

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.