

THE SAFE & TOGETHER MODEL™ COLLABORATION KICKSTARTER PROJECT: Otero, New Mexico



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INTRODUCTION

ABOUT THE SAFE & TOGETHER INSTITUTE

The Safe & Together Institute's mission is to create, nurture, and sustain a global network of domestic violence-informed child and family-serving professionals, communities, and systems. The Safe & Together™ Model is an internally-recognized suite of tools and interventions designed to help child and family-serving systems improve outcomes by practicing from a domestic violence-informed perspective. The Institute teaches these tools and interventions with the goal of supporting sustainable change and full integration into local agencies.



ABOUT THE COLLABORATION KICKSTARTER PROJECT

The Safe & Together Institute (S&TI) and New Mexico Children, Youth, and Families Department (NM CYFD) have a robust history of partnering together to implement domestic-violence informed practices. Through the Safe and Together™ Model Advocate/CYFD Collaboration Kickstarter Project (referred to below as 'the project'), NM CYFD and S&TI partnered with the Center of Protective Environment, Inc. (COPE), to improve collaboration between local domestic violence advocates and county CYFD staff in Otero county.

ABOUT THE PROJECT EVALUATION

S&TI's Evaluation Team implemented a comprehensive retrospective pre/posttest survey with both Otero county CYFD and COPE project participants asking them to reflect on changes in their relationship with the other agency over the course of the project. The survey was sent to all 35 Otero county project participants and 15 complete responses were collected and analyzed. The Evaluation Team also reviewed facilitator notes and video recordings from the final project meetings of both agencies to identify impacts of the project on practice skills as well as the relationship between staff from Otero CYFD and COPE. The following sections describe the results of the Collaboration Kickstarter Project.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BEFORE THE PROJECT...

While they often work with the same clients and with the same overall goal of safer, stronger families, child protection and domestic violence agencies' relationships are often tense and overrun with conflicts around advocates' confidentiality, the revictimization of domestic violence victims by child protection, and differing philosophies and mandates. Before the project Otero CYFD and COPE staff described their relationship with one another as:



FRUSTRATING



MINIMAL



INARTICULATE



FRAGILE

AFTER THE PROJECT...

Otero CYFD and COPE participants in the Kickstarter Project noted improvements to both their working relationships across agencies as well as to their individual practice skills. After the project, participants reported feeling more effective in working together to improve client outcomes and a sense of built collaboration and trust in one another. CYFD staff reported increased confidence in intervening with perpetrators as parents and partnering with the parent survivor. COPE staff reported improvements in describing perpetrator behaviors and advocating for CYFD involved clients. After the project Otero CYFD and COPE staff described their relationship with one another as:



PROGRESS



GREAT!



IMPROVED



TRUSTING

BIGGEST SHIFTS WERE SEEN IN...



Use of Safe & Together Tools

After the project, many participants from both COPE and Otero CYFD noted the positive impacts the Perpetrator Pattern Mapping Tool has had on their case documentation and ability to work with both survivors and perpetrators.



Shared Commitment

After participating in the project, 67% (compared to 17% before) of COPE and Otero CYFD staff reported they 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that **they trusted one another**, and 77% (compared to 46% before) 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that they **honored their commitments to one another**.



Use of Shared/Common Language

After the project, 60% of participants agreed that the different agencies communicated openly with each other. An increase from 27% before the project.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

The Kickstarter Project was designed to improve communication and collaboration between COPE and Otero County CYFD staff as well as to build their skills in domestic violence-informed practice. Over a five-month period, the Safe & Together Institute engaged leadership and frontline staff in both agencies through a series of activities aimed at improving understanding of the Model and cross-agency collaboration. Activities included:

1 TRAINING THROUGH E-LEARNING COURSES & LIVE REMOTE SESSIONS



Prior to the start of the project, participants were given access to the Institute's Virtual Academy and completed foundational e-learning courses in the Safe & Together™ Model and the basics of domestic violence-informed practice. Participants also engaged in monthly All Project virtual training sessions facilitated live by senior S&TI faculty.

2 TRAINING TO IMPLEMENT SAFE & TOGETHER TOOLS



Participants were also given access to Institute's suite of tools including the Ally Guide, Choose to Change Tool Kit, and the Perpetrator Mapping Tool. During training sessions participants were coached in how to not only implement these tools with clients, but also in how to use them to create shared language, framework and practice across agencies.

3 MONTHLY COACHING SESSIONS



Coaching can dramatically increase training participants' capacity for applying the learned skills and tools in their day-to-day practice. In this project, each agency's participants received coaching and guidance from S&TI faculty tailored to their sector.

