

strengthening families

A L A S K A

supporting family strengths and resiliency

Strengthening Families:
a proven, cost-effective
approach to building
Protective Factors around
children by supporting
family strengths and
resiliency.

FY 2016 Report Summary
Child Welfare Academy



STRENGTHENING FAMILIES ALASKA

Child Welfare Academy

FY 16 Project Summary

The UAA Child Welfare Academy (CWA) funding from the State of Alaska, Department of Health and Social Services, Strengthening Families Alaska program to support Alaska's role in Strengthening Families™, a growing national movement that uses the Protective Factors Framework to develop innovative programs across the country.

Strengthening Families™ is a research-informed, strength-based approach to helping families reduce stress, address risk factors, and promote healthy development. The overarching goal is the promotion of child and family well-being. It is based on engaging families, programs and communities in building five protective factors that help families succeed and thrive, even in the face of risk and challenges:

- **Parental resilience**- Managing both general life and parenting stress and functioning well when faced with stressors, challenges, or adversity; the outcome is positive change and growth
- **Social connections**- Having healthy, sustained relationships with people, institutions, the community, or a force great than oneself
- **Knowledge of parenting and child development**-Understanding the unique aspects of child development; implementing developmentally and contextually appropriate best parenting practices
- **Concrete support in times of need**- Identifying, seeking, accessing, advocating for, and receiving needed adult, child, and family services; receiving a quality of service designed to preserve parents' dignity and promote healthy development
- **Social and emotional competence of children**- Providing an environment and experiences that enable the child to form close and secure adult and peer relationships, and to experience, regulate, and express emotions

Research shows that when parents develop protective factors the risk of child maltreatment is greatly reduced, child development is improved and families are stronger.

Harper Browne, C. (2014, September) *The Strengthening Families approach and Protective Factors Framework: Branching out and reaching deeper*. Washington, DC: Center for the Study of Social Policy

The Strengthening Families approach is grounded in seven foundational ideas:

1. **The two generation approach**- promoting young children's healthy development by developing the capabilities and resources of parents or caregivers
2. **A consideration of culture**-investigating, understanding, and appreciating cultural differences and commonalities in parenting beliefs, values, expectations, practices and child-rearing goals; being attuned to cultural competence and cultural humility
3. **The strengths-base perspective**-appreciating and highlighting the set of relationships and processes that support and protect families and family members, especially during times of adversity and change
4. **The biology of stress**-understanding the neurobiological impacts of adverse childhood experiences and how supportive parenting and positive relationships can foster positive adaptation
5. **Resilience theory**-supporting the potential to rebound from adversity strengthened and more resourceful
6. **A focus on well-being**-focusing on the healthy development and well-being for all families; healthy family relationships and attachment to a caring and reliable adult
7. **The nature of risk and protective factors**-acknowledging the individual, relational, community, and societal factors that must be addressed in order to promote healthy child, adult, and family well-being

