
STRENGTHENING FAMILIES

Protective Factors Training Feedback



STELLAR
GROUP

November 2018

KEY FINDINGS

- » Individuals in many different roles took the two-day Strengthening Families training, but the majority (60%) work in social service, family services and child welfare.
- » A large number (83%) also have coworkers who have also attended the two-day Strengthening Families training, indicating organizations are investing in building knowledge of the framework in their organizations. A few (17%) have even been to more than one of the two-day trainings.
- » Almost all training participants report confidence in their knowledge of the protective factors (94%), indicating that the training by Child Welfare Academy is successful in building knowledge.
- » Not surprisingly, the more frequently a participant used the protective factors framework in their work, the more confident they reported being in their understanding of it.
- » The most common ways participants have implemented the protective factors in their work are sharing resources with others (83%), making changes in the way they work with families (72%), and intentionally building parent partnerships in their work (59%).
- » While less than 25% of participants had conducted a Strengthening Families self-assessment, organized a parent café or community café, or made formal changes to their organizations policies or procedures, 37%-45% of attendees were interested in doing so. This is helpful for thinking about where to focus training or technical assistance in the future.
- » Only 27% of training participants have attended other trainings or webinars on Strengthening Families or protective factors, but additional training was one of the top three supports participants asked for (32%). Of those who haven't had any additional trainings, the number interested jumps to 81%. Several participants also suggested additional training topics and formats that are already offered by the Child Welfare Academy and its partners. This suggests that participants are not aware of all the training opportunities that are available.
- » The most common support requested (47%) was ideas about how to implement the framework which goes hand in hand with the other request for peer learning opportunities (39%). There is a need among participants for more detailed guidance on steps for implementation, as well as support in developing effective ways to talk about the protective factors.
- » Few participants felt there were any barriers to implementing the protective factors (just 14%). For those that did, a lack of knowledge or skill of other staff was the most common barrier participants faced. Interestingly, most of the participants who cited this barrier also had coworkers who had attended the 2-day Strengthening Families training, suggesting that they either need more training, or different coworkers trained.
- » Overall, the training was very well-received by those who attended. Many shared examples of how using the protective factors had made an impact on the families they worked with. As one participant said, *"This is the right way to work with families."*

INTRODUCTION

Strengthening Families (SF) framework is a research-based approach developed by the Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP) to increase family strengths, enhance child development, and reduce the likelihood of child maltreatment. The approach is based on engaging families and communities and building five protective factors that help families succeed and thrive, even when there are challenges or risk factors present. The five protective factors are:

1. Parental resilience
2. Social connections
3. Knowledge of parenting and child development
4. Concrete supports in times of need
5. Social and emotional competence of children

In order to implement this framework in the state, the Child Welfare Academy (CWA) has been funded through the Office of Children Services (OCS) to host an annual two-day, in-person training on the Strengthening Families protective factors framework in locations throughout the state of Alaska since 2015.

By attending the two-day Strengthening Families Protective Factors Framework training, individuals can gain skills and knowledge on the protective factors framework so that they may better provide support and services to the families they serve. This might include making changes to program policies or procedures to be more strengths-focused, building parent partnerships, or hosting community or parent cafes where participants can discuss topics related to the five protective factors, share experiences, and gain support in a group setting.

The following report discusses the feedback provided by these individuals about their experience in the SF two-day training, how they use or plan to use the framework, as well as what challenges they face and what additional supports they would like to successfully implement protective factors into their work.

