

STRENGTHENING FAMILIES WASHINGTON: STATE PROFILE

Infrastructure

Washington's Strengthening Families™ state initiative began in spring 2006. It is led by a collaborative team which includes the Community Café Collaborative (CCC), Department of Early Learning (DEL), Department of Health, Child Care Aware of WA and various community-based organizations such as First Step Family Support Center, Child Care Resources and Pierce County Early Learning Coalition.

Washington's Strengthening Families Collective (WSFC) works to steward integration of the Strengthening Families approach and the Protective Factors Framework into statewide systems, communities and norms through collaboration, innovation and collective impact. WSFC envisions that, as a result of this stewardship, all of Washington's communities, systems and organizations will come to focus on building protective and promotive factors to reduce risk and create optimal outcomes for children, youth and families.

Parent Partnerships

WSFC focuses on enhancing leadership of and partnership with parents, caregivers and other adults engaged in the lives of children. Parent members of WSFC are involved in the decision making process. Community Cafés, and the parent partnerships that evolve from them, remain a key strategy. CCC and the Protective Factors Framework are called out in the State Home Visiting Plan as integral to the success of home visiting, and a strong support of parent leadership efforts.

Deepening Knowledge and Understanding

The protective factors have been incorporated into training for Early Achievers (see next page) and Kaleidoscope Play & Learn facilitator training. Kaleidoscope Play & Learn is a promising practice developed by Child Care Resources and is a key strategy of Child Care Aware of WA to engage families in children's early learning. The protective factors serve as a foundation of two strength-based engagement and education programs for parents and family, friend and neighbor caregivers: Early Learning Conversations, a parent/caregiver-led peer education model, and Brothers & Sisters, a program supporting youth who care for younger siblings and relatives.

WSFC members provide Strengthening Families Protective Factors Framework presentations at state and regional conferences that target family support professionals, home visitors and child care providers. The presentations are provided by professionals in the field who have significant experience or training in the Protective Factors Framework. The presentation provided is tailored to the audience, but maintains the integrity of the SF approach through the utilization of CSSP resources and materials.

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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

A six-hour introductory class on the Protective Factors Framework is included in the Professional Training Series that is required for Level 2 participants in Early Achievers, the state Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) launched in July 2012. Intended for child care center directors and family child care primary providers, trainings are offered free of charge by Child Care Aware agencies throughout the state. In the state Early Learning Plan, Strengthening Families is a specific strategy for fostering supportive relationships among parents, families, caregivers, early learning professionals and schools. The approach is a recommended practice for many of the plan's other strategies as well.

United Ways of Washington (UWW) are integrating the Protective Factors Framework into their grantmaking process. Through the support of a grant from the National Alliance of Children's Trust and Prevention Funds in 2010, UWW shared its process by creating a self-guided workbook for grantmaking organizations.

The Community Café Leadership Team (CCLT) stewards an approach that sparks leadership to develop relationships necessary to strengthen families. Meaningful conversations are the mechanism used to develop bonding and bridging social capital for families throughout the socio-ecological model. This approach is currently being used in neighborhoods, early learning and child care settings, tribal centers, schools, faith-based organizations and social service systems. The CCLT is comprised of parents, youth and community organization allies who volunteer their time. The team also coaches parents and organizations in the use of community building strategies such as building partnerships with parents, Appreciative Inquiry, the World Café technology and implementing the Strengthening Families Protective Factors Framework within the cultural context of their community.

WSFC has deepened its relationship with the Department of Corrections. The Protective Factors Framework has been the foundation of their Community Parenting Alternative (CPA) program and continues to be integrated into other avenues of their family work. The Residential Parenting Program (RPP) at one of their correction facilities is taking a closer look at their family policies specific to the mother/child relationship while incarcerated and re-entry as a result of the Strengthening Families approach.

Ensuring Accountability

WSFC and CCC have established theories of change that guide actions and provide a basis for evaluation efforts. WSFC is participating in the Strengthening Families National Network's working group considering how to effectively evaluate the impact of Community Café on parents, families and communities. The CCC continues to use an appreciative inquiry framework in its evaluation process.

Evolving Work

The demand for Community Cafés continues to grow across the state and the country. There are now Community Café leadership teams led by parents in two states, and newly forming teams in two additional states. Washington parents are considering how best to respond to the interest, and to maintain a statewide community of Café practitioners who want to learn and share together despite being separated by geography. An introduction to the Community Café approach has been requested for a statewide meeting of ten Early Learning Regional Coalitions, to support regional and local family engagement efforts. A parent member of the Community Café leadership Team is participating on the state Essentials for Childhood Steering Committee. Washington was one of the states chosen by the CDC to participate in this new initiative.

A relationship is developing with the University of Washington's Center for Child and Family Well-Being, which is working to support research-based practice at the community level through building communities of practice.

WSFC is participating in the multi-sector ACEs (adverse childhood experiences) Public-Private Initiative, working to integrate the Protective Factors Framework into communities' responses to and prevention of adverse childhood experiences.