

strengthening families

kansas: opportunities and synergy

Kansas has always been a leader in prevention of child maltreatment. The state created the first Children's Trust Fund and the first Prevent Child Abuse state chapter in the nation (both incorporated in 1980). In 1999 the state's Children's Cabinet was formed. With nine members appointed by the Governor and the Legislature, the Cabinet has authority over the state's tobacco settlement and oversees the distribution of \$74 M a year, half of which is dedicated to children's services. The Cabinet also manages the Children's Trust Fund, the Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention (CBCAP) program, and was asked to convene the planning group for the federal Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems (ECCS) program¹ when it was developed. With such a backdrop, the story of Strengthening Families™ in Kansas is one of synergies and opportunistic connections.

Jackie Counts, the ECCS coordinator in Kansas, learned about the Strengthening Families initiative in 2007 at the CBCAP meeting in Washington D.C. A grant opportunity was available through the National Alliance of Children's Trust and Prevention Funds to apply the Protective Factors to the child abuse and neglect prevention strategies of Children's Trust Funds. The Protective Factors appealed to Jackie because "they really make sense. They are something that, whatever you are doing, you can apply it and see how it fits. It is strengths-based and gives you a practical way of thinking about what strengths to emphasize." Kansas applied and received a grant to implement the Protective Factors in early care and education settings.

Around the same time Kansas had been selected to send a team to the PREVENT Institute. PREVENT provides an opportunity each year for states to bring a multi-disciplinary team together for intensive planning to launch a project that will impact child abuse and neglect in their state. The Kansas team's goal was to create a prevention plan for their state. Through PREVENT the team examined other state models for prevention and chose to focus on incorporating Strengthening Families into their prevention planning because they felt it provided them with an opportunity to address prevention in a new way.

As in a number of states, the ECCS planning team in Kansas saw Strengthening Families as an opportunity to give specificity to the family support component of their ECCS plan. For Kansas this provided a perfect opportunity to align state planning processes that might otherwise have been separate. Strengthening Families offered a language which served both the needs of ECCS and of the prevention planning needs of the state. The effect is that the Early Childhood

KANSAS CHILDREN'S CABINET AND TRUST FUND

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GOVERNANCE

The Strengthening Families Leadership team in Kansas has 14 members: 2 parents and 12 others representing state and community agencies. Included are: CBCAP, Parents as Teachers, Higher Education, the Department of Education, advocacy groups, the Department of Social and Rehabilitation Services, the Children's Cabinet, and others. The leadership team provides oversight, but a larger stakeholder group of close to 80 handles planning and implementation.

plan now includes prevention and not just maltreatment response. They are no longer two separate goals. These connections led to co-mingling of workgroups, new relationships among work groups, and inclusion of new partners that had not been involved before. The clear, intuitive language of the Protective Factors has provided an opportunity to engage a much broader range of stakeholders in the work. So, while the planning teams for Strengthening Families and ECCS are relatively small (14 to 15 people), the Strengthening Families stakeholder group includes about 80 individuals, and the ECCS stakeholder group includes over 150 individuals.

The broad participation in Strengthening Families planning in Kansas has been an asset for the initiative and a potential challenge. Kansas leaders coordinating the initiative have found that people are very receptive to the ideas at the core of Strengthening Families and the language of the Protective Factors. At the same time, this can make it difficult to keep abreast of where and how Strengthening Families is being adopted in the state and makes evaluation, quality control, and oversight challenging.

EARLY CHILDHOOD SYSTEMS BUILDING

Since 2007, Strengthening Families has been part of the early childhood system in Kansas. The Kansas Children’s Cabinet and Trust Fund (KCCTF) acts as convener for a large group of stakeholders, brought together under the Kansas Strengthening Families Plan (KSF Plan).ⁱⁱ Using the Strengthening Families Protective Factors to frame a common set of outcomes for

children and families, more than 80 stakeholders from across the state developed the Plan by examining what it would take to make Kansas the best place to raise a child. Once developed, the Kansas Strengthening Families Plan was printed on pocket folders and widely distributed. This product not only increased the profile of the Plan in the state, but allowed many different groups to share ownership of the plan by putting their own materials inside the folder.

Strengthening Families has provided a common, easily understood language that has been adopted across systems in Kansas. The KSF Plan has been intentionally and thoughtfully connected to the state’s Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems (ECCS) Plan and its CBCAP efforts. Figure 1 shows how ECCS provides the larger architecture from which the Strengthening Families plan was developed, and how CBCAP has been shaped by both the ECCS and SF plans. So, for example, CBCAP funding guidelines were revised to ask grantees to demonstrate how their proposed activities support implementation of a Protective Factors approach.

