



VERMONT

# strengthening families™

CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF SOCIAL POLICY

A PROTECTIVE FACTORS FRAMEWORK

## 2016 STRENGTHENING FAMILIES VERMONT: STATE PROFILE

### Infrastructure

The Vermont Agency of Human Services (AHS) is leading efforts to sustain and integrate the Strengthening Families™ framework in child and family systems throughout the state. In 2015, AHS's [Integrating Family Services \(IFS\)](#) and the Department for Children and Families [Child Development Division](#) (DCF CDD) convened meetings to establish a Vermont Strengthening Families Leadership Team with diverse cross-sector membership.

To assist in determining where Strengthening Families implementation is taking place, the Strengthening Families Leadership Team used a web-based survey. Using information from the survey, the Team is engaged in recognizing where successful adoption and implementation of Strengthening Families is occurring and where opportunities are to advance collaboration and training across agencies and systems. Going forward, the Strengthening Families Leadership Team will recommend policy and systems adjustments to deepen and sustain Strengthening Families informed practices within Vermont and its communities.

### Parent Partnerships

Approximately 37 licensed child care centers, serving over 1,300 children, receive Strengthening Families Child Care grants from CDD to implement Strengthening Families informed practices including parent partnerships. These high quality programs also have attained the highest levels in Vermont STARS which is Vermont's Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System. These programs use the Strengthening Families self-assessment tool to help keep in touch with parents' feelings of successful engagement and partnership.

Fifteen Parent Child Centers have incorporated Strengthening Families practices for decades and the seven Head Start programs' Policy Councils have a long history of engaging families and have policies aligned with Strengthening Families. Community and Parent Cafés in seven Vermont [Promise Communities](#) provide a venue for parents to lead discussions and voice perspectives.

*Profile last updated: March 2016*

### Strengthening Families

Strengthening Families™ is a research-informed approach to increase family strengths, enhance child development and reduce the likelihood of child abuse and neglect. It is based on engaging families, programs and communities in building five protective factors:

- Parental resilience
- Social connections
- Knowledge of parenting and child development
- Concrete support in times of need
- Social and emotional competence of children

Using the Strengthening Families framework, more than 30 states are shifting policy and practice to help programs working with children and families focus on protective factors. States apply the Strengthening Families approach in early childhood, child welfare, child abuse prevention and other child and family serving systems.

Nationally, the Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP) coordinates Strengthening Families and works with more than a dozen national partner organizations to create a new vision in which communities, families, institutions, service systems and organizations:

- Focus on protective and promotive factors
- Recognize and support parents as decision-makers and leaders
- Value the culture and unique assets of each family
- Are mutually responsible for better outcomes for children, youth and families

For more information, visit [www.strengtheningfamilies.net](http://www.strengtheningfamilies.net).

### Implementation Checklist

Protective Factors used in Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems projects and other early childhood systems related planning	✓
Protective Factors used in Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention RFP Process	✓
Protective Factors integrated into state Quality Rating and Improvement System	✓
Child Care Resource & Referral Network in state supporting program implementation	✓
Strengthening Families included in State Home Visiting Plan (Manual)	✓
Strengthening Families is being implemented into child welfare system	✓

#### State Coordinator

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### Deepening Knowledge and Understanding

The state sponsored Community Café skills-based trainings for approximately 50 parents as well as a training of 30 early childhood and afterschool professionals, to train early education, child care and after-school programs. Vermont has used federal Child Care and Development Fund, Department of Labor and Race to the Top—Early Learning Challenge grant funds to provide Strengthening Families training for trainers and child care professionals.

### Shifting Practice, Policies and Systems

Prevent Child Abuse Vermont provides a three-hour training and introduction to Strengthening Families. Three state child welfare offices partner with three parent-child centers to support families at high risk for child maltreatment, using a Strengthening Families informed approach. Safe Babies Courts are in two regions of the state and are effectively linking with Strengthening Families child care programs and other community service providers. Vermont Children's Trust fund requires grantees to incorporate at least one protective factor as part of their grant practices. The DCF Commissioner's Office and the Washington County Youth Services Bureau received a Youth Thrive technical assistance grant to improve their work helping youth to build protective and promotive factors.

### Ensuring Accountability

Vermont uses the surveys and assessments from CSSP to measure impact. Population-based measures like the Youth Risk Behavior Survey; the Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths (CANS) tool; indicators and performance measures in the IFS [strategic plan](#); and other evaluation plans are under consideration.

### Evolving Work

The AHS, IFS mission is to bring state government and local communities together to ensure holistic and accountable planning, support and service delivery that will meet the needs of Vermont's children, youth and families. In 2015, IFS convened five work groups to develop a strategic work plan to achieve outcomes defined in Vermont's law ([Act 186](#)). Two workgroups, State and Local Service Delivery and Community-Based Prevention and Promotion adopted the Strengthening Families framework into their action strategies.

In 2013, Vermont received a four-year Race to the Top - [Early Learning Challenge](#) grant which includes funding to expand Strengthening Families Child Care to family child care homes and funding to evaluate the Vermont Strengthening Families Child Care models. This project also contributes to [Vermont's Early Childhood Action Plan](#) result # 2: *Families and communities play a leading role in children's well-being*, which aims to embed Strengthening Families framework into the early childhood service delivery system. Another Early Learning Challenge project underway is Vermont's [Help Me Grow \(HMG\)](#), a system that helps identify children who are physically, socially, or emotionally at-risk through developmental screening; promote the protective factors; and support families in finding community-based programs and services.