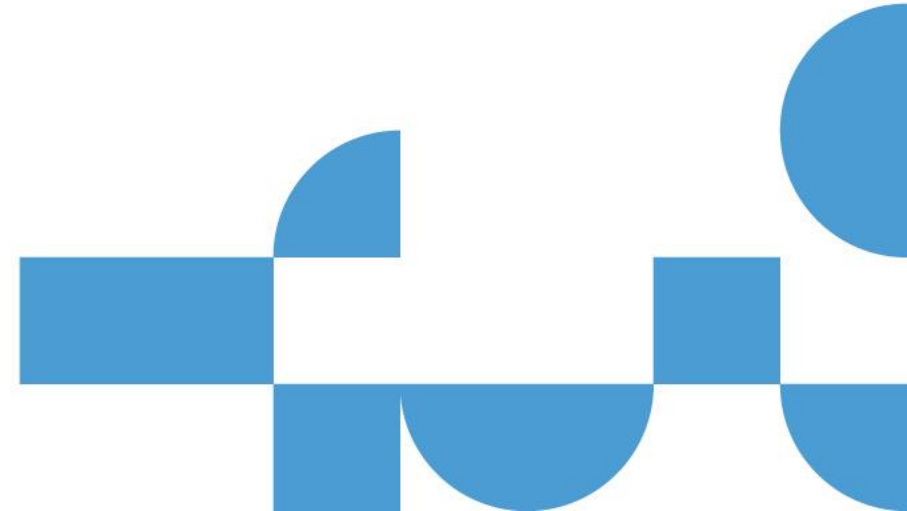


Creating Indicators and Improving Outcomes for North Carolina START

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Introductions: START Evaluation Team



**SCHOOL OF
SOCIAL WORK**



CHILDREN AND FAMILY FUTURES
Strengthening Partnerships, Improving Family Outcomes



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- Buncombe County
START Team
- North Carolina
START Pilot Sites

**Creating Indicators
Project:**

<https://ssw.unc.edu/ma/>

Contrasts for Your Consideration

Traditional vs. Empowerment Evaluation

Traditional

- External
- Expert
- Reports only for leadership or funder
- Independent Judgement

Empowerment

- External but Internally Involved
- Coach
- Self-Determination & Capacity Building
- Collaboration

Empowerment Evaluation

Evaluation is a process, **not a report**

Involves key stakeholders throughout the process-gathering, analyzing, and using data about a program and its outcomes

Empowers jurisdictions to engage in **systems change**

What would Empowerment Evaluation look like in START?

Shared goals for evaluation process

- Understanding county's goals for implementing START
- Discussion topics in evaluation meetings
- Option to customize spreadsheet or suggest outcomes to explore in administrative data

Teaching data analysis skills in Excel

- Troubleshooting data entry and formulas
- Adding or updating charts

County staff as experts of documenting families' stories and leading Continuous Quality Improvement processes

Transparency with staff across roles during evaluation meetings and shared file storage within the organization

Evaluation Team: Give-Get Grid

What Evaluation Team Expects to Contribute

- Facilitating bi-monthly meetings
- Technical support with data analysis and fidelity monitoring
- Evaluating program outcomes in relation to a comparison group using administrative data
- Interviewing site staff about program strengths and challenges

What Evaluation Team Hopes to Receive

- Building collaborative working relationships
- Strengthening evidence-base for START program outcomes as a Well-Supported Practice in the Title IV-E Clearinghouse
- Monthly submission of spreadsheet and turnover updates, as applicable
- Feedback on what's working well and areas for improvement

What Pilot Sites Hope to Share with Evaluation Team

Includes themes from Carteret, Craven, Jackson, Henderson, Orange, and Rockingham county DSS leadership

- Open communication and responsiveness between teams about questions that may arise
- Improving NC DSS's standard data collection and data quality related to substance use treatment
- Information about referrals, case acceptance, cases accepted
- Discussion about our successes and how this is working for us
- Sharing and exploring any challenges, barriers we come across and feedback as it comes up
- Understanding that evaluation is an ongoing process
- Adding additional data elements we are interested in for our county
- Troubleshooting data entry

