

STRENGTHENING FAMILIES NORTH CAROLINA: STATE PROFILE

Infrastructure

The North Carolina Department of Social Services (NCDSS) is the lead agency in North Carolina using the Strengthening Families™ Protective Factors Framework as an overarching framework for the state's child welfare service continuum. NCDSS has embedded our child welfare training and primary and secondary prevention programs in the five Protective Factors.

NCDSS partners closely with Prevent Child Abuse North Carolina (PCANC), the Children's Trust Fund Alliance, the North Carolina Child Welfare Family Advisory Council (CWFAC), and community-based agencies to ensure that the protective factors framework is the philosophical underpinning of NCDSS's family strengthening efforts. This work is funded through a variety of prevention and intervention federal and state funding streams, including Community Based Child Abuse Prevention, Promoting Safe and Stable Families, and the NC Children's Trust Fund.

Parent Partnerships

NCDSS sponsors a state-level NC Child Welfare Family Advisory Council where Family Partners with lived experience in the child welfare system provide feedback on child welfare policies and practices. NCDSS requires Family Partners to complete the online protective factors training as part of their orientation and also provides an annual Protective Factors training for the CWFAC.

In addition to a state-level family partner council, NCDSS supports three pilot Family Engagement Committees (FEC) in Durham, Forsyth, and Richmond County Departments of Social Service. Both the state CWFAC and county FECs have conducted community cafés with parents, caregivers, and youth with lived experience in the child welfare system. These cafés were designed not only to solicit information from participants, but also to recruit potential Family Partners.

On the community level, all NCDSS Family Support Grantees are required to provide a variety of meaningful parent engagement and leadership opportunities for program participants, including planning, implementing, and evaluating programs. All grantees are required to report on their parent engagement and leadership efforts.

During the COVID-19 Pandemic, community-based agencies worked to help families build the protective factors to cope with higher levels of stress, social isolation, and economic hardship.

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

Deborah Day
 Community Prevention Programs
 Administrator
 N.C. Department of Health & Human
 Services, Division of Social Services
deborah.day@dhhs.nc.gov
 (919) 527-6436

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Deepening Knowledge and Understanding

NCDSS requires all community-based grantees direct service staff, supervisors as well as NCDSS Community Preventions Team staff to complete the online [Bringing the Protective Factors Framework to Life in Your Work](#) training course.

NCDSS sponsored a Train-the-Trainer of Protective Factors in 2018. NC currently has 54 certified Protective Factors trainers. PCANC convenes peer support opportunities for these trainers. PCANC also uses the Strengthening Families framework as the basis for developing Community Prevention Action Plans. Using the protective factors, the agency has developed tools and provides comprehensive training to local communities.

In order to increase public awareness, PCANC maintains a webpage devoted to defining the five protective factors and offering an infographic and additional resources. This page can be found at <https://www.preventchildabusenc.org/resource-hub/protective-factors/>.

Shifting Practice, Policies and Systems

In an effort to enhance Strengthening Families practice at the local level, all new NCDSS funding announcements with a child abuse and neglect prevention focus will include the Strengthening Families Protective Factors Framework language and require outcomes correlated to the protective factors.

CSSP has developed a [Strengthening Families Self-Assessment Tool for Community-Based Programs](#) that uses concrete, observable items to help agencies make "small but significant changes" in program practice to build protective factors. Starting in July 2021, NCDSS will require that all Family Support Grantees form a Self-Assessment Team that represents different perspectives within the agency, including program participants, and complete the self-assessment tool within the first six months of funding. After completing the assessment, the Grantee will develop an action plan to build protective factors within programs by the end of first year. The Self-Assessment Team will review this tool and action plan annually during the three-year grant cycle.

Ensuring Accountability

All NCDSS Family Support Grantees are required to report every quarter on how they have promoted the protective factors with the families they serve. Most of these programs also use the retrospective Protective Factors Survey to measure their success on these five factors.

Evolving Work

As mentioned above, NCDSS will require Family Support grantees to complete the Strengthening Families Self-Assessment and develop an action plan based on the results. NCDSS plans to analyze individual assessments, aggregate results, and develop technical assistance to support grantees' plans. NCDSS also plans to explore sponsoring additional Train-the-Trainer of Protective Factors training events to increase the number of certified trainers in NC. State and county child welfare staff, community-based professionals, and family partners will be invited to attend the training.

In the 2021 Family Support Request for Applications, applicants were required to describe how they work to build racial equity, diversity, and inclusion at the community, agency, program, and staff levels. This expands on their previous cultural competency efforts. NCDSS will research how grantees can use the Strengthening Families framework to understand and support their anti-racist work.