

## Strengthening Families through the Title IV-E Waiver Demonstration Projects

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### Introduction

The Administration on Children, Youth and Families (ACYF) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) has established the social and emotional well-being of children and their healing and recovery from trauma as a top priority for state innovation. ACYF's well-being framework incorporates protective factors as a core component and has identified assessing and supporting the development of protective factors - along with parenting interventions - as critical strategies to build the environmental buffers that contribute to children's healing and recovery. ACYF is using the Title IV-E waiver authority, described in the sidebar to the right, as an opportunity to advance its focus on well-being.

The latest round of approved state applications under the waiver authority illustrate the opportunity provided by the IV-E waiver demonstration projects to test new approaches to child abuse and neglect prevention and better outcomes for children and families in the child welfare system. The waivers open a window of opportunity for states to continue exploring how Strengthening Families™ can support improved outcomes for children and families who come into contact with the child welfare system.

Because the Strengthening Families Protective Factors Framework directly informs ACYF's child well-being framework, the waiver demonstration projects fit logically with state Strengthening Families initiatives. The research and evaluation requirements of the waivers also provide an opportunity for states to add to the evidence supporting a strength-based protective factor approach to supporting children and families. As states develop waiver proposals and plans, this issue brief encourages the exploration of possibilities to support current and future demonstration projects that incorporate Strengthening Families.

### *The Title IV-E Waivers*

*The bulk of federal funding for child welfare services stems from Title IV-E of the Social Security Act (Title IV-E or simply IV-E). The most significant source of funds is the open-ended entitlement Title IV-E Foster Care Program, but restrictions limit the use of these dollars to placement and maintenance of foster children in out-of-home care, related administrative costs and caseworker training. Since the early 1990's the federal government has used waivers from these restrictions in the IV-E program to allow states to test innovation in child welfare practices. Congress recently reauthorized the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to approve 10 new waiver demonstrations per year between fiscal year (FY) 2012 and FY 2014. Nine states received waiver approvals in FY 2012: Arkansas, Colorado, Illinois, Massachusetts, Michigan, Pennsylvania, Utah, Washington and Wisconsin.*

## Why Strengthening Families is Relevant to the Title IV-E Waiver Opportunity

### ✓ Strengthening Families Supports the Title IV-E Waiver Goals of Prevention, Permanency and Well-Being

- **The protective factors are linked to well-being and positive outcomes for children and families.** The Strengthening Families protective factors are also “promotive” factors that build family strengths and a family environment that promotes optimal child development.
- **Strengthening Families emphasizes the importance of building the capacity of all parents (biological, foster, extended or adoptive).** The universality of the Protective Factors Framework means that it can be applied to all families child welfare systems touch. Across the country, Strengthening Families is being used as a prevention framework for families at risk, as a capacity building frame to help families that enter the child welfare system address the issues that brought them there and as a framework to help resource families deal with the stress of caring for children who have experienced trauma and transition.

Almost all of the newly approved FY 2012 IV-E demonstration projects include approaches to address individual family needs and build protective factors at one or more point along the child welfare service continuum: *before removal* to prevent foster care placement, *during placement* to reduce the length of stay and improve the quality of foster care and *after placement* to support families after reunification or adoption to prevent reentry and ensure continued healing.

### *Using a Protective and Promotive Factors Framework to Support the Well-Being of Youth in Care*

*The Center for the Study of Social Policy has expanded upon the Strengthening Families approach to develop **Youth Thrive™**, a Protective and Promotive Factors Framework for advancing the healthy development and well-being of adolescents. Recent research has shown that the adolescent brain is in a period of significant growth and is adaptable and shaped by experiences. By bringing together an understanding of adolescent brain development with knowledge about promoting positive youth development, Youth Thrive focuses on improved approaches for supporting at-risk youth and their families.*

*The Youth Thrive protective and promotive factors include:*

- *Youth Resilience*
- *Social Connections*
- *Knowledge of Adolescent Development*
- *Concrete Support in Times of Need*
- *Social-Emotional Competence in Youth*

