Start and Stay Strong:
Building Strengthening Families Practice at the Community Level
The **National Alliance of Children’s Trust and Prevention Funds (Alliance)** holds the unique position of serving as the membership organization for state children’s trust and prevention funds. Children’s trust and prevention funds are the backbone of our nation’s infrastructure to support children and their families.

The Alliance leads a national **Early Childhood Initiative (ECI)**, which includes a 30-state Learning Community of state children’s trust and prevention funds and their partners, including parents and community members. Through this national initiative, the Alliance is focusing on strategies that strengthen families, build protective factors, promote individual growth, help systems be more responsive to families and children and strengthen communities’ capacities as safe and healthy environments.

The Alliance has engaged in collaborative partnerships with members of the ECI Learning Community and expresses appreciation to the **Doris Duke Charitable Foundation (DDCF)** for supporting the development of the valuable resources resulting from these partnerships. The DDCF improves the quality of people’s lives through grants supporting the performing arts, wildlife conservation, medical research and the prevention of child maltreatment, and through preservation of the cultural and environmental legacy of Doris Duke’s properties.

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Introduction and Background:

Overview of the Strengthening Families Model

National Perspective

Strengthening Families (SF) is a research-based, cost-effective framework designed to increase family stability, enhance child development and reduce child abuse and neglect. It is built on five protective factors (PF):

- **Parental resilience** – The ability to cope and bounce back from all types of challenges.
- **Social connections** – Friends, family members, neighbors and other members of a community who provide emotional support and concrete assistance to parents.
- **Knowledge of parenting and child development** – Accurate information about raising young children and appropriate expectations for their behavior.
- **Concrete support in times of need** – Financial security to cover day-to-day expenses and unexpected costs that come up from time to time; access to formal supports, such as Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) and Medicaid, and to informal support from social networks.
- **Social and emotional competence of children** – A child’s ability to interact positively with others and communicate his or her emotions effectively.¹

State and national foundations as well as over thirty states have applied the SF framework. The SF framework is consistent with the socio-ecological model, which recognizes there is an inter-relationship between individuals, families and their environment. It presumes behavior is determined to a large extent by the social environment, including community norms and values, regulations, and policies.² Given this context, the developing child must receive the appropriate resources from his or her environment at the right time in order to optimize his or her biologic potential.³ SF strategies foster those linkages.

State and national foundations as well as over thirty states have applied the SF framework to shift policy, funding and training to help programs working with children and families build protective factors into their interventions. Many states are also using the SF approach to integrate state prevention strategies, inform comprehensive early childhood planning, strengthen families in the child welfare system and engage parents and communities in embedding protective factors locally.⁴ The overall goal is to support the role of families in providing an optimal environment for their children’s development.⁵

“As a child – that is the best way to grow up – where you feel secure in your family, you feel secure in your school system, you feel secure when you go out into the community as a whole. The Strengthening Families Protective Factors, if they are present, build a strong family. That is so meaningful at the community level because strong families make strong communities.”

~ Paula Waters
Community Coordinator
Smart Start North West Oklahoma

¹ State and national foundations as well as over thirty states have applied the SF framework.
² The SF framework is consistent with the socio-ecological model, which recognizes there is an inter-relationship between individuals, families and their environment. It presumes behavior is determined to a large extent by the social environment, including community norms and values, regulations, and policies.
³ SF strategies foster those linkages.
⁴ State and national foundations as well as over thirty states have applied the SF framework to shift policy, funding and training to help programs working with children and families build protective factors into their interventions. Many states are also using the SF approach to integrate state prevention strategies, inform comprehensive early childhood planning, strengthen families in the child welfare system and engage parents and communities in embedding protective factors locally. The overall goal is to support the role of families in providing an optimal environment for their children’s development.
Oklahoma Approach:
Building Strengthening Families Practice at the Community Level

In 2007, Oklahoma drew on the national Strengthening Families (SF) strategy to launch the Oklahoma SF initiative in seven pilot Smart Start (SS) communities in the state. The intent was to build protective factors (PFs) into early childhood education (ECE) programs. The state focused on early childhood because:

1. ECE had a systematic way to reach out and engage many families.
2. Providers saw families on a daily basis.
3. Families turned to ECE providers for information and guidance about their children.

Key partners included the Oklahoma State Department of Health (OSDH) as lead agency, Smart Start (SS) Oklahoma (Oklahoma’s state early childhood advisory council), SS Communities, and the Oklahoma Department of Human Services (OKDHS). SF received over $147,000 during the 3-year grant period ($66,500 in FY 2009; $51,673 in FY 2010 and $32,928 in FY 2011).

Pilot sites were part of SS communities in South Central Oklahoma, North Central Oklahoma, North West Oklahoma, Kay County, Stephens County, Logan/Kingfisher Counties and Tulsa. The kickoff activity focused on training child care center staff on the PF to enable them to better support families and children at their sites. The state used a “train the trainer” format and through the SF partnership identified trainers from within child welfare, child care licensing and health department child guidance systems. With a grant from Zero to Three, Oklahoma trained 40 early care and education professionals across the state in the Preventing Child Abuse and Neglect: Parent–Provider Partnerships in Early Care and Education (PCAN) ZERO TO THREE curriculum (consisting of 12 modules). Five child care sites in each of the pilot SS communities received this training. They were also awarded $2,000 in mini grants to pilot SF activities in their communities. First year funding also included financial support for SF coordinators. This common activity across the sites provided the capacity for local governance teams to learn about protective factors, build support and implement similar interventions thereby providing the conditions for evaluation across communities.

The sites have been able to infuse the protective factors in many ways by expanding to other programs and events in their communities. The broad range of activities undertaken at these sites provides an opportunity to assess the necessary ingredients for a successful community level SF initiative by identifying the key levers of change. These include:

- Leadership and governance at local sites
- Linkages that support collaboration and community
- Policy and practices to institutionalize changes supportive of PF
- Professional development received by childcare staff at each site and of the SF Coordinators

Outcomes of Oklahoma Strengthening Families

1. Prevention of child abuse and neglect through increased knowledge and understanding of child development and parenting strategies.
2. All child and family serving agencies will be building in the protective factors throughout their programs.
3. Strong partnerships between early childhood programs, child care and child welfare to prevent abuse and neglect and strengthen families.

Goals of Oklahoma Strengthening Families

- Improve parents’ knowledge of parenting and child development, expand parents’ social support circle and increase parents’ access to community resources.
- Improve the early childhood program environment in order to better facilitate positive provider-to-child interactions, provider-to-parent interactions and parent-to-parent interactions.
The report will identify areas to consider in the future, ensuring the SF framework is continually woven into community strategies. Challenges to ongoing implementation and expansion to other communities will also be identified. The evaluation will conclude with factors to consider in the success of any SF community initiative.

The Success Case Method

The project was developed by Smart Start Oklahoma and the Oklahoma State Department of Health in collaboration with the National Alliance of Children’s Trust and Prevention Funds. The evaluation is based on the Success Case Method – a balance of storytelling blended with principles of rigorous evaluative inquiry and research. The method is designed to evaluate new or innovative approaches and quickly define what is working, what needs to be adjusted and how to replicate.

This method asks the questions: What is really happening? What results, if any, is the program helping to produce? What is the value of the results? How could this initiative be improved?

With regard to the evaluation of the SF work in the identified Oklahoma Smart Start Communities, the Success Case Method served to:

- Provide a quick assessment of strategies that are working.
- Identify areas needing adjustment.
- Provide findings that can inform policymakers about future directions for the initiative.

To initiate the process, evaluators created a survey document designed to elicit features of a successful SF community initiative. Community staff was interviewed in order to:

- Gather information about current strategies.
- Gain understanding about the results of implementation.
- Ascertain the value of those results.
- Communicate any recommended changes.

Survey responses included stories illustrating application of successful practices. The evaluation coupled implementation of the Success Case Method with administrative data gathered by each of the communities during the process of SF implementation.

The chapters that follow will summarize the application of each of the key levers of change, major activities that occurred and lessons learned by the communities.

