

strengthening families

A L A S K A

OUR PLEDGE TO YOU

WE WILL:

nurture your child

support your parenting role

respect your family's strengths

involve you in program decisions

honor you as a partner



**United Way of Anchorage
Strengthening Families Initiative
Final Evaluation Report 2010**

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Executive Summary

The Alaska Strengthening Families Initiative (SFI), led by the state's Office of Children's Services, began the Strengthening Families movement in 2005 by selecting six pilot programs from four vastly different regions across the state. Five of the six programs completed the entire process and had shown promising results for future replication of the SFI model. In 2007, United Way of Anchorage submitted and was awarded a grant to take the SFI model to scale in the Municipality of Anchorage among early care and learning programs. There was a slight twist to the United Way SFI Anchorage model in that local United Way Family Service programs would also be added to the mix.

The United Way SFI Anchorage program, housed at **thread** (Anchorage's local child care resource and referral program), selected ten highly qualified early care and learning programs to begin the replication process. Over the past two fiscal years, United Way SFI Anchorage conducted focus groups, oriented programs to SFI, tracked self-assessment and implementation planning processes, facilitated more than 20 required trainings, provided direct technical assistance, and initiated a protocol for programs implementing the Community Café process. As a benefit to programs engaged in Strengthening Families, six monthly Learning Networks were included.

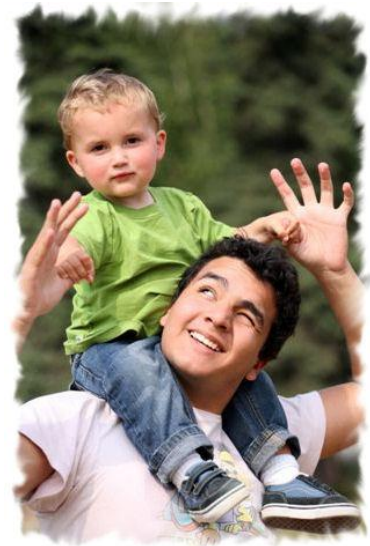
In 2010, the evaluation program measured the results of the two year grant program (2008-2010) in comparison to the outcome measures initially identified. United Way SFI Anchorage outcome measures included but were not limited to identifying the:

1. number of Anchorage Early Childhood Education (ECE) programs and family support agencies that met the requirements of becoming an Alaska Strengthening Families Program.
2. meaningful and relevant basis for the use of the Protective Factors and how to embed the Protective Factors into daily activities.
3. ways parents felt supported by and connected to their early care & education program site.
4. feelings of parents supported by and connected to the Family Service Agencies whose services they accessed.

As a matter of protocol, each Early Care and Education center completed an initial SFI Self-Assessment and a post-program SFI Self-Assessment with the goal of reporting at least a 30 percent improvement overall in the following SFI Strategies:

- valuing and supporting parents
- facilitating friendships and mutual support among parents
- strengthening parenting
- responding to family crisis
- linking families to services and opportunities
- facilitating children's social and emotional development
- observing and responding to early warning signs of child abuse and neglect

In the final analysis, the overall strategies improved by 37 percent, exceeding the initial targeted goal. Twelve hundred children participated in United Way SFI Anchorage centers. Fourteen parents were representatives on individual program and leadership teams. Six-hundred and thirty-two parents participated in program activities developed by Strengthening Families centers. An average of 50 percent increase in parents reporting that their capacity to parent has been identified and the strategies used within Strengthening Families has strongly improved the quality of care for their children. These are impressive statistics with even more impressive identified keys to success.



Keys to Success

- Getting early buy-in from key partners by soliciting and incorporating their input from the very beginning, building a plan based on the group's best thinking.
- Building on that early buy-in, having, from the outset, an enthusiastic, well-connected, committed core team.
- Establishing a strong working relationship with statewide SFI Alaska leadership.
- Recognizing that specific implementation strategies must be tailored to individual program needs and resources; what works for an employer-based child care center may not work for a nonprofit center.
- Keeping an "eye on the prize" (long-term goals) throughout strategic planning discussions.
- Designated coordinator to follow up with sites, provide support and next steps direction, and provide technical assistance.
- Maintaining strong leadership team work with clearly defined roles and responsibilities.
- Augmenting Strengthening Families with mental health consultation, community café model, and on-site technical assistance.
- Participating in SFI Alaska Learning Network calls.
- Evaluating to inform progress/change as well as implementation and support needs/changes.
- Connecting to Early Childhood Comprehensive Services (ECCS) plan with State level support.
- Funding for two years for full implementation of project.
- Focusing on sustainability and broad based community impact; embedding Strengthening Families model into United Way allocations.

Success Story #1

Caring – Customer Service – Family strengthening...whatever you call it, it has become the fabric of our Center...

The focus of the Family Strengthening training for our staff became evident in the case of one particular family. A single mom - three children - working two jobs and trying to keep her kids happy and healthy in the midst of her own health issues.

Staff provided the interface between Center volunteers and the family to provide on-going support throughout the challenges that have faced this family. When mom was disabled and bed-ridden for a period of time, transportation was arranged with other families so her children could continue to attend the Center, providing her some respite to heal. When custody and safety was challenged, all staff stepped in to reassure the children that they were safe and cared for. And when one child struggled with emotional issues, staff and a close friend was available to assist – even providing support through mental health counseling.

Throughout the past three years, raising these children has been a partnership – between mom, other childcare families, and childcare staff. Throughout the process, childcare staff worked to wrap services around the family, helping with names and addresses of agencies that could be helpful – but mostly making sure this family had consistent, nurturing support and access to services.

The benefits have become obvious – Mom has sole custody of the children and for the most part they are managing day-to-day without undue stress. The oldest child continues to struggle with mental health issues but is in treatment. The mom continues to struggle with a disabling injury but has a support system when she needs it. The youngest children are happy, bright, and loving.

Mom has repeatedly told staff how sincerely she values the Center and the staff that have made such an effort to ensure health and happiness for her children. Not terribly long ago, she arrived at the Center with hand-made gifts for key staff and volunteers – touching, beautiful little trinkets that were made with each person in mind.

The Foundation of SFI

*It Takes **All** Five Protective Factors to Prevent Child Abuse and Neglect*

What do the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, the Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP), and United Way Strengthening Families Initiative (SFI) Anchorage all have in common? They are all linked together by a common belief. When you build Protective Factors into your practices of care for children and families, your community environments and your respectful approach to each family, the outcome is strengthening of families. Beginning in 2001, funded by Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, the CSSP began studying how, through evidence-based practices, Early Care and Education can directly impact the prevention of abuse and neglect in young children. Over the past ten years, the approach has spread worldwide and now includes programs beyond Early Care and Education such as family support programs, school and university programs, with endless possibilities in the future. The effects of the SFI “movement” (as it is fondly called) have been as simple as learning each parent’s name to whole systems restructure.

As stated within the Strengthening Families’ website:

“Across the country, Early Care and Education programs, child welfare departments, and other family support agencies are using the Strengthening Families approach to build five Protective Factors in families. Research shows that these factors reduce the incidence of child abuse and neglect by providing parents with what they need to parent effectively, even under stress. By building relationships with families, programs can recognize signs of stress and build families’ Protective Factors with timely, effective help.”

The Protective Factor framework which guides the practices of Strengthening Families is:

PARENTAL RESILIENCE	One important predictor of parenting behavior is a parent’s ability to “bounce back” from adversity. Active participation and having a voice in the programs that serve them positively impacts parents’ psychological well-being.
SOCIAL CONNECTIONS	Improving social connections can help prevent child maltreatment through informal support networks as well as increasing a community’s social capital. The most effective social connections are positive, reciprocal, flexible, trusting, and embody pro-social, child-friendly values.
KNOWLEDGE OF PARENTING & CHILD DEVELOPMENT	Child abuse and neglect is often correlated to a lack of understanding of basic child development. Effective approaches focus on parents’ strengths, offer formal and informal learning opportunities, build trust, and respect individual & cultural differences.
CONCRETE SUPPORTS IN TIMES OF NEED	Risk factors such as unemployment and inadequate housing are highly correlated with both child maltreatment and poverty. Connecting with the everyday lives of families increases providers’ awareness of high-stress situations and helps them link families with resources when they are most needed.
SOCIAL & EMOTIONAL COMPETENCE OF CHILDREN	Healthy development is threatened when families of young children face multiple problems and stressors. Strong early childhood settings have positive teacher-child relations, educationally rich environments, consistent daily routines, periods of open-ended playtime, clear rules and limits, and a curriculum with conceptual and emotional themes.

From “Protective Factors Literature Review,” Center for the Study of Social Policy, 2003

Strengthening Families Initiative: History in Alaska

United Way SFI Anchorage came to Alaska at a critical juncture in the history of SFI Alaska. SFI Alaska began in 2005, led by the state's Office of Children's Services, with the selection of six early childhood program pilot sites from four vastly different regions across the state, who ventured forward with seed money to redesign, rebuild and/or realize the potential to serve families using the Protective Factors. Five of the six programs continued the process for three years demonstrating promising results for future replication of the SFI model. In 2007, six more programs were added to SFI Alaska programs; five ECE programs and one primary family service program. It has been the intent of SFI Alaska to embed the Protective Factors concepts into all facets of systems that serve children and families statewide, therefore, adding a Family Service Agency was a natural step for SFI Alaska.

In 2008, United Way of Anchorage submitted and was awarded a grant by United Way Worldwide, to take the SFI model to scale among Early Care and Education programs in the Municipality of Anchorage. There was a slight twist to the United Way SFI Anchorage model in that local United Way family service programs would also be added to the mix. Using the foundational research from CSSP, United Way SFI Anchorage built strategies and activities into their ten existing Early Care and Education programs while a small number of Family Service Agencies began the Strengthening Families journey by cross-referencing and revising the SFI Self-Assessment with tools and strategies currently used. Concurrently, the Protective Factors were also embedded within the allocations process for United Way Anchorage funding 2011. All the energy placed in these three key initiatives over a two year period of time produced exciting results discussed within this report.

The United Way SFI Anchorage program, housed at [thread](#) (a local child care and referral agency), selected the ten highly qualified Early Care and Education programs to begin the replication process. Over the past two years, United Way SFI Anchorage experimented with strategies, used data-driven decision making, and concluded a two year process of investigation into best practices for strengthening families within the Early Care and Education settings. A leadership team, led by a United Way representative and supported through [thread](#), ensured the following goals and strategies of the project were successful by:

1. Consistent communication and support of a designated United Way SFI Anchorage coordinator who facilitated regular team meetings.
2. Conducting an initial focus group for targeted community programs; this became the program kick-off and baseline data gathering stage.
3. Participating in orientation and intensive, ongoing technical assistance to Early Care and Education sites and family support agencies. Orienting ten programs to Strengthening Families; each program completed a Self-Assessment and subsequent Implementation Action Plan.
4. Facilitating SFI trainings and providing ongoing technical assistance to the ten programs.

5. Conducting “Train the Trainers” seminars which helped to establish a protocol for programs implementing the Community Café process.
6. Participating in monthly SFI Alaska Learning Networks.

As a part of the United Way SFI Anchorage program, an external evaluation was required. The evaluation was conducted by an independent evaluator, who adapted and incorporated tools sanctioned by SFI Alaska and the Center for the Study on Social Policy (CSSP) program. The results of the data received over the past two years helped provide a “road map” for Early Care and Education programs. Data-driven decisions were based on surveying efforts including:

1. Provider staff surveys comparing pre/post understanding, knowledge and behaviors.
2. Parent surveys regarding their individual perspective on the Protective Factors.
3. Director surveys comparing pre/post understanding, knowledge and behaviors; Implementation Surveys comparing practice with outcome measures.
4. Evaluations of training and technical support provided including the creation of the Alaskan Starter Kit for SFI programming.
5. Crosswalk and comparisons of Self-Assessment data and Implementation Plans.
6. Analysis of program observations, participant interviews, focus group information and Community Café Harvest sheets.



SFI Anchorage Purpose, Goals and Logic Model(s)

Outcomes

The overall outcome of United Way SFI Anchorage was:

***Parents feel supported by and connected to their Early Care and Education program site, and that;
Parents feel supported by and connected to the Family Service Agencies whose services they access.***

Purpose

On the surface, the purpose of United Way SFI Anchorage was simple and pure: to embed the Protective Factors into ten Anchorage Early Care and Education project sites. Underlying this purity, was the nitty-gritty work of shifting system paradigms (meaning actually implementing “out of the ordinary” practices contrary to the norm), and engaging parents at an emotional level seldom considered for an Early Care and Education setting. Care givers and parents alike felt the reverberations of the time intensive act of building relationships which in turn reconstructed a foundation of solid collaborative support.

Goals

United Way SFI Anchorage selected five key goals to keep their focus for two years. These five goals were:

1. Anchorage team participation in the national United Way leadership network for Strengthening Families.
2. Development of a new Self-Assessment tool, parent survey, and staff survey for Family Service Agencies that they can use for families with young children.
3. Increase in United Way partner agencies serving young children and their families that integrate Protective Factors into their work.
4. Dissemination of program evaluation and documentation that can lead to successful replication and/or adaptation.
5. Incorporation of Strengthening Families messaging in marketing/campaign opportunity.

To further articulate, the United Way SFI Anchorage team created two logic models (see next two pages) that guided the program toward successful outcomes. These outcomes were demonstrated as:

Early Childhood Education programs and Family Support Agencies will:

- recognize their role in preventing child abuse and neglect, and
- implement effective strategies for supporting parents and building Protective Factors around children.