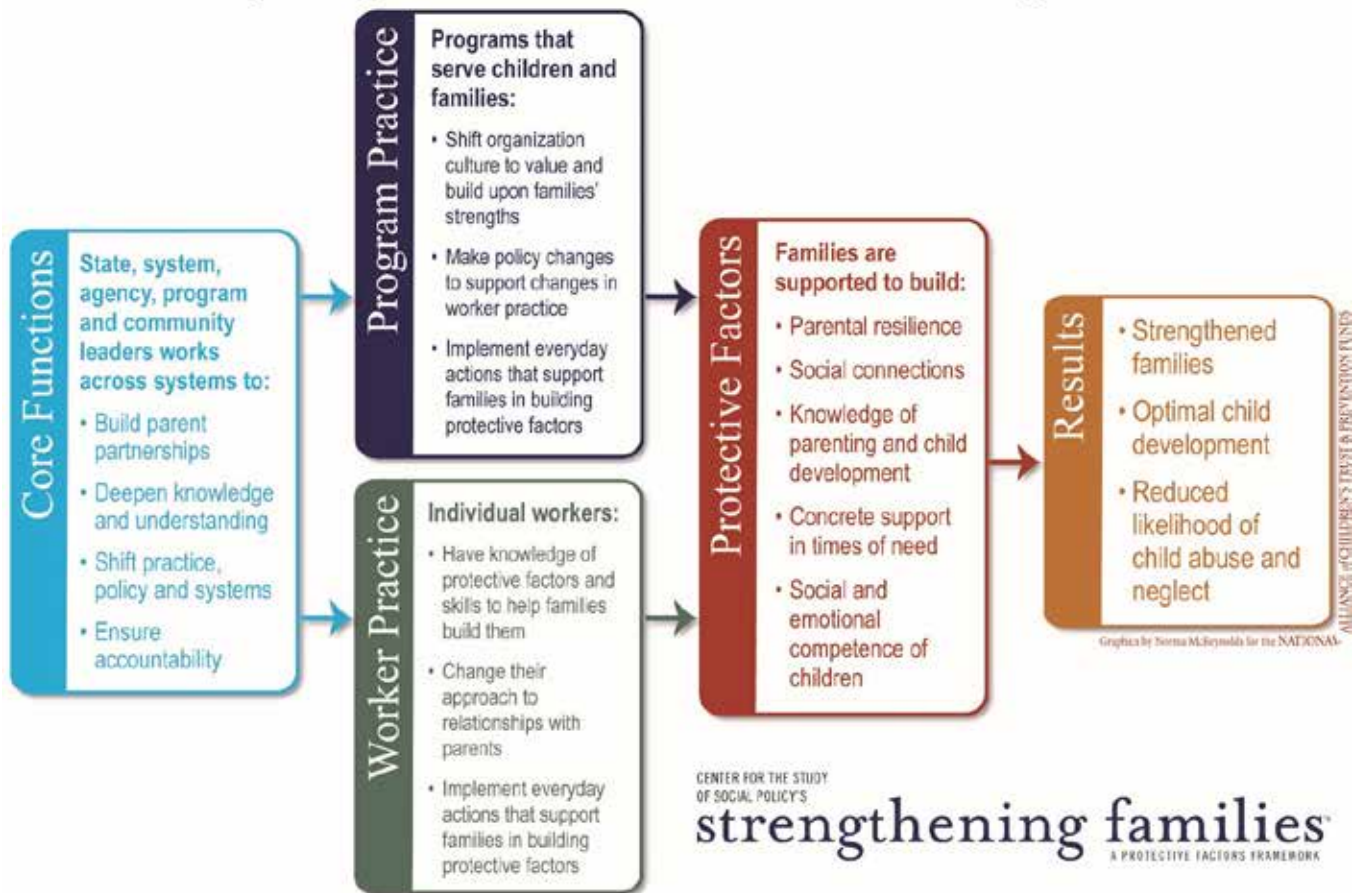
The Strengthening Families approach:

- Benefits ALL families
- Builds on family strengths, buffers risk, and promotes better outcomes
- Can be implemented through small but significant changes in everyday actions
- Builds on and can become a part of existing programs, strategies, systems and community opportunities
- Is grounded in research, practice and implementation knowledge



The Pathway to Improved Outcomes for Children and Families

Strengthening Families™ Protective Factors Framework Logic Model



FY 16 IMPLEMENTATION

In 2015 the Child Welfare Academy was enlisted to expand the use of the Strengthening Families Protective Factors Framework in programs and communities across the state with a special focus on western and northern Alaska. Bethel and Nome were chosen as the hub communities to concentrate on. This work continued in FY 16.

This effort involved several paths of implementation:

1. Engaging local communities and programs in discussions about the usefulness and appropriateness of this framework in their regions
2. Intensive trainings on the Strengthening Families Protective Factors Framework
3. Workshop and conference presentations
4. Mini-grants to local programs and communities
5. Ongoing technical assistance
6. Representing Strengthening Families Alaska with related projects
7. Developing and distributing Strengthening Families Alaska materials

ENGAGING LOCAL COMMUNITIES AND PROGRAMS

Strengthening Families community meetings were held in Nome and Bethel designed to solicit feedback on the cultural appropriateness and regional readiness for the Strengthening Families approach. In FY 15, two meetings were held in Nome. The first was with a variety of service providers, and the second with the Kawerak Wellness Coalition. Both meetings resulted in positive feedback about the “fit” with the region, traditional values, and beliefs; and support for introducing the Protective Factors Framework. Follow-up discussions were held about who to involve, how to approach the introduction of Strengthening Families, etc. Invitations to participate in the Strengthening Families project were sent to all communities surrounding Nome and Kotzebue. Communities were required to select a “Leadership Team” with a minimum of 3 persons to attend a two-day intensive training. 5 communities were selected to participate, attended training and received mini-grants: Golovin, Elim, Brevig Mission, Noorvik and Shungnak. Over the next several months Strengthening Families staff visited all communities except Shungnak, meeting with Leadership Teams and participating in community events.