* Note: Throughout the document “governance team” is used to describe the leadership structure that was used by the sites. Sites may have used a steering committee, Smart Start Board, leadership team as their guiding board of citizen leaders.
Leadership and Governance

“Leadership should be more participative than directive, more enabling than performing.”
~ Mary D. Poole, Fellow of the Association for Healthcare Philanthropy

From its inception, all of the sites had the advantage of being part of the Smart Start (SS) network of community-based school readiness collaboratives developed in the 2000s. The goal of these collaboratives is to ensure all children are valued, safe, eager to learn and ready to succeed when they begin school. SS communities had already established approaches to system building, collaboration, resource maximization and innovative project implementation. The SF initiative built on those efforts to extend the network of leaders involved in these endeavors.

Each site initially hired a local Strengthening Families Coordinator to facilitate and implement the initiative. Governance structures varied, but all were a part of the SS Initiative in their community. Committee/coalition representatives reflected the local leadership of each community. The composition of the governance structure created a climate where potential connections and partnerships were optimized. In one community, two governance team members identified local partners to assess the developmental needs of children at pilot sites, talk with their parents and make any necessary referrals. Community partners utilized a variety of communication methods, including e-mails, phone calls and social media such as Facebook.

Each of the SF sites developed strategic action plans that built on the existing assessment and development processes initiated in SS. Action plans specified project activities, responsible entities, needed resources and timeframes for completion. Strategies incorporated outreach and public awareness, collaborative partnerships, training on protective factors, child care policy and practice changes, as well as programs designed to build protective factors in the community.

Lessons Learned

- Build on prior successes in community building: board development, program management, public engagement & advocacy; utilize “buy in” from prior training to expedite recruitment for current work.
- Incorporate SF in existing early childhood collaboratives.
- Use existing local leadership while growing new ones.
- Assure continuity in program staff to sustain strong leadership & governance structure.
- Include education as a key partner throughout the system.
- Increase parent engagement by linking SF framework with No Child Left behind (NCLB).
- Increase involvement by child protective services.

Strengthening Families Community Participants

Participants included health and social service agencies directly involved in serving families with young children, parents, United Way agencies, child care and resource and referral directors, educators, therapists and board members in schools and universities, OSU Extension services, businesses, libraries, media, faith based organizations, medical providers, tribes, local government, prevention networks, courts and volunteers.
SUCCESS STORIES

Smart Start North Central Oklahoma: Engaging the Courts

The Smart Start North Central SF Steering Committee initiated a project called “Engaging the Courts” to recruit and train a paraprofessional group of volunteers to support and facilitate the speedy reunification of families involved in DHS cases. Initial discussions occurred between SF staff, steering committee members and the Associate District Judge in Payne County assigned to juvenile cases. Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) and other community agencies and providers expressed interest in working to develop court procedures that would embody the SF approach. Discussions about this project would not have been possible without the proactive engagement of SF staff and community leaders.

Smart Start Stephens County: Beginning at the Birth of a Child

Smart Start Stephens County (SSSC) became part of the Oklahoma Strengthening Families (SF) Initiative in 2007, having been active as a community initiative since 2005. SSSC brought communities together around the goal to have all children be safe, healthy, eager to learn, and ready to succeed by the time they enter school. SSSC worked toward this goal by providing parent education, increasing access to quality child care, as well as creating community awareness about the importance of early childhood development. It seemed natural to incorporate the SF initiative, with its use of protective factors, as part of the foundation for preparing young children for school and for life.

A primary concern in the community was the prevalence of teen pregnancy and births to single moms. Other factors, i.e., a family poverty rate of 11.6%, a low literacy rate, a high incidence of methamphetamine use and many parents in prison were risks that could potentially lead to child abuse and neglect. The coalition wanted to mitigate these factors by providing support that started at the birth of the child.

With the help of community partners, the initiative made a positive impact in Stephens County by 1) helping families understand the opportunities for parent-child bonding, 2) fostering positive relationships and 3) providing support to families to reduce isolation and increase their comfort in reaching out before their frustration resulted in a child being hurt. SS Stephens County maintained successful working relationships with many agencies, including the Oklahoma Department of Human Services, Oklahoma State Department of Health, Duncan Regional Hospital, local pediatricians, OSU Parent-Child Connection, Great Plains Resource & Referral Agency, Wichita Mountains Prevention Network, The Chickasaw Nation, Duncan Public Schools, Delta Head Start, etc.

The collaboration achieved success for families by viewing the SF initiative as a continuum of care for young children and parents - beginning with a focus on the establishment of strong/resilient families, healthy childbirth and development, education and literacy, and community support.

Smart Start Stephens County is making a difference for the families served through this initiative.
Linkages that Strengthen Collaboration and Communication

All of the sites included initiatives seeking to improve services to families by building collaboration and communication. A major goal was to implement strategies to increase public awareness about protective factors. To facilitate this, staff initiated community events, conferences and training for child care providers, parents/caregivers, educators, and civic organizations. Topics ranged from detection and prevention of child abuse to knowledge of early childhood, healthy living, effective parenting and mechanisms to access resources in their communities. Communities engaged both the public and private sectors. One community held an economic summit on early childhood and conducted child care tours, which included remarks by a state philanthropist investing in early childhood initiatives in the state. The First Lady participated in a series of tours, which led to a higher level of commitment from state leadership.

In addition to training, sites also increased public awareness through dissemination of newsletters, parent resource material and media engagement. Various media approaches included public awareness campaigns, public service announcements (PSAs) as well as submission of articles to local newspapers.

Sites engaged with and joined local organizations to communicate and expand awareness about the SF framework. They engaged with medical practices, participated in local workforce committees, local university-affiliated organizations, regional trainings and statewide leadership forums.

These collaborative efforts produced the desired results. Sites utilized the Protective Factors framework to conceptualize systemic interventions with disadvantaged populations and with the general community. Some collaboratives secured alternative funding to enable additional sites or to introduce innovative programming.

These interventions are illustrated in the communities’ success stories and are documented in their individual responses (see section on Community Focus: Summary of Community Responses).
SUCCESS STORY

Payne County: ‘Young at Art’ – A Museum without Walls

In partnership with Smart Start Payne County and the City of Stillwater’s Multiographic Art Center, the Stillwater Children’s Museum (SCM) created “Young at Art,” a Museum without Walls program that introduces young children to art. This program supported the Smart Start Payne County’s “Strengthening Families” strategy to work with child care facilities and families to build protective factors around children with the goal of reducing or preventing child abuse and neglect.

Staff believes that “None of us plans to treat our children badly, and yet all of us are capable of it. Babies are the most susceptible because it is difficult to understand what it is they are saying to us. The latest research tells us that all babies speak to us about themselves from birth on. ‘Young at Art’ is designed to help us begin to understand what babies are saying by interacting with them in different ways and learning their cues. When communication between babies and caregivers is better understood, a very strong protective factor is provided which reduces misunderstanding and therefore possible abuse.”

Five pilot sites were selected to receive the “Young at Art” curriculum, which included fifteen unique activity kits focusing on hands-on elements of visual art, dance and music developed for children 0-12 months of age. Participating families checked out these kits and utilized them in their homes with their babies. The curriculum was specifically designed to be fun and to educate parents about child development and promote parent-child attachment.

By utilizing the “Young at Art” kits, children and their families were exposed to dance, music, visual art, pictures and books to increase their participation in and appreciation of the arts. The bright colors, pictures, music, soft sounds, textures and activities provided in the kits stimulated children’s learning, encouraged the use of the five senses, and increased development of motor skills. The time and focus involved in using these art kits increased family bonding and strengthened attachments.

SS Payne County, ONEOK Foundation, Inc. and the Stillwater Arts and Humanities Council provided 100% of the funding for “Young at Art” making it possible for thirty-five families to utilize this program completely free of charge.

Ruth Calvins, SCM Executive Director notes: “Our Museum without Walls programming has been extremely successful largely due to the amazing support of the Payne County community. We are touching lives through play, and I commend these groups for recognizing the value and impact of something so simple, yet so important.”

