



# Family Initiative

# Autism Community Support

Family Initiative, Incorporated

Southwest Florida

(Lee, Charlotte, & Collier Counties)





As a result of Legislative and community support, Family Initiative has increased its autism support programs and community engagement initiatives significantly over the last year. In the past year, we have expanded our Autism Arts programming to offer Autism ArtPlay, Improv, Hip Hop Dance, and Music Jam class for children and adolescents on the Autism Spectrum. These programs are critical to the long-term success of individuals on the Autism Spectrum, as supported by both clinical research and national best practice models. We have also grown our role in educating and engaging with law enforcement organizations throughout Southwest Florida. We partner with Lee County Sheriff's Office, Cape Coral Police Department, Charlotte County Sheriff's Office, and Hendry County Sheriff Office to educate law enforcement officers, in addition to co-hosting community safety fairs. These programs are intended to educate autism families about available safety resources in the community, including the ReUnite Program with Lee County Sheriff's Office, and to support better understanding between the autism and law enforcement communities.

Our previous appropriation project included expanding access to both community-based support programs and clinical services for children and adolescents in the community. Additionally, it included the construction of an autism center to support the autism community and the introduction of the Autism Navigator position to support families throughout our community. As a result, we have been able to exponentially expand access to services for autism families throughout Southwest Florida, as reflected in the data below. Creating a central point of access to link families to services ensures early intervention and strengthening the long-term outcomes of the children served. The Autism Navigator also initiated and facilitated the safety programs with law enforcement agencies as stated above. These efforts to connect and engage families also prevent tragic child fatalities by connecting families to available safety resources.

New Screening Assessments Completed by Age of Child

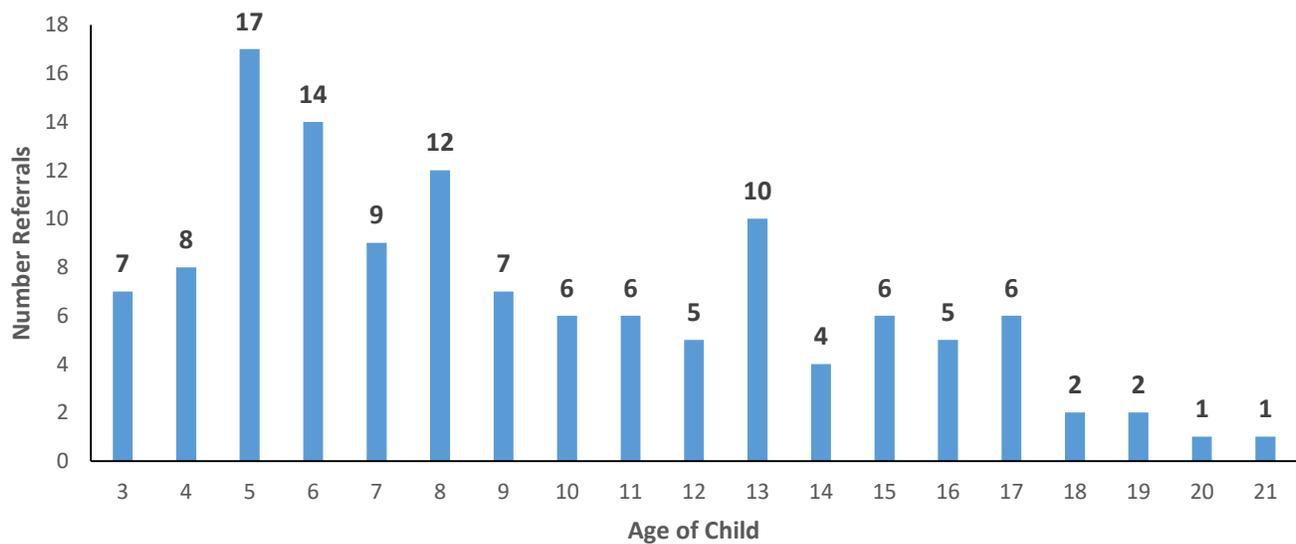


Figure 1. Number of new screenings completed by Autism Navigator from October 2018-June 2019. Total is 128 new screenings.

