

strengthening families

THROUGH EARLY CARE & EDUCATION

ALASKA
January 31, 2007

CAPTURING THE BIG PICTURE:

Ways in which the original vision and plan matched up (or not) with the end of pilot achievements:

In the original application to CSSP, Alaska identified the following results for this project:

1. Actively engaging the early care and education community to become key stakeholders in carrying out child abuse and neglect prevention strategies.
2. Enhancing collaboration between the Office of Children's Services, Child Protection Programs staff and the early care and education community statewide.
3. Linking early care and education systems change efforts into a cohesive plan that is clear and concise for potential funders.
4. Identifying key early care and education sites that are ready to implement the Strengthening Families strategy to prevent child abuse and neglect through training and technical assistance.
5. Demonstrate that early care and education programs play a valuable role in their efforts to prevent child abuse and neglect.

These results were later revised by the Leadership Team to include the following goals and results:

1. To demonstrate that early care and education programs play a valuable role in their efforts to prevent child abuse and neglect
2. To actively engage the early care and education community in becoming key stakeholders in carrying out child abuse and neglect prevention strategies
3. To enhance collaboration between the Office of Children's Services, Child Protection Program staff and the early care and education community statewide
4. To link early care and education and child protection programs systems change efforts into a cohesive statewide plan

Project Results:

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

ECE programs will recognize their role in preventing child abuse and neglect and implement effective strategies for supporting parents and building protective factors around children.

CPS workers will see themselves as members of the prevention team, refer screened out families to community ECE resources, include protective factors in the early assessment of families, and routinely include placement in quality early childhood education programs in service plans for children 0-5.

Key policy and practice changes will be initiated for statewide implementation of the Strengthen Families principles.

Professional training and education programs will use consistent vocabulary and goals regarding protective factors in their curriculum.

A plan will be developed to promote the Strengthening Families principles statewide.

Alaska made major strides toward achieving the goals originally identified for this project. Although there is much work yet to do to implement Strengthening Families on a statewide basis, we have made significant progress, established a great deal of momentum, and positioned this project to move forward with support from the major stakeholders.

By establishing a Leadership Team made up of decision makers from a variety of programs, collaborating with other major early childhood efforts, presenting the model at statewide and local meetings and conferences, and piloting the model in early care and learning programs in four regions of the state, we have made significant advances in the early care and learning community seeing themselves as stakeholders in preventing child abuse and neglect. The SFI framework has met with enthusiasm every time it has been presented. Virtually all of the early childhood “leaders” in our state are familiar with the program and have supported its development.

The early childhood pilot programs selected to implement the Strengthening Families model have demonstrated significant shifts in how they think about families and interact with them. They have come to see the role they play in prevention efforts and the positive resource they can be to all families. One of the pilot sites, however, dropped out of the program mid-year. Through the pilot programs we have learned a great deal about the support needed to impact change and sustain the SFI model in programs. We did not

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establish a measurement to determine parent satisfaction with programs. We are making a cautious assumption that more parents received the supports needed based on the practice changes that were demonstrated by the pilot sites.

With support from the Deputy Commissioner of the Office of Children's Services, we have drawn Child Protection Services Managers into the prevention discussion and engaged them in planning for improved partnerships with the early care and learning community. The SFI project is having an impact on CPS policies and procedures, their partnerships with early care and learning programs, and their relationship with the State Child Care Program. Again, there remains work to be done, particularly in the area of ensuring that all children in custody are placed in high quality early childhood programs. These steps will need to move hand in hand with the development of a system for *determining* quality, which Alaska is just beginning to develop. We will be formulating strategies for moving SFI information through the CPS organizational structure to the local level as we broaden our scope.

Professional training and education programs have begun to include the protective factors framework in their coursework and practicum experiences. The work to date with the Universities has been accomplished by meeting with individual faculty. We are posed to do more systems level work as the distance early childhood education faculty is meeting this spring to review the scope and sequence of the AAS degree, and will consider including the protective factors in the coursework. We are in the midst of embedding the protective factors in the "Level One" training provided by the CCR & R's statewide.