Promote widespread participation of advocates, parents and the early childhood system; convene partners through relationship-based practices, which is a critical step to success.

Use collaborative processes to generate creative and innovative solutions to local issues.

Develop leaders and champions at multiple levels: parents, providers, businesses & other community partners.

Match needs & talents of volunteers/community partners to project strategies.

Secure seed funding to incentivize private support.

Engage business leaders through organized activities.

Apply community-driven decisions to maximize innovation.
Success Stories

Garfield County: Community Partnerships

The success story of the Strengthening Families Initiative in Garfield County can be summed up in two words: community partnerships. This community in Enid placed a priority on bringing people together for children. Local partners included businesses, public schools, social service agencies, churches, Parents as Teachers, the Chamber of Commerce, the Alliance for Economic Development and Senior Living Centers.

The Strengthening Families initiative provided the broad framework for multiple projects:

- One-on-one mentoring and group training for child care providers
- Conversation Café focus groups at child care sites
- Free play day at the local children’s museum, and
- A pre-school soccer camp conducted by the high school soccer team for children from local child care centers.

To support these efforts, the SF project enlisted community support to update the Child Advocacy parent/child visitation area, assuring that it offered support to families in a family-friendly manner.

Garfield County made it a priority to involve local business partners in these efforts. They enlisted the help of their local Lowe’s Home Building Center, who donated $1,200 worth of supplies. Lowe’s employees volunteered their time to build a community garden at a Strengthening Families child care site. Business leaders were the targeted audience for events such as the Economic Summit on Early Childhood Investment, the Enid Community Profile event, and “Our Future Starts Today” which included tours of Strengthening Families pilot site child care centers and featured George Kaiser as a guest speaker.

Families in Enid were strengthened by an innovative Smart Start-led collaboration that placed two Enid public school 4-year-old classrooms inside local senior living centers, the Commons and Greenbrier, making them the 3rd and 4th classrooms of this type in the nation.

Logan and Kingfisher counties: Eye Screenings for All

In the summer of 2007, the local English as a Second Language director asked Smart Start if they would provide some information classes to the students while during summer break. Smart Start arranged a variety of classes and services including eye screenings, which were provided by Dr. Michael Bennett and staff. After examining all of the children, Dr. Bennett and his staff also took time to screen the parents.

One mother was found to be nearly legally blind. She was stunned, but concerned because she was unable financially to provide for this need. Dr. Bennett assured her he would make sure she got corrective eyewear if she would visit his office. The support offered as a result of this partnership demonstrated the value of partnering and emotionally touched everyone at the site.
Policy

The Strengthening Families (SF) approach is similar to other early childhood grant-making approaches that are currently undergoing evaluation. The Harvard Family Research Project evaluated the Preschool for California’s Children grant-making program and identified strategies that mirror SF in its emphasis on leadership and engagement, application of research, and geographic targeting of local implementation. As mentioned in earlier sections of this report, SF drew on the state’s SS infrastructure to allow for rapid deployment of strategies that would build on existing local leadership and collaborative approaches used by communities. The state chose to initiate SF due to evidence supporting strategies that promote protective factors to ensure the well-being of children and families. SF pilots were chosen based on prior evidence of successful implementation of SS in their communities.

The common goal among all of the pilot sites was to build protective factors into SF interventions and at the larger community level. The initial focus was on child care sites that received training, mentoring and education about the SF framework and stipends to use for local child care centers. The consistency of this application resulted in similar operational changes across sites. Day care centers changed their physical configuration to be more family friendly. They intentionally provided:

- More age appropriate play spaces
- Parent bulletin boards
- Parent resource areas, equipped with books, developmental information and educational materials to check out for use at home
- Computer access for staff and parents
- Books on tapes and backpacks filled with books – to promote family literacy and develop opportunities for parents to learn to read

The value of building protective factors was routinely and intentionally emphasized in communications with parents through newsletters, phone directories and education packets to inform both parents and caregivers in timely ways. Child care strategies, e.g., family events, parent meetings and cafes, increased parents’ interaction with each other and their children. JumpStart in Tulsa used PCAN training to influence policy on a statewide level by incorporating it in the Infant-Toddler Endorsement process.

Here are some observations from the child care sites:

“Infant room teachers are glad that parents seem to talk informally at arrival and departure so the parents interact with all the children. They are more relaxed and spend more time in the classroom. Love the resource center at the library”

“We work together as a team better. The PCAN training is beneficial to teacher/parent communications; staff are able to reflect on children’s behavior and change their actions to help make the environment more conducive for a learning environment for the child”

Lessons Learned

- Develop strategies and outcomes based on relevant theoretical models.
- Use local strategic planning and community assessment processes to build policy interventions.
- Provide evidence-based training to systematize operational changes across child care sites.
- Utilize the SF framework to produce changes that reflect best practice for providers (results: child care providers more reflective, aware of family stressors and capable of intervening early with troubling family situations because of the relationships they have built).
- Admit the reality that child care providers face similar issues as the families they serve.
- Apply tenents of the SF framework to business & school interventions.
- Incorporate ongoing evaluation processes to identify successes and needed program corrections.

“Free the child’s potential, and you will transform him into the world.”

~ Maria Montessori, MD, founder of Montessori Educational Method
Smart Start North Central Oklahoma: Positive Rituals

In the spring of 2009, Smart Start North Central Oklahoma sponsored a community training where teachers, parents and caregivers learned about “Positive Rituals.” The purpose was to get adults to pay attention to what their children may be asking for through challenging behaviors. Its intent was also to help children and adults deal with major life changes as well as everyday challenges.

The following is a story of what resulted from the “Positive Rituals” training that strengthened a family’s understanding of their son and changed the thinking of his teachers and school policy.

One of the mothers attending the training had a child with Asperger’s Syndrome. She was very familiar with rituals because her son, Quinn, used them to cope. Some of his rituals were not very positive, or so she thought. As she listened during the training, she decided that if she could sit down and look at her son’s rituals from a strength-based perspective, she could then take her newly-formed ideas of her son’s strengths and write letters to his teachers from his point of view. If the teachers had a way to know Quinn better from the beginning of the school year, dealing with his challenging behavior might not be so traumatic for everyone concerned.

Quinn’s mother wrote the letter as if he were writing it, using his strengths as a way to give the teachers a way to connect with him. The letter informed the teacher: “Dear Mrs. Murphy, when I get overstimulated, you may see me pacing the floor, twitching my fingers, humming, licking my lips too much or biting my arms. This is how I calm myself down, so please don’t be concerned. Sometimes I speak very loudly. This is because I can’t hear the difference between loud and soft. I also like to be the one who initiates being touched.” The mother wrote all kinds of things so that the teachers would know her son better and signed the letter with his name, “Sincerely, Quinn.”

Quinn’s mother wrote to us to report that because of our training, Quinn, for the first time ever, after years of crying and destructive behavior at the start of school, came home on the first day with a smile on his face, eager to go back the next day. It had been a few weeks since school started when she wrote, reporting that Quinn was still eager to go to school. She was amazed and deeply grateful. She reported the teachers were also so grateful for the information about Quinn that they began to ask each parent at the beginning of the school year to write a similar letter, whether or not their child had a special need. This has become a standard practice at the school, helping teachers connect better with their children and making parents more aware of their children’s strengths.

Lessons Learned: What we see as weaknesses in our children and each other very often are strengths with a small shift in perception.
JumpStart Tulsa:  
An Endorsement Component for Infant and Toddler Caregivers

The success story for JumpStart Tulsa is broader than those at the center/program/local level. It represents a solid commitment to support implementation of the Protective Factors framework resulting in recommendations from the Oklahoma Association for Infant Mental Health (OKAIMH) and the local chapter OKAIMH-Tulsa. These recommendations have led to approval of Strengthening Families and the PCAN Training Modules as a fulfillment of training requirements for the Infant and Toddler (I/T) Endorsement Levels 1 and 2. The I/T Endorsement process is a statewide initiative supported by state agencies and local agencies. Oklahoma is one of only 13 states to incorporate an Endorsement component for infant and toddler caregivers.
Professional Development

At the beginning of the initiative the SF project staff received training on protective factors using the ZERO TO THREE PCAN curriculum, which is grounded in clinically informed research and experience. This provided foundational support for implementation of local strategies.

