A Year of Resilience

Founded on the belief that all families deserve to thrive in protective and caring environments, the Strengthening Families Georgia (SFG) Initiative formed in 2006. With a vision that all Georgia families with children birth through age five have the resources and support necessary for a meaningful and successful life, the mission of SFG is to utilize the Strengthening Families™* asset-based framework of Protective Factors in all systems, programs, services, and activities supporting families and young children as the approach to achieving this vision.

In October 2019, SFG became a part of Prevent Child Abuse (PCA) Georgia. This seamless transition allowed the work of SFG to continue as outlined in the Strategic Plan as well as presenting new focus and opportunities to the initiative.

This annual report provides information and activities completed by the SFG network, but it is by no means a typical annual report, nor a typical year. On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization declared the rapidly spreading coronavirus outbreak (COVID-19) a pandemic. The pandemic reinforced the need to embed Protective Factors such as social connections and concrete supports across the state while also revealing and exacerbating the inequities Black and Brown families face. This, coupled with the pain of racism on full display through multiple murders of unarmed Black men, put a spotlight on systemic injustice and racism in our country. These factors fundamentally changed how we did business for the remainder of the reporting period.

With close to 50 partner organizations the work of SFG, guided by the Leadership Team, is to build the five nationally recognized Protective Factors:
- Parental Resilience
- Social Connections
- Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development
- Concrete Support in Times of Need
- Social and Emotional Competence of Children

We believe the future of Strengthening Families is in creating a new and more equitable normal for child and family serving organizations and systems, so that they see their work as building Protective Factors to reduce the potential for child maltreatment, to bolster resilience and mitigate the impact of traumatic events when they occur, AND to create the best possible environments and communities for development of children and youth. We are committed to applying an intentional equity and racial justice lens to our work by:
- Acknowledging racism and inequities within the context of our organizational work
- Building objectives into our future strategic plan that focus on raising awareness and reducing racism at every level
- Seeking out experts to deliver workshops, keynotes, and trainings to educate communities and professionals who work with families
- Using diverse staff, partners, and community perspectives in the development of our work

* Strengthening Families is a research-informed approach developed by the Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP) to increase family strengths, enhance child development, and reduce the likelihood of child abuse and neglect.
Goal 1:
Embed the Strengthening Families Framework into all systems serving families with young children from the state level to community-based services. (Training, Education, and Public Awareness)

The SFG framework will guide policy and decision-making related to the allocation of resources, service configurations, training efforts and priorities of agencies, organizations, and individuals serving or working on behalf of families with young children. An independent evaluation of SFGs efforts in FFY 2020 found the SFG Initiative to be highly effective and responsive in its relationships with partners, policy makers, and leaders.

- Online SFG Training Modules funded by the Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL):
  - Strengthening Families Georgia: An Effective Approach to Supporting Families and Communities: 6,504 DECAL Quality Rated Center Staff trained
  - Connections: The Foundation of Family Engagement: 3,140 DECAL Quality Rated Center Staff trained

- In-person and virtual SFG Overview and Protective Factor Training: 310 individuals trained

- Virtual Parent Café
  - SFG, PCA Georgia, and Division of Family and Children Services Prevention and Community Support Section (DFCS PCSS) partnered to offer five virtual Parent Café sessions for parents/caregivers. The Cafes were attended by 78 individuals.
  - Each Café featured one unique Protective Factor as a guide for facilitating group discussions and formulating questions for breakout sessions led by Table Hosts
  - These discussions led to the development of Action Plans

- Provided technical assistance to programs interested in embedding Strengthening Families into new and existing program initiatives, including:
  - Head Start Regional Directors
  - University of Georgia’s Project F.R.E.E. for Families and Healthy Marriage and Relationship Education Project
  - Sheltering Arms

- Resources and Public Awareness
  - As COVID began to radically effect families’ lives, SFG developed resources to inform parents and caregivers on the many state and community resources available. Additionally, we increased awareness of ways Protective Factors could help build the resilience needed to deal with social distancing, virtual learning, and the financial implications many were facing.

CONCRETE SUPPORTS EXAMPLE

Schedule 2 tasks each week:
1. Family—chalk drawing/dance party
2. Designate YOU time—fave snacks and binge watch

SOCIAL CONNECTIONS EXAMPLE

- Child and family zoom video chats (by age groups)
- REACH OUT when needed
LEADERSHIP GROWTH AND SUSTAINABILITY:

The leadership team developed a SFG Communications and Branding Toolkit and a Planning Guide for Embedding Protective Factors within the Department of Education to further solidify Strengthening Families brand and messaging. Effective communications around Protective Factors can build and strengthen organizational relationships with the families they serve, potential funders, and within their work places and in neighborhoods and communities.