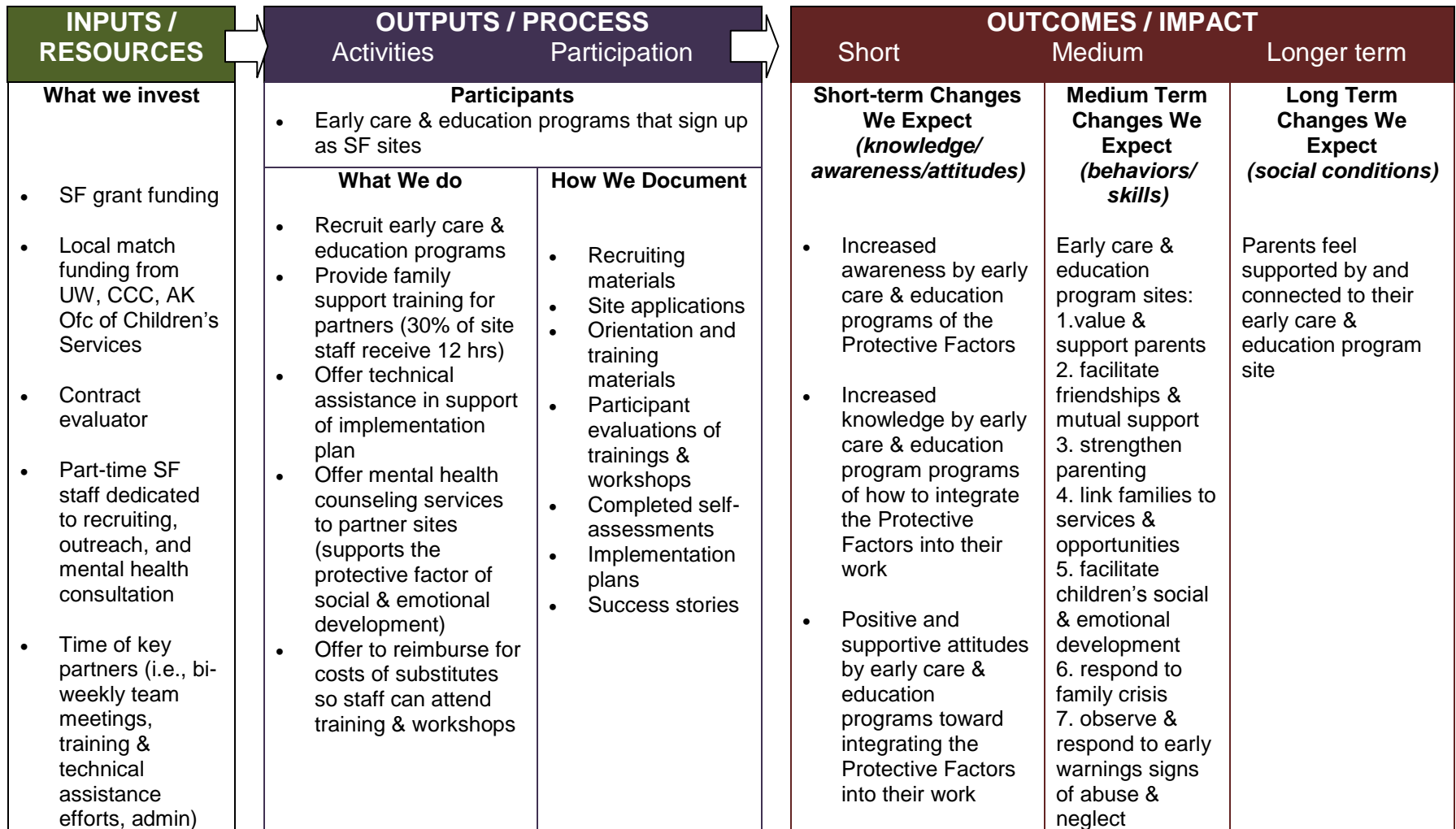
Parents will:

- access the support and services they need to care for their children, and
- report feeling supported in increasing their capacity to parent.

Logic Models for Early Care and Education and Family Support/Family Services

UNITED WAY STRENGTHENING FAMILIES - LOGIC MODEL Worksheet (Table format)

Overarching Goal: Use of the Protective Factors becomes embedded at the Early Care and Education project sites.



UNITED WAY STRENGTHENING FAMILIES - LOGIC MODEL Worksheet (Table format)

Overarching Goal: Use of the Protective Factors becomes embedded in the work of United Way partner agencies that serve families with children.

INPUTS / RESOURCES	OUTPUTS / PROCESS		OUTCOMES / IMPACT		
	Activities	Participation	Short	Medium	Longer term
What we invest <ul style="list-style-type: none"> SF grant funding Local match funding from UW, CCC, AK Ofc of Children's Services, Alaska Children's Trust Contract evaluator SF staff dedicated to recruiting, outreach, training and technical support Time of key partners (i.e., bi-weekly team meetings, training & technical assistance efforts, admin) 	Participants <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Family service agencies that sign up to pilot adapted SF tools 		Short-term Changes We Expect (knowledge/awareness/attitudes) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased awareness by Family Service Agencies of the Protective Factors Increased knowledge by Family Service Agencies of how to integrate the Protective Factors into their work Positive and supportive attitudes by Family Service Agencies toward integrating the Protective Factors into their work 	Medium Term Changes We Expect (behaviors/skills) <p>Family service agency partners:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> value & support parents facilitate friendships & mutual support strengthen parenting link families to services & opportunities facilitate children's social & emotional development respond to family crisis observe & respond to early warnings signs of abuse & neglect 	Long Term Changes We Expect (social conditions) <p>Parents feel supported by and connected to the Family Service Agencies whose services they access</p>
	What We do <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adapt SF tools for use by Family Service Agencies: self-assessment, parent and staff surveys Recruit Family Service Agencies Provide training in Strengthening Families principles Adapt self-assessment tool for use by Family Service Agencies Provide technical assistance in piloting adapted self-assessment tool, and in developing an implementation plan Incorporate SF into UW mktg/campaign Incorporate SF principles into United Way app process 	How We Document <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adapted self-assessment tool Recruiting materials Site applications Orientation and training materials Participant evaluations of trainings & workshops Completed self-assessments Implementation plans Adapted evaluation tools (surveys, etc.) Success stories 			

SFI Anchorage Program Description

General Program Description

Through United Way SFI Anchorage, a complete process was created and implemented over the two year period of time. Beginning with focus group recruitment through the use of conversational methods such as Community Cafés, the program clearly outlined the “how” to identify and begin a Strengthening Families program within community programs and settings.

United Way of Anchorage identified three key areas of focus for the Strengthening Families endeavor as described below.

1. “Scale up” the SFI program to include ten new Early Care and Education Programs within the Municipality of Anchorage. This section of the plan was called “Early Care and Education.”
2. Invite Family Service Agencies who were United Way recipients to rework the SFI Self-Assessment tool so that it was inclusive of family support strategies; experiment with the use of the newly revised Self-Assessment for Family Service Agencies. This section of the plan was called “Family Service Programs.”
3. Working within our United Way, Community, Marketing/Public Relations

These three sections are described in full on the following pages.

1. Early Care and Education

In Year One of the grant, an RFP was distributed to Early Care and Education programs; ten sites applied and were accepted into the initial cohort. These programs attended an orientation, completed the Strengthening Families Self-Assessment, developed an Implementation Plan, and were required to send at least 30 percent of program staff to a minimum 12 hours of training related to Strengthening Families and the Protective Factors. In return programs received mini-grants of \$1,000 to offset costs of sending staff to training, and/or to implement family engagement activities. They also received free access to monthly Learning Networks, statewide professional development teleconferences focused on issues related to Strengthening Families and the Protective Factors.

For this cohort, larger centers were targeted for recruitment, with the strategy of taking the Strengthening Families Initiative to scale in a community. The initial cohort brought the number of children served by Strengthening Families sites to approximately 1,000, or about 20 percent of children being served by licensed child care in Anchorage.

“I pick up ideas for better ways to respond to undesirable behaviors by observing staff interactions with my child and other children, and I get helpful tips and ideas from staff specific to my child's progress and development of the moment.”

There were seven strategic steps to becoming a United Way SFI Anchorage program. Following is the step-by-step process.

A) Recruitment

Through advertisement and targeting, two Focus Group strategies were employed to engage interested programs. Conducted by United Way SFI Anchorage team members, Stakeholder and Program Focus Groups were held from July to September the first year of the grant. Each group had specific questions to address by which to gather baseline data. The process for each Focus Group is described below.

Stakeholder Focus Groups:

Stakeholder Focus Groups were a three hour community event. Questions asked were:

1. To what extent do you have the five Protective Factors embedded into your organization's policies, procedures, and practices?
2. What is the "state of families" in your community organization?
3. To what extent are parents/family members involved in policy making at the organizational level?
4. What are your families' greatest needs, from your perspective?
5. In what ways are the Protective Factors evident in your community? In your organization's environment? In the behaviors of your staff members?

Document the Focus Group information through photos, written dialogue on large tablets, individual note cards collected. Organize data for analysis.

Parent/Family Focus Groups *(Conducted by SFI Anchorage Coordinator at individual sites)*

Based on the designated Early Care and Education sites/centers selected for the project, a Parent/Family Focus Group was organized and advertised as a part of the United Way SFI Anchorage Orientation. The questions asked:

1. Where do you go when you need assistance in your community?
 2. In what ways are these agencies/programs/people helpful?
 3. Describe how "family centered – family friendly" your neighborhood is.
 4. From your family's perspective how safe, accessible, supportive, and healthy is your community? If you have experienced a family crisis, in what ways did your community support you?
 5. From your perspective, to what extent does your community support family growth and development across the age spectrum?
- Document the Focus Group information through photos, written dialogue on large tablets, and individual note cards collected. Organize data for analysis.

- After the Parent/Family Focus Groups are completed, use the concept mapping process to overlay the Community Stakeholder data with the Parent/Family data. Develop written results and recommendations for United Way SFI Anchorage.
- Share results with the full community and project leaders.
- An Invitation (sample within the Alaska Starter Kit) was then sent to programs that were selected by [thread](#). Programs then choose Leadership Teams in preparation for the program orientation.

B) Orientation

Following participation in the Focus Groups and selection, orientation was held. Program Leadership Teams (replicated after the SFI Alaska Leadership Team) consisting of a Program Director, a staff member, and a parent (who was not a staff member) attended a one day seminar on how to implement SFI into programs and the steps toward becoming a successful SFI program. Programs were asked to come prepared to describe their program and to bring photos, notebooks, or scrapbook to share about their programs. The General Orientation held for all programs at the beginning of the project year and a more intensive orientation for Leadership Teams snapshot is listed in the Starter Kit in the appendix of this report.

C) Memorandums of Understanding

The Memorandum of Understanding was between the Early Care and Education programs of Anchorage, United Way SFI Anchorage, and SFI Alaska. The purpose of this agreement was to establish and implement a partnership between the three programs which built upon existing program strengths and integrated Strengthening Families theories and principles into program infrastructure. Key elements of the memorandum are listed in the Starter Kit in the appendix of this report.

D) Self-Assessment

The purpose of this tool was to help agencies and organizations assess whether they were offering opportunities to develop and exercise the five Protective Factors and seven strategies. An agency supportive of Strengthening Families welcomed the active involvement of these strategies within their classrooms, within their program management, implementation, and assessment, and nourished the development of relationships among and with parents.

The Self-Assessment tool was best completed as a group activity among agency leaders, key staff and parents (this is a SFI Alaska recommendation) so that everyone was able to contribute. Once the Self-Assessment was completed, the agency was ready to develop goals and action steps to enhance the five Protective Factors and seven strategies of Strengthening Families in their organization.

E) Implementation Planning

Once the Self-Assessment tool was completed, organizations analyzed their answers paying particular attention to the areas noted as “needing attention.” These were areas organizations may have wanted to address, and many agencies or organizations had multiple areas that needed to be addressed. The reality is, for many years now there has not been a major emphasis on promoting Protective Factors in human services agencies. As more and more organizations and systems look at this issue it is realized that promoting Strengthening Families is critical to developing responsible, relationship-based programs and building support for them. If programs did have multiple areas that needed to be addressed, prioritization was necessary. Organizations selected ONE area that needed to be addressed and developed a plan for beginning to move forward. Action Planning tools were supplied to the organizations as templates to enhance their ongoing continuous improvement processes.

F) Required Training

12 hours for 30 percent of the staff

The foundation of the required training within United Way SFI Anchorage was Stronger Together, a framework/curriculum developed by the Parent Services Project (PSP). It was an introduction to the principles of family support and strategies for applying work with families. In 2008, 25 early childhood advocates in the state of Alaska received intensive training on this training guide. Following the training it was overwhelmingly decided Stronger Together would serve as a tool to guide SFI project training efforts.

United Way SFI Anchorage initially included ten Early Care and Education sites which agreed that 30 percent of their staff would complete 12 hours of Strengthening Families and family support training. Staff at these child care centers not only brought a wide range of training and experience with them, but they were also from diverse cultural backgrounds. Each participant received a Stronger Together manual which included stories, research, wisdom, assessment tools, and tips collected from parents and practitioners that brought to life the day-to-day work of building relationships with families. The Training Section also provided the participants with PowerPoint's, handouts, activities, café questions, and other general information regarding items for training in that topic area to supplement the Stronger Together training manual and activities.

