STRENGTHENING FAMILIES GEORGIA: STATE PROFILE

Infrastructure

The Georgia Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS), Prevention and Community Support section, provides funding through the Federal Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention Grant Program for Strengthening Families Georgia (SFG). Since its inception in 2006, SFG has expanded from an effort to utilize frontline early childhood caregivers as a means to prevent child abuse and neglect to an initiative aimed at embedding the Strengthening Families Protective Factors Framework throughout all systems, programs and services supporting families with young children. SFG is administered by the Georgia Association for the Education Young Children (GAEYC). Major partners include: DFCS, GAEYC, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning, Georgia Department of Education, Georgia Department of Public Health, Georgia Department of Developmental Disabilities and Behavioral Health, Sheltering Arms Early Education and Family Centers, Technical College System of Georgia, United Way of Greater Atlanta (UWGA), Black Child Development Institute – Atlanta Affiliate, Children’s Healthcare of Atlanta, Georgia Family Connection Partnership, Head Start Collaboration Office, Georgia Parent Teacher Association, Georgia Chapter - American Academy of Pediatrics, Prevent Child Abuse Georgia, Parent Leaders and Advocates. www.strengtheningfamiliesga.net

Parent Partnerships

Parent leaders have always served on the SFG Leadership Team. Our parent partners are valued through the implementation of parent activities, parent leadership roles, jargon free literature/communication and by creating an environment where parent’s opinions are respected. SFG resource materials have also been translated into Spanish. Based on survey data many SFG partner organizations have at least one parent engagement strategy in place. Several partner organizations offer opportunities for parents to receive training on leadership and advocacy and to participate in focus groups.

SFG began facilitating Parent Cafés across the state in 2010. Since then over 150 Parent Cafés have been held. In 2017 a SFG Training of Trainers (TOT) for Parent and Community Leaders and a SFG Parent Café TOT was developed with funding from UWGA and GAEYC. With DFCS funding, the Parent Café TOT was first offered in 2018 for kinship navigator and foster parent resource staff.

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 https://cssp.org/our-work/project/strengthening-families/
Deepening Knowledge and Understanding

In 2011 SFG developed training modules on the Strengthening Families Protective Factors and an SFG Overview specifically for use across disciplines. We now have over 250 SFG-trained trainers who have delivered face-to-face training to over 6,000 child and family serving professionals throughout Georgia. In addition, the SFG Overview online training module, which went live for the state’s Quality Rated (QR) system in 2012, was completed by over 45,000 child care staff through 2018. In 2018 a second online module, Connections: The Foundation of Family Engagement provided 4,043 DECAL QR providers with family engagement strategies on the social connections protective factor.

In 2016 Georgia Technical Colleges began embedding Strengthening Families content into their Early Childhood Care and Education courses.

Shifting Practice, Policies and Systems

Findings across three data collection methods in 2017-18 (Partner Survey, Leadership Team Survey and SFG Focus Groups) indicated that SFG partner organizations have made a shift from just beginning to utilize the SFG framework to incorporating the framework in policy and decision-making regarding allocation of resources, training efforts and priorities. SFG partners in several projects including the University of Georgia’s Project F.R.E.E. and Project LAUNCH through the GA Department of Public Health. SFG is part of the Essentials for Childhood initiative in Georgia and has been integral in the Convening & Strategic Planning for the newly-formed Georgia Family Support Network.

Ensuring Accountability

In 2017 SFG underwent a 3rd five year strategic planning process to review our vision, mission and accompanying goals. In Year One (2017–18) the completed SFG Strategic Plan Initiatives included: a) a knowledge assessment built into the Partner Survey, b) the development of a SFG Communications Plan, and c) documented examples of how Partners are using SF and the Protective Factors in their organizational work. Documentation also detailed how DECAL has embedded the Protective Factors into their policies and practices since 2006, d) An SFG protocol was developed for integration of SFG work into partner funding applications that support SFG, and e) a rubric for determining “success” in integrating Protective Factors is in the 2nd draft stage of development.

Evolving Work

In 2018-19 SFG will implement Year Two of its 5-year Strategic Plan. Key components will include ensuring: a) Increasing awareness and understanding of SFG and why it is relevant to each partner’s work, b) increasing the diversity of types of funding sources for SFG, and c) increasing communication efforts to recognize and reward organizations for their success in integrating Protective Factors into their professional development systems and other work.

Profile last updated: December 2018