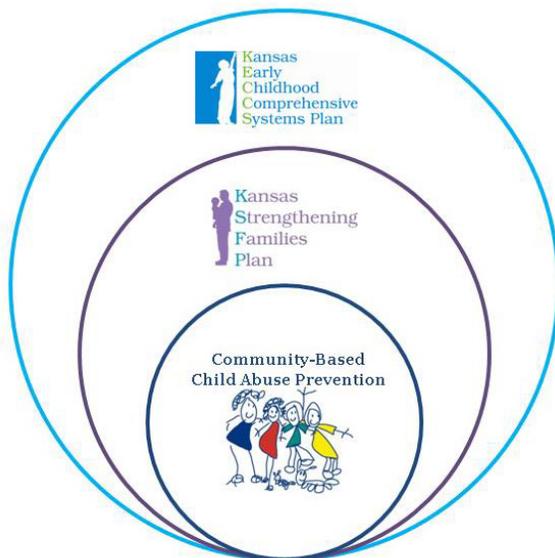


Fig. 1: Alignment of Early Childhood Initiatives in Kansas

Factors come alive within their own work. The work was led by the KSF Plan Leadership Team, and the uptake was surprising. For example, the Kansas Attorney General’s office made the commitment to train all staff members on the Protective Factors, making it a common framework for how they interact with families. The members of this stakeholders group are currently mapping the services they offer to gauge their alignment with the Strengthening Families Protective Factors.

In 2008 at a KSF Plan stakeholder meeting, the Children’s Cabinet challenged stakeholders to show how they would make the Protective

BUILDING STRENGTHENING FAMILIES PRACTICE ON THE GROUND

In 2008, 154 early care and education programs in Kansas had at least one staff member trained in Strengthening Families, including the Protective Factors and Program Strategies. Twelve programs, serving a total of 180 children and 125 families completed the Self Assessment online.

Two communities in Kansas are using the Strengthening Families framework broadly to support families. In one jurisdiction, partners include local businesses, the school district, economic development staff, prevention advocates, and 35 agencies that provide direct services. Organizers in the second community are using the Strengthening Families approach to develop a community plan that addresses a recent increase in substantiated cases of maltreatment.

In the last year, \$11.1 million in new funding available through the Early Childhood Block Grant program required applicants to demonstrate how their proposed project addressed priorities in both the Kansas Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems Plan and the Kansas Strengthening Families Plan. Fourteen Block Grants were funded for 2009.

BUILDING PARENT PARTNERSHIPS

Two parents (14%) currently sit on the Strengthening Families Leadership Team. Their participation is key to the success of the Leadership Team. Kansas is exploring innovative methods to maximize parent voices that can be used at the state, community, and agency levels.

2009 marks the beginning of a Parent Involvement Research Initiative for Strengthening Families Kansas. The goals are to gain a better understanding of how parents understand parent involvement, how they access the supports they need to nurture their children, and how agencies use parent input to inform programmatic changes. The research process involves focus groups with approximately 120 parents and an agency survey, followed by a meeting of parents to discuss findings and make recommendations to the Strengthening Families leadership team.

Kansas is developing a plan to use online social networking sites, such as Facebook, to connect parents with one another, share information and resources, and get feedback on existing and developing policies and programs. Use of this technology has the potential to address barriers to engaging hard-to-reach families and the stigma associated with services.

GARDEN CITY, KANSAS

After participating in a state stakeholder meeting, a Garden City teacher decided that Strengthening Families could do great things for her hometown. In the rural yet diverse community, she pulled together a team with representatives from schools, the local hospital, the area's largest employer, and residents. An area farmer and leader of economic development efforts then brought the framework to the economic development council. The council is now working with the area's largest employer to develop a housing initiative using the Strengthening Families framework.

Opening new lines of communication to initiate and strengthen social ties between individuals can help connect to the next generation of parents, and to get feedback from parents and family members on program and policy issues

An upcoming brief will outline additional strategies for encouraging parent leadership and sustaining meaningful partnerships with parents in programs and policymaking.

ENRICHING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

In 2008, 7,950 early childhood providers received training in Strengthening Families and the Protective Factors.

Training in the Strengthening Families approach is widely available through the state's Child Care Resource and Referral agencies, as well as through various conferences and trainings. Through a partnership between the KCCTF and the Kansas Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies' (KACCRRA), staff at each of the state's seven regional Resource and Referral agencies have been trained in ZERO TO THREE's *Preventing Child Abuse and Neglect (PCAN)* curriculum. PCAN covers the five Strengthening Families Protective Factors and Program Strategies, and is designed to support providers in completing the Self Assessment.

