



Graduate Education, Applied Research and Public Engagement

Implementation Study of Strengthening Families Initiative, Rhode Island

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I. Purpose and Learning Question

The purpose of our field visit to Rhode Island was to observe the progress of the Strengthening Families Initiative (SFI/RI) model for early childcare, education and child welfare services. The goal of SFI is to mobilize communities, stakeholders and leaders from state departments of children, youth and family, health, education, and human services. By working together, risk factors associated with child abuse and neglect diminish. We limited our findings to those, which pertain to program impact at the provider level.

Our team is comprised of students at The Heller School for Social Policy and Management who are currently enrolled in Professor Susan Curnan’s “Contemporary Issues in Policies and Programs for Children Youth and Families” class. We were instructed to plan and design a field study of SFI implementation at Child and Family Services (C&FS) of Rhode Island. As a part of this process, our team visited the C&FS Middleton site to engage in a point-in-time observation. Our visit was guided by the following learning questions:

Who are the partners for this program?

What are the impacts of the program?

Has the process of implementation been a success?

How is program sustainability ensured?

How, why and to what extent is the SFI model implementing the five protective factors in the center?

II. Overview of SFRI Model

The SFI model provides a framework of five protective factors that are integrated into early childhood programs as an intervention for child abuse and neglect. These factors include: (1) Parental Resilience; (2) Social Connections; (3) Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development; (4) Concrete Support in Times of Need and; (5) Social and Emotional Competence of Children. The framework is integrated into programs as a tool for teachers to engage parents, and provide them with what they need to parent effectively. The SFI theory of change suggests that when programs implement this framework, children across all socioeconomic backgrounds are provided with the care they require to grow into strong, healthy and productive adults.

C&FS is committed to setting clear guidelines for strategies and outcomes that promote the SFI vision. The SFI/RI leadership team developed a logic model or theory of change to be used as a high performance management tool. The logic model describes the theory and the assumptions underlying the work of SFI/RI. It then links the overarching vision with strategies and outcomes on three levels: client, provider and policy-maker. For the purpose of this team’s site visit, we focused on the provider level section of the logic model (see Appendix A).

III. Approach and Methods

The purpose of this field study was to determine how SFI is implemented in the Middleton site. Heller students used an “appreciative inquiry” method to observe teachers in action.

a. Participants

As part of the process, Heller students interviewed Program Director Patricia Cabrone, Head Teacher (floating teacher for all classroom and second-hand to Program Director), Lead Teachers and Teachers Assistants (TAs) at the site. There was a variety of classroom experience among the teachers, ranging from 4 – 20 years. TAs were typically part-time employees, volunteers, and college interns. Since the Heller team visited during working hours, teachers and TAs were interviewed while performing their usual child-care responsibilities. Patricia Cabrone made introductory and conclusive remarks at the beginning and end of the visit.

b. Instrument/Methods

Heller students created an interview tool that included questions pertaining to the SFI logic model at the provider level (see Appendix B). The students designed this tool through “Technology of Participation” methods designed by the Institute of Cultural Affairs (ICA) – a collaborative process of brainstorming. In addition, we employed the “conversation” and “carousel” methods for brainstorming and organizing ideas. While developing this tool, the students took into consideration the different levels of teacher experience and responsibilities within the classroom. Within the context of the classroom, it proved challenging to sit down and systematically interview teachers. As a result, many of the pre-designed questions were reformatted in response to the nature of the reflection-in-action process. The goal of the interviews was to observe teachers’ knowledge of the five protective factors in the SFI model.

c. Design

Following the development of the interview tool described above, the class divided into two teams. Each team was comprised of 4-5 students, at least one of whom was a member of the Heller School’s “Children Youth and Families” concentration. Professor Curnan assigned each team to one of two C&FS site locations where the team would interview staff. All interviews were conducted as one-on-one dialogues between a Heller student and either the Head Teacher, Lead Teacher or TA. Team members were not matched with specific staff. Each team member interviewed a number of staff persons such that each staff member participated in multiple interviews with separate students.

d. Procedure

The procedures used in our SFI exercise included Appreciative Inquiry, Reflection-in-Action and Reflective Post Site Visit technique known as ORID.

i. Appreciative Inquiry

This approach refers to a particular way of asking questions and envisioning a future that fosters positive relationships and builds on the basic goodness in a person, a situation, or an organization. We focused on this approach as a way to spotlight strengths and assets that exist within the center. This differs from the typical process of evaluation or observation, which usually focuses on discovering the negative aspects of operations.

ii. Reflection-in-Action

Similar to Appreciative Inquiry, the Reflection-in-Action approach maintained the integrity of the exercise while allowing for questions to be adapted during each inquiry. The team interviewed Head Teachers and TA individually at the center as they performed their regular duties.

iii. Reflection Post Site Visit

After returning from the site visit, the team used a discussion technique referred to as ORID (Objective, Reflective, Interpretive, and Decisional). This technique includes a logical series of questions that probes the natural sequence people use to think about an issue. Questions included the facts about the experience or event (Objective), the overall feeling of the event (Reflective), the meaning and value of the event, its significance and usefulness to the group (Interpretive), and next steps for the organization (Decisional).