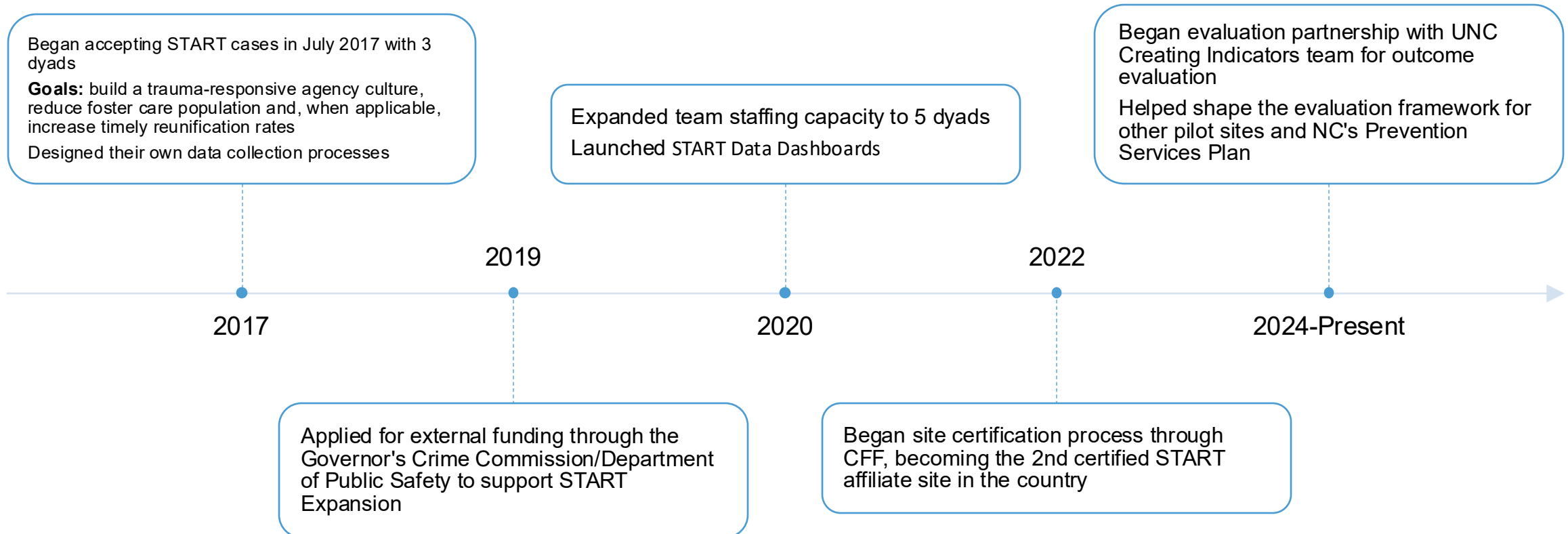
Support in understanding the data and the people and stories behind the numbers

What Pilot Sites Hope to Learn from Evaluation Process and Apply to Practice

Includes themes from Carteret, Craven, Jackson, Henderson, Orange, and Rockingham county DSS leadership

- Learning by doing
- Interpreting data trends to make practice improvements, as applicable
- Information that supports effective and helpful service delivery
- Access to real time data so that changes can be made along the way
- Metrics to advocate in our community for the population's needs, whether it's treatment needs or recommendations about where our families have been more successful
- Understanding how many children, *if any*, enter foster care, the relationship between when they enter foster care and other events in the START timeline; how long they're staying in the foster care system and higher rates of reunification; decrease in foster care population because children aren't entering care
- Numbers to describe trends as we perceive them that we can talk about with people who aren't in the work about what's working and what's not, particularly around reunification timeframes and time to substance use treatment engagement
- Comparing outcomes to regular in-home services/permanency planning cases
- Guidance around Title IV-E Prevention Services Plan and moving towards Title IV-E reimbursement
- Access to training materials and transparency around evaluation process
- Easier approach to calculating the time between timeline dates

