

strengthening families

a look at strengthening families in the states

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A LOOK AT STRENGTHENING FAMILIES IN THE STATES

The Center for the Study of Social Policy is a nonprofit (501(c)3) organization based in Washington, DC, that helps states and localities implement creative and effective strategies that strengthen disadvantaged communities and families and ensure that children grow up healthy, safe, successful in school, and ready for productive adulthood.

Strengthening Families™ is an approach to work with children and families that build five research-based Protective Factors with families to prevent child abuse and neglect and promote optimal child development. Strengthening Families is an initiative of the Center for the Study of Social Policy and is supported by the generous support of the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation.

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background for this report

The simple, powerful ideas behind Strengthening Families have led to rapid implementation and eager adaptation in across the country, creating a wealth of diverse practice and policy action under the banner of Strengthening Families. State leadership teams and task forces have developed exciting new resources, training and tools to support their Strengthening Families implementation. They have brought diverse partners across disciplines and a broad network of parents into the conversation. They have created a variety of ways to integrate the ideas into sustainable structures across their states. Everyone is eager for technical assistance, information from peers and other kinds of support to continue to expand their Strengthening Families work. In many ways, the Strengthening Families work is being led by states, with several key counties beginning to make a mark with their own approach. The partnership among participating states is critical to continued growth and expansion of the Strengthening Families National Network.

This report offers a snapshot of the overall implementation of Strengthening Families at this point in time and offers an analysis of successes, challenges and focus for next steps. Sustaining and enhancing the work nationally will depend on continued evolution of the network among states, an effective platform for sharing tools and resources, attention to ensure that evolving practice continues to be grounded in research, and methods for sharing the evolving knowledge base about the approach.

a brief history of strengthening families

In 2001 the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation funded the Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP) to develop a broad new strategy for child abuse and neglect prevention. Based on their research and board discussion, the foundation decided to focus on young children 0-5 with strategies aimed at intervening before abuse or neglect occurred. They aimed to reach a national audience impact very large numbers of children and families.

CSSP proposed engaging early care and education (ECE) providers in child abuse and neglect prevention for several reasons:

- › Early care and education was a systematic way to reach out and engage the majority of families with young children;

A LOOK AT STRENGTHENING FAMILIES IN THE STATES

- › ECE providers see families on a daily basis;
- › An early childhood program is a non-stigmatizing environment which families enter by choice; and
- › Families already turn to ECE providers for information and guidance about their child.

PHASE I: DEVELOPING THE FRAMEWORK

The first phase of the initiative included research and information gathering.

A distinguished national advisory committee was formed with members from the fields of early care and education, children’s mental health, child abuse prevention, family support, state and federal policy, and child welfare. Several meetings were held to review research findings, evaluate different approaches to child abuse and neglect prevention, and discuss the potential of alternate strategies.

Deborah Daro of Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago provided an overview of current child abuse prevention strategies; Sharon Lynn Kagan of Teachers College at Columbia University provided an analysis of the implications of implementing a child maltreatment prevention approach in early care and education programs. Carol Horton of the Erickson Institute in Chicago was commissioned to review existing research literature to identify protective factors that were correlated with a reduction in child abuse and neglect.

Dialogue sessions were held around the country with leaders of national organizations and practitioners in the early childhood, CAN prevention, and child welfare. Hundreds of practitioners and organizational leaders participated.

STRENGTHENING FAMILIES PROTECTIVE FACTORS

- › Parental Resilience
- › Social Connections
- › Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development
- › Concrete Support in Times of Need
- › Social and Emotional Competence of Children

A LOOK AT STRENGTHENING FAMILIES IN THE STATES

The literature review and wisdom gathered from the advisory committee and the field was used to develop the five Protective Factors that are at the heart of Strengthening Families. The Protective Factors cluster findings from many research studies into a simple framework designed to help all programs identify the outcomes they need to pursue with all families to avoid child maltreatment and promote healthy child development.

An in-depth study of exemplary practice in 21 early care and education programs across the country identified common strategies across very different programs. All research tools were aligned with the Protective Factors, and the study protocol included:

- › Expert nomination of programs to study in all states,
- › An initial survey and review of program materials from nominated programs, and
- › Site visits that included structured observation, interviews with parents and staff, and focus groups with parents, staff and community partners.

Out of this initial research, practice tools were developed from an extensive analysis of the implications of implementing such a strategy in early childhood programs:

- › A self-assessment to help early care and education programs identify specific changes to enhance their ability to support and strengthen families,
- › A program guidebook for early care and education programs,
- › Summaries of all the exemplary programs, and
- › A number of practice monographs describing specific aspects of programs that were essential to excellent practice.

Everything was made available via the CSSP website, and could be downloaded for free.

PHASE 2: STATE PILOTS

In phase two, CSSP tested application of the framework through state governments, seeking to understand the action needed at a state level to engage many early care and education programs in Strengthening Families practice. All states and territories were invited to partner with CSSP in a two-year pilot where they would receive technical assistance and support as they implemented Strengthening Families in their state. No funding was provided to pilot states. Twenty-seven states applied to be a part of this initial pilot, and seven were chosen. After two years of intensive work with the pilot states, significant knowledge was gained about the types of policy and practice changes that would support Strengthening Families initiatives at a state level. Key

A LOOK AT STRENGTHENING FAMILIES IN THE STATES

Levers for Change were identified from the states as opportunities for successful implementation.

PHASE 3: BUILDING THE NATIONAL NETWORK

In 2006, with support from CSSP, the National Alliance of Children's Trust and Prevention Funds launched its Early Childhood Initiative (ECI) with funding from the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation. The ECI provided grants to Children's Trust Funds in nine states to bring Strengthening Families and the Protective Factors into their work and prevention approaches. Another ten states joined the nine grantees in a learning community to share information about implementation as it emerged. This initiative engaged the Children's Trust Funds in many states in making Strengthening Families and the five Protective Factors a cornerstone of child abuse and neglect prevention.

In 2007, CSSP launched the Strengthening Families National Network for all states interested in Strengthening Families implementation. Twenty-six states joined in the first year, and currently 30 states are adopting or adapting Strengthening Families with assistance from CSSP and several national partner organizations. Significantly, Strengthening Families is going beyond state implementation to change the approach to child abuse and neglect prevention and the engagement of families in early childhood education across the country. Some indicators of the impact of the work include:

- › A recent Rand Corporation study of child abuse prevention strategies, commissioned by the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, asked respondents which prevention strategies they had heard of—82% of the close to 2,000 respondents had heard of Strengthening Families. The next highest response was 44% for the Nurse Family Partnership. All other strategies had less than a 25% response rate.ⁱ

KEY ATTRIBUTES OF STATE PILOT EFFORTS

The focus of state Strengthening Families pilots was to help many more early childhood programs learn how to build Protective Factors with children and families.

States were encouraged to build cross-system, multi disciplinary leadership teams to guide their efforts.

They were encouraged to organize their state-level Strengthening Families work around key Levers for Change: parent engagement and leadership; systems integration; professional development.

CSSP offered strategic technical assistance, cross-state networking, development of common tools, and dissemination of information across participating states to support pilot efforts.

States were provided no external funding.

A LOOK AT STRENGTHENING FAMILIES IN THE STATES

- › The agency responsible for the Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention program that provides federal funding to all states convened a working group of states to develop a response to requirements for enhanced data tracking of child abuse and neglect prevention efforts. The working group concluded that an adapted version of the Protective Factors were important outcome elements to be used to assess the effectiveness of child abuse and neglect prevention efforts (See page 11).
- › In seventeen states, Strengthening Families planning efforts are linked with the planning for Early Childhood Comprehensive Services (ECCS) within the state.
- › Several state Strengthening Families initiatives are working to align funding from certain state agencies with the Protective Factors framework. Some are re-writing the proposal requests for their Community-based Prevention Grants (CBCAP) to encourage funded programs to build Protective Factors as a part of their work.

Many states have taken leadership in pushing Strengthening Families even further, developing training materials and tools that bring the concepts to life for early care and education practitioners and adapting the concepts and tools to child and family-serving programs beyond the early childhood sector. Some state Strengthening Families efforts have built the Protective Factors framework into key infrastructure aspects of state government, including Requests for Proposals, contracts, and quality rating and improvement systems being designed for early childhood programs.

The most recent work around Strengthening Families has been developed in the context of one of the most challenging budgetary periods for state governments in history. Fiscal climates for programming are changing on a daily basis in some states, staffing is being interrupted, long range planning is uncertain, and, in some cases, the entire infrastructure for early childhood services is being undermined. It is difficult to determine where the next steps will lead.

the implementation study

In 2009, CSSP engaged in a structured study of Strengthening Families work across the country. The goal was to learn more about:

- › The depth and spread of implementation

- › What has contributed to the success of Strengthening Families
- › Challenges in implementation
- › Impacts that can be documented
- › Status of evaluation efforts

This study is not intended to be an evaluation. A true evaluation of outcomes of state Strengthening Families work would require a degree of rigor and depth that is not within the scope of this inquiry. This study is intended to examine the continued evolution of the work and to determine how to be responsive to emerging needs in the field. Assessing progress in this structured way reflects the ongoing commitment among the many partners in the initiative to continuous learning and to support more effective support for the initiative.

finding key successes

THE POWER OF THE PROTECTIVE FACTORS IN CROSS-SYSTEMS PLANNING

One surprise emerged early in the study: cross-systems planning for comprehensive early childhood services has become a primary role for Strengthening Families Leadership Teams, with the Protective Factors being used in many states as a framework for describing desired outcomes for families across systems.

