

strengthening families

THROUGH EARLY CARE & EDUCATION

illinois

strengthening families national network partner

LEAD AGENCY

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ASPECTS OF ILLINOIS'S APPROACH

Add sixth Protective Factor on Healthy Parent-Child Relationships

Launch six learning networks of early childhood programs across the state working to embed the Strengthening Families approach in their centers

Translate Protective Factors into common, accessible language for providers and parents; develop the *Love is Not Enough (LINE) to Keep Your Family Strong* campaign and accompanying Parent Café process

Engage child welfare system fully in building partnerships with early care and education systems and incorporating the Protective Factors into its own practice

Link Strengthening Families Illinois (SF-IL) with other statewide initiatives addressing key areas of approach (e.g. Illinois Children's Mental Health Partnership)

Create materials and resources in support of Strengthening Families

Develop training materials and quality assurance process to support Strengthening Families implementation; increase the availability through training of trainers

UPCOMING ACTIVITIES

Engage parents with LINE campaign, LINE Parent Cafés, and additional LINE materials

Expand to more than 40 school districts and develop resources for family child care providers

Shift and deepen practice in of Strengthening Families in early care and education centers across the six learning networks and in additional communities

Develop stronger collaborative relationships between local child welfare case-worker staff and early childhood program staff

February 2008

STRENGTHENING FAMILIES NATIONAL NETWORK

With funding from the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, the SFNN, brings together states, territories, and tribes implementing Strengthening Families with national organizations embedding the approach into their work.

Partners in the SFNN have deep, broad-based Strengthening Families initiatives across multiple systems in the state, and have a leadership role in the network. 9 states are partners in the SFNN.

Affiliates in the SFNN are strongly committed to Strengthening Families and are working towards implementation of the approach at the state level. 14 states are affiliates in the SFNN.

For more about Strengthening Families visit www.strengtheningfamilies.net

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PARENT ENGAGEMENT

Strengthening Families Illinois (SF-IL) and its partner, the Illinois Family Partnership Network, translated the Protective Factors into accessible, common language to deliver the information directly to parents. Through the *LINE* campaign and new Parent Cafés, parents across the state are hearing about ways that they can build Protective Factors in their own families. The state initiative also includes a Parent Engagement Workgroup to ensure that parent leadership and a parent voice are emphasized at all levels of the work.

In 2008, parent leaders will receive training in facilitating the *LINE* Parent Cafés, using a newly developed facilitator's manual, and will implement them in each of the six learning network sites. More *LINE* materials will be disseminated across the state through preexisting networks.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Strengthening Families Illinois has partnered with several organizations to identify and develop trainings specific to the approach and the Protective Factors. Five organizations currently make training in the Protective Factors available throughout the state. In addition, the Midwest Learning Center for Family Support, a National Affiliate Organization in the SFNN, also offers trainings in three other topic areas related to Strengthening Families. SF-IL also developed a training sequence for both individual programs and learning networks interested in implementing the approach, as well as a quality assurance process for qualified trainers to ensure high-quality training and to track training statewide.

Upcoming professional development activities include ongoing work with the initiative's partners to infuse Strengthening Families into preexisting trainings, building Strengthening Families into Gateways Career Lattice credentials, and working with the Department of Human Services to bring the Family Development Credential to Illinois. SF-IL will also provide additional Training of Trainer opportunities on additional curricula, such as Recognizing and Responding to Signs of Family Stress, and others.

In 2008, Strengthening Families Illinois also led cross-trainings with 200 Head Start staff and 200 child welfare workers to build linkages between the early childhood and child welfare systems.

At least 60 early care and education centers were using the Strengthening Families Self Assessment in 2007.

In 2008, many more centers will complete the Strengthening Families Self Assessment.

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EARLY CHILDHOOD INITIATIVES

Strengthening Families Illinois participates or staffs several workgroups and initiatives with an early childhood focus throughout the state. For example, Illinois's Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems grant, managed by the state Department of Human Services, includes an infusion of the Protective Factors throughout early childhood services.

Many other early childhood initiatives also incorporate Strengthening Families and the Protective Factors, including Preschool for All, Illinois's universal preschool program; the Illinois Children's Mental Health Partnership; and the Birth to Five Project and the Ounce of Prevention's Government Interagency Team through the Department of Children and Family Services.

CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT PREVENTION

Through its partnership with the Department of Children and Family Services, Strengthening Families Illinois has been integrated into child abuse prevention efforts throughout the state. Activities include participation in and planning of the Prevent Child Abuse Illinois conference and the Child Abuse Prevention Month Statewide Planning Committee.

Funding, staff time, and in-kind resources for SF-IL have been provided by:

- Illinois Department of Human Services
- Illinois Department of Human Services: Community Health and Prevention
- Illinois State Board of Education
- 40+ partner organizations/agencies contributing to the approach statewide—Visit www.strengtheningfamiliesillinois.org for a complete list

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CHILD WELFARE

Illinois is one of three pilot states participating in a project funded by the Arthur L. Mailman Foundation to explore and expand linkages between child welfare and early childhood systems. The Director of the Department of Child and Family services has developed a protective timeline for all child welfare services, beginning with the prevention in communities, that is centered around infusing a family support approach. Strengthening Families Illinois is working to develop tools and training to facilitate this shift in practice.

With the involvement of the Strengthening Families team, Illinois is the first state in the country to mandate that all children ages three to five in the foster care system are enrolled in and attend a quality early learning program. Strengthening Families Illinois's internal Early Learning and Family Support Workgroup is focused on implementing the Department's five Strengthening Families Goals:

- Embed the Protective Factors in all child welfare practices and initiatives
- Ensure children 3-5 in the child welfare system are enrolled in quality early care and education
- Ensure collaboration at the community level among early childhood programs and agencies
- Advance developmentally appropriate and trauma informed child welfare practice
- Work with public and private agencies to embed Protective Factors into child- and family-serving systems

Work to ensure collaboration between child welfare caseworkers and early childhood program staff for children in the child welfare system is ongoing. Cross trainings between early childhood and child welfare staff are taking place, with topics ranging from DCFS 101 to strategies for collaborating around work with families involved with the child welfare system.

Locally, Strengthening Families Illinois encourages collaboration between its learning network sites and local caseworker staff. The cadre of programs participating in Strengthening Families are committed to making this collaboration happen, beginning with scheduling informal opportunities for early childhood professionals to meet and network with child welfare staff; connecting with caseworkers; inviting caseworker staff to network meetings; and making early care and education programs available as resources to child welfare workers.

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