Now that we have concluded the formal "pilot" stage with our early childhood programs and are finalizing our evaluation of that process, we are ready to solidify a plan to promote Strengthening Families statewide. We are looking for opportunities everywhere. SFI Co-Leaders have been requested to present to the Health, Education and Social Services committees of both the Alaska Senate and House as a result of the NCSL/SFI meeting in Chicago. The Alaska Children's Trust is willing to entertain proposals from sites interested in implementing the SFI model. Representatives from the primary early childhood initiatives in the state have agreed to support expansion of the SFI model in their recommendations to funders. We are hopeful that the momentum will continue for moving our expansion and sustainability plan forward.

Key Implementation decisions in year one:

- Determining the location of the project in DHSS- Office of Children's Services ensures engagement of CPS
- Selection of Leadership Team members- decision makers, members with influence
- Focusing on pilot programs rather than wider scope- concentrate our efforts
- Providing \$10,000 mini-grants to pilot programs- provided motivation as well as sense of accountability
- Selection of pilots with a variety of program models- learn how this plays out in different environments, cross training between programs creates energy

- Selection of programs from a variety of geographical locations- learn about implementation issues
- Hiring a contractor to assist with technical assistance and evaluation
- Raising consciousness of the program through conference presentations and meetings

Key implementation decisions in year two:

- Engaging CPS Regional Managers in learning about SFI and meeting directly with Pilot Programs in their area
- Hosting a statewide “Partnership in Early Childhood” Conference for a cross-section of professionals with featured speakers from CSSP (Judy Langford and Jean McIntosh)
- Partnering with major statewide early childhood initiatives
- Hosting a statewide “summit” which included SFI pilot sites, their CPS managers and early childhood programs interested in the model
- Attending the NCSL/SFI meeting in Chicago

Barriers removed or ameliorated:

One barrier has been the difficulty of engaging and influencing systems that are already overwhelmed with what they see as their primary mission. As in many states, Alaska is faced with enormous demands on the child protection system. Early care and learning programs are struggling to provide basic services on a shoestring (with various degrees of quality). It takes time and repetition of the message about how prevention will provide significant returns on investments made, to “shift” people’s thinking. “Shifting” attitudes and practice is something that we talk about repeatedly. Presenting consistent messaging, reframing ideas, drawing relationships between current work and prevention work, and persisting in addressing the issues have helped the efforts in Alaska.

Assets employed and leveraged:

- Support of OCS Deputy Commissioner
- Members of Leadership Team in strategic positions
- Involvement and implementation with the ECCS planning process
- Coordination with the Alaska Children’s Trust and Title V programs
- Membership on SEED Council (ECE professional development entity)
- Collaboration with other early childhood initiatives
- Access to conferences/meetings
- Linkage with CPS orientation and training through the University of Alaska Anchorage

Waves of change, leading to transformation of “What was,”:

Strengthening Families has provided a very concrete example of the cross-system work that needs to be done for young children. It presented a clear image of how children are better served when services are offered to their families in locations where they naturally engage. SFI has helped to highlight why cross-systems collaboration makes such sense.

Strengthening Families also provided a “purpose” framework for programs already providing family support. The model provided one answer to, “Why is family support so important?” As the Family Coordinator from the Head Start program serving primarily Native families noted, it helped to shift their focus from compliance of family support requirements to supporting families first, with compliance automatically falling into place as a result of the work they were doing. Her staff reporting feeling better about their work with this new focus.

Momentum developed to sustain SFI over time: See above

Context elements that significantly affected implementation:

- Geography is always a consideration in Alaska. The resources needed for travel and teleconferences are significant. The majority of the state-to-regional and state-to-local work must be done long distance.
- The programs that were chosen were all operating with somewhat different models and structures, from a church-based program to a private Montessori School. The programs were also from four different regions of the state, one a very rural area serving villages. There was also diversity in the children and families served. The project highlighted the commonalities as well as the differences in how support can be offered to families.

QUANTITATIVE INDICATORS

More programs use the protective factors framework

How many programs in your state were eligible to potentially be pilot programs?

Information about the Strengthening Families Initiative and an invitation to apply to become a pilot site was sent to 235 licensed childcare programs and certified preschools in Alaska.