Collaboration across multiple service systems has always been central to the Strengthening Families approach, but it was originally seen as a means for expanding implementation in early childhood programs. Applicants to be chosen as initial state pilots were required to demonstrate that key leadership in the early childhood, child abuse and neglect, and child welfare sectors in the

GATHERING INFORMATION

Four states—Georgia, Kansas, Minnesota, and Washington—participated in in-depth conversations with leadership teams and CSSP staff in their states.

Structured 90-minute telephone interviews were held with every state in the Strengthening Families National Network.

Regular technical assistance and support providers from several organizations offered additional information on state efforts.

Quarterly meetings with national partners provided opportunities to enrich CSSP's analysis with partners' knowledge of the work in states.

Peer learning webinars for the network provided opportunities to showcase the work of states in their areas of strength.

A LOOK AT STRENGTHENING FAMILIES IN THE STATES

state had all participated in the development of their proposal. State leadership teams were encouraged to include multiple agencies and partners from the beginning. The shift in emphasis subsequent to the pilots phase has been in the widespread use of the framework far beyond program implementation.

The synergy between Strengthening Families and the Maternal and Child Health Bureau's Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems (ECCS) planning grants is evident in many states. These grants, funded by the federal Maternal and Child Health Bureau, are provided to states and territories to support planning and implementation of a comprehensive system for early childhood through aligning and coordinating services for families with young children. State ECCS plans address five "critical components:" Access to Health Insurance and Medical Homes, Mental Health and Social-Emotional Development, Early Care and Education/Child Care, Parenting Education, and Family Support. ECCS efforts were initially linked to Strengthening Families because the Protective Factors helped give specificity to the family support component of the ECCS plans. In a number of states, such as Arkansas and Wisconsin, the Strengthening Families Leadership Team spearheaded the family support component of the ECCS grant. As states started to combine their Strengthening Families and ECCS planning efforts, they saw the power of the Protective Factors to support the cross-systems goals of ECCS beyond the family support components of the plan. The Protective Factors were able to provide an overarching frame for outcomes for the cross-systems collaboration. Currently 17 states have connected their Strengthening Families and ECCS efforts at some level, with a few merging their work entirely so that the ECCS coordinator may also be the state Strengthening Families coordinator.

One intriguing theory of why Strengthening Families has been able to engage many partners in cross-systems collaboration is that it did not come into the state through large grants or assignment to specific agencies. CSSP has provided no funding to state, and funds from national partners have been relatively small and tied to collaborative efforts. Many states reported that the power dynamic among the state partners supported joint ownership of the initiative, since no one agency "owned" Strengthening Families through funding. The framework itself had to prove it could serve the needs of partner agencies in order to secure their support and resources. From the beginning, Strengthening Families was implemented by states leveraging their existing infrastructure rather than adding a new program, and using training capacity, funding sources, and quality control mechanisms that were already in place.

The use of Strengthening Families as a platform for cross-systems work has contributed to the success of state Strengthening Families efforts. It has supported:

A LOOK AT STRENGTHENING FAMILIES IN THE STATES

- › A broad range of funding sources for state Strengthening Families efforts: Because multiple partners are at the table, funding and support for state Strengthening Families efforts rarely comes from a single agency or funding source. This has been especially important in the current fiscal crisis as it has meant that even when one Strengthening Families agency was facing sharp fiscal constraints, others found ways to continue their work.
- › A focus on systems changes rather than on funding streams: Because money has been very tight, collaboration across agencies in the state Leadership Team level has been the most available resource. As a result, much of the focus has been on low-cost and no-cost changes that can support implementation. In some ways this has been very productive for the initiative. States with no new dollars to spend have built the Protective Factors into existing contracts, Requests for Proposals, trainings, or other vehicles already in place to shape and support practice on the ground. This approach has served to leverage many more resources across multiple agencies than would have been dedicated to a fledgling initiative.
- › Impact on many programs that serve children and families: As states focused on building their Leadership Teams and exploring the cross-systems aspects of Strengthening Families, they often brought a very diverse array of partners to the table—and often found a surprising number of partners seeking them out. In state after state, Strengthening Families sometimes was “getting out ahead” of the lead agency, with partners (such as parent groups or community organizations) integrating the Protective Factors as a framework for their own work with families and the lead agency struggling to keep up with what was happening on the ground. In many cases,

“[The success of Strengthening Families in Georgia] has a lot to do with the fact that there’s no money connected to the initiative. There’s no fighting over funding. Everyone who is participating is doing it because they believe in Strengthening Families. It creates a different atmosphere. We’re all in this together. It’s almost a more constructive way to start something. After that, you have relationships in the group, and then you can start looking for funding and having action plans for implementation.”

- Member of
Strengthening Families
Georgia Leadership Team

A LOOK AT STRENGTHENING FAMILIES IN THE STATES

programs and agencies have begun to include or feature the Protective Factors in training and other professional development opportunities that already exist without necessarily informing state teams about their work.

IMPACT ON STATE APPROACHES TO CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT PREVENTION

One of the key successes of Strengthening Families has been the rapid uptake and support from child abuse and neglect prevention leaders in all states. In half of the Strengthening Families National Network states, the Children's Trust Fund is either taking leadership or plays a strong role in the state's Strengthening Families efforts. The state Community Based Child Abuse Prevention (CBCAP) leader is actively engaged in Strengthening Families in another third of the states. The role of national partners, particularly the National Alliance of Children's Trust and Prevention Funds (the Alliance) has been essential to implementing Strengthening Families with leadership from local prevention advocates. By adopting Strengthening Families as a signature initiative, the Alliance was able to quickly build broad awareness among Trust Funds and to support the leadership of Trust Fund directors in the Strengthening Families work.

In many states, the Children's Trust Fund serves as the lead agency for the federal CBCAP funds. The federal CBCAP program provides more than \$41M to states, a primary source of funds and influence for child abuse and neglect prevention programming in states. As state CBCAP leaders took on Strengthening Families, they brought to the national table two new federal partners with key roles in supporting state child abuse and neglect prevention efforts throughout the states: the FRIENDS National Resource Center for CBCAP (FRIENDS), which provides support to all fifty states on their CBCAP programs, and the National Child Welfare Information Gateway (the Gateway), which serves as a clearinghouse for new information in the field of child abuse and neglect, including prevention efforts. These two organizations have a national reach across the child abuse prevention field and through their connection to the federal CBCAP program are widely respected in the field of CAN prevention. The annual federal child abuse and neglect prevention resource Packet sent to all child abuse prevention programs in the nation during Child Abuse Prevention Month has been based on the Strengthening Families framework since 2007.

Through Alliance, FRIENDS and the Gateway, Strengthening Families has become a foundational part of the child abuse prevention field, as indicated in a recent RAND survey showing that it is recognized by professionals in the field more than twice as

A LOOK AT STRENGTHENING FAMILIES IN THE STATES

much as the next recognized approach. More importantly, Strengthening Families has been able to shape prevention approaches in states in several important ways:

- › **Aligning prevention funding to the Protective Factors:** Many states are now aligning their CBCAP Requests for Proposals with the Strengthening Families Protective Factors. This means that CBCAP funds that flow to states go to programs that build Protective Factors and that the strengths based Protective Factors approach to prevention is gaining ground. Asking programs applying for state CBCAP funding to demonstrate how they are building Protective Factors in their proposed work has not radically changed the allocation of CBCAP dollars, as many programs were already building some aspects of the Protective Factors through their work. However, framing work around the research-based factors has raised the level of intentionality about building them and broadened the focus of programs. For example, the framework can supporting helping a strong parent education program in adding social networking and service connections to the work they already do with families.
- › **Using the Protective Factors to frame public messages around prevention:** Public awareness has always been an important part of state child abuse and neglect prevention efforts. Communications campaigns, blue ribbon programs, public service announcements, and other tools have long been building awareness and influencing cultural norms around child abuse and neglect. A few states today are linking their public awareness efforts to their Strengthening Families work. For example, New Hampshire renamed its Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention month to Strengthening Families Month. West Virginia's Children's Trust Fund has funded a public media campaign with video spots organized around the Protective Factors. In Minnesota all of the CBCAP grantees, including those focused on public awareness, are being asked to use Protective Factors in their work. Wilder Research, the evaluator for Minnesota's Strengthening Families work, is developing new tools to test the impact of these new public awareness efforts built around the Protective Factors. At the national level, CSSP is working with the Child Welfare Information Gateway to produce a Family Strengthening Calendar to go out to prevention programs across the country next April.
- › **Creating more support for a strengths-based approach:** The tenets of primary prevention and strengths-based work have been at the heart of state child abuse and neglect prevention efforts for a number of years. According to a number of states, Strengthening Families provided new evidence, language and many

A LOOK AT STRENGTHENING FAMILIES IN THE STATES

necessary tools to take these ideas from conceptual frameworks to more robust practice on the ground. These ideas have begun to be integrated into professional development opportunities across multiple systems to embed them into everyday practice.