METHODOLOGY

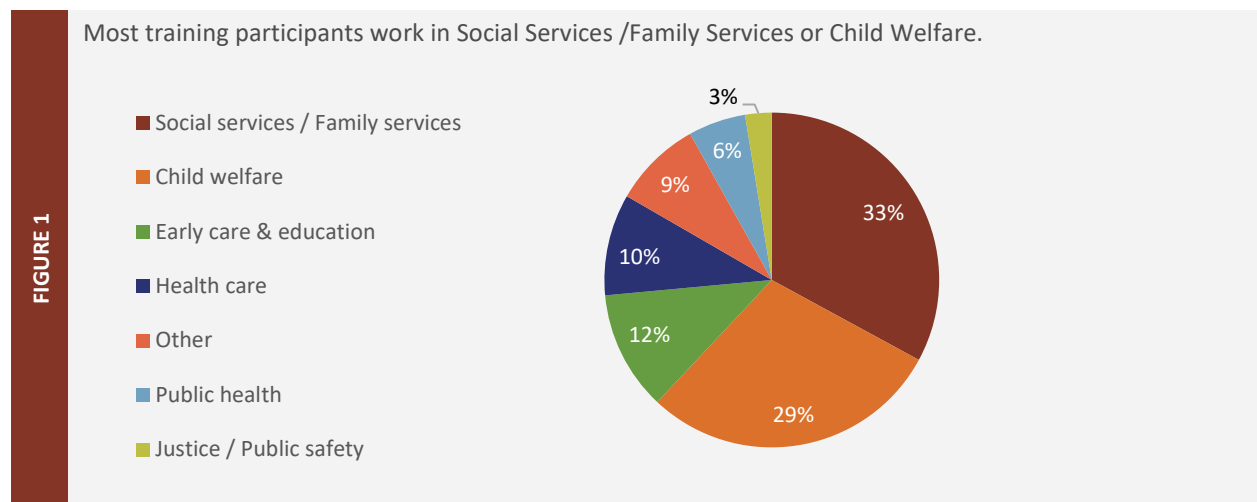
In order to determine the impact of the two-day Strengthening Families Protective Factors Framework training, a brief evaluation survey was created by the Stellar Group, an external evaluation team, using Survey Monkey online platform. In October 2018, the survey was sent out electronically via email in to all individuals who had attended the training since it was implemented in Alaska in 2015. The survey was open from October 10th – November 5th, 2018.

In total, 680 individuals were invited to take the survey. Eighty-one of the email addresses were undeliverable, and three recipients of the invitation said they had not taken the training and were removed from the list, for a sample of 596. A total of 234 responses were received. The results have a 95% confidence interval with a five percent margin of error.

Analysis was conducted using Survey Monkey analytics for quantitative questions, and Dedoose software was used for coding and analysis of qualitative responses included in the survey.

SURVEY SUMMARY

Most of the surveyed participants worked in either social services/family services (33%), or child welfare (29%). Early care and education workers and health care workers also represented a significant number of participants in the training. A small group of training participants specifically identified mental or behavioral health, or substance abuse as their area of work. These individuals were included in the health care group, or in the group labeled 'other' if they worked in education (such as school guidance counselors) or it was unclear what capacity they worked in.



Individuals grouped in the 'other' category include: 9 individuals whose response did not clarify what role they work in, 4 individuals working in education (other than early care & education), 3 tribal workers whose role is not otherwise specified, 3 foster/adoption parents, and 1 state government worker.

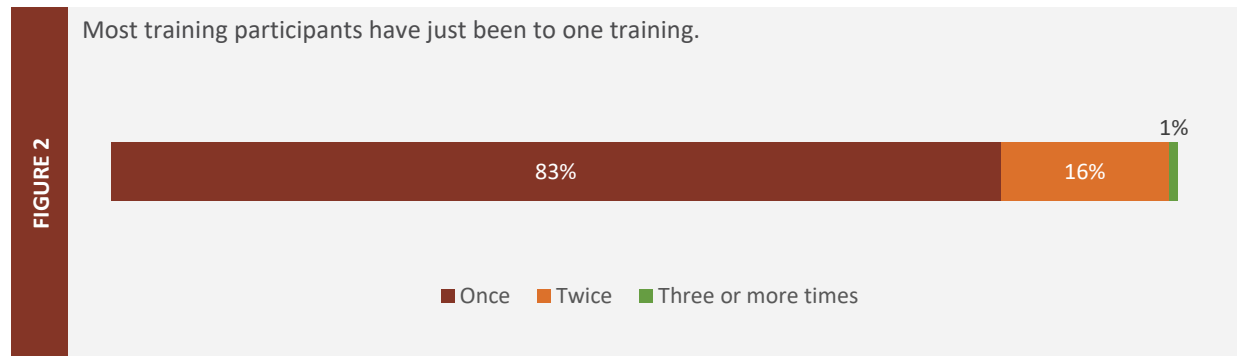
Most participants attended the training to learn about the framework and to improve their services to families and children. The reasons cited for taking the training reflect their varied roles. Some specific examples include:

- » *"motivating families to want recovery"*
- » *"reaching and supporting at-risk families with Imagination Library"*
- » *"learn about the protective factors and mesh with traditional values"*
- » *"support therapeutic foster care families"*
- » *"improving [our] education program"*
- » *"deal with broken families in the Correctional System"*
- » *"apply material learned to work on R.O.C.K. Mat-Su"*
- » *"write about it more effectively in grant proposals"*
- » *"pediatric system development"*

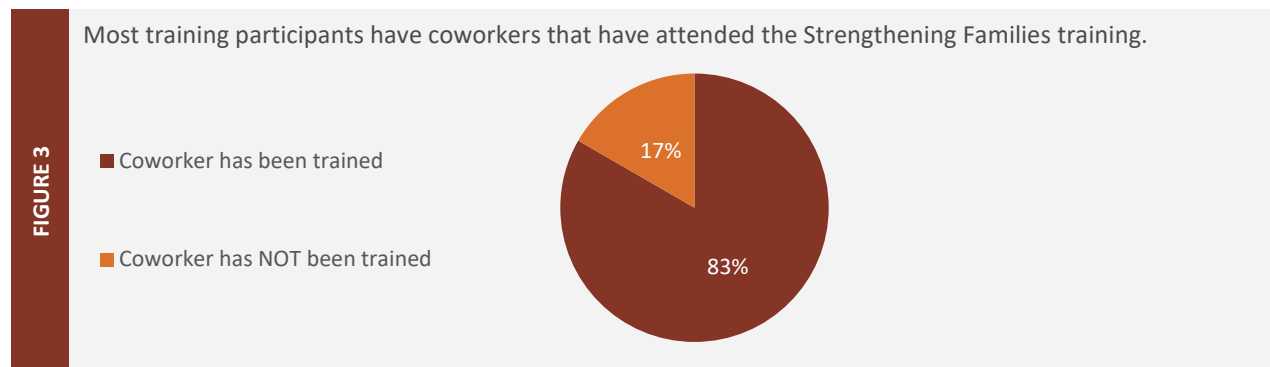
In addition to these reasons for attending the SF training, more than one third (38%) of surveyed participants said that the training was either part of their professional development or required for

work. A small group of participants said that networking with other agencies was one of their main reasons for attending the SF training, however networking was never the only reason for attending.

The majority of survey respondents had participated in the two-day Strengthening Families Protective Factors training in 2017 or 2018 (86%). Most had been to the two-day SF training only once (83%). A small group (16%) had been trained twice and two individuals had attended three or more trainings.



When asked if any of their co-workers had attended the two-day Strengthening Families training, most participants indicated that they had. This suggests that many of the agencies and organizations in Alaska are building the knowledge base of their staff.