How many pilot programs are participating in your state’s initiative?

15 programs applied to become a SFI pilot site and after going through a selection process 6 programs were chosen. The pilot programs chosen were from four different regions of the state- the interior, south central, southeast, and western Alaska. The program models are quite diverse. The pilot programs include a large faith based program, a Head Start program serving villages, a private Montessori school, a child care program attached to a homeless shelter, a Boy’s and Girl’s Club child care center, and a program operated by a Community Action Agency.

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How many programs, beyond the pilot programs are participating as part of a broader SFI network, or receiving SFI mentoring, in your state?

The Leadership Team made a decision to focus all of our attention on our pilot sites to learn about what it would take to implement the program.

Parent leadership is demonstrated at all levels

What is the number and percentage of parent-representatives on your state leadership team?

6 out of 10 (60%) Leadership Team members are parents, however only one (10%) of the positions is designated as a “parent representative”.

What is the number and percentage of parent-representatives on the leadership teams of your pilot programs?

Boys & Girls Club:

This program was unable to develop a Parent Leadership Team. They made several unsuccessful attempts to organize one.

BBNA Head Start:

Year One: The BBNA Head Start Policy Council was made up of 12 current parents, 4 former parents and 1 non parent.

71% current parents

24% former parents (or current grandparents)

6% non parents

Year Two:

The BBNA Head Start Policy Council is made up of 15 current parents, 3 former parents and 2 non parents.

75% current parents

15% former parents (or current grandparents)

10% non parents

Open Arms:

Year One: Board: 1 (11%). Leadership Team: 2 (25%)

Year Two: Board: 3 (33%). Leadership Team: 8 (100%)

RurAL CAP:

The Parent Council includes 12 parents.

Juneau Montessori:

Year One: 5 parent representatives out of 6 board members. (83%)

Year Two: 7 parent representatives out of 8 board members. (88%)

Integration of Strengthening Families into Early Care and Education initiatives

What total dollars (aggregated from both state and local levels) are invested in promoting SFI?

State level

Year One:

Title V= \$20,000

Alaska Children's Trust \$50,000

System for Early Education Development = \$30,000

Year Two:

Title V=\$23,050

Local level

Juneau Montessori School: \$1,860

Open Arms: Year One: \$1700. Year Two: \$5,000 allocated.

RurAL CAP: \$2,000.

BBNA: Feel it is so embedded in their services it is hard to determine.

Boy's & Girl's Club: Provided food for parent meetings, staff time for training, etc.

What in-kind resources (aggregated from both state and local levels) are invested in promoting SFI?

State level

The in-kind provided through the time commitment on the part of the Leadership Team is estimated to be \$12,000 per year. Staff time within the Department of Health and Social Services is approximately \$30,000 per year.

Local level:

The pilot sites have had difficulty quantifying the value of their in-kind as they have embedded in their daily practice and are not sure how to quantify it.

Enhanced Early Care and Education and Child Welfare partnership

What is the number of cross-training events held during the year at the state or regional level? At the local program level?

In April of 2006, the state hosted the "Partnerships in Early Childhood" Conference. This was a significant cross training event not only for child protection and early childhood professionals, but also for early intervention staff, mental health providers, medical practitioners, and a variety of family support professionals. An entire track was devoted to family support. The Strengthening Families Initiative was highlighted; with

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keynotes presented by the national CSSP staff and a half day workshop presented by CSSP staff and the six pilot programs.

CPS managers and pilot program directors attended a statewide “Summit” in December 2006 and received training on systems and collaboration, as well as the protective factors framework. The regional meetings with these groups have focused on discussions issues around partnerships vs. training.

TRACKING IMPLEMENTATION PROGRESS

How has your state increased the number of programs using the protective factors framework?

Training/Information Sharing

In October 2005, six pilot programs brought “teams” (consisting of the Director, a staff member, and a parent) to the Strengthening Families orientation. Programs were given in-depth information about the SFI concepts and strategies. Additionally programs shared information on how they were currently working with families. Using this information, and the results of their self-assessment, programs developed their plans on how to implement SFI in their program.