- › Creating a new framework for measuring the impact of prevention efforts: As the pilot phase for Strengthening Families was coming to a close, the federal Office of Management and Budget asked every federal program to address a new accountability measure: PART (the Program Assessment Rating Tool). PART was designed to evaluate the effectiveness of federal funding based on outcomes. The designated PART outcome for the CBCAP program was declining rates of child maltreatment. In response to the new PART requirements, a working group of state CBCAP leaders came together to respond to the new requirements and offer additional indicators that could be used to show impact of prevention efforts. This working group offered a slightly adapted version of the Protective Factors as an additional outcome framework. The federal Office on Child Abuse and Neglect then initiated development of an instrument to measure change in parent Protective Factors to go along with the new outcome measures. The instrument, the Protective Factors Survey, has been through four rounds of reliability and validity testing and is ready for use in the field. This is a vital step forward in being able to show the impact of strengths based primary prevention programs.
- › Infusion into existing professional development and training programs: States have been very creative in finding ways to insert training on the Protective Factors and how they reduce the likelihood of child abuse and neglect into many places, including curricula for two- and four-year college classes required for child development credentials; training for family development workers through adaptation of the Family Development Credential training; and trainings regularly offered by Child Care Resource and Referral agencies, Head Start, and other child care programs. One interesting approach in two states has been to base the legally-required training for mandated reporters of child abuse and neglect on the Protective Factors and offer many options for reducing family stress long before a child abuse report might be necessary.

A HIGH-PERFORMING NATIONAL NETWORK

The many states engaged in Strengthening Families serve as the critical learning laboratory for the initiative, developing implementation tools, adapting the framework

A LOOK AT STRENGTHENING FAMILIES IN THE STATES

to different practice modalities, and shaping the larger understanding of “what works” based on many diverse contexts. The underlying network structure behind Strengthening Families has been an important vehicle for the initiative’s success. It provides not only for broad dissemination of information about the initiative, but is the essential source of new knowledge and tools for the initiative. States reported on the high value of the collaborative process fostered by the national network and the willingness of members to share their experiences, tools and ideas.

The network has created significant ownership of Strengthening Families by encouraging innovation and participation that is more than just friendly sharing of information. In contrast to the development of a single program model, Strengthening Families was intentionally structured to be “an approach and *not* a model”. Implementation has been guided by a framework and set of practice tools based on in-depth reviews of the research literature and a structured field research process. But Strengthening Families is also intended to be adaptive and evolutionary, continuously strengthened and informed by ongoing learning from implementation in the field, supported by a national group of partner organizations, some with state and local chapters.

This approach can be described as a **distributive network model.**ⁱⁱ There is a shared goal and a central source of information, but no centralized *control*. Participants act, sometimes jointly, sometimes independently – to make progress towards common goals, doing what they can when they can.

The Strengthening Families National Network has successfully built key elements of a distributive network:

- › The opportunity (and encouragement) of adaptation to suit local context, needs and resources
- › An emphasis on opportunism; that is, the ability to take advantage of key events, resources and strengths within the context of local implementation
- › Information disseminated from a centralized source as well as innovation developed within one part of the network to rapidly reach other implementers
- › A collaborative structure across states so that evolving practice can be tested and fine-tuned within multiple state environments and results quickly shared with others

DEEPENING AND BROADENING PARENT ENGAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP STRATEGIES

Parent partnerships help ensure that prevention strategies are responsive and relevant to all kinds of family needs and choices, and model the relationships between families, service providers, and community resources that can promote the best possible environment for children's development. During the state pilot phase of Strengthening Families, each state was asked to incorporate five hallmarks of effective Strengthening Families practice into their initiative design. One of these hallmarks was parent engagement, focused on inviting and supporting parents to play decision-making roles on state Leadership Teams and within programs that were implementing Strengthening Families. All seven states struggled with this hallmark, but their work in this area helped to shape the next steps for parent partnerships within the initiative.

- › States reported far greater success in engaging parents in decision-making roles within individual programs that were implementing Strengthening Families. In contrast, sustaining the engagement of parent leaders on state Leadership Teams was challenging.
- › Sustained engagement of parents in leadership roles started with a broad effort to engage parents to start dialogues within communities about Protective Factors and family strengthening, then progressed to development of a cadre of leaders.
- › When parents were engaged in sustained ways, there were significant contributions to the initiative. Specifically, in one state, parents played a critical role in spurring an effort to develop a family-friendly version of the Protective Factors language. Parents also played a crucial role in leading families to engage other families in peer-based strategies for building Protective Factors.

The experience in the pilot states underlined the importance of parent partnerships to the work as well as the challenge of building effective parent partnerships. Based on this experience, parent partnerships were identified as a key Lever for Change, one of the specific areas recommended to states beginning their Strengthening Families work and tracked in all the states on an annual basis. Many states still struggle in this area, but the focus on parent partnerships as much more than just representation on the state Leadership Team has also created a number of innovative new strategies within states:

- › Deepening knowledge about what it means to partner with parents: States now know that engaging parent representatives on State Leadership teams is not sufficient for demonstrating parent partnerships, and states are beginning to grapple with what it really means to partner with parents. In 2009, Strengthening Families Kansas launched its Parent Involvement Research Initiative to create a better understanding of how parents understand parent involvement to learn how they access the supports they need to nurture their children, and how agencies use parent input to inform program changes.
- › Building an infrastructure to support parents in playing a direct leadership role in building Protective Factors. A number of states have used a parent or community café approach to engage parents directly in dialogue with peers around the Protective Factors and family strengthening. The states that pioneered this approach, Illinois and Washington, both invested heavily in developing their café models as well as in supporting a core group of parent leaders who are leading these efforts. In these states and many more, cafés have become a larger platform for parents to lead in areas where they are, in fact, the experts.

challenges in implementation

ENGAGING CHILD WELFARE SYSTEMS

Even though participation of child welfare partners has always been a goal of the Strengthening Families approach, engaging child welfare departments has often been a challenge in the states. In general, it appears that state child welfare departments, often overwhelmed with caring for the children with active child welfare cases, have little energy, or funding, to invest in prevention efforts. In 2005, CSSP received funding from the A.L Mailman foundation to focus specifically on engaging state child welfare systems in Strengthening Families. Three states—Illinois, New Jersey and Wisconsin—were selected. CSSP provided technical assistance to these three states over three years, with exciting results. Breakthroughs with child welfare systems in these states include:

- › Using the Protective Factors as a framework for collaboration with community-based agencies responsible for differential response for families where there was a child welfare report, but the case was not opened.

A LOOK AT STRENGTHENING FAMILIES IN THE STATES

- › Using the Protective Factors as a framework a more family supportive case practice model, and/or training and support for child welfare workers to shift the way they work with families in a more positive direction.
- › Building collaborative relationships with the early childhood sector to meet the developmental needs of the youngest children entering the system.

These early linkages are yielding information about working effectively with child welfare agencies, but the connections in most states are still in the early phases. Additional states in the Network are making strides in engaging their child welfare departments in the work, new tools have been developed based on the work to date, and new national partnerships are being built with organizations whose constituency lies within the field of child welfare.

In 2009, CSSP, under the banner of Strengthening Families, released a paper on the importance of family-strengthening child welfare practice and collaborations between child welfare and early childhood systems. The paper and accompanying tools are available online.

DEEPENING IMPLEMENTATION IN THE EARLY CHILDHOOD SECTOR

While there has been significant success in engaging multiple state partners in Strengthening Families around cross-system work, states report that it has been more challenging to engage large numbers of early care and education programs to implement Strengthening Families. There are significant exceptions such as Georgia and New Jersey where Strengthening Families is an important part of their state-funded Pre-K programs. Similarly in other states -- like Missouri-- Strengthening Families is an integrated part of the funding and support structure for early childhood education. In many states, however, engaging early childhood advocates and leaders has been challenging, and Strengthening Families is only sporadically included in discussion and planning for expansion of early childhood education in the state.

One observation is that in most states early childhood is not so much a system as a patchwork of programs, providers, and funding streams, meaning there is often great complexity and difficult collaborations characterizing the early childhood field, which creates a barrier to collaborations between early childhood and other sectors. Yet effective collaboration with state level early childhood partners is crucial to implementing Strengthening Families in large numbers of early childhood programs. The importance of these collaborations is evident in states where Strengthening

A LOOK AT STRENGTHENING FAMILIES IN THE STATES

Families lead agencies provided small grants for early childhood programs to complete the Self Assessment and develop action plans. Where the Strengthening Families lead agency collaborated with a state early childhood agency the small grants were effective in gaining broad participation among early childhood programs. In Wisconsin, where the Strengthening Families lead agency, a Children's Trust Fund, collaborated with the Department of Workforce Development, which funds child care, and the Child Care Resource and Referral infrastructure using mini-grants, more than 122 early childhood programs completed the Self Assessment and action plans. In other states where mini-grants were offered by a non-ECE agency, such as a Children's Trust Fund, without an early childhood partner, the process failed to garner much interest from early childhood programs. One state embarked on a similar mini-grant process twice: once without an early childhood partner, and again, with much better effect, after a strong early childhood partnership had been established.

Successful partnerships with early childhood leaders have revolved around:

- › Partnerships focused on changes in the ECE sector. Over the past year the National Alliance of Children's Trust and Prevention Funds has been working with several states to integrate Strengthening Families into emerging quality rating and improvement systems. Many states around the country are working to develop QRIS systems which impact a large proportion of early childhood programs within the state. Connecting Strengthening Families to state QRIS efforts has the opportunity to effectively engage the early childhood sector.
- › Taking advantage of new efforts to support cross-system planning for services for young children, where there is growing focus and attention. As the new federal administration helps to develop State Advisory Councils on Early Childhood Education and Careⁱⁱⁱ and more cross-systems coordination in every state, there is an important opportunity for state Strengthening Families efforts to engage key early childhood partners.

