

Strengthening Families Annual Report

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*The University of Tennessee College of Social Work
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Introduction

The Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP) launched the Strengthening Families Program to encourage the early childhood community to work collaboratively in an effort to strengthen bonds between parents and children and prevent child abuse and neglect. In cooperation with the Doris Duke Foundation and working through the Alliance of Children’s Trust and Prevention Funds, CSSP hopes to disseminate the Strengthening Families model throughout the United States. Tennessee initiated its participation early in the process. The Tennessee Children’s Trust Fund partnered with the Tennessee Department of Human Services (DHS) to establish the Strengthening Families (SF) model in Tennessee. Because it has a well established system of collaboration through the Report Card and Star Quality Program, Tennessee is in a favorable position to integrate the Strengthening Families curriculum and model into the early care and education community.

The Report Card and Star Quality Program provides a comprehensive system whereby child care providers are regulated and evaluated by DHS Licensing and receive an annual assessment to determine the quality of care they provide. Additionally, a myriad of services are provided to child care facilities to promote professional development and provide technical assistance through Tennessee State University, the Tennessee Early Childhood Training Alliance (TECTA), Signal Center, and the Tennessee Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) Network of 10 community based agencies. The Tennessee Family Child Care Alliance provides mentoring and support to family and group homes through TOPSTAR. Under contract with DHS, the University of Tennessee College of Social Work Office of Research and Public Service (UT SWORPS) collects assessment data and publishes the Report Card and Star Quality information to assist parents and others in

choosing quality care for children. To extend its partnership further, DHS collaborates with the Tennessee Departments of Health, Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities Education, and Children’s Services as well as other community based organizations to support and promote best practices in the areas of health and safety, care for children with special needs, social/emotional development, and school readiness. (A complete list of collaborators is provided in Appendix A.) All of these departments, organizations, and providers play an important role in protecting and nurturing young children and are willing partners in the Strengthening Families initiative.

DHS contracted with UT SWORPS to conduct a comprehensive evaluation of the Tennessee Collaborative System for Strengthening Families (hereafter referred to as Tennessee’s Strengthening Families) that includes both process and outcome evaluation. In this first year, the evaluation focuses primarily on the implementation of Tennessee’s Strengthening Families. This report provides findings about the first year, what was accomplished in implementing the approach in Tennessee, and what can be done to improve overall implementation.

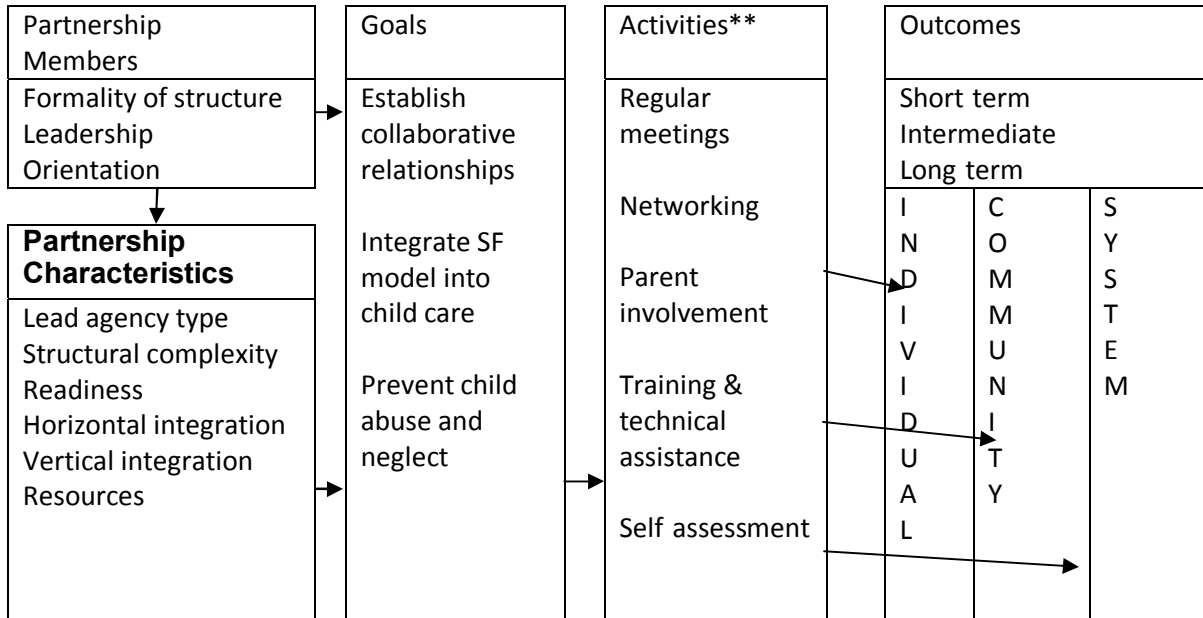
Evaluation Design and Methodology

As stated previously, UT SWORPS initiated a process evaluation of Tennessee’s Strengthening Families initiative and will be conducting a comprehensive evaluation that includes both process and outcome evaluation in the years ahead. This section of the report details the evaluation design, methods, and limitations of the current implementation study.

Design

Evaluators adapted a model proposed by The Urban Institute and Caliber Associates for the evaluation that incorporates a theories of change approach and provides an avenue for “a systemic and cumulative study of the links between activities, outcomes, and context of (an) initiative” (Roman, More, Jenkins, & Small, 2002). As shown in Figure 1, the model provides a contextual framework to assist in understanding partnership processes and results. The model was adapted to Tennessee’s Strengthening Families programmatic goals and objectives, activities, and outcomes at the system, individual, and community levels.

Figure 2: Conceptual Framework for Evaluation of Tennessee’s Strengthening Families Capacity*



*This framework was adapted from the Conceptual Framework of Partnership Capacity proposed by The Urban Institute, Justice Policy Center, and Caliber Associates in a final report, *Understanding Community Justice Partnerships Assessing the Capacity to Partner*, published May 24, 2002.

**The activities listed represent only a sample of the types of activities coordinated by Tennessee’s Strengthening Families.

Methods

Evaluators used a multi method approach to the process evaluation of Tennessee’s Strengthening Families. Each was designed to provide information about how the project was being implemented and explore sources of information for conducting a more comprehensive evaluation in later years. The following paragraphs describe those methodologies.

DOCUMENT REVIEW AND MEETINGS WITH ADMINISTRATION

Evaluators reviewed a variety of formalized documents specific to Tennessee’s Strengthening Families as well as general information about the Strengthening Families model from the Strengthening Families National Network (SFNN) website hosted by CSSP. These documents helped orient the evaluators to the Strengthening Families model and its implementation in Tennessee. Evaluators also attended four Strengthening Families Steering Committee meetings either in person or via telephone throughout the year and reviewed minutes of these and earlier meetings to stay abreast of

program activities. Telephone calls with program administrative staff took place on an as needed basis as well.

INTERVIEWS WITH KEY INFORMANTS

Evaluators conducted three sets of interviews with key informants—those who had been most directly involved in the implementation of Tennessee’s Strengthening Families. These interviews included selected members of the Steering Committee, a group of individuals representing numerous organizations that serve children and their families in a variety of arenas. In addition, interviews were conducted with the Parenting Liaisons based at 11 CCR&R sites across the state and the Strengthening Families CCR&R Network Coordinator. Interviews were also conducted with child care providers who had completed the Strengthening Families self assessments.

Seven members of the Steering Committee were interviewed either face to face or by telephone. The interviews lasted between 45 minutes and 2 hours 30 minutes. All 11 Parenting Liaisons and the statewide Coordinator were interviewed by telephone except for one Parenting Liaison who was interviewed face to face in the process of piloting the interview questions.

The evaluation team conducted semi structured telephone interviews with 24 directors and owners of child care facilities currently participating in Tennessee’s Strengthening Families program. Providers contacted for an interview had completed the self assessment either on their own, with staff members, or with the help of their Parenting Liaison. Twenty three providers interviewed had met with a Parenting Liaison for targeted technical assistance (TTA). Eight providers reported they had attended Tennessee’s Strengthening Families workshops or classes, many accompanied by their staff members. Providers were asked about their experiences and satisfaction with the program. Reoccurring themes within providers’ responses were identified and are summarized in the Findings section.

Structured interview guides were designed using the evaluation framework for assessing organizational capacity and the overall study questions presented in the chart below.