In October of 2015 a community meeting was held in Bethel. Meeting participants encouraged the CWA to move forward with a 2-day Strengthening Families training. It was recommended that the focus should be on Bethel vs. the surrounding communities at this time, with expansion to villages coming later.

Also, in October, 2015 a 2-day Strengthening Families Gathering was held in Nome for 3 of the 5 community teams who participated during FY 2015: Golovin, Noorvik, and Shungnak. Two of the community Leadership Teams submitted mini-grant applications for activities in their communities. Additionally, a training was provided for Kawerak EHS/Child Care Partnership and an agency-wide training was provided for Nome Community Center.

TWO-DAY INTENSIVE TRAININGS



In FY 16, several two-day intensive trainings were provided using the curriculum developed by the National Alliance of Children's Trusts and Prevention Funds. In addition to the trainings focused on the Bethel and Nome areas, training was provided to other groups as funds and time would allow. The two-day intensive Strengthening Families trainings provided included:

August, 2015 - **Cook Inlet Tribal Council** (31 staff participants)

October, 2015 - **Strengthening Families Training/Gathering** in Nome. The villages Golovin, Noorvik and Shungnak participated.

February 2016- **Nome Community Center** (agency wide training for all staff)

February, 2016 – **Bethel Community**. Participants from AVCP Head Start; UAF Qungasavik Project, Center for Alaska Native Research; Bethel Youth Facility; ANTHC; Orutsararmiut Native Council; OCS; Tundra Women's Coalition; and Bethel Public Health Center participated.

April, 2016 - **Council on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault.**

April, 2016 - Communities of **Talkeetna, Willow, & Trapper Creek**

May, 2016 - **RurAL CAP Parents as Teachers** program (22 participants from across the state)

June, 2016 – Community of **Hooper Bay**. This training was in partnership with the UAF Qungasavik Project. (16 participants).



MINI-GRANTS

Small mini-grants were provided to support local Strengthening Families activities. In the Nome area, the communities of Noorvik and Golovin received mini-grants and continued the activities begun in the previous year. The team leaders held family events aimed at strengthening the

protective factors in families. For example, at one of the community events in Golovin, discussion centered around the following questions:

- What is the next big thing your child needs to learn?
- How do you intend to be a part of it?
- How do you build trust in a relationship?
- How are you involved in your child's social life?
- How do you keep from getting depressed by the negativity in life?
- What is one change you could make that would dramatically improve your life?
- How could you get assistance to make it happen?

Noorvik held several community potlucks with outdoor and indoor activities supporting interactions between the elders and youth in the community intended to further the transmission of traditional knowledge and values.

The Nome Community Center also received a mini-grant and used it to support staff training and embed the Strengthening Families Protective Factors framework in their work agency wide. Additionally, their mini-grant supported a weekly playgroup for mom's and young children and several family events focused on families working and playing together to strengthen family relationships.

In the Bethel area, mini-grants were awarded to the Tundra Women's Coalition and Bethel Youth Facility. The Tundra Women's Coalition mini-grant provided support for the Teens Lead Ahead Leadership Camp which engaged youth from area communities in traditional and healthy activities. Youth reported learning a lot about "healthy relationships and how to plan for better in their home communities". Bethel Youth Facility funds were used to purchase materials and equipment to be used at family visits and gatherings.

WORKSHOPS AND CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

Several presentations were made during FY16. They included:

August, 2015 - **Kawerak EHS/Child Care Partnership**

October, 2015 - **Fairbanks Children's Behavioral Health Summit**

November, 2015 - **Resource Basket** statewide webinar (41 participants)

December, 2015 - **All Alaska Pediatric Partnership**

January, 2016 - **Alaska Center for Pediatrics**

March, 2016 - **Early Childhood Mental Health Institute**

April, 2016 - **UAA LEND Program** 3 hr. video-conference (88 participants across the state)

April, 2016 – Webinar for **OCS Staff**

June, 2016 - **World Association of Infant Mental Health Conference in Prague, Czech Republic**

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

Technical assistance was provided to sites and communities on an as needed basis. The CWA also provided facilitation of the August Strengthening Families Leadership Team meeting and support for the ECCS mini-grant awarded to the Sunshine Health Clinic in Talkeetna for hosting Parent Cafes.