Buncombe County START Model History

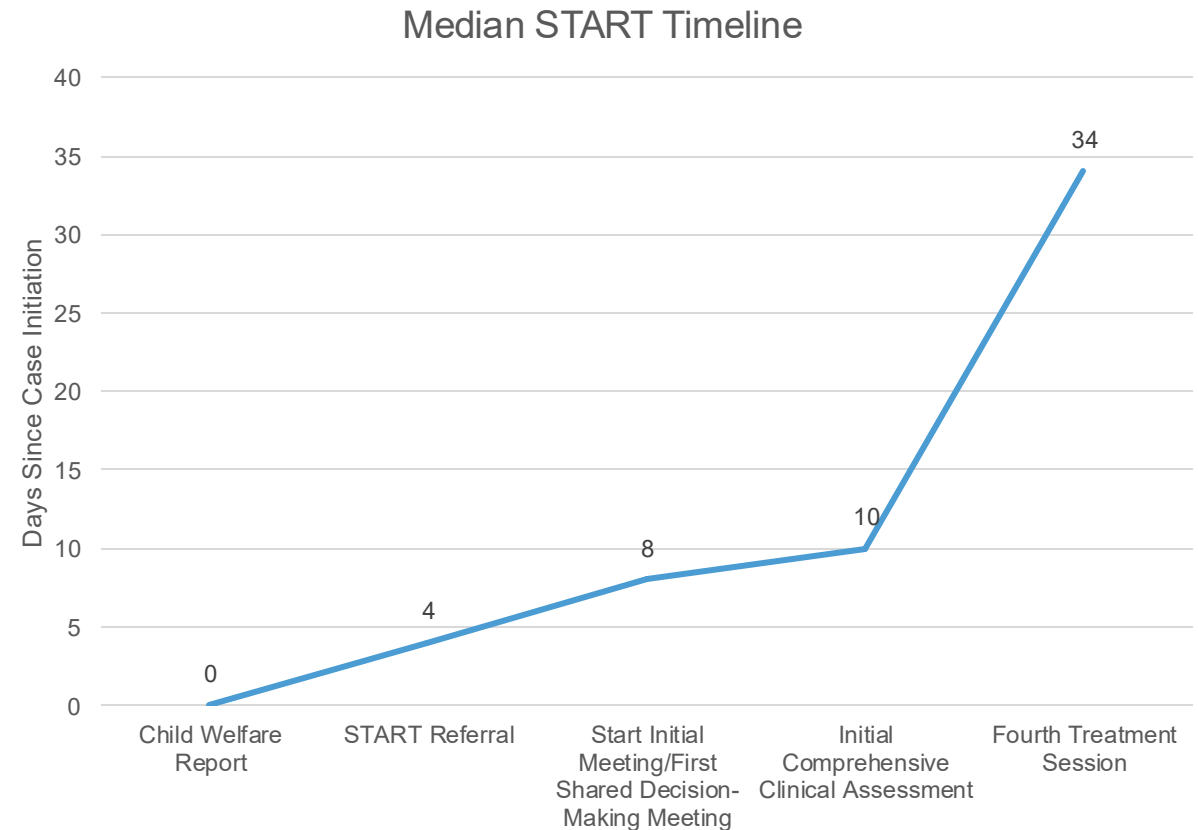


Buncombe START Data Collection

Data source: Buncombe ISSI
(START Referrals, Closed Cases)

Between July 2018 (1 year following START implementation) and April 2025...