In alignment with the SFI Alaska requirement of 30 percent of the staff receiving 12 hours of training (total in two years) prior to being designated a SFI Alaska program, United Way SFI Anchorage programs were set in place to receive the SFI Alaska designation through the completion of the following training protocol for the required 12 hours. Each section required two hours of participation in training. Additional trainings to supplement individual program's needs based on the annual survey were also provided through United Way SFI Anchorage. A description of these 2-hour training sessions follows.

Section 1: Overview of Strengthening Families (2 hours)

Protective Factors: In this session we will delve into the background of the Strengthening Families Initiative in Anchorage and discuss the Protective Factors that have been shown to prevent child abuse and neglect. We will provide an overview of the principles of family support and ways to shift from child centered practices to family centered practices. We will end by reviewing the plan for future trainings.

Section 2: Family Support (2 hours)

Supporting Families: In this session we will discuss more in-depth the family centered care principles and design ways to implement these strategies into individual programs. We will discuss specific strategies for including families in individual programs and creating a family-friendly environment.

Section 3: Family Centered Care Practices (2 hours)

Family Centered Practices: In this session we will deepen our knowledge and learn strategies of how to integrate family support principles into Early Care and Education environments. We will learn strategies for balancing the interests of the program, staff, and children and their families. We'll identify steps to increase family centered practice in Early Care and Education environments.

Section 4: Building Relationships with Families, Involving Families, and Promoting Strong Families (2 hours)

In this session we will discuss how to build effective relationships with families. Creating family centered environments is a crucial aspect of working in child care and we will discuss effective communication strategies, partnering with families, and problem solving tough situations.

Section 5: Diversity (2 hours)

In this session we will define and expand our understanding of culture. We will learn strategies and skills to support cultural awareness and continuity, and how to empower families. We'll learn strategies for building equitable communities and gain an understanding of how prejudice, racism and bias affect early childhood programs.

Section 6: Making Change (2 hours)

In this session we will work in small groups to address some of the following questions: What were the family activities that worked well? Why did these efforts work, what attributes contributed to success? What did our leaders and staff do to ensure success? What does our Early Care and Education site need to continue our efforts to strengthen families?

Additional Trainings Offered (on an as needed and requested basis)

Mandatory Reporting of Child Maltreatment and Abuse

Training by the Office of Children's Services (2 hours): Within the first year evaluation of United Way SFI Anchorage, we discovered some staff challenges that were evident after directors and staff members were surveyed. Since involvement in the SFI program training, staff noticed these challenges: knowing how the child welfare system works and more specifically how to follow program protocols in making child welfare reports. A staff member from the Alaska Office of Children's Services was invited to present training to our Early Care and Education directors and staff members on the topic of mandatory reporting. Some of the topics covered were:

- Identification of abuse or neglect.
- Who are mandated reporters of abuse and neglect?
- Mandatory reporting laws, Legal liability.
- What OCS wants to know, The Reporting Process.
- What happens after I report?
- Who is in charge of the Investigation?
- Child protection, and information on Team Decision Meetings

G) Complete annual report

- Verify percentage of staff training in Strengthening Families and Family Support.
- Participate in Annual SFI Evaluation of Services.
- Document through Success Stories family strengthening activities/systems.



Community Cafés

United Way SFI Anchorage programs were encouraged and trained to host Alaska's Community Cafés, a practice that networked (parents and programs), communities to dream, discover, design and deliver a plan of action to improve lives for Alaska's children. This practice is a process that invites all who resonate with the idea of collective intelligence growing from meaningful conversations about strengthening families, building partnerships and leadership. Hosts create a safe container, allowing each person to share their gifts and serve as a catalyst for conversations that foster collective wisdom and the will to act. The word practice also infers a process rather than an end goal.

Alaska's practice will impact child maltreatment throughout the state by inviting rather than campaigning. An invitation is framed by the hosts and articulates the "who, what, when, where, why and how" of each gathering. Café hosts design what they think is a compelling invitation then trust that whoever shows up is who is needed to do the work at that moment. Hosts and guests are encouraged to think of their entire community as one living system.

In a living system, if one part is not well, the whole system is impacted. This perspective makes the well-being of every child and family the responsibility of the community and compels each community and each individual to rely on one another.

"I have really liked the sharing that goes on with the Cafe'. Knowing that other parents are experiencing similar concerns validates that I am not going crazy."

The Community Café practice does not provide prescriptive or recommended solutions to a community problem but rather provides an opportunity to build on its strengths and commit to a solution. Every person and community has gifts to share to this process. Each person, from the youngest to the oldest has threads to offer that can add to the strength of the social fabric. The shift in thinking may be in not only acknowledging this, but in the expectation that every person must have a meaningful way to contribute so that the entire system is healthy enough to support all of its children. Cafés bridge science to action to strengthening families, deepen our understanding of leadership, and develop effective partnerships. We also explore the complexities of designing questions that invite conversation, what we mean when we use the term "harvest," and how the harvest moves the discussion from feel good to something dynamic. The United Way SFI Anchorage programs were participants in a community wide training to prepare hosts and programs in the following ways.

1. Learn how to harvest the collective wisdom of the Community Café to create meaningful change that strengthens families.
2. Learn what it means to create and hold a container for possibility rather than problem-solving to strengthen families.
3. The challenge of changing from within to help our families and communities.
4. Gain the confidence to design a Café relevant to the community.
5. Staying connected to advance a statewide effort.

Success Story #2

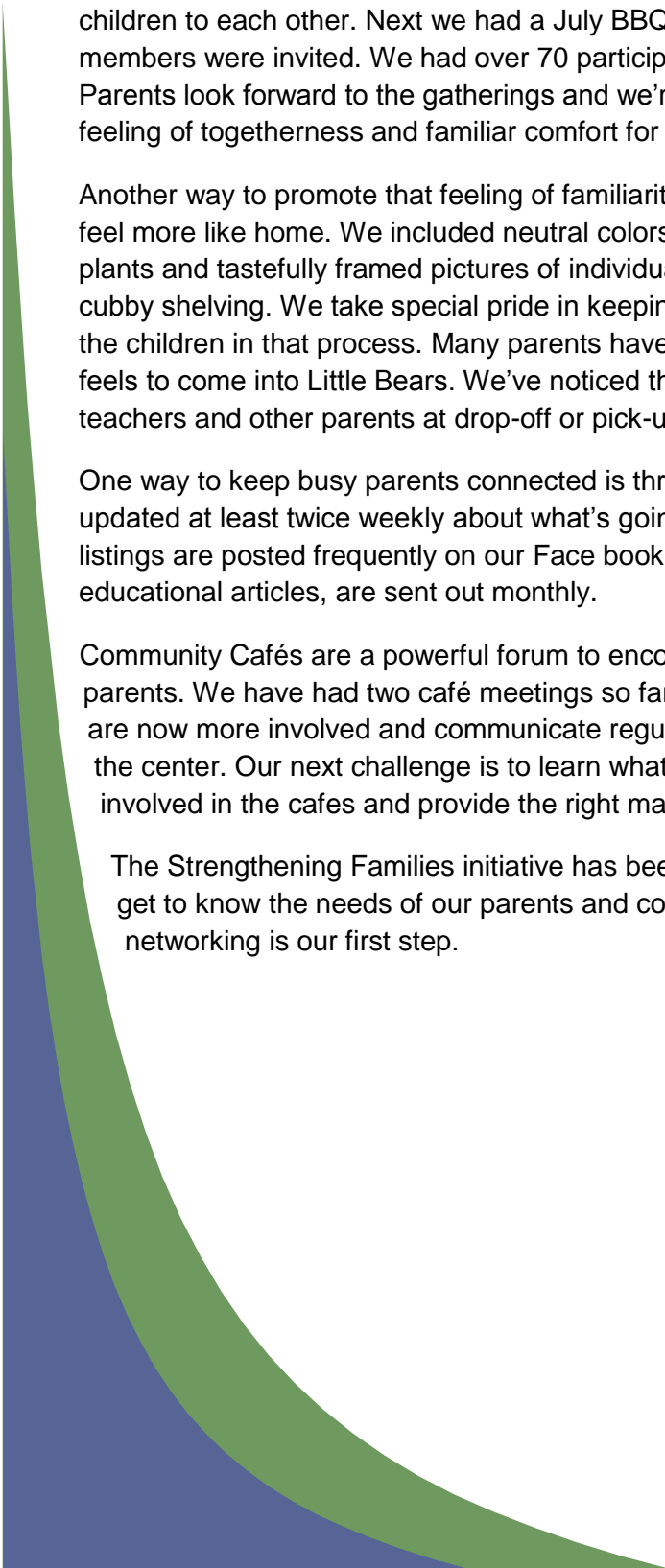
Our Challenge: To bring families together for networking and informal conversations.

Girdwood, Alaska is a small community. Our population fluctuates with seasonal tourists ... skiers, snowboarders, snowmobilers and all other winter sports from November through April and then outdoor enthusiasts, bicyclists, hikers, climbers, and outdoor educators from May through October. Many of the homes in Girdwood are unoccupied except for weekend and holiday use by families who are not established community members. Most of the permanent residents in Girdwood either work from home or commute to the Kenai Peninsula, Anchorage and other surrounding areas. We have two churches (one with a small food bank), an elementary public school program, Lions Club, Rotary Club, and weekly library storytelling times for young children. We have an organized community schools program that offers a wide variety of classes and events for children and adults of all ages. None of these organizations have high participation numbers. Girdwood does not have organizations or agencies that meet the greater need of more populated areas such as food programs, women/children centers, support groups or free health clinics. Little Bears is the only childcare/learning center for young children in Girdwood. The closest place to obtain these services is in Anchorage, about 40 miles away. Because of these issues and the busyness of their lives, parents are somewhat isolated with no connection to each other except the time spent during the summer months at the small community playground.

Our challenge as a learning center was to provide ways for the parents of preschool children to gather communicate and network with each other. We wanted to provide informal forums for parents to share experiences and information.

There were four things we decided to do: Plan and market pot-luck gatherings at least four times annually, create a family-type environment at our center that would promote an inclusive feel for parents, provide on-going communication through a Facebook site, newsletters, parent-group emails, and begin our Community Café program.

We started out small with a Harvest Breakfast. Late in October, we invited parents to bring in a breakfast dish and come share breakfast with their children and other parents. We approached them personally and sent home flyers. We had a turnout of about 10 parents, a big number for us, since we're a small center. It was just the start we needed. Some tasty breakfast dishes were brought in that we were able to brag about in our newsletter. Our next attempt at bringing parents together was more in spirit instead of in-person. We had a Christmas Cookie Exchange where families were asked to bring in their favorite baked cookies to exchange with other families. We had about 12 families participate. We had a Spring Potluck that highlighted a slideshow of all the children at play and work throughout the prior months and a few songs by the children. At this particular event, we took the time to introduce all the families and their



children to each other. Next we had a July BBQ potluck to which all alumni and community members were invited. We had over 70 participants! We now have all these events annually. Parents look forward to the gatherings and we're finding that things done 'traditionally' create a feeling of togetherness and familiar comfort for all of us.

Another way to promote that feeling of familiarity was in redesigning our center environment to feel more like home. We included neutral colors, window valances, and a variety of lamps, plants and tastefully framed pictures of individual children placed strategically on top of the cubby shelving. We take special pride in keeping our 'home' neat and clean and have included the children in that process. Many parents have expressed how much more cozy and relaxed it feels to come into Little Bears. We've noticed that they spend more time interacting with teachers and other parents at drop-off or pick-up times.

One way to keep busy parents connected is through our newsletters and emails. All parents are updated at least twice weekly about what's going on in our center via email. Photos and event listings are posted frequently on our Face book page. Newsletters, which include most of our educational articles, are sent out monthly.

Community Cafés are a powerful forum to encourage thought-provoking conversations among parents. We have had two café meetings so far. Only a few parents attended, but those parents are now more involved and communicate regularly and more comfortably with staff members at the center. Our next challenge is to learn what topics of discussion will motivate parents to be involved in the cafes and provide the right marketing to increase participation.

The Strengthening Families initiative has been the catalyst for all our thoughts and actions to get to know the needs of our parents and community. Promoting parental inclusion and networking is our first step.

2. Family Service Programs

United Way SFI Anchorage was originally designed to have two main tracks for program recruitment: a first-year cohort of Early Childhood Education (ECE) programs, and a second-year cohort of Family Service Agencies. The thinking was that tools and assessments already existed for ECE programs, and a pilot project in the state had already recruited several programs in Anchorage, whereas tools and assessments would need to be modified in order to be adaptable to Family Support Agencies.

For the second cohort, Family Service Agencies who were existing United Way partners were recruited. Because there were not yet tools specifically adapted for Family Service Agencies, the plan for this cohort was to utilize their input in order to adapt the Self-Assessment tool and staff and parent surveys. Additionally, while ECE programs were more likely to already have some focus on early child development, Family Service agencies were more likely to already have some focus on family “wrap-around” support; therefore, the expectations for training needs differed somewhat for this group.

Family Service Agencies that attended the initial United Way SFI Anchorage Focus Group in the summer of 2008 were invited to participate in the project. Of the six initial Family Service Agencies, all expressed interest in participating over the two year period of time.