*Taken together, Strengthening Families and Youth Thrive can provide a framework for child welfare agencies to mitigate risks and promote strength-based approaches to address the developmental and well-being needs of children, youth and families.*

*For more information about Youth Thrive, visit <http://www.cssp.org/reform/child-welfare/youth-thrive>*

✓ **The Strengthening Families Framework Aligns with ACYF's Demonstration Priorities**

- **Research shows that protective factors buffer the impact of child trauma.** Positive attachment between a parent and child is a basic building block for many aspects of early development. Neglect or trauma during early childhood years can have a cascading negative impact on ongoing development, but research shows that the protective factors identified in the Strengthening Families framework are important buffers that can mitigate the impacts of trauma.
- **The social and emotional competence of children is one of the five protective factors in the Strengthening Families framework.** Strategies that support parents' facilitation of children's development are inherent in the approach, while the remaining protective factors provide additional support for what families and caregivers need to fully support healing and recovery.
- **Both ACYF and Strengthening Families recognize the importance of involving parents in the healing and recovery process.** ACYF's IV-E Waiver Information Memorandum notes that many of the recognized evidence-based and evidence-informed interventions require the involvement of parents and caregivers and specifically include them in the healing and recovery process. These interventions often address parent capacities to provide a safe and nurturing environment and consistent interaction with their children. Several evidence-based and evidence-informed programs – such as Parents as Teachers and Nurturing Parent Programs – have already demonstrated clear alignment with the Strengthening Families Protective Factors Framework. (For more information, see CSSP's [Making the Link](#) series.) At the programmatic level, Strengthening Families provides a framework and set of tools that can be applied in any environment that supports young children and their families to enhance their capacity to build protective factors that promote optimal development and prevent abuse and neglect.
- **Strengthening Families supports ACYF's priority to improve cross-agency coordination.** The IV-E Waiver Information Memorandum asserts that IV-E agencies that coordinate across departments and promote service innovation are more likely to achieve sustainable change. In particular, HHS encourages proposals that leverage resources and support improvements across child welfare, health and mental health. Such coordination and collaboration has long been a hallmark of Strengthening Families in states across the country.
  - As states have found, the five protective factors are recognized as fundamental building blocks for strong and stable families by multiple agencies and disciplines. Strengthening Families can therefore serve as a platform for coordination across diverse initiatives because it is based on research, is used by different disciplines and focuses on goals held in common by several departments and agencies.
  - In many states, the Protective Factors Framework has been an effective tool for bringing together stakeholders from early care and education, child abuse and neglect prevention, child welfare, mental health, public health, substance abuse, domestic violence and other sectors. For demonstrations offering a range of services to meet the unique needs of families, Strengthening Families offers a common framework, language and understanding across programs and service professions that can lend cohesion to individual service plans and to the demonstration as a whole. The protective factors also offer a common outcomes framework for measuring child and family well-being.

✓ **Strengthening Families Infrastructure May Already Exist to Support Title IV-E Demonstration Project Implementation**

- **The national scope of the Strengthening Families initiative offers existing infrastructure in many states and communities.** Effective implementation of IV-E waiver demonstration projects is critical to the successful attainment of a state’s goals. More than 40 states and a growing number of communities, cities and counties are using Strengthening Families to unite formal and informal services under a common vision to build protective factors. This means that within state and local agencies – and among child and family service programs on the ground – there are professionals, community members and families that already “speak the language” of Strengthening Families and the Protective Factors Framework. Using Strengthening Families as a common framework can help case managers tie an array of services into a coherent case plan for individual families, and can make the experience for families more continuous and supportive.
- **Strengthening Families training resources are already available in many states and service sectors.** In states where Strengthening Families has been adopted, training curriculum and courses on Strengthening Families may already exist that can be used or adapted for child welfare professionals and other service providers that would be involved in a IV-E demonstration. Many states are also taking advantage of the National Alliance of Children’s Trust and Prevention Funds free online courses, [Bringing the Protective Factors Framework to Life in Your Work – A Resource for Action](#).
- **Multi-disciplinary Strengthening Families leadership teams are active in many states.** In most states participating in Strengthening Families, there is a Strengthening Families leadership team that works across systems and programs to coordinate resources and tools. Existing state investments in Strengthening Families reach into the millions of dollars and touch hundreds of programs. Strengthening Families leadership teams serve as an important collaborative platform for supporting cross-system implementation of creative innovations.

