



Parent Perceptions of Their Success with OhioSTART

This document summarizes interviews with 34 parents who completed the Ohio START program between June 2020 and November 2022 and chose to participate in an interview. The parents lived in 15 predominantly Appalachian Ohio counties. At the time of their interview, all but two parents had their children living with them.

Perception of Services

- Parents consistently reported that they appreciated the supportive and non-judgmental relationships with caseworkers and Family Peer Mentors (FPMs).
- Parents cited consistent communication and their relationships with START staff to be integral to their positive experience.
- Many parents cited their experiences with Family Peer Mentors as being integral to their positive perceptions of OhioSTART.
- Parents appreciated the range of services and supports made available to them, including mental health, parenting skills, legal support, and job training.
- Parents also appreciated the tangible support such as housing aid, financial assistance, transportation, and food assistance.
- In many cases, parents' experiences led to a more positive perception of child protective services, viewing them as supportive allies rather than adversaries.
- Many parents credit OhioSTART for helping them keep custody or reunite with their children if custody was temporarily lost.
- Four parents reported the START program saved or prolonged their life.

"The set of women that I got were amazing. I built a good foundation. They've helped me accomplish quite a few goals. First, getting my daughter back. They're very supportive. They helped me get an apartment. I'm a five-time convicted felon. Been in prison quite a few times. And I'm in a Section 8 apartment. They're just amazing."

– Parent

Family Peer Mentors and Parent Success

- Family Peer Mentors, with personal substance use recovery experience, build a unique rapport with families, offering understanding and sharing recovery challenges and insights.
- The shared lived experience with substance use disorder between FPMs and parents established trust and helped them overcome their initial resistance/skepticism.
- The FPMs' partnership with parents provided a sense of belonging and support, especially for those lacking sober networks, enhancing the model's collaborative approach.
- Parents who completed the OhioSTART model valued the support from their FPMs, including emotional encouragement and practical assistance (e.g., transportation to appointments).
- FPMs' support helped parents overcome recovery barriers and provided a safe space for open struggle sharing, with parents appreciating the non-judgmental approach.
- FPMs' role in community building and resource facilitation is crucial, helping parents feel part of a supportive community and connecting them to essential resources (housing, financial assistance, childcare).

"But she would come over and talk to us once a week as a couple and they helped us work on our marriage. Really, they helped us recognize what the other was feeling when we didn't really take that into consideration. And since then, our marriage has become so strong, so not only did they help me with my relationship with my son, but they've helped me with my relationship with his father as well, which benefits my son in the long run." – Parent



Parent Perceptions of Their Success with OhioSTART

Changes in Family Functioning after OhioSTART

- **Being present for children** – nearly all of the interviewed parents discussed being more present with their children after completing START.
- **Engaging in activities with children** – parents reported they are more engaged and do new and appropriate activities with their children that they did not do before completing START. Changes in activities included things like homework, eating dinner together, and playing games together.
- **Enjoyment in providing care to children** – parents also described an increase in their desire to interact with their children, as well as the joy they experience while providing them care.
- **Maintaining employment for financial stability** – parents acknowledged the financial instability their substance use created for the family. They attributed their improved ability to provide financially for the family to the ability to maintain employment, and the availability of money that would have previously gone toward their substance use.
- **Better emotion regulation and stress management** – parents acknowledged that while they were actively using, they were quicker to become aggravated or lose their temper with their child. After participating in START, they reported having developed skills to regulate emotions and manage stress in a healthier manner.
- **A sense of pride** – many parents demonstrated a sense of pride when describing changes in their parenting after completing the START program, related to their ability to provide for and care for the family.

Yoon, S., Ploss, A., Hutzler, M., Webb, R., Hatfield, A., Lee, J. Y., Munshi, A., Radney, A., & McClellan, J. (2024). Parenting attitudes and behaviors among parents involved with the child welfare system and affected by substance use disorders. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 149, 106657.

START Challenges

When asked about challenges with START, a common response from parents is “none” or “there aren’t any challenges.”

Some parents note the program intensity at the beginning is challenging, specifically noting the high number of appointment/meetings, and feeling overwhelmed.

Parents in Their Own Words

“Me and the mother we fought a lot between coming down or not having drugs. We never took our kids out to get drugs or anything. It was one thing we never used in front of them. We just got along a lot better and we learned how to handle our problems a lot different and became better people for our kids to see.”

“At first, I didn't like it because [it meant] having somebody that I wasn't really in control [of] or just having somebody watch over us. But after we got started in it and it really got rolling.... It really is a great program.”

“I never realized how many people was in my corner until I actually started this program.”

“I wasn't able to provide, I wasn't able to keep the job. Me and my kids prior to this incident, we were bouncing from home to home.”

“For me, it was like I said, a life-changing experience for the better, and I felt like it was truly a blessing.”

“Just all the way around. I'm a completely different person. I'm there. I threw my son his first birthday party since he was a year old. And I did it. I bought the cake. I bought the presents. I wrapped everything. I bought balloons. It was all me.”