



STRENGTHENING MAINE FAMILIES

Infrastructure

The Maine Children's Trust initiated the Strengthening Maine Families (SMF) Project with a seed grant from the National Alliance of Children's Trust and Prevention Funds, funded by the Doris Duke Foundation. The Trust engaged Maine's Early Childhood Initiative as an initial partner, forming a positive public/private partnership to implement the project. Following a year in which this framework was introduced to a variety of Maine policy leaders from executive, judicial and legislative branches, as well as other human services program and policy leaders, SMF began implementing this framework in multiple systems, contracts and documents. SMF has blended private foundation funding, Children's Trust support and other state and federal funding opportunities to support its strategic planning team, training tool development and project coordinator and technical assistance.

SMF's goal has always been to become sustainable through partnerships. The Maine strategy continues to develop a pool of trainers that can and will work with child care providers to provide protective factor training, assist with self-assessment and utilize technical assistance. SMF plans to continue to promote the online training, as well as the on-line Strengthening Families tools.

Parent Partnerships

An emerging area for SMF, parent partnerships will be the focus of expanded technical assistance to child care centers in the near future. SMF held Community/Parent Café training for its partners so that those who provide training and technical assistance to child care providers could use this as part of the work they do. SMF has offered Parent Cafés in several sites and has plans for more. SMF has a parent trained as a co-trainer in parent leadership, and we intend in the following year to more fully utilize this parent, our SMF coordinator and our network of CAN council professionals to expand the utilization of parent café's and expand the parent leader network.

Deeping Knowledge and Understanding

Staff from Councils for the Prevention of Child Abuse and ECI partners will be trained in Strengthening Families through a train-the-trainer curriculum that is being developed by SMF in partnership with Maine Roads to Quality. This curriculum will be part of core training for providers enrolled in Maine Roads, but can be taught in separate modules. The state of Maine offers certificate programs to undergraduates in the area of early childhood development, and Strengthening Families has been integrated into the Parent Engagement module for these certificates. SMF offers informational presentations and workshops at childcare conferences and as electives for providers. SMF intends to offer basic training to a variety of partners, including child welfare. The Maine Children's Trust has already integrated the Protective Factors into their granting process, and continues to offer information to other granting agencies whenever possible.

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.



MAINE

strengthening families™

CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF SOCIAL POLICY

A PROTECTIVE FACTORS FRAMEWORK

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 Coordinator

Amanda Dennen
 Strengthening Maine Families
 Coordinator
 (270) 720-0316
 amanda.dennen@gmail.com

Shifting Practice, Policies and Systems

The SMF program is open to all family- and center-based child care providers. Upon completion of the Strengthening Families self-assessment, providers are eligible for technical assistance through the SMF statewide coordinator. SMF has created a website through which child care staff can access the self-assessment and strategic planning tools.

SMF has adopted a strategy to embed the Strengthening Families Protective Factors Framework into as many systems as possible, and to develop a system of training and support that would continue beyond the project's lifespan. SMF is now a priority of the legislatively created Children's Growth Council, which oversees the implementation of Maine's Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems plan. The director of the Children's Trust is a member of the growth council and sits on its family initiative team, which has adopted SMF as a top priority.

SMF is partnering with the state quality rating system (QRS) to incorporate Strengthening Families into the QRS. Strengthening Families has also been taught as part of a parent engagement course for child care providers at a local community college and has been introduced to the Committee for Higher Education for Early Childhood.

SMF continues to work with the state, training partners and councils for the prevention of child abuse.

Ensuring Accountability

To date, providers' progress has been monitored through a rapid cycle change process. Participants identify areas of growth through the self-assessment and choose one action plan to implement. They keep basic data to track progress; if the action plan strategy works they maintain it and if not they modify or abandon it. The SMF coordinator keeps track of the strategies used and resulting outcomes as a way to build a bank of ideas for other providers to use. SMF plans to use the Protective Factors Survey in the future to help track changes in families' protective factors over time.

Evolving Work

SMF will continue to expand its web-based tools as the project seeks to increase the number of centers completing a self-assessment and action plan. Work to refine the Strengthening Families curriculum and train-the-trainer courses will continue and SMF training will soon be offered for certification through the Maine Roads to Quality program. SMF will have to continue to be creative and flexible as the current state budgeting process makes definitive planning a challenge.

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