



STRENGTHENING FAMILIES MINNESOTA: STATE PROFILE

Infrastructure

In 2007, the Children's Trust Fund (CTF) of the Minnesota Department of Human Services began incorporating a Strengthening Families™ approach across all of its Children and Family Services divisions. Today, external partners include: Minnesota Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems, Evidence-Based Home Visiting, Prevent Child Abuse Minnesota (PCAMN), Minnesota Fathers and Families Network and the Minnesota Child Care Resource and Referral Network.

Minnesota has invested in CTF staff positions to continue focused integration of the Strengthening Families framework and to promote the protective factors and parent leadership in the public child welfare continuum. The Strengthening Families Roadmap includes communications and practice integration across the continuum, specifically focused on the youngest and most vulnerable child welfare populations. As Minnesota develops a trauma-informed public child welfare system, dedicated staffing and resources will ensure professional development and public awareness of the impact of trauma on early brain development and collaboration through stakeholder partnerships to minimize adverse childhood experiences and focus on health promotion.

Parent Partnerships

The Minnesota Department of Human Services' Child Safety and Permanency Division has partnered with PCAMN to recruit, train and support parent volunteers to participate in efforts to reform the public child welfare system. Parent leaders have firsthand knowledge of family support programs and/or the public child welfare system. Parent Leadership for Child Safety and Permanency is a formal team established to bring the parent voice to enhance policy, programs and practice. Minnesota has created a statewide network to promote, expand and develop parent leadership, which includes training and provision of the Minnesota Café Model.

Deepening Knowledge and Understanding

Minnesota's commitment to strengthening families through the protective factors includes a focus on essential partnerships to assure accessible and meaningful statewide professional development opportunities. This includes conference support, cross-disciplinary training and implementation of a Minnesota Café Model train-the-trainer professional development plan with parents, professionals and community and early childhood services stakeholders.

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

Minnesota is working to expand and promote the protective factors within a broad-based early intervention continuum within the public child welfare system. The CTF supports the Parent Support Outreach Program through the Child Safety and Permanency Division. This program provides support services to families with at least one child under the age of 10 and risk factors for child maltreatment. The Parent Support Outreach Program is a voluntary, consumer-driven family support service emphasizing respectful engagement, partnership with families and recognition of strengths as well as needs. Program goals are to prevent child maltreatment and negative developmental outcomes and promote the development of the Strengthening Families protective factors. CTF is dedicated to early intervention efforts in Minnesota specifically to address the over-representation of American Indian children in the public child welfare system through the Parent Support Outreach Project-American Indian Families grants.

Child and Family Services Administration has prioritized the use of a Strengthening Families approach and the Protective Factors Framework to orient and align work across the agency. A key goal is to reduce disparities in service access and outcomes for racial and ethnic populations through outreach to special populations and the exploration of the integration of culture within the Protective Factors Framework. All CTF efforts must identify a strategic plan to reach out to underserved populations. Efforts need to be racially and ethnically reflective of the targeted populations and incorporate knowledge of the cultural and linguistic diversity of the populations to be served. The CTF is facilitating a public-private partnership, "Embracing the Protective Capacities of Culture" workgroup, to identify and integrate ways in which working through the lens of cultures strengthens families and communities and informs the protective factors.

Ensuring Accountability

The CTF contracted with Wilder Research to evaluate its efforts between 2008 and 2011. The evaluation demonstrated that the CTF had positive impact on families and organizations. Families served through organizations funded by the CTF reported growth in all five protective factor areas. The evaluation also determined the impact that CTF initiatives have in preventing child abuse and neglect through the promotion of protective factors. Through this collaboration with Wilder Research, the CTF has also made internal changes toward more effective and efficient evaluation methodologies and a culture of continuous improvement.

Evolving Work

In an effort to build the protective factors that benefit parents, children, their families and communities throughout Minnesota, the CTF is leading the development of a Minnesota Café Model. The CTF, PCAMN, Minnesota Child Care Resource and Referral Network and Child Development Services committed to developing the infrastructure to support statewide training of parents, professionals and communities in 2012. The CTF is a leader in the coordination of early childhood policy, programs and practices to better address the developmental needs of infants and toddlers within the child welfare system. The CTF works to ensure that services and supports within the child welfare system enhance the well-being, safety and permanency of infants and toddlers. Additionally, the CTF is partnering with adolescent services on a national technical assistance application to promote prevention of pregnancy and sexually transmitted infection among youth across the prevention/early intervention/permanency continuum.

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