



## STRENGTHENING FAMILIES CONNECTICUT: STATE PROFILE

### Infrastructure

Connecticut is engaged in two related Strengthening Families™ initiatives, one led by the Connecticut Children’s Trust Fund (Trust Fund) and the other by a partnership between the Department of Children and Families (DCF) and the Head Start State Collaboration Office. The Trust Fund helps Connecticut parents develop nurturing relationships with their children and improve their own lives through community programs and support networks. The DCF/Head Start Partnership is building capacity to raise awareness of the Strengthening Families approach in local communities to support better services for families.

Trust Fund staff are trained on Strengthening Families and a primary prevention services coordinator serves as lead staff for this initiative. Strengthening Families is infused throughout the Trust Fund’s work to support child abuse and neglect prevention through family support and parent education, service provider networks and ongoing site development for continuous quality improvement.

Although the state does not currently have a Quality Rating Improvement System (QRIS), discussions are taking place on the development of a state QRIS system and related Strengthening Families resources and state models are being shared with state leaders.

The informal leadership team of partners implementing the Strengthening Families Approach (SFA) and the Protective Factors Framework in CT was convened by the Trust Fund during the first quarter of 2013 to formalize the leadership team, set a meeting schedule, and otherwise work to enhance communication and collaboration around our work.

### Parent Partnerships

The Trust Fund offers Parent Café trainings to communities. Recently, the Trust Fund facilitated Parent Cafés at a Pre-K through 12th-grade school and two Early Childhood programs in Hartford. The Trust Fund also launched the “[Take 5 for Positive Parenting](#)” campaign for parents. Parents are included as intended participants in the DCF/Head Start Partnership’s training activities. The DCF/Head Start Partnership sponsored a presentation on Parent Cafés for 150 participants by Strengthening Families Illinois at a recent statewide DCF-Head Start Partnership quarterly meeting.

### 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](http://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	✓

### State Coordinators

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## Deepening Knowledge and Understanding

The Trust Fund facilitates delivery of Strengthening Families training to all 40 Nurturing Families Network home visiting programs statewide. The Trust Fund also provides Strengthening Families training to community early care and education providers through 80 Help Me Grow Early Childhood Networking Breakfasts statewide. Through their ACF Early Childhood Child Welfare federal grant, the DCF/Head Start Partnership offered a train-the-trainer course and professional development trainings on Strengthening Families to a broad range of child and family service sectors, including DCF, Head Start, foster care, early childhood mental health, supportive housing and child care. Community partners are being supported to align their approach to supporting and engaging families by embedding the Strengthening Families protective factors into the work they do. The goal is to educate a wide audience on the Strengthening Families approach.

The Trust Fund provides “Strengthening Families 101” training statewide to program staff, early childhood professionals, physicians and communities. Programs also receive training and technical assistance on using the Strengthening Families self-assessment tools. The DCF/Head Start Partnership is using professional development as a strategy for building capacity and partnerships to spread and sustain the Strengthening Families approach. Specifically, the two-day train-the-trainer engaged 25 participants from DCF, Head Start, foster care, early childhood mental health, supportive housing, child care and other sectors; and three one-day trainings engaged over 250 cross-sector participants representing local community teams.

## Shifting Practice, Policies and Systems

The Trust Fund led efforts to incorporate the Strengthening Families (SF) approach into the Help Me Grow System of Care: Child Development Infoline, the state’s early childhood telephone information and referral service for parents of children at risk or suspected of developmental delays or disabilities. DCF is currently aligning child welfare practice to the Strengthening Families approach and worked with the Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP) to develop a toolkit focused on the specific needs of very young children. The cross sector train-the-trainer is providing community representatives and lead staff the opportunity to build shared capacity, to influence the content of future

professional and policy development, to strengthen partnerships and plan jointly across service sectors. The Department of Children and Families utilizes the SF Protective factors in both the Family Assessment Response (DRS) and Intake Assessment (Investigations) consistent with our Strengthening Families Practice Model.

*Profile last updated: June 2014*