The pilot programs, which were located in four different regions of the state, were brought together for two more face-to-face trainings in April 2006 and again in December 2006. At the December meeting, five additional early care and learning program representatives attended to learn more about SFI. Pilot sites were asked to present on the framework and share their experiences with implementation. These new programs responded enthusiastically and are primed and willing to participate in the next phase of expansion.

Although many programs may be using some of the SFI concepts they’ve learned about through conference presentations, etc., we have not tracked that information. The Strengthening Families model is promoted whenever possible through presentations at conferences and workshops. In April of 2006, the state hosted the “Partnerships in Early Childhood” Conference. This was a significant cross training event for not only child protection and early childhood professionals, but also for early intervention staff, mental health providers, medical practitioners, and a variety of family support professionals. An entire track was devoted to family support. The Strengthening Families Initiative was highlighted; with keynotes presented by the national CSSP staff.

Strengthening Families is talked about at every opportunity. We have presented information regarding Strengthening Families at several meetings, events and conferences. The most significant and far reaching include:

- Statewide Health Summits
- Southeast Chapter of the Association for the Education of Young Children Annual Conferences

- Southcentral Chapter of the Association for the Education of Young Children Annual Conferences
- Office of Children's Services, Child Protection Regional Manager's Quarterly Meetings
- Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems Family Support Workgroup Meetings
- System for Early Education Development (SEED) Quarterly Meetings
- Alaska Head Start Association/Director's Monthly Meetings
- Ready to Read, Ready to Learn Governor's Task Force (now known as the Early Learning Council) Meeting
- Statewide CPS Supervisors Meetings

Pilot programs have been encouraged to present information on SFI when opportunities arise. In two of our regions, pilot sites have are submitting workshop proposal to present at regional conferences.

The University of Alaska Anchorage and University of Alaska Fairbanks have begun incorporating the SFI framework into their early childhood and social work courses. Early childhood practicum students are encouraged to use the SFI Self-Assessment in their early care and learning placements. A BSW practicum student has been placed in one of the pilot programs (for the first time) to focus on SFI and there are plans to bring the University of Alaska Anchorage Early Childhood and Social Work Faculty together to discuss the possibilities for expanding this model. The University of Alaska Anchorage early childhood family development classes have partnered with one site to plan and execute Family Nights. The University distance early childhood education faculty is meeting this spring to review the scope and sequence of the AAS degree this spring, and including the protective factors is on the list of items to consider.

The Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies have agreed to embed the SFI "protective factors" framework in the CDA training that is provided.

Follow-up Support

A "learning network" was established with the pilot programs and has been facilitated through monthly conference calls centered on protective factors, family support issues and resources. A contractor was brought on board in February 2006 to prepare materials, research resources and facilitate the monthly conference calls. On these calls the pilot programs give program updates, share information about the things that have worked well, and problem solve their challenges. It has made a significant difference in keeping program directors energized and engaged in the process.

The SFI Coordinator and the SFI Contractor have made on-site visits to all of the pilot programs except one. During the on-site visits we participated in and/or provided training as requested.

The SFI project partnered with the Zero to Three: Partnering with Parents project managed by one of our Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies and pilot programs

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were offered that training upon request. Programs have been directed to resources when an interest is identified, for example we facilitated an on-site visit to our Anchorage programs by staff of the Alaska School Board Association for the purpose of sharing information about an assets based program called “Helping Little Kids Succeed”.

Evidence of Change in ECE and CWS Practice

Some of the practice changes the early childhood programs have made include:

- Sponsoring:
 - Parent Education Classes
 - Grandparent Education Classes
 - Parent Date Nights
 - Family Nights
 - Coffee Mondays
 - Cultural Activities
 - Potlucks
 - Open Gym for the whole family
 - “Celebrate Recovery” dinners
- Using Websites and Yahoo Groups to encourage communication between parents, and between the program and parents
- Creating physical spaces for parents to connect, utilize a parent library, etc.
- Incorporating the use of mental health consultation
- Increasing connections with community agencies that can be resources to families
- Marketing weekly dinners for families differently
- Increasing communication with parents regarding their child’s participation and progress through daily information and/or parent/teacher conferences
- Supporting individual families based on need, more military families needing assistance
- Providing gas and food gift cards for families in financial crisis
- Teachers proactively calling parents to check in
- Starting classroom weekly newsletters to send home, (emailed or hard copy according to people’s preference)
- Using parent advisory groups to guide the programs
- Four Point Connect Plan—an intentional plan to connect new families with teaching staff, administration, seasoned parents, and parent coaches.
- Parent Navigators—A group of seasoned parents who serve as mentors to new families—not just Moms—Dads too!
- Using standardized rating scales to measure classroom quality
- Working closer with the Office of Children’s Services to streamline billing for foster children
- Putting up bulletin Boards for families on Center/Church/ Community family events
- Reaching out to local CPS office

