

## STRENGTHENING FAMILIES TENNESSEE: STATE PROFILE

### Infrastructure

In 2006, the Tennessee Children's Trust Fund in the Department of Children's Services (DCS) joined the Strengthening Families™ learning community and began working with the Tennessee Department of Human Services (DHS) and the Child Care Resource and Referral Agency (CCR&R) to integrate Strengthening Families into Tennessee's early care system. Other key partners included the Head Start Collaboration Office, the Early Childhood Comprehensive Services planning team, the Governor's Office of Children's Care Coordination, the state Commission on Children and Youth, Department of Education (DOE), Parents as Teachers (PAT), Tennessee Center for Child Welfare, University of Tennessee (UT) Extension Agency, Tennessee United Way, Vanderbilt University's Center on Social/Emotional Foundations for Early Learning, Prevent Child Abuse Tennessee (PCAT) and the University of Tennessee Social Work Office of Research & Public Service (UT-SWORPS).

### Parent Partnerships

Training in community cafés across the state is an innovative and growing way to begin parent leadership and community outreach. Tennessee has developed a "Parents Know Kids Grow" (PKKG) website and Facebook page. These tools, along with the CCR&R website, help inform parents about the protective factors. Tennessee is also promoting parent leadership through initiatives with PCAT, home visitation programs, PAT, UT Extension parent outreach and various teen parenting programs.

### Deepening Knowledge and Understanding

Professional development continues through partnerships with the Tennessee Early Childhood Training Alliance, which provides a free 30-hour orientation for all providers and subsidized academic classes leading to the Child Development Associate designation. The orientation provides content that corresponds to the Strengthening Families protective factors. There are also plans to introduce Strengthening Families in early childhood bachelor's degree classes.

ZERO TO THREE came to Tennessee in 2011 to train 40 CCR&R staff on the Prevent Child Abuse and Neglect curriculum. This curriculum is used in training to enhance professional development with a focus on Strengthening Families.

### 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	

**State Coordinator**

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www.parentsknowkidsgrow.org**Shifting Practice, Policies and Systems**

Tennessee has the unique capacity to train and support all child care providers interested in Strengthening Families. DHS appropriated funding for a Strengthening Families Network Coordinator within the CCR&R. Ten CCR&R offices across Tennessee provide free training and technical assistance to improve the quality of child care. DHS also supports two parenting liaisons who deliver Strengthening Families workshops to providers. The parenting liaisons also deliver targeted technical assistance (TTA) to child care directors, direct caregiver staff and owner/operators of family and group homes on completing the Strengthening Families self-assessment, making a plan for implementation and becoming a recognized site. TTA work qualifies as required licensing hours for providers. The parenting liaisons also work with numerous community agencies serving children, families and teen parents and collaborate with DCS on Community Advisory Boards, which are required in all counties.

Local recipients of federal Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention (CBCAP) funds administered through DCS are required to demonstrate how their work supports the protective factors in families.

Work continues to incorporate Strengthening Families as a major part of the parent/family involvement component of Tennessee's annual Child Care Evaluation and Report Card Program and Star Quality Program. Other work includes embedding this work in all systems serving child care providers, child welfare staff, pre-school and early intervention parents and children. Home visiting programs are also using Strengthening Families as a unifying framework.

**Ensuring Accountability**

Under contract with DHS, UT-SWORPS completed the final year of a three-year evaluation of Strengthening Families implementation and outcomes in Tennessee. Findings indicate that the Strengthening Families approach has benefitted parents by building protective factors and by enhancing the relationship between parents and providers.

**Evolving Work**

Tennessee will continue its outreach to child care providers and seeks to spread community cafés across the state as a strategy to engage and support parent leaders. Efforts will continue to build a close working relationship with the child welfare system to promote the use of quality child care for children in care or at risk. Strengthening Families is lending support to *Give Army Parents a Break*, a collaborative effort to improve the lives of the spouses and families of deployed Army service members. There is also a move to engage the business community, health partners and the child fatality review boards.

*Profile last updated: February 2014*