Table 1: Overview of Study Questions and Interviews

Study Questions	Steering Committee	Parenting Liaisons	Providers
How is the Collaborative System for Strengthening Families organized, and does this organizational structure work effectively?	√	√	
What has the Collaborative System for Strengthening Families achieved thus far toward its goals and objectives?	√	√	√
What outcomes can be expected as the Collaborative System for Strengthening Families continues including outcomes at the system, community, agency, provider, and family levels as identified by the Leadership Team and program staff? These outcomes include the following:	√	√	√
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At least 15% of pre school programs use STRENGTHENING FAMILIES self assessment and commit to increased demonstration of parental interactions leading to use of protective factors. • At least 50% of providers attend SF TN CCPT workshop and follow up with targeted technical assistance 			
How could the Collaborative System for Strengthening Families improve its effectiveness in improving identified outcomes for children and the professionals that provide services?	√	√	√

The guides for each set of interviews were strictly followed to assure consistency in the line of questioning by the evaluators. However, interviewees were allowed to freely express their opinions about their experiences with Tennessee’s Strengthening Families in the last question of the interview. The three interview guides can be found in Appendix B.

REVIEW OF AVAILABLE SECONDARY DATA

While the evaluators did not collect and analyze information available from data systems with relevant information on Tennessee’s Strengthening Families, they did look closely at what is available through various data systems and how the information can be used to assess implementation efforts as well as the effectiveness of providers using the Strengthening Families model. Evaluators explored the information that is available through the following systems:

- Tennessee Child Care Management System (TCCMS)
- Star Quality
- TECTA professional development
- TN CCPT
- CCR&R targeted technical assistance data

ANALYSIS OF RELEVANT DATA

Evaluators took detailed notes or recorded interviews with members of the Steering Committee, Parenting Liaisons, and child care providers. After all interviews were completed, the evaluators reviewed these notes and/or tapes and applied standard qualitative analysis methods to identify important themes among respondents. Ideas expressed by more than one person were generally included in the initial analysis, while those expressed only by one individual were disregarded unless the response was a reasonable suggestion for improvement. Findings from the interviews were then organized by the study questions and are reported here in that same manner.

A pilot analysis of CCR&R data collected for 6 months (July 1, 2008–December 31, 2008) was run to determine information available on training, technical assistance, and targeted technical assistance specific to Tennessee’s Strengthening Families model. Further analysis of the data will take place in early fall 2009 to fulfill reporting requirements for fiscal year 2008–2009 (July 1, 2008–June 30, 2009).

Limitations of the Study

As with any qualitative analysis, the findings can be somewhat subjective depending on the way the questions are asked and the perceptions of both the interviewee and the interviewer. The use of a structured interview guide heightened consistency in how questions were asked. In addition, the set of interviews were conducted by one individual (i.e., one evaluator conducted the child care provider interviews and another evaluator

conducted the Steering Committee and Parenting Liaison interviews). This too offered consistency in how questions were asked and responses interpreted.

One limitation of the study was that Tennessee’s Strengthening Families just got underway this year, and while it is getting off to a good start, information to determine if the program is making a significant impact on work to enhance parental involvement and prevent child abuse and neglect is limited. Even the desired outcomes of providers attending Tennessee’s Strengthening Families training and using the self assessment and targeted technical assistance cannot be assessed adequately at this point. More time is needed to determine these outcomes and to observe the impact of Tennessee’s Strengthening Families on child care quality.

Exploring the connection between Tennessee’s Strengthening Families implementation and changes in the Environment Rating Scales (ERS)¹ has proven to be somewhat of a challenge. While there are specific items on the Environment Rating Scales that relate to the thrust of the Strengthening Families model, it is difficult to make a direct link from involvement in Tennessee’s Strengthening Families training, technical assistance, and self assessment to changes in Star Quality scores. Different classrooms and teachers are observed from one year to the next for the Star Quality ratings. So the comparison will not be a true pre /post test, comparing one teacher’s performance prior to Tennessee’s Strengthening Families to her performance after receiving training or technical assistance. While the program may have undergone a Strengthening Families self assessment and received targeted technical assistance, the specific teacher observed may or

¹ *Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale—Revised Edition* by Thelma Harms, Richard M. Clifford & Debby Cryer. (New York: Teachers College Press, ©2005 by Thelma Harms, Richard M. Clifford & Debby Cryer). Used with permission of the publisher and the authors. All rights reserved.

Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale—Revised Edition by Thelma Harms, Debby Cryer & Richard M. Clifford. (New York: Teachers College Press, ©2006 by Thelma Harms, Deborah Reid Cryer and Richard M. Clifford). Used with permission of the publisher and the authors. All rights reserved.

Family Day Care Rating Scale by Thelma Harms and Richard M. Clifford. (New York: Teachers College Press, ©1989 by Thelma Harms and Richard M. Clifford.) Used with permission of the publisher and the authors. All rights reserved.

School Age Care Rating Scale, by Thelma Harms, Ellen Vineberg Jacobs, and Donna Romano White. (New York: Teachers College Press, ©1996 by Thelma Harms, Ellen Vineberg Jacobs, and Donna Romano White.) Used with permission of the publisher and the authors. All rights reserved.

may not have received Tennessee’s Strengthening Families training or implemented the approach in the classroom. However, evaluators will continue to explore the use of the Star Quality data and make adjustments to their theories regarding the impact of Tennessee’s Strengthening Families on child care quality.

Findings

The Tennessee’s Strengthening Families process evaluation revolves around five basic study questions as well as an assessment of existing data sources for use in the evaluation. For the study questions, rather than present findings specific to a methodology (e.g., findings related to the opinions of the Steering Committee), the evaluators integrated findings from the various methodologies and interviews and provided discussion about the opinions of various stakeholders in relation to major research questions.

What information is available from existing data sources to assess implementation of Tennessee’s Strengthening Families?

Evaluators wanted to determine what information was available from existing data sources to assess the implementation of Tennessee’s Strengthening Families, particularly the training, technical assistance, and targeted technical assistance provided by Parenting Liaisons and other CCR&R staff. The series of tables on the following pages provide samples of information that is available. The data collection period spans 6 months from July 1, 2008 through December 31, 2008. These data indicate that considerable information can be gleaned from the database maintained by CCR&R to produce reports on the volume of services during a given period. As can be seen in the tables during this 6 month period:

- 378 participants received technical assistance specific to Tennessee’s Strengthening Families.
- 76 participants from 14 different providers received targeted technical assistance specific to Tennessee’s Strengthening Families. Each provider received, on average, 5.4 hours of TTA.

- 625 participants received Tennessee’s Strengthening Families training, and the vast majority of these (611) were child care providers.

Table 2: Strengthening Families Technical Assistance—Audience by Delivery Method

Delivery Methods	
1= Lending/Mobile Library	8= Staff Development
3= Onsite Visit	9= Phone Consultation
7= Other Delivery Method	



Audience	Number of Participants by Delivery Method					Total	
	1	3	7	8	9	#	%
Community		52	3			55	14.6
Parents		30	0			30	7.9
Providers	1	238	3		19	261	69.0
Other		3	0		2	5	1.3
CCR&R Staff		6	0	1	2	9	2.4
Teen parents		1	0			1	0.3
DHS		0	0			0	0.0
DOE		1	0			1	0.3
TECTA	1	0	1		1	3	0.8
TOPSTAR		3	0			3	0.8
DHS Licensing		5	0			5	1.3
DHS Assessment		4	0			4	1.1
SWORPS		0	0			0	0.0
DOH		1	0			1	0.3
DMHMR		0	0			0	0.0
TSU		0	0			0	0.0
Unknown		0	0			0	0.0
TOTAL	2	344	7	1	24	378	100.0

Note: This information was derived from CCR&R data provided by Signal Centers.

Table 3: Targeted Technical Assistance Provided by Audience

Audience	# Participants	Total # Hours	# Providers	Avg. # Hours Per Provider
Community	1	1	1	1
Providers	75	75	13	5.8
TOTAL	76	76	14	5.4

Note: This information was derived from CCR&R data provided by Signal Centers.

Table 4: Targeted Technical Assistance Provided by Region

Region	Parenting Liaison	Targeted Technical Assistance		
		# Providers	Total # Hours	Avg. # Hours per Provider
Davidson	C. Turner	1	1	1
East Tennessee	M. Harrison	0	0	0
Hamilton	E. Hill	5	5	1
Knox	M. Harrison	4	4	1
Mid Cumberland	J. Sample	1	1	1
Northwest	J. Donaldson	24	24	1
Shelby	N. Royston	8	8	1
	C. Thompson	21	21	1
South Central	S. Tipps	0	0	0
Southeast	E. Hill	0	0	0
Southwest	R. Wilson	5	5	1
Upper Cumberland	R. Bartlett	0	0	0
Upper East	P. Oliver	4	4	1
Unassigned		3	3	1
Statewide		76	76	

Note: This information was derived from CCR&R data provided by Signal Centers.

Note: The following shows the breakout of non urban counties by region. However, these designations can be revised to coincide with DHS Licensing, CCR&R, or Parenting Liaison responsibilities.