3. Working within our United Way, Community, Marketing/Public Relations

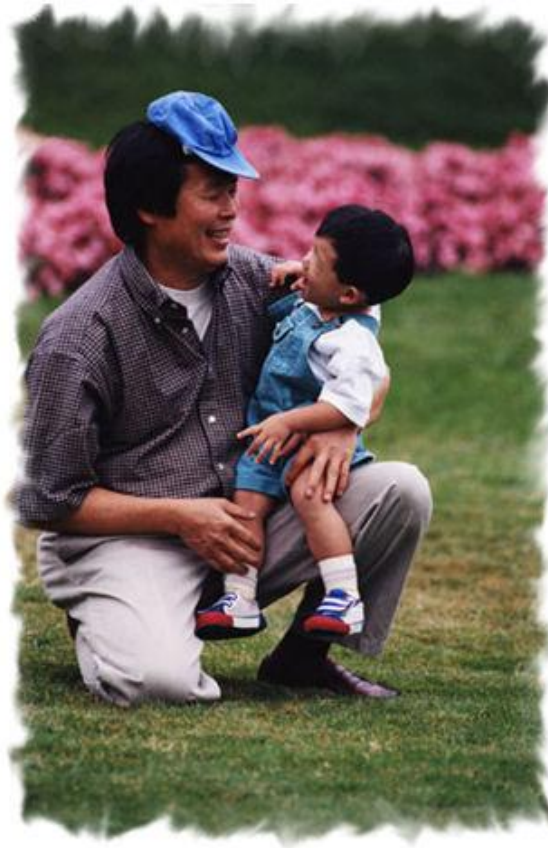
Another element of United Way SFI Anchorage was the incorporation of Strengthening Families into the United Way of Anchorage campaign and other marketing messaging.

What was proposed?

- Expand Strengthening Families to enough partners in Anchorage to reach a “tipping point”
- Adapt Self-Assessment tool for use by family-serving organizations
- Will also need to document our approach, for future replication by others
- What United Way of America requested in addition
- Use Protective Factors to guide funding of providers in early childhood realm (early learning, family support, parent education, child welfare, early child health, etc.)
- Encourage other funders to do the same (including private and government funders)
- Integrate Protective Factors into child welfare, public health, education and family support policies and systems at community and state levels
- Promote use of Self-Assessment and other tools as part of Quality Rating Information System (QRIS) and other quality improvement and professional development efforts

- Train 2-1-1 staff in Protective Factors to help them in screening calls
- Incorporate Protective Factors and SFI into marketing materials and campaign presentations
- Promote adoption of strategies by other United Ways in state

Finally, elements not included in the initial proposal, but later developed, included the targeted expansion of the Community Café concept and process, and integration of the Protective Factors into United Way's funding application in the early childhood action area.



“What has helped the most is that the staff recognizes the things I do for my kids and they always let me know that my kids are well behaved and happy. It gives me confidence when other people recognize my efforts to be a good parent. They always ask how our weekend was, if we did anything special, if anything is new etc... and it feels good to talk about it!”

Evaluation Methodology and Tools

For the past two years United Way SFI Anchorage conducted an evaluation that sought answers to the following question:

“What are the most effective ways to integrate the SFI Protective Factors into ALL systems/organizations/programs that serve families and children in Anchorage, Alaska?”

The evaluation plan was divided into two distinct strategies:

1. Taking the SFI statewide model to scale in ECE programs in the Municipality of Anchorage.
2. Working with a cadre of Family Service Agencies and organizations (not necessarily ECE) to integrate Protective Factors into their current system (or way of doing business).

United Way of Anchorage was the optimal conduit to successfully implement these strategies.

United Way SFI Anchorage activities began with the end in mind. The initial steps of gathering baseline data on programs through Focus Groups and a selection process offered insight into how programs were approaching and serving families. Over the past two years program Self-Assessments, Implementation Plans, Community Café harvests, training evaluations and comments were collected, and, along with the parent, staff and director surveys, the data was analyzed. At the end of the Year One, a Summary of Results was published (*see separate Appendix document*). Based on this information, course changes were made in Year Two. United Way SFI Anchorage used the data-driven decision making process successfully. It provided individual programs opportunities to focus on their own growth while keeping within the parameters of the overall project goals. In addition, the data provided guidance for the Leadership Team to rethink their training strategies. Community Cafés were utilized instead of Focus Groups, as the conversations during the Community Cafés and their harvests provided the depth and breadth needed to clearly articulate the successful practices occurring at the Early Care and Education settings.

The outcomes (*as seen on the logic model on pages 8 and 9*) that aligned with SFI Alaska and program goals provided the framework for the content of the monthly meetings of the United Way SFI Anchorage Leadership Team. On a quarterly basis, the evaluator assisted the United Way SFI Anchorage project by sharing progress on the action steps. These quarterly checks enabled United Way SFI Anchorage to make course changes that improved the process of integrating the Protective Factors. The steps that were unsuccessful were analyzed, as they offered critical insights as well. As a part of a larger National Evaluation by the University of Florida for United Way Worldwide, Progress Reports were submitted, Success Stories were documented and Director Interviews were conducted over the course of the two year grant.

Following is the evaluation plan of activities for 2008-2010.

United Way SFI Anchorage | Evaluation Timeline 2008-2010

Dates	Evaluation Activity	Description/Purpose	Tools	Sources of Data
May – June	Strategic Planning and data sharing	SFI Anchorage Planning Team will convene a strategic planning session to revise and improve the implementation plan for 2008-2010	Analysis of all available data from Directors, Staff, Parents and Planning Teams documentation/observations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SFIA Evaluator • SFI A Planning Team
July	Success Stories	Site evaluators work with project leads to create success stories	Breakthrough/ Success Story Worksheet	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NSFI Site evaluators, • SFIA Project Director
July	Project Lead Interviews	Site evaluators may contribute to the interview process	Interview protocol	SFIA Project Director
August	Collaborative baseline	Family Support Agencies and collaborative organizations aligned with SFI Anchorage will complete a baseline questionnaire	Collaborative Questionnaire	SFIA Project Director
Sept	Staff Satisfaction Survey	All SFI Anchorage staff members will complete an online SFI staff satisfaction survey.	SFI Staff Survey	SFIA Evaluator
Sept – Nov	Family Support Agency Planning	Family Support Agencies will develop a plan to revise their materials based on the cross-walk document	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-Assessment Crosswalk • Planning Document 	SFIA Director, State SFI Director, Evaluator
Sept	Training Workshop Evaluation	Collect data from the past 6 months of training workshops provided through the SFIA project.	SFI Anchorage Training Workshop Evaluation	SFIA Evaluator
Oct	Action Plan revisions	Individual SFI Anchorage centers will revise their 2009 Action Plans to include new priorities (those next in line on their Self-Assessment)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Action Plan • Self-Assessment 2008 data • Data from Surveys; Directors, Staff, Parents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SFIA Project Director • SFIA Center Directors/Teams • -SFIA Evaluator
Oct	Progress Report	Site evaluator will provide evaluation description and data for Progress Reports	Outline of Progress Report	NSFI Site evaluator

Dates	Evaluation Activity	Description/Purpose	Tools	Sources of Data
Dec 09	Data collection from Family Support Agencies	Data from surveys (listed above) will be collected and analyzed. Prep data for use in Family Support Agencies work	Data from: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SFI Director's Survey • SFI Staff Survey • SFI Parent Survey 	SFIA Evaluator
Jan 2010	Final Success Stories	Site evaluators work with project leads to create success stories	Breakthrough/ Success Story Worksheet	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NSFI Site evaluators, • SFIA Project Director
Jan 2010	Final Project Lead Interviews	Site evaluators may contribute to the interview process	Interview protocol	Project lead
March 2010	Final Collection and analysis of evaluation data	Data from observations, surveys, café's, Action Plans, questionnaires, etc. will be gathered and analyzed.	All current data from; Action Plans, Director's Surveys, Staff Surveys, Parent Satisfaction/Parent Café's, Training Workshops, Collaborative Surveys, Self-Assessment pre/post analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SFIA Planning Team • Evaluator
Apr 2010	Final Report	Report on progress achieved in Year 1 & 2	Final Report Outline	SFIA Evaluator

Evaluation Methodology

The evaluation methodology focused on the following areas:

1. Early Care and Education Programs
 - a. Self-Assessment Analysis Pre/Post
 - b. Implementation Planning (linked to program outcome) Analysis
 - c. Program Implementation Analysis of:
 - i. Parent Perspectives
 - ii. Staff Perspectives
 - iii. Director Perspectives
 - d. Required Training/Workshop Evaluation Analysis
 - e. Learning Network Analysis
2. Family Service Agencies
 - a. Self-Assessment Cross-Walk
 - b. Analysis of one year goal
3. Working With United Way/Marketing/Public Awareness
 - a. Allocations process update

1. Early Care and Education Programs

a. Self-Assessment Analysis

Programs were rated using a Self-Assessment tool. Items on the Self-Assessment were assigned ratings of: Excellent, Fair, Poor, or N/A. The items were grouped into seven strategies, shown below. An average score for each strategy was computed, using the values 3 for Excellent, 2 for Fair, and 1 for Poor. Overall, the Self-Assessment pre/post measures improved by 37 percent. The target was for an increase by 30 percent overall.

All Programs	Average Score		Percent Improvement
	2008	2010	
Strategy #1: Facilitate Friendships and Mutual Support	2.20	2.34	5%
Strategy #2: Strengthen Parenting	2.34	2.47	4%
Strategy #3: Respond to Family Crisis	2.47	2.54	2%
Strategy #4: Link Families to Services and Opportunities	2.14	2.40	9%
Strategy #5: Facilitate Children's Social and Emotional Development	2.63	2.67	2%
Strategy #6: Observe and Respond to Early Warning Signs of Child Abuse	2.61	2.74	4%
Strategy #7: Value and Support Parents	2.13	2.47	11%

Self-Assessment Data Synopsis

1. Strategies that built in value toward parenting and the value of building relationships with parents worked.
2. When training strategies concentrated on communication, collaboration with organizations and linking parents to support networks, there were direct improvements within the programs.
3. Community Cafés strengthened parents, staff and program strategies. It became a respectful method to meet the rigors of building relationships and increasing communication by all.
4. Self-Assessments need to be conducted on a semi-annual basis to ensure that programs understand and learn which strategies work best for them and which do not.

b. Implementation Plan Analysis

A four-part questionnaire was developed to capture what Directors perceived to be evidence of changes in practices by their staff. The questions were based on the logic model short-term outcomes/impact we expected in knowledge, awareness and attitudes. Directors were asked to review their Implementation Plan goals and answer the four questions with the goals in mind.

SFI Implementation Survey Results

In what ways have your SFI goals increased awareness within your Early Care and Education program of the Protective Factors?

Program #1: As you work within the strengthening families model you are more aware on a day to day basis of what the Protective Factors are and what role you can play in helping each family in your scope of contact. Our staff is more aware as this becomes a larger part of who you are as a center and in your contact/communication with families.

Program #2: While we have always valued the way families were involved going thru the Strengthening Families Initiative made us more aware and intentional about our relationship with families. Thru the training of all staff on the Protective Factors at the beginning we realized the need for it to become a part of the Orientation Training piece so that all new staff would be on the same page. As well, we realized the need for on-going training and support to see it implemented into staff's knowledge and skill sets.

Program #3: Throughout this grant period, Child Development Staff were regularly trained on the Protective Factors. In some cases, teams of teachers, administrative staff, parents and other caregivers worked together to develop a plan for the particular challenges specific children faced. The training received through this grant, coupled with our own training has elevated many of our staff to a higher level of professionalism, care-giving, and overall awareness of the challenges and concerns facing children and their families.

Program #4: Many of our SFI goals focused around increasing parent involvement. When parents are more involved, then we have the opportunity to discuss Protective Factors, model them in action, and find out where parents need guidance or assistance.

Program #5: We have established a system of parent/teacher conferences that allows for specific conversations on development, in addition to the semi-annual conferences. I held a cafe with staff in January and we discussed the factors and how we play a part in them. We have held 2 Open Houses to allow parents the opportunity to discuss the classroom environments.

Program #6: One staff member on our team stated, "Being new to the field of early education learning and becoming aware of the Protective Factors has shaped the way I think and interact with families on a daily basis." During our daily conversations with families knowledge of the Protective Factors gives us an opportunity to be more purposeful with the content of our conversations and the conversations become more of a natural process.

Program #7: The Protective Factors have helped facilitate friendship and mutual support though the parent café. We have provided parents with necessary services with our parenting with providence classes, emergency assistants fund and offered one on one meeting times with teachers when needed.

In what ways have your SFI goals increased knowledge within your Early Care and Education program of how to integrate the Protective Factors into your work?

Program #1: I think we have found that it becomes a natural part of the program as you get to know the family dynamics and take time to gain the trust and friendship of the parents.

Program #2: Taking staff thru the strengthening families framework, specifically looking to view the strengths families bring has helped to change the dynamic between the staff on the floor and families. While this has not happened overnight, it is an ongoing process and one that would not have been brought to the forefront without our participation in the Strengthening Families initiative.



Program #3: Probably the most significant change has been in the attitudes of staff working with our youngest youth. Increased communication and feedback with, and for parents we hope has been a big step in providing growing families with a support system that will allow them support and resources should they experience crisis or challenges in their families.

Program #4: In order to integrate Protective Factors into our work, we found that we need to be aware of what the Protective Factors are and how we can assist families. We found that it was helpful to have a true understanding of what the Protective Factors are, how they can be implemented into family life, and the benefits of the increasing Protective Factors in our families.

