

## STRENGTHENING FAMILIES MARYLAND: STATE PROFILE

### Infrastructure

In 2011, Maryland's Early Childhood Education Advisory Council (ECAC), comprised of 28 different local, state, public and private agency representatives, added to its three-year plan a commitment to host parent cafes in order to give families opportunities to meet and talk about their parenting experiences and share information about how to keep their families strong. This plan became part of Maryland's 2012 application for a Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge (RTT-ELC) grant, which was awarded to the State in December, 2012. Also in 2011, the State Council on Child Abuse and Neglect (SCCAN), comprised of 35 different local, State, public and private agency representatives began work on Maryland's first child abuse and neglect prevention plan and in 2012, chose Strengthening Families as a statewide approach to protecting children from maltreatment. Members of these councils hope to incorporate Strengthening Families into the State's developing Quality Rating Improvement System called Maryland EXCELS, and into the work of the Parent Engagement Coalition, created as a result of the Race to the Top plan.

### Parent Partnerships

Maryland has successfully used the Parent Cafes to connect families with each other and with community-based service providers, particularly child care providers. By the end of 2012, 20 cafes were held in child care programs, Head Start programs, home visiting programs and others, in all parts of the State – urban, rural, small town and metropolitan.

### Deepening Knowledge and Understanding

Maryland's networks of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies and Family Support Centers – both coordinated by Maryland Family Network under contract with the State – have been active in promoting the protective factors and teaching others about them. The Home Visiting Alliance and the Developmental Disability Council are expanding awareness of Strengthening Families, and members of various State child care organizations are active participants: The Association of Family Child Care Providers, the Center-Based Child Care Association, the Head Start Association and the Before and After School Care Association. Maryland Family Network and community-based partners are in the process of developing additional training and tools that will support efforts in the many settings represented by ECAC, SCCAN and other agencies.

### 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](http://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**

Maryland’s approach, still in its infancy, is to train a wide variety of practitioners from many disciplines in the fundamentals of Strengthening Families and to give them the tools to use the world café technology to engage families in working together to improving family, community and State child welfare and child well-being outcomes. The State has contracted with Maryland Family Network, its lead agency for the CBCAP grant and the largest Early Head Start grantee in the State, to provide the training and coordination of the Strengthening Families effort.

Because of the opportunities presented by the RTT-ELC funding, an important aspect of Maryland’s Strengthening Families work focuses on improving the quality of child care to promote school readiness. Accordingly, Strengthening Families eventually will be incorporated into Maryland EXCELS, particularly as it relates to levels of parent engagement and support. Also, the Parent Engagement Coalition is to provide a framework for local jurisdictions to follow with respect to supporting families. Using the Head Start Parent, Family and Community Engagement Framework as a base, the Coalition is imbedding the Protective Factors in the guidance handbook.

**Ensuring Accountability**

Currently, process information from facilitators about the outcomes of cafés and from café participants about their experiences is collected by Maryland Family Network and reported to the State. Additional evaluation strategies will be implemented and/or developed based on the way Strengthening Families takes shape in Maryland.

**Evolving Work**

The annual Sandra J. Skolnik Lecture, held jointly by the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health and Maryland Family Network, featured Bryan Samuels in October, 2012, as a part of a symposium

designed to build connections between the child welfare system and child care providers to promote child well-being. In the summer of 2012, Strengthening Families practitioners met informally to identify their needs in terms of extending their individual Strengthening Families practice, and Maryland Family Network is assisting the group in the development of a one-year strategic plan.

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