

STRENGTHENING FAMILIES INDIANA: STATE PROFILE

Infrastructure

Indiana is in the relatively early stages of implementing the Strengthening Families framework and new to the National Network in 2021. The Indiana Kids First Trust Fund in partnership with Prevent Child Abuse Indiana is currently leading this effort. The Indiana Department of Child Services is also a key partner. We are in the process of forming a leadership team.

The primary focus is to incorporate Strengthening Families in community based prevention programs and initiatives, although the Department of Child Services has also incorporated the Protective Factors in its practice model. The community based nonprofit agencies that have sent staff to Protective Factors training have included the cost in their program budgets (typically funded by state contracts). With Strengthening Families and the Protective Factors Framework as key elements of its strategic plan, the Kids First Trust Fund is implementing strategies to increase its funding capabilities beyond existing but diminishing funding sources.

Parent Partnerships

Several provider agencies have incorporated Parent Café's into their community based prevention programs. Others have done parent focus groups and/or trained their professionals in how to engage and partner with parents, but this has happened on only a limited basis.

The Kids First Trust Fund is in the process of creating a Parent Advisory Board to help guide prevention efforts across the state and increase parent engagement.

Deepening Knowledge and Understanding

To date, training offered on Strengthening Families has largely been limited to nonprofit provider staff engaged in community based prevention programs in some, but not all, geographic areas in Indiana. At this point there has been no consistent statewide messaging about the Protective Factors and Strengthening Families, although the Kids First Trust Fund plans on taking an active role in this area in the years to come.

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 and federal partners 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

Doug Weinberg
Vice Chairman
Kids First Trust Fund
dougweinberg@att.net
(317) 292-3509

Shifting Practice, Policies and Systems

The Protective Factors approach is currently limited to child welfare professionals. However, the Kids First Trust Fund is now actively engaged with other key stakeholders in Indiana to develop a Child Abuse & Neglect Statewide Strategic Framework (Strategic Framework) as a tool and resource for local community based prevention programs and agencies. Strengthening Families is being incorporated as a key element in the Strategic Framework which will facilitate the promotion of Strengthening Families to education and healthcare professionals, providing Strengthening Families and Protective Factors resources in its Toolkit.

Ensuring Accountability

As Indiana is in the initial stages of implementing Strengthening Families, there is currently no formal evaluation or review function in place.

Evolving Work

The Strategic Framework and Kids First Trust Fund funded programs will provide tools and resources to local prevention programs and agencies that will promote racial equity. Promoting equity and diversity in all prevention efforts is a core component of the Kids First Trust Fund's strategic plan.

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