SUSTAINABLE PROGRAM AND PRACTICE SHIFTS THROUGH AN ENHANCED FOCUS ON PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Many of the efforts to increase the use of Strengthening Families have relied on systemic changes, such as integrating the Protective Factors into Quality Rating and Improvement Scales or CBCAP Requests for Proposals. This has allowed states to impact a number of programs with a relatively low investment or by leveraging investments that are already being made. There is a concern among states, however,

A LOOK AT STRENGTHENING FAMILIES IN THE STATES

that the depth and quality of implementation gained through these systems changes may not be sufficient to change program practices at the front line level. While using the framework creates an effective platform for programs to align their work with the protective factors, this is not necessarily strong enough to help programs successfully build Protective Factors with families. In some states, program representatives who were implementing Strengthening Families spoke with enthusiasm about Strengthening Families but had difficulty describing how they had changed their practice since they had become part of the initiative.

A few states have taken the approach of funding programs to implement their Strengthening Families action plan developed after using the Self Assessment. This approach created concrete changes in programs, but they were often limited (e.g., putting up a parent bulletin board, creating a parent resource room, etc.) and did not have an overall impact on the environment of the program. Some states created pilot programs that received funding for a specified period of time, with technical assistance, training, and peer support built into the support for pilots. These states felt that the pilots had been effective, and in some cases evaluations of the pilots showed a significant impact on how a program operated. Unfortunately, these pilots often received only short-term funding and there was no follow-up to determine if the changes in the programs were being continued after the pilot period.

The underlying question for the future is: what combination of program approaches, incentives, professional development, and capacity-building can create both deep and broad changes in a program so that many more programs can effectively build Protective Factors with families? While a deeper analysis that focuses primarily on this question is needed, some evidence is emerging from evaluations in a few states:

- › To change the experience for families on the ground, there needs to be focus not only on program structure, but also on the practice of individual workers. Changing program structure without changing the way individual workers practice with families will not change the day-to-day experience of families or be sufficient to build Protective Factors. Focusing on worker practice without changing program structure will not give workers the support they need to operate differently.
- › A critical mass of staff members trained in Strengthening Families is essential for success in any individual program implementing Strengthening Families. For example, Alaska reports that a third of all workers within a program need to

A LOOK AT STRENGTHENING FAMILIES IN THE STATES

- receive Strengthening Families training. Rhode Island reports the most robust impact when over half of all workers in a program participate in training.
- › At the state level, “layering” strategies are necessary for sufficient impact on programs and practice. Broad systems strategies such as requiring programs to use the Protective Factors need to be combined with efforts to make training, ongoing technical assistance and support, funding, and incentives available to gain specific changes in programs and practice.
 - › Training efforts must be integrated with the larger infrastructure for training and professional development for all people who work with children and families. States have shown most impact where they were able to leverage their existing professional development systems—for example, using the training capacity of their Child Care Resource and Referral infrastructure within the child care context, or their child welfare training academies within the child welfare context. The continuing focus on professional development as a key Lever for Change will be an important part of addressing this issue as states continue their Strengthening Families work.

ENHANCING STATE LEVEL IMPLEMENTATION

While state teams often have great enthusiasm for Strengthening Families, it can sometimes take a long time to engage in strategic implementation. Occasionally a state hosts a public Strengthening Families kick-off event with many partners, after which the real work is dormant for a year or more. Because there isn't a simple manual for how to “do Strengthening Families,” it is incumbent on state teams to identify key opportunities for integrating Strengthening Families and act upon them. This can be daunting for partners already stretched thin in terms of responsibilities and little funding. In many states, the work has not progressed without interactions with other states or contact and technical assistance from CSSP or one of the national partner organizations. These interactions may be quite limited, but they serve to help the leading organization within the state see the opportunities they can capitalize on to start the work within the state.

One of the most effective ways to support a new state is to connect them to other states further along in implementation. Currently this happens informally when someone staffing the Strengthening Families work in a state calls CSSP or another partner for technical assistance and support. National staff are usually able to connect them with a number of their peers. A more intentional way to support peer sharing

A LOOK AT STRENGTHENING FAMILIES IN THE STATES

could be useful in the form of a more formal mentoring program between states, orientations or connections on specific topics.

At national level, the national partners have found it challenging to ensure that states launching Strengthening Families receive adequate guidance and support during the early phases of their work. Significant investments were made by CSSP to create technological support to facilitate information exchanges and peer technical assistance. A website was developed with the appropriate programming to support collaborative tool development, information sharing, and continuous dialogue among network members, but the network's actual use of the website was low. As a result, CSSP has examined other ways to enhance support to states:

- › Start with existing networks as the building blocks: Relationships are at the core of all networking activities. With multiple demands on the time of Strengthening Families leaders, networking happens primarily with people and organizations they already feel a sense of affiliation with. The Strengthening Families national partners have been key to the success of the Strengthening Families National Network. Their existing relationships with their constituencies have created a strong network for Strengthening Families with long standing relationships at its base.
- › Network the networkers: Because of the significant role that national partners play in supporting the national network, connecting the key partner organizations is critical. All partners come together for three annual meetings to discuss trends, challenges, successes, and strategies in the states where they are working to support Strengthening Families. Frequent contact among staff of the partner organizations further supports ongoing coordination and information sharing for the common work across the states.
- › Invest in one-on-one contact: While technology can be an important tool for sharing materials, the underlying glue remains phone and in person contact. Relationships motivate people to put the time and energy into using technology and other tools to support interaction. The national partners provide the one-on-one connections to support state networking and regularly coordinate their work at the national level.
- › Staff the website functions: Even with a relatively well-functioning network, there is low usage of technological tools to support information sharing. States turn to the on-line resources when they need to search for information—but

rarely can find the time to upload the good work that they've done. In the short term it has been essential for national staff to identify the new tools and resources being developed and facilitate sharing them with the network. The Alliance's Early Childhood Initiative has had more success in getting members (many of whom are members of the Strengthening Families National Network) to use its online platform, and there are lessons to be learned from its efforts.

moving forward

Studying Strengthening Families implementation in 2009 has served to identify what is going well and give direction for areas that need growth and attention to sustain and deepen the excellent work that has been started. As in the past, the success will depend on the creative, committed work of leaders in each state, taking advantage of opportunities that emerge to integrate the Strengthening Families approach throughout communities and in child and family serving systems. Working together and learning together along with the national partners, it appears that states will be focusing on these three key areas of work in the coming year or two:

- › Broader, deeper implementation of Strengthening Families in programs and practices,
- › Stronger state level action to support and sustain Strengthening Families, and
- › More effective methods for measuring impact.

ⁱ Shaw, R. & Kilburn, R. M. (2009) *Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention: Reports from the Field and Ideas for the Future*. RAND Corporation, working paper prepared for the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation. http://www.rand.org/pubs/working_papers/WR632/#

ⁱⁱ CITATION NEEDED

ⁱⁱⁱ American Reinvestment and Recovery Act (2009).

strengthening families

minnesota: moving a legacy forward

Minnesota has a long history of working to strengthen families to prevent child abuse. The Minnesota Department of Human Services, Children and Family Services Administration (CFS), intentionally aligned child welfare programs that support children and families. The coordinated systems include: Child Safety and Permanency, Community Partnerships Division (Child Development Services, Office of Economic Opportunity, Refugee Resettlement Program), Child Support Enforcement Division, Transition to Economic Security Division and Transition Support Systems. The administration has worked to incorporate strengths-based child abuse prevention strategies across its statewide early care and education infrastructure and across the child welfare continuum.

It has been nearly 15 years since Minnesota launched a successful series of child welfare reform efforts geared to incorporate strengths-based, family-centered practices. Specifically, the Child Safety and Permanency Division has created a continuum of strengths-based child abuse prevention, child welfare, and child protection supports and services for families. This includes a broad child welfare practice model and strategic alignment of the Children's Trust Fund's (CTF) prevention work with reforms such as Family Assessment Response; Parent Support Outreach Program; the Minnesota Family Investment Program/Family Connections pilot; and the Children's Justice Initiative, a collaboration between Minnesota's Judicial branch and the Minnesota Department of Human Services.

The Child Development Services area and the Children's Trust Fund applied for the 2004 Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP) Strengthening Families Initiative pilot program to further cross-disciplinary work. Despite not being selected as a pilot state, Minnesota continued efforts to integrate and embed strengths-based practice across program areas. In 2006, department staff attended the Strengthening Families Summit and concluded that the Strengthening Families approach was a natural building block to the administration's foundation of successful strength-based practice reforms.

In 2007, Minnesota became an affiliate in the national network of Strengthening Families states. The first year of work was coordinated by the Children's Trust Fund, Child Safety and Permanency Division, and focused on broad-based statewide engagement. Concurrently, the Minnesota BUILD initiative applied for and received a training opportunity through the National BUILD initiative¹ to pilot

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GOVERNANCE

Minnesota's initiative has been coordinated by the Department of Human Services' (DHS) Children's Trust Fund and Minnesota Ready4K. The Minnesota Child Care Resource and Referral Network recently joined coordination efforts. The DHS leadership team has representatives from Child Development Services and Child Safety and Permanency. Statewide stakeholders include public and private organizations. The McKnight Foundation has generously provided financial support.