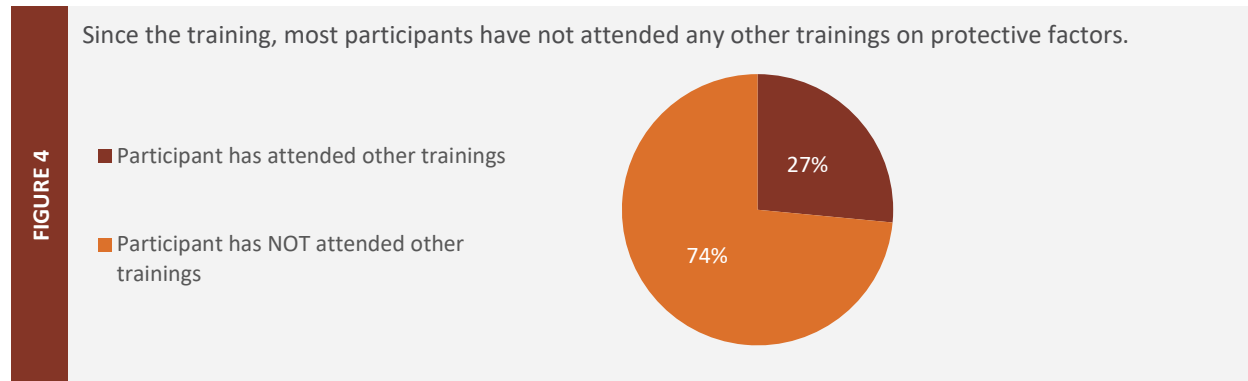
Since attending the SF training, only 27% of respondents had participated in other trainings on protective factors. Many of the respondents who had participated in additional training mentioned specific trainings they had participated in, such as other Strengthening Families trainings, trauma-centered trainings, parenting curriculum workgroups, and trainings such as SKILS (Standards, Knowledge, and Insight Leading to Success), CDA (Child Development Associate) certification, NEAR@Home, and other trainings held through CSSP. These trainings took place in a variety of settings, including in-person, online, through webinars, and on phone calls.

For the participants who had not attended any other training, 81% said they would like additional training opportunities.

When looking only at participants who had attended the training in 2017 or earlier, 64% had not attended any additional training. However, of this same group, 76% said they were fairly confident and

16% said they were very confident with the framework, suggesting that they did not attend other training because they felt confident in their ability to implement the framework without additional instruction. A small group (8%) of those who hadn't attended additional training since 2017 or earlier, however, said they were not very confident with their knowledge of the framework.

There was a small group of the total group participants that mentioned more informal ways that they had continued their training or brought the framework into their organization/agency. For example, some participants discussed the training with coworkers, brought up the topic in other trainings, hosted a speaker on the topic, or presented a short summary of the protective factors framework to their organization/agency.



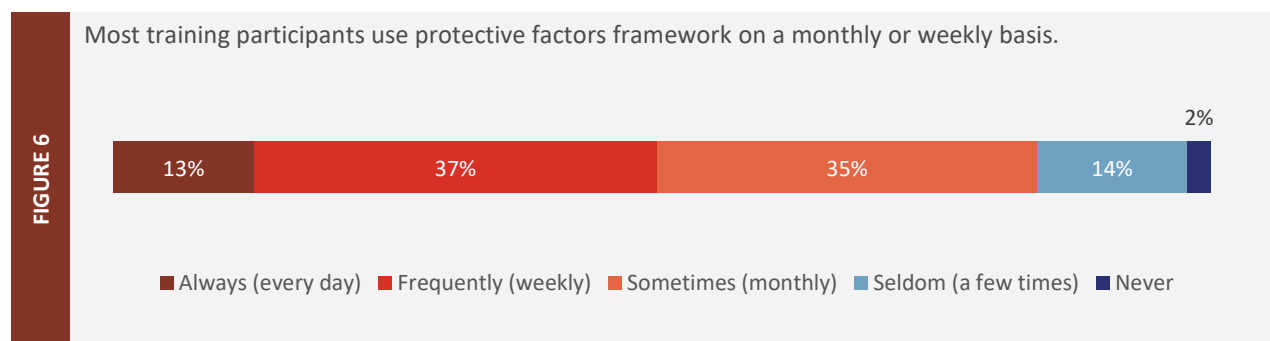
Overall, participants of the two-day Strengthening Families training felt confident in their knowledge of protective factors; the majority were fairly confident (68%). However, a small group of individuals (5%) were not very confident, and one respondent said they were not confident at all. These individuals with little or no confidence also reported that they seldom use protective factors in their work and were more likely to want ideas for how to implement in their work.



