select more than one response, therefore percentages may sum to more than 100%.

Peer Group Participant Feedback

Participant feedback from Year Three centered on the group’s relevant topics, clear explanations, and meaningful discussion. Some participants offered suggestions for future improvements, including more interactive presentations and making Spanish-language or translation more available.

Notable Quotes

» The presenters were great. The topic of stress was very well explained. And fabulous suggestions.
» I love that women are comfortable sharing their experience; it makes it more personal.
» The subject of Domestic Abuse was powerful and the conversation was personal, insightful and meaningful.
» Excellent presentation. The topic was very timely due to so many stressing issues that we are experiencing these days.
» Thank you for doing this. I would like to help support parents. I have found some of the resources available in my county helpful and others not so helpful. I would not want what
happened to me and my family to happen to any other family. We need to make meaningful assessments of what is done and why the systems of care fall short. We can make things better but we need to understand the perspectives of where we are failing. Mental health & wellness is one area where we need to make significant investment but we need to understand the problem and I believe we are not understanding the trees for the forest, sadly. I know we can do better.

» I find the information quite on point and well needed and for sure is relevant and will be useful to us. The leaders are very knowledgeable but one or two could be more engaging instead of just reading the info straight to us. Sometimes it appears as I am watching the news when I want to hear them expound more and be more engaging.

» More information like that but in Spanish or with translation available.

**Conclusion and Next Step Recommendations**

The findings presented in this report suggest that, at the end of its third and final year, the SPAN Empowering Women program successfully achieved its dual goals of providing diverse women of childbearing age with peer support; and of training women to be peer leaders, educators, and advocates in their communities to reduce the risk of preventable IDDs.

In all three grant years, participants in the SPAN Empowering Women leadership training reported **higher levels of knowledge in all seven of the program’s key content areas** after participating in the training compared to before. Participants rated their **training experiences similarly high for all three grant years**, with total scores on a 5-point scale of **4.4** in Year Three and **4.5** in Years Two and Three (both).

Participant feedback supported these findings, with **valuable takeaways that included support and connections made among the training participants; learning about the core training topics; learning and/or strengthening leadership skills; tools and resources; and learning about cultural competence**.

Participants also expressed plans to use what they learned. Their responses reflected a sense of confidence and optimism about becoming more involved in their communities and sharing what they learned with others, with themes that included plans to **participate in community groups; use skills gained in their professional roles; for advocacy; cultural competence; and self-improvement**. Many reported plans to **share what they learned with family and friends**.

Results from a follow-up survey suggest additional positive impacts three months following the training, including a majority of **65% who reported that they are more involved in their local communities** by participating in group/s working to make a change. Participants reported additional important impacts, including **improved leadership skills; increased confidence; motivation to participate in community groups; helping others; improved advocacy skills; and networking**. Further, three-quarters reported that since participating in the leadership training, they have **helped family members and/or other interested individuals learn about serving on groups**.
Findings from the program’s peer support groups showed similarly positive outcomes in all three grant years, with participants reporting moderate to high learning in the program’s 10 key content areas, including risks of alcohol use while pregnant; risks of drug use; lead poisoning prevention; social determinants of health; where to find help in their community; how to advocate to improve their community; oral health; and stress reduction as a result of their peer group participation. Aspects of the peer support groups that participants liked best included information and learning about specific topics; feeling supported by the other people in the group; hearing about other people’s experiences; and group interaction. These best-liked aspects were reported consistently across all three grant years, suggesting that the supportive peer group setting is an effective way for participants to learn the Empowering Women core content.

As with all evaluations, the Empowering Women evaluation has limitations. For example, small sample sizes, convenience samples, and lack of a comparison/control group limits the extent to which the results may be generalized beyond the program participants, as may the modifications and adaptations made to the program and evaluation instruments due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, the evaluation relied primarily on participants' self-reported information, which may result in a subjectivity bias (i.e., participants’ reported perceptions may be influenced by their experiences and feelings). Despite these limitations, the evaluation findings may provide useful information and insights for future programmatic planning.

Program leadership may wish to consider the following next step recommendations based on the Year Three evaluation findings:

**Next Step Recommendations**

- Discuss strategies for increasing evaluation response rates, including encouraging participants to complete the evaluation tools before, during, and after their program participation; allocating time during the training to complete the tools; and, if possible, offering an incentive.

- Consider expanding the program's reach to include additional populations and subgroups, for increased inclusivity and diversity in addition to women.
Appendix: Logic Model

Empowering Women Empowering Women in Community Leadership for Healthier Families Logic Model

Goal: To lower the incidence of Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS), Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD), and lead poisoning in New Jersey by building community capacity to enhance engagement and leadership opportunities among women of childbearing age for the prevention of FAS/FASD and lead poisoning.

Inputs
- Funding
- Program leadership and staff
- Existing community partnerships

Activities
- Conduct focus groups
- Prepare training curricula
- Train Family Resource Specialists (FRSs) to train women to be leaders and advocates in preventing FAS/FASD and lead poisoning prevention.
- Trained FRSs train women in target communities to be leaders and advocates.
- Facilitate Peer Support Groups for women in target communities.
- Hold Women’s Leadership mini summits
- Build and/or strengthen community partnerships

Outputs
- Number of focus group participants
  - Type of focus groups held (target: 1 English, 1 Spanish)
- Training presentation slide decks and supporting materials
- Number of FRSs trained and number of women trained by FRSs.
- Number of women who participate in peer support groups
- Number of mini summits held, number of attendees, topics addressed.

Short-Term Outcomes
- Increased knowledge and skills in program key content areas:
  - FRSs
  - FAS/FASD
  - Risks of alcohol use
  - Lead poisoning prevention
  - Social Determinants of Health
  - Health Equity
  - Leadership skills
  - Advocacy skills
- Women in Target Communities
  - FAS/FASD
  - Risks of alcohol use
  - Lead poisoning prevention
  - Social Determinants of Health
  - Health Equity
  - Leadership skills
  - Advocacy skills

Mid-Term Outcomes
- Participating women increase healthy behaviors to prevent FAS/FASD and lead poisoning.
- Participating women engage in local and/or state leadership and advocacy efforts related to FAS/FASD prevention and lead poisoning prevention.

Long-Term Outcomes
- Women abstain from alcohol use before and during current and future pregnancies.
- Lower incidence of infants born with FAS/FASD.
- Lower incidence of lead poisoning.

Note: The long-term outcomes will not be evaluated in the current project but are included in the logic model for completeness.