IV. Findings

Our findings are presented in the context of the “framework for managing complex change” developed by the Center for Youth and Communities. These are: (i) Shared vision; (ii) Knowledge, skills, and abilities; (iii) Resources; (iv) Incentive; (v) Ownership; (vi) Action plan; and (vii) Evaluation. Taken together, these elements function to promote sustained organizational change. When any single element is absent or incomplete, change will be gradual and punctuated. Each element promotes a distinct set of change characteristics and is associated with a unique outcome that results when that element is functioning sub-optimally. During our visit, we sought indicators that would show the strength of each element (see Appendix C for the managing complex change framework).

Additional resources influenced the following reflections. The first of these, Jim Collins' "Good to Great and the Social Sector," which identifies the key characteristics of organizations which have successfully implemented a lasting shift from mediocrity to excellence. In it, he describes the *right* types of leadership, teamwork, vision-casting and evaluation which yield high-quality outcomes. Another book by Christine Letts, William Ryan and Allen Grossman, "High Performance Nonprofit Organizations: Managing Upstream for Greater Impact," identifies important tools for building adaptive capacity and maximize one's performance. Of these tools, two are particularly relevant in that they provide an essential link between vision and lasting results. These are benchmarking and strategic human resources. Finally, we refer to an article by three members of the Boston Consulting Group, called "The Hard Side of Change Management." The authors identify four factors that determine the

outcome of a change initiative: (i) Duration, the length of time between official progress reviews; (ii) Integrity, the fit between staff skills and initiative strategies and goals; (iii) Commitment, the level of commitment displayed by staff at every level and; (iv) Effort, the amount of time, above and beyond daily responsibilities, that staff must commit to the initiative.

a. Shared Vision

Before an organization throws itself into a change initiative it must articulate a clear, detailed vision of the "big picture." The vision dictates the ultimate goal of the initiative and defines the path that the organization will take to achieve it. Strengthening Families Rhode Island has developed such a vision: to reduce the incidence of child abuse and neglect by promoting the five protective factors. The purpose, strategies, desired outcomes and ultimate impact of the vision is detailed in the initiative's logic model. However, sustained change is possible only when this vision is communicated to and shared by stakeholders at all levels of the organization. A shared vision enables people to "work in concert towards common goals," (Adams, Kingsley & Smith, p. 4). We examined the pervasiveness of this vision at the provider level.

During our visit we consistently found that staff demonstrated a commitment to using a strengths-based approach to working with parents. Their language and behavior indicated a strong desire to build parental resilience by developing trusting relationships, connecting parents to a social safety net, and building parents' knowledge of child development. We observed this on all staff levels, from executive director to teachers' assistant. The executive director casts the vision of the initiative as one that "empowers our own passion". One teacher described her enthusiasm for the program's commitment to parents, especially in comparison to other child care centers where she has worked in the past. She explained, "at other places I've worked, they didn't think it was right or important to ask parents about life, like it was none of our business. Here it's encouraged." Another teacher noted how this center has changed its approach to working with parents since launching the initiative. Although the staff "always thought it was important to communicate with parents and get them involved," she sees that "now [communication] is more intentional." A teacher assistant, who identified herself as a relatively new employee of just a few months, spoke about the importance of "taking more into considering [parents] values". Multiple teachers and assistants referenced the great importance of trust-building between parents and staff, such as the occasional on-site event to help parents become "more comfortable coming to talk to staff" so that staff can "help them with their problems."

We noticed however that very new staff felt somewhat disconnected from the SFI vision. One teacher assistant, who had only been working with the organization for two weeks, stated that she "was given some materials" when she first started but was not aware that C&FS had launched a new initiative. She described herself as having very little knowledge of how the organization engages parents or why. Her response was certainly the exception to the rule and may be merely an artifact of her very recent hire.