IMPLEMENTING THE FRAMEWORK

The information learned about Strengthening Families protective factors from the training is used by most of the participants on a weekly (37%), or a monthly basis (35%). A small group (13%) of individuals use this information in their work daily, and most of these participants were very confident in their knowledge of the framework. In general, the more frequently a participant used the framework, the more confident they were with it. Further, participants who reported use of the protective factor's framework on a weekly or monthly basis were less likely to have had additional training (only 25% had), and for those who use the framework every day, there was a 50/50 split; half had attended other trainings, half had not.

A sizeable group (16%) reported seldom or never using the framework in their work. These individuals worked in social services/family services, early care and learning, public health, and health care.



There was a wide variety of ways that individuals attending the SF training implemented the SF framework into their own work. Most participants have shared resources on protective factors with other people (83%), made changes to the way they work with families (72%), or intentionally built parent partnerships in their work (59%). Some examples of this include:

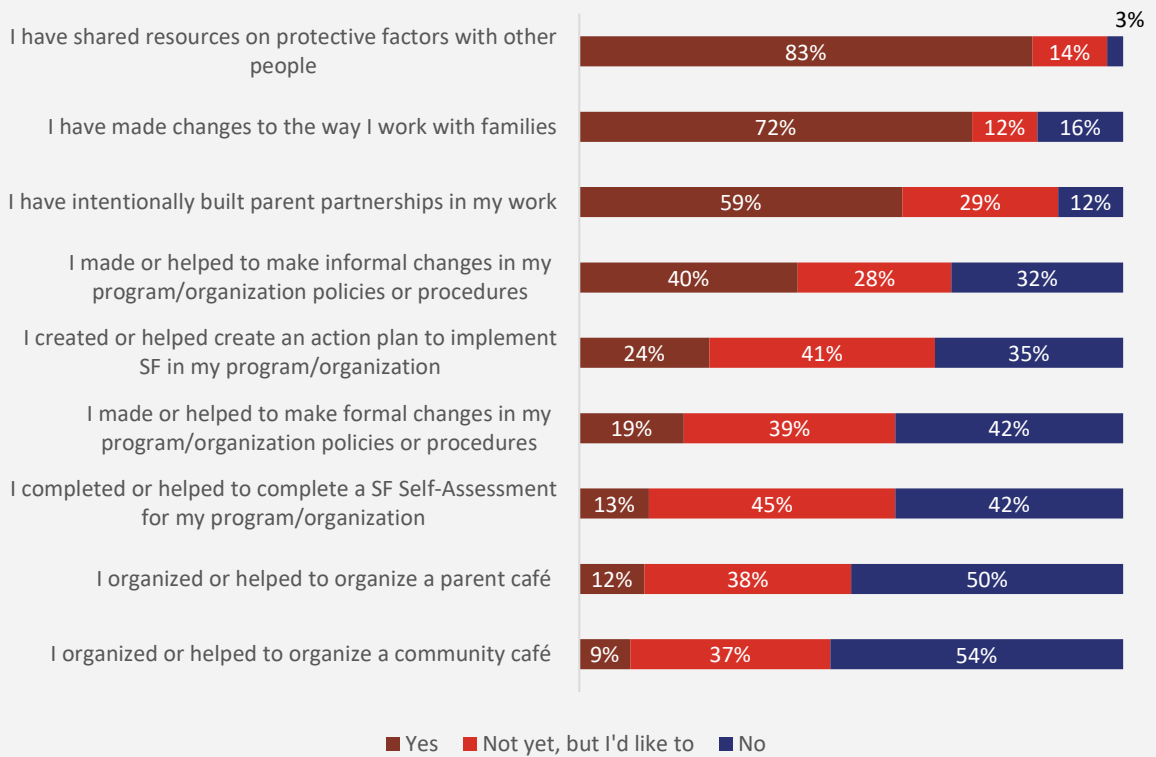
- » *“We will be implementing the Strengthening Families Model in a new ANA Grant project that we were recently awarded.”*
- » *“Beginning my assessments for safety on my family and using the protective factors, gets me off to a good start with the families I am working with.*
- » *“I have reformatted our intakes for shelter, to highlight strengths and needs with all of the protective factors. It has been amazingly helpful to working with families.”*
- » *“I have been able to coach my team on how assessing protective factors directly relates to the information we need to collect via the Purple Guide.”*