THE ROLE OF CULTURE

When a stakeholder mentioned early on that she did not feel that the role of culture was emphasized in Strengthening Families, a workgroup was created with representatives from the predominant cultural groups in the state to explore Culture as a Sixth Protective Factor. This workgroup has passionately debated identifying culture as a sixth protective factor or integrating culture more fully in each of the other protective factors.

With funding from the McKnight Foundation, a research analyst will provide background research to outline strategies to support the addition of culture as a sixth protective factor in families and communities.

a tool that looked at how Strengthening Families concepts could inform systems change. Leadership for the statewide initiative thus became shared between the Children's Trust Fund and Ready 4 K—an early childhood advocacy organization. By August 2008 the Strengthening Families Initiative was ready to hold the first stakeholder meeting. Sixty-five people attended, representing both public and private organizations, rural and urban communities, child abuse prevention, early childhood and child welfare fields.

Stakeholders of the Strengthening Families Initiative completed a survey around the five levers for change. Completion of this survey was an important step in broadening ownership for the work across Minnesota.

Early Childhood Systems-Building

In addition to the partnership with Minnesota's BUILD initiative, the Strengthening Families work is also connected to the state's Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems plan. Within DHS, the Strengthening Families work has involved implementation of the Strengthening Families Roadmap for the Children and Family Services Administration, setting out plans and activities for integration of the Strengthening Families framework, and the knowledge and application of the five protective factors. The roadmap structures implementation for cross-system impact involving the Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP), Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), child welfare, Child Development Services, Child Support Enforcement Division and Community Partnerships Division program areas.

Building Strengthening Families Practice on the Ground

In Minnesota, the Children's Trust Fund provides modest grants to every county interested in maintaining a local Child Abuse Prevention Council. Currently, there are 58 councils within 87 counties, each of which organizes prevention work around the Protective Factors. In addition, DHS has designated \$4.5M in Strengthening Families grants to 16 community-based agencies providing child abuse and neglect prevention supports and services using the protective factors knowledge in their work with children and their families. Along with funding, the grantees are provided:

- Technical assistance and training on prevention topics, including the Protective Factors and promotion of parent engagement and parent leadership
- Participation and implementation of evaluation activities aligned with the Protective Factors
- Participation in formal learning communities.
- Media kit, including key messages, news release and brochure

Building Parent Partnerships

Minnesota has created a statewide network to promote and develop parent leadership, which includes training and provision of Parent Cafés and development of a statewide Parent Leadership Team.

Through the work of the Children’s Trust Fund, the department has developed a partnership with Prevent Child Abuse Minnesota to build the statewide *Parent Leadership for Child Safety and Permanency*, a team of parent leaders who can proactively bring the parent voice and experience in partnership on committees, workgroups, and teams within child welfare to enhance child welfare policies, programs and practices.

Through the creation of this statewide team, parent leadership is developed and supported to contribute to systemic improvements. Additionally, Child Abuse Prevention Councils and Strengthening Families grantees are expected to demonstrate parent leadership and involvement.

Creating Family-strengthening Child Welfare Practice

Minnesota’s child welfare reform success is the underpinning of the Strengthening Families work, particularly in prevention and early intervention. Through development of the Minnesota Child Welfare Practice Model, practice principles focus on: engaging family protective capacities, recognizing and employing family strengths, maintaining community and cultural connections, and addressing immediate safety concerns and ongoing risks of child maltreatment. Key aspects of this include:

- Plans to incorporate Strengthening Families Protective Factors into foundation training for all child welfare caseworkers
- Strategic planning to bridge prevention, early intervention and safety-focused program work.

Enriching Professional Development

Minnesota’s commitment to prevention awareness and education includes a focus on partnering with others to assure accessible and meaningful professional development opportunities. Professional development assures consistent delivery of information regarding strengthening families and incorporating knowledge of Protective Factors into prevention efforts across the state.

- The Children’s Trust Fund is developing a training Request for Proposals (RFP) to identify trainers to conduct cross-sectional statewide trainings on the Protective Factors. This training will include not only early care providers, but child and family services professionals in other fields. Other training connections are also being explored with the statewide Minnesota Child Welfare Training System.

- The Strengthening Families Parent Leadership Team is connecting with the Child Care Resource and Referral network to explore the role of professional development and leadership for the larger initiative.
- Minnesota is exploring incorporation of child abuse prevention activities within the Program for Infant and Toddler Caregiving curriculum with the goal of retraining and cross-training the network of early care professionals and child welfare practitioners on child abuse prevention and the Protective Factors.
- The DHS Strengthening Families Leadership Team will provide resources on the Protective Factors for a training that is being developed for providers to increase awareness and referral of appropriate children with special needs to Part C early intervention services.

Evaluating Strengthening Families in Minnesota

The Children's Trust Fund contracted with Wilder Research to conduct an evaluation of its six initiatives including: funding Strengthening Families grantees; Child Abuse Prevention Councils; statewide networking; professional development and training; public awareness; and parent leadership. Wilder Research evaluation efforts will:

- Aid in the development of a culture of continuous improvement across the CTF initiatives aligning intended outcomes, analyzing results and accountability, and informing strategic planning through the development of assessment of annual and long-term efficiency measures
- Promote more effective and efficient evaluation methodologies across CTF activities
- Provide recommendations to align CTF initiatives with best practices
- Determine the impact that provision of CTF initiatives has in preventing child abuse and neglect through the promotion of protective factors.

¹ BUILD works in seven states, including Minnesota to create comprehensive early childhood systems – coordinated, effective policies that address children's health, mental health and nutrition, early care and education, family support and parenting programs, and services for children with special needs.

strengthening families

kansas: opportunities and synergy

Kansas has always been a leader in prevention of child maltreatment. The state created the first Children's Trust Fund and the first Prevent Child Abuse state chapter in the nation (both incorporated in 1980). In 1999 the state's Children's Cabinet was formed. With nine members appointed by the Governor and the Legislature, the Cabinet has authority over the state's tobacco settlement and oversees the distribution of \$74 M a year, half of which is dedicated to children's services. The Cabinet also manages the Children's Trust Fund, the Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention (CBCAP) program, and was asked to convene the planning group for the federal Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems (ECCS) program¹ when it was developed. With such a backdrop, the story of Strengthening Families™ in Kansas is one of synergies and opportunistic connections.

Jackie Counts, the ECCS coordinator in Kansas, learned about the Strengthening Families initiative in 2007 at the CBCAP meeting in Washington D.C. A grant opportunity was available through the National Alliance of Children's Trust and Prevention Funds to apply the Protective Factors to the child abuse and neglect prevention strategies of Children's Trust Funds. The Protective Factors appealed to Jackie because "they really make sense. They are something that, whatever you are doing, you can apply it and see how it fits. It is strengths-based and gives you a practical way of thinking about what strengths to emphasize." Kansas applied and received a grant to implement the Protective Factors in early care and education settings.

Around the same time Kansas had been selected to send a team to the PREVENT Institute. PREVENT provides an opportunity each year for states to bring a multi-disciplinary team together for intensive planning to launch a project that will impact child abuse and neglect in their state. The Kansas team's goal was to create a prevention plan for their state. Through PREVENT the team examined other state models for prevention and chose to focus on incorporating Strengthening Families into their prevention planning because they felt it provided them with an opportunity to address prevention in a new way.

As in a number of states, the ECCS planning team in Kansas saw Strengthening Families as an opportunity to give specificity to the family support component of their ECCS plan. For Kansas this provided a perfect opportunity to align state planning processes that might otherwise have been separate. Strengthening Families offered a language which served both the needs of ECCS and of the prevention planning needs of the state. The effect is that the Early Childhood

KANSAS CHILDREN'S CABINET AND TRUST FUND

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GOVERNANCE

The Strengthening Families Leadership team in Kansas has 14 members: 2 parents and 12 others representing state and community agencies. Included are: CBCAP, Parents as Teachers, Higher Education, the Department of Education, advocacy groups, the Department of Social and Rehabilitation Services, the Children's Cabinet, and others. The leadership team provides oversight, but a larger stakeholder group of close to 80 handles planning and implementation.

plan now includes prevention and not just maltreatment response. They are no longer two separate goals. These connections led to co-mingling of workgroups, new relationships among work groups, and inclusion of new partners that had not been involved before. The clear, intuitive language of the Protective Factors has provided an opportunity to engage a much broader range of stakeholders in the work. So, while the planning teams for Strengthening Families and ECCS are relatively small (14 to 15 people), the Strengthening Families stakeholder group includes about 80 individuals, and the ECCS stakeholder group includes over 150 individuals.

The broad participation in Strengthening Families planning in Kansas has been an asset for the initiative and a potential challenge. Kansas leaders coordinating the initiative have found that people are very receptive to the ideas at the core of Strengthening Families and the language of the Protective Factors. At the same time, this can make it difficult to keep abreast of where and how Strengthening Families is being adopted in the state and makes evaluation, quality control, and oversight challenging.

Early Childhood Systems Building

Since 2007, Strengthening Families has been part of the early childhood system in Kansas. The Kansas Children’s Cabinet and Trust Fund (KCCTF) acts as convener for a large group of stakeholders, brought together under the Kansas Strengthening Families Plan (KSF Plan).ⁱⁱ Using the Strengthening Families Protective Factors to frame a common set of outcomes for

children and families, more than 80 stakeholders from across the state developed the Plan by examining what it would take to make Kansas the best place to raise a child. Once developed, the Kansas Strengthening Families Plan was printed on pocket folders and widely distributed. This product not only increased the profile of the Plan in the state, but allowed many different groups to share ownership of the plan by putting their own materials inside the folder.