Prior expertise in collaboration and parent involvement was a criterion in the selection of pilot child care sites. Initially each child care site completed a self-assessment tool provided by SF. These results were used to tailor training. All staff at the pilot sites received training on the protective factors. Director questionnaire results identified the types of training offered during 2008 and 2009. Over 254 staff received training as part of their professional development (See Appendix B: Strengthening Families Evaluation Director Questionnaire Results 2008-2009).

Smart Start sites offered additional training, built on curriculum used by earlier SS collaborative work:

- Smart Start Kay County – The community educator took the “I Can Problem Solve (ICPS)” curriculum and expanded it to additional child care homes and centers in the county.
- JumpStart Tulsa – The Infant-Toddler Specialist partnered with Oklahoma Association for Infant Mental Health (OKAIMH) to provide PCAN training.
- Smart Start Stephens County – “Bridges out of Poverty” training helped to reduce cultural and social barriers between staff and families.
- Smart Start North West Oklahoma – “Conscious Discipline” training informed staff and parents regarding social/emotional issues.

During initial stages of the initiative, coordinators offered additional guidance to staff with a weekly check-in call. Some sites provided onsite mentoring and technical assistance to child care providers through the “Parents as Teacher” (PAT) curriculum. One site incorporated onsite mental health observations to educate staff on the social and emotional competence of children and to assist in identifying when additional referrals should occur. Another offered technical assistance on issues related to children with special needs. Sites also took advantage of information from the Internet to educate staff about the SF framework.

SF staff also educated child care centers about protective factors through regular dissemination of newsletters. Stephens County SS created

“I do see a difference…the caregivers realize that they can either make that day or break that day for both the child and the family.”

~ Paige Whalen
Quality Enhancement Coordinator
JumpStart, Smart Start Tulsa
additional incentives to enhance the quality of child care professionals as they provided mini grants to selected child care centers. These small but significant mini-grants enabled programs to qualify and advance under the state’s Reaching for the Stars program, a tiered reimbursement system tied to quality improvements.

Here are child care director comments:

“Child behavior has improved”
“Staff knows how to word concerns to parents “
“I believe the training/classes really help in the classrooms with the teachers, staff and children”
“Teachers have really advanced in areas that recognize different temperaments and differences in parenting with cultural differences”

Lessons Learned

✓ The child care director’s leadership is an essential component, instilling staff confidence.
✓ Ongoing training that supports community-capacity building skills is critical.
✓ Consistent training and technical assistance that supports child care providers in an appropriate and timely manner is required in order to sustain high quality child care practices.
✓ Child care providers’ own needs must be met, enabling them to better meet the needs of children and families.
✓ PCAN training can be effective in:
  ➔ Organizing professional staff and community partners to support young children & families.
  ➔ Improving child care staff cohesion, talents, understanding of and interactions with parents/caregivers.
  ➔ Reducing the risk of child abuse and neglect through relationship building and the use of reflective practices.
JumpStart Tulsa: Parent Board

One center, in making an attempt to work better with their families, set up a parent board. The board learned about the plans and goals of the program. Board members were especially interested in the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) accreditation process, designed for centers to acquire best practices, improve quality of care and achieve 3 STAR status. The Board reviewed the results of the teaching and family survey and made plans with staff to make corrections to the program to improve survey results going forward. During this process the families became aware that staff were working to improve their education and wondered if they could afford to go to college. When they found out that some staff couldn’t qualify for state scholarship monies, board members set up a scholarship account to enable all staff an opportunity to increase their education.
Oklahoma views SF as a philosophy designed to improve the wellbeing of young children and their families. This section identifies the community approaches used to infuse PF into local programs and events.

Participating sites have identified numerous innovative activities, which occurred over the 3 years of the grant. They reflect both common and community-specific programming designed around:

- Supporting families
- Engaging parents
- Strengthening parenting
- Facilitating friendships and mutual support
- Linking families to other services
- Fostering an understanding of a child’s social and emotional development

The diagram and stories that follow illustrate Oklahoma’s innovations.

“The happiness of any society begins with the well being of the families that live in it.”

~ Kofi Annan, former Secretary-General of the United Nations
Stillwater:
F.a.t.h.e.r. (Fathers Acting To Heal, Educate and Reconnect) Program

In 2008, under the umbrella of the Strengthening Families initiative, a partnership was formed between Smart Start North Central Oklahoma and the Corrections Corporation of America at the Cimarron Correctional Facility, a medium security prison, in Cushing, Oklahoma. Its purpose was to help fathers become aware of their irreplaceable role in nurturing healthy, productive children, even while incarcerated. Many of these incarcerated fathers did not recognize that they already possessed basic parenting skills necessary to raise healthy, happy children. The F.a.t.h.e.r. program focused on child development, understanding behaviors as communication, how to listen to and talk with children, reasonable and effective discipline, positive role modeling, being honest with children about incarceration and how to strengthen the father/child/caregiver relationship from prison.

Because the inmates requested a female perspective on their issues, Rita Bridenstine, Strengthening Families Coordinator for Smart Start North Central Oklahoma, was invited by the inmates to co-facilitate the program with Brian Inks, Mental Health Professional at the correctional facility. The groups met once per week for 10 weeks, with 2-hour sessions. Startup costs for this program were less than $2,000.

The men formed a close bond during the course of the 10-week sessions, continuing to support one another after the course ended. In the safe environment of the group, true empathy, respect, compassion and wisdom could be expressed among the men. A sense of purpose in the lives of their children gave the fathers something very important for which to live.

So far, the program has graduated 54 inmates. The current class will graduate 16 more and there is a waiting list of over 60 fathers.

Letters written by fathers graduating from the program demonstrate its success. Also, the Corrections Corporation of America newsletter, in its 2010 Father's Day edition, quotes Inks as saying, “The offenders who have graduated tell us that of all the classes they are offered at the facility, this is the only one that allows them to speak freely of their childhood and past circumstances that led them to where they are now, and that they appreciate a space to feel safe enough to emotionally process some of those memories.”

In September 2010, Smart Start North Central Oklahoma received the “Outstanding Child Abuse Prevention Program Award” from the state of Oklahoma for its work with the F.a.t.h.e.r. Program.

Smart Start North Central Oklahoma is trying to get the Oklahoma Department of Corrections to implement this program statewide.
**SUCCESS STORIES**

**Ada: Cornerstone Kids Ranch**

During the first year of the pilot, each center completed a self-evaluation. It helped centers think about the protective factors and how they work to help caregivers reach out to parents. In addition to various parent activities, the Pontotoc County pilots, banded together to have an end of year family event at Cornerstone Kids Ranch in Ada.

Parents who attended were asked to fill out an evaluation of their center as well as talk about the impact that the SF initiative had on their lives. Melissa, a mom to an infant and a toddler cared for at one of the pilot sites, had this to say about the program:

“I enjoyed the event at the Cornerstone Kids Ranch. My children had a blast and I was able to spend quality time with my family as well as meeting and conversing with other parents and workers from the day care. I would not take my children to any other day care. I trust the day care, and I know that my children are being well taken care of as well as being exposed to developmentally appropriate activities. I see the results as I interact with my children. We are reaping the benefit of this wonderful place.”

Staff knew this mom’s connection to her child care center lessened the stress of leaving her children with someone else while she worked. The connection between the center and parents, the confidence that children are well cared for and the chance to network with other parents during fun family events was invaluable.

**Kay County: Parent Cafés**

Staff knew making SF work in Kay County required an “at ease” environment for parents, children, and staff to come together to support each other in raising young children. The greatest success at all three sites was seeing parents talk with each other about what they were going through and experiencing the building of relationships with the staff at each center.