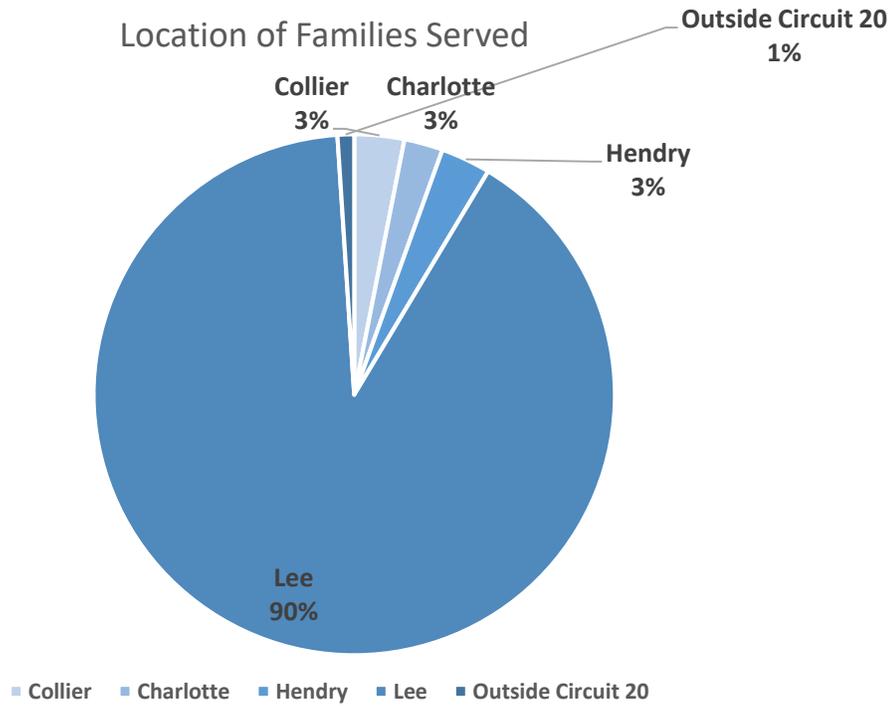


Figure 2. Location of families served by county.

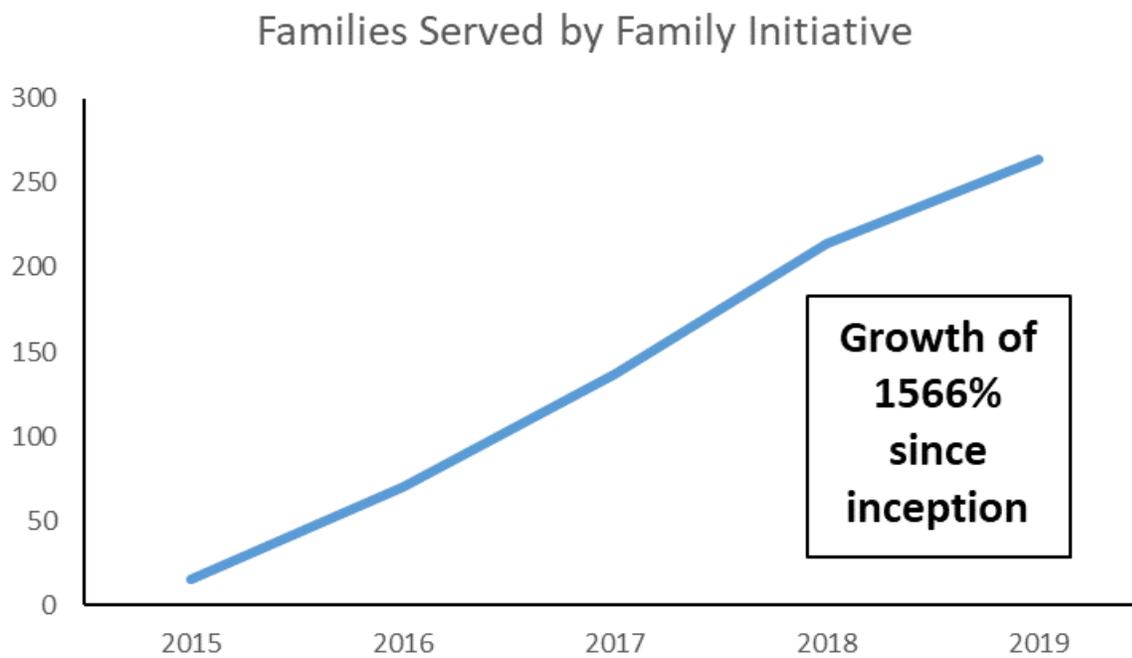


Figure 3. Growth in families served by Family Initiative programs since beginning in October 2015 through July 2019.