Strengthening Families has provided a common, easily understood language that has been adopted across systems in Kansas. The KSF Plan has been intentionally and thoughtfully connected to the state’s Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems (ECCS) Plan and its CBCAP efforts. Figure 1 shows how ECCS provides the larger architecture from which the Strengthening Families plan was developed, and how CBCAP has been shaped by both the ECCS and SF plans. So, for example, CBCAP funding guidelines were revised to ask grantees to demonstrate how their proposed activities support implementation of a Protective Factors approach.

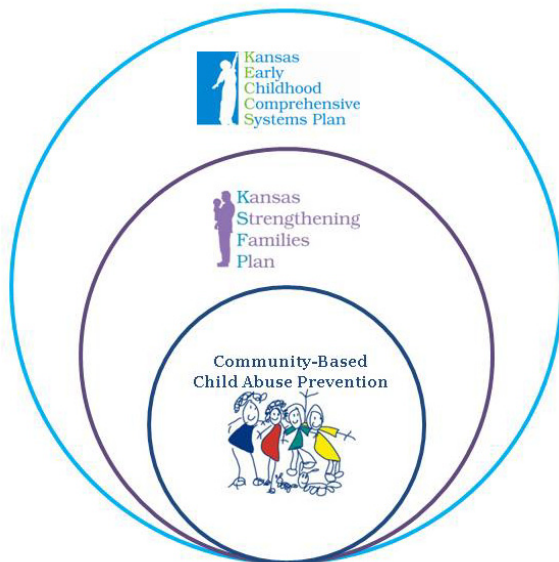


Fig. 1: Alignment of Early Childhood Initiatives in Kansas

Factors come alive within their own work. The work was led by the KSF Plan Leadership Team, and the uptake was surprising. For example, the Kansas Attorney General’s office made the commitment to train all staff members on the Protective Factors, making it a common framework for how they interact with families. The members of this stakeholders group are currently mapping the services they offer to gauge their alignment with the Strengthening Families Protective Factors.

In 2008 at a KSF Plan stakeholder meeting, the Children’s Cabinet challenged stakeholders to show how they would make the Protective

Building Strengthening Families Practice on the Ground

In 2008, 154 early care and education programs in Kansas had at least one staff member trained in Strengthening Families, including the Protective Factors and Program Strategies. Twelve programs, serving a total of 180 children and 125 families completed the Self Assessment online.

Two communities in Kansas are using the Strengthening Families framework broadly to support families. In one jurisdiction, partners include local businesses, the school district, economic development staff, prevention advocates, and 35 agencies that provide direct services. Organizers in the second community are using the Strengthening Families approach to develop a community plan that addresses a recent increase in substantiated cases of maltreatment.

In the last year, \$11.1 million in new funding available through the Early Childhood Block Grant program required applicants to demonstrate how their proposed project addressed priorities in both the Kansas Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems Plan and the Kansas Strengthening Families Plan. Fourteen Block Grants were funded for 2009.

Building Parent Partnerships

Two parents (14%) currently sit on the Strengthening Families Leadership Team. Their participation is key to the success of the Leadership Team. Kansas is exploring innovative methods to maximize parent voices that can be used at the state, community, and agency levels.

2009 marks the beginning of a Parent Involvement Research Initiative for Strengthening Families Kansas. The goals are to gain a better understanding of how parents understand parent involvement, how they access the supports they need to nurture their children, and how agencies use parent input to inform programmatic changes. The research process involves focus groups with approximately 120 parents and an agency survey, followed by a meeting of parents to discuss findings and make recommendations to the Strengthening Families leadership team.

Kansas is developing a plan to use online social networking sites, such as Facebook, to connect parents with one another, share information and resources, and get feedback on existing and developing policies and programs. Use of this technology has the potential to address barriers to engaging hard-to-reach families and the stigma associated with services.

GARDEN CITY, KANSAS

After participating in a state stakeholder meeting, a Garden City teacher decided that Strengthening Families could do great things for her hometown. In the rural yet diverse community, she pulled together a team with representatives from schools, the local hospital, the area's largest employer, and residents. An area farmer and leader of economic development efforts then brought the framework to the economic development council. The council is now working with the area's largest employer to develop a housing initiative using the Strengthening Families framework.

Opening new lines of communication to initiate and strengthen social ties between individuals can help connect to the next generation of parents, and to get feedback from parents and family members on program and policy issues

An upcoming brief will outline additional strategies for encouraging parent leadership and sustaining meaningful partnerships with parents in programs and policymaking.

Enriching Professional Development

In 2008, 7,950 early childhood providers received training in Strengthening Families and the Protective Factors.

Training in the Strengthening Families approach is widely available through the state's Child Care Resource and Referral agencies, as well as through various conferences and trainings. Through a partnership between the KCCTF and the Kansas Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies' (KACCRRA), staff at each of the state's seven regional Resource and Referral agencies have been trained in ZERO TO THREE's *Preventing Child Abuse and Neglect (PCAN)* curriculum. *PCAN* covers the five Strengthening Families Protective Factors and Program Strategies, and is designed to support providers in completing the Self Assessment.

Evaluating Strengthening Families in Kansas

The KSF Plan specifies outcomes in five areas: health and safety, early identification, family support, parent education, and aligning evidence-based research with public policy and practice. Stakeholders are currently collecting baseline data, but working with such a large number of outcomes (more than 50) has been challenging. The use of the Protective Factors Surveyⁱⁱⁱ among CBCAP grantees, and the current efforts of Strengthening Families partner agencies to map the alignment of their services with the Protective Factors is helping the initiative better understand who is using the Strengthening Families approach and how to measure impact.

one town's story – garden city, kansas

Finney County is rural, with a population of 42,000, in Western Kansas. It faces the same challenges many rural counties face: isolation, few high-wage jobs, and transportation issues, among others. In addition, Finney County hosts a large, multi-ethnic immigrant community, drawn by employment in the county's meat packing plants. This creates a unique set of challenges: 17 languages spoken in the public schools; four schools where 100% of the kids are defined as at-risk based on demographic information; 65% of the students qualify for free or reduced fee lunch, and a similar percentage are non-English speakers.

Coming from this context, Ann Knoll, a school teacher from Garden City who grew up in Finney County and had many local connections, attended two statewide stakeholder meetings convened as part of the Kansas Strengthening Families Plan. Based on what she learned, Ms. Knoll decided to bring the Strengthening Families approach back to Finney County. She quickly convened a group of interested individuals to explore how Strengthening Families could support their work in the area. The group invited Rebecca Gillam and Jackie Counts, who coordinate the state Strengthening Families efforts, to come to Garden City to talk about Strengthening Families. Before long, the work began to take on a life of its own. Garden City organizers carefully selected key agencies and individuals to invite for the initial meeting with Rebecca and Jackie: both

“it’s not that we want more money or to provide more services...
...it’s about pulling things together.”

Finney County school districts, represented by their superintendents, principals, a counselor and a teacher; two of the top executives from the local Tyson meat packing plant; the local Services Center, which serves migrants and provides ESL services; the Finney County Economic Development Committee; the CEO of the local hospital; members of the community council; and a representative for the local Court-Appointed Special Advocate program. Before the planners presented the Strengthening Families framework, no one was sure if it would be successful. But the framework and ideas engaged the group immediately. The two Tyson executives saw it as an approach that could become part of the support system for the employees in their plants. The Economic Development Council used the Protective Factors framework as part of a retreat they held, looking at how they could incorporate Protective Factors into their economic development activities

Kevin Gallagher, Vice President for Mission & Ministry at St Catherine Hospital, supported the initial Strengthening Families meeting and brought the approach to the Community Health Coalition. This 34 member coalition was launched ten years ago to address underage pregnancy, but over the past ten years, has significantly expanded its mission, realizing that their success depended on strong, healthy families. Two years ago, the Coalition won funding to develop a Center for Children and Families, a physical and a virtual place in the county where parents could turn for parent education, life skills, health, and support. Strengthening Families was a natural fit with the goals of the Health Coalition, and the Kansas Strengthening Families Plan was a perfect way to support the collaborative activities already underway in the County. While the Community Health Coalition has already overcome many barriers to collaboration, they found that Strengthening Families provided a common language and framework to support the work of the individual agencies in the Coalition. Partners could focus not only on their role in the collaboration, but also what they could do within the context of their respective agencies. For those partners who had previously just attended meetings or handed out flyers about the efforts, it helped them to see where they fit in and how their work also could contribute to family-strengthening efforts.

Garden City is working to build awareness of Strengthening Families across their services sectors, as a thread that will align different pieces of work. The effort continues to grow and shift, with continued enthusiasm from many partners. The Garden City Strengthening Families school partners are pressing the Kansas State Department of Education to incorporate the Protective Factors into the Multi-Tiered Systems of Support plan, a continuum of evidence-based, system-wide practices designed to support academic and behavioral needs of individual students. The Garden City partners believe that incorporating the protective Factors into the statewide framework will give their school districts an opportunity to build on the work that they are already doing to integrate services in their community.