Program #5: Information has been sent out in newsletters to parents and to staff. My staff cafe provided the opportunity to brainstorm ways of integrating them. I attended the training on Community Cafes and have a better understanding of not just how to hold the open forum cafe, but also how to create the

discussion questions.

Program #6: We have implemented several strategies to build communication and community between staff and families. Simple things such as placing sticky notes near the sign in/out sheet for families to write what they did over the weekend. An inspirational corner for families to write notes about anything happening in their child's life they would like to share, success stories, questions, or just a note to pass along during the day. There is also a suggestion box for families to provide input or feedback. Our Saturday play dates to the zoo, McDonalds, and Bouncing Bears has been a huge success. We have presented two parent cafés and surveyed families to see if a Saturday café would work better for schedules and the feedback was very positive. So we are planning to implement a cafe on Saturday, April 10. Our parent resource library has linked families to services and opportunities. We have a room parent in pre-school who e-mails events in the community to share with families. We also have fun classroom events such as the luau we had today where families brought in foods to share and were invited to come have lunch with their children.

Program #7: Awareness and knowledge of what the Protective Factors are and how families need them to thrive.

In what ways have your SFI goals shaped positive and supportive attitudes within your Early Care and Education program toward integrating the Protective Factors into your staff's work?

Program #1: We have always had a good attitude within the staff to help families and to reach out to each individual as a person not a number or just an entity. This helps us have a positive attitude when it comes to integrating the Protective Factors into the daily scope of the work expected of the staff.

Program #2: Thru this process we have realized that we constantly needed to tweak our plans on involving parents as their needs changed and ours evolved. We also realized the importance of having all staff trained on Strengthening Families as part of the Orientation Process to keep the momentum going.

Program #3: Our program has made significant growth these past two years; safe, positive and developmentally appropriate rooms, staff that are committed to providing the best care possible and that share the vision of the child development center being not only an excellent care center for children but also an extended family for parents - particularly those without other significant support systems.

Program #4: Staff has been very excited to see the increased family involvement (one of our SFI goals). When they see the parents in the center, the teachers know they are making a difference. That feeling motivates them to continue learning about Protective Factors and integrating them into the daily classroom activities.

Program #5: It's really been an opportunity to get back to the roots of why we're here and what our focus should be. It's a chance to show our families that we care enough to hold these events and to obtain trainings on topics that relate to their children. Just taking the time to discuss the factors and ways we can integrate them is a good first step in making it happen. Staff are more motivated because it has given them something to focus on, something to achieve and/or provide.

Program #6: In the toddler classroom the project for the week was creating mail and delivering it to the families at the HQ. The staff, children and families had so much fun as they completed the project and delivered the mail to their parents. Co workers peaked out of their offices to greet the children and the smiles on everyone's faces were priceless. Members coming into the branch smiled and made comments on what the children were doing. This made everyone feel great. It was a true testament to the quality of the curriculum and how it bridged school and family. One parent was training new staff, her child came in and said, "Special delivery for you, mom!" the new staff noticed, it made a statement of what a family friendly place this is to work. This activity was done with toddlers the teachers talked about it with the children all week and there was a great deal of communication with families regarding the visit and what we know about toddler child development, routines etc. (families were warned there may be crying when time to go.) I am happy to say due to the amazing communication there was no crying, however families were prepared and so were the children.

Program #7: The training that was provided by thread has helped the staff understand the Protective Factors and implement them with the families.

Please share examples of how parents have expressed their feeling of support and connection to your Early Care and Education program.

Program #1: One single dad has a daughter who never combed her hair and had less than perfect hygiene. By being a friend to this dad and communicating with him in a non-threatening way we were able to help him in encouraging his daughter in this area. She now has a cute haircut, is aware of how "nice" it is to be clean and is also aware of how to dress appropriately. Dad was actually relieved to have the help of a lady in this area. One mom lost her job and came in to have a "crying session" with the staff. She felt like we were friends who would support her and understand her position. We were able to encourage her to not give up. She got a new job right away. We have had numerous parents come in and ask us for prayer and for support in areas from health issues, to behavioral issues, to family disputes. We are glad to take the time to be available as that seems to be the one thing that impacts both families and individuals.

Program #2: We have developed an open, supportive relationship to a family who joined Hillcrest in the past year. Thru participation at the Parent Dinners they had opened up about some struggles they were having that allowed the staff and other families to reach out to offer concrete support. This relationship has developed to the point where the families trust us to provide great care for their children and follow thru on outside resource referrals. Other families have enjoyed the family centered events that started up thru Strengthening Families such as Moms and Muffins and Dad and Donuts- we even have mothers who were not doing drop-off duty on Moms and Muffins day come in just to meet with other mothers. The mothers especially like having the time to socialize with each other and start their day off with coffee and company. We are reevaluating our Dad and Donuts event to see how we can give the Dads a "purpose" beyond socializing as that does not seem to be strength. Having examples from the other sites on how they incorporated Dads made us realize we may need to find a "purpose" activity for the dads to enjoy.

Program #3: Parents are engaged daily in conversation about their children. The CDC Director and Associate Director have relationships with many families, and are easily recognized by parents and grandparents. Both staff in these management positions is often in the halls and rooms at drop off and pick up times. Parents have been quick to complement staff on the changes they have observed in the Center. Some parents report feeling that the Center is warmer and more welcoming. Two in particular have expressed their gratitude for the additional support they have received in times of family challenges.

Program #4: One of the goals was to create a more welcoming space. Parents have expressed many times that they liked the new lobby area. It's very calm and inviting. We also turned one of our closets into a nursing room, which has been a huge hit. It's in use every day by multiple mothers. Our Friendship (Valentines) and spring (Easter) parties had huge turnout, with parents commenting that they liked the activities.

Program #5: I receive emails from parents thanking me for responding to them promptly. It makes them feel appreciated and important. I had to make a very difficult decision about releasing a staff member, and I had 3 parents respond that they knew it was hard and was disappointed that the teacher would be leaving, but that they respected what I was trying to do for the good of the program. Getting referrals is always a compliment to the program.

Program #6: A parent just e-mailed me and said "That was awesome!!! I loved my little mail and my treat and to see my lil Natbug at work!!! That was fun you guys are awesome! How about that for support.... Cool

Program #7: We have had positive feedback from our parents from the parent café. Many ask when the next one is and if they can do anything to help. Staff has heard parents taking to each other in the classroom. We feel like it has brought parents together and has given them a support system. The room parents have also been positive in connecting parents together to help in the classrooms.



"I feel calmer and more secure about my parenting and my relationship with my child because of the constant support and feedback from staff, and because of my child's happiness and growth in the program."

c. Program Implementation Analysis

The following results measured parent, staff and director's perspectives on how and if the Strengthening Families strategies were learned and practiced throughout the two year grant. The data was gathered through surveying (pre/post), program observations, interviews, and community café harvests.

Parent Survey 2010 Results:

In spring 2010, parents were asked to complete a survey online or on paper. The survey asked parents to reflect back over the past months and rate their experiences with their child care program. The total number of parents to be surveyed was 632, and the number of surveys returned was 165 for a return rate of 26 percent.

Fifty-seven percent (57 percent) of the respondents were parents with children that had been in the program more than 12 months, 30 percent were parents with children that had been in the program 6-12 months, and 13 percent were parents with children in the program for less than 6 months. The following tables display a summary of the results of the 165 completed surveys.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	N/A
In the past six months I:					
Discovered something new about my child's feelings or emotions	46%	46%	4%	1%	3%
Participated in activities with my family at the program	29%	40%	20%	7%	4%
Made new friends with other parents at the program	19%	42%	30%	6%	3%
Asked staff questions about my child's progress	60%	35%	3%	1%	1%
Asked staff for help or suggestions about handling a specific concern about my child	40%	36%	19%	1%	4%
Built strong relationships with staff at the program	42%	48%	9%	0%	1%
Had opportunities to grow through my involvement at the program	26%	41%	22%	3%	9%
Had opportunities to share my skills, experiences, and/or talents with other parents and staff.	21%	37%	28%	4%	11%
Understand the role I play in program decisions.	21%	45%	23%	4%	6%
Received written information about the Strengthening Families project.	27%	42%	18%	3%	9%

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	N/A
I feel comfortable going to staff:					
With questions about my child's strengths and challenges	62%	33%	4%	1%	0%
When I am worried about my child	63%	33%	4%	1%	0%
When seeking services and supports that assist my family	44%	33%	10%	2%	11%
For ways to support my family in a crisis situation	39%	28%	9%	6%	18%

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	N/A
Because of my family's involvement in the child care program:					
I spend more time playing/reading with my child	23%	36%	32%	3%	6%
I have more ways to respond to my child's needs and behaviors	31%	47%	16%	1%	5%
I know more people I can rely on when I have a problem or concern	31%	49%	14%	1%	5%
I know who to contact in the community when I need help	21%	37%	28%	2%	12%
I know more about how to encourage my child's healthy development	30%	52%	13%	2%	3%
My child talks more about how he/she is feeling	33%	42%	12%	1%	12%
I know what my child does best	33%	44%	18%	1%	4%
I know how to encourage my child to be more independent and competent.	37%	45%	14%	1%	3%

Because of my family's involvement in the child care program I feel:	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	N/A
I make better choices about family schedules and activities that reduce family stress	23%	42%	23%	1%	11%
Like I'm part of a community	21%	56%	15%	1%	6%
I have steps I can take to deal with family issues	21%	37%	29%	1%	12%
I'm a better parent	32%	41%	17%	1%	9%
I have a better relationship with my child	35%	38%	17%	1%	9%
That staff care about me and my family	45%	49%	3%	1%	2%
That staff have recognized my growth and efforts	23%	38%	18%	1%	19%
That my efforts to help/volunteer in the program are acknowledged by staff at the program	25%	45%	7%	1%	23%
That I have confidence in my ability to parent and take care of my children	32%	45%	14%	1%	8%

Parent Data Synopsis

1. There is an increase in communication with the staff initiated by the parents with regards to their children's progress, strengths, challenges, successes, and worries.
2. Staff has increased their skills of identifying when a family is in crisis and what resources are available within the community for the families.
3. Compared to last year's survey, parents demonstrated a higher percentage of agreement to the program's practices which have embedded Protective Factors.
4. Strategies that decreased over the past year were staff abilities to identify families' growth and development and the staff ability to acknowledge parent volunteer efforts.
5. Parents strongly responded to the question of "confidence in their ability to parent and care for their children." Comments suggested that the centers provided activities for their children satisfactorily and that the centers were safe places for parents to place their children. There were several comments by parents that they came to the center with confidence as a parent; which continues to date.

The parent data also suggested that parents noticed the shift in practices of engaging them (the parents), especially those having difficulty. Supporting families in crisis and knowing the community resources and support for families in time of need ranked high on the parent comment sheets.

This shift was intentional. Since the 2009 spring data indicated that staff and directors needed to “amp up” their efforts in the crisis awareness areas, thereby resulting in revamping and revising the training schedule for the centers. The new focus of training became identifying families in crisis, knowing the steps for assisting families and children, understanding the effects of neglect and abuse, and how to promote support among families to help in support of each other.

Because parents initiated increased communication and conversations with the child care staff, it can be suggested that staff are more open to parent suggestions and that staff are seeking ways to develop relationships with the parents. As evidenced in the overall parent data, the centers were paying closer attention to relationship-based experiences, nurturing these experiences, and in turn engaging the parents in far different ways beyond the child care center and into the community.



Staff Survey Results

In spring 2010, 144 staff members from the United Way SFI Anchorage Early Care and Education programs were asked to complete a survey. The survey asked respondents to reflect and rate their actions and knowledge prior to and after any Strengthening Families training they had experienced. Surveys were completed by a total of 75 staff members from nine programs which was a 52 percent return rate. The following charts demonstrate the demographics of the staff serving at United Way SFI Anchorage programs.