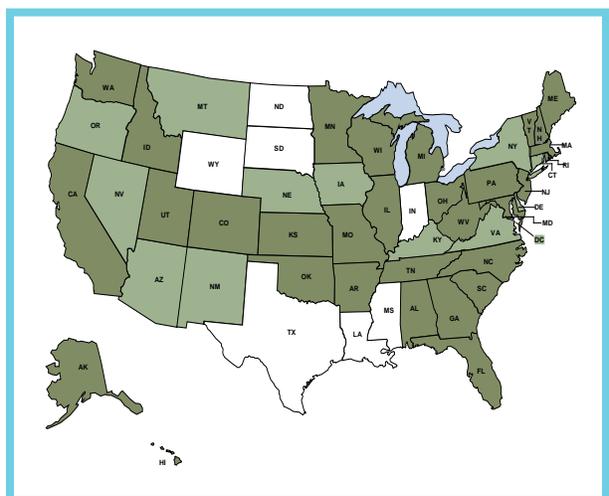
✓ **Many States are Already Using Strengthening Families to Support Child Welfare Reform Strategies**

More than half of all state child welfare systems already use the Strengthening Families framework. Fourteen states integrate Strengthening Families into training for child welfare workers, twelve states integrate Strengthening Families into their child welfare practice model, nine are developing assessment tools which assess around protective factors and six are weaving Strengthening

### Strengthening Families Implementation

*The map indicates states that are actively involved in the Strengthening Families National Network (dark green) or implementing some Strengthening Families strategies at the state level (light green) as of April 2013.*

*For state-specific information, see CSSP’s [Strengthening Families States](#) webpage at [www.strengtheningfamilies.net](http://www.strengtheningfamilies.net).*



Families into differential response strategies. The growing uptake in child welfare systems means that tools, resources and knowledge are available to support states as they move Strengthening Families into child welfare practice. For states that are already moving in this direction, the waiver provides a new opportunity to resource some of the changes they are already making.

## How Title IV-E Waiver Demonstrations Can Support State Strengthening Families Initiatives

State Strengthening Families leadership teams should explore working with IV-E waiver demonstration projects to promote the goals and objectives of their statewide initiative. In particular, the IV-E waiver opportunity can be a mechanism to build cross-sector partnerships, test new approaches to preventing maltreatment and promoting optimal development and expand the pool of resources for prevention and family support services.

### ➤ Waivers are an opportunity to build and strengthen cross-sector partnerships

For state Strengthening Families leadership teams seeking to engage new partners and/or share the Strengthening Families approach with other agencies, a IV-E waiver presents an opportunity to coalesce around a concrete demonstration project. ACYF specifically encourages IV-E agencies to connect waiver demonstrations with efforts to improve accessibility, coordination and efficient delivery of effective mental and behavioral health services to children, youth and their families involved in child welfare. They are also encouraged to work with the state Medicaid and mental health agencies to develop complementary approaches to serving children with special needs and ensure continuity of Medicaid eligibility as children move in and out of foster care. ACYF also mentions connections with the Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnostic and Treatment (EPSDT) benefit and Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) as important developmental screening and service strategies for mental health and developmental needs of children in the child welfare system.

### ➤ Title IV-E Waivers can test new approaches to building protective factors

The IV-E waivers can allow states to test new approaches to building protective factors at any point along the child abuse prevention and child welfare service continuum. Among the IV-E waiver demonstration projects approved in FY 2012, **Massachusetts, Michigan, Pennsylvania, Utah** and **Wisconsin** all have all built Strengthening Families explicitly into their plans, as shown in Table 1. Strategies include integrating Strengthening Families into caseworker training and into child welfare practice models, tools and processes; using the protective factors as a framework for setting performance expectations with community-based contractors; informing child welfare/early childhood partnerships and expanding the use of Strengthening Families Community Cafés or Parent Cafés to engage and support child welfare-involved parents and community members.