ⁱ Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems planning grants are available to all states from the Maternal and Child Health Bureau of the federal Department of Health and Human Services. Systems planning is done around five areas: health, mental health and social development, early care and education, parent education, and family support.

ⁱⁱ View the KSF Plan at www.ksfplan.org

ⁱⁱⁱ The Protective Factors Survey is available for download at <http://www.friendsnrc.org/outcome/pfs.htm> and www.strengtheningfamilies.net

strengthening families

georgia: fostering meaningful partnerships

During the first Strengthening Families Leadership Summit in 2007, 21 participants came from Georgia, one of the largest teams from any participating state. The challenge was that they were not, in fact, a team. While each of the participants was actively engaged in Strengthening Families work within the state, few knew of the others' involvement in the initiative, and there was little coordination or shared work across the existing Strengthening Families stakeholders. Meeting their fellow Georgia representatives and learning about their engagement with the Strengthening Families work provided an important catalyst for the creation of a true statewide leadership team that could create synergy across each of these pre-existing pieces of work. Since then, the Strengthening Families efforts have gone through a transition of leadership. Bright From the Start: Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (the state agency responsible for pre-k and child care) took on a leadership role with funding from the Governor's Office for Children and Families. However, the deep commitment across the diverse set of stakeholders that make up the leadership team has remained constant.

Early Childhood Systems-Building

With over 75 stakeholders participating, including a number of parent representatives, Georgia has one of the largest Strengthening Families leadership teams. The participating stakeholders cross not only systems but levels of work. The leadership team has active participation from direct service programs that are implementing Strengthening Families, as well as State departments of education and child welfare. The inclusion of stakeholders from multiple systems on the leadership team has created widespread buy-in from many child- and family-serving organizations and agencies while facilitating opportunities for coordination and collaboration among them.

This creates a structure for the Strengthening Families work in Georgia that is multi-layered, involving not only the child abuse and neglect prevention community, but also early childhood and child welfare. Participants speak enthusiastically about the level of engagement and willingness to share information and resources across the leadership team.

BRIGHT FROM THE START:
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GOVERNANCE

The lead agency convenes a group of over 75 stakeholders, representing 47 public and private organizations, to make up the state's Strengthening Families Strategic Planning Group. 12 members make up a Leadership Advisory Board, which reviews the strategic planning work, provides recommendations to further the planning, gives input regarding future (cont'd)

Cont'd from p. 1

direction of the work, and assists in carrying out the mission of Strengthening Families Georgia by promoting the framework of protective factors and strategies in all areas of related work.

Six workgroups—including an evaluation workgroup, based on the Levers for Change, address specific issues within the larger initiative.

Building Strengthening Families Practice on the Ground

In keeping with how the Strengthening Families work in Georgia developed independently from a number of sources, programmatic practice is being supported through a number of mechanisms.

As the governmental body responsible for child care and early education, Bright from the Start (BFTS) has been able to infuse Strengthening Families concepts throughout many components of the early childhood system in the state. For example:

- Georgia is one of few states to fund universal Pre-K, meaning it is available to any child regardless of income. A primary mechanism used to include families is the Resource Coordinator program. The program consists of over 500 Resource Coordinators (RCs) serving more than 50,000 four year olds in approximately 1,000 Pre-K locations. RCs use Strengthening Families as a framework for providing support services. Specifically, RCs utilize the five Protective Factors that research demonstrates increase family stability, enhance child development, reduce child abuse and neglect, and promote school readiness and success. All RCs attend annual training that focuses on the implementation of these protective factors. The assessment used to evaluate individual RC programs was created using the Strengthening Families Self Assessment. This RC program assessment evaluates a program's ability to integrate the Strengthening Families approach into the services provided for Georgia's Pre-K children and families.
- Strengthening Families is a part of the licensing system for child care programs, administered by BFTS. Child Care Consultants, who license and monitor child care programs, have been trained in Strengthening Families and are able to support providers and encourage them to include Strengthening Families in their work with children and families. This is part of an effort on the part of BFTS to transform their system from one of only inspection and compliance-monitoring to one that includes support and technical assistance.
- Bright from the Start has identified a group of nine early care and education programs with a high level of Strengthening Families exemplary practice. These sites have received additional training in Strengthening Families and will serve as mentors to other programs around the state who have expressed interest in implementing Strengthening Families. These programs make up the Georgia Strengthening Families Network.

“people see themselves and their work in the language and the approach,
but when people come together, they really see the power of it.”

In addition to the training, the mentor programs receive support from BFTS in the form of a small stipend, technical assistance, coaching and site visits.

- Sheltering Arms, one of the original 21 exemplary programs studied to develop the Strengthening Families Self Assessment, has continued to develop its Strengthening Families practice. Sheltering Arms operates a network of 17 centers in the state for which they provide training, tools, and materials to support consistency of practice. Sheltering Arms operates the Georgia Training Institute (GTI), a resource for training in the early childhood sector throughout the state. As an exemplary program, Sheltering Arms was already doing strong family strengthening practice prior to their engagement with the initiative, but enthusiastically embraced the Protective Factors and made them an integral part of their program’s approach. Sheltering Arms has developed a number of important tools to support the program implementation of the Strengthening Families approach that are being used by the 17 Sheltering Arms programs, and other programs that they mentor. These include:
 - Training materials and tools for early childhood teachers
 - A Strengthening Families planning guide that helps program staff design activities year round that build protective factors
 - An assessment and evaluation tool that helps family support staff work with families to develop and monitor a family development plan built around Protective Factors.

From 2007-2008 in Metropolitan Atlanta, the Georgia Chapter of the Black Child Development Institute, with funding from the Arthur M. Blank Family Foundation, worked with a network of 14 relatively small early care and education program to support them in building Protective Factors with families. Programs were provided initial training in Strengthening Families key concepts, supported in completing the Self Assessment, and networked as they worked on implementing the action plans they developed from their Self Assessments.

Georgia is also home to the United Way of Metropolitan Atlanta,ⁱ one of six local United Ways around the nation working to weave Strengthening Families concepts throughout all early childhood activities taking place at the sites. Metropolitan Atlanta’s chapter is exploring methods for embedding Strengthening Families not only in its services, but also in its internal policies and protocols. Successful strategies piloted in the United Way of America’s Strengthening Families project will also eventually be disseminated to all United Way chapters with early childhood activities.

Building Parent Partnerships

Creating meaningful partnerships with parents and family members has been a priority of Strengthening Families Georgia’s work since it began. Five parent representatives sit on the Strategic Planning Group, and one also sits on the Leadership Advisory Board. Three parent organizations are engaged in the state’s Strengthening Families efforts.

Four parent representatives, along with several other strategic planning group members, make up the Parent Partnerships Workgroup, which is currently developing strategies to increase parent leadership in the state and involve more parent organizations in the initiative. The group has recommended that the Protective Factors always be stated both as they are written in Strengthening Families materials *and* in family-friendly language.ⁱⁱ

Creating Family-Strengthening Child Welfare Practice

Bright from the Start, the lead agency on Strengthening Families Georgia, has developed a partnership with the state Department of Human Services (DHS), which includes the Division of Family and Children's Services (DFCS), to align departmental priorities to prevent maltreatment and promote optimal development of all children. For nearly two years, the assistant commissioners of BTFS and DHS have been working to make sure that children getting subsidized child care and children in foster care are enrolled in high quality early care and education programs.

When DHS selected SafeCare[®], an evidence-based parent-training curriculum for parents who are at-risk or have been reported for child maltreatment, as its home visiting program, BTFS was able to ensure that a mentor early childhood program (see above) was identified in each of the counties where SafeCare[®] is available. Staff in each SafeCare[®] county is aware of the mentor program and work to ensure that when families complete the 18-21 week SafeCare[®] program, they have the option to enroll their children in early education programs that are familiar with Strengthening Families concepts and attuned to their needs.

Goals outlined in the Strengthening Families strategic plan include ensuring that young children in foster care are enrolled in quality early care and education programs, providing continuity of educational placements for children involved in the foster care system, embedding Strengthening Families into child welfare practices and policies, and training caseworkers, supervisors, and foster parents in the Strengthening Families approach.

Enriching Professional Development

Strengthening Families Georgia has also included in its strategic plan the goal of embedding Strengthening Families in the professional development, training, and technical assistance systems for child and family serving professionals. In 2009 when trainers from Idaho trained the mentor programs on their Strengthening Families curriculum, trainers from across agencies attended as well. Those participating in the training included trainers from the Bright from the Start technical assistance unit (involved in training the state child care consultants and child care providers), quality initiatives team, and Pre K division (responsible for training resource coordinators within state pre-K programs). This training of trainers will not only build the overall Strengthening Families training capacity in the state, but also help to assure consistency of Strengthening Families practice across various venues.

Evaluating Strengthening Families in Georgia

The development of a strategic plan for Strengthening Families in Georgia provides a roadmap for evaluation in the coming years. An evaluation workgroup is currently using the plan to create an evaluation strategy to track and measure the impact of Strengthening Families in the state.

¹ Visit <http://www.unitedwayatlanta.org/> for more about United Way of Metropolitan Atlanta.