*East Tennessee: Anderson, Blount, Campbell, Claiborne, Cocke, Grainger, Hamblen, Jefferson, Loudon, Monroe, Morgan, Scott, Sevier
Mid Cumberland: Cheatham, Dickson, Houston, Humphreys, Montgomery, Robertson, Rutherford, Stewart, Sumner, Trousdale, Williamson, Wilson
Northwest: Benton, Carroll, Crockett, Dyer, Gibson, Henry, Lake, Obion, Weakley
South Central: Bedford, Coffee, Giles, Hickman, Lawrence, Lewis, Lincoln, Marshall, Maury, Moore, Perry, Wayne
Southeast: Bledsoe, Bradley, Franklin, Grundy, Marion, McMinn, Meigs, Polk, Rhea, Sequatchie
Southwest: Chester, Decatur, Fayette, Hardeman, Hardin, Haywood, Henderson, Lauderdale, Madison, McNairy, Tipton
Upper Cumberland: Cannon, Clay, Cumberland, DeKalb, Fentress, Jackson, Macon, Overton, Pickett, Putnam, Smith, VanBuren, Warren, White
*Upper East: Carter, Greene, Hancock, Hawkins, Johnson, Sullivan, Unicoi, Washington

Table 5: Strengthening Families Training Provided by Audience

<i>Audience</i>	Number of Participants by Delivery Method		Total	
	<i>Series</i>	<i>Workshop</i>	<i>#</i>	<i>%</i>
Community	0	1	1	0.20
Providers	15	596	611	97.80
Other	0	8	8	1.30
CCR&R Staff	0	5	5	0.80
Teen parents	0	0	0	0.00
Unknown	0	0	0	0.00
TOTAL	15	610	625	100.1

Note: This information was derived from CCR&R data provided by Signal Centers.

Note: There is no information in the CCR&R database to designate training to home visitors/family support workers, child welfare staff, or foster parents.

Table 6: Strengthening Families Training Provided by Region

<i>Region</i>	Strengthening Families Training				
	<i># Participants</i>	<i>Total # Hours</i>	<i>Avg. # Hours per Participant</i>	<i># Providers</i>	<i>Avg. # Hours per Provider</i>
Davidson	74	156	2.1	43	3.6
East Tennessee	47	94	2.0	17	5.5
Hamilton	37	74	2.0	13	5.7
Knox	134	268	2.0	46	5.8
Mid Cumberland	68	136	2.0	26	5.2
Northwest	33	66	2.0	16	4.1
Shelby	26	52	2.0	12	4.3
South Central	47	94	2.0	16	5.9
Southeast	24	48	2.0	9	5.3
Southwest	24	48	2.0	8	6.0
Upper Cumberland	8	16	2.0	1	16.0
Upper East	103	206	2.0	31	6.6
Unassigned	0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Statewide	625	1,258	2.0	238	5.3

Note: This information was derived from CCR&R data provided by Signal Centers.

Evaluators are still exploring ways to extract information by provider identification number and connect the receipt of Tennessee’s Strengthening Families training and technical assistance to outcomes at the provider level. While a direct link can be made to the Star Quality data available including overall ratings and item scores from the Environment Rating Scales, evaluators are not certain that the data will be as useful in assessing outcomes as once thought. There are numerous factors that may impact both the overall and item scores; and it may not be possible to establish a causal link between Tennessee’s Strengthening Families training and technical assistance to improvement in Star Quality scores, especially since different classrooms may be assessed from year to year. The variation in item scores related to Tennessee’s Strengthening Families may be more attributable to differences in teacher training and implementation of the Tennessee’s Strengthening Families approach in a classroom rather than overall provider scores. Evaluators will continue to examine the data and

determine the feasibility of using the Star Quality data as well as information from other DHS state system sources.

How is the Collaborative System for Tennessee's Strengthening Families organized, and does this organizational structure work effectively?

This first study question can best be addressed by applying the *Conceptual Framework of Partnership Capacity* proposed by The Urban Institute, Justice Policy Center, and Caliber Associates Formality of Structure (Roman, More, Jenkins, & Small, 2002). Based on findings from the qualitative analysis of interviews with key stakeholders including Steering Committee members, Parenting Liaisons, and providers, various features of the partnership members and the characteristics of the partnership are expressed in the paragraphs that follow.

PARTNERSHIP MEMBERS

Formality of Structure

Steering Committee members describe Tennessee's Strengthening Families as a loosely formed collaborative that is more organic than structured in nature, but say it is working well as it is. In fact, several believe that a more formal structure would not facilitate this collaborative as formal agreements might stifle rather than encourage its growth. Formal memorandum of agreements or other formal agreements are not currently used, but these may be implemented as the project moves forward to assure the commitment of agency administrators.

Leadership

Tennessee's Strengthening Families leadership can best be characterized as two dedicated people with a strong sense of direction who work collaboratively with a committed group of individuals toward a common purpose to integrate the Strengthening Families approach into all organizations that serve children and families. Many of the Steering Committee members were approached directly by one of these two leaders and encouraged to get involved with the initiative. The influence of these individuals and their ability to motivate others were evidenced throughout the interviews with Steering Committee members and Parenting Liaisons.

One of the ways that evaluators assessed leadership was through a series of questions about Steering Committee meetings. All of the members of the Steering Committee agreed or strongly agreed that different viewpoints are

welcomed, teamwork is encouraged, and milestones are celebrated. As far as power struggles or hidden agendas being dealt with effectively, all of the Steering Committee members felt that they did not even exist. As one person claimed, “There are no power struggles—just strong, caring personalities.” Steering Committee members relayed that all members are free to share their opinions, and ideas from others are embraced.

Orientation

Orientation refers to the capability of members to engage in joint efforts (Roman, More, Jenkins, & Small, 2002), and it is apparent from the interviews that Steering Committee members have a common purpose and collectively promote that purpose within their organizations and to the community at large. Many of the members have long standing relationships with one another and have worked collaboratively in the past to serve the best interests of children and families in Tennessee. In fact, the Steering Committee recently incorporated members of an Early Childhood Comprehensive System (ECCS) subcommittee and felt that by combining the two committees, the partnership would be stronger and they could recruit more members and levy additional resources for both Tennessee’s Strengthening Families and ECCS.

PARTNERSHIP CHARACTERISTICS

Lead Agency

While Tennessee’s Strengthening Families is a partnership among organizations, the lead agencies are the Tennessee Department of Human Services and the Tennessee Children’s Trust Fund, which operates within the Department of Children’s Services (DCS). These two state organizations have the capacity to make far reaching policy and programmatic decisions that dramatically impact services to children and families. The Tennessee Department of Human Services operates child care licensing and the Star Quality and Report Card Program and funds much of the training and technical assistance offered to child care providers through its agreement with the CCR&R network. The Tennessee Children’s Trust Fund administers and oversees child abuse and neglect prevention services within the state.

Structural Complexity

The Tennessee Collaborative System for Strengthening Families is a complex partnership among the lead agencies and other state and community organizations serving children. The integration of Tennessee’s Strengthening Families with ECCS added a further tier to the partnership, albeit a complementary one. The association with the Strengthening

Families National Network (SFNN) also adds to the structural complexity of the partnership. However, Steering Committee members believe that the various players and their purposes come together because of the passion each has for the work they do for young children.

Readiness

Roman, Moore, Jenkins, and Small in *Understanding Community Justice Partnerships: Assessing the Capacity to Partner* (2002, p. 77) assert that, “Partnerships can have the best intentions and best staff, but can still fail if the community is not ready to undertake the mission of the partnership.” Thus far, the evidence from the interviews suggests that readiness may depend on the organization and may vary considerably from organization to organization. The CCR&R is well on its way to adopting the Tennessee’s Strengthening Families approach and some child care providers have embraced the model. Steering Committee members and Parenting Liaisons indicated that most people they talk with are excited about the new Strengthening Families approach and they are encouraged by the level of acceptance in the community thus far. Some organizations and leaders within those organizations are not quite ready to move totally away from their standard way of doing business. That is, they primarily focus on risks and deficits in their work with children and families and are delivering child focused services rather than taking a family oriented approach.

Vertical and Horizontal Integration

This aspect of the organizational capacity model can best be thought of as the “depth of communication” and the “extent of resource sharing and communication” (Roman, More, Jenkins, & Small, 2002). There are shared goals and activities among partners, communication is good, and the level of participation is fairly high, although some partners admit that they could do more to promote Tennessee’s Strengthening Families even within their own organizations.

Resources

Currently, there are 27 members of the Steering Committee representing a diversity of organizations that serve children and families. New members are being added as new relationships are cultivated. Members of the Steering Committee who were interviewed are all committed to integrating Tennessee’s Strengthening Families into the work of their own organizations. The Steering Committee members come from organizations that have a long history of serving children and families. The members are prominent players who have the ability to promote the approach in the

wider early childhood education and service community and recruit others to join their efforts.