COPE Advocates received coaching specifically related to using Safe & Together™ Model tools to 1) discuss the role of the perpetrator with CYFD cases involving domestic violence, and 2) advocate for survivors while using strategies for communicating client protective capacities with CYFD staff.

Otero CYFD Staff received coaching specifically related to using Safe & Together tools to 1) improve work with families and domestic violence cases – particularly intervening with the perpetrator, discussing the role of the perpetrator, and partnering with survivors – and 2) facilitating meetings/discussion of complex cases involving domestic violence and other issues.

4 AGENCY LEADERSHIP TEAM MEETINGS



Leadership buy-in and support is key to any major initiative. Leadership members from both agencies were engaged from the start and met monthly with S&TI senior staff to discuss project progress and sustainability.

KEY FINDINGS

COLLABORATION & RELATIONSHIP IMPROVEMENT



Objective #1 Improve cross-agency collaboration and the overall relationship between Otero CYFD staff and COPE advocates

CYFD and COPE program participants were asked about changes in their relationships since the beginning of the pilot program. Specifically, they described improvements in the following areas: Communication Effectiveness, Inter-Agency Trust, Flexibility, Shared Purpose, Professional Roles and Commitment to Collaboration. See specific findings below.

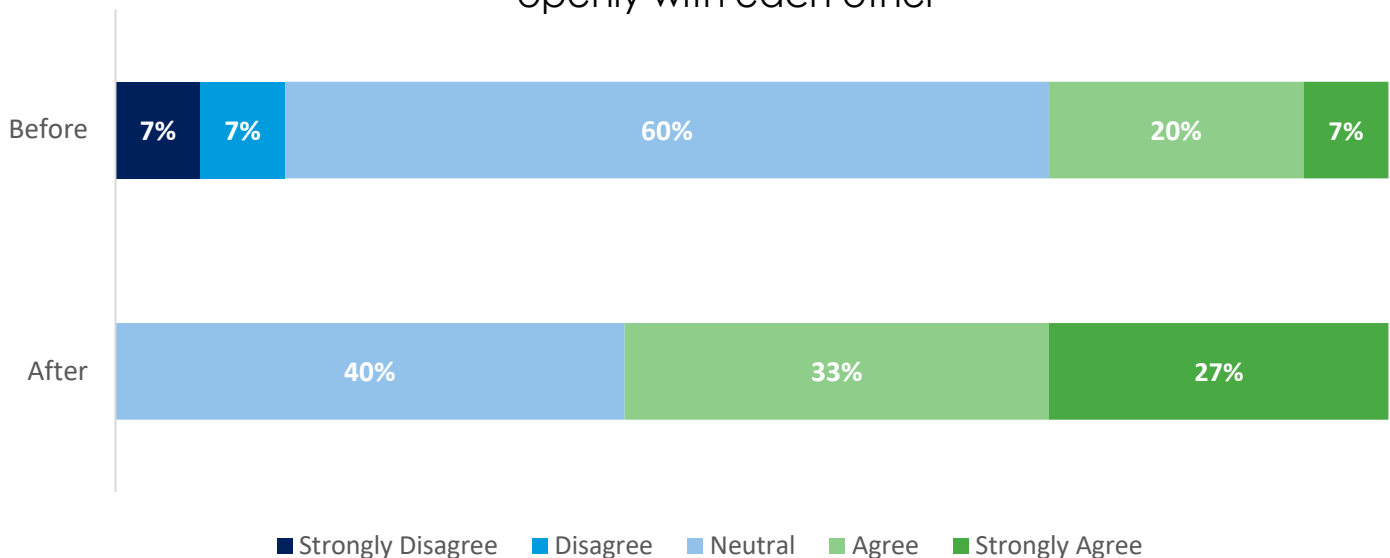
1 COMMUNICATION



Both COPE and Otero CYFD staff agreed communication became easier with each other following the project. This shift is attributed to greater knowledge of how and who to contact at each agency and use of shared language.

After participating in the project, the majority (60%, compared to 27% before) of COPE and Otero CYFD staff reported they 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that they **communicated openly with each other**. See chart below.

Domestic Violence/Child Protection Case Workers and I communicated openly with each other



“First and foremost, [the impact was] the ability to have meaningful and useful contacts with folks from CYFD - that’s amazing. I have found in day-to-day tasks I am being much more mindful about questions that I ask and how I frame discussions that we have.”