MEETINGS AND ADVOCACY/SPREAD

CWA represented Strengthening Families Alaska at community meetings (such as Help Me Grow) and advocated for its expansion whenever possible.

MATERIAL DEVELOPMENT AND DISTRIBUTION:

Strengthening Families Alaska posters were developed in partnership with representatives from the Nome area and were printed and distributed. Development began for posters for the western, southeast, and southcentral regions of Alaska. Strengthening Families materials and information were provided upon request.



CONCLUSIONS:

The Protective Factors framework is designed to allow for diversity in implementation in a variety of settings. Additionally, the framework is intended to delineate protective factors that are relevant across cultures with respect to describing conditions or attributes that mitigate risk factors and actively enhance well-being in all families.

Harper Browne, C. (2014, September) *The Strengthening Families approach and Protective Factors Framework: Branching out and reaching deeper.* Washington, DC: Center for the Study of Social Policy

Using the strategies listed at the beginning of this report, Strengthening Families Alaska has made steady progress in rural Alaska over the last two years, particularly in the Nome and Bethel areas. Initial and ongoing feedback from area residents affirmed the “fit” with regional and traditional values, and beliefs. In training and discussions we have often heard that the

protective factors have historically been a “way of being” and Strengthening Families strengthens concepts and practices already in play.

While recognizing that change takes time and persistence on many peoples part, Strengthening Families Alaska is committed to nurturing the Protective Factors Framework as an approach to supporting families. Through training, mini-grants, materials, and ongoing technical assistance the framework is mobilizing positive participation. Implementation on the ground takes hard work and embedding this on a community level requires committed local leaders. Where the project has found that, efforts have steadily progressed. In areas where leadership has changed mid-stream, it has been more difficult. In FY17 the CWA, in partnership with the Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems Program will be looking for additional ways to support local leaders in expanding this approach.

In other areas of the state, enthusiasm for the Strengthening Families approach continues to grow. Requests for training have multiplied as communities and providers learn about the potential to use this framework as an “organizing approach” in their programs and across service systems.

Training is a major avenue for supporting the expansion of the Strengthening Families Protective Factors framework. The training is intended to help participants:

- Understand and recognize the five protective factors that help keep families strong and prevent child abuse and neglect.
- Identify multiple strategies and everyday actions that help families to build those protective factors.
- Identify steps and create concrete plans to integrate these ideas into their work.
- Learn how to provide welcoming, non-threatening support to families.
- Identify the challenges and opportunities culture and tradition present as we try to help families.
- Understand what it means to work with families in a strength-based way.
- Learn about a variety of tools available to support this work such as the Strengthening Families Self-Assessment.

The training is highly interactive and many of the benefits come from participants sharing their own experiences both personal and professional. It is designed to help participants change the way they practice and interact with families and become more *intentional* in how they support the protective factors in all families. Feedback to the training has been very positive.

Participants report the training helped them to:

- Have a better understanding of the protective factors and how they support one another
- Recognize that all families are different, and all need protective factors
- Realize biases and the need to avoid making assumptions
- Focus on strengths rather than negatives
- Gain ideas for approaching and working with families
- Recognize that by supporting parents they are supporting the children
- Feel that working with complex families seemed more manageable
- Acknowledge that pride and trust works both ways

- Recognize that it takes us back to the traditional & cultural teaching families
- Realize the strength-based approach gives families more hope
- Recognize their own struggles and setbacks
- Acknowledge that all families have the ability to be resilient
- Understand the importance of relationship building
- Understand the importance of being “intentional” in their work

Participants were asked what additional information would be helpful. They suggested:

- Handouts and materials for families
- Additional training on: developing social and emotional competence in children; understanding trauma, genetic influences on resilience
- Additional information on how to conduct Parent Cafes
- Information on resources in their communities
- Examples of successful complex community-wide partnerships
- How to take action in their communities; using apps and social media
- Information on OCS protocols

