

STRENGTHENING FAMILIES ARKANSAS: STATE PROFILE

Infrastructure

The Arkansas Children's Trust Fund (CTF), the Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education (DCCECE) in the Arkansas Department of Human Services and the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences (UAMS) Department of Family and Preventive Medicine are the leaders of the Strengthening Families™ work in Arkansas. Their primary focus is to encourage child care providers to adopt and implement the Strengthening Families Protective Factors Framework and to increase the availability of professional development opportunities to support those providers.

The Arkansas Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems Initiative's Social-Emotional Workgroup articulated the state plan for early childhood mental health consultation. To ensure immediate access to updated resource and referral information, the Arkansas DCCECE partnered with the University of Arkansas at Little Rock (UALR) and UAMS to develop an online resource directory that will include a searchable resource guide for services statewide.

Parent Partnerships

Training on how to conduct Community Cafés have been provided to child care centers across the state.

Deepening Knowledge and Understanding

Arkansas has created a continuum of services that encourages early care and education programs to adopt the Strengthening Families approach:

- Naptime Academy, an online, one-hour professional development course on topics related to the protective factors
- Strengthening Families Assessment: Directors Seminar that provides six hours of training and technical assistance to complete the online assessment
- Family Map Inventories, a six-hour training on conducting a family assessment using a semi-structured interview process to identify risk and protective factors and develop an action plan for parent education and support
- Project PLAY, an early childhood mental health consultation program to facilitate collaboration between Community Mental Health Centers, early childcare programs and child welfare
- Teaching Important Parenting Skills: TIPS for Great Kids!, a six-hour training and toolkit that includes a unit on the Strengthening Families approach.

Strengthening Families

Strengthening Families™ is a research-informed approach to increase family strengths, enhance child development and reduce the likelihood of child abuse and neglect. It is based on engaging families, programs and communities in building 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

Using the Strengthening Families framework, more than 30 states are shifting policy and practice to help programs working with children and families focus on protective factors. States apply the Strengthening Families approach in early childhood, child welfare, child abuse prevention and other child and family serving systems.

Nationally, the Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP) coordinates Strengthening Families and works with more than a dozen national partner organizations to create a new vision in which communities, families, institutions, service systems and organizations:

- Focus on protective and promotive factors
- Recognize and support parents as decision-makers and leaders
- Value the culture and unique assets of each family
- Are mutually responsible for better outcomes for children, youth and families

For more information, visit www.strengtheningfamilies.net.

Implementation Checklist

Protective Factors used in Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems or other early childhood systems planning	✓
Protective Factors used in Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention RFP Process	✓
Protective Factors integrated into state Quality Rating and Improvement System	✓
Child Care Resource & Referral Network in state supporting program implementation	✓
Strengthening Families included in State Home Visiting Plan	
Strengthening Families is being implemented into child welfare system	✓

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Shifting Practice, Policies and Systems

Arkansas has embedded Strengthening Families into the Better Beginnings Quality Rating Improvement System (QRIS) for early care and education programs. At the highest rating level so far developed, programs are required to complete at least three of the seven strategies of the Strengthening Families online self-assessment, develop an action plan and implement at least one action step. Over 200 programs have begun the online assessment.

The Arkansas CTF now encourages all grant recipients to address one or more of the protective factors in their programming. Arkansas received a federal grant to increase protective factors for children in foster care. Interviews of key stakeholders have begun and the planning committee is exploring ways to strengthen the relationship between Child Protective Services and the early childhood education community.

Ensuring Accountability

The current evaluation includes a process component that assesses compliance with the QRIS standards. The Better Beginnings evaluation tracks programs that achieve level 3 for the Administration component in which Strengthening Families is addressed. UAMS tracks programs' use of the Strengthening Families self-assessment using the online tracking system, and has conducted 11 Strengthening Families Directors' Seminars this fiscal year. Nineteen of the directors attending the training started the online assessment. Data analysis is underway to examine the individual items in the online tracking report for Arkansas to determine areas that may require technical assistance.

Evolving Work

Arkansas has reestablished its Strengthening Families Leadership Team to guide the integration of the training into the Arkansas professional development plan to enhance caregivers'

knowledge of the Strengthening Families approach. The team is also exploring ways to utilize the online training course developed by the National Alliance of Children's Trust and Prevention Funds into professional development and education systems. UAMS will partner with Child Care Resource and Referral agencies to deliver a one-hour introductory training to early care and education providers statewide to increase their awareness of ways they can impact children and families

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