The evaluation concluded the SFG Initiative is highly visible as a force promoting the Protective Factors and the approach is known and understood by all key community leaders. During this time period, SFG committed to providing leadership to support partnerships and organizations by:

- Furthering the partnership with the Georgia Family Support Network (GFSN), the SFG State Coordinator became a member of the GFSN steering committee and co-chair of the programs workgroup. GFSN is a network of state, county, and community providers working together to strengthen practices and policies that champion quality family support.

- SFG has served on the Georgia Essentials for Childhood (EfC) since 2013 and continues to participate by serving on the steering committee and programs workgroup. Both SFG and EfC seek to assure that children grow up in communities in which they have safe, stable, nurturing relationships and environments.

- A Vision for Child and Family Well-being in Georgia, our State’s Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention Plan, offers a comprehensive approach to supporting child and family health and well-being over the next ten years. Georgia’s vision and goals promote a collective, strength-based approach that can help increase family assets, enhance child development, and reduce the likelihood of child abuse and neglect. This approach, is based on engaging families, programs, and communities in building the five key Protective Factors, which are characteristics that make a parent or caregiver, child, or family more likely to thrive despite whatever risk factors (characteristics that make a parent or caregiver, child, or family more likely to experience a negative outcome) they might face. All families benefit from having strong protective factors. Continuing the support of the Georgia Child Abuse and Neglect Statewide Prevention Plan, SFG shared the rollout of the plan in September 2020 and envisions regional action plans that embed strengths-based strategies. https://abuse.publichealth.gsu.edu/canpp/

- As part of regular operation, SFG Continues to conduct SFG Leadership Team, Partnership, and Committee Meetings to guide current and future work. Outreach efforts also continue through SF resources for parents and professionals which are distributed through the SFG website, now housed within Prevent Child Abuse Georgia’s website. The website newsfeed regularly informs child- and family-serving professionals and parents by adding a spotlight on SFG Partners.
Goal 3:
Use the Strengthening Families Framework to guide policy and decision-making.

SFG is utilizing a developmental evaluation approach to provide documentation of guiding policy and decision-making and the implementation of the SFG Initiative useful to partner agencies. This includes measuring changes, successes, barriers, and solutions which occur as the initiative unfolds. In addition, the SFG Logic Model has been updated to reflect the current strategic plan. The independent evaluation found the SFG Initiative to have successfully built the capacity of partners to support families in a way that builds Protective Factors.

During FFY19, SFG evaluation consultants reviewed the current strategic plan and developed a new SFG Evaluation Plan to align with new SFG objectives. The new evaluation plan was guided by the SFG Evaluation Committee and includes an updated logic model, measurement model, and new data collection instruments.

Facilitated conversations were held with the Leadership Team and Partnership group to identify and refine new evaluation questions for the FFY20-22 plan. The SFG Evaluation Committee held quarterly meetings throughout the year to review questions, data collection instruments, and ensure alignment with the current strategic plan. Implementation of new data collection began in FFY20 in partnership with PCA Georgia, and the ongoing support of the SFG Evaluation Committee.

Data collection activities for FFY20 included:
1. Leadership Team Survey
2. Modified Partner Survey*
3. Two focus groups
4. DFCS training survey
5. Follow-up training survey*

* These two items were new to FY20.

A primary role of the Leadership Team is to make sure funding is in place to move the Initiative forward, meet our benchmarks, and stay abreast of best practices.

Strengthening Families Georgia Leadership Team:
- AnthroEval Consulting, LLC
- Black Child Development Institute—Atlanta
- Bright from the Start: GA Department of Early Care & Learning
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
- Georgia Association for the Education of Young Children
- Georgia Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics
- Ga Department of Behavioral Health & Developmental Disabilities
- Georgia Department of Education
- Georgia Department of Human Services, Division of Family and Children Services
- Georgia Department of Public Health
- Georgia Family Connection Partnership
- Mental Health America of Georgia
- Multi-Agency Alliance for Children
- Parent and Family Advocates, Leaders and Representatives
- Prevent Child Abuse Georgia
- Sheltering Arms Early Education and Family Centers
- Stephanie V. Blank Center for Safe and Healthy Children, Children’s Healthcare of Atlanta
- Technical College System of Georgia
- United Way of Greater Atlanta
- Voices for Georgia’s Children
Prevention and Community Support

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