



VERMONT

strengthening families™

CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF SOCIAL POLICY

A PROTECTIVE FACTORS FRAMEWORK

2017 STRENGTHENING FAMILIES™ VERMONT: STATE PROFILE

Infrastructure

The Vermont Agency of Human Services (AHS) leads Vermont's efforts to sustain and integrate the Strengthening Families™ Approach in systems serving children and families across Vermont. In 2016, AHS' [Integrating Family Services \(IFS\)](#) and the Department for Children and Families [Child Development Division](#) (DCF CDD) convened Vermont's Strengthening Families™ Leadership Team, a diverse group of leaders from state government, community-based non-profits, and other sectors. Team members gather to deepen and sustain Strengthening Families™ research-informed practices at state, regional and local levels. In 2017, VT's Strengthening Families Leadership Team identified where the Protective Factors Framework is implemented and what additional opportunities exist, then created a strategic action plan the team is using to advance collaboration and training across agencies and systems.

Parent Partnerships

Since 2013 Vermont has deployed Race to the Top - [Early Learning Challenge](#) (RTT-ELC) grant funds to expand our Strengthening Families™ Child Care initiative to family child care homes, and fund an evaluation of VT's Strengthening Families™ Child Care models. This project focuses on embedding the Strengthening Families Framework into the EC service delivery system and aligns with [Vermont's Early Childhood Action Plan Result # 2: Families and communities play a leading role in children's well-being](#). Another RTT-ELC project is [Help Me Grow VT \(HMG VT\)](#), a system that uses developmental screening to identify physically, socially, or emotionally at-risk children; promotes the 5 Protective Factors; and helps families connect with needed community-based programs and services.

In 2016, thirty-one licensed child care centers, serving over 1400 children, received Strengthening Families Child Care grants from CDD to implement Strengthening Families™ informed practices. These high-quality programs have attained the highest levels in Vermont STARS, Vermont's Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System. The centers use the Strengthening Families™ self-assessment tool to evaluate whether engagement of parents has been successful, and to improve and deepen partnerships with families and their community.

Vermont's fifteen Parent Child Centers continued decades-long efforts to incorporate Strengthening Families™ informed practices; and seven Head Start Programs' Policy Councils engaged families and adhered to policies aligned with Strengthening Families™. Community and Parent Cafés in VT's 24 [Promise Communities](#) provide venues for parents to lead discussions and voice perspectives.

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 that work with children and families to focus on protective factors. States apply the Strengthening Families™ approach in early childhood, child welfare, child abuse prevention and other systems that serve children and families.

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.



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Implementation Checklist

Protective Factors used in Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems projects and other early childhood systems related 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 (Manual)	✓
Strengthening Families is being implemented into child welfare system	✓

State Coordinator

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Deepening Knowledge and Understanding

The State held Community Cafés to provide skills-based trainings for fifty parents, and trained thirty early care and education (ECE) professionals, including afterschool professionals. Using federal funding from the Child Care Development Fund, the Department of Labor and Vermont’s Race to the Top–Early Learning Challenge grant, the State continues to provide Strengthening Families™ trainings for trainers and ECE professionals.

Shifting Practice, Policies, and Systems

In spring 2017 the VT legislature passed [H.508](#), “An act relating to building resilience for individuals experiencing adverse childhood experiences.” The legislation requires AHS and the VT Agency of Education to report on State efforts to prevent and address trauma. AHS will apply the Strengthening Families™ framework to analyze into which SF Protective Factor each of AHS’ programs fit. The report will note which Factors are heavily embedded in services; which Factors merit more attention; and where AHS resources might be shifted to improve systems serving children and families. Prevent Child Abuse Vermont provides a 3-hour training and introduction to Strengthening Families™. Using a Strengthening Families™ informed approach, 3 state child welfare offices are collaborating with 3 Parent Child Centers to support families at high risk for child maltreatment. Safe Babies Courts link effectively with Strengthening Families™ child care programs and other community service providers in two VT regions. The Vermont Children’s Trust fund requires grantees to incorporate at least one Protective Factor into their grant practices. Finally, the DCF Commissioner’s Office and the Washington County Youth Services Bureau used a Youth Thrive™ grant to deliver technical assistance, and is providing intensive training on the Youth Thrive Protective Factors to youth-serving professionals statewide.

Ensuring Accountability

Vermont uses CSSP’s surveys and assessments to measure impact. Population-based measures like the Youth Risk Behavior Survey, the Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths (CANS) tool, and other indicators, performance measures and evaluation plans are under consideration.

Evolving Work

The AHS / IFS mission is to bring state government and local communities together to ensure holistic and accountable planning, support and service delivery that will meet the needs of Vermont’s children, youth, and families. IFS convened 5 work groups in 2016 to develop a strategic work plan to achieve outcomes defined in Vermont’s [Act 186](#). The State and Local Service Delivery work group, and the Community-Based Prevention and Promotion work group aligned their action strategies with the Strengthening Families™ framework.

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