EVALUATING STRENGTHENING FAMILIES IN KANSAS

The KSF Plan specifies outcomes in five areas: health and safety, early identification, family support, parent education, and aligning evidence-based research with public policy and practice. Stakeholders are currently collecting baseline data, but working with such a large number of outcomes (more than 50) has been challenging. The use of the Protective Factors Surveyⁱⁱⁱ among CBCAP grantees, and the current efforts of Strengthening Families partner agencies to map the alignment of their services with the Protective Factors is helping the initiative better understand who is using the Strengthening Families approach and how to measure impact.

one town's story – garden city, kansas

Finney County is rural, with a population of 42,000, in Western Kansas. It faces the same challenges many rural counties face: isolation, few high-wage jobs, and transportation issues, among others. In addition, Finney County hosts a large, multi-ethnic immigrant community, drawn by employment in the county's meat packing plants. This creates a unique set of challenges: 17 languages spoken in the public schools; four schools where 100% of the kids are defined as at-risk based on demographic information; 65% of the students qualify for free or reduced fee lunch, and a similar percentage are non-English speakers.

Coming from this context, Ann Knoll, a school teacher from Garden City who grew up in Finney County and had many local connections, attended two statewide stakeholder meetings convened as part of the Kansas Strengthening Families Plan. Based on what she learned, Ms. Knoll decided to bring the Strengthening Families approach back to Finney County. She quickly convened a group of interested individuals to explore how Strengthening Families could support their work in the area. The group invited Rebecca Gillam and Jackie Counts, who coordinate the state Strengthening Families efforts, to come to Garden City to talk about Strengthening Families. Before long, the work began to take on a life of its own. Garden City organizers carefully selected key agencies and individuals to invite for the initial meeting with Rebecca and Jackie: both

“it’s not that we want more money or to provide more services...

...it’s about pulling things together.”

Finney County school districts, represented by their superintendents, principals, a counselor and a teacher; two of the top executives from the local Tyson meat packing plant; the local Services Center, which serves migrants and provides ESL services; the Finney County Economic Development Committee; the CEO of the local hospital; members of the community council; and a representative for the local Court-Appointed Special Advocate program. Before the planners presented the Strengthening Families framework, no one was sure if it would be successful. But the framework and ideas engaged the group immediately. The two Tyson executives saw it as an approach that could become part of the support system for the employees in their plants. The Economic Development Council used the Protective Factors framework as part of a retreat they held, looking at how they could incorporate Protective Factors into their economic development activities

Kevin Gallagher, Vice President for Mission & Ministry at St Catherine Hospital, supported the initial Strengthening Families meeting and brought the approach to the Community Health Coalition. This 34 member coalition was launched ten years ago to address underage pregnancy, but over the past ten years, has significantly expanded its mission, realizing that their success depended on strong, healthy families. Two years ago, the Coalition won funding to develop a Center for Children and Families, a physical and a virtual place in the county where parents could turn for parent education, life skills, health, and support. Strengthening Families was a natural fit with the goals of the Health Coalition, and the Kansas Strengthening Families Plan was a perfect way to support the collaborative activities already underway in the County. While the Community Health Coalition has already overcome many barriers to collaboration, they found that Strengthening Families provided a common language and framework to support the work of the individual agencies in the Coalition. Partners could focus not only on their role in the collaboration, but also what they could do within the context of their respective agencies. For those partners who had previously just attended meetings or handed out flyers about the efforts, it helped them to see where they fit in and how their work also could contribute to family-strengthening efforts.

Garden City is working to build awareness of Strengthening Families across their services sectors, as a thread that will align different pieces of work. The effort continues to grow and shift, with continued enthusiasm from many partners. The Garden City Strengthening Families school partners are pressing the Kansas State Department of Education to incorporate the Protective Factors into the Multi-Tiered Systems of Support plan, a continuum of evidence-based, system-wide practices designed to support academic and behavioral needs of individual students. The Garden City partners believe that incorporating the protective Factors into the statewide framework will give their school districts an opportunity to build on the work that they are already doing to integrate services in their community.

ⁱ Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems planning grants are available to all states from the Maternal and Child Health Bureau of the federal Department of Health and Human Services. Systems planning is done around five areas: health, mental health and social development, early care and education, parent education, and family support.

ⁱⁱ View the KSF Plan at www.ksfplan.org

ⁱⁱⁱ The Protective Factors Survey is available for download at <http://www.friendsnrc.org/outcome/pfs.htm> and www.strengtheningfamilies.net