Overall, our observations indicate that the SFI vision is embedded in the culture of C&FS. All fully trained staff and most staff with little to no training expressed an understanding of and enthusiasm for practices that promote the five protective factors. Based on the model for managing complex change, we expect to see widespread confusion about the purpose and content of the vision when indeed shared vision is not optimally functioning. This degree of confusion does not seem to permeate C&FS. However, very new and partially trained staff did admit a degree of confusion. One

teachers assistant, describing her desire to attend more SFI trainings, told us, "sometimes its confusing because I missed things".

The primary method of vision sharing appears to conform with what Letts, Ryan and Grossman describe as "diffusion" – "the formal or spontaneous spread of a program or idea . . . [to] promote best practices, share lessons learned or publicize innovations, particularly through awards programs, conferences, and publications." These authors propose a complimentary strategy that may increase the sustainability and consistency of a shared vision at C&FS – development of adaptive capacity. Building adaptive capacity involves infusing the vision of the organization into daily processes. Collins describes the every day use of a shared vision in his "Hedgehog concept" (see section VI). He insists that sustainable change is possible only when staff "make decisions relentlessly consistent with [the vision]."

b. Knowledge, Skills and Abilities

To create sustained change, practitioners at all levels of the organization must possess the knowledge, skills and abilities they need in order to bring the vision into action at a high level of quality. Collins writes that an initiative will be successful only when, "the right people are on the bus" and "the right people are in the right seats". The "right people" in this case are those with integrity and commitment. We have already concluded in the previous section that C&FS has the "right people" by these standards. But sustained change will occur only if these people are "in the right seats", that is, if they possess exactly the sets of knowledge, skills and abilities required to perform their roles with excellence. Staff in varying roles will require distinct skill sets in order to fulfill their responsibilities and achieve their goals. However, teachers and all staff involved in this particular initiative must have knowledge of SFI's purpose and methods, as well as its short and long-term goals.

Staff at all levels presented themselves as skilled and knowledgeable child care providers. Four teachers reported between ten and twenty years of experience in the field of child care and seemed well educated in child development. One staff person even held a degree in Early Childhood Education. Only one staff person, a TA, expressed a desire for more child-care specific knowledge. Staff also described a high degree of familiarity with what one teacher described as "the system." In general, the staff appeared very knowledgeable about local services for families and children. All felt certain that they could provide parents with appropriate referrals when needed. One teacher stated, "If a parent has a problem, I probably know how to help them. If I don't, someone here does". Many staff members cited collective knowledge – the combined knowledge of themselves and their peers – as sufficient to handle any problem that might arise.

All staff that attended at least part of the SFI training series stated that the experience provided them with new knowledge and skills that have positively impacted their daily work. One teacher assistant reported that the training helped her learn "how to talk to parents" from different backgrounds. Another staff person said that the training "reminded [her] how important it is to engage parents." Although most staff seemed aware of and enthusiastic about the center's commitment to engaging parents, none described this practice in SFI specific language. Even staff that did not attend the training demonstrated the ability to implement multiple strategies that are emphasized by SFI for the promotion of the five protective factors. However, we did not find that any staff was explicitly familiar with the five protective factors, per se. Many teachers provided specific examples of instances in which they engaged parents. One teacher reported talking to parents about how she implements

methods to promote child development in her classroom and invites parents to discuss any questions or concerns they may have regarding her techniques. Another described a time when she was able to "redirect" a parent from a potentially harmful practice (providing toxic crayons to her child) by providing her with relevant information regarding child development.

Multiple staff mentioned a Thanksgiving turkey event that they felt had provided them with a wonderful opportunity to put their skills for parental engagement and support into practice. They described the event as a "trust-building" opportunity that helped parents feel more comfortable talking with staff about important issues. The language and content of this description provides strong evidence that staff understand SFI strategies and are able to implement them. The incident is also an example of the organization collectively implementing SFI strategies. The concept for the event was proposed by a parent, shared among teachers, and ultimately put into action. This process demonstrates an organizational respect for parent voice as well as inter-agency communication and support.

Based on the "managing complex change" model, we would expect to observe a great deal of anxiety and poorly performed work if staff lacked essential knowledge, skills and abilities. We did not observe any behavior that would indicate that to be the case. This implies that the capacity building works and training is "paying off".

c. Resources

The success of an initiative depends first upon the employment of competent workers who are willing and able to share a compelling vision. But effective action also requires that these workers have access to the resources that they require to do their job well. These resources include funding for program components, supplies, and space. Just as important are non-monetary resources like a supportive professional network and adequate time. Action will have the greatest impact when these resources are allocated toward the maximum performance of activities that are critical to the vision and away from activities that are peripheral.

