

New Jersey: State Initiative Profile



Overview

In 2005, New Jersey joined the Early Childhood Initiative of the National Alliance of Children's Trust & Prevention Funds, a learning community for states implementing Strengthening Families™. The Commissioners of the New Jersey Department of Human Services (DHS) and the Department of Education co-convened relevant stakeholders to form the New Jersey Strengthening Families Initiative (NJSFI) Task Force. Members represent six state departments: Children & Families (DCF), Education, DHS, Health & Senior Services, Labor and Workforce Development, and Environmental Protection. NJSFI also seats members from the New Jersey Children's Trust Fund, five community-based child protection/advocacy agencies, eight parents, three child care provider directors and eight institutions of higher education. In 2006, the Division of Prevention & Community Partnerships (DPCP) in the newly established Department of Children & Families (DCF) became the lead agency for NJSFI.

Building Strengthening Families Practice on the Ground

NJSFI first initiated a pilot program selecting eight communities to be introduced to the Strengthening Families approach and subsequently receive funding to develop and conduct activities that would engage parents. Soon after, DPCP partnered with the DHS Division of Family Development (DFD) to implement Strengthening Families in 105 child care centers throughout the state. DFD added to its existing contract with the 21 county Child Care & Referral (CCR&R) agencies in the state, assigning the CCR&Rs responsibility for selecting, training and monitoring implementation of the Strengthening Families approach in five centers in each county. CCR&RS make two visits a year to each site and prepare a report to DPCP outlining the centers' progress based on standard evaluation tools. DCF funding also allows for each center to receive a \$400 mini-grant to support parent engagement efforts. By 2009, the effort expanded to support eight centers in each county.

Key Aspects of the State's work

Policy / Systems Change

Strengthening Families is becoming a part of the prevention fabric in New Jersey. The lessons learned from implementing the approach are applicable to a broad context, and the principles & concepts are being infused into all the work of DPCP. One of the key planks of the state child abuse prevention plan is revising the state prevention standards to incorporate Strengthening Families as a goal. All community-based prevention programs funded by DPCP must show evidence that their program frameworks incorporate the Protective Factors and the revised prevention standards.

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

State Coordinator:

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SF Investment: N/A

Programs reached: 184 early
childhood programs

Children reached: 13,916

Professional Development:
382 individuals trained;
9,904 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

Parent Partnerships

The NJSFI Parent Leadership Team consists of two parents from each of the 21 counties in the state. Members meet quarterly to discuss the successes and challenges of parental engagement. These meetings are located regionally at the request of the parents. Six of these parents are members of the NJSFI Task Force. Each of the approximately 180 centers participating in the Strengthening Families program has established a center leadership team with parents as members. Parents have requested that county-level parent leadership teams be established and the CCR&R network is working to establish these. Parents have also participated in the mandatory Strengthening Families/Division of Youth & Family Services (DYFS) case model alignment training for DYFS workers.

Professional Development:

Institutes of Higher Education are engaged in NJSFI. The Protective Factors are now infused in the NJ State Core Knowledge and Standards Competencies Manual for professionals working with children through age eight and in after school programs. Six community colleges and eight four-year higher education institutions currently include the Strengthening Families framework in their curriculum for early childhood coursework. The chairs or deans of the early childhood departments of these institutions participate in the SFI Task Force Education Subcommittee. Twelve of the 16 community colleges statewide have incorporated two courses in social –emotional well-being, and students majoring in early childhood education and/or social work have opportunities to intern with early childhood centers implementing Strengthening Families and CCR&R agencies.

Evolving Work

New Jersey's success in engaging parents as leaders has created a cadre of empowered parents who want to see the effort expand to the primary school grades. NJSFI is now collaborating with the Department of Education to introduce the Strengthening Families approach to all school districts in the state.