- 355 Referrals to START, **39% accepted**
 - Among not accepted group, **74% met START eligibility criteria**
- 130 Families (199 Children) with **closed START cases**
- **Median Case Length:** 312 days from Child Welfare Report to START Case Closure
- **Median Time to 4 Treatment Sessions:** 34 days from Report to Child Welfare



Outcome Evaluation: START-Eligible Sample

Data source: Services
Information System
Administrative Data,
Buncombe ISSI (START
Referrals)

	# of Children
Intervention Group	125
Total Comparison Group	561
Eligible Referral, Not Accepted	124
Eligible, Not Referred	437
Total Sample Size	686

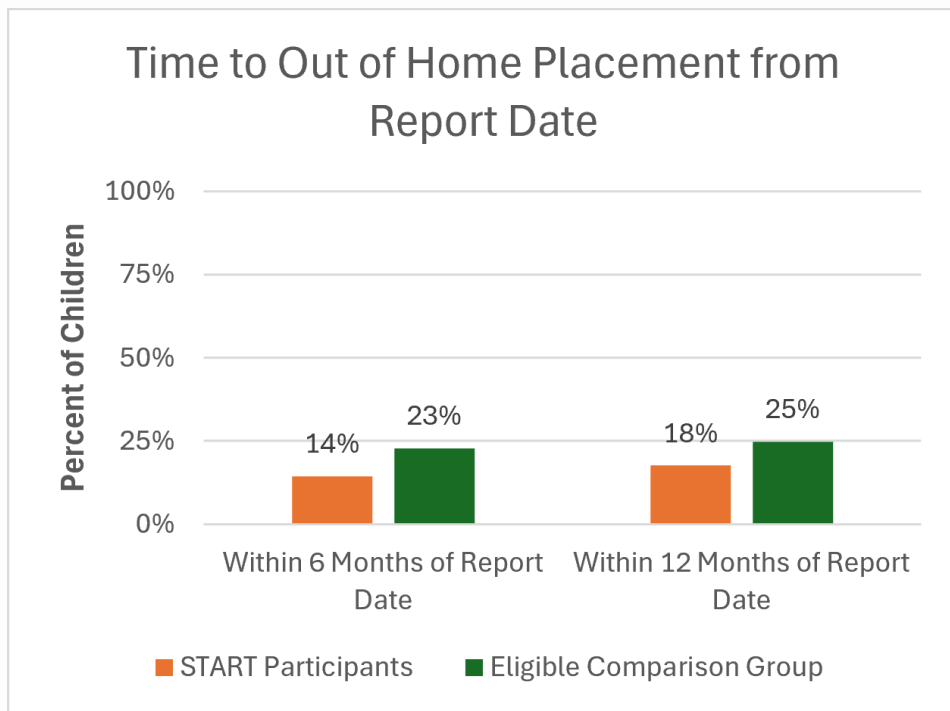
Filtering criteria for total sample:

- Any caregiver substance use (alcohol and/or substances) as a contributory factor to the case finding
 - Child age group (0- 5)
- Investigation finding (substantiated or services needed)
- Date of Index Event (report received after July 2018, case closed before July 2024)
- Participation in In-Home Services or Foster Care Services following eligible report
- Ongoing Services Case opened after eligible child welfare report date
 - Within county offering START

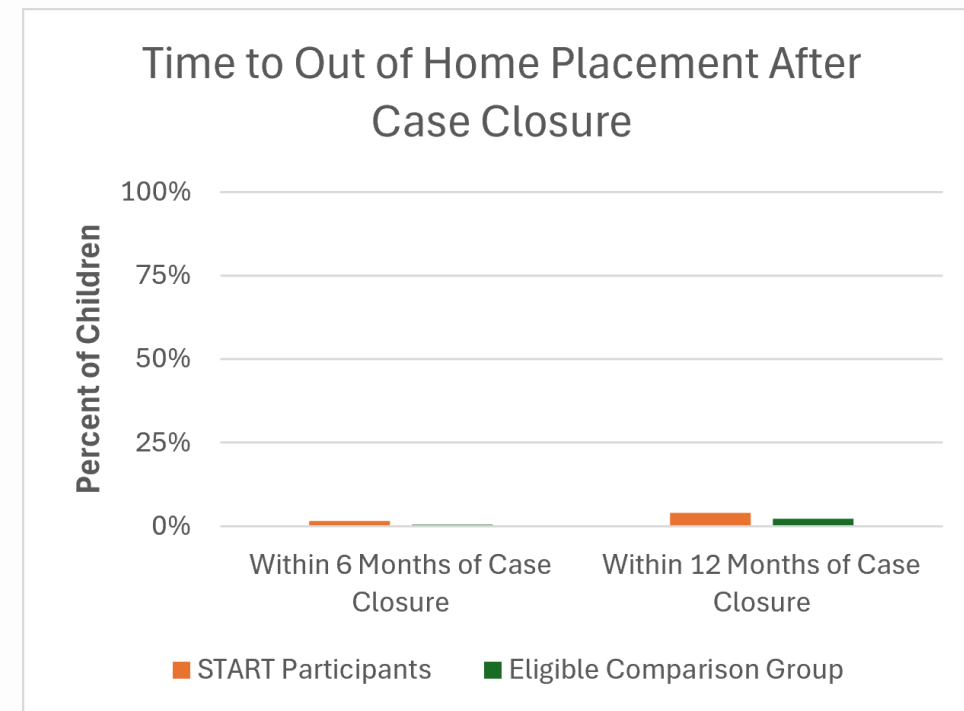
Total sample represents **45% of all substantiated reports for the 0-5 age group** in Buncombe County during the study period

