

## STRENGTHENING MAINE FAMILIES

### Infrastructure

Maine Children's Trust initiated the Protective Factors Project with a seed grant from the National Alliance of Children's Trust and Prevention Funds, funded by the Doris Duke Foundation. The Trust engaged Maine's Early Childhood Initiative as an initial partner, forming a positive public/private partnership to implement the project. Following a year in which this framework was introduced to a variety of Maine policy leaders at the executive, judicial and legislative branches of state government, as well as with other human services program and policy leaders, the Trust began implementing this framework and continues to do so in multiple systems, contracts, and messaging. The project is funded by support from the Trust and other state and federal funding opportunities to assist in implementation, training, evaluation, and technical assistance.

The goal has always been to become sustainable through our network of partners located in every county in Maine. The Trust has developed a pool of trainers that work with child care providers and other family-serving professionals to provide protective factor training, information and technical assistance.

### Parent Partnerships

The Trust supports the statewide network of Prevention Councils to engage parent leaders in a variety of ways by supporting parent partnerships through contracts, trainings and technical assistance. The Prevention Councils have received the National Family Support Network's Standards of Quality for Family Strengthening and Support training and have completed the self-assessments to support activities to strengthen parent leadership in local programs. The Trust also supports caregiver participation in local Prevention Council Advisory Boards that assist in the development of annual prevention plans for local services and provides a Protective Factor training specifically for caregivers and other community members.

### Deeping Knowledge and Understanding

Maine Children's Trust has integrated the Protective Factors Framework in all contracts, resources, public messaging and trainings provided to our prevention workforce. Additionally, our contracted network of Prevention Councils are trained and required by contract to provide Protective Factor trainings annually in every county in Maine to a diverse group of family serving professionals. This includes child care staff, early childhood students, health professionals, school staff and others. The Trust also requires Prevention Councils to utilize the Protective Factor Retrospective Survey to evaluate across evidence-based parenting education curricula provided to ensure efforts are building protective factors in 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

**Implementation Checklist**

Strengthening Families is used in state or local early childhood systems planning efforts	✓
Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention (CBCAP) efforts include a focus on protective factors	✓
Strengthening Families is integrated in a Quality Rating and Improvement System for early care and education	
Strengthening Families is included in the state's Home Visiting Plan	✓
Strengthening Families is being implemented in the child welfare system	
Strengthening Families efforts are linked to work to advance equity, anti-racism, and social justice	✓
The state's work around Adverse Childhood Experiences includes a focus on protective factors and positive childhood experiences	✓

**State Contact**

Heidi Aakjer  
 Prevention Coordinator &  
 Assistant Director  
 (207) 623-5120  
[heidia@mechildrenstrust.org](mailto:heidia@mechildrenstrust.org)

*Profile last updated: May 2021*

Our social norms campaign was launched in the midst of the 2020 coronavirus pandemic. The *In It Together Maine* campaign provides supports to help parents navigate parenting during the uncertainties of this difficult time by connecting parents with local parenting resources that the Prevention Councils provide, as well as fostering social connections. Beyond the span of the pandemic, the campaign is intended to make a lasting effect in the way that Maine families consider the resources available to them, and to cultivate a community of parents that stay in touch and support each other long after the retreat of the virus. The campaign is comprised of a TV commercial, radio ads, a social media campaign, and local promotional efforts by Prevention Councils, as well as an online map of resources. To achieve these goals, the campaign has four specific objectives: 1) change parental attitudes around reaching out for help, 2) promote the free services of Prevention Councils as a parenting resource for all parents, 3) normalize the idea that parenting is hard, and 4) provide supports to families during a difficult time.

**Shifting Practice, Policies and Systems**

Maine Children's Trust has adopted a strategy to integrate Strengthening Families into as many systems as possible and to develop a system of training and support that will be embedded into the continuum of services for families allowing for a shift to a unified strengths-based approach. The Trust models this integration in all its initiatives and messaging. By funding our local Prevention Councils to examine their own practices and policies through the National Family Support Network's Standards of Quality for Family Strengthening and Support, we are supporting action to strengthen providers approach to families. The Trust also continues to work closely with state agencies such as the Maine Center for Disease Control and the Office of Child and Family Services to ensure the Protective Factors Framework is core to programming and partnerships. In our management role of the statewide home visiting system, we can assure that the Protective Factors Framework is infused in the work. The Trust also works with other statewide entities such as the Maine Resiliency Network whose focus is on Adverse Childhood Experiences to support education around the Protective Factors. Additionally, we have several legislators that serve on our Board of Directors that support our efforts to strengthen Protective Factors in our communities.

**Ensuring Accountability**

Within our network, the Trust is supporting an intentional progression toward integrating Protective Factors in policies and practices at the Prevention Councils. The Councils are identifying areas of growth through the self-assessment and have chosen strategies to implement. They will keep basic data to track progress; if the strategy works they maintain it and if not they modify or abandon it. The Trust keeps track of the strategies used and resulting outcomes to inform the learning community to provide new ideas and strategies. The Trust also uses the Retrospective Protective Factors Survey to track changes in families' protective factors over time. Through our evaluation, we have seen consistently significant increases of Protective Factors after participants attend our parenting education efforts.

**Evolving Work**

Maine Children's Trust will work to provide up to date information, best practices and research that develops our prevention workforce. The Trust will also work to expand education on the Protective Factors to various professionals such as local child welfare staff. Additionally, the Trust will continually visit efforts around public awareness activities for the social norms campaign and other marketing activities. Efforts are also underway for Trust staff and our network to integrate the Protective Factors in the areas of anti-racism, equity and inclusion.