ⁱⁱ Different family-friendly phrasings of the Protective Factors have been developed by Strengthening Families Illinois (www.strengtheningfamiliesillinois.org), the Parent Partnership Council of the National Alliance of Children's Trust and Prevention Funds (www.ctfalliance.org), and Strengthening Families Idaho (<http://idahochildrenstrustfund.state.id.us/>).

strengthening families

washington: a shared vision

In August 2006, the state of Washington was selected to receive a seed grant from the National Alliance of Children's Trust and Prevention Funds to incorporate a Strengthening Families™ approach into the work of the statewide prevention entity, the Washington Children's Trust Fund (now the Council for Children and Families (CCF)). Washington was poised to take on Strengthening Families. Groundbreaking work on risk and protective factors by researchers J. David Hawkins, Ph.D. and Richard F. Catalano, Ph.D. at the University of Washington, had been guiding the state's child abuse and neglect prevention work for over a decade. Strengthening Families provided an opportunity to apply a Protective Factors approach more broadly in ways that could engage the early learning and child welfare communities. The timing was right. In 2008 the state created a new Department of Early Learning, launched an innovative public/private partnership called Thrive by Five, invested in a progressive expansion of all-day kindergarten, and set out on a long-term path towards improving the quality of child care and early learning programs.

Over the years, Strengthening Families Washington (SF-WA) has become an increasingly well known vehicle for advancing policies and practices that benefit young children and their families in many systems. The common language provided by the Protective Factors framework has enabled SF-WA leaders to bring stakeholders together from a variety of fields, from early learning to child welfare, from mental health to the military. As the diverse group meets regularly to develop strategies to prevent child maltreatment and promote optimal development of children in Washington, the Strengthening Families approach is infused into different sectors. CCF Director Joan Sharp notes that success in engaging a broad group of leaders is the result of an approach that emphasizes coordination and collaboration to enhance their individual areas of work. Together, members of the Strengthening Families Washington Steering Committee, which has representatives from 17 organizations as well as unaffiliated volunteers, have developed a logic model and theory of change that reflects their shared vision for children and families in Washington.

Early Childhood Systems-Building

When designing the state's Strengthening Families approach, one strategic choice was to use the state's Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems (ECCS) plan, *Kids Matter*, as a framework for its efforts. In 2009 the state included

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GOVERNANCE

The Strengthening Families Steering committee includes an array of public and private entities, including, the Council for Children and Families, Department of Health, the Child Care Resource and Referral Network, the Department of Early Learning, the Head Start State Collaboration office, the United Way of Washington, and many others.

Strengthening Families has advanced Kids Matter (the state's ECCS plan) in significant ways:

- The way Strengthening Families is defined helps answer how to strengthen and focus the family support component of the work.
- The language is very cross-sector friendly—it doesn't just apply in the family support box, but is a language that connects to priorities across systems.
- It not only connects to the outcomes that we care about related to prevention—it *also connects to promoting optimal development for children*. This brings new partners to the table who wouldn't necessarily be engaged otherwise.

Strengthening Families as a core strategy in its proposal for ongoing funding for its ECCS systems building work. The committees for Strengthening Families and ECCS/Kids Matter have recently merged as part of a larger effort to ensure that Washington's Strengthening Families work is aligned with and leverages other ongoing systems change initiatives. A strong partnership with the state's United Way association, a recipient of one of United Way's Strengthening Families United grants, is building the Protective Factors framework and Strengthening Families strategies into programming in local United Ways. A focus of current efforts is integrating Strengthening Families into the framework of the state's early learning plan. With several early childhood initiatives working simultaneously in Washington, coordination and communication have been crucial. The Protective Factors framework has provided a common language for these efforts while also bringing new stakeholders to the table.

Building Strengthening Families Practice on the Ground

In November 2006 Washington selected ten early care and education pilot sites to build knowledge of what works and to promote a Protective Factors approach in their programs. These ten sites conducted the Strengthening Families Self Assessment and participated in skill-building activities, networking, and development of an initial implementation plan. The pilot was completed in 2008, providing valuable information about strategies for bringing Strengthening Families to life in early care and education programs. The learning from the pilot sites is now being integrated into training offered to a variety of organizations. A report on the pilot can be accessed at:

<http://www.ccf.wa.gov/sfece/documents/StrengtheningFamiliesReport2008.pdf>

Building Parent Partnerships

Fostering leadership and partnering with parents are central components of Washington's Strengthening Families strategy. The Community Café concept was developed in Washington by Strengthening Families parent leaders and represents a key SF-WA strategy. The Community Café approach is based on the World Café, a series of conversations that build upon one another to further understanding and discussion about "questions that matter." These community-based, culturally relevant conversations have three focal areas: building Protective Factors, promoting parent leadership, and creating lasting partnerships throughout communities. Many parents who have participated in these cafés go on to host their own cafés, mentor future hosts, and advocate for their families and communities in venues like the state legislature.

Though members of each community design their own unique cafe, a Community Café Collaborative Leadership Team of parents coordinates this effort at a state level. The team provides orientations for communities that hope to begin holding their own cafés. A budget of \$2,000 will pay for snacks and child care for a café series, and support efforts to build sustainability in the community. In addition, close to 100 partner organizations around the state provide in-kind contributions to support the cafes. This includes venues, food, books from a reading foundation as an incentive, and many other partners. The Leadership Team also encourages café hosts to develop partnerships with local organizations and agencies and to create their own local leadership team. SF-WA has contributed to national replication of Community Cafes by supporting development of the Café Host Orientation Kits now available on the National Alliance of Children's Trust & Prevention Funds website, <http://www.ctfalliance.org>.

Washington has seen tremendous enthusiasm for the Community Café approach since it began in 2007. The Community Café Collaborative strives to meet the demand for cafés and build a flexible structure to support the statewide deployment of this strategy, but remains steadfast in its commitment to developing a model that allows for an optimal level of community input and co-design.

Enriching Professional Development

Training and professional development around Strengthening Families is a focus for work in the coming year. A Steering Committee subgroup on Professional Development will be coordinating work that is taking place in three areas: general introductions to Strengthening Families, professional development in early learning, and child welfare caseworker training. A "Strengthening Families 101" presentation is available upon request to for those who would like an introduction to the Protective Factors and other basic Strengthening Families concepts. As Washington's Department of Early Learning begins to develop a system of professional development in its early learning framework, several Strengthening Families stakeholders will be bringing their knowledge of the Protective Factors to the process, embedding them into the plan and delivery system.

Family-Strengthening Child Welfare Practice

Recent transitions at multiple levels of the child welfare system present both a challenge and an opportunity to develop Strengthening Families work in this area. While administrative positions were filled by interim staff at the time of this report, the Council for Children and Families hopes to engage the new child welfare leaders once they are appointed to build on emerging efforts to incorporate the Strengthening Families approach into the training of child welfare staff. The goal is to educate caseworkers about early childhood development and the importance of ensuring that the youngest children in their caseloads are enrolled in quality early care and education programs.

Evaluating Strengthening Families in Washington

Strengthening Families Washington operates from a Theory of Change which provides a framework for evaluation. As systems change is a key area of emphasis in the state's Strengthening Families work, a significant part of the states' evaluation work tracks progress in this area. SF-WA benefits from their linkage to the state's Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems plan, which implements broader data-gathering efforts as part of the evaluation required in that grant. Evaluation processes and tools have also been established for some of the programmatic efforts undertaken, such as presentations and trainings on the Strengthening Families approach and Protective Factor framework, Community Cafes, etc. An evaluation consultant is currently working with the leadership committee's evaluation work group to fine tune an evaluation plan.

community cafés that strengthen families

Washington State is supporting a parent-led project called Community Cafés to mobilize parents towards building better communities, services and systems for themselves and their families. The Community Café (CC) approach grew from a seed planted by the Illinois Family Partnership Parent Café at the Strengthening Families through Early Care and Education Summit in San Diego in 2007. Building on the World Café process of structured small group conversations, Community Cafés, and the Parent Cafés that inspired them, engage parents in a dialogue about the Protective Factors at the core of Strengthening Families. Washington's Community Cafés also include a set of conversations about leadership and what it means to take and show it, then a set of conversations about partnerships and the type of relationship-building necessary to make community and policy changes.

Over 150 parents and staff across the state have been oriented to the Community Café approach, 68 of them parents. The Community Café process actively engages over 500 parents and community members in Washington alone, powered by over 70 volunteers, who have donated more than 4,000 documented volunteer hours. Parents have led the process from the beginning. Though members of each community design their own unique café, a Community Café Collaborative Leadership Team of parents coordinates this effort at a state level. The team provides orientations for communities that hope to hold their own cafés. No paid staff was used to design, manage, budget, implement or evaluate cafes though small amounts of funding were used to provide parent leaders a gratitude stipend and subsidize meals, child care, mileage, and supplies.

At the local level, a \$2,000 grant to a community pays for snacks and child care for a café series, and supports efforts to build sustainability in the community. Almost 100 partner organizations around the state provide in-kind contributions to support the cafés including sites for holding the cafes, food, books as an incentive from a foundation, and other contributions. The Leadership Team also encourages café hosts to develop partnerships with local organizations and agencies and to create its own local leadership team.

The whole structure is designed to create a ladder of leadership opportunities and capacity-building for parents. Parents build relationships with organizations at the local, state, and national levels; write grants and letters; learn computer skills; design conversations; implement evaluations; give public presentations; mentor other parents; and do a myriad of other jobs. They have been invited to several national conferences and meetings and started cafes in seven states. Four national non-profits are partnering to use the approach to support state prevention efforts. Parents receive a stipend to design and customize trainings and fly out of state to present them. There is also a mentor option for new hosts and a national monthly conference call to support Community Café practice.