Program Name	Number of Surveys Received
BP Early Learning Program	8
Boys & Girls Club	19
Providence CCD	28
Child in Transition	1
Credit Union 1	7
King's Kids	3
Williwaw	1
Hillcrest	3
Midnight Sun Montessori	5

Hours of Strengthening Families Training that Staff Participated In		
	Response Percent	Response Count
No hours	26.1%	18
1-5 hours	29.0%	20
6-10 hours	15.9%	11
more than 10 hours	29.0%	20
<i>answered question</i>		69
<i>skipped question</i>		6
Highest Level of Education Completed		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
High School	45.6%	31
Associates Degree	13.2%	9
Bachelors Degree	19.1%	13
Masters Degree or Higher	2.9%	2
CDA (Child Development Associate)	19.1%	13
FDC (Family Development Credential)	0%	0
<i>answered question</i>		68
<i>skipped question</i>		7

Professional Development Experiences Provided at Work (not including Strengthening Families)		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
CDA classes	54.2%	32
FDC classes	0.0%	0
Other credentialing program	13.6%	8
Under graduate college course(s)	25.4%	15
Completed an Associate's degree	13.6%	8
Completed a Bachelors degree	6.8%	4
Graduate school course(s)	6.8%	4
Community conference/workshop	54.2%	32
Program/Center Teams or Implementation	32.2%	19
answered question		59
skipped question		16

Familiarity with Strengthening Families (February 2010)		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Very familiar	40.0%	28
Somewhat familiar	35.7%	25
Know very little about it	15.7%	11
Do not know about it	8.6%	6
answered question		70
skipped question		5

Participation in Strengthening Families On-Site Opportunities		
Answer Options	Yes	Response Count
Self- Assessment	51.6%	62
Developing an action plan	52.5%	59
Learning Network meetings	38.6%	57
Community conference/workshop	55.9%	59
Program /Center implementation team	46.6%	58
Mentoring, coaching or supervising another person	31.6%	57
Receiving mentoring or coaching, or supervision from another person	42.4%	59
answered question		62
skipped question		13

Staff Data Synopsis:

1. Most significant was the shift in practices; knowing how the child welfare system works and that staff know this IS a part of their responsibility.
2. Staff was more highly informed and has concrete strategies they employ when working with families in crisis.
3. It can be safely assumed that because of turnover there exists a percentage of staff unaware of how their daily work relates specifically to strengthening families.
4. 73 percent of the responding staff has increased from not having sufficient information to having a lot of information in serving families in multiple ways.
5. Prior to Strengthening Families, 33 percent of the staff felt they rarely helped parents locate services and resources in the community. This indicated that 1) staff did not know the community resources and services available, and 2) staff was uncomfortable getting involved in what appeared a “family need.”
6. Post-Strengthening Families, 78 percent of the staff usually to always assisted families in locating community resources and services. The highlight to this data is that the staff followed up with the assistance and stayed by the family’s side during times of need.
7. The building of positive relationships with parents has grown significantly among staff. 90 percent of the staff has improved their relationship building practices with parents; they are much more comfortable reaching out to families with the Protective Factors as their foundation.
8. Staff has increased their knowledge of child development and can articulate developmental information to parents. An increase of 35 percent was demonstrated in this area.
9. 70 percent of the responding staff (since SFI) has increased their social/emotional observations of children within the center setting. 100 percent of this total followed up with parents when there were concerns with a child’s behavior.
10. Staff clearly understands the connection that when there is family support, the level of parent’s engagement within the center increased, which contributed to successful children.
11. Prior to Strengthening Families, 90 percent of the staff was comfortable engaging parents except for the hard to reach parents. Since Strengthening Families, 90 percent were now VERY comfortable which indicated staff was clearer about their intentions and understanding of parent interaction and communication strategies. Staff also indicated that they now clearly understand and use the strategies because they “fit” within their everyday life.

Staff opinion of the amount Strengthening Families improved their program		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Not at all	0.0%	0
Very little	0.0%	0
Moderately	42.6%	20
A great deal	42.6%	20
Entirely	6.4%	3
Do not know	8.5%	4
answered question		47
skipped question		4

Overall, the programs have improved because of Strengthening Families embedded within the child care center's practices. The following charts demonstrate the amount of increase in the specific key strategies of the SF framework. These strategies directly relate to the United Way outcome of *Parents feel supported by and connected to their care and education program site through:*

- *Increased awareness by Early Care and Education programs of the Protective Factors*
- *Increased knowledge by Early Care and Education program s of how to integrate the Protective Factors into their work*
- *Positive and supportive attitudes by Early Care and Education programs toward integrating the Protective Factors into their work.*

Before Strengthening Families					
Rating of items before and after Strengthening Families involvement. 0 = Poor 1 = Could use work 2 = Good 3 = Excellent DK = Don't Know					
Answer Options	0	1	2	3	DK
Staff Morale and Culture	6%	35%	37%	17%	5%
Father-involvement in the program	4%	49%	27%	9%	11%
Number of activities / events for parents and families	8%	36%	32%	19%	5%
Ability of program to address children's social/ emotional and / or developmental issues	2%	22%	49%	22%	4%
Attendance at program activities and events by parents and / or families	9%	22%	42%	22%	4%
Opportunities for parent feedback	4%	15%	49%	27%	5%
Parent input on programs and policies	6%	34%	28%	23%	9%
Events / activities organized by parents	17%	31%	29%	15%	8%

Since Strengthening Families

Answer Options	0	1	2	3	DK
Staff Morale and Culture	0%	22%	37%	39%	1%
Father-involvement in the program	0%	26%	33%	31%	11%
Number of activities / events for parents and families	2%	12%	43%	41%	2%
Ability of program to address children's social/emotional and / or developmental issues	0%	14%	38%	45%	4%
Attendance at program activities and events by parents and / or families	0%	18%	30%	48%	4%
Opportunities for parent feedback	0%	9%	38%	48%	5%
Parent input on programs and policies	2%	18%	29%	39%	13%
Events / activities organized by parents	4%	26%	31%	22%	16%

Director's Survey Analysis

In spring 2010, nine directors of the United Way SFI Anchorage Early Care and Education programs were asked to complete a survey. The survey asked respondents to reflect and rate their actions and knowledge prior to and after any Strengthening Families training they had experienced. Surveys were completed by all nine directors.

Using this survey, the items were grouped into seven strategies shown below. An average score for each strategy was computed, where 0 = no information, 1 = very little information, 2 = some information, and 3 = a lot of information.

Responses from the Nine Directors	Average Rating		
	Before Strengthening Families	Since Strengthening Families	Percent Increase
Strategy #1: Facilitate Friendships and Mutual Support	1.31 (very little)	2.26 (some)	32%
Strategy #2: Strengthen Parenting	1.70 (some)	2.69 (a lot)	33%
Strategy #3: Respond to Family Crisis	1.25 (very little)	2.58 (a lot)	45%
Strategy #4: Link Families to Services and Opportunities	1.04 (very little)	2.30 (some)	42%
Strategy #5: Facilitate Children's Social and Emotional Development	1.61 (some)	2.67 (a lot)	51%
Strategy #6: Observe and Respond to Early Warning Signs of Child Abuse	1.59 (some)	2.51 (a lot)	52%
Strategy #7: Value and Support Parents	1.46 (very little)	2.41 (some)	47%

Director Data Synopsis

1. There were significant increases in all strategies of the Strengthening Families program, according to the director's perspective.
2. Director's felt that 100 percent of their staff trained in Strengthening Families had improved their skills and their practices with children and families in the following areas:
 - Opportunities for families to socialize and foster a sense of community at their centers were noted as most improved in the data.
 - Staff helped parents to see and understand the social skills and developmentally appropriate emotional behaviors in their children.
 - Staff was equipped with knowledge and information on age appropriate discipline and reasonable expectations.
 - Staff worked with parents on plans to seek resources and community services; 44 percent of the staff had no information on this prior to Strengthening Families and 88 percent post-Strengthening Families have a lot of information.
 - Staff understands and utilizes consultation services for challenging behaviors now that they have been in Strengthening Families programs.
 - 90 percent of the staff now felt prepared to work with families experiencing extreme difficulties. Prior to Strengthening Families, a significant number of staff and directors did not see this as their responsibility.
 - Observation skills, communication skills, strategy implementation skills and practices have all improved over the past two years because of the intensity, frequency and skill development of the staff, directors and parents involved in the Strengthening Families programs.

"Knowing why your child behaves the way they do is very empowering in learning to deal with it properly. As well as we know our children, I'm not an expert when it comes to child development so their direction has helped me immensely."

Required Training/Workshop Evaluation Analysis

12-Hour Training Program for Strengthening Families

*“When someone with the authority of a teacher, say,
Describes the world and you’re not in it,
There’s a moment of psychic disequilibrium,
as if you looked into a mirror and saw nothing.”
~ Adrienne Rich ~*

Workshop Evaluation Results

Throughout the year, staff members were asked to complete a paper evaluation after each workshop or training they attended regarding Strengthening Families. Twenty required trainings were conducted over the course of the grant. One-hundred-ninety (190) evaluations were completed.

The majority of the participants rated the trainings very high:

- 98 percent agreed or strongly agreed that the activities, materials and information on the topic presented were of high quality.
- 94 percent agreed or strongly agreed that they were more knowledgeable about understanding embedding Protective Factors into home/program setting.
- 92 percent agreed or strongly agreed that the training’s activities, materials, and information would be highly useful.
- 97 percent agreed or strongly agreed that their comments and suggestions were listened to.
- 94 percent agreed or strongly agreed that their questions and concerns were addressed.
- 95 percent agreed or strongly agreed that the workshop encouraged them to become more involved in parent/school involvement.
- 95 percent agreed or strongly agreed that they feel comfortable sharing what was learned in this workshop with others.
- 99 percent agreed or strongly agreed that the presenter was prepared and knowledgeable.
- 98 percent agreed or strongly agreed the presentation was relevant to increasing their knowledge and skills on strengthening families in the home/program setting.

What the Data Told Us

- Increase the minimum training hours from 12 to 15. Lay a solid groundwork “base camp” for Strengthening Families training foundation.
- In order to better serve the training and professional development needs of the staff, the training from here forward will need to be linked to each program’s Professional Development Plan.
- Due to high turnover, orientation for new staff must include clear expectations of the 15 hours of training required to employ the Strengthening Families strategies within the classroom.
- The Workshop Evaluation tool needs to be revised to explore more depth and breadth of the training attended.
- Embed training on the SFI Self-Assessment process and Implementation process into future training schedules. Training needs to focus on the Leadership Teams completing the Self-Assessment (there are online webinars to train on completion of the Self-Assessment and Plan).
- Keep the training “organic” as well as planned. Developmental needs of each program will emerge as the level of engagement with Strengthening Families increases.
- Trainers must have been trained and/or mentored by a trainer from the Stronger Together training team.



Learning Network Analysis

The following is an analysis of the two years of SFI Alaska/Anchorage Learning Networks.

Date	Learning Network Topic	Link to Protective Factor	Percentage Overall Satisfaction (Average of Strongly Agree/Agree responses)	Suggested Improvements (if any)
February 2009	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Professional Development Staff Development /Orientation <p><i>Stronger Together: Creating a Path for our Children, One Step at a Time. Presenter: Lee Lesser</i></p>	Knowledge of Parent/Child Development	72%	Maybe a blog of some sort to share reflection time or suggestions as people make changes in their programs.
March 2009	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Trauma & impact on young children <p><i>"The Impact of Trauma on our Very Young Children. Presenter: Josh Arvidson</i></p>	Social Emotional Support for Family/Child	90%	Really liked the discussion board idea. I think that would allow our wonderful team of Early Childhood professionals to share some MORE of their ideas that they use to support this growth in their children and families. In an hour ½ session it is hard to get the professional development time, reflection time, and learn more application ideas. So this would allow each of us to reflect or share after each session and we would learn so much more from each other in terms of application ideas.
April 2009	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parent Partnerships & Leadership <p><i>"United Way 211" Presenters: Karen Bitzer & Sue Brogan</i></p>	Parent Resilience/Social Connections	69%	An agenda a week prior would be helpful.

Date	Learning Network Topic	Link to Protective Factor	Percentage Overall Satisfaction (Average of Strongly Agree/Agree responses)	Suggested Improvements (if any)
May 2009	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Linking families to services and opportunities <i>"Family Partnerships"</i> <i>Presenter: Carolyn Hoseth</i>	Concrete Support in Times of Need	87%	More sharing of stories and successes among our Alaska SFI programs.
June 2009	Annual SFI Alaska Picnic	Our Programs' Stories	<i>*Note: only 1 response was recorded and was from coordinating agency (not an SFI Program)</i>	None
July 2009	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Professional Development Staff Development <i>"Engaging Parents"</i> <i>Presenter: Shelia Wray</i>	Knowledge of Parent/Child Development	80%	None
August 2009	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Social/Emotional Development <i>Embedding Mental Health into our Early Care and Education programs</i> <i>Presenter: Shirley Pittz</i>	Social Emotional Support for Family/Child	78%	None
September 2009	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Linking families to services and support opportunities <i>"Strengthening Families: Concrete Support in Times of Need"</i> Presenters: Beth Snyder & Pam Christianson	Concrete Support in Times of Need	93%	None

Date	Learning Network Topic	Link to Protective Factor	Percentage Overall Satisfaction (Average of Strongly Agree/Agree responses)	Suggested Improvements (if any)
October 2009	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Social / Emotional Development <i>"Introduction to the Pyramid Model – The Next Three Years" Presenter: Erin Kinavey</i>	Social Emotional Support for Family/Child	100%	None
November 2009	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parent Partnerships & Leadership <i>"Alaska Parent Information Resource Center (AKPIRC)" Presenters: Julie Jessal & Karin Halpin</i>	Making Connections	86%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The learning networks are very helpful and informative. I received a reminder call to listen in and that helped. SMILE Life has been busy and a friendly call was even better than an email. Thanks Kathy Hall. The little things you do make a big difference. Have Sheltering Arms present on how to embed in agency systems- job descriptions, policies, etc
December 2009	Holiday Gathering for SFI Alaska	Social Connections	25 program participants were present	Fun and interactive
January 2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Child and Family Literacy Development <i>"Language and Literacy" Presenter: Karin Halpin</i>	Knowledge of Child and Family Development	86%	None

Date	Learning Network Topic	Link to Protective Factor	Percentage Overall Satisfaction (Average of Strongly Agree/Agree responses)	Suggested Improvements (if any)
February 2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sustaining the Heart of SFI <i>Update on Strengthening Families: Presenter: July Langford</i>	Sustainability of SFI	79%	I would like each member attending to briefly give their name, number and contact info. Then identify who they serve and services provided. With this sharing of info gain knowledge regarding who might connect my clients with for resources. This will build on my community contacts
March 2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community Cafés <i>“Community Café’s of Alaska: Changing the Lives of Children, One Conversation at a Time. Presenters: Robin Higa & Panu Lucier</i>	Social Connections	80%	None
April 2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents Advocating for their Children <i>“Stone Soup Group: Who We Are and What We Do” Presenter: Barbara Chambers</i>	Parent Resilience	93%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have presenter return and have a panel with parents and other family support providers in the community. I find them very helpful as they are. The only thing that would probably be helpful to us would be to have the information in the power points in another format that is more compact. This would be helpful for training follow-up and referral.