Smart Start Kay County started Parent Cafés a little over two years ago, which were well received at the Head Start facility. Parents received new ideas and education materials, all related to the family. The parents stated numerous times that they gained advice, learned better ways and heard new ideas on how to handle difficult situations within their family. Friendships formed. Adults were able to have conversations without their children being present; children were able to interact with each other. In August 2010, staff surveyed the parents to determine if they would commit to participation in Parent Cafés once every two months. Parents answered NO on the surveys. Instead, they requested a monthly Café meeting. The parent group in Kay County has continued to build these relationships outside of the Head Start facility, working on bettering themselves as individuals.
Stephens County: Annual Community Baby Shower

An annual community baby shower was initiated in 2008 with Smart Start Stephens County and continues to be a much-anticipated event. The baby shower is held each year in the spring to benefit expectant parents and new parents of infants up to one year of age. Parents are offered information on prenatal care, child development, links to social services, gift bags of books and resource materials and door prizes. These items are provided by generous donations from community and civic organizations. A great benefit of the shower is the way it connects new parents to resource agencies and other needed supports at the beginning of their child’s life. At such an exciting time when parents are engaged and excited about doing the best for their infant, this annual event aids in building a strong foundation in the community. In the first year the 25 participants were primarily moms. In 2009, 64 attended, including fathers and other siblings and in 2010, attendance surpassed prior years with families attending together.

Current planning anticipates over 120 attendees for 2011. Although there are still families that need to be reached, each year sees more families being served.

JumpStart Tulsa: Increasing Family Involvement

In an effort to increase family involvement and meet the needs of families known to experience economic hardship, the program sponsored a free haircut day at the center. A parent, who was currently attending cosmetology school, offered to cut hair for free to anyone at the program. The event was a huge success.

Another center said their parents had taken over Teacher Appreciation plans and provided a week of special services for the staff. They provided breakfast and snacks for teachers and sent notes of appreciation. Parents finished the week with a barbeque on the center playground. At the wrap-up barbeque all staff were presented with a $30 Quick Trip gift card. The families coordinated all plans and fund-raising for the event.

Still another center has parent/grandparent support throughout the year – but especially during the spring. The parents/grandparents built a raised garden and installed it at the center. Working with the teacher, they helped children prepare the garden, plant veggies and flowers, maintain the garden and harvest the vegetables. They enjoyed a meal with the children in the center and the vegetables grown were a feature of the meal. This was the brainchild of one family who secured the assistance of other parents and grandparents of children enrolled in the center. This spring is the 3rd year for this activity and it continues to grow in support among families at the center.
Community Impact

Strengthening Families (SF) has elevated community awareness of protective factors through community-wide events and dissemination of resource information. All of the sites have actively engaged community partners in the process of building protective factors into their communities. Community partners demonstrate their involvement by initiating and participating in the interventions. Sites have been able to leverage accomplishments in the community because SF is perceived as having a broad base of expertise. Community partnerships have sustained strategies through funding from the private sector, professional development training through the resource and referral agencies and volunteer support.

The initiative has increased family and social connectedness through parental training and community events that are intentionally designed to:

- Support families as they establish social connections with other families.
- Provide alternative methods and strategies for parenting.
- Increase parental involvement in their children’s activities.
- Foster a better understanding of parenting and child development.
- Build relationships with parents, creating the foundation for an increased trust and comfort level in requesting assistance when needed.

As a result, fathers are more involved with each other. Education is more valued. In some cases, parents have been able to focus on their own educational or vocational goals, resting assured that their children are well cared for. Parent survey results for 2008-2009 showed a positive shift in the areas of family participation in program activities, identification of personal problems and children talking more about their feelings.16

“Your community is only as healthy as the least one of your population.”
—Bruce Perry, M.D., Ph.D., Senior Fellow of the Child Trauma Academy

Start and Stay Strong: Building Strengthening Families Practice at the Community Level 19
A child care director noted:

“Parents are more comfortable coming to staff because staff are more open to them”

The SF initiative laid a critical foundation of understanding for the Protective Factors framework by providing the evidence and research-based training of the ZERO TO THREE PCAN. Participation in this training prompted real changes in everyday practice for participating child care centers. Some of the noticeable changes include:

- Parent resource areas are provided where parents may visit with other parents informally and have access to needed resource materials.
- Play space is provided onsite.
- Staff demonstrates a positive shift in attitudes, professionalism and interactions with families, seeing their role more as partners with parents to actively support their parenting.
- Staff exhibits greater confidence in making needed referrals. When appropriate, they are prepared to recommend that parents seek additional services.
- Staff shows an increased appreciation and understanding for the role that cultural and socioeconomic conditions play in the process of building protective factors. Opportunities for trainings and mentoring help staff continue to grow in this important area.
- Staff actively partner with parents, providing increased opportunities for parents to assert leadership roles in their parenting and in the community.

Families who have been impacted by the SF initiative have demonstrated evidence of increased resilience and seem better able to handle the stressors in their lives. Participating families have experienced greater cooperation between service providers with whom they interact. The communities have mobilized to assist underserved populations and have been able to share the approaches that originate from the Strengthening Families Protective Factors framework with additional child care centers in their communities.

The philosophy of Strengthening Families is alive in these Oklahoma Smart Start Communities. Staff reports that attendance is increasing each year for programs established through the initiative. Commitment to the goals of the SF framework is evident in staff dedication and leadership, effective communication between community partners and the continuation of programming. Community support for this work remains strong, even with the small amount of funding currently designated for the initiative.
Future Considerations

Future considerations for partnerships include:

- Engaging various early childhood systems such as child protective services, education and mental health.
- Sustaining professional development around the SF philosophy.18

Participating communities were polled to gather their wisdom about how to sustain this initiative in the future. What follows are suggestions from community members and evaluators of this project:

- Cultivate a stronger commitment from state leaders.
- Employ a full-time project coordinator at the local level.
- Increase financial support to continue existing sites and expand activities both in pilot communities and statewide.
- Increase funding for staff support, training and technical assistance, supplies, materials, transportation and for mini-grants to initiate site-specific activities tailored to communities’ needs.
- Stimulate more intensive and ongoing involvement with child care providers.
- Provide training and technical assistance for project coordinators and key community partners involved in Strengthening Families.
- Advocate for inclusion of the protective factors in higher education curricula and in professional development training for staff in state agencies serving young children and families.
- Implement strategies to reduce staff turnover at child care centers.
- Require ongoing collection of community data to aid in assessment and evaluation.
- Increase awareness and reinforce the fact that Strengthening Families is an approach that views families as the driving force in all interventions – not “just another program.”

“Caregivers and parents are not alone in this. Both of them need to have training and information regarding the Strengthening Families approach and all of the protective factors so that they together can make this the best success story for our children.”

~ Paige Whalen
Quality Enhancement Coordinator
JumpStart, Smart Start Tulsa
Broader Implications

The Federal government is investing in community-driven place-based initiatives to promote positive outcomes for children and families. Initiatives like the Department of Education’s Promise Neighborhoods and the Office of Head Start’s Early Learning Communities Initiative seek to support local leaders and community residents as they work together to achieve common goals. At the heart of these initiatives are core elements that encourage accurate needs assessment, strategic planning and coordination among stakeholders, delivery of effective practices and measurement of progress toward outcomes for children, families and communities.

The Oklahoma Strengthening Families example offers yet another demonstration of the power and potential of community-driven place-based initiatives. While decisions and actions must occur at the local level, there is an important role for state leadership to:

- Set clear expectations and guidelines for communities.
- Support community capacity for planning, implementation and progress reporting.
- Provide common professional development, training and technical assistance to providers and programs across communities.
- Ensure consistency of efforts to encourage cross-site comparisons and evaluation for lessons learned.
- Document successes and encourage peer-learning and communications among the communities to promote best practices.

Oklahoma has the benefit of an infrastructure of a local school readiness collaborative that was ready to take on the Strengthening Families initiative with support and guidance from state level leadership. In the absence of such structures, a first step for states seeking to replicate the Oklahoma model is to support the formation of a coordinated local leadership team. This should include representatives from the public and private sector, parents, early care and education programs and providers, public schools, community-based organizations, health, mental health and child welfare, family support and other child and family services. State leadership can provide technical assistance, strategic planning tools, and “glue money” to support these important early organizational activities (meetings, facilitation, materials, etc).