With the support of the Tennessee Department of Human Services and a grant from the Alliance of Children’s Trust and Prevention Funds, the financial resources available to Tennessee’s Strengthening Families are, from the standpoint of Steering Committee members, more than expected. As one person said, “We have far more resources than I ever dreamed.” While not everyone agreed that the financial resources were sufficient to move the Tennessee’s Strengthening Families agenda forward in the future, they were encouraged by the amount of support they had received thus far and the possibility of greater support in the future from state, federal, and private foundation entities. Some interviewees expressed uncertainty about the future and were worried that financial resources might decline with the downturn in the economy. One or two felt that another macro level funding source was needed to increase staffing and other resources for Tennessee’s Strengthening Families.

Having the support of and resources from the SFNN provides a valued asset to Tennessee’s efforts to implement the approach. While initially Tennessee was an affiliate rather than a full partner with SFNN, Tennessee’s status with this national organization appears to have been enhanced through the efforts of its leadership and the inclusion of an evaluation component. Members of the Steering Committee think that the relationship between this national partner and Tennessee will strengthen over time.

Technological resources have been made accessible through the cooperation of the Tennessee Department of Human Services, CCR&R, and UT SWORPS. Data are readily available to track training, technical assistance, and targeted technical assistance efforts directly related to Tennessee’s Strengthening Families as indicated in the tables provided earlier. It will also be possible to access and connect relevant information on provider training, licensing information, and self assessments with data from departmental systems and the Star Quality and Report Card System for the evaluation.

STRENGTHENING FAMILIES STAFF

Staffing for Tennessee’s Strengthening Families consists of a Strengthening Families CCR&R Network Coordinator and 11 Parenting Liaisons who are based in 10 regions across the state. Except for urban areas, one Parenting Liaison serves multiple counties in a geographic region. While they are based in the CCR&R agency, many work out of their homes and travel to provider sites within the region they serve. The coordinator serves as a supervisor to the Parenting Liaisons but also works directly with child care

providers and organizations across the state to promote Tennessee's Strengthening Families and present the approach at statewide meetings and conferences.

Role of the Parenting Liaisons

In talking with the Parenting Liaisons, evaluators determined that their roles and responsibilities were fairly clear. They saw themselves as salespeople for the Tennessee's Strengthening Families approach. Many of them talked about their training responsibilities to educate providers on the protective factors and the advantages of using a strengths based approach. Making initial contacts with early childhood providers to engage them in Tennessee's Strengthening Families was another important responsibility. Eight of the 11 expressed the importance of building relationships with providers in their region and 5 mentioned something about making initial contacts or "getting their foot in the door." Three stressed the need to help agencies understand and ensure quality child care. Many understood that part of their role was to encourage providers and assist with the self assessment and action planning. As part of this, they provide technical assistance and targeted technical assistance so that providers will communicate with families during greeting and departing, install bulletin boards, and perform any activity that builds a connection between the provider and the families served. The Parenting Liaisons also make themselves available to providers to answer their questions and link them to the information and services they might need.

Parenting Liaisons also work with teen parents and organizations serving them within their communities. Several Parenting Liaisons have provided workshops directly to teen parent groups in schools or other organizations serving teens. Teens are often included in workshops provided to parents of young children. One Parenting Liaison shared that organizations are sometimes reluctant for the Parenting Liaison to meet with teens because of confidentiality issues. Another spoke of low attendance at workshops as a barrier to working with teen parents. Several of the Parenting Liaisons spoke of sharing information on the Tennessee's Strengthening Families approach with organizations serving teen parents in their communities. Many are working on building those relationships and increasing their visibility as a resource for teen parents.

Along with their direct role of helping child care providers and working with parents, Parenting Liaisons build relationships with other agencies serving young children and families to promote widespread use of the Tennessee's Strengthening Families approach and encourage parental involvement. Four mentioned collaborating with agencies in their community that might be a

resource for child care providers. Others talked about visiting agencies that work with children and families and making connections between agencies, providers, and parents to facilitate working collaboratively. Four of the Parenting Liaisons mentioned that they provided training and other services directly to parents, and some worked with the CCR&R specialists or child care providers to encourage parental involvement.

Enhancing Effectiveness of Staff and Partners

Questions were posed to staff and Steering Committee members about how they might be more effective or productive in their roles. Some of the Steering Committee members also talked about the staffing issues related to the effectiveness of Parenting Liaisons. The interviewees provided suggestions that they believed might enhance the overall effectiveness of Tennessee’s Strengthening Families.

Parenting Liaisons spoke of the need for improved communication because they are so isolated from one another and their supervisor. While they feel supported by their supervisor and program administrators, it is sometimes difficult to get quick answers, share ideas, and learn from each other. Three Parenting Liaisons suggested monthly conference calls, a few wanted more meetings, and 5 simply expressed the desire for better ways to communicate.

One of the issues expressed during the Parenting Liaison interviews was their feeling that there is “so much to do, what should we do first.”

Parenting Liaisons said that there are so many things they want to do, such as train providers, assist with self assessments, work with teen parenting programs, conduct community or parent cafés, network with providers and community agencies, and much more. And while they enjoyed the opportunity to do different things, some were not always clear about how to prioritize their activities and do what was most important. Some said they needed more direction or a narrower job scope because they felt they did not have time to do everything they wanted to do. A few mentioned that Parenting Liaisons across the state were doing things inconsistently as a result of the lack of direction. Four suggested that they needed more guidance and feedback from their supervisor and more program leadership about what they are doing and whether they are on target. One felt that more frequent and regular one on one staff meetings would help a great deal.

Two Steering Committee members echoed some of the same concerns as the Parenting Liaisons. One person described the Parenting Liaisons as an “amazing group of professionals,” yet added that she did not know how they accomplish everything. Others felt that the Parenting Liaisons, while

making progress in building relationships with providers, were only able to work intensely with a few providers to encourage them to complete the self assessment and integrate the Tennessee's Strengthening Families approach into their everyday practices. While nearly everyone agreed that having more staff would help, they realized that resources were not available at this time for additional staff in these positions.

Parenting Liaisons may need more professional development themselves on Tennessee's Strengthening Families. While Parenting Liaisons generally understand the basics of the approach and are gaining knowledge as they move forward, a few said they would like more professional development, specifically about how to promote Tennessee's Strengthening Families and how to approach providers who are resistant to the ideas. Another area where Parenting Liaisons needed guidance was in assisting providers in dealing with families who are difficult to engage or are disconnected from their children's care. Three mentioned that they would like to know more about what other states are doing and perhaps have a mentor from another state that could answer their questions, provide guidance, and talk through ideas.

The relationship between Parenting Liaisons and CCR&R specialists could be strengthened. As conveyed by Steering Committee members, the relationship between the Parenting Liaisons and the CCR&R specialists was intended to be a strong partnership. This was confirmed by many of the Parenting Liaisons who said that they worked closely with the CCR&R specialists. However, a few felt that the CCR&R specialists did not thoroughly understand their roles beyond training on the Tennessee's Strengthening Families approach. Two suggested that expectations of how the Parenting Liaisons and the CCR&R specialists should work together are clearly defined and communicated.

SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVING TENNESSEE'S STRENGTHENING FAMILIES ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

Suggestions were elicited from the staff of Tennessee's Strengthening Families as well as Steering Committee members on how to improve the organizational structure and move toward a true collaboration among partners. A few Steering Committee members offered suggestions: One said that during committee meetings, partners should be asked to account for the activities and accomplishments in promoting Tennessee's Strengthening Families in their own organizations and in the community at large. This individual felt that this accountability would move the agenda of Tennessee's Strengthening Families forward. However, another expressed that their own work sometimes limits how much they can be involved;

therefore, the balance of encouraging without pushing partners to become more involved may be delicate. From what others said, the leadership has achieved this balance.

Parenting Liaison suggestions centered on improved communication and planning. Suggestions about improving communication among the Parenting Liaisons and between them and their supervisor were mentioned by 7 of the 11 Parenting Liaisons. As stated earlier, more meetings or phone conferences were suggested. Additionally, three felt that everything they needed such as forms, online assessments, and parenting tools were not ready when they started their jobs. Some of these issues were exacerbated by their inability to access results of the online self assessment for their providers. Another issue mentioned was the lack of clarity about what defines a Tennessee’s Strengthening Families program. Is it simply going through the self assessment or do programs have to meet certain criteria? This is an issue not specific to Tennessee, but one that the SFNN is struggling with as well.

