

STRENGTHENING FAMILIES NORTH CAROLINA: STATE PROFILE

Infrastructure

Through a three-year contract, which began on July 1, 2012, the North Carolina Department of Social Services (NCDSS) is partnering with the Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP) to use the Strengthening Families[™] Protective Factors Framework as an overarching framework for child welfare policy and practice within NCDSS and with other state and local agencies and community stakeholders, including parents. The five primary goals of this partnership are: 1) assess the opportunity for integration of the protective factors across child maltreatment prevention fund sources and develop an integration matrix for guiding development and expansion; 2) analyze NCDSS' recently developed logic models and outcomes and co-develop with managers and others a set of overarching outcomes and indicators that broadly measure the impact of the work of NCDSS as a collective; 3) increase capacity of prevention services grantees to design and deliver strategies consistent with a protective factors approach; 4) contribute to dialogue with stakeholders in the development of a unifying approach to multi-system prevention work within the state; and 5) support NCDSS in examining, adopting and embedding protective factors as a part of its child welfare practice model with families and develop with other stakeholders a greater understanding of what it means to have a dual focus on optimal child development (child well-being) and family strengthening (safety and permanency).

North Carolina child abuse prevention stakeholders are working to create a unifying approach to multi-system prevention work. This includes the work of the Alliance for Evidence-Based Family Strengthening Programs, a collaborative network of public and private funders and supporters who engage in broad systems-level work. The purpose is to enhance fiscal and implementation support to programs delivering evidence-based programming to improve outcomes for children and families. Strengthening Families is under consideration as a framework for multi-system prevention efforts.

Parent Partnerships

In partnership with CSSP, NCDSS hopes to strengthen capacity to engage parents and families in the planning, coordination and leadership to support child and family well-being outcomes. CSSP will be assisting NCDSS in identifying opportunities where parent leaders can take on leadership roles and provide direction to strengthen services, practices and policies as well as work in shared leadership to achieve shared vision and mutual goals to improve outcomes for children and families. Strategies will include: 1) conduct an environmental scan of existing parent/family engagement activities and assessment of opportunities for connection among existing parent/family engagement strategies using the Protective Factors Framework as a unifying approach; 2) using the parent café model, provide an educational session to discuss the value of parent engagement in NCDSS decision making and the development of next steps for inclusion of the "family voice"; and 3) conduct parent/community café sessions with decision makers and identified parent leaders to help identify actions for the development of a coordinated parent/family engagement strategy.

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	✓

State Coordinators

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Deepening Knowledge and Understanding

The Protective Factors approach is being utilized as a unifying framework for supporting workers in more effectively engaging parents across the child welfare continuum. This training builds off the strong foundation of the existing online training developed by the National Alliance of Children's Trust and Prevention Funds, but is infused with content and examples more specific to child welfare practice. CSSP is contributing content based on its work with child welfare jurisdictions around the country and the NACTPF is taking the lead on creating a new online course, parallel to the existing course which will be specific to a child welfare audience.

Shifting Practice, Policies and Systems

In an effort to enhance Strengthening Families practice at the local level, all new NCDSS funding announcements with a child abuse and neglect prevention focus will include the Strengthening Families Protective Factors Framework language and require outcomes correlated to the protective factors.

The integration of the Strengthening Families protective factors as an overarching framework for child welfare services within the NCDSS would unify and build on current work and assets across the child welfare continuum and agencies to amplify both knowledge and momentum to positively impact greater numbers of families and children. The anticipated result of this approach is the prevention of child abuse and neglect long before it occurs and promotion of well-being for children served by the child welfare system. Strategic efforts will begin with NCDSS, Child Welfare Services Section, and involve the collaboration of other state and local agencies and community stakeholders. As a comprehensive approach to working with families (rather than a model program), Strengthening Families and the Protective Factors Framework can be sustainably woven into existing policies, programs and practice across child and family serving systems. This will allow partners to apply the framework within the context of their own work with children and families.

Ensuring Accountability

Through its partnership with CSSP during the next several years, NCDSS will develop an evaluation plan for assessing its efforts to integrate the Strengthening Families framework throughout North Carolina.

Evolving Work

The three-year contract with CSSP is expected to help NCDSS unify and build on current work and assets across multiple prevention and child welfare funding sources and agencies to amplify both knowledge and momentum to positively impact greater numbers of families and children. Strategic efforts will begin with NCDSS and radiate to other departmental and community programs as appropriate.

Profile last updated: May 2014