Placement Outcomes

Out of home placements in DSS custody are **lower among START participants** at any time following the report date and within the first 12 months following the report date



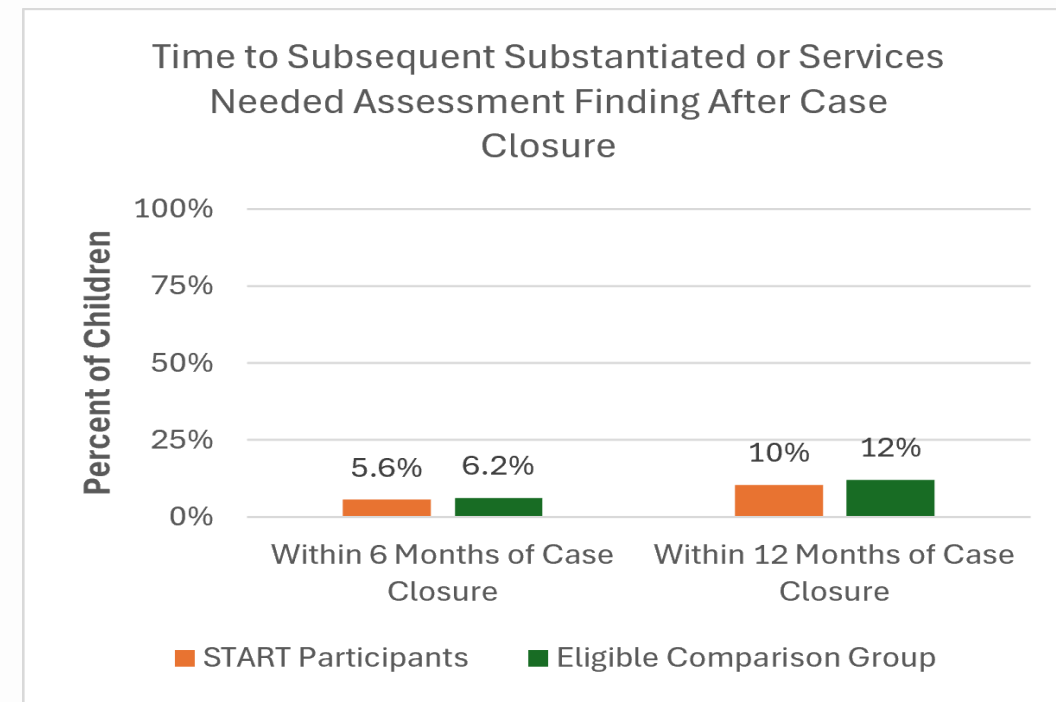
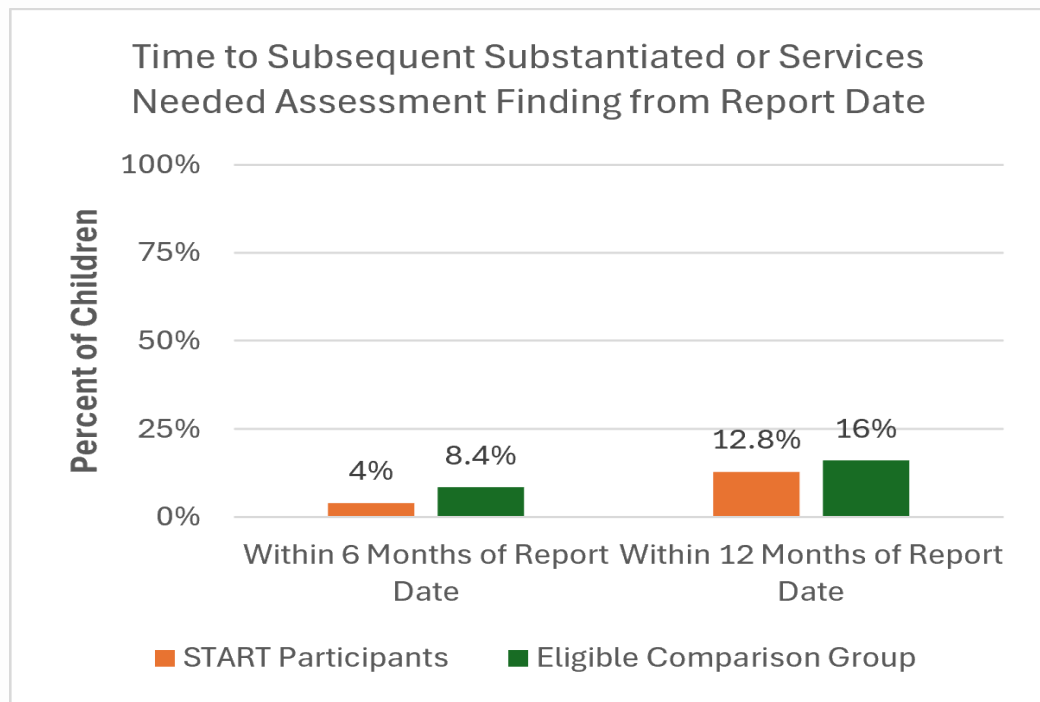
Group differences are **statistically significant from the report date interval (6 months, 12 months)**



