

appendix e

strategies to support linkages between early childhood and child welfare: examples from states

While only three states participated in the A. L. Mailman Family Foundation-funded pilot, many others developed strategies for supporting partnership between state child welfare and early childhood entities. A selection of examples from states in the Strengthening Families National Network illustrates some of the possibilities for linking these systems to better support young children and their families. This list is not exhaustive.

Goal One: Build a focus on optimal development and family-strengthening into child welfare practice with young children.

Strategy: Ensure that all child welfare systems, agencies, administrators, supervisors, and caseworkers understand early child development, including developmental milestones, indicators of developmental delays, and requirements for optimal child development.

New Jersey: The Division of Prevention and Community Partnerships developed a handbook on the Protective Factors for staff in the Division of Youth and Family Services (DYFS). The Division plans to use the booklet as a training tool in each of the state's local DYFS offices.

Idaho: Staff supporting Strengthening Families Idaho met with the child welfare system's lead social workers in each of the state's regions to introduce the Protective Factors and discuss using them to increase the knowledge of child welfare workers about the needs of young children.

Several states, including **Missouri** and **Illinois**, are embedding information about the Protective Factors and the developmental needs of young children into foundation training for child welfare workers.

Strategy: Consider risk *and* Protective Factors in all aspects of work with families of young children in the child welfare system.

Wisconsin: The Wisconsin Children’s Trust Fund adapted its original training on Strengthening Families for use with foster parents, and the training has been used in various jurisdictions around the state.

Missouri: Child welfare administrators in Missouri chose to identify where practice building Protective Factors was already in place by analyzing workers’ required training. Language about the Protective Factors and their relevance to ongoing work was then added to all communications from state child welfare agency administrators.

Illinois: Working with the Department of Children and Family Services, Strengthening Families Illinois revised reunification tools, including a handbook for parents and a readiness tool administered by caseworkers, that explains and identifies risk and Protective Factors present in families before reunification.

Goal Two: Ensure that families reported to the child welfare system are appropriately assessed and receive services tailored to their needs.

Strategy: Shift the paradigm around child abuse and neglect reporting to allow and encourage reporters to connect parents experiencing stress to the supports and services they need before incidents occur.

Minnesota: Hotline operators in each of Minnesota’s counties are encouraged to use strengths-based screening practice. Suggested questions for screeners seek to identify family Protective Factors and potential community resources for families who are reported. These questions include:

- 1 What do you think is going well for this family?
- 2 Do you know of any resources or supports the family currently has (supportive relationships)?
- 3 Do you know of any (or any other) services or supports that would be helpful to this family?
- 4 What are you willing to do (or have you done) to help the family thus far?

New Jersey: Trainers from local child care resource and referral agencies visit early care and education centers and discuss the role and responsibilities of the child welfare system and how to make referrals.

Strategy: Create pathways for families who may benefit from non-child welfare services to receive support without opening a child welfare case.

New Jersey: Community-based agencies in counties across the state have contracts to engage families referred to protective services but diverted to local agencies because of lower risk levels.

Goal Three: Link the various systems that serve young children and their families in order to enhance supportive services to families within any of these systems, including child welfare.

Strategy: Ensure an understanding between and appreciation among early childhood and child welfare systems as partners in prevention of maltreatment and promotion of optimal child development.

Illinois: Several hundred child welfare workers and Head Start providers have participated in cross trainings, allowing each group to learn about the other's work and explore how they might collaborate to better support the most at-risk children in the state.

New Jersey: Mirroring the state-level Leadership Team structure, each of the state's 21 counties have multidisciplinary Leadership Teams that collaborate across early childhood and child welfare sectors to align services that support children and families.

Tennessee: A pilot is being conducted in two Department of Children's Services (DCS) regions to provide child welfare workers and child care resource and referral staff the opportunity to know each other and understand the work of each entity. The outcome of cross-training and communication will help DCS workers who are seeking to place young children in child care to find the knowledge and resources about quality child care available in local areas through the CCR&Rs.

Goal Four: Ensure that young children in child welfare have access to high quality early care and education programs.

Strategy: Mandate that young children with open child welfare cases are enrolled in quality early care and education programs.

Illinois: A change to the state administrative code mandates that all children ages 3-5 in state custody are enrolled in high quality child care programs. A memorandum of understanding between the child welfare agency and Head Starts guarantees that these children will automatically be moved on to priority lists for enrollment.

Georgia: In Georgia, Bright from the Start developed a partnership with the Department of Human Services, including the Division of Child and Family Services, which has led to efforts to ensure that children in foster care are enrolled in high quality early care and education programs.

Goal Five: Include specific strategies and benchmarks aimed at improving developmental outcomes for children, such as enhanced school readiness, into QSRs, CFSRs, PIPs, and other quality improvement efforts.

Strategy: Include specific goals and strategies to improve developmental outcomes for young children in state child welfare system Program Improvement Plans (PIPs).

Idaho: The director of the state Children's Trust Fund was able to participate in the process of developing the state's PIP in 2008, providing an opportunity to explore how Strengthening Families could support the state's PIP goals.