

STRENGTHENING FAMILIES COLORADO: STATE PROFILE

Infrastructure

The effort to embed Strengthening Families™ in the work of child- and family-serving agencies of all types has continued unabated in Colorado since 2007. While the Colorado Children's Trust Fund has led the effort, the work would not be possible without the vested involvement of the Family Resource Center Association and member centers, Clayton Early Learning Center, Mile High United Way, local Early Childhood Councils, Families First, Prevent Child Abuse Colorado and the Promoting Safe and Stable Families and Infant Mental Health programs at the Colorado Department of Human Services.

Purpose: To increase awareness of the Strengthening Families Protective Factors Framework and encourage efforts to embed the framework in family support practice across Colorado.

Goal: To increase quality training offered to providers and parents on the protective factors; build a learning community to stay on top of new research and best practices related to the protective factors; create a vehicle for providers doing this work across the state to share what they are doing and learning in their communities with others; build a network, comprised of professionals in many sectors and roles, that can build public will to embed protective factors into all work with families in the state; utilize this network to weigh in on other projects and initiatives to make sure the protective factors lens is considered; and serve as the state Strengthening Families leadership team that acts as a liaison with the Center for the Study of Social Policy.

Membership: The Network contact list currently has 1,100 professionals from across the state from many sectors and fields of practice.

Activities: Conduct quarterly meetings and biennial conference. Provide feedback on statewide projects and initiatives involving children, youth and families such as the Early Childhood Colorado Framework Revision, Policy Advisory Council Birth to Five Task Force recommendations, and the development of a joint workshop on the Protective Factors, Quality Standards for Family Support and Two-Generation Approach. Additionally, the Network has worked with Promoting Safe and Stable Families Program to bring the Strengthening Families Toolbox Curriculum to Colorado.

Parent Partnerships

The language of the Strengthening Families protective factors has been used in the recruitment and training of parent leaders in Colorado.

Deepening Knowledge and Understanding

The "Bringing the Protective Factors Framework to Life in Your Work" online training effort by the National Alliance of Children's Trust and Prevention Funds provided a welcome Strengthening Families resource in Colorado. This training has helped local partners to understand the protective factors and how they could be implemented in a variety of settings.

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	✓

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Shifting Practice, Policies and Systems

Mile High United Way, the Colorado Children's Trust Fund and Family Resource Centers programs require local partners to integrate the Strengthening Families protective factors into their program services model. Language related to the implementation of the protective factors has been added to Request for Applications and reporting documents for these grant-making organizations. Local programs are now positioned to report their success in this effort.

A project to integrate the Strengthening Families protective factors into the work of local child welfare offices continues. This project encourages these offices to work in concert with their local early childhood councils and to use the protective factors as a "common language" to bridge a long-existing partnership gap at the local level.

Ensuring Accountability

More agencies have been formally evaluating their work to implement the Strengthening Families Protective Factors Framework, but this is still a "next step" for our efforts. Anecdotal evidence of successful and purposeful implementation of the framework remains strong. Grant reporting for the Colorado Children's Trust Fund and the Family Resource Centers Program include a section on implementation of the protective factors, but this reporting is focused on agency-level observations of change and does not discuss outcomes for children and families or individuals served by the agency.

Evolving Work

In the future, Colorado will continue to integrate the Strengthening Families protective factors into structures designed to serve children and families and to increase the number of people across the state who are trained via the online resource. An opportunity to further integrate the protective factors into statewide policy and funding structures exists in the Office of Early Childhood in Colorado. This office contains many state programs focused on improving outcomes for Colorado's youngest citizens and may provide an opportunity for long-term, statewide integration of the protective factors.

Additionally, Colorado will be working with statewide and local partners to increase our ability to say that the purposeful implementation of the protective factors is indeed working to improve outcomes for children and families in a variety of settings.

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