**Table 1: Using IV-E Waivers to Integrate Strengthening Families in Child Welfare (FY 2012 Waivers)**

Strengthening Families Integration Strategy	State IV-E Waiver Proposal				
	Massachusetts	Michigan	Pennsylvania	Utah	Wisconsin
Strengthening Families integrated into child welfare training	✓				
Strengthening Families integrated into child welfare practice model, tools and processes	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Strengthening Families used as a framework for contract performance expectations	✓	✓			✓
Strengthening Families used to inform child welfare/early childhood partnerships					✓
Adoption/expansion of Community/Parent Cafés for child welfare-engaged families			✓		✓

Although not articulated as Strengthening Families activities, other approved FY 2012 projects include approaches and interventions that seek to build one or more protective factors. These are outlined in Table 2 on the following page.

*Michigan's* waiver will require community contractors to establish priority linkages to home visiting programs for families with young children.

*Wisconsin* will use its waiver demonstration project to deepen connections between early care and education and child welfare services. Case managers will assist birth parents in utilizing the state's Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) to access high quality child care for their children after reunification. Multiple state agencies are also working to link longitudinal data across child welfare, early care and education, Medicaid, early intervention and other health programs to enable case managers to monitor families' access to early childhood supports during the post-reunification period.

**Table 2: Title IV-E Waiver Approaches That Build Protective Factors, by State (FY 2012 Waivers)**

Waiver Approach	FY 2012 State IV-E Waiver Proposal							
	Arkansas	Colorado	Massachusetts	Michigan	Pennsylvania	Utah	Washington	Wisconsin
Promoting family engagement in decision-making and service planning	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			
Adopting evidence-based screening tools/functional assessments	✓	✓		✓				
Tailoring services based on the needs of individual families (before, during and/or after involvement in the child welfare system)	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Training child welfare workers on trauma-informed care	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	
Using evidence-based and evidence-informed programs to 1) deepen parents' knowledge of child development and effective parenting strategies and 2) help children heal from trauma and involve parents in the healing process	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Helping parents (biological, foster, adoptive, etc.) build social networks and community connections			✓	✓			✓	✓
Providing flexible funds to help families meet immediate, concrete needs				✓			✓	

➤ **Savings generated by Title IV-E waiver demonstrations can be reinvested in prevention, family support and family preservation services.**

The waiver demonstration projects are an opportunity to contribute to the evidence base that investing in prevention and family support yields substantial savings. Rather than savings reverting back to the state general fund, IV-E agencies must use any savings generated through the waiver demonstration for other child welfare purposes. This can include a range of child abuse and neglect prevention services as well as enhanced services to build protective factors for families that are connected to child welfare.

*Utah* expects to save \$1.4 million during its five-year demonstration project and plans to reinvest it into in-home prevention services.

*Wisconsin* estimates that its demonstration to reduce re-entry to foster care will result in more than \$13 million in savings that will be reinvested to expand post-reunification services to more families.

## Tips for Getting Started

To take the first steps to integrate Strengthening Families into a waiver demonstration project, state IV-E agency leaders can:

- ✓ Reach out to their state Strengthening Families leadership team for more information about programs and communities implementing the approach
- ✓ Review CSSP's [Making the Link](#) series to learn about evidence-based intervention and support programs that are aligned with Strengthening Families
- ✓ Review the approved FY2012 IV-E waiver demonstration projects for ideas and talk with other states about their decisions
- ✓ Learn more about the [Youth Thrive](#) initiative
- ✓ [Request technical assistance](#) from the Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP)

To support state IV-E agency leaders in this process, Strengthening Families leadership teams can:

- ✓ Share information about Strengthening Families with their state IV-E agency leader and suggest options for using the approach to inform IV-E waiver project design and implementation
- ✓ Share experiences of local evidence-based programs that use Strengthening Families to inform their work with families
- ✓ Talk with other states in the Strengthening Families National Network that are integrating Strengthening Families into child welfare to get ideas and lessons learned
- ✓ [Contact CSSP](#) for technical assistance

## Sources

Horton, C., *Protective Factors Literature Review: Early Care and Education Programs and the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect*. Washington, DC: Center for the Study of Social Policy, 2003. Accessed from <http://www.cssp.org/reform/strengthening-families/resources/body/LiteratureReview.pdf>

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*Promoting Social and Emotional Well-Being for Children and Youth Receiving Child Welfare Services* (ACYF-CB-IM-12-04), April 17, 2012. Accessed from <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/cb/im1204.pdf>

*Title IV-E Waiver Demonstration Project Proposals (Arkansas, Colorado, Illinois, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, Utah, Washington and Wisconsin)*, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children's Bureau. Accessed from <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/programs/child-welfare-waivers>

*Strengthening Families™ is a research-based, cost-effective approach to increase family stability, enhance child development and reduce child abuse and neglect. It builds 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*

*Through the Strengthening Families Initiative, more than thirty states are shifting policy, funding and training to help programs that serve children and families build these protective factors with the children and families they serve. Many states are also integrating the Strengthening Families approach into state prevention strategies, home visiting programs and child welfare systems.*

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

- *focus on building 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 and families*

*For more information, visit [www.strengtheningfamilies.net](http://www.strengtheningfamilies.net)*

## Appendix: Strengthening Families through the Title IV-E Waiver Demonstration Projects: State Profiles

**Massachusetts, Michigan, Pennsylvania, Utah and Wisconsin** mention Strengthening Families explicitly in their IV-E waiver demonstration proposals.

### Massachusetts

The Massachusetts waiver demonstration project will test whether flexible funding to support an integrated set of child- and family-tailored residential and community services will:

- improve permanency outcomes and increase child well-being, resiliency and other positive youth outcomes
- strengthen families
- reduce risk and rates of child maltreatment
- increase tenure in the community
- reduce lengths of out-of-home placement
- increase investment in community services
- maintain cost neutrality

Massachusetts has applied the Strengthening Families approach and the principles and values of Building Bridges, a national “systems of care” initiative of the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Agency (SAMHSA), to integrate congregate care treatment and community-based treatment under a unified service model called “Caring Together: Strengthening Children and Families through Community-Connected Residential Treatment” (Caring Together). The new service framework will combine periodic Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths (CANS) screening and training for Massachusetts Department of Children and Families (DCF) staff, caretakers and providers to create a comprehensive trauma-informed system of care for DCF.

Caring Together adopts the Strengthening Families approach to help families build protective factors and deepen parental capacities. Massachusetts will use the IV-E waiver flexibility to serve children and families on a continuous basis regardless of whether the child is at home or in residential care. The objective is to prepare families - including foster, kinship or adoptive families - to manage their children successfully at home and promote their capacity to sustain their child’s and the family’s well-being. Among others, the focus of interventions will be on helping parents build the skills necessary to better support their children and helping parents, children and youth maintain and develop lasting relationships and connections to their community. All services along the continuum of out-of-home and community treatment will be delivered by the same provider in order to maintain the connections that children and families build with program staff.

### Michigan

Michigan’s IV-E waiver will test the assertion that using a protective factors approach with families will build their resiliency, parenting insight and social connections to more effectively manage situational and environmental stress. The waiver demonstration will provide targeted in-home services to families with young children (ages zero through five) to address key factors that correlate with neglect, including parental isolation, loneliness and weak social networks. Michigan will engage private sector contractors to assess needs and develop individual family case plans. Contractors will be responsible for establishing priority linkages to home visiting programs for families and identifying specific evidence-based resources and

strategies that will be used to build protective factors. Flexible funds will also be available to help alleviate crises and address short-term issues that cause stress for the family, such as transportation costs, respite care, housing assistance, legal fees and beds and other essential household needs. All family case plans will include strategies to improve a family's economic success and stable housing.