SFI Pilot Program Directors Comments (6/06):

“Our everyday practices have changed. All employees make an extra effort greet and communicate with parents. All employees have received training on child development, signs of abuse and neglect, challenging behaviors and environments. All employees are given information including the benefits of implementing the SFI model.”

“The main difference in our program is how we see our families. We all have made more of an effort to get to know the families and their situations. We know the parent’s first names and attempt to connect them to other parents or resources in the community.”

“One of the strengths of this program is the support individual families receive when special circumstances arise. Several military families have had special situations arise while families members are deployed to Iraq. The staff have gone above and beyond in providing support for these families.”

“What SFI has done is give us the freedom to expand on some of the ideas and increase the level of services that we are able to provide. Many things that are happening under the SFI are things that BBNA has strived to do in the past but for one reason or another just weren’t happening. SFI has given us a goal and a road map as to how to coordinate with other programs in the best interests of the community. “

“We have become more deliberate during our planned social and/or educational activities to encourage parent communication and relationships.”

“We are trying to schedule events that are fun and interesting to the parents. We have always expected a high degree of parental input but now we are able to expand these ideas out of the classroom and someday would love to see them parent led.”

“It has served to strengthen the belief that the successes of the family and of the child are inextricably linked.”

“The biggest change I see (for children) is a change in attitudes towards children with challenging behaviors. Instead of insisting they move to another classroom or perhaps asking the child to leave the Center; we see teachers and parents working out ways to be an inclusiveness program.”

How has your state provided significant participation and leadership opportunities for families at all levels of SFI?

Parent roles and contributions

The parent representative on the Leadership Team was regarded as a valuable, important member of the team. The parent representative served not only on the Leadership Team,

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but on a number of subcommittees created for specific tasks such as pilot selection or curriculum development. This parent has just moved out of state (January 2006) and the Leadership Team will be recruiting for this position.

Parents from the local programs were significant members of the program teams that came together at the October 2005 SFI Orientation. They participated in the completion of the Self-Assessment before attending. Their perspectives were encouraged during the discussion as well as in the program planning for back home.

In February and March, 2006 parent focus groups were held around the state. The purpose of the focus groups was to learn more from parents of young children about the kind of family support that would be/is most helpful to them. The Leadership Team used this information along with our “learnings” from the pilot programs to promote strategies that are most useful to parents as we implemented the SFI. In Alaska, this can be significantly different depending on the area of that state that families live in and whether they are in a rural or urban community.

Pilot programs report that parents are invited to participate in some of the following ways:

- Sit on interview teams for teaching staff
- Participate on the parent council
- Share opinions regarding policy changes and center programming
- Visit and volunteer in the classrooms
- Participate on the “safety team”
- Assist with special projects-reading dates, fundraising, etc.
- Complete the Ages & Stages screening instrument on their child and discuss development
- Become parent navigators
- Participate in CPR/1st Aid training
- Assist with field trips

How has SFI been integrated into early childhood efforts in your state?

Baseline-Planning and program improvement efforts. SFI representation.

When Alaska was chosen as a Strengthening Families Pilot State the primary early childhood efforts were the System for Early Development Council (SEED), the Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems project (ECCS), the Alaska Children’s Trust, and the Alaska Association for the Education of Young Children.

