

Alaska: State Initiative Profile



Overview

Alaska joined the Strengthening Families™ effort in 2005 as an original pilot state. With a very high rate of child abuse and neglect, Alaska policymakers were intrigued by the opportunity to approach prevention in a new, innovative way. The initiative's original focus was on embedding Strengthening Families in early care and learning programs. Over the last five years, the reach has expanded to professional development systems, university programs, child protection services, schools and other service providers.

The program is coordinated by the Office of Children's Services in the Department of Health & Social Services. From the beginning, the Leadership Team has included key decision makers from a variety of programs. Currently the membership includes representatives from: the University of Alaska, United Way of Anchorage, the Alaska Children's Trust, the Department of Education and Early Development, the Head Start Collaboration Office, Title V & Women's, Children's & Family Health, the Child Care Program Office, the Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems Initiative, the Child Care Resource & Referral Agency, the Early Intervention/Part C Program, Best Beginnings and the Family and Youth Training Academy. Parents are also important members of this leadership team.

Building Strengthening Families Practice on the Ground

Alaska first engaged six pilot sites, adding an additional 10 sites later with support from United Way of Anchorage. Early childhood programs are encouraged to have at least 30 percent of their staff complete 12-15 hours of Strengthening Families training, complete the self-assessment and develop an implementation plan. A monthly learning network teleconference provides ongoing training, discussion and support for programs across the state. Additionally, programs are provided individualized technical assistance through the Child Care Resource & Referral Agency. Programs have access to early childhood mental consultation as well.

Alaska has had limited funding available for Strengthening Families and it has been quite remarkable to see how much has been done despite that. Since 2005, the project's primary support has come from the Alaska Children's Trust, the Title V Block Grant, the System for Early Education Development, the Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems grant and United Way of Anchorage. Future work will also utilize funding from the Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority and the Early Intervention/Part C Program.

Key Aspects of the State's work

Policy / Systems Change

The Alaska Strengthening Families strategic plan includes policy and systems goals focused on including the Protective Factors in grant requirements for a number of

Strengthening Families is a research-based, cost-effective strategy to increase family stability, enhance child development and reduce child abuse and neglect. It builds five protective factors:

Parental resilience

Social connections

Knowledge of parenting and child development

Concrete support in times of need

Social and emotional competence of children

Through the Strengthening Families Initiative, more than thirty states are shifting policy, funding and training to help programs working with children and families build protective factors with families. Many states are also using the Strengthening Families approach to integrate state prevention strategies, strengthen families in the child welfare system and engage parents and communities in building protective factors. For more information, visit www.strengtheningfamilies.net

Nationally, Strengthening Families is coordinated by the Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP) and supported by a number of national partner organizations including:

The National Alliance of Children's Trust and Prevention Funds

The BUILD Initiative

United Way Worldwide

Zero to Three

The FRIENDS National Resource Center



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2009 QUICK FACTS

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SF Investment:

Direct - \$269, 690 (includes
Title V FY 2005- FY 2009)

Match - \$34,560 (Early
childhood programs, CCR&Rs)

Programs reached: N/A

Children reached: N/A

Professional Development:

416 individuals; 2,232 training
hours

Protective Factors used in

ECCS Planning: Yes

Protective Factors used in

CBCAP RFP Process: Yes

Protective Factors integrated

into state QRIS: Yes

CCR&R Network in state

supporting program
implementation in EC sector:
Yes

programs. Already the Protective Factors have been embedded in grant solicitations from United Way of Anchorage, the Alaska Children's Trust, early childhood mental health projects and the Community Based Child Abuse Prevention program. A structure and process for designating programs as official Strengthening Families sites have been developed and the Child Care Program Office is exploring the implications of including requirements for Strengthening Families training as part of its licensing requirements.

Parent Partnerships

Parents are represented on the State Leadership Team and co-facilitate committees and workgroups. Strengthening Families programs are required to include parents on local leadership teams. The Alaska Children's Trust and the leadership team have teamed up to promote the use of "community cafés" to create meaningful dialogue with parents and staff. Most recently Strengthening Families has teamed up with the Alaska Parent Information Resource Center to offer a course to an entire school district on parent engagement.

Professional Development

The Strengthening Families framework has been embedded in several professional development systems and will be included in the new Early Childhood Professional Development Core Knowledge document. Embedding the information in professional development efforts such as university courses, Child Care Resource & Referral training, workshops at regional conferences and specific training to organizations has been key.

Evaluating Strengthening Families

Two major evaluations have been conducted on early childhood programs utilizing the Strengthening Families approach. The first evaluated the six initial pilot sites and focused on practice changes occurring in the programs as a result of their participation. The second was conducted through the United Way Strengthening Families project funded in Alaska. This evaluation looked at changes in staff knowledge and practice, as well as parent changes and benefits. Both evaluations found significant improvements in programs, staff and parents.

Evolving Work

Alaska continues to expand its reach with Strengthening Families. A variety of service sectors are exploring the possibility of incorporating this approach into their work with families, including Early Intervention/Part C, Head Start and Parents As Teachers. Alaska is also looking at the development of specific "parent events" that can be aligned with early childhood conferences, and is exploring the use of social networking venues as mechanisms for reaching and supporting parents. Alaska continues to explore the alignment of Strengthening Families Protective Factors with Alaska Native values and the use of community conversations as a way to support the building of strong, supportive communities around the state.