As more attention is focused on place-based initiatives, Oklahoma’s experience demonstrates that the Strengthening Families approach is well-suited to frame a community-wide early childhood effort. The Strengthening Families Protective Factors are research-based and offer a clear framework and common language that transcend the typical siloed approach to child and family services. There are already many documented examples of small but significant changes aligned to the protective factors that programs can implement that reduce the likelihood of child abuse and neglect and promote optimal child development. Tools such as the Strengthening Families online Self-Assessment are available to all programs to establish a baseline of current practice and inform action plans for implementing program changes; data
can be aggregated at the state level to measure progress and inform technical assistance and support offerings across communities. The ZERO TO THREE PCAN training incorporates the Protective Factors and is available to states and programs. The Alliance’s ECI Learning Community and the Center for the Study of Social Policy’s Strengthening Families National Network are resources for sharing best practices and lessons learned across states and communities. States seeking to pursue place-based initiatives for young children have a wealth of resources at their disposal to support their efforts, and can learn from the experiences of Oklahoma to support community efforts.

Acknowledgements

Smart Start Oklahoma, the Oklahoma State Department of Health and the Oklahoma Department of Human Services would like to thank the National Alliance of Children’s Trust and Prevention Funds for providing the funding to perform this evaluation. Our organizations are especially appreciative of the efforts of Martha Reeder, Program Manager with the Alliance’s Early Childhood Initiative for providing technical support for this report, to Norma McReynolds for the graphic design and to Timothy Corey for original artwork. Anna Lovejoy contributed a national perspective in “Broader Implications.”

Strengthening Families Oklahoma Communities

We would also like to thank the communities, individuals and agencies for their collaborative efforts in preparing this publication. They include:

- **Smart Start South Central** – Cindy Byrd, Project Coordinator and Patricia Little, Community Coordinator
- **Smart Start North Central Oklahoma** – Rita Bridenstine, Project Coordinator
- **Smart Start Kay County** – Lilly Freeman Community Coordinator
- **JumpStart Smart Start Tulsa** – Paige Whalen, Quality Enhancement Initiative Coordinator
- **Smart Start Stephens County** – Deborah J. Smith, Community Coordinator
- **Smart Start North West Oklahoma** – Paula Waters, Community Coordinator
- **Smart Start Logan and Kingfisher counties** – Linda Lacina Blair, Projects Coordinator

Report Preparation and Data Analysis

- Sharon Neuwald, Dr.PH, Grace Kelley, MSW and Kathy Hall, MPA
Appendix A:

Factors to Consider in Building a Successful Community SF Initiative

The evaluation of the Oklahoma SF points to several factors necessary to build a successful community-based initiative. This section outlines those necessary ingredients.¹⁹, ²⁰, ²¹

- **Governance** – Organize a sustainable governance structure through regular meetings, bylaws, job descriptions for volunteers, education of members about the issues, processes for how decisions will be made, terms of board members, etc.

- **Prior success with community building** – Draw on the experiences of communities that demonstrate a previous history and reputation for successful collaborative efforts. Aspects of community change incorporate:
  - Developing effective coalitions and collaborations
  - The ability to capture a community snapshot through the assessment of local data
  - Strategic prioritizing of targeted actions
  - Facilitating “quick wins” versus only long-term focus
  - Documenting and celebrating successes²²

- **Existing identifiable leadership as well as building of new leadership within the community** – Develop leadership and champions at multiple levels: parents, providers, community leaders, small business owners, faith based and others.

- **Widespread participation** – Include a broad cross-section of advocates, child-serving agencies, educational entities, law enforcement and other community-based organizations.

- **Build community partnerships** – Sustain community partnerships that can generate needed resources. Building effective partnerships and linkages takes time and patience, but is worth the investment. Business leaders want to invest in their communities through organized activities. Match the talent of the volunteer/partner to the needs of the project. Accept that some partnerships may be just for the life of the project, but that you are building advocates in the community who believe in your cause.

- **Resource development** – Provide ongoing program funding to sustain the interest of local leaders and the communities as a whole. Seed funding provides the catalyst for local private funding to expand initiatives embodying the SF philosophy. Best practices in community building point to more successful outcomes when there are private contributions to support local initiatives. However, maintenance of state support is critical to sustain a community infrastructure that can elicit this kind of local financial and in-kind support.

  Dedicated staff makes all the difference in planning, making progress and sustaining strategies. Lead project staff must be highly qualified, skilled in community organizing and committed to the initiative.

- **Ongoing evaluation** – Collect uniform and community specific information to allow both for comparisons across sites and identification of innovative practices.

- **Training on community building skills** – Train on-board development, program management, public engagement, strategic planning and community assessment as well as the importance of the early years to help build strong governance, community commitment and staff expertise.

- **Use of technical assistance and training** – Use evidence-based training such as PCAN to initiate systemic changes in early childhood settings and to educate staff about protective factors.

- **Community control of decision-making** – Allow communities maximum discretion to develop strategies that incorporate the SF approach. This flexibility allows sites to address the unique needs of their own community.
# Appendix B: Strengthening Family Program Metrics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site</th>
<th>Number of Early Care and Education Programs Participating</th>
<th>Number and types of local media contacts</th>
<th>Methods used to engage community partners</th>
<th>Number of community partners</th>
<th>Children/families served</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SS North Central</td>
<td>80 child care centers, child development labs and family home care facilities and 5 public school systems</td>
<td>5 e-newsletters sent to 320 contacts in Payne, Lincoln, Noble and Pawnee Counties, blog links sent monthly to 161 recipients and one family day care proclamation to 3 area newspapers</td>
<td>Phone, email, in person with staff/committee members, relationship building experiences, committee events, participation in conferences, training and regular meetings, serve on collaboration boards and committees</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>Over 1,000 children served (estimate) Over 250 families served (Touch every child in 80 child care centers and 5 public school systems)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SS Kay County</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1 (Ponca City News), newsletters at pilot sites</td>
<td>Presentations, flyers and workshops, PCAN training, assist in execution of parent engagement events</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>527 children 545 parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SS North West</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5 newspaper articles; 6 newsletter articles – chamber and agency</td>
<td>Community events, coalition building, trainings, parent involvement events, parent café conversations, serve on chamber committees, mentoring, e-newsletters</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>230 children 175 families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SS South Central</td>
<td>6 (3 child care centers in Pontotoc County, 3 in Garvin County – 2 of which are Headstarts – and 1 private center) 150 child care teachers</td>
<td>5 media contacts, articles in local newspapers (Ada Evening News and online version, Pauls Valley Democrat, Lindsay Stopper) and 30 PSAs on local cable provider covering 89 stations</td>
<td>Presentations at bi-monthly Smart Start meetings, Oklahoma Parent as Teacher annual meeting, monthly community council meetings, annual Children’s Fair, businesses through civic clubs and other community events, parent training, child care center training</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1,300 children 600 families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SS Stephens County</td>
<td>3 centers 1 child care home</td>
<td>Monthly column in newspaper, television</td>
<td>Emails, monthly calls, Internet, social media (Facebook)</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>&gt;202</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SS Logan &amp; Kingfisher Counties</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Monthly newsletter to all child care homes, centers and prekindergarten programs, 2 newspapers &amp; 2 cable station</td>
<td>Monthly coalition meetings to discuss protective factors</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>190 at child care centers 1,100 direct mail per month</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JumpStart Tulsa</td>
<td>5 initially recruited, added 7 sites over time</td>
<td>Billboard campaign, local/program specific newsletters to community and parent/families, newspaper article (Claremore Progress)</td>
<td>Advisory Councils, Steering Committees, Board participation, parent boards, newsletters, emails, face-to-face communications</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1,277 children 638 families</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Appendix C:
Community Focus: Summary of Community Responses