Date	Learning Network Topic	Link to Protective Factor	Percentage Overall Satisfaction (Average of Strongly Agree/Agree responses)	Suggested Improvements (if any)
May 2010	SFI Alaska Picnic Gathering	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sustaining the Momentum • Dialogue with SFI Anchorage Leadership Team and SFI Alaska/Anchorage Programs. 	N/A	N/A

Learning Network Data Synopsis

1. Increase the engagement of the programs in planning and conducting Learning Networks. For example, assign one program per month to determine the Learning Network focus (based on the Protective Factors) and to co-lead the Learning Network. This will increase the ownership and buy-in of the participants and ensure they will respond more actively than passively.
2. Consider having more face-to-face Learning Networks. Perhaps every other month meeting together to discuss issues related to Protective Factors as a Community Café style.
3. Link additional resources and research to the Learning Network presentations to further the development of content learned.
4. Apply adult learning strategies throughout the SFI Learning Network. For example, enhance the learning by utilizing online tools that include visuals, discussion boards, auditory engagement, videos, etc.



“Many of the teachers are willing to spend individual time with me and my children at the end of the day. We talk about the events of the day and ways to help my children through any challenges that may be going on. We also discuss how to reinforce good behavior. It is tremendously helpful.”

2. Family Service Agencies

The initial step was to conduct a “crosswalk” between the existing Self-Assessment strategies present in Early Care and Education Programs and Family Support strategies. The following is a comparison of the Crosswalk strategic categories.

Value and Nurture Parents	
Early Care and Education	Family Service
14 strategies in total.	<p>6 strategies were consistent:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1) Volunteer opportunities2) Cultural Competence3) Recognizing Parent contributions4) Parent socialization activities5) Fatherhood activities6) Outreach activities <p>Additional strategies not related to ECE:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Universal first contact• Leadership of parents• Facilitating individual family in times of need• Leadership opportunities for parents• Direct support for parents and caregivers i.e. food, transportation, etc.• Parents ideas are welcomed and utilized• Parents report feeling respected by program staff.

Facilitate Friendships and Promote Mutual Support	
Early Care and Education	Family Service
7 strategies in total	<p>1 strategy was consistent:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Program staff reaches out to isolated families and introduces them to other parents at family events and connecting them with community resources. <p>Additional strategies not related to ECE:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> As much as possible, parents are connected to other parents in the program Additional family supports programs are developed as needs in the community are identified. Informal support systems are honored and respected.
Strengthen Parenting	
Early Care and Education	Family Service
13 strategies in total.	<p>9 Strategies align with ECE.</p> <p>Additional strategies not related to ECE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents and other caregivers have access to a comprehensive array of programs and activities that offer a variety of ways to learn and build skills. Parenting curricula core components include, at a minimum, information on child growth and development, stress and anger management, positive discipline, promoting alternatives to corporal punishment, effective communication and strengthening family support networks. Programs and activities provide opportunities for parents to become more confident and competent at parenting. Parents and other caregivers report changing their parenting techniques based on gaining knowledge about normal child growth and development.

Facilitate Children's Social and Emotional Development	
Early Care and Education	Family Service
8 strategies total.	6 strategies align with ECE. No additional strategies listed.
Link Families to Services and Opportunities	
Early Care and Education	Family Service
5 strategies in total.	1 strategy aligns: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff makes referrals to outside services and use consistent strategies to acquire services.
Respond to Family Crises	
Early Care and Education	Family Service
10 strategies in total.	8 strategies align with ECE. Additional strategies not related to ECE: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff receives support when working with families under stress through appropriate supervision. Parents and other caregivers report knowing where to find resources in the community when they need help. Parents and other caregivers report feeling that program staff respects them.
Serve as an Early Warning System for Child Abuse/Neglect	
Early Care and Education	Family Service
9 strategies in total.	6 strategies align with ECE. Additional strategies not related to ECE: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff has regular contact and maintains positive relationships with local child protective service staff.

Family Service Analysis

A Focus Group convened in July 2008 provided evidence that there was enough interest among Family Service Agencies to engage in this work. At the end of Year One, the United Way SFI Anchorage Leadership Team conducted a “crosswalk” of the Early Care and Education strategies to the Family Service strategies currently employed within Family Support organizations (*see results on previous pages*). Beginning in Year Two of United Way SFI Anchorage, the Leadership Team extended the initiative’s family support approach to United Way Partner agencies that worked with families in a supportive context. Application packets were distributed in July 2009 to request formal intention for participation in United Way SFI Anchorage. Applications required a program description, letters of support from clients, staff, and a board member, a list of staff members and backgrounds, and a Memorandum of Understanding. Six Family Service Agencies were selected from the application pool.

An orientation on the Strengthening Families Initiative and the approach to the project was conducted on August 6, 2009 with four to five agencies attending. An overview of the SFI framework was presented by Shirley Pittz, State of Alaska, and an overview of the project was delivered by Karen Benning, United Way of Anchorage. As an initial step in the first goal of the SFI Anchorage Family Services program, a review and revision of the Self-Assessment for Early Care and Education was conducted. During the orientation day, the Family Service Agencies embarked on the mission of revising each key strategy from the SFI model for building Protective Factors. Each strategy and each corresponding indicator was examined for relevancy for supporting families from a Family Service Agency perspective. All edits and feedback were gathered and submitted to key staff at the Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP) immediately following the August meeting. A follow up phone call occurred in September 2009 with the CSSP national staff, and evaluators provided an opportunity for further clarification and feedback from the Anchorage group of Family Support Agencies.

Subsequent communication from the CSSP informed us that the inclusion of our feedback would be evident in the final version of the SFI Self-Assessment tool and that the Anchorage Family Service Agencies involved in the project would beta test the new tool. In October 2009 we were told that although we wouldn’t be involved in the beta testing of the tool, we would be invited to log in and provide more feedback while there was still an active contract with the developer. The new Self-Assessment tool was available in February 2010 without further involvement from United Way SFI Anchorage. The final tool is inclusive of the group’s feedback and reflects the needs of family support practice.

Family Service Agencies engaged in other related activities such as participation in ongoing Learning Network calls, national training from the Parent Services Project and an extensive orientation to the Community Café process in January 2010. An additional meeting was convened January 27, 2010 with the Family Service Agencies to provide an update of the project’s goals following all of the changes to the original plan due to CCSP’s efforts. The Hospice of Anchorage Forget-Me-Not Program completed the Self-Assessment tool and created a plan for using it for future programming. The project coordinator met with Hospice to provide further input around how the Self-Assessment might be used. Plans are now underway for linking existing Self-Assessment tools that are in use in Family Service Agencies with the SFI Self-Assessment for possible linkages and to avoid duplication of efforts.

Family Services Data Synopsis

1. Make sure the goals of the SFI Anchorage Family Service Agencies lead to the outcome of “Parents feel supported by and connected to the Family Service Agencies whose services they access.”
2. The SFI Family Service Agencies program lacked focus and energy. Once the initial goal was met, the strength of the group diminished down to two active agencies. Family Service programs were unsure of the next steps which were not clearly articulated to them.
3. Involve SFI Family Service Agencies in the planning and implementation steps for any future work. Allow them to determine their goals and where they want to place their energy.



3. Working within our United Way, Community, Marketing/Public Relations (Analysis of Activities)

Integration of Protective Factors into Funding Application

At the same time United Way of Anchorage was awarded the Strengthening Families grant, the organization was also in the midst of transitioning to a new funding application process, to begin with funding year FY11. Prior to this transition, funding was based on an allocation formula so old nobody could remember how it had been developed, and there was no requirement for reporting performance measures.

The FY11 funding application process was completed in mid-March. Ten applications were funded in the Education: Early Childhood action area, nine local programs and one statewide systems-focused initiative. Of the nine local programs funded, performance measures will now include:

	<u># Programs reporting</u>
<u>How much was done (outputs)</u>	
• # families who receive information, training & education	9
• # children 0-5 receiving screenings, early interventions	5
• # referrals provided to families	4
<u>How well was it done (process?)</u>	
• % families who feel respected and supported by program	5
<u>How are clients better off (results?)</u>	
• #/% families w/increased engagement in child's early development	7
• #/% families who report an increase in protective factors	4
• #/% children 0-5 showing increased development	5

One program that had previously identified itself in the Education: Youth action area applied in Education: Early Childhood this year because of its work with teens who are pregnant or have young children, and they are adopting Strengthening Families into their program.

Additionally, the other three United Way of Anchorage action areas (Income, Health, and Education: Youth) changed one of their application performance measures, from customer satisfaction, to customers who feel respected and supported by the program.

Accomplishments

1. Upon receipt of first-year results, United Way was able to include compelling SFI information in marketing materials.
2. United Way internal management now understands how SFI contributes to the ultimate community result in the Education: Early Childhood action area.
3. Developed strong working relationships with partners that brought supplemental strengths to the initiative, such as training expertise in the Protective Factors.
4. Developed performance measures to integrate the Protective Factors into the United Way funding allocation process.
5. United Way provided in-kind support of marketing director to develop SFI poster for Alaska sites.
6. Connected community members with United Way's work who might not otherwise have had a previous connection with United Way; not only with SFI, but by sharing other work with sites, such as 2-1-1, Earned Income Tax Credit, etc.

Challenges

1. Lack of understanding of SFI as an approach, not a separate or "add-on" program; also, lack of understanding that it must be tailored to fit individual program needs and resources, that it's not a "one size fits all" initiative.
2. Due to lack of understanding, inability to develop layperson language for campaign and other marketing materials.
3. Not a direct service provider.
4. Difficulty in explaining how SFI fit into overall community plan for the goal of ensuring more children begin school ready to succeed.

United Way Keys to success

1. Getting early buy-in from key partners by soliciting and incorporating their input from the very beginning, building a plan based on the group's best thinking.
2. Building on that early buy-in, having, from the outset, an enthusiastic, well-connected, committed core team.
3. Establishing a strong working relationship with statewide initiative leadership.
4. Recognizing that specific implementation strategies must be tailored to individual program needs and resources; what works for an employer-based child care center may not work for a nonprofit center.
5. Having a dedicated staff to provide ongoing, one-on-one technical (and moral!) support.
6. Keeping an "eye on the prize" (long-term goals) throughout strategic planning discussions

Community Cafés

Community Cafés were the “shining star” for relationship development and conversation starters among staff and parents. Now viewed as an integral part of United Way SFI Anchorage, Community Cafés have a force all their own. Parent led cafés are becoming the new focus for a few of the centers. “Donuts for Dads” and “Muffins for Moms” were the energizers for parents to connect with each other while having a treat. Parents reported looking forward to these weekly events to build upon relationships within the center. These subtle but significant activities made Strengthening Families a TRUE community builder. Without Community Cafés, the relationship development strategies for Strengthening Families would be much more exclusive and staff driven.

Seven United Way SFI Anchorage programs consistently hosted cafés since 2009. These programs included: Williwaw, Little Bears, Hillcrest, Credit Union One, Providence Child Development Center, Midnight Sun Montessori, and Boys and Girls Clubs. King's Kids have one scheduled in May, and BP Early Learning Center plans to schedule a café in June.

Sample Feedback | Community Café Feedback

Name of Strengthening Families Site: Credit Union 1 Learning Center

Dates of Café: August 20, 2009 and December 3, 2009

Attendance by:	August 20 Number in attendance	December 3 Number in attendance
Parents	4	4
Children	0	0
Staff	2	3

Café Questions

1. Think about a challenging time in your family. How did you get through it?
2. What family traditions do you want to pass on to your child/Children?

Second Café

1. What experiences did you find memorable as a child. Why?
2. How would you incorporate these experiences in your children?
3. Parenting is part natural and part learned. What can you do when you need more information? Does this make you feel supported?

Comments from the Café

Parents were receptive, open and positive. *“I am inspired to make family traditions and put more thought and into holiday practices and celebrations. I think the goal of building connections was definitely reached.”*

Parents felt very supported in child development, they felt very comfortable! They loved it, they would attend another one. We built great connections with returning families as well as new ones.

