

STRENGTHENING FAMILIES IDAHO: STATE PROFILE

Infrastructure

The Idaho Children's Trust Fund and the Idaho Association for the Education of Young Children (AEYC) began working on the Idaho Strengthening Families Initiative in 2006. With a grant from the National Alliance of Children's Trust and Prevention Funds, Idaho developed a plan to embed the five protective factors into the state's early care and education system. As a first step, the state incorporated the Strengthening Families™ (SF) protective factors into a professional development system-approved training curriculum for child care providers in 2008. The protective factors were incorporated into Idaho's Quality Rating and Improvement System in early 2010. Since 2010, the initiative has "spread out" through the Strengthening Families Roundtable and begun to build SF practice in various systems.

As the Idaho team deepens its relationships with more partners it is strengthening the infrastructure of Strengthening Families that is built on shared leadership. Institutionalizing Strengthening Families into the infrastructure of systems as has been done successfully in child care is the surest path to sustainability. In order to bring a statewide perspective to the leadership group, Idaho began video-conferencing in 2013.

Parent Partnerships

The Idaho Trust Fund has trained facilitators and funded projects to build parent leadership using a variety of methods including Community Cafés, Circle of Parents and parent advisory groups. Idaho will continue to forge ahead in this area.

Deepening Knowledge and Understanding

Idaho's QRIS was developed to support IdahoSTARS, the state's child care professional development system. IdahoSTARS includes a specialization in Strengthening Families, and courses in early childhood at the College of Western Idaho are incorporating Strengthening Families.

Idaho is a state in which "outside of government" solutions tend to gain the most traction. The QRIS is built through the Idaho Association for the Education of Young Children (AEYC) which contracts for federal funding through a state agency. Incentives, rather than regulation, guide the process. Funding for quality child care is contracted out to the Idaho AEYC, which has greater latitude to support innovative efforts than the state agency might. An important driver, though, is a strong relationship between Idaho AEYC and the state child care administrator.

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 Coordinator

Roger Sherman
 Children's Trust Fund, Prevent Child Abuse Idaho
 (208) 386-9317
shermanr@dhw.idaho.gov

Shifting Practice, Policies and Systems

Since 2009, the Idaho Children's Trust Fund has required all grantees to demonstrate how they are building protective factors into their work. In 2011, eight programs participated in the funding cycle, with total funding of \$62,000. This reflects a reduction in self-generated revenues which have been down since 2009. The funded programs focus on parenting education, parent leadership, home visiting, community awareness and child sexual abuse prevention. The Idaho Children's Trust provides ongoing training and technical assistance, including a Strengthening Families Training Institute that brings in best practices from around the country. The Strengthening Families Team has also shared its Strengthening Families training curriculum with New Jersey, Georgia, Los Angeles, Texas, South Carolina and soon Colorado.

Strengthening Families has been embedded into the state's Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) since 2010. This has institutionalized the protective factors as a key aspect of child care quality. Based on the experience of programs that have already implemented the training curriculum, Idaho expects to see changes throughout the system as more child care programs join the QRIS. Deepening Strengthening Families within the early childhood system is a critical aspect of the state strategy. At the same time, Idaho is broadening its efforts through a Strengthening Families Roundtable that involves Head Start programs, adult and juvenile corrections, some divisions of the Department of Health and Welfare, children's mental health and a variety of anti-poverty organizations including Catholic Charities.

Ensuring Accountability

While Idaho designed an evaluation project based on field surveys, funding has not been sufficient to implement it. However, Idaho AEYC is embarking on a five-year research project on the newly implemented QRIS with the University of Idaho that will evaluate all of the quality standards, including Strengthening Families. Beginning this year, the Idaho Trust Fund is training

its grantees on the use of the Protective Factors Survey and asking them to use it to evaluate their programs to establish more consistent measurement of outcomes. The Idaho Trust Fund has also developed innovative qualitative evaluation techniques that are being used with various grantees and especially with participants for whom written English is not their main communication modality.

Evolving Work

Over the past year and looking forward, Strengthening Families Idaho has focused on engaging a broader network of partners through the Strengthening Families Roundtable. It has deepened its relationship within the corrections system and brought in a Division of the Health and Welfare Department that is focused on work support strategies. In the child care arena, Idaho is engaging all of the Strengthening Families levers of change.

Profile last updated: February 2014