### How are you organized to do this initiative (Governance issues)?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GOVERNANCE CATEGORY</th>
<th>Stephens County: There is broad representation on the SF team.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>North West: Smart Start (SS) coalition was the SF leadership team with diverse representation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>JumpStart Tulsa: Project used existing staff from community’s Resource and Referral (R&amp;R) and quality enhancement initiative as well as leadership from the Community Service Council and LINK (early intervention services program) and the Oklahoma Association for Infant Mental Health-Tulsa Chapter leadership.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>North Central: Project converted an existing “family support” committee into SF committee; broad representation and operates under governance of SS.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kay County: Advisory group consists of health dept, early childhood providers (including Head Start), Parents as Teachers, schools, child advocacy center, medical center, United Way and OSU extension.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Logan County: Leadership team represented by agencies directly involved in serving families with young children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>South Central: Initial leadership team from diverse groups from both Garvin and Pontotoc Counties was developed for the pilot year, 2007-2008. The SSSC Advisory Council served as leadership in all SF projects from that time onward.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What is the participation on the leadership team?</th>
<th>Stephens County: Leadership members are ambassadors for initiative.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>North West: There are effective vehicles for communication between agencies serving children; regular coalition meetings; team composition allowed detection of needed interventions at child care sites.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>JumpStart Tulsa: Participation includes the coordinator support staff of R&amp;R and SF mentor/coach as well as the Quality Enhancement Initiative Accreditation Specialists &amp; Child Care Health Consultant and OKAIMH-Tulsa partners. This leadership built the SF/PCAN “philosophy/framework” into all fieldwork such as training, technical assistance and mentoring.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>North Central: Leadership team is engaged and invested in SF; participation has declined with turnover in SS Board and executive director; board of directors is being rebuilt which should lend itself to recruiting new members for SF leadership team.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kay County: Health department support has been added to assist working group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Logan County: There is broad participation from child care, health &amp; mental health, education, parents and special needs groups.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>South Central: Community plans on recruiting new members to leadership team if there is a continuation of funding.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| How do you work with community partners? | Stephens County: Partners use Internet, e-mails, monthly calls, and social media (Facebook) to communicate and educate.  
North West: Extensive participation between partners has built a foundation of support for early childhood.  
JumpStart Tulsa: Project works closely with mental health providers whose focus is infant mental health, child care health consultants, quality improvement specialists, child guidance and resource and referral specialists to spread the “word/philosophy framework” and achieve buy-in for continuation of our work. Project staff plan and implement trainings and TA to any community partner/program.  
North Central: The project calls on partners to support SF strategies i.e. time, donations, volunteers, educational opportunities and referrals.  
Kay County: Provide PCAN training to child care providers and assist with parent meetings, parent cafes and family activity nights.  
Logan County: The partnership is driving force behind most community initiatives due to its broad base of expertise.  
South Central: Parent and child care provider training; Health department disperses age appropriate materials to children and their families. Grant monies provided to individual centers help fund several types of parent events, parent areas and information areas within centers. |
| How did you educate your project staff and the public about the protective factors? | Stephens County: Provide PCAN training, car seat installation, health and wellness and parental support.  
North West: Offer specific training: PCAN [all protective factors (PFs)], “Conscious Discipline” (social and emotional issues).  
JumpStart Tulsa: Educate through one-day seminar in partnership with the local community college, monthly PCAN training opportunities as well as other training events as requested by community members and partners. Parent resource centers at at least five child care programs, parent training events/dinners. At multiple program sites, there is training on “Conscious Discipline” (social and emotional positive discipline model). Multiple opportunities to implement training at large statewide and local conferences on PCAN modules.  
North Central: Educate through conferences, community training with providers, parents and educators on PF, onsite child care training, presentations to civic groups, family events to foster social connectedness, potential engagement of court system in parent education strategy.  
Kay County: Parent and child care training; primarily used Zero to Three and PCAN training.  
Logan County: Educate through state sponsored trainings & utilization of web.  
South Central: Educate through Zero to Three and PCAN training. |
What evidence do you have that protective factors are evident in your community?

### AREAS OF IMPLEMENTATION

| Any strategies in child care facilities? | Stephens County: Provision of mini-grant to defray training costs.  
North West: Some child care centers incorporated PF without designated SF funds  
JumpStart Tulsa: Developed relationships between SF and caregivers; worked with pilot sites as a cohort to develop site-specific resources tied to their needs. Parent resource centers at at least five child care programs, parent training events/dinners, and monthly PCAN training opportunities. Per request at multiple program sites, training on “Conscious Discipline” (social and emotional positive discipline model) to improve communication between caregiver and family and to use appropriate methods for discipline. Multiple opportunities to implement training at large statewide and local conferences on PCAN modules at which child care providers are in attendance.  
North Central: Child care centers call project staff for assistance and to make referrals; there are food closets, gift cards for disadvantaged families; child care turnover rates have improved.  
Kay County: It is consistent with SF philosophy to empower child care providers, promoting family connectedness through parental training; training also informed families about available resources and about how to navigate agency systems; project customizes assistance to families.  
Logan County: Child care staff worked actively to involve parents; communicate they are partners with parents in the raising of their children.  
South Central: Parent training to promote family connectedness; space at sites for families to interact with each other and providers; increasing attendance at annual events (Christmas party) where food and informational gifts are provided, informal evenings of play and fun with all family members of centers along with the staff, and staff members are encouraged to be alert to signs of distress in parents. |
| Are protective factors built into your community programs?  
(Please describe in detail.) | Stephens County: All PFs are built into SF initiative.  
North West: PF incorporated in SF programs and sponsored intergenerational conference to expand replication of this concept to public 4-year-old programs.  
JumpStart Tulsa: All PFs are built into community activities especially at the provider level when working with programs to improve their quality, both with staff, administration and families.  
North Central: Conferences and community training based on PF; partnered with online group to meet needs of children in elementary and preschools; partnerships with agencies who address PF; social agencies call on project for needs, PF being incorporated into prison parenting curriculum.  
Kay County: The primary factor is training to promote social connectedness. Parent nights are used to 1) gain parents’ trust, 2) create a safe place for parents to express concerns and 3) create a stress free environment for parents to learn how to play with their children.  
Logan Counties: Front line workers more likely to refer families to other services and child care staff seek input of agency case managers to meet families’ needs.  
South Central: Use onsite trainings, infant sign language classes, Project Invest, is a partnership with businesses to invest in acquisition of educational materials at child care centers. |
Have you seen an increase in families reporting an increase in protective factors?

**Stephens County:** Trust between families and SF staff has resulted in families valuing education more (see this in GED and online college classes); anticipate families will continue the tenets of SF as their children mature.

**North West:** Saw an increase in communication between parents and infants in the classroom.

**JumpStart Tulsa:** See improvements in PF documented in self-assessment evaluation.

**North Central:** Child care staff report better partnering with families; less of an adversarial relationship; school counselors report families more freely request assistance knowing that supports are available.

**Kay County:** Parents referring other parents to meetings; parents feel their needs are heard; there is assistance with accessing resources.

**Logan County:** Families report greater cooperation between service providers; families feel professionals understand the demands on their lives.

**South Central:** Parents more comfortable talking to each other and child care providers; parents, because of parental training, are more effective in interacting with their child; increased knowledge about available resources, increased comfort in seeking assistance.

What can we learn for future work at the state and national levels?

**AREAS OF REPLICATION**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What strategies did you use the most in your initiative?</th>
<th>Stephens County</th>
<th>North West</th>
<th>JumpStart Tulsa</th>
<th>North Central</th>
<th>Kay County</th>
<th>Logan County</th>
<th>South Central</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Stephens County:</strong> Use teen parent connection, family nights, book fairs, volunteer support to have SF activities at low income housing site.</td>
<td><strong>North West:</strong> Training and community events resulted in provider mentoring and for parents, social connections and knowledge about parent and child development.</td>
<td><strong>JumpStart Tulsa:</strong> Trainings used especially with staff of child care centers and community partners; parent resource centers implemented in many programs, along with training for caregivers and families.</td>
<td><strong>North Central:</strong> Education in the community used SF language; Trainings that involved partners and collaborators were approached from a strength-based perspective.</td>
<td><strong>Kay County:</strong> Parent involvement; supplied age appropriate materials for onsite and home use.</td>
<td><strong>Logan County:</strong> Providers use the language of PF; encourage parental involvement in child care.</td>
<td><strong>South Central:</strong> Reduce parents’ stress levels regarding child care placement; help child care staff become more professional in their communications with parents and children.</td>
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What can we learn for future work at the state and national levels?