Community Café General Comments from Parents and Staff

- I left these cafes with a feeling that I was connected to each family deeper than I was when we all walked in the door. I felt that each parent had a new person they felt comfortable with and could turn to in times of need. Many parents expressed their comfort with us and all who attended left with a piece of a new family puzzle. I truly look forward to connecting those pieces again at our next café!
- The harvest was the most connected time during our cafes. By this time families were more relaxed and willing to open up. By their body language and vibe, they put out a very warm feeling. This made staff feel accomplished and more connected than ever!
- At our second café parents were more open with their answers because they knew what to expect. Our families left both cafes feeling supported and emotionally connected with all of the staff.
- This experience of attending a café was great and we can't wait to continue 'sharing the wisdom'. Thank you so much for providing the training to our staff to make this experience happen! We really appreciate your time and commitment. We will now be presenting more café's on a quarterly basis.
- One father shared this after a community café: He likes being with other parents and being able to share thoughts and ideas with them. He was concerned about his child's development and being with parents at the café and bouncing ideas off of them has normalized his child's behavior for him.
- One of our sites requested one Strengthening Families training session would be set up in the 'café model.' The topic of early literacy was chosen and parents were invited to join staff. Questions posed at this café included: I feel that early language and literacy means...; Things I like to do with my child that promote early language and literacy are...; Playing and interacting with my child is important to me because....
- We have found parents and staff are hungry to connect and to have meaningful conversations with each other. In this age of electronic, instant connectivity, families are finding, yes, they are connected. But are these connections really satisfying, helpful, affirming, and deep? Through the community café experience, they have discovered that face to face conversations and discussions with other parents have been missing from their lives. The Community Café process has truly become a promising model to strengthen our families, identify and build on their strengths, while embedding Protective Factors into the everyday fabric of their lives.
- One of our sites characterized their first café as "speed dating for parents." After the café, families seemed more than ready to start making connections by exchanging names and phone numbers. Out of this grew Donuts for Dads. One morning a month dads are encouraged to drop their children off at child care and take a little time to 'hang out' and enjoy donuts made by the center cook. Mothers were determined not to be 'left out,' and are now doing the same with Muffins for Moms.
- After attending quarterly community cafes, parents at one center asked staff members to meet on Saturdays at McDonalds to talk and share while their children play.

Success Story #2

Hello,

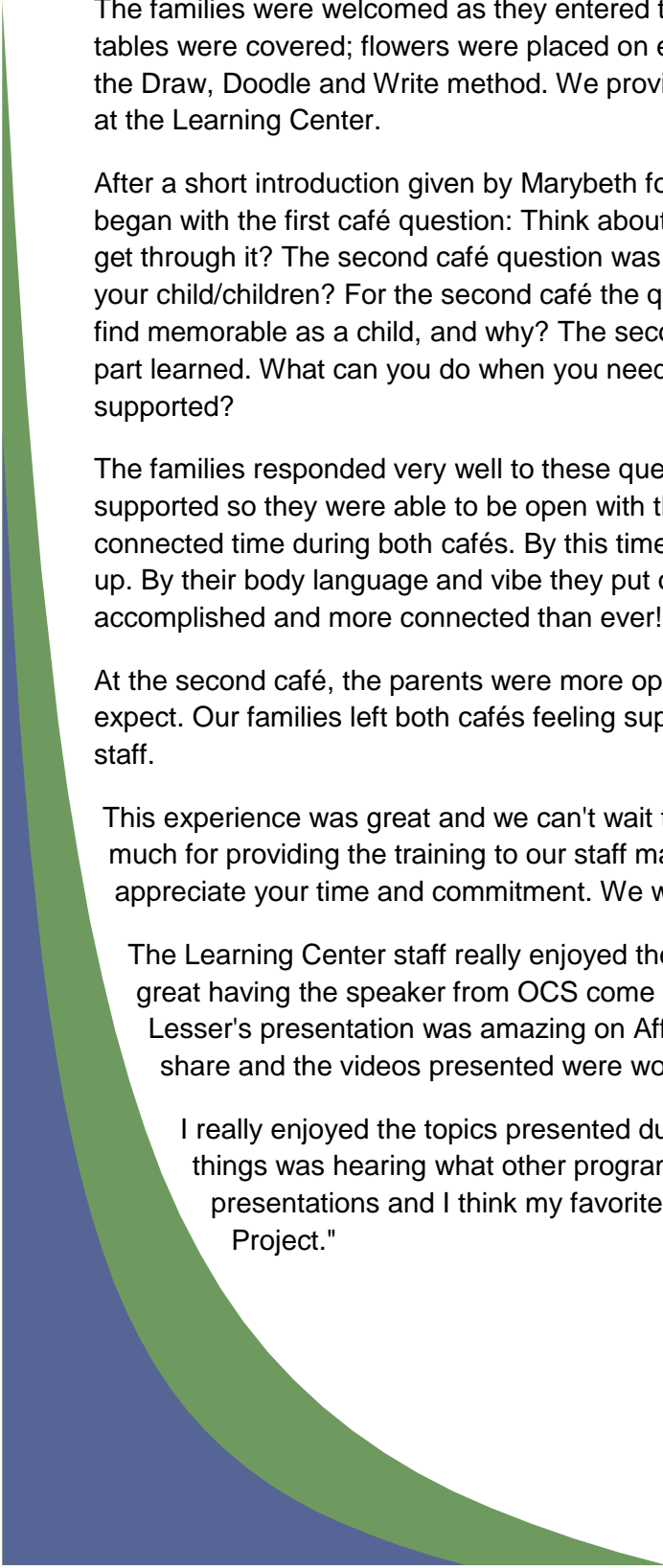
I wanted to share my experiences with the 2 parent cafés that I have attended and participated in. At both cafes I was a host at our tables and joined in conversations with our families. During these times I really felt like I was a part of an extended family. The atmosphere during these cafes was very comfortable and inviting for me and made me feel like I was sitting at a table at home with friends. Each topic we explored seemed to be very important to each parent and family, each person spoke about experiences and difficulties they had and how they conquered them or was able to find the help they needed. During each harvest the host of each table was able to express and relay feedback on the topics our families explored and the families all joined in with each other to form what seemed like a concrete base for future cafes. I left these cafes with a feeling that I was connected to each family deeper than I was when we all walked in the door. I felt that each parent had a new person they felt comfortable with and could turn to in times of need. Many parents expressed their comfort with us and all who attended I feel left with a piece of a new family puzzle. I truly look forward to connecting those pieces again at our next café!

Lead Teacher

Anchorage-based Center

Our learning center has presented three Community Cafés. Our first café was for staff and was presented at a staff meeting. During this meeting we informed the teaching staff about all five Protective Factors: Resiliency, Adequate Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development, Concrete Support, Array of Social Connections, and Healthy Social Emotional Development. After reviewing these we began the café process. First we did the gathering ritual: everyone brings something different to the group. Everyone brought something that reflected them, and at the end choose something to take home and we shared why. Then we discussed some potential questions that would later be used at our parent café. After reviewing the questions we grouped together to Harvest the Wisdom among the group. We shared how our views have changed or what ‘aha’ moment we had. The staff got to experience how a parent café would be presented. It was a great sharing experience. I received some chocolate from Guatemala, another staff member brought a quilt she had made, other cookies, and another shared a great story of her childhood.

During the first parent café, Marybeth was the facilitator; Kellie and Kayla were the table hosts. During the second café Kellie was the facilitator, Kayla and Laura were the table hosts.



The families were welcomed as they entered the room that was very nicely decorated. The tables were covered; flowers were placed on each table along with pens, markers and paper for the Draw, Doodle and Write method. We provided dinner and child care for the families enrolled at the Learning Center.

After a short introduction given by Marybeth for the first café and Kellie for the second, we began with the first café question: Think about a challenging time in your family. How did you get through it? The second café question was: what family traditions do you want to pass on to your child/children? For the second café the questions we used were: what experience did you find memorable as a child, and why? The second question was; Parenting is part natural and part learned. What can you do when you need more information, does this make you feel supported?

The families responded very well to these questions; they felt increasingly comfortable and supported so they were able to be open with their answers. The harvest was the most connected time during both cafés. By this time families were more relaxed and willing to open up. By their body language and vibe they put out a very warm feeling. This made staff feel accomplished and more connected than ever!

At the second café, the parents were more open with their answers because they knew what to expect. Our families left both cafés feeling supported and emotionally connected with all of the staff.

This experience was great and we can't wait to continue "sharing the wisdom." Thank you so much for providing the training to our staff making this experience happens! We really appreciate your time and commitment. We will be presenting more cafés on a quarterly basis.

The Learning Center staff really enjoyed the presentation on child abuse and neglect. It was great having the speaker from OCS come and presents the PowerPoint presentation. Lee Lesser's presentation was amazing on Affirming Diversity. She had great resource books to share and the videos presented were wonderful.

I really enjoyed the topics presented during the Learning Networks. One of my favorite things was hearing what other programs were up to. I really liked the PowerPoint presentations and I think my favorite one was the introduction to the "Pyramid Model Project."

Overall Accomplishments and Keys to Success

Accomplishments

1. Strengthened partner relationships and cross sector team.
2. Further integration of Strengthening Families in **thread** services, specifically professional development and among **thread** staff.
3. Created a cohort peer support model for participating programs.

Keys to Success

1. Designated coordinator to follow up with sites, provide support and next steps direction, and provide technical assistance.
2. Maintaining strong leadership team work with clearly defined roles and responsibilities.
3. Augmenting Strengthening Families with mental health consultation, community cafe model, and on-site technical assistance.
4. Coordinated Learning Network calls.
5. Building the evaluation and continuous improvement process into each implementation plan is essential. Evaluating to inform progress/change as well as implementation and support needs/changes. A must for data-driven decision making.
6. Connecting to Early Childhood Comprehensive Services (ECCS) plan with State level support.
7. Funding for two years for full implementation of project.
8. Focusing on sustainability and broad based community impact; embedding Strengthening Families model into United Way allocations.
9. Developing a survey for parents new to program to help serve them better

“One of my children has ADHD. His teacher had a grandchild who also has ADHD; she was able to understand his emotional needs and realize that strict boundaries only evoke aggressive-obstinate behavior. Her strategies for helping him to cope with change and rules make a difference and have helped me to understand ways to get a positive response instead of starting an episode.”

SFI Anchorage Lessons Learned

- SFI requires a lead person or lead team effort to ensure that the programs uphold accountability and fidelity to the model.
- Initial Application: Interview each site to consider the following: Do they have a staff person or persons designated to support an SF effort? What about turnover of staff?
- The MOU needs to specify they will only get their funding after certain expectations are met, such as training, etc. Be specific in the MOU about 30 percent of staff completing ALL 12 hours of required training.
- Evaluation and continuous improvement process is critical to the success of the programs. Build in an evaluation plan for each center which is linked to the larger program model. Evaluation and continuous improvement process training should be included in the two day orientation OR developed as an additional training for SFI programs.
- Conduct SFI Self-Assessments and analysis on a bi-annual basis. Need a baseline initially in order to rate and determine next steps. Quarterly meetings with centers regarding their data are recommended.
- Utilize the CSSP online Self-Assessment tools. They are now linked together to provide more fluid connections between data from programs, parents, staff and directors. Implementation plans are directly linked within the tools and can be updated on an as needed basis. Simple reminders are included in the tool which will help to keep the program on track with their goals.
- Learning Networks are required for SFI Anchorage programs. The programs must agree to attend all the Learning Network offered. Future Learning Networks will engage the programs in research, presentation development and leading the calls.
- Orientation: Increase to two days of orientation. Have laptops set up for leadership teams to begin the Self-Assessment at the Orientation. Go over the function of the Implementation Plan thoroughly as well as schedule of deadlines. Invite experienced directors to give overview of their continued efforts. Smaller group work at the Orientation and use the café model to pose questions and to harvest wisdom.
- Trainings: Increase the required training to attend 15 hours using Stronger Together and supplementing with other resources. Continue to include experts from Parent Services Program in California to mentor Alaska. Each participating program needs a Stronger Together manual (maybe one or two manuals per site).

- Encourage sites to include 6 hours of SFI training on their in-service day. This worked well for those who used this model. Networking and relationship building resulted from the in-service day trainings.
- Use Harvest forms in place of the Workshop Evaluations. Clearer, more intensive and relevant information will be gained from this process.
- Parade of Centers: **thread** offers this once a year as part of the training calendar. Each center should be required to send a certain number of administrators and staff to this enlightening event.
- Money: As stated earlier, money needs to be directly tied to hours of training. Also, clearer accounting by sites as to how the money was used would be recommended.



Success Story #4

Program #1

Situation: challenge, issue, perspective

One of our three year olds had sores on bottom and upper legs due to wearing pull-ups too long. Child was new to our facility and culturally parent's background is one of a private and somewhat non-communicative nature. The parent felt like children will potty train when ready.

Strategies

Staff members discussed the situation to figure out how best to help the child without alienating the parent. Decision was made to monitor the child's problem, working with the child in the program to encourage them to have independent toileting habits and to communicate with the parent whenever we had the chance.

Keys to Success

The staff took the time to talk with the parent each day, building a strong relationship with her, which led to an opportunity to let her know we cared and were there to help. We were able to give her ideas for helping her child become independent in this area and encourage her efforts.

Building strong relationships with the parent and having open and honest communication with them is the best strategy for helping them. Giving your time doesn't cost you anything and can make a world of difference.

Working with the parent and giving her ideas without doing her job for her helped her to help her child. The child was potty trained after 2 weeks of talking with the parent. The parent came in after a weekend excited and happy that they had had no accidents. She is now more open with us in other areas as well. She tells us that her child teaches her the songs we sing here, is happy and "growing up" since being here. Mom always has a smile on her face when she comes into the facility.

Follow up to this success story: This family has already enrolled their daughter for next fall. I guess it's all in a day's work for us in a way. We love to work with and connect with our families and all the staff are very good at communicating with them. I believe God has placed all of us here for a time and a purpose. If we were just babysitting I don't think we would be successful no matter how much money we might make. Loving families is what we are all about.

Benefits: community and United Way SFI Anchorage

When you help someone there is always a positive benefit. In this case the parent was part of a particularly close-knit cultural group where the impact can be far reaching. We were able to encourage a parent who in some places might be overlooked or looked down upon because of both her heritage and ability to communicate. Any time you help someone be successful it is beneficial and touches both yourself and others.