Michigan will also test approaches to promoting the social and emotional competence of children. Within the project's pilot communities, trauma-informed screening tools will inform child and family referrals for comprehensive trauma assessments and interventions such as Parent-Infant Psychotherapy, among others. The hypothesis is that by identifying and addressing the underlying reasons for a child's behavior, workers and clinicians can intervene therapeutically with children and help parents understand and respond appropriately to their children's behavior.

### Pennsylvania

Pennsylvania's IV-E demonstration project will test approaches to supporting parental resilience, knowledge of parenting and child development and the social and emotional competence of children. The waiver demonstration project will involve flexible investment of IV-E dollars and other federal sources (such as Medicaid) in five counties to purchase supports needed to keep at-risk children safely in the community and return them to their communities after placement so that they remain connected to their families. The project will support a model of case practice that engages families appropriately and uses needs assessment and evidence-based programs to achieve several outcomes, including: improved parent behavioral health and functioning; increased parenting skills; decreased placement disruptions due to child and youth behaviors and improved child and youth functioning at home, at school and in the community.

Several family teaming strategies will be used to help families build social capital, maximize access to community resources and engage parents, the extended family and community resources in their shared commitment to the safety and well-being of the children. As one of the demonstration sites, Philadelphia will use the waiver to support further implementation of the Strengthening Families approach through the integration of the framework into agency training and policy and with the expansion of community programs and Parent Cafés to help families build protective factors.

### Utah

Utah's IV-E waiver demonstration project will test the hypothesis that increased delivery of quality in-home services will reduce out-of-home placement and improve well-being outcomes for children and families in the system. Utah's child welfare demonstration project will expand on existing efforts to strengthen in-home services in Utah and will incorporate family-centered practice as a key tenet. An essential project component is strengthening and supporting caseworkers in their ability to keep families intact while helping parents increase their ability to keep their children safe and improve child well-being. Specifically, Utah will implement an evidence-based and trauma-informed family assessment tool, incorporate the Strengthening Families Protective Factors Framework into caseworker practice and deepen caseworker knowledge and capacity to recognize and address trauma through evidence-based and evidence-informed services to families. Utah will also target funding to expand community capacity to deliver evidence-based and evidence-informed services at the local level.

## Wisconsin

Wisconsin's IV-E waiver demonstration project will test whether 12 months of post-reunification services to families will reduce re-entry and improve safety, permanency, stability and well-being of children and families. During the 12-month post-reunification support period, the child welfare case manager – in collaboration with the family – will develop and implement an individualized support plan that reflects the family's unique needs. Supports will include case management services and appropriate evidence-based and evidence-informed practices such as Parent Child Interaction Therapy (PCIT), Child-Parent Psychotherapy (CPP), Trauma Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (TF-CBT), in-home therapy and parent peer mentors.

Among other waiver activities, Milwaukee and Waukesha counties will expand use of the Parent Café model - originally piloted in Waukesha through Wisconsin's Strengthening Families initiative - to connect foster, birth and other community parents in shared dialog about parenting issues and approaches. Wisconsin will also offer the support of existing parent peer specialists during the post-reunification period to improve parents' capacity and understanding of their children's special needs. Wisconsin will engage its strong network of Family Resource Centers to link families to services in the community whenever possible to ensure that families have sustainable supports beyond the post-reunification support period.

Wisconsin will also use the waiver demonstration project to continue to deepen connections between early care and education and child welfare services. As they already do for foster parents, case managers will assist birth parents in utilizing YoungStar, the state's Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) for early care and education programs, to access high quality child care for their children after reunification. Additionally, the Department of Children and Families, Department of Public Instruction and Department of Health Services are collaboratively developing an early childhood longitudinal data set that will link data from child welfare, child care and other early childhood education programs, Medicaid, the IDEA Part C program for children with disabilities and other health programs. This linked data system will enable case managers to monitor early childhood education and care during the post-reunification period and assist parents to achieve strong early childhood education outcomes for their children.