During our visit we learned that C&FS is in the process of completing a new building where Middletown and Newport programs will join forces under one roof. This will provide employees with an updated working space and more easily accessible social network. As a nonprofit organization operating in an economic climate of fiscal scarcity, we expect that C&FS will usually have sub-optimal access to program funds. In light of this, we focused much of our attention on non-monetary resources.

Across the board, staff consistently acknowledged their peer network as a strong and valuable resource. In the previous section, "knowledge/skills/abilities" we discussed the strength of collective knowledge that we observed at the center. Interviews confirmed that staff members are knowledgeable and that they have access to the knowledge of others through a strong peer network. Teachers described their working environment as one in which staff communication is highly valued. One teacher explained, "We are encouraged to ask questions". Another assured us that when she is unsure about anything at all, she can "always ask staff". When we asked teachers how their peer network has changed since the initiative they responded, "staff are more open with each other" and "teachers are talking to each other more."

When we consider teachers' access to time – (i) the time necessary to fulfill their daily responsibilities and (ii) the time available to utilize SFI strategies – we found somewhat inconsistent results. When discussing time constraints, teachers described a desire for *more* time but did not report feeling like they did not have *enough* time. Teachers expressed a desire for "more time to talk to parents" and "more events" for staff and teacher bonding. They did not feel that the initiative was taking too much away from their daily activities. Rather, they desired for of an opportunity to allocate time to activities that would engage parents and strengthen staff-parent relationships. In "The Hard Side of Change Management", the authors explain that the time staff must devote to a change initiative *above and beyond* that required for their daily responsibilities should not exceed 10 percent of their total time. That staff would like to spend more time on activities which are central to the SFI vision suggests that the amount of time they are currently expected to commit to the initiative falls well below that 10 percent mark. Additionally, staff reported that they did have enough time in the day to do their jobs well. On the other hand, they wished that more time could be set aside for activities that promote the five protective factors.

The "managing complex change" model shows that staff will become frustrated when they lack sufficient resources to do their job at a high level of quality. During our short Point- In-Time observation, staff did not describe themselves as overworked or frustrated. It seemed that the amount of resources they had access to be sufficient to prevent frustration. However, these resources may not be optimally allocated toward activities that are central to the SFI vision.

d. Incentive

Our findings thus far indicate C&FS has undergone a significant change as a result of the SFI/RI leading team. Incentives are essential mechanisms for sustaining that change. By tying rewards directly to effort, incentives encourage staff to continue pursuing the SFI vision over the long term. When we consider incentives we first think of monetary rewards such as performance bonuses and generous pay. These types of incentive are powerful and go a long way to reduce turn-over and minimize burn-out. But nonprofits like C&FS are often minimally funded and face strict limitations in the use of non-program (administrative) funds. Luckily, the types of people who choose nonprofit employment are also highly motivated by *results, mission and commitment*. They are motivated by evidence that their work is making an impact and that they are a 'change agent' in the field. During our visit, we looked for staff's answers to the question, "*what's in it for me, for those I serve, and for my organization?*"

Throughout this report we have documented the results that staff has seen in terms of parental engagement, staff-parent relationships, and inter-agency support. They have demonstrated enthusiasm for increasing strategies that promote the five protective factors because they have seen the impact that these strategies have on their clients and their organization. They have also reported personal benefits from the SFI trainings. The trainings have provided them with skills and knowledge that will positively impact their careers for years to come.

Staff reported powerful incentives, which are twofold:

- External to their experience in the organization (impact on clients and their future careers), and
- Collectively shared by all staff (improved working environment, more supportive staff-network).

In our short visit, we did not see evidence that personal effort to utilize strategies that promote the five protective factors is directly tied to professional rewards. The authors of "Managing Complex Change" write, though change may occur in the absence of this type of incentive, "[it] will occur slowly at best". Another framework by Christine Letts, "Managing Upstream for a Greater Impact" describes how successful nonprofits strengthen incentives through organizational processes that intentionally links vision with personal effort and rewards. They describe this technique as "strategic human resources". Strategic Human Resource acknowledges individuals for effort that promotes the goals of SFI through official performance reviews. These performance reviews are strengths-based; they are used to specify vision-related objectives and acknowledge a job well done. Periodic official acknowledgement for personal effort is an incentive in itself. The authors also suggest that organizations offer special assignments, lateral promotions and performance awards (not bonuses) to staff as non-monetary rewards for initiative-related effort.

e. Ownership

Ownership of the vision goes beyond mere understanding; it ties success and responsibility across stakeholder groups. It attempts to leverage all knowledge, skills, and abilities of stakeholders to hold everyone accountable for their actions. Ownership results when employees value the initiative and have a stake in it—when they believe the initiative will be beneficial for themselves and their clients—and that it *can* and *should* be done. When staff "buy-in" to the vision, they put forth strong individual and collective effort to make necessary changes to achieve short- and long-term goals.