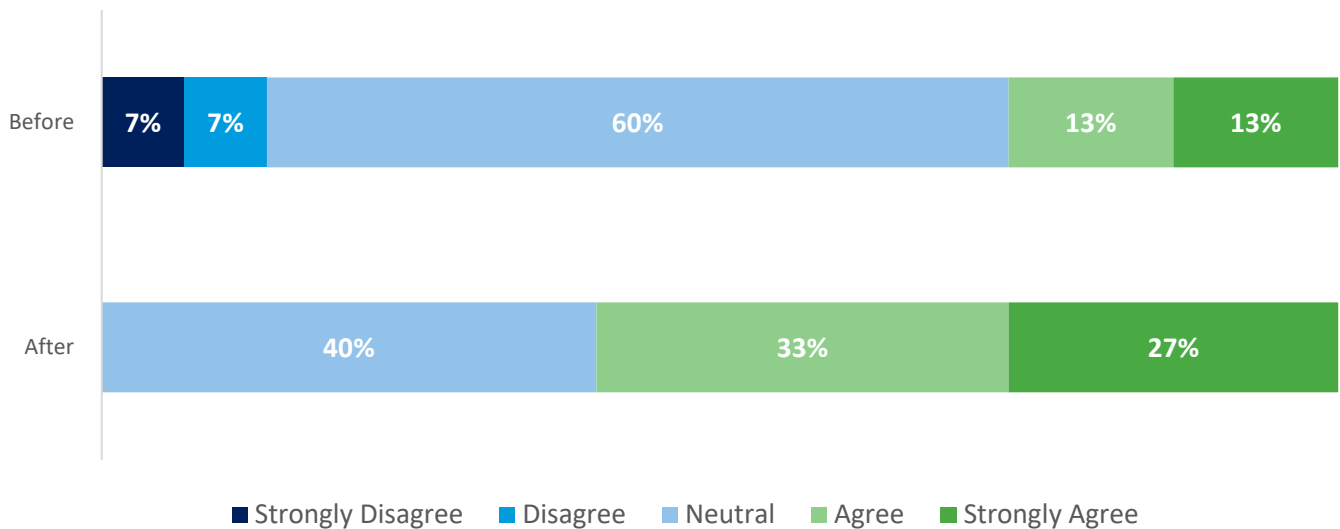
KEY FINDINGS

2 EFFECTIVENESS

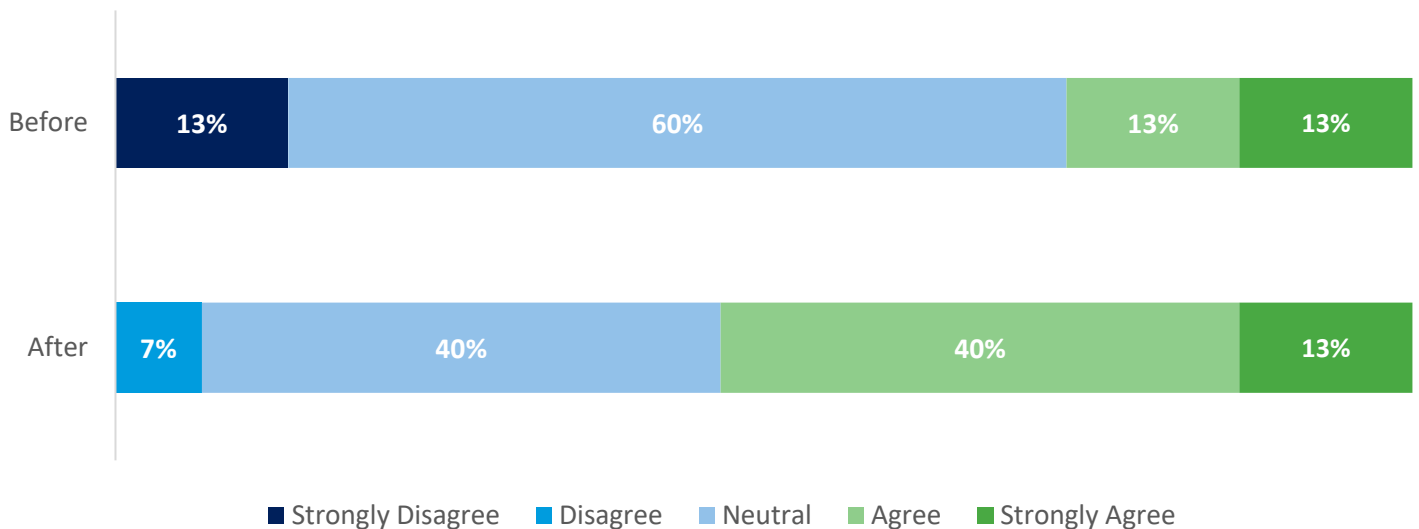


After participating in the project, the majority of COPE and Otero CYFD staff reported they 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that they **worked closely with the other agency to support CYFD-involved survivors** and families (60%, compared to 26% before) and that they were **informed as often as they should be** about what is going on with a survivor/client at the other agency (53%, compared to 26% before). See charts below:

I worked closely with DV Advocates/Case Workers to support system-involved survivors and families

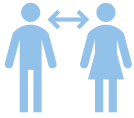


I was informed as often as I should be about what is going on with a survivor/client at the other agency



KEY FINDINGS

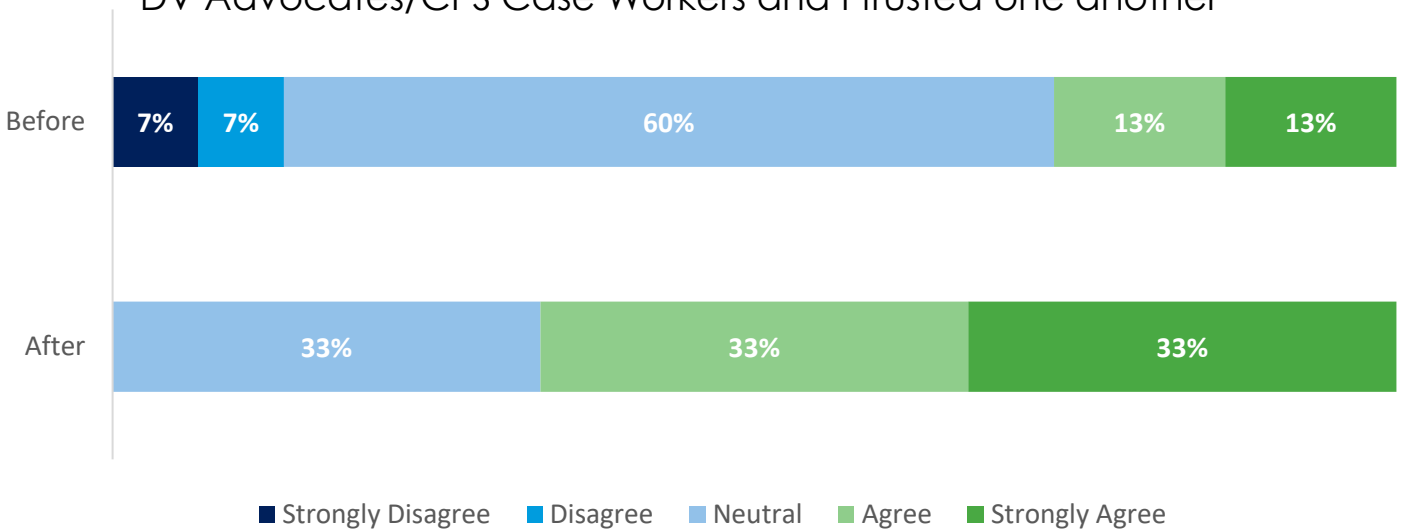
3 INTER-AGENCY TRUST



There is greater trust between staff from each agency. This is largely due to **familiarity with each others' processes, shared expectations, shared tools and language**, and identified points of contact that can be reached.