The System for Early Development (SEED) Council, focused on developing a professional development system for early care and education professionals, had been operating for a few years and had made major progress toward designing a comprehensive and coordinated system for ECE professional development. The SEED

Council includes representatives from the Alaska Universities, the Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies, Head Start, the Child Care Program, the Alaska Association for the Education of Young Children, the Department of Health and Social Services, and the Department of Education. It is a strong group of public and private representatives. The SEED Program Manager is a member of the SFI Leadership Team and the SFI Co-Leaders (Claudia and Shirley) sit on the SEED Council. Reports on the progress of the Alaska Strengthening Families Initiative are made to this group at each quarterly meeting.

The Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems planning had just begun when Alaska became a pilot for Strengthening Families. ECCS workgroups were just forming to develop recommendations for a statewide, comprehensive early childhood system. The ECCS Early Care and Learning Workgroup included many members of the SEED Council as well as other stakeholders in the EC Community. The ECCS Family Support/Parent Education Workgroup consisted of stakeholders in various state programs, representatives of non-profit organizations, tribes and parent advocacy groups. Both of those groups were educated on the SFI framework and considered this model in their planning.

The Alaska Association for the Education of Young Children (AAEYC) was operating with a fairly weak state board with strong regional affiliates. The Statewide Board was not very active nor effective as a statewide organization when SFI began. Since that time the Board has reorganized and received funding (from SEED) to hire an Executive Director. Strategic Planning is happening and it is becoming an active player in the early childhood efforts in the State. The SFI Leadership Team is represented on this new Board of Directors.

The Alaska SFI project has with the Alaska Children's Trust on coordinating several prevention efforts. SFI staff and ACT Trustees have made several joint presentations at conferences and public meetings. Periodic SFI updates are provided to the ACT Board and/or the ACT Chairperson and Executive Director (recently hired). The SFI Leadership Team includes a Trustee and the Executive Director of the ACT. As a result, ACT Board Members have gained a greater appreciation for the SFI logic and philosophy. The ACT provided funding for the first year of this initiative for mini-grants for the pilot programs. This year we will be working to encourage programs to directly apply to the ACT to fund their SFI efforts.

The Director of the Women's, Children's and Family Health Program became a member of the SFI Leadership Team. Title V funding was provided to support the Strengthening Families efforts in year one and year two.

Over the past year the Department of Education and Early Development and the Department of Health & Social Services partnered to develop Early Learning Guidelines which SFI Co-Leaders participated in.

In November, 2005 a “Ready to Read, Ready to Learn Task Force” (now known as the Early Learning Council) was established by the Governor. This group consisted primarily of business leaders, school superintendents, one early childhood representative and the Commissioners of the Departments of Education and Health and Social Services. A presentation which included information regarding SFI was made to this group by the Office of Children’s Services Systems Reform Administrator (a SFI Co-Leader). The recommendations resulting from this Task Force include the need for providing support to families of young children, especially around school readiness issues.

Upon the recommendation of the SEED Council, a “Coordinating Committee” was formed to look at the overlap in the early childhood initiatives and strategize regarding the coordination of efforts. The “Coordinating Committee” consists of the SEED Program Manager, Child Care Program Manager, AAEYC Executive Director, Early Learning Council Program Director, a representative of the CC R & R Network, Head Start Program Manager, a representative from the Head Start Association, and a ECCS Coordinator/SFI Co-Leader.

Changes in Initiatives Based on SFI principles

The SFI principles have been embedded in the ECCS plan which, of course, will have statewide implications. By incorporating this philosophy into the ECCS plan, it will influence many early childhood efforts in our state such as the training of early childhood professionals, the provision of mental health services to young children and their families, and the policies and procedures in the child protection system.

The SEED project has embraced the SFI model and dedicated funding to the implementation of the SFI principles in the pilot programs.

The University of Alaska Anchorage and University of Alaska Fairbanks have begun incorporating the SFI framework into their early childhood and social work courses. Early childhood practicum students are encouraged to use the SFI Self-Assessment in their early care and learning placements. A BSW practicum student has been placed in one of the pilot programs (for the first time) to focus on SFI and there are plans to bring the University of Alaska Anchorage Early Childhood and Social Work Faculty together to discuss the possibilities for expanding this model. The University of Alaska Anchorage early childhood family development classes have partnered with one site to plan and execute Family Nights. The University distance early childhood education faculty is meeting this spring to review the scope and sequence of the AAS degree this spring, and including the protective factors is on the list of items to consider.