### Percentage of Families Seeking ABA Services

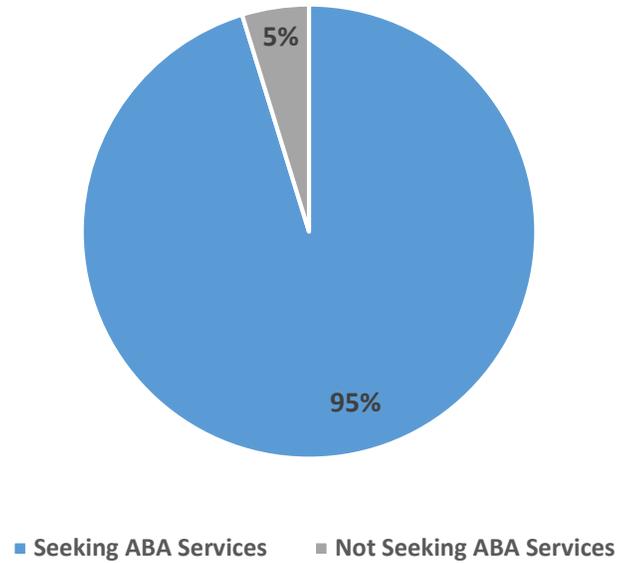


Figure 4. Families requesting Applied Behavior Analysis Services (through any agency).



## **Family Initiative Autism Community Support Project**

In serving hundreds of autism families across our community, numerous parents have reported concerns including significant difficulty locating providers to work with their growing children who have deficits with language skills or basic self-care skills, those who have limited to no safety awareness as well as children and adolescents who engage in behaviors such as refusal to go to school, high levels of aggression, or antisocial behaviors. As these children grow into teenagers and young adults, their parents report increasing difficulty managing them safely due to their size and age.

Working alongside Cape Coral Police Department and several other law enforcement agencies in our community, they have expressed concern regarding the lack of resources available to provide intensive behavioral support services for children on the Autism Spectrum. Law enforcement reports they are called out to numerous residences due to domestic disturbances, which turn out to be ungovernable children/adolescents on the Autism Spectrum. These officers stated there are no community-based providers who are able to work with these families. Additionally, the Saluscare Outpatient team reported their number one concern was the lack of available community-based behavioral services for school-aged children and adolescents on the autism spectrum. By funding these critically needed services in our community it will offer preventative community-based intervention, which serves as a resource for law enforcement, behavioral health providers, and most importantly autism families throughout Southwest Florida.

We are requesting a \$401,660 nonrecurring grant to expand community-based autism treatment for school-aged children, adolescents, and young adults. The community-based treatment will include autism-related therapies, including occupational and applied behavior analysis services for treating underserved children in Southwest Florida diagnosed on the autism spectrum. Without treatment, these families experience the stated concerns and many more, significantly limiting barriers.

The request for the \$401,660 grant also specifies \$50,000 will pay an Executive Director, along with a \$50,000 match from the Southwest Florida Community Foundation and another \$120,360 will cover the cost of building occupancy, equipment, insurance, and supplies. The remaining \$231,300 will be used for clinical and support staff salaries.

Our program employs a team of clinicians who provide intensive, high quality Applied Behavioral Analysis, the only recommended treatment by the US. Surgeon General for individuals diagnosed with autism. Managing their child's behavior and teaching them skills are some of the biggest issues impacting families who have a child with autism. Additionally, we also have a team of highly experienced and qualified Occupational Therapists who work in collaboration with our ABA clinicians. As part of the state grant, Family Initiative must provide data showing that its program is making measurable improvements in such skills as communication, behavior reduction and social interaction. Family Initiative will send invoices to the funding state Agency for Persons with Disabilities after services have been provided to children and families.