**AREAS OF REPLICATION (cont.)**

### What impact have these strategies had on your programs? In the community?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Example</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stephens County</td>
<td>See increased attendance and public interest.</td>
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<tr>
<td>North West</td>
<td>Original sites continue to recognize the importance of the five protective factors and incorporate them in the center.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>JumpStart Tulsa</strong></td>
<td>The monthly PCAN trainings have been extremely successful with full participation and waiting lists to attend. These trainings have included a high number of family child care home providers. This has impacted the way providers/caregivers respond and communicate with parents/families to 1) recognize stressors, both within themselves as well as in their families and 2) determine responses based on that knowledge. A large-scale community impact has been the intent to incorporate the PCAN training (which includes the SF framework) into the Oklahoma Infant Toddler Endorsement process as recognized training at Level I and 2. This has the ability to reach any provider working with young children and their families.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Central</td>
<td>The SF PF perspective is the foundation of partner and program actions.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kay County</td>
<td>Increased community outreach and referrals for support needs; also improved quality of education.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Logan County</td>
<td>Child care providers more likely to intervene and make recommendations to parents about other support services.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>South Central</strong></td>
<td>The impact has been more qualitative than quantitative, because measuring the confidence of parents in their child care facility and teachers is not an exact science. Child care providers have better rapport with parents, better child development skills, and greater understanding of the difficulties facing parents of young children.</td>
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### How have you engaged program staff in changing their philosophy about working with families?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stephens County</td>
<td>“Bridges out of Poverty” training broke down cultural and social barriers between families and staff.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North West</td>
<td>SF facilitator made weekly visits to pilot centers; staff mentoring project resulted in more age appropriate play spaces including books in these areas; provider training resulted in teacher at child care site submitting article for the newsletter; providers more confident discussing developmental concerns and milestones with parent educator.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>JumpStart Tulsa</strong></td>
<td>Staff already familiar with SF information and had experiences supportive of the philosophy; initiative allowed greater cohesion; project staff were able to evoke changes in both child care staff and in the community. Important to hire the right staff to 1) communicate the message; 2) develop relationships and 3) be change agents; requires a “big picture lens”. Within core staff that is building quality in programs, the SF/PCAN frameworks/philosophy is imbedded in the NAEYC and NAFCC Accreditation Standards and Criteria, so for programs looking to achieve this standard of best practice, it was not difficult to bridge the gap.</td>
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<tr>
<td>North Central</td>
<td>Use child care and community trainings; it took a year of training to see an attitudinal and behavior shift in how providers relate to families; staff are more confident which makes it easier to communicate productively with families.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kay County</td>
<td>PCAN training and SF initiative created a staff bond; program staff learning to recognize difficulties families have in negotiating agency systems serving their children.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Logan County</td>
<td>Training on cultural competency, poverty and PF have influenced staff thinking.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>South Central</strong></td>
<td>PCAN training and SF initiative helped staff establish bonds; Staff recognized the value of the SF philosophy in creating the “Toolbox for Dads”; some centers continue projects they felt were successful after funding for the projects ended.</td>
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</table>
| What changes have you seen in families as a result of your strategies? | Stephens County: SF safe place to turn for help. Parents value education.  
North West: Parents are more knowledgeable and comfortable in engaging children in age appropriate play (including reading); parents realize they need support knowing SF will provide them with resources or referrals; this builds resilience and confidence in parents.  
JumpStart Tulsa: Initially saw changes with staff support; however there is a need for ongoing staffing to retain relationships; there is evidence of a change seen in family waiting lists for training supportive of the SF approach. The intent on developing relationships and better communication resulted in families trusting caregivers and feeling they could “talk” more openly about their child(ren) or other issues. The parent resource areas were used not only by the families, but by caregivers who had stressors as well.  
North Central: Families more frequently requesting assistance; schools and child care facilities see themselves as caregivers for the families as well as the children.  
Kay County: There is father attendance at parent café; dad groups are forming; more parent excitement about children’s activities, children behaving in an-age appropriate manner, more able to problem solve and nurture each other.  
Logan County: Sense of partnership with providers results in parents seeking assistance and being more candid with service providers.  
South Central: Children are more comfortable when parents less anxious; children enjoy time with peers and with child care staff, parents spending more quality time with children; there are more connections with other parents that have created networks of support; parents see centers as partners in raising their children. |
|---|---|
| What did not work well in your community? | Stephens County: Grandparent support group – lower attendance over time, which may be due to demands on grandparents.  
North West: Loss of funding resulted in the inability to support a dedicated SF family facilitator position; this resulted in staff support and technical assistance not being continued.  
JumpStart Tulsa: Ending the initiative.  
North Central: Child care providers and teachers did not have the education and professionalism grounded in child development that would enable them to understand SF; this slowed implementation of the initiative; still an issue for the community; also there is a lack of funds to incentivize participants.  
Kay County: Lack of funding; understaffing and overworked child care employees make staff participation in programs difficult.  
Logan County: Training that requires extended amounts of time or using personnel not involved in the community did not work well; a need exists for specialists employed by the state to do the training.  
South Central: Management of a 4 county area is difficult without funding and staff; support to retain child care staff difficult given competition in area; difficult for director and staff to consider training on early childhood brain development and community involvement given work demands; evening events are sometimes problematic for both staff and parents. |
**What can we learn for future work at the state and national levels?**

**AREAS OF REPLICATION (cont.)**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Is there something you wanted to implement and were unable to do so?</th>
<th>Stephens County: Would like to get one additional county in their area involved in the initiative.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>North West: Unable to implement a Fatherhood initiative to assist dads in making social connections with each other; learning center did not retain gardening as part of their curriculum.</td>
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<td>JumpStart Tulsa: Due to staff constraints, the project was unable to join other groups whose activities were aligned with SF; unable to continue implementing initiative through a “quality enhancement lens”. Saw a possible alignment but was unable to connect with the local entity who housed the “Front Porch Project” Would have liked to link with the Community Schools approach in Tulsa since its core components stress the families’ role in their child’s school success. Also would like a full time person to be a SF mentor/coach.</td>
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<td>North Central: Still trying to engage court system in SF approach.</td>
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<td>Kay County: There is a lack of consistent funding with no dedicated staff.</td>
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<td>Logan County: Grandparents Raising Grandchildren support group in Crescent was not implemented due to low numbers.</td>
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<tr>
<td>South Central: Hope for SF initiative to become involved with a new child care center being built in the area. “Project Invest” on hold due to local economic conditions.</td>
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<tr>
<th>What suggestions do you have that could make implementation of your plan more successful or allow your approach to expand to other communities?</th>
<th>Stephens County: Provide earlier notice about funding availability; staff commitment and donations keep SF initiative operational.</th>
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<tr>
<td>North West: Program philosophy is alive, even with reduced funding; need more funding for dedicated staff; encourage communities to attract partners; explore areas of collaboration with service providers.</td>
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<tr>
<td>JumpStart Tulsa: Need funding for full or part-time dedicated staff to implement training and support programs. Need participation at the state level with state administered entities promoting this philosophy (i.e., Department of Education, Department of Human Services, Child Protective Services, etc). This approach is something that can be used with anyone working with children and families. A federal emphasis for states to embrace this approach would be helpful.</td>
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<tr>
<td>North Central: Need for funding; need a sustained state effort, including a lead agency, to make the initiative a “state of the art” approach for agencies serving children and families; difficult to engage local agencies when state leadership is unfamiliar with this approach.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kay County: Need more onsite training and provision of CEU credits, create a network of county providers to coordinate training.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Logan County: Reinforce that SF is a concept; its intent is to change the way service providers think to have a family-driven focus.</td>
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<tr>
<td>South Central: If SF is to continue in any sustained way, there must be a lead agency willing to give a measure of financial support to the initiative.</td>
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Endnotes