Parenting Liaisons and Steering Committee members called for greater involvement of and improved coordination with other early childhood programs. One of the Parenting Liaisons suggested that licensing staff promote Tennessee’s Strengthening Families during their licensing visits, and a few Steering Committee members expressed the desire for licensing and assessor staff to work together with the Parenting Liaisons and CCR&R specialists to encourage providers to adopt practices related to the protective factors and help them see that by doing so they can improve their Star Quality ratings. With everyone lending their support, it is more likely that providers will adopt the Tennessee’s Strengthening Families approach and improve the quality of their care to children while involving families at the same time.

What has the Tennessee Collaborative System for Strengthening Families achieved thus far toward its goals and objectives?

The overarching goal of the Tennessee Collaborative System for Strengthening Families is to implement the Tennessee’s Strengthening Families approach in the early care and education community. More specifically, the goals and objectives of Tennessee’s Strengthening Families include:

- Building a Leadership Team (or Steering Committee) that includes families and providers and a cross section of the early childhood community support system.

- Engaging collaborative partners in creating a child abuse and neglect prevention framework that shifts the focus of prevention efforts from family risk and deficits to family strengths and resiliency.
- Creating a widespread understanding of what programs and providers can do to promote healthy child development and reduce the incidence of child abuse and neglect.
- Initiating conversations with child care staff, board or advisory committees, and parents in individual programs. Help providers learn:
 - § more about child abuse and neglect
 - § the prevalence, warning signs, and impact on children and their development
 - § the importance of early intervention
 - § the protective factors and the role caregivers can play in preventing child abuse and neglect

To assess the extent that Tennessee’s Strengthening Families has achieved these goals and objectives, evaluators asked Steering Committee members, staff, and providers a series of questions related to these goals and objectives. One such question asked Steering Committee members if they saw adequate representation of families, providers, and others in the early childhood community on the Steering Committee, and if they did not, they were asked to identify how it was imbalanced, and what has and could be done to correct it.

Steering Committee members generally agreed that providers and others in the early childhood community were adequately represented, and any imbalance was with adequate parent representation and others providing care directly. Steering Committee members reported that they were always recruiting new members from the early childhood community as new relationships were cultivated. Even though several parents were present at the last two Steering Committee meetings, according to most of the Steering Committee members interviewed it has been a challenge to get parents involved. Their work schedules and child caring responsibilities are not easily coordinated, with many of them unable to attend daytime meetings. In one Steering Committee meeting, members brainstormed ideas for getting more parents involved and hoped to implement some of those strategies in the near future. Some felt that the inroad to parent involvement is by working through providers. Another thought this might be the way to recruit parents of young children without special needs. One

person interviewed mentioned that family care providers were not represented on the Steering Committee and that she wished they had more members who worked directly with children and families in child care settings. These individuals could then represent the typical needs of families and child care providers.

Tennessee’s Strengthening Families has made slow, steady progress in achieving the goal of organizations shifting their focus from concentrating on risks and deficits to focusing on family strengths and resiliency.

Evaluators posed a question asking Parenting Liaisons and Steering Committee members to rate organizations along a 10 point continuum from a strict focus on risks and deficits to one on strengths and resiliency. However, the question proved difficult to answer as most interviewees felt that different organizations fell at different places along the continuum. Interviewees also stressed that Tennessee’s Strengthening Families was still a very new approach and dramatic change would not be evident at this point. They felt that progress had been made and organizations were moving in the right direction, but that it would take time to move organizations and child care providers to a point where they will use the Tennessee’s Strengthening Families approach. Nine of the Parenting Liaisons spoke of the difficulties in changing provider behavior from “the way they’ve always done things” where they focus on the negative behavior of children and parents to a more strengths based approach. Someone said that even mission statements of organizations talked about “at risk” or “disadvantaged” children or families, and it was hard to change that mindset in such a short time frame. One Steering Committee member commented that people do not understand resilience—that they may understand the philosophy but do not know how to put that philosophy into practice. That will take even more time.

Leaders report evidence that knowledge of Tennessee’s Strengthening Families is becoming more widespread. One of the Strengthening Families Steering Committee members cited a story about her involvement in the start up of an evidence based home visiting program in Memphis. While this large, multi year grant is not directly connected to Tennessee’s Strengthening Families, the committee working on the mission, vision, and goals for the organization decided that the work of the group would be guided by the Strengthening Families Five Protective Factors as core principles. The facilitator remarked that, “We’re going to use those five protective factors that we all know.” To the Strengthening Families Steering Committee member, this was “amazing—that the five protective factors have entered into the community dialog so quickly that people think they’ve always known about them.”

While the presentations and trainings have gotten providers and other organizations interested in Tennessee’s Strengthening Families, additional steps can be taken to move organizations toward more of a focus on strengths and resiliency. One of the ways suggested by Parenting Liaisons to move the agenda forward was to promote Tennessee’s Strengthening Families by making changes in DHS Licensing requirements and the Star Quality and Report Card program. One suggestion voiced by three Parenting Liaisons was to make attendance at a Tennessee’s Strengthening Families training a licensing requirement. Four Parenting Liaisons suggested simply getting the word out to licensure and assessment staff and having them promote Tennessee’s Strengthening Families with providers. Three suggested more buy in from various state agency administrators. One stated that “we are salespeople,” but someone at the top needs to take a more structured approach to promoting Tennessee’s Strengthening Families so that providers will respond positively.

Some of the Steering Committee members suggested a softer approach because they felt that child care providers were struggling to cope with so many changes in and requirements for the provision of child care, and Tennessee’s Strengthening Families was just one more. One suggested a presentation at an upcoming Leadership Summit of child care providers. She thought that by making an impact on the “cream of the crop” of child care providers, it is more likely that they can promote Tennessee’s Strengthening Families to their peers.

Tennessee’s Strengthening Families training has helped organizations understand how they can promote healthy child development and prevent child abuse and neglect. The Parenting Liaisons feel that the Tennessee’s Strengthening Families approach by its very nature focuses on strengths and resiliencies and promotes healthy child development. Many of the Parenting Liaisons mentioned that Tennessee’s Strengthening Families is not a risk oriented approach—that instead it stresses the protective factors in preventing child abuse and neglect. Four of the Parenting Liaisons thought that the training also stresses a proactive approach—intervening before child abuse and neglect occurs by enhancing child development rather than focusing on identifying signs of child abuse and neglect and providing intervention.

Providers believe that participation in the Tennessee’s Strengthening Families program is a valuable learning experience. Providers reported gaining useful advice, a fresh perspective, and valuable knowledge from their experiences with Tennessee’s Strengthening Families classes, TTA, and self assessment. Specific ideas tailored to individual child care programs were offered by Parenting Liaisons, while general ideas for making

improvements were supplied by items on the self assessment and topics covered in classes or workshops. Many providers recounted new ideas they were given for strengthening the families involved in their programs such as tips for improving family involvement, reaching out to family members other than mothers, motivating families to interact with each other, and asking for volunteers to help with program needs. Multiple providers emphasized the value of learning better approaches for communicating with families such as sending home more reports, encouraging staff to persevere, providing tips for approaching sensitive subjects, and teaching them how to listen more effectively.

Experiences with Tennessee’s Strengthening Families also allowed providers to view their programs from a new perspective. Providers have learned to focus on more than just how children experience their programs when assessing the quality of their programs. One provider clearly stated, “I am now looking from the parents’ point of view.” Providers explained that the perspective gained from Tennessee’s Strengthening Families allowed them to see program strengths and weaknesses that they were not aware of previously. One provider shared that her experiences revealed her own personal prejudices. Providers have used this perspective to set goals for improvement.

The Tennessee’s Strengthening Families program has educated providers about the five protective factors reducing the likelihood of child abuse and neglect. It has also given them knowledge of available resources that can provide concrete help to families in need. Providers reported learning about community resources that offer valuable help to both families and staff members. Parenting Liaisons have shared hand outs, brochures, lists, and other literature that serve as child development resources themselves and have directed families and staff members to available resources such as health departments, government funded insurance, accessible education, and assistance with paying bills. Multiple providers reported having no prior knowledge of such resources.

Providers are satisfied with the Tennessee’s Strengthening Families program. Every provider interviewed offered positive feedback about his or her overall experience with Tennessee’s Strengthening Families. One explained, “I was complacent and this revived me.” Another shared, “I’m just sold on this. It’s the best program in a while.” All providers who had received TTA reported a high level of satisfaction with the work they have done with their Parenting Liaison. A provider shared that her Parenting Liaison “always finds answers and solutions to my questions.” Every provider who attended a Tennessee’s Strengthening Families workshop or class (8) was satisfied with the knowledge he or she gained. Providers

reported that workshops were particularly helpful for staff. One commented that the class she attended could have been improved with “better wording” but still found it to be a valuable learning experience. Most providers reported the self assessment to be a useful opportunity to examine their program from a new perspective. As explained by one provider, many found the assessment beneficial because it “pointed out areas that needed improvement.” The three providers who were not satisfied with the self assessment blamed its length or “vague” wording of questions.