The Child Care Program has SFI on their “big picture” agenda. They are discussing avenues for providing additional training to child care licensors regarding the Self-Assessment and looking for how it might be incorporated in licensing requirements when the next round of changes are made. They are launching the development of a Quality Rating System (QRS). The SFI program will have input on how to incorporate family support into the QRS.

This “Coordinating Committee” is very engaged in discussions about Strengthening Families and ways to utilize Strengthening Families as the umbrella structure for the family support recommendations from the other groups. Because this family support model is embedded in early care and learning environments and makes so much sense to all of the partners, it has been readily accepted as a unifying structure. The private sector members are advocating for the statewide implementation of the model.

Joint meetings are being planned around the state that will incorporate discussions regarding the ECCS Plan, the Early Learning Guidelines, the Strengthening Families Framework and the Early Learning Council recommendations.

(See efforts with education and professional development systems above.)

How has SFI developed more opportunities for partnerships between ECE and Child Welfare?

Child Welfare Agency Role in Planning and Implementation

The DHSS, Office of Children’s Services houses the Child Protection Program, WIC, the Infant Learning Program, the Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems Project and the Strengthening Families Initiative. The Deputy Commissioner of OCS is a member of the Leadership Team for the Strengthening Families Initiative and has made a commitment to support this philosophy and practice within the Child Protection Program. The SFI is strategically placed to work closely with the early childhood planning initiatives as well as the child protection system.

New Linkages Created between ECE and CPS- Specific Policies and Practices

We are working to integrate our work across Child Protection Services in several areas. Both SFI Co-Leaders attend the CPS Regional Manager bi-weekly teleconferences. This meeting is significant, as it is a vehicle for transferring information to all of the regions of the state, as well as for discussing practice and policy changes.

Key staff from the early childhood pilot programs and child protection services have engaged in regional meetings to look at options for integrating key elements of the approach into existing policies, procedures, and training opportunities. Many of our discussions began around billing and payment issues. As a result, we have explored our relationship with the Child Care Program and are in the middle of revising how we receive and distribute child care assistance funds. This has also led to an examination of all of the child care policies within the Child Protection System. The regional groups have generated several recommendations for improved partnering which include: cross-training, creating a system for specialized training for child care staff working with traumatized children, formalizing the exchange of information regarding children between the two systems, including child care providers in “Team Decision Making” meetings, and increasing the availability of mental health consultation. The regional groups were brought together at a statewide meeting in December for joint training and

planning. Their discussions led to “take home” plans that will further the partnerships at the local level.

A SFI Co-Leader was given the responsibility to facilitate the review of the child care policies and procedures for child protection services and revise the MOU with the Child Care Assistance program. These opportunities were impacted by the SFI philosophy. Although we have not made changes to policy that require foster children be placed in early care and learning programs, we have begun the discussion around the importance of quality child care placements for these children and the need for monitoring this area of a child’s plan. We are hoping this process will bring positive outcomes to the foster care system and increase the quality of services for the children who require the most skilled and knowledgeable teachers.

CWS Training:

We currently work with the two largest University of Alaska campuses in the state which have both social work and early childhood education degrees.

New CWS workers are introduced to the SFI in their Training and Orientation for New Employees (TONE) a two-week course of introduction to child protective services work. A more in-depth overview of SFI is planned for the Child Development course which is currently undergoing revision for roll-out beginning in summer, 2007.

In field practice, one of the SFI co-leaders is the field instructor for BSW and MSW students in the CWS offices. As such, she is working with university faculty to further define SFI as a part of field practicum experiences, guest lectures in social work classes and providing an overview of SFI to social work students.

Have SFI Principles been incorporated into the PIP?

The State of Alaska’s PIP was completed in August 2005. We are in a non-overlapping year and are focused on continuous impact which includes supporting the SFI model. It has been included in the Annual Progress Report on federal IV-B plan

Information on Pilot Programs

See attached for the statistics on the pilot programs. Also see some of the results of an evaluation based on pre and post Self-Assessment ratings. **The items highlight in yellow are from year two.**