

Wisconsin: State Initiative Profile



Overview

Wisconsin was among the first Strengthening Families™ initiative pilot states. The Wisconsin Children's Trust Fund convened a state leadership team that included representatives from the Departments of Children and Families and Public Instruction, the Supporting Families Together Association, the Wisconsin Alliance for Infant Mental Health and county child protective service agencies. All who saw the value in enhancing connections with systems like early care and education as a means of preventing child abuse and neglect. The partners found that the Strengthening Families Protective Factors provided a useful, strategic framework for working with families and the systems that serve them. At this time there are no designated financial resources going towards the Strengthening Families Initiative in Wisconsin. All funds are provided in-kind by the respective agencies.

Building Strengthening Families Practice on the Ground

The state resource and referral agency for child care and family resource centers, now known as the Supporting Families Together Association (SFTA), offers training and technical assistance on the Protective Factors to early care and education providers and child care centers. Since 2005, providers from more than 900 child care centers have received training and approximately 200 centers have completed the Strengthening Families self-assessment.

Key Aspects of the State's work

Policy / Systems Change

Wisconsin is working with several pilot counties on ways to enhance the relationship between child welfare and early care and education. As a result of these efforts, Wisconsin was selected as one of three states in 2007 to receive specialized technical assistance from the Center for the Study of Social Policy through a grant from the A.L. Mailman Foundation. Currently Wisconsin is focusing on policy efforts that embody the Strengthening Families philosophy as well as continuously marketing Strengthening Families throughout the state. This includes developing formal recommendations to the Department of Children and Families on the transitional supports provided to families leaving the child welfare system and revised eligibility requirements to allow more families the opportunity to qualify for the Wisconsin Shares child care subsidy program.

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: N/A

Programs reached: N/A

Families reached: N/A

Professional Development:

251 individuals trained

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

Professional Development

Wisconsin's new YoungStar quality rating and improvement system gives extra "points" for early care and education settings that have acquired the Protective Factors training. Wisconsin is working with SFTA to create a Protective Factors training plan and will provide technical assistance to counties implementing the Strengthening Families approach.

Evaluating Strengthening Families

Though no rigorous evaluation has been conducted, in 2009 the peer-reviewed journal *Early Education and Development* published an article summarizing Wisconsin's Strengthening Families implementation efforts. The authors analyzed program self-assessments submitted by 186 early care and education programs. The analysis revealed that Head Start programs had better support systems in place for families than "mainstream" early care and education programs. Results also showed that a small amount of state and local funding provided enough incentive for programs to improve their family-strengthening practices. In addition, Wisconsin created a logic model to discuss ways to integrate Strengthening Families into child welfare practice and also created Parent Café evaluation forms.

Evolving Work

Wisconsin will continue to market and implement the Strengthening Families approach, starting with follow-up on findings/recommendations of a recent Child Care Expulsion Survey. The initiative is also working on a plan to evaluate Parent Cafés and continues to identify strategies for implementing Strengthening Families in child welfare practice. An environmental scan is also underway on the professional development offerings across systems, which will identify needs for additional training specific to the Protective Factors.