While changing attitudes and practices of providers and other organizations serving children and families will take time, Parenting Liaisons and Steering Committee members indicated a need to enhance the training experience and build a stronger relationship between Parenting Liaisons and providers. Several of the Parenting Liaisons wanted additional training themselves on child abuse and neglect so that they would be better prepared to answer questions that arose during training sessions. Primarily they wanted information on warning signs and what to look for in a child’s development that would indicate abuse or neglect. A few also felt that they could recruit experts from child advocacy centers or from DCS to assist them in training providers. Not only would the Parenting Liaison benefit from this expertise, but relationships could be built or strengthened between those agencies and providers. Steering Committee members felt that the training was a good starting point to introduce Tennessee’s Strengthening Families to providers, yet a few indicated that providers needed more than just an introduction to the approach. They needed demonstration of techniques, technical assistance, and support to actually transfer their knowledge into practice. This they saw as the role of the Parenting Liaison.

What outcomes can be expected as the Tennessee Collaborative System for Strengthening Families continues?

Tennessee’s Strengthening Families defined two specific outcomes in documents reviewed by the evaluator. These included:

- At least 15% of pre school programs use Tennessee’s Strengthening Families self assessment and commit to increased demonstration of parental interactions leading to use of protective factors.
- At least 50% of providers attend Tennessee’s Strengthening Families TN CCPT workshop and follow up with TTA.

Staff and members of the Steering Committee indicated that the rate of progress in the first year toward achieving these two outcomes met or exceeded expectations. Given that this was a start up year, many of those interviewed felt that they were making reasonable progress on both outcomes, but did not think they would be able to achieve them in the first year. As reported earlier, for the 6 month period between July 1, 2008 and December 31, 2008, a total of 625 child care providers had received training on Tennessee’s Strengthening Families; 378 providers had received technical assistance; and 76 had received targeted technical assistance. These figures point to the success in providing training and technical assistance to child care providers. Regarding the self assessment, one Steering Committee member was pleased because she thought that only 10 providers would complete the self assessment but by the end of 2008 they had exceeded that number. Parenting Liaisons reported at least 54 providers who had completed the self assessment at the time of their interviews in April 2009, and more were in the process of completing one.

Parenting Liaisons have engaged in a number of activities designed to achieve these desired outcomes including training, working with the CCR&R specialists, and providing direct assistance to providers. At least four of the Parenting Liaisons have been working closely with CCR&R specialists to obtain referrals for providers who are interested in Tennessee’s Strengthening Families, and some of these Parenting Liaisons actually have gone with the CCR&R specialists to recruit providers. Three spoke of attending training to get to know providers and talk with them about Tennessee’s Strengthening Families. Others mentioned that they encourage providers by telling them that they are already adopting much of the Tennessee’s Strengthening Families approach. Two people said that their relationship with the providers influences participation in that some providers will complete the assessment just because the Parenting Liaison asked them to do so. One simply said they do “whatever it takes” to get providers on board.

Providers found the Targeted Technical Assistance from Parenting Liaisons to be especially helpful. Providers were asked whether their experiences with the Tennessee’s Strengthening Families program have given them a better understanding of what they can do to help strengthen the families involved in their center or family/group home. All but one provider responded that they had. Affirmative respondents then explained which part of their involvement in the program has most influenced their improved understanding. Most providers mentioned the TTA they received from Parenting Liaisons. Twelve providers reported TTA alone to be most helpful. They valued the brainstorming, customized advice, feedback, open communication, and relationship that was only possible with TTA. “She

cares about it and what I want to make happen. It's not just a job to her." Five providers described the most helpful aspect of the program as being the combination of completing the self assessment and working with their Parenting Liaison. These providers appreciated having one on one assistance with understanding and applying the results of the assessment to make improvements. One provider explained that the self assessment "pointed out weak areas and made us wake up, then the Parenting Liaison helped make improvements in those areas." Four providers felt that the program was most helpful because all three aspects worked together. These interviewees valued the self assessment because it illuminated shortcomings, the classes and workshops because they motivated other staff members, and the TTA because the Parenting Liaison was able to offer ideas for improvements that were tailored to the individual child care program.

Getting providers on board with Tennessee's Strengthening Families program presents some challenges, and these challenges have much to do with their reluctance to complete a self assessment. Reportedly from Parenting Liaisons and Steering Committee members alike, the term "assessment" conjures up a negative connotation with providers. And this is a challenge that is difficult to overcome. Many of the Parenting Liaisons reported that providers fear that performing the self assessment will take too much time and they are reluctant to commit. Many of the Parenting Liaisons felt themselves that the self assessment is lengthy and difficult to complete, especially for providers who may be intimidated by using the computer. Two of the Parenting Liaisons reported that they worked with providers who completed the self assessment and became discouraged when they found they were not doing as well as they expected. Their reports coincide with what providers told the evaluators. A few said that there is no external motivation or incentive for providers to complete the self assessment, and some just did not have the desire to complete it on their own to improve quality. One of the Steering Committee members voiced this same opinion, stating that the "cream of the crop" may be interested but others would not devote the time required to complete the self assessment.

Competing priorities may deter providers from completing the self assessment. Steering Committee members and Parenting Liaisons talked about the competing priorities of PSAM, the Star Quality and Report Card assessment, and other demands from licensing related to meeting staffing ratios. Even though Tennessee's Strengthening Families is just a different approach and implementing its basic tenets can assist providers in improving the quality of care, they may view it as just another demand. Helping providers see the connections between Tennessee's Strengthening

Families and other child care programs may remedy these issues as time goes on, but for now it presents quite a challenge.

Other outcomes of Tennessee’s Strengthening Families

Each of the individuals interviewed were asked about other outcomes that could be expected as a result of implementing Tennessee’s Strengthening Families. They were asked to consider things that could be achieved at the community level, at the agency or provider level, and with families.

Additional outcomes can be achieved by Tennessee’s Strengthening Families at the community level, at the agency or provider level, and with families. Parenting Liaisons and Steering Committee members mentioned a number of possible outcomes that they hoped Tennessee’s Strengthening Families could achieve. Some of the ones most frequently mentioned include:

- the formation of partnerships at the community level as Parenting Liaisons work more closely with agencies within their regions
- implementation of parent or community cafés
- increased family support by child care providers
- increased parent knowledge of quality child care and child development
- infusion of Tennessee’s Strengthening Families into frontline practice of agencies serving children

Providers have made changes to enhance the quality of care because of their involvement in Tennessee’s Strengthening Families program.

Twenty one out of the 24 providers interviewed reported changes they have made to their child care programs as a result of participating in Tennessee’s Strengthening Families. The three who did not report changes referred to goals and plans for changes in the near future. Providers reported a variety of changes including specific additions they made to their programs as well as changes in the overarching approach they take to managing their programs. Most interviewees have added resources to their centers or family/group homes and made them available to families. Resources included general child development literature as well as literature designed for individual families’ specific needs such as information in different languages or information pertaining to specific child rearing challenges. Other resources added by providers included information for parents on connecting to community resources in times of physical, psychological, emotional, and economic need. Many providers have created family bulletin boards or libraries to incorporate new

resources into their programs and provide a space dedicated specifically to families.

Providers have made changes to encourage more family participation.

Some have made conscious efforts to invite parents to visit. One provider began offering a light breakfast to parents in order to have them spend more time in the program. Some providers have begun to use parent meetings and surveys to gather family opinions and preferences. One has offered more parent training on specific child development topics. Providers have also made changes to encourage families to interact with each other. They reported changes such as adding space for parent cafés, creating a business card gallery, and offering a coupon exchange.

Multiple providers suggested that their participation in Tennessee’s Strengthening Families has led to a change in attitude toward families and how they evaluate the quality of their programs. They have gained awareness and knowledge that have led them to be family centered rather than child centered. One provider explained, “I’ve opened up to inviting the whole family, not just the child.” Providers have made efforts to highlight family strengths and regard family members as individuals. One director rearranged her work schedule so that she could be more available to parents during times that they typically came to the center.

Providers have experienced the effects of Tennessee’s Strengthening Families program on parents, staff, and children. Changes that providers have made due to their involvement in Tennessee’s Strengthening Families have produced noticeable effects. Providers reported improvements in their relationships with families as well as the classroom environment, and they have received positive feedback from parents due to the changes. They have also experienced an increase in the frequency and length of time parents spend in the program as well as the frequency at which they volunteer to help in the program. One provider explained that her efforts, inspired by Tennessee’s Strengthening Families, have “opened the lines of communication with parents.” Another explained, “Parents are more open and willing to share because they know that we care outside of tuition.” Providers also reported that this more receptive and caring relationship between the staff and families has led to a more positive environment for the children. One provider clarified that the staff and children are happier because the children are more concerned with their performance in school when they notice a closer relationship between their teachers and their family members. She says that they are “more proud and happy about what they do at school.”