During our visit, we found that most staff demonstrated an implicit understanding of the SFI vision and a strong ability implement SFI strategies. More than that, they were actually *enthusiastic* about putting the vision into action. As mentioned above, staff members enjoy implementing strategies that promote parental engagement and strengthen parent-staff relationships. They also care deeply about child development and passion that the SFI approach encourages them to share this knowledge with parents. *They desire more SFI training* and more opportunities to implement the strategies that they learn there.

Based on the "Managing Complex Change" model, we reviewed our findings for evidence of where ownership may be lacking, in particular, we looked for reports of apathy or resentment. We did not find any incidence of resentment among the staff members. However, one teacher assistant, a very new hire with no SFI training, did appear somewhat apathetic towards SFI strategies. Despite one respondent's lack of shared vision and ownership, we overwhelmingly saw staff that is highly committed to SFI. Yet, the example of this one person suggests that C&FS may benefit from a hiring process which incorporates SFI goals and strategies into position descriptions, and thus setting standards for interconnection and partnership with parents, while connecting new staff with the vision of the organization from the beginning.

f. Action Plan

Earlier, we discussed the impact of incentive on staff's long-term commitment to a change initiative. Results, we argued, are a powerful incentive for lasting change. A practical action plan facilitates the use of results as incentives by defining interim and final goals for individual staff members, teams and the organization. It provides people with the structure and direction they need by informing others about their specific roles and responsibilities. An action plan should communicate

“what they must do within those roles, by when, with whom, and how.” The answers to these questions are directed by the vision, goals, objectives and expected outcomes as defined in the logic model. Specifically, an action plan should define structural components, prioritized tasks, processes, standards, guidelines, constraints, schedules, communication, roles and deliverables. It identifies staff skills, available resources, and provides incentives that will motivate staff to perform better. We live in an evolving world where things are not static. Therefore, a good action plan should also be designed in such a way that it is able to adjust to changing conditions

Funders and stakeholders usually demand early evidence that a change initiative is achieving its goals. An organization can use an action plan to identify and highlight early evidence of change. Most importantly action plans function as a feedback mechanism that accounts for stakeholders’ accountability and quality criteria that are often of interest to investors.

Before we visited the SFI field site we were aware of the organization’s Plan of Action which translates the vision and goals into distinct action lines. It describes how the organization will achieve its goals by engaging all stakeholders such as staff, families and other partners in completion of the SFI program self-assessment. The SFI managing team and staff hold bi-weekly meetings for staff and teachers during which they discuss the progress of the program’s goals and vision and share new ideas that will strengthen the initiative.

According to the “Managing Complex Change” model, an organization which lacks a clear and relevant action plan will experience a number of false starts in its change initiative. The short duration of our visit precludes this team from recognizing this phenomenon at C&FS. Even so, C&FS can certainly prevent false starts by fine-tuning the action plan such that interim goals and the strategies that each staff person must employ to achieve them are clear and are regularly reviewed.

g. Evaluation to Produce Ongoing Change

Evaluation is the term we use to describe the process of systematically reviewing the progress of the action plan and responding accordingly. Evaluation is not an event. Rather it is “an ongoing process through which one can identify progress and problems, spearhead improvements, encourage accountability, and keep up with other changes in the field.” Evaluation can answer some of the following questions: How we are doing? Where have we progressed? Where are we still lacking, and why? Are we achieving our goals at the expected levels of quality? What is working well? What strategies or activities must we revisit? In this way, evaluation pushes an organization towards continual improvement.

The “Managing Complex Change” model indicates that, without ongoing evaluation processes, a change initiative will reach a plateau. It is important therefore that each of the elements of ‘managing change’ have associated evaluation components that pertain specifically to midstream and ongoing performance, and outcomes in general. Through such continuous evaluation progress may be achieved, with the original vision or purposes being fulfilled. Evaluation can also assist SFI leaders to keep financial stakeholders engaged and knowledgeable of how the project is progressing. Educating donors and other stakeholders about the importance of evaluation will be a crucial part of the resource puzzle. As the field moves more toward accountability and evaluation, it will be necessary for C&FS RI to display their successes through empirical means.