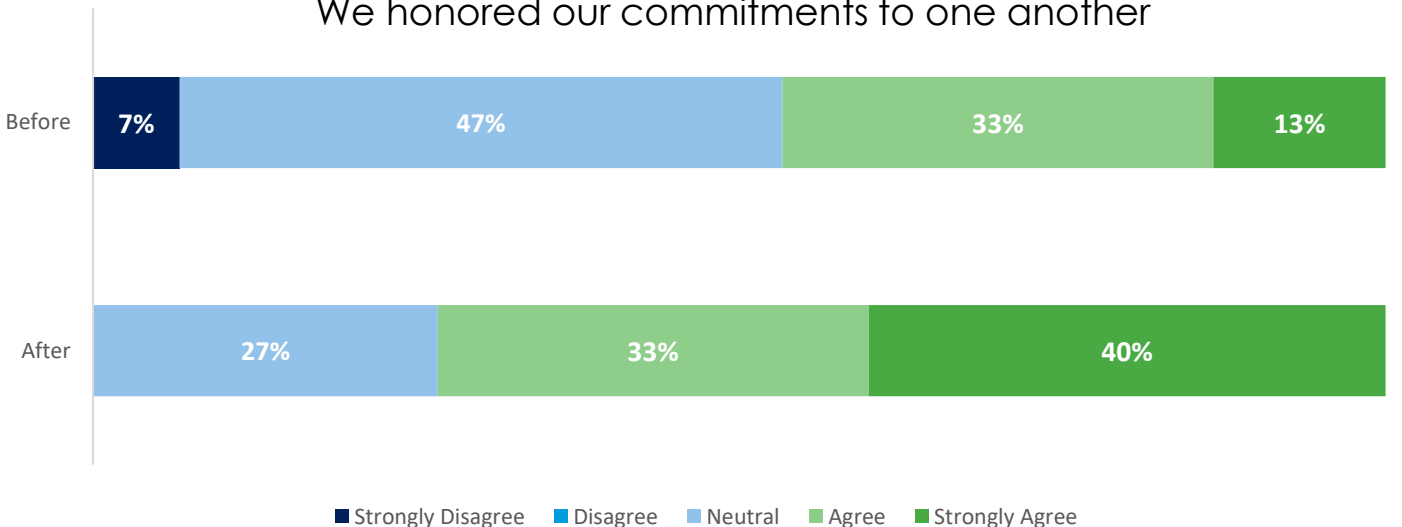
After participating in the project, the majority (66%, compared to 26% before) of COPE and Otero CYFD staff reported they 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that **they trusted one another**. Additionally, after the project most (73% compared to 46% before) COPE and CYFD staff 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that they **honored their commitments to one another**. See charts below:

DV Advocates/CPS Case Workers and I trusted one another



“Thankful and grateful in starting this. We already had a good relationship, but it became even greater when we had the shared language.”

We honored our commitments to one another



KEY FINDINGS

4 FLEXIBILITY



After participating in the project, over half (60%, compared to 27% before) of COPE and Otero CYFD staff reported they 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that they were **willing to compromise for the good of survivors and families**.

“I came from CPS before doing advocacy work. Both are hard, but when there is teamwork, it makes a difference. And to hear leadership committed on both sides and see ongoing collaboration, I feel excited about the tools and feel ready for conversations.”

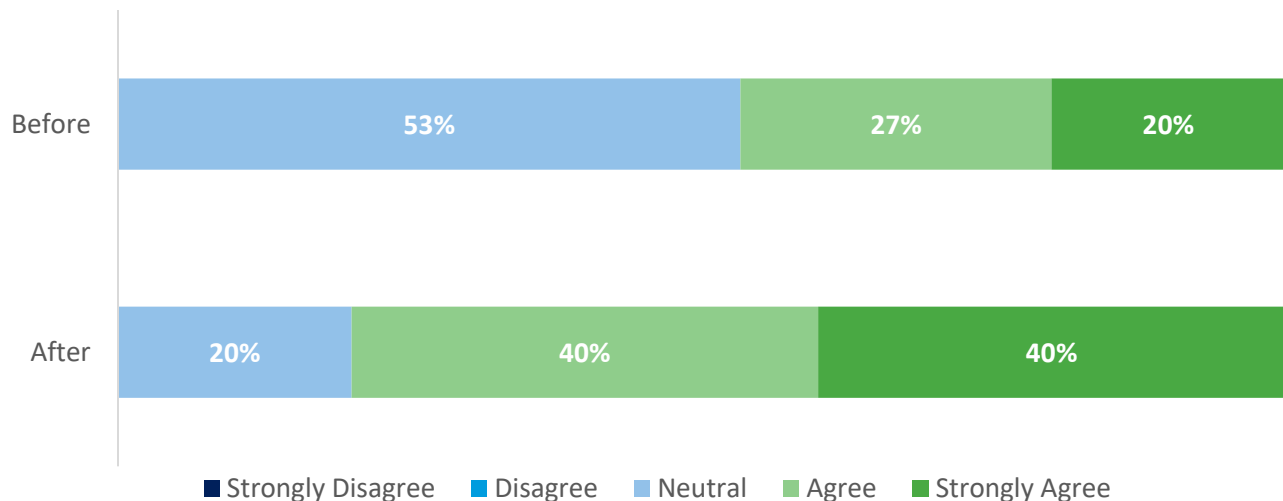
5 SHARED PURPOSE



COPE and CYFD both expressed an **increase in understanding that both agencies have the same end goal** and desired outcomes. This has had positive impacts on the families served by both agencies.

