



STRENGTHENING FAMILIES WEST VIRGINIA: STATE PROFILE

Infrastructure

Strengthening Families™ in West Virginia began before any dollars were invested. Formal funded efforts began in 2007 with a three-year Innovation Grant to the Cabell County Family Resource Network (FRN) from the WV Children’s Trust Fund (CTF). State efforts involve multiple partners such as CTF, the Bureau for Children & Families (BCF), the Bureau for Public Health and Prevent Child Abuse WV (PCA WV). The state’s Prevention Leadership Council oversees implementation efforts, which depend on collaboration among administrators of WV’s Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems (ECCS) grant initiative, Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention (CBCAP) program, early care and education, Maternal, Infant and Early Childhood Home Visitation (MIECHV) grant and the statewide Early Childhood Advisory Council (ECAC).

In 2015, a part-time Strengthening Families WV Project Coordinator was hired. In addition to coordinating learning opportunities and collaborating with various state partnerships, this position enabled the launch of an annual mini-grant program. In its second year, the program has awarded over \$50,000 in funds to 12 local projects through a competitive process, with the purpose of encouraging local leaders both to “dig deeper” in implementing the protective factors framework and include non-traditional partners in community implementation.

Parent Partnerships

West Virginia requires reporting related to parent involvement and leadership for several grant programs and has offered training and technical assistance around parent involvement. In 2012, WV Department of Health and Human Resources and PCA WV launched a Circle of Parents™ network in the state and became part of the Circle of Parents national network. Parents also serve as members of the state’s Prevention Leadership Council.

Deepening Knowledge and Understanding

New WV learning opportunities delivered knowledge and skills around the protective factor framework to over 700 participants from 2010-2016. “Strengthening Families Made SIMPLE” was delivered from 2010 to 2013, focusing on program practice with resources to assist program directors in making low-cost and no-cost changes, with a focus on everyday strategies to build protective factors. These tools are now available for download on the state’s Strengthening Families website.

A second training developed in 2015 focuses on worker practice. “Strong Roots & Good Soil: Your work with families and Protective Factors” draws on research cited in CSSP’s *The Strengthening Families Approach and Protective Factors*

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 Coordination

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Framework: Branching Out and Reaching Deeper. Representatives from early care and education programs, home visiting services, schools, child welfare agencies and family resource centers have been among the participants.

Four West Virginians were certified in 2015 as “in-person” trainers in “Bringing the Protective Factors Framework to Life in your Work” by the National Alliance of Children’s Trust and Prevention Funds. In 2015-2016, representatives of Partners in Prevention grants, Family Resource Centers, early care/education, child welfare and other systems were able to gain in-depth knowledge about specific protective factors and further explore everyday actions to incorporate into their individual programs.

WV has also developed a mandated reporter training structured around the protective factors. “Making a Difference: The Mandate to Report, The Responsibility to Prevent” includes video vignettes with real-life scenarios to stimulate discussion about prevention and protective factors. More than 175 trainers have been certified in this curriculum since 2013.

Shifting Practice, Policies and Systems

In 2011 the WV ECCS initiative awarded Strengthening Families implementation grants to six child care resource and referral agencies and six child care centers. The state Bureau for Children and Families (BCF) incorporated the protective factors into the funding announcement for family resource center grants. PCA WV updated the 9-minute video, “[Circles of Caring](#),” in 2014, introducing protective factors and how community members, families and others work together to strengthen families.

The protective factors are included in the ECAC’s state plan and the MIECHV state plan. BCF contracted with Hornby Zeller & Associates to develop a cross-program WV Family Survey, based on the Protective Factors Survey

developed by the FRIENDS National Resource Center. The survey was rolled out in 2011 and is now being used by all family resource centers and other programs funded through CBCAP, MIECHV and Promoting Safe and Stable Families.

A Tool Kit of Strengthening Families Resources for community programs and a guide for home visitors have also been developed under the “Strengthening Families West Virginia” brand. CSSP’s 2015 “Strong Families” brochure has been customized with state program information on the back cover and disseminated statewide. The state’s ECAC has written Strengthening Families efforts into its state plan, and stakeholders will continue to collaborate with leaders and local programs that are implementing the MIECHV program.

Ensuring Accountability

The WV Family Survey is administered annually to all CBCAP and other prevention programs, including home visiting programs receiving state or MIECHV funding. The survey measures pre- and post-service changes in the presence and strength of protective factors among families participating in direct service programs, and captures a one-time snapshot of protective factors among families to inform public education and awareness efforts.

Evolving Work

WV continues to “brand” its Strengthening Families efforts through the development of a website and other materials with a common look and logo.

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