V. The Promise of Moving Forward

The team unanimously agrees that Strengthen Families Rhode Island shows significant benefits for the center’s staff and children. Program Director Patricia Carbone’s strong leadership skills and dedication to the initiative combined with the staff’s excitement for new learning leads us to believe that SFI holds great potential. We now offer some promising techniques to assure that the Child and Family Service continue their great work with SFI, especially as they move into the newly built center.

a. From Good to Great by Jim Collins

Jim Collins, a management theorist who researches and works with leaders in the corporate and social sector, developed a framework for businesses to move from good to great practices. Through critical feedback, structured interviews, and laboratory work, Collins identified four basic stages that build a great organization – disciplined people, discipline thought, disciplined action, and building greatness to last. Each of these promising techniques can be applied to early education centers for the purpose of ensuring lasting results and success implementation of SFI.

i. Disciplined People: First Who, Then What

Collins advises organizations to do whatever they can to get the right people on the bus, the wrong people off the bus, and the right people in the right seats. According to Collins, the “right” people refer those that are productively neurotic, those who are self-motivated and self-disciplined, and those who wake up every day, compulsively driven to do the best they can because it is simply part of their DNA. In this sense, getting the right people on board is more important than determining how much to compensate workers.

This model can be applied to SFI and the center as a vehicle for sustainability after Strengthening Families Coordinator Kimberly Ash discontinues her intense involvement with initiative operations. It is clear that the center has a handful of “right people,” such as Kimberly, Patricia, veteran teachers such as Theresa, and teachers who have completed the training. As new teachers become introduced to the initiative or as the center attempts to educate teachers lacking training, it is imperative that these “right people” become “bus drivers” – workers who become mentors to fellow workers who are not yet fully capable of implementing practices from SFI. This promising technique will ensure that practices continue well into the future.

ii. Disciplined Thought: The Stockdale Paradox

According to Collins, the Stockdale Paradox is, “retaining unwavering faith that you can and will prevail in the end, regardless of the difficulties, and at the same time having the discipline to confront the most brutal facts of your current reality, whatever they may be.” There are many facts that the center must face before traveling on a route to greatness – realizing that not all staff understand SFI or are fully educated in its practices, understanding that teacher turnover can undermine progress, and facing the reality that funding may be limited. Confronting the facts and finding solutions to concerns will be one of the most important promising techniques the center can invest in.

iii. Disciplined Action: The Flywheel

Turning the flywheel refers to the process of relentlessly pushing a giant, heavy flywheel in one direction, turn upon turn, building momentum until a point of breakthrough, and beyond. The key point in this concept for SFI is creating momentum within the organization by building the brand. Building this brand establishes recognition for the organization by publicizing their services to the public.

SFI itself already has a brand – the initiative exclaimed their presence in the community and knowledge of the initiative can be easily obtained. This promising technique can be applied to the center’s infrastructure in terms of branding SFI within their practices. The center should steer away from referring to SFI as “that initiative that we do” and move towards proclaiming it as “our practices.” By claiming SFI as “normal operating practices” and part of the mission, staff will have an easier time pushing the flywheel. New staff will realize that SFI isn’t simply what the center *does*, but SFI is what the center *is*.

iv. Building Greatness to Last: Preserve the Core and Stimulate Progress

The last promising technique for future greatness is having a set of timeless core values and a core reason for being that remains constant over long periods of time, while also having a relentless drive for change and progress. SFI itself serves as core values and practices that the center can maintain. Future progression depends on determining how to change depending on the needs of the community while maintaining a strong commitment to SFI values and practices. This last promising technique will be dependent upon the strong leadership of Program Director Patricia Cabrone.

VI. Challenges and Opportunities

After discussing our observations through the Managing Complex Change Model and the promises moving forward it is worth noting some opportunities the initiative and organization has ahead of them. Although some may consider these challenges, we see them as opportunities for greater success. These opportunities include: (1) Incorporating SFI language into daily routine; (2) Confronting the brutal facts; (3) Maintaining commitment to the SFI goals and model which will drive as well as sustain economic growth and; (4) Benchmarking performance.

a. Incorporate SFI language into daily routine

One of the central challenges we saw within the organization was incorporating language from the Strengthening Families Initiative into staff’s daily language at the Child and Family Services site. The Executive Leadership Team of Kimberly and Kate recognized the need to use the language associated with the 5 Protective Factors in the daily routines. Kate suggested during the debriefing meeting that there might be two ‘implicit’ languages among the staff – one that is appropriate for fostering and strengthening parent relationships and another that supports the SFI model to prevent child abuse and strengthen families. We agree with these efforts and encourage leadership to promote the proper language from strengthening families frequently; this may include weekly updates and/or brief messages from leaders to acknowledge the continued commitment to the model and understanding of SFI terms.

b. Confront the Brutal Facts

As Jim Collins suggests, “facts are better than dreams.”^[1] This is often a difficult task for nonprofits to recognize. Educational missions are often too broadly defined, such as teaching children to become great minds or provide children with safe and healthy environments. With such broad definitions and responsibilities, it can be difficult to reflect on little more than daily routines. However, we urge that within the SFI you continue to push beyond the routines in search of creating a larger impact. This may come in the form of confronting the brutal facts of reality.