After participating in the project, nearly all (80%, compared to 47% before) of COPE and Otero CYFD staff reported they 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that **both agencies shared a high level of commitment to survivors and families' well being**. See chart below.

Both our agencies shared a high level of commitment to survivors' and families' wellbeing



KEY FINDINGS

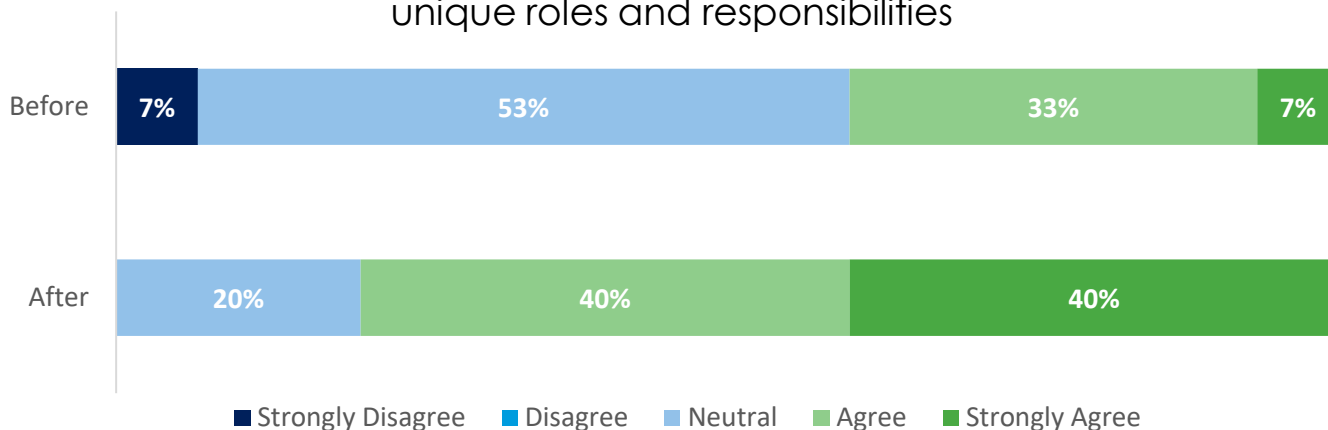
6 PROFESSIONAL ROLES



There is **now greater mutual understanding and appreciation** for what each agency does and how people in different roles across the agencies interact to achieve common goals.

After participating in the project, nearly all (80%, compared to 40% before) of COPE and Otero CYFD staff reported they 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that they each had a **clear sense of each other's unique roles and responsibilities**. See chart below:

DV Advocates/CPS Case Workers and I each had a clear sense of our unique roles and responsibilities



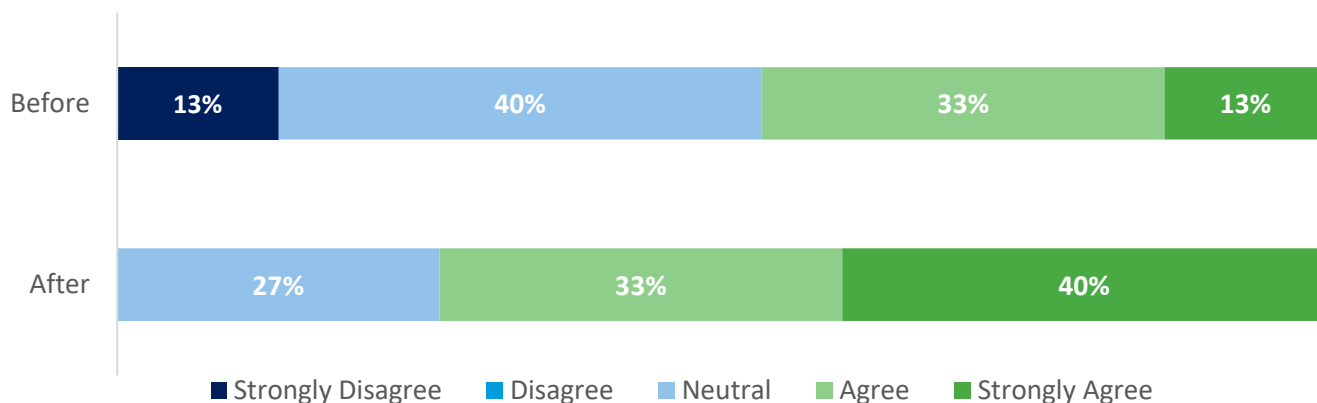
7 COMMITMENT TO COLLABORATION



Each agency's leadership is **dedicated to intentionally cultivating a good relationship** to be able to collaborate to improve survivors' and families' outcomes. This willingness to work together has spread even beyond the project participants, with each agency noting staff are markedly more willing to practice collaboratively and continuously reflect on their joint efforts.

