

Missouri: State Initiative Profile



Overview

Missouri was one of the original seven Strengthening Families™ pilot states selected by the Center for the Study of Social Policy in 2005. Missouri chose to become part of the initiative because it blended well with many initiatives already going on in the state. Strengthening Families offered the perfect complement to existing planning processes to allow children the best possible start in life free of abuse and neglect and on a level playing field with their peers when entering school. The will appeared to be there within the Child Welfare agency, which had just created a section devoted to Prevention, Partnerships, and Early Childhood, along with the will to raise public awareness and improve efforts in the prevention of child abuse and neglect. The key focus thus far in Missouri's Strengthening Families effort has been in early childhood with the Department of Social Services (DSS), Children's Division as the lead agency. The key partners have been the Parent's As Teachers National Center, the Missouri Children's Trust Fund, and the Missouri Child Care Resource and Referral Network (MOCCRRN).

Building Strengthening Families Practice on the Ground

Both the Children's Division and the Missouri Children's Trust Fund incorporate the Strengthening Families Protective Factors Framework in their respective grant programs. The Children's Division also works with MOCCRRN to provide Strengthening Families training. MOCCRRN also provided 52 hours of technical assistance on Strengthening Families implementation to 10 early childhood programs. Missouri has mandated that all child care programs receiving quality improvement assistance complete the Strengthening Families self-assessment and develop an implementation plan. For those programs participating in the Missouri Accreditation Facilitation Project through MOCCRRN, the idea of doing another assessment on top of the accreditation system's self-study and developing another implementation plan seemed overwhelming. In order to help the child care programs, the MOCCRRN compared the Strengthening Families self-assessment to accreditation criteria. It was found that specific items in the Strengthening Families self-assessment could be used as concrete ways to meet some of the accreditation criteria.

Accreditation specialists point out these parts of the Strengthening Families self-assessment when a child care program is working on those accreditation criteria. This approach has removed the resistance child care program directors had and allowed them to consider the idea of embedding the protective factors at the same time that they pursue accreditation.

Key Aspects of the State's work

Policy / Systems Change

The Missouri Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems (ECCS) plan embeds the Strengthening Families framework. The ECCS steering team continues to work to improve family involvement in that work and have developed strategies around that for this grant cycle. Child welfare has been a key partner from the beginning in the state's

Strengthening Families is a research-based, cost-effective strategy to increase family stability, enhance child development and reduce child abuse and neglect. It builds 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

Through the Strengthening Families Initiative, more than thirty states are shifting policy, funding and training to help programs working with children and families build protective factors with families. Many states are also using the Strengthening Families approach to integrate state prevention strategies, strengthen families in the child welfare system and engage parents and communities in building protective factors. For more information, visit www.strengtheningfamilies.net

Nationally, Strengthening Families is coordinated by the Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP) and supported by a number of national partner organizations including:

The National Alliance of Children's Trust and Prevention Funds

The BUILD Initiative

United Way Worldwide

Zero to Three

The FRIENDS National Resource Center



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QUICK FACTS

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SF Investment:

Direct Investment:
\$778,160

Programs reached:

215 ECE Centers
completing the Self-
Assessment

51 home-based child
care programs
completing the Self-
Assessment

Children reached:

11,787 children
reached through the
above programs

Professional Development:

1,807 individuals
trained
4,805 person/hours
training

work. Starting in 2009 the state has placed an emphasis on trying to embed more of the protective factors into child welfare practice in the state and building relationships between child welfare and early childhood. In 2009 all new child welfare workers received at least two hours of training on the protective factors. In addition the Children's Division provides Strengthening Foster Families training through contracted trainers around the state.

Parent Partnerships

Missouri is promoting the addition of parent representation on the ECCS with strategies developed in this ECCS grant cycle. One strategy is to explore partnerships with local Parent Teacher Organizations/Parent Teach Associations to engage parents of preschoolers.

Professional Development

Despite significant funding cuts in 2010, the quality of training and emphasis on the Strengthening Families Protective Factors Framework remain strong, though there is a decrease in the frequency of training provided. In the first half of 2010 MOCCRRN provided Prevent Child Abuse and Neglect training to 756 individuals in the 133.5 hours offered. MOCCRRN also provided 52 hours of technical assistance to 10 early childhood programs specifically on embedding the Strengthening Families protective factors into their programs. The University of Missouri, Center for Family Policy and Research, Opportunities in a Professional Education Network (OPEN) holds the state's child care program trainer registry and the Professional Achievement and Recognition system, which is a registry for child care practitioners. OPEN also has oversight of Missouri's Core Competencies that were developed in a bi-state effort with Kansas. In 2010 the work began to revise the Core Competencies with one of the goals being to incorporate the protective factors throughout. All training in Missouri is to be based on these Core Competencies. This work is scheduled to be completed in early 2011.

Evaluating Strengthening Families

The Children's Trust Fund is hoping to add a standardized evaluation specific to the Strengthening Families Protective Factors Framework to CBCAP site evaluations in 2011.

Evolving Work

The Department of Health & Senior Services (DHSS) is working on further embedding the Protective Factors Framework into the training it provides to licensed childcare providers. DHSS is developing Social Emotional Child Care Orientation Training along with Social Emotional Competencies to be implemented in Early Childhood programs around the state. This was made possible by with American Reinvestment and Recovery Act dollars. Missouri is moving toward the development of a state-wide QRIS. The models approved by the state departments have the Strengthening Families Protective Factors Framework embedded within. Hopefully soon this will be available to more and more child care programs and can be used to assess the program's work. Finally, an upcoming focus is deepening the implementation of Strengthening Families within the child welfare system by working to embed the Protective Factors Framework into the everyday practices of child welfare.