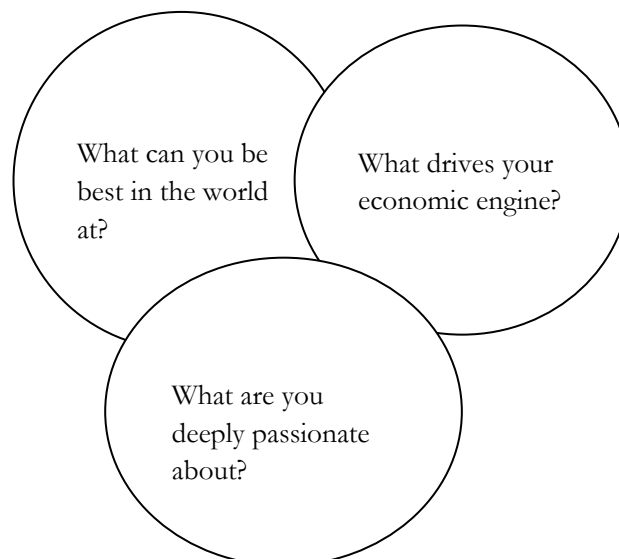
For example, as Kimberly had suggested, her leadership and training “cannot last forever.” So as an organization, how do you prepare for her departure? What is the exit strategy? What are the strategies needed for staff to feel confident in their understanding and awareness of the model? How can you empower staff to do more with this knowledge? What tools, if any, are the centers lacking to be successful? Questions such as these may uncover many more opportunities for the SFI model, both locally and nationally.

You may have already answered many of these questions and as Christine Letts suggests, “innovative often means little more than well implemented.”^[2] So this Heller students’ team promotes any efforts you may make to discuss major struggles, setbacks, and lessons in an open and honest manner to develop and invigorate the sustainability of the SFI model.

c. Remain committed to your model and passion and it will drive the economic engine

As a class, we were extremely impressed with the quality of leadership from Patricia Cabrone, commitment to the initiative and overall focus to early childhood education. To that end, we believe if SFI and Child and Family Services RI keeps their vision narrow and goals explicitly defined then it will continue to drive the economic engine needed for success. Collins uses the broad Hedgehog Concept to describe this framework, as seen below.

Hedgehog Concept



The challenge within the economic engine aspect of this model is the ability to leverage resources. Clear communication with donors, funders, and community leaders about the needs of populations being served, as well as the needs of the organization will be crucial in achieving further success. This may require some restructuring in your current development strategies, but we believe focusing internally is as important as direct services. Stressing the importance of building an organization's internal capacity may be helpful in rethinking one's strategies. We suggest using the term '*building the organization's adaptive capacity*', when searching for funding opportunities. Adaptive capacity is an organization's ability to *ask, learn, reflect, and adapt*.^[4] By engaging in these processes an organization recognizes it is more than the sum of its programs. The organization can be more effective in stepping back and observing current practices and daily routines. Utilizing this information can inform practice for the organization and ultimately protect children more effectively.

We are hopeful the initiative and organization has already found a middle ground between these three circles and is committed to thriving in this area.

d. Benchmark performance

Benchmarking is an organizational process that links learning and results. Letts (1999) suggests that, "getting from best practices [within the SFI model] to better performance requires an organizational learning tool."^[5] A shift to active, organizational learning requires attention to the following: Measurement; Analysis of deficiencies; Comparisons with better performing organizations and; Investment of time and resources ^[6].

Understanding organizations' practices are vital to the success and/or failure of this initiative. We suggest embracing a benchmark model that puts process first and metrics second. For example, the Xerox Corporation uses the following benchmarking process to look at their production and purchasing processes to discover if there are differences between sites and to determine if action is needed to improve their process.

Planning

1. Identify service or process to be benchmarked.
2. Identify comparative organizations.
3. Determine data collection method and collect data.

