

STRENGTHENING FAMILIES RHODE ISLAND: STATE PROFILE

Infrastructure

Rhode Island joined the Strengthening Families™ initiative as one of the original pilot states in 2005. With implementation funding from the United Way of RI, Strengthening Families Rhode Island (SFRI) continued the collaboration of diverse stakeholders that developed Successful Start, the state's Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems plan. The SFRI Leadership Team is comprised of representatives from the state departments that administer programs for young children, community-based agencies, child care providers, health care and mental health professionals, child advocates and parents. Prevent Child Abuse RI, serving as the lead implementation agency for SFRI, is consistently seeking and securing funding and in-kind supports from a variety of sources to sustain the infrastructure and implementation of the work. The Protective Factors Framework has been integrated into 100% of the child maltreatment prevention work of Prevent Child Abuse RI to the point where there is a seamless framework for outreach, promotion and integration in the agency's work in advocacy, education and public awareness.

Parent Partnerships

SFRI is partnering with parents in a variety of ways with assistance and support from community partners including the Parent Support Network of RI, Parents as Teachers, the RI Parent Information Network and the four regional Family Care Community Partnerships. Together, these partners provide parent resources, classes, activities as well as parent empowerment and leadership opportunities. One such example is collaboration of SFRI and the Parent Support Network to implement and expand the Timebanks USA© in-kind reciprocity program.

Deepening Knowledge and Understanding

SFRI trains, supports and guides child care and family support providers in their work with parents of young children. The intent is to prepare the provider to be a strong, competent mentor and coach for parents and other family members around issues of child development, parenting roles and responsibilities and discipline. The focus is on encouraging parent engagement and family involvement by facilitating positive supportive relationships between parents and providers. SFRI developed and utilizes an eight session, 16-hour Core Protective Factors Training Series, two-hour workshops and one-hour webinar training sessions on a variety of topics related to the Protective Factors Framework, parent engagement and support, child abuse prevention and program strategies for implementing SF. These professional development offerings are presented both on-site for centers and family support programs and as part of a Training Calendar that is offered throughout the year. The Child Welfare component of the SFRI Professional Development system utilizes an 18 hour Core Protective Factors Training Series that incorporates the System of Care principles and child welfare philosophy. This training is offered to the RI Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF) and their community partners through the RI Child Welfare Institute at RI College.

Strengthening Families

Strengthening Families™ (SF) 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 SF 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 SF 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 SF 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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Shifting Practice, Policies and Systems

SFRI works with a variety of providers, programs and partners to help them implement the principles and program strategies in their practice. SFRI developed a two-tiered approach to supporting center-based early care and education providers. Tier I participants receive intensive technical assistance and professional development training over a five-month period. Centers receive one-to-one technical assistance for the completion and analysis of the Strengthening Families program self-assessment and the development of an action plan for program enhancements. The staff participates in a Core Protective Factors Training series. Tier II participants (including family child care providers) are offered discreet professional development opportunities on the protective factors through workshops and webinars.

SFRI is working with DCYF to integrate the Protective Factors Framework into the System of Care network including training DCYF staff and the many community partners involved with the System of Care.

SFRI works with DCYF and their community partners (Family Care Community Partnerships) that are providing family support services throughout RI. Programs are provided the Core Protective Factors Training Series and are offered technical assistance and support to complete the Strengthening Families self-assessment and develop action plans for embedding new strategies into their practice.

SFRI has focused on ways to embed the Protective Factors Framework and Strengthening Families approach into existing early childhood systems. SFRI partners with the RI Family and Children's Trust Fund, the RI Home Visiting Leadership Council and the RI Early Learning Council and BrightStars (TQRIS) to foster awareness and use of the protective factors approach statewide. A parent engagement logic model was developed to set the path for expanding the reach and breadth of the initial SFRI work.

Ensuring Accountability

Brandeis University's The Heller School has studied SFRI on four different occasions and has provided SFRI with feedback and recommendations for furthering the work and engaging in continuous improvement efforts. Copies of the Brandeis studies are available upon request.

Evolving Work

SFRI continues to reach out to community partners, state agencies and families. The overarching goal is to introduce the Protective Factors Framework to all professionals and programs that work with young children and their families and to foster an awareness and motivation to embed the principles and strategies in their everyday work. SFRI and DCYF are collaborating to integrate the Strengthening Families approach and the Protective Factors Framework into multiple areas including child welfare staff development, foster care parent support and high-fidelity wraparound services. SFRI continues to partner with the RI Department of Health and the Home Visiting Leadership Council to find ways to collaborate and integrate the Protective Factors Framework into the three home visiting models funded by the federal Maternal, Infant and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) program in RI – Nurse Family Partnership, Healthy Families America and the Parents as Teachers Program.

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