Some of the new ideas participants would like to try:


- Making a hands-on activity using the “building blocks of resilience
- Hang the Strengthening Families posters and refer to them often
- Establish “Parent Corner” bulletin boards around town
- Do a Parent Café
- Concentrate on looking for strengths
- Do more activities in group settings
- Implement cultural activities
- Implement more behavioral education
- Utilize protective factors questions in parent contacts
- Connecting without judgement
- Hosting a Healing Retreat implementing all 5 protective factors
- Incorporate this in my personal life
- Be more proactive on social media
- Have it available for foster parents
- Involve teens and elders in conferences
- Hosting a Talking Circle

Participants made some suggestions for improving the training such as inviting an elder from each site to be present at trainings; bringing the same material over and over again to each group training; providing more information on implementation; including more activities; and MORE TIME, MORE TIME, MORE TIME!

TRAINING EVALUTIONS-Summary

Evaluations were conducted following each Strengthening Families training. The summary is below. For full evaluations by site contact the Child Welfare Academy.

RATING SCALE:

No Mark	Low					High
0	1	2	3	4	5	

PRE-TEST AVERAGES	Oct	Feb	Feb	April	May	June
LOCATION	Nome	Bethel	NCC	Talkeetna	RurAL CAP	Hooper Bay
Number of Attendees	9	12	11	11	17	6
My knowledge of the 5 Protective Factors	3	3	3	3	3	4
My knowledge of Strengthening Families	3	3	3	3	3	3
My knowledge of how to incorporate protective factors into my work	N/A	3	3	3	3	3
My understanding of my role in supporting families in using the SF Protective Factors concept	3	3	3	3	3	3

POST-TEST AVERAGES	Oct	Feb	Feb	April	May	June
LOCATION	Nome	Bethel	NCC	Talkeetna	RurAL CAP	Hooper Bay
Number of Attendees	9	12	11	11	17	6
My knowledge of the 5 Protective Factors	4	4	4	4	4	5
My knowledge of Strengthening Families	4	4	4	5	4	5
My knowledge of how to incorporate protective factors into my work	N/A	4	4	4	4	4
My understanding of my role in supporting families in using the SF Protective Factors concept	4	4	4	4	4	5
My satisfaction with this training	5	5	5	4	5	5
Trainer's knowledge about this topic	5	5	5	N/A	N/A	N/A

CITC- POST EVALUATION ONLY (31 Attendees)

Familiarity with SFA Protective Factors <i>before</i> this training	3
For your experience level, this training was.....	3
Usefulness of Overview of Protective Factors	4
Usefulness of Parental resilience Session	4
Usefulness of Social Connections Session	4
Usefulness of Concrete Support Session	4
Usefulness of Community Café Exercise	4

Relevance & appropriateness of materials to Alaska Native Culture	4
Understanding SFA Protective Factors <i>after</i> this training	4
Was the training session worth your time	4

CDVSA- POST EVALUATION ONLY (30 Attendees)

	0	1	2	3	4	5
Rate your understanding of the topics covered in class today.					11	19
The learning activities helped prepare me to do my job.				7	8	15
Rate your initial ability to apply what you learned today to your job.				4	11	14

LEND- POST EVALUATION ONLY (88 Attendees)

1= Strongly disagree 4= Strongly agree

	Anchorage	Fairbanks	Juneau	Sitka	Kodiak	Mat-Su	Barrow	Pexip	Average
Number of Participants	35	5	11	17	4	8	3	2	
Strengthening Families Overview:									
I am satisfied with the training received	3.6	3.8	3.14	3.6	3.25	3.63	3.67	4	3.57
My knowledge increased	3.44	3.8	3.27	3.6	3.25	3.63	4	4	3.51
Strategies for Supporting Trust & Connections:									
I am satisfied with the training received	3.56	3.8	3.09	3.6	3.5	3.38	3.67	4	3.49
My knowledge increased	3.41	3.8	3	3.6	3.25	3.25	4	4	3.42
Case Study Activities:									
I am satisfied with the training received	3.57	3.8	3.27	3.6	3.25	3.38	3.67	4	3.52
My knowledge increased	3.51	3.8	3.36	3.6	3.75	3.38	4	4	3.54