Providers also reported that families used and benefited from the resources they added and changes they made. One provider was surprised to see how often parents actually took home literature about Tennessee's Strengthening Families. Parents were observed using resources concerning child development, substance abuse, and special needs. One provider shared that she was able to use Tennessee's Strengthening Families resources to teach a parent more appropriate discipline techniques. Providers reported effectively helping families gain access to community resources: One helped a family pay bills for a month. Another helped a mother get a GED and apply for college. A provider was able to help a battered woman get into a safe environment, and another provider gave multiple parents the resources that led them to sign their children up for government health insurance. Staff members benefited along with parents when a director shared information on government funded cell phones.

What changes would you make in Tennessee's Strengthening Families to improve its overall effectiveness?

All those who were interviewed were asked about making changes in Tennessee's Strengthening Families program that would improve its effectiveness and assure its success. Generally, their suggestions were more about expanding the program and continuing efforts rather than making significant changes. Some did make some important suggestions.

Providers did not suggest significant changes to Tennessee's Strengthening Families. One of the project evaluators asked providers to suggest changes that should be made to Tennessee's Strengthening Families program. Only 10 providers offered any suggestions, and most of these suggestions reflected a desire for more easily accessible resources. Providers suggested a comprehensive book list, CD, or website of resources. One provider requested more professional brochures to give to parents in place of copied hand outs. Another suggested providing a list of public speakers or experts who are available to come speak to parents and staff. Providers also suggested changes to increase the public exposure of Tennessee's Strengthening Families program. They recommended advertising the program, including an orientation class for staff and families, and circulating a periodic newsletter. Multiple providers requested a pamphlet, poster, or some other symbol to directly communicate a programs' participation in Tennessee's Strengthening Families to families and other members of the community. The remaining suggestions addressed editorial changes to the self assessment and classes. One provider suggested a shorter self assessment with more simplified

language. Another would like a self assessment and class option that is more tailored to family/group homes.

The adequacy of staffing presents some challenges. As mentioned previously, many of the Parenting Liaisons cover a large geographic area and, as a result, are stretched fairly thin. Many of those interviewed recommended hiring more Parenting Liaisons to provide better coverage across the state. An additional person at the state level position was also recommended by Steering Committee members. While the increase in staff was a recurring theme, most everyone thought that given the economic situation of the state, addressing this concern was probably not realistic at this time.

Steering Committee members are hopeful that the work currently underway to implement Community Cafés will be the impetus for growth of Tennessee’s Strengthening Families. Beginning in July 2009, Tennessee will enlist the assistance of a national Strengthening Families expert to conduct training on implementing Community Cafés. This will be a vehicle for getting families on board and providers enthused about involving parents. One member felt that the Community Café is a nice way for providers to see one way they can implement Tennessee’s Strengthening Families approach.

By continuing opportunities to collaborate and helping partners see specifically what they can do, Tennessee’s Strengthening Families can build on its success. Steering Committee members indicated success so far in their collaboration, but as one person said, “Sometimes momentum can be lost” as time goes on. One Steering Committee member encouraged continued collaboration among existing partners and suggested that recruiting others can energize the work of both Tennessee’s Strengthening Families and ECCS. Someone suggested the inclusion of a representative from the University of Tennessee Agriculture Extension Office on the statewide committee, and a Parenting Liaison also suggested that they collaborate with this organization on a local level. Generally, what Steering Committee members suggested about collaboration at the state level was echoed by Parenting Liaisons at the local level. Two mentioned specifically the connections between Tennessee’s Strengthening Families, DHS licensing and assessment, and CCR&R as well as local agencies serving children.

Changes to the self assessment were recommended by Parenting Liaisons to make the process less burdensome for providers. As stated earlier, Parenting Liaisons found the self assessment lengthy and overwhelming for providers. They suggested not only shortening the instrument but making changes to make it more strengths based so providers learned things they could be doing, rather than emphasizing the things they were not doing.

They also would like to be able to access results for providers they are working with, which they are currently unable to do. Additionally, some of the Parenting Liaisons and Steering Committee members suggested that the self assessment could be completed by providers in a small group setting, rather than individually. This might make the process less intimidating and provide a vehicle for promoting Tennessee’s Strengthening Families approach as word would spread. One Steering Committee member suggested that Parenting Liaisons could use their first group of providers as mentors for later groups, and eventually providers would encourage and work with each other to implement the approach.

Continued involvement with national efforts to promote Tennessee’s Strengthening Families will assist Tennessee in its implementation of the approach. A few Steering Committee members cited Tennessee’s association with the SFNN, being part of the national Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS), and participation in a national evaluation of Strengthening Families as being facilitators in implementing the approach in Tennessee. These relationships allow Tennessee access to the latest research and expertise of nationally recognized experts in the field of child abuse and neglect prevention, early childhood education, and quality improvement and evaluation in early childhood education and care.

Finally, Tennessee’s Strengthening Families needs time to reach its full potential. All of the Steering Committee members and staff who were interviewed agreed that it will take time for Tennessee’s Strengthening Families to take hold. Many said they would not change anything about the approach, were pleased with the progress, and did not want to move the program along too quickly. As one person said, “I’m passionate about Strengthening Families... Let it flourish but don’t give it Miracle Grow.” She and others agreed that change takes time.

Conclusions

- **Tennessee’s Strengthening Families is a loosely organized yet strong collaborative with support from essential players.** The Department of Human Services and the Tennessee Children’s Trust Fund with support from the Strengthening Families National Network have enlisted support from the key statewide organizations serving young children and families. This collaborative was strengthened by the merging of Tennessee’s Strengthening Families and a subcommittee of ECCS.
- **Steering Committee members and staff are committed individuals who work tirelessly to promote the Strengthening Families approach.** Everyone interviewed (Steering Committee members and staff alike) believed in and expressed a desire to promote the Tennessee’s Strengthening Families approach in their work with early childhood education and care providers and other organizations that serve children and families. Parenting Liaisons have so much to do with the expansive task before them and serve so many geographic areas that some have difficulty deciding on priorities, but overall they are making slow but steady progress.
- **A variety of approaches can be used effectively to promote Tennessee’s Strengthening Families.** There were numerous suggestions including more training opportunities, presenting Tennessee’s Strengthening Families at conferences and large gatherings of providers and frontline staff, and taking small groups of providers through the self assessment process and then using them as mentors to promote Tennessee’s Strengthening Families among peers. Steering Committee members also have high hopes that the upcoming Community Café training will be the impetus for moving the Tennessee’s Strengthening Families agenda forward.

- **Coordination of Tennessee’s Strengthening Families with other programs or initiatives that assure quality care is essential to its success.** Some partners suggest that licensing standards should incorporate requirements for providers to attend Tennessee’s Strengthening Families training and adopt its practices. However others suggest a softer approach with child care licensing and assessment staff, CCR&R specialists, and Tennessee’s Strengthening Families Parenting Liaisons working collaboratively to enhance program effectiveness. Providers, they feel, will then be encouraged and given the support they need to adopt practices related to the protective factors and help them see that by doing so they can improve their Star Quality ratings. With everyone lending their support, it is more likely that providers will adopt Tennessee’s Strengthening Families approach and provide higher quality child care including the involvement of families in the process.
- **Data from existing systems are readily available for use in the evaluation.** While there are some concerns about limitations of the Star Quality and Report Card data, training data from the TN CCPT system and from DHS licensing are available and can be interconnected to evaluate outcomes related to Tennessee’s Strengthening Families’ impact on quality of care. While the Star Quality and Report Card data will provide information on the quality of care, establishing a causal link between Strengthening Families training, technical assistance, and completion of the self assessment may prove difficult.
- **Facilitating communication among Parenting Liaisons may need to be addressed.** Parenting Liaisons expressed a need to communicate with each other and their supervisor, share ideas, gain a sense of direction, and get feedback to let them know if they are doing what is expected of them. Many were concerned that they were doing things differently than others and not meeting expectations.
- **The idea of Tennessee’s Strengthening Families’ self assessment may have a negative connotation with providers, but once they complete it, they and the children and families they serve will reap the benefits.** Most providers, Parenting Liaisons, and Steering Committee members report that the self assessment is too lengthy, not strengths based, and that providers are reluctant to complete it. However, the providers who have completed the self assessment have made changes in their programs that improve the quality of care and benefit children, parents, and their own staff. They report that parents use available resources, seek help when they need it, and get more involved at their child care centers. Children are happier when they see their parents and provider staff working together, and staff members are happier with the changes

in attitudes toward parents and the reciprocal improvement they experience in their relationship with parents.