After participating in the project, most (73%, compared to 46% before) of COPE and Otero CYFD staff reported they 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that they were **dedicated to the idea that they could improve their relationship**. See chart below.

We were dedicated to the idea that we can improve our relationships



KEY FINDINGS

CONFIDENCE & SKILLS – Otero CYFD



Objective #2 Build CYFD staff's confidence & skills in intervening with domestic violence perpetrators as parents

Otero CYFD staff reported both a deeper understanding and practice change around holding the domestic violence perpetrator accountable for their actions. One CYFD staff member noted being able to use the **Perpetrator Pattern Mapping Tool** to improve their documentation in client case files so future service providers have a clear understanding of the ways the perpetrator has impacted the family. Others noted the Mapping Tool aided them in talking with clients about how the perpetrators actions impact their children and and increasing accountability back to the perpetrator.

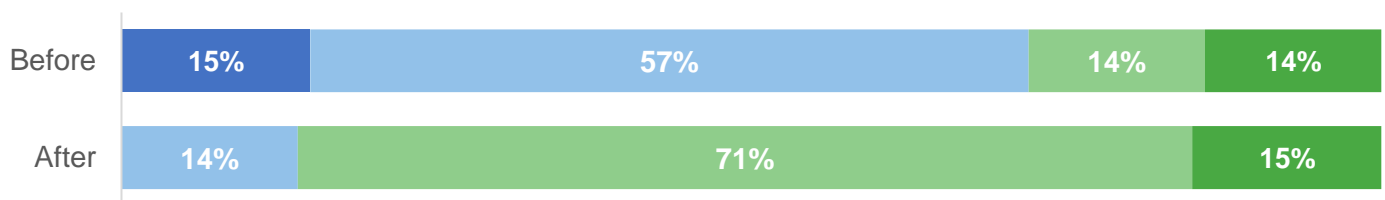
After the project, Otero CYFD staff reported improved confidence with **86% of staff reporting 'strong' or 'complete' confidence** in engaging the perpetrator, compared to 57% before. Fewer participants indicated they had 'little' confidence (0%) after the project than before (14%).



Objective #3 Increase CYFD staff's confidence & skills in partnering with adult domestic violence survivors

Otero CYFD staff, following the project, reported improved confidence in their ability to partner with domestic violence survivors with **86% reporting feeling 'strong' or 'complete' confidence** after the project compared to 28% before. See chart below.

How would you rate your confidence to partner with domestic violence survivors?



■ No Confidence ■ A little Confidence ■ Some Confidence ■ Strong Confidence ■ Complete Confidence

“It was a really good learning process. I think what really we took out of this is changing our mindset and changing how we work with victims and perpetrators and how we can work with them together instead of using the old-school methods we used to practice.”