Although few had yet to do so, many participants said they would like to complete, or help complete, a Strengthening Families self-assessment for their program or organization (45%), or would like to create, or help create, an action plan to implement SF framework into their program or organization (41%).

Organizing, or helping to organize, a community café or a parent café were the least common ways training attendees had applied or planned to apply what they learned; more than half of training participants had not done these things, and were not interested in doing so.

FIGURE 7

Training participants have applied, or would like to apply, protective factors in a variety of ways.

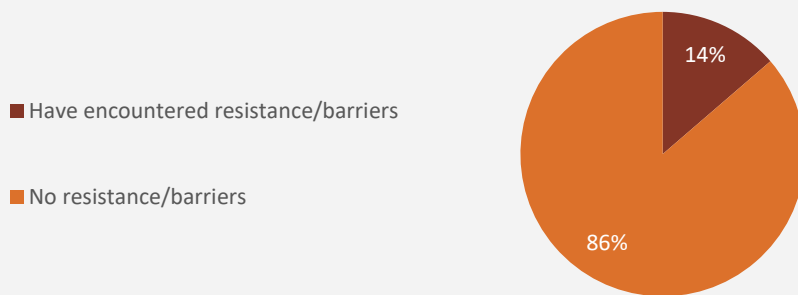


ADDRESSING BARRIERS TO IMPLEMENTATION

Most participants (86%) of the Strengthening Families training had not encountered any resistance or barriers to using protective factors in their work, however a small group (14%) had.

FIGURE 8

Most training participants have not encountered any resistance or barriers to using protective factors.



For most of the training participants who had experienced resistance or barriers, the lack of knowledge or skill of the staff in their organization/agency was the most commonly cited. Interestingly, the majority of respondents who mentioned this as a barrier had also previously stated that they have a co-worker(s) who had also attended a two-day SF training. These participants explained that while SF training gives

thorough background information, workers still need more support on developing skills for effective communication and implementation of the framework. Respondents shared statements such as:

- » *“I have a few specialists that struggle to assess protective factors when investigating foster parents”*
- » *“More practical, useful, specific directions on recognizing factors and/or implementing their use is needed”*
- » *“Training to build skills in communications that enable staff who work with families at risk of ACES is also needed”*

A lack of leadership support was also a commonly identified barrier that training participants have encountered. This feedback included statements such as:

- » *“Policy doesn’t always align with Strengthening Families”*
- » *“Not everyone was receptive when I talked about the training”*
- » *“I don’t feel like OCS [takes] our suggestions or recommendations seriously, and we often times never hear back the outcome”*

In some cases, resistance came from the parents that are served through the participant’s organization/agency. For example:

- » *“Often parents are unwilling to discuss beyond surface”*
- » *“Parents feel like they just need to say something the worker wants to hear”*
- » *“Sometimes it seems the wording may be difficult for parents to understand”*

When asked what types of technical assistance would help them use protective factors in their work, most participants wanted ideas about how to implement (47%) the framework, peer learning opportunities with others working on Strengthening Families changes (39%), and/or additional training (32%).