Group differences are **not significant following case closure (6 months or 12 months)**

Child Safety Outcomes

Data source: Services
Information
System Administrative Data



Subsequent referrals to child welfare with a substantiated or services needed finding are **lower for START participants** across follow-up periods

Findings are not statistically significant **from the report date** or **following case closure**

How did your team feel about data collection in the beginning? Did it change over time?

"Terrified, mainly because we didn't really have a framework for how to do this...Nobody told me about [data collection] when I applied for the position...We had anecdotal information, but we knew we needed numbers to verify that information. We made a lot of shifts...and we had really good guidance and support from CFF in trying to automate it so we were not hand counting it like we were."

Besides the CFF site certification process, when has reviewing available data been most helpful?

"Whenever we've wanted to expand the program, we've reviewed data around referrals received and outcome information...whenever we look at writing contracts each budget cycle...Being able to tell [funders], this is the work that START is doing and we need funding to continue the program."

What are you most proud of since implementing START?

"We are constantly fighting battles...and we keep going...and we're still doing something right. I'm proud of this team and our leadership that is invested in START."

"I'm proud of the resiliency of every team member and our ability to navigate through unsurmountable challenges. It's truly remarkable that we keep doing what we're doing and people are still employed and we had a START Initial Meeting today."

How might initial findings from the outcome evaluation shape service delivery in your county?

"It continues to stress the importance of this model.

This supports the why behind why we need support...We've got this data and the comparison data speaks volumes and may encourage other counties to take this leap...It may help to support implementation across the state."

"Using this data whenever we have meetings with judges to show how critical cases being continued is to permanency."

Q&A with Buncombe County

**What have been
the biggest
barriers to
implementing
START?**

**What are some
of your success
stories?**