

# Retrospective Evaluation: A new twist on assessing program effectiveness

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## Abstract

This poster session highlights the findings from a program evaluation using a retrospective methodology. Strong Start is an innovative program delivered to expectant and parenting unmarried couples in Cuyahoga County. Prior to implementing the retrospective methodology, low participant completion of evaluation tools provided limited information to assess program effectiveness and efficacy. The retrospective methodology was instituted in the 3<sup>rd</sup> year of the program. At the end of the program, participants are asked 15 questions which are presented in the format of “*Before*” Strong Start and “*After*” Strong Start. Whereas in previous years, completion rates were below 40%, current completion rates are nearly 90%. Results indicate that on each question positive change was recognized by the participants. Poster will highlight those changes as well reflect information regarding client satisfaction and client learning. Strategies for implementing retrospective evaluations will be identified along with supportive empirical literature as part of this poster session.



## Strong Start of Cuyahoga County Program Overview

Strong Start for Cuyahoga’s Families is a voluntary program that is designed to offer a “one-stop” shop experience of family support, education and resources for couples who are either **expecting a baby** (*mom can be at any stage of pregnancy*) or have a new baby that is **3 months old or younger** at the time they enroll. Couples who participate in the program **MUST** be 17 years of age or older. Couples who participate in the program will be provided with the tools needed to enhance the life of their child.

Weekly programs are provided in convenient neighborhood locations throughout the City of Cleveland. Services are also offered in Spanish.

## Methodology

### Development of Retrospective Evaluation Tool

Year four marked the implementation of a new evaluation instrument specifically developed for Strong Start of Cuyahoga County. The original intent of using the ENRICH and FACES IV instruments proved impractical and not very useful for gauging Strong Start’s impact on couples. Many obstacles contributed to the evaluation plan revision:

- Pre/post design too cumbersome for agencies to administer
- Difficulty matching pre/posts responses
- Too long to administer/complete
- Instruments did not align with *Better Together* curriculum

Several considerations were important in the development of a new instrument:

- Ease of administration - single administration
- Close alignment with curriculum and Federal PARTS evaluation
- Readability for low literacy
- Self assessment of learning as a measure

Retrospective type of survey instruments, also referred to in the literature as a retrospective pretest or a pre then post evaluation, are gaining popularity due to the ease of administration and diminishing some threats to validity in traditional pre/post testing for program evaluation such as the “response shift effect”. Using the retrospective design, the participant can use the same frame of reference for reporting the before and after behavior with the newly acquired knowledge.

## References:

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Year	Total # of Graduates	# of Usable Evaluations	% Graduates Evaluated
One	31	18	31%
Two	128	22	17%
Three	160	32	31%
<i>New retrospective instrument introduced for year four</i>			
Four	266	214	80%

## Discussion

The retrospective tool is proving useful through increasing the response rate of the participants. These data have been used to inform the program administrators and services providers of areas of strength in the program’s delivery, as well as areas in need of improvement. From the perspective of program participants, results show the curriculum is contributing to positive change in communication, interpersonal interaction, and parenting knowledge and behaviors. Continued use of the retrospective method appears to offer benefits to not only to program administration but also offers insight to the effectiveness of the curriculum and program satisfaction.