Some specific examples of additional training ideas shared by participants include:

- » *“Field shadowing by CWA or protective factors experts”*
- » *“Online courses, Facebook groups, Twitter live chats”*
- » *“Train the trainer so my leadership team can conduct training themselves”*
- » *“One-on-one consultations with someone who could come out here and see what we do and how they might suggest we delve deeper”*
- » *“Ongoing face-to-face workshops to keep the language and process fresh in mind”*
- » *“I would like to have part of this training incorporated into training for foster families”*
- » *“A refresher would be very helpful”*
- » *“Specialized training on protective factors for licensing units”*

One respondent shared that their agency was already working on developing a system of peer-learning and support, *“We are working with other agencies to get more training, and to do a parenting class together to build confidence.”*

This feedback about what support participants want shows that most training participants do not have major push-back from their coworkers or colleagues, but rather face barriers related to limited understanding of how to implement the framework and low confidence in their organization’s ability to effectively do so.

This reflects similar feedback in which participants noted the limited knowledge and skill of agency/organization workers was a main barrier to implementing protective factors. This feedback demonstrates a clear need for more ‘how-to’ guidance and detailed information on the steps to effectively implement protective factors among those who participate in the two-day SF training. There was only a small group of participants (16%) who said they do not need any support.

A small group of surveyed training participants (12%) shared their own ideas of supports they would like to have, the majority of whom spoke to the need for more resources to support families, and more time allotted in their work schedule to work with families using protective factors framework, to implement the strategies into already-existing programs, or to develop policy around the framework.

One respondent shared that having information on outcomes regionally and state-wide, and on the evidence base of protective factors, would help in developing program and funding proposals that center on the Strengthening Families framework.

TRAINING FEEDBACK

There was very little criticism or suggested improvement for the Strengthening Families training, however a few respondents shared valuable feedback about how this training can be further enhanced or expanded to increase impact and reach more members of their community. One respondent shared that the scheduling of the training was problematic, they stated, *“The last time the strengthening families training was offered...we weren't given much notice. And it was held during the day. How can our teachers and parents attend in the middle of a work day?”*

Other respondents had ideas of bringing the SF training to other groups of people. For example, one participant said they would like to see the training provided to early childhood educators, while another said they would like the training adapted for parenting classes, and yet another individual had the idea of creating shortened versions of the training to use for their organization's volunteers. Bringing this information about the protective factors framework into schools was also suggested by several participants. Much of what participants has asked for is already available and suggests there is a lack of knowledge among training participants about additional opportunities for follow-up trainings.

Over all, survey respondents found the SF training to be informative and helpful. They showed enthusiasm to implement the skills and knowledge they had learned and see the positive impacts of the framework in their communities. Many also cited a willingness to become a SF Trainer. Some specific comments included,

- » *“The training improved my case planning skills with parents”*
- » *“Beginning my assessments for safety on my family and using the protective factors, gets me off to a good start with the families I am working with.”*
- » *“I have observed the protective factors have an impact on just about everyone who attends SF training. I helped to ensure that all of my colleagues had the opportunity to take the training and I would recommend that everyone be exposed to the 5 protective factors.”*
- » *“SF is one of my favorite trainings-it's extremely engaging and relevant.*
- » *“I really enjoyed the training and took away valuable tools that I use in my job today. Thank you”*
- » *“I value this training a great deal since there are so many hurting families in the villages where professional help is hard to come by, especially due to bad weather when plane's cannot come from the closest place where the clinicians/counselors are at...I am willing to get more training to become a ready-source helper in times of emergencies, here in my village.”*
- » *“Truly want to thank you for this seminar! I was able to gain so much more confidence in myself, and my ability to be a faithful, sincere, dedicated teacher and helping families to strengthen their own families. I have enjoyed recognizing the other participants faces and greeting each other with smiles and hellos in the community as well.”*

One participant summed it up well, writing simply **“This is the right way to work with families.”**