- **The Tennessee Collaborative for Strengthening Families in its first year has made slow and steady progress.** This approach needs to continue on the path of promoting dramatic change in thinking and practice, with a focus on strengths and resilience and serving the entire family instead of risks and deficits and serving children. All members of the collaborative system agree that this process takes time.

Reference

Roman, C. G., Moore, G. E., Jenkins, S., & Small, K. M. (2002). The Urban Institute, Justice Policy Center and Caliber Associates. *Understanding Community Justice Partnerships Assessing the Capacity to Partner*, published May 24, 2002.

***Appendix A:
Steering Committee Members***

Leadership Team Child Abuse Prevention Initiative

State: Date: Person Submitting: Email Address:

State of Tennessee	Submitted by Jeanne Brooks, jeanne.brooks@state.tn.us	Name of Organization	Phone Number	Email Address
Leadership Team Name	Title	Mailing Address		
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Leadership Team Child Abuse Prevention Initiative

State: Date: Person Submitting: Email Address:

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Appendix B: Interview Guides

Steering Committee Interview Guide

Parenting Liaison Interview Guide

Provider Interview Guide

§ *Create a widespread understanding of what all kinds of programs and providers can do to promote healthy child development and reduce the incidence of child abuse and neglect.*

§ When you look at the Strengthening Families Steering Committee, do you see adequate representation of families, providers, and others in the early childhood community? Where is the imbalance? And what has and can be done to correct it?

§ Based on your experience so far, do you think organizations within the collaborative are ready to move toward the Strengthening Families model? How would you rate them on a continuum of 1 to 10 where 1 is concentration on risks and deficits and 10 is a focus on family strengths and resiliency?

<i>Risks /Deficits</i>					<i>Strengths/ Resiliency</i>				
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

§ Can you tell me why you feel that way? What might move them closer to a focus on strengths and resiliency?

§ So far, what has Strengthening Families accomplished to help organizations understand how they can promote healthy child development and prevent child abuse and neglect? What else needs to occur?

Initiate conversations with child care staff, board or advisory committees and parents in individual programs. Help providers to learn:

§ *More about child abuse and neglect*

§ *The prevalence, warning signs and impact on children and their development*

§ *The importance of early intervention*

§ *The protective factors and the role caregivers can play in preventing child abuse and neglect (CAN)*

§ I'd like you to think about the training, technical assistance, and other services provided through the Strengthening Families Collaborative. What do you think Strengthening Families has accomplished thus far is helping providers learn more about child abuse and neglect including the prevalence, warning signs and impact on children and their development, the importance of early intervention, and the protective factors.

§ What more could be done to assure that providers learn these important concepts?

What outcomes can be expected as the Collaborative System for Strengthening Families continues including outcomes at the system, community, agency, provider, and family levels as identified by the Leadership Team and program staff? These outcomes include the following:

- § *At least 15% of pre-school programs use SF self-assessment and commit to increased demonstration of parental interactions leading to use of protective factors*
- § *At least 50% of providers attend SF TN-CCPT workshop and follow up with Targeted Technical Assistance*

§ The Collaborative System for Strengthening Families hopes to achieve the following outcomes. How much progress do you think has been made?

§ At least 15% of pre-school programs use SF self-assessment and commit to increased demonstration of parental interactions leading to use of protective factors

§ At least 50% of providers attend SF TN-CCPT workshop and follow up with Targeted Technical Assistance

§ What is Strengthening Families doing to accomplish these desired outcomes?

§ What gets in the way of achieving these outcomes?

§ What other outcomes can the Strengthening Families project hope to achieve at the system level? At the community level? At the agency or provider level? With families?

§ What progress has been made in achieving these outcomes thus far? What gets in the way?

How could the Collaborative System for Strengthening Families improve its effectiveness in improving identified outcomes for children and the professionals that provide services?

§ What else might be done in the next year to assure Strengthening Families success?

§ What changes would you make in the Strengthening Families program to improve its overall effectiveness?

What has the Collaborative System for Strengthening Families achieved thus far toward its goals and objectives? These goals and objectives include:

- § *Build a Leadership Team that includes families and providers and a cross-section of the early childhood community support system.*
- § *Engage collaborative partners in creating a child abuse and neglect prevention framework that shifts the focus of prevention efforts from family risk and deficits to family strengths and resiliency.*
- § *Create a widespread understanding of what all kinds of programs and providers can do to promote healthy child development and reduce the incidence of child abuse and neglect.*

- § Strengthening Families hopes that organizations will shift their focus from concentrating on risks and deficits of families to focusing on family strengths and resiliency. Think about the organizations you work with. On a scale of 1 to 10, where do you think most organizations are in shifting their focus?

<i>Risks /Deficits</i>										<i>Strengths/ Resiliency</i>
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

- § Can you tell me why you feel that way? What needs to occur to move them more toward a focus on strengths and resiliency?

- § So far, what has Strengthening Families accomplished to help organizations understand how they can promote healthy child development and prevent child abuse and neglect? What else needs to occur?

Initiate conversations with child care staff, board or advisory committees and parents in individual programs. Help providers to learn:

- § *More about child abuse and neglect*
- § *The prevalence, warning signs and impact on children and their development*
- § *The importance of early intervention*
- § *The protective factors and the role caregivers can play in preventing child abuse and neglect (CAN)*

- § I'd like you to think about the training and technical assistance that you provide in your role as a Parenting Liaison. Using a 4-point scale of not at all, a little, some, a great deal.

How much do you believe the training and technical assistance helps child care providers and parents learn...

- § More about child abuse and neglect
 - § The prevalence, warning signs and impact on children and their development
 - § The importance of early intervention
 - § The protective factors and the role caregivers can play in preventing child abuse and neglect (CAN)
- Explain:

- 1 Not at all
- 2 A little
- 3 Some
- 4 A great deal

- § What more could be done to assure that providers learn these important concepts?

What outcomes can be expected as the Collaborative System for Strengthening Families continues including outcomes at the system, community, agency, provider, and family levels as identified by the Leadership Team and program staff? These outcomes include the following:

- § *At least 15% of pre-school programs use SF self-assessment and commit to increased demonstration of parental interactions leading to use of protective factors*
- § *At least 50% of providers attend SF TN-CCPT workshop and follow up with Targeted Technical Assistance*

The Collaborative System for Strengthening Families hopes to achieve two major outcomes. What progress do you think has been made toward seeing that:

- § At least 15% of pre-school programs use SF self-assessment and commit to (increased demonstration of parental interactions leading to) use of protective factors

Are they closer to 0 5 10 15%

(Ask about total # of providers and # completing self-assessment)

- § At least 50% of providers attend SF TN-CCPT workshop and follow up with Targeted Technical Assistance

Are the closer to 0 10 20 30 40 50%

(Ask about # of providers attending workshops and # where they have done TTA)

- § What are you doing to help achieve these desired outcomes?

- § Conversely, what gets in the way of achieving these outcomes?

- § What other outcomes can the Strengthening Families project hope to achieve at the community level? At the agency or provider level? With families?

- § What progress has been made in achieving these outcomes thus far? What gets in the way?

How could the Collaborative System for Strengthening Families improve its effectiveness in improving identified outcomes for children and the professionals that provide services?

- Š What changes would you make in the Strengthening Families program to improve its overall effectiveness?

Strengthening Families Evaluation Provider Interview

Introduction including:

I would like to ask you some questions about your involvement and satisfaction with Strengthening Families. Your answers will be confidential. We will only report what providers say as a group and will not provide your name or the name of your program.

- 1) How did you learn about Strengthening Families?
- 2) What convinced you to get involved in the program?
- 3) Can you tell me about your involvement so far?

... intro classes, assessment , visits from parent liaison?

How have other members of your staff been involved?

Did your parent liaison assist with completing the self assessment and/or setting goals?

- 4) Were you satisfied with *(list each part separately)*? *Do you feel that they were valuable learning experiences?*
- 5) What have you learned from your involvement with Strengthening Families so far?
- 6) Has your involvement with Strengthening Families led you to make any changes in your center/ home?
- 7) Have you seen any effects of these changes in your center/home so far?
- 8) How *else* have CCR&R staff or parent liaisons been involved in your participation in Strengthening Families?
- 9) Do you know of other centers/home that are working on Strengthening Families?
Do you communicate with these directors/owners about Strengthening Families or meet as a group?
- 10) Do you feel like you now have a better understanding of what you can do to help strengthen the families involved in your center/home?

If so, which part of your involvement with Strengthening Families was most influential to this understanding?

If not, where any aspects of Strengthening Families helpful to your program?

11) What changes, if any, should be made to Strengthening Families to better help you work with families in an effort to strengthen family functioning, enhance child development, and prevent child abuse and neglect?