Analysis

4. Determine current performance 'gaps'.
5. Project future performance levels.

Integration

6. Communicate benchmark findings and gain acceptance.
7. Establish improvement goals.

Action

8. Develop action plans.
9. Implement specific actions and monitor progress.
10. Recalibrate benchmarks ^[7].

In the case of the SFI, benchmarking might be done through internal comparisons across sites. Reviewing a variety of site information may be helpful. Certain site successes may illuminate useful

strategies. Gauging those strategies against setbacks in other organizations may be a valuable resource. One effective approach to benchmarking is making participation a vital element in self-improvement. Collaborating with program directors and head teachers can identify key best practices and assist in creating central questions, gathering information, and implementing action plan [8].

VII. Conclusion

While it is our opinion that SFI/RI is a successful initiative, it will ultimately require a formal evaluation that balances initiative objectives and capacity building. The fact that the SFI/RI Executive Team allowed students to visit C&FS reflects the team's commitment to the initiative and desire to maintain and sustain its success. Although defensive in some instances during the post-visit reflection, the SFI Executive Team was generally enthusiastic about the Heller team's findings and truly concerned about the staffs' noted concerns.

Appendix A: SFI/RI Logic Model ¹

FOR WHOM	ASSUMPTIONS <i>Theory of Change</i>	STRATEGIES <i>Activities</i>	OUTCOMES	IMPACT
<p>Children and Parents in Rhode Island</p> <p>Early Care and Education Providers in Rhode Island</p> <p>Policy Makers, Practitioners and Change Agents Throughout Rhode Island</p>	<p>An evidence-based framework that integrates a universal support system for families, providers and EEC programs is the approach of choice</p> <p>Children & Parents/Caretakers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> All 5 Protective Factors are necessary for preventing child abuse and neglect and preparing children to learn—they are evidence based building blocks. Regardless of socio-economic circumstances, children and families who are provided with all 5 can grow into strong, healthy, productive adults Parental/Caretaker engagement and leadership is essential for integrating protective factors and catalyzing parent engagement and connections Family race, culture, language and other diverse characteristics are a critical component to respect in a strength based approach <p>Providers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> For more than 30 years practice and policy has been based on a model of family risk and deficits <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shifting to a strength based approach will take time, leadership, expertise, resources and political will The practitioners and programs are willing and ready to learn but may not have the skills and knowledge to make the shift No one agency or program can achieve desired outcomes in isolation, collaboration and shared learning is necessary Core training needs to have depth, duration and dosage to support the long term changes in practice. <p>Sustainability</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A need to have a favorable political climate for innovation in early care and education policy through education and advocacy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Embedding the SF framework in ECEC programs, PBIS, QRS, ELS & other partnered state initiatives is necessary for sustainability and strengthens all systems The new strategy is doable, affordable and has widespread support <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shared understanding of this approach provides opportunities for continuity for families 	<p>Children & Parents/Caretakers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A place-based approach by enlisting early care and education providers Expand and develop statewide Assess and prepare programs to implement protective factors frame Document outcomes and use data for continuous improvement Identifying parent leaders and directing them to additional trainings Recognize multiple opportunities to build parent leadership in programs and communities and place parents in leadership opportunities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Such as: annual leadership meetings for parents, PAT, COZ Center groups, workshops, parent mentorship Build parent involvement in self-assessment and parent to parent support <p>Providers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expand a broad-based peer to peer learning and support network with connections – representation on the Leadership team Deliver effective, responsive TA tools and processes to support shifting practice in programs (delivered by skilled and knowledgeable individuals) Embed respect for family diversity in all PD/TA delivered to providers in order to improve skills specific to dealing with diverse families Develop an effective strategy – build a broad-based provider “buy-in” for the paradigm shift Deliver and institutionalize an effective, high quality consistent PD experience that has the depth, duration and dosage needed to change practice <p>Sustainability</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Educate and build awareness about SFI Launch communication campaign – using lessons from the pilot and other learning opportunities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strengthen the specific action plan for embedding SF framework in ECEC programs, PBIS, QRS, ELS and other state initiatives – involving regular intro trainings and collaboration – and identify the added value SFRI would bring to each <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Secure a dedicated development person to secure sustaining funding Leadership team – define roles and monitor progress Positioning SFRI (through language) so that it is recognized that the most vulnerable children benefit from this program Flexible funding for parent engagement and parent leadership activities Link to newly emerging Early Childhood council (state level) Use cyclical evaluation with all stake-holders as a management and learning tool. Self-assessment, program improvement planning (goals and strategies) implementation and re-assessment Collaborate to build a favorable climate for innovations in early care and education policy through education and advocacy 	<p>Children & Parents</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parent/Caretaker engagement and leadership Supportive relationships between early care and education providers and parents/caretakers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduced investigations Fewer