KEY FINDINGS

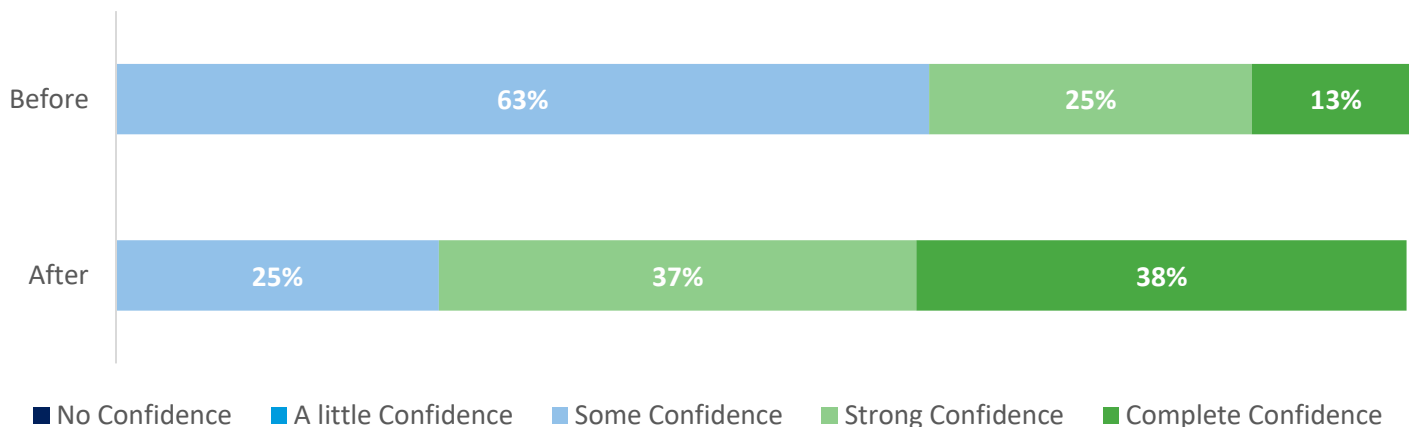
CONFIDENCE & SKILLS – COPE ADVOCATES



Objective #4 Increase COPE advocates' confidence & skills in describing domestic violence perpetrators' patterns of behavior

Before the project, under half (38%) of COPE staff reported feeling 'strong' or 'complete' confidence in discussing the perpetrator's role in domestic/family violence with Child Protection Workers. **After the project, the majority (75%) reported feeling 'strong' (37%) or 'complete' (38%) confidence.**

How would you rate your level of confidence in discussing the perpetrator's role in domestic/family violence with child protection workers?



I can see the perpetrator pattern-based approach directly impact my individual clients. Instead of just saying 'no, it's not your fault' – we're giving concrete reasons why it isn't. We know whose fault this is [the perpetrator]. Bringing that to the conversation, it's like a little switch."



Objective #5 Build La Casa advocates' confidence & skills in advocating for CYFD-involved clients

COPE advocates reported **improvements in their confidence and skills in interactions with CYFD** staff. They feel they are now better able to communicate with CYFD due to a new shared language and growing trust between the two agencies.

After the project, **over a third (38%) of COPE staff reported feeling 'complete' confidence** in advocating for the CYFD-involved clients compared to just 13% before the project.

FINAL THOUGHTS



At the close of the project, participants and leaders from both agencies met together in the project's last formal meeting to reflect on the experience. Below are some of the observations, stories, and takeaways they shared.

Improved Survivor Experience

Representatives from both agencies described the tangible difference it makes in a survivor's experiences when they have systems working together and actively partnering with them. One COPE advocate talked about working nights with families in emergency situations and how helpful it is to have survivors see that both systems understand their efforts and see what they do [to keep their kids safe]. CYFD workers reflected on how meaningful it was that "Mom felt heard" in their domestic violence cases during the project. One-on-one, clients seemed more comfortable sharing their experiences because of the staff's perpetrator pattern-based approach. A COPE advocate noted the impact of showing survivors concrete examples of their strengths and of their partners' patterns of coercive control. To disrupt a perpetrator's message that the abuse is the survivor's fault and to not just tell her it's not her fault, but also show her specific reasons, felt really powerful.

The Benefit of Safe & Together™ Model Language & Tools

Project participants reported that coaching on how to use Safe & Together™ Model tools was "really helpful." One CYFD leader reflected on how their workers were able to see through this project how beneficial the tools and Model language are because they were able to see for themselves how both work in real time with real cases. CYFD project participants were able to follow one family throughout their time together. They got to see the Model's impact and how their practice changes influenced the case. Documentation and language proved to be key as they watched the family move from one worker to another. Participants found the Understanding My Parenting Strengths tool helped them uncover survivor strengths that likely would not have been identified previously. Similarly, the Mapping Tool gave them a new understanding of perpetrators' behaviors as parenting choices and how that information could be used to hold them accountable. COPE advocates discussed using the Survivor Strengths section of the Mapping Tool as survivors shared their stories to highlight what they had been doing [to keep their children safe], to record specific examples, and to pull out the information that was most important. With new intakes at CYFD, workers are now discussing with supervisors how they can use the tools with the family and are taking copies of the tools with them in their investigations packet.

Impacts On the Wider System

Participants noted a feeling at the end of the project that their work is "different" and not just their work. They saw changes in multiple contexts – domestic violence shelters, courts, schools, community service providers. They described how all "lanes" were feeling the impact. One advocate talked about how she's having new conversations with court personnel as questions come up about why the language is different and why she's framing issues certain ways. The CYFD workers who followed the family through the system talked about how each new worker inherited a "wealth of information" and how even if the family moves out of state, that quality information can go with them.



Back when I started, there was no relationship between the two agencies and when we did connect it was really between lawyers. Now new staff come on and we explain what they offer, their roles, and who can help with what. It was nice to see new people in the course of this project see who to reach out to to better support our families. We have this joint goal and joint missions. You don't have to be on your own and the family doesn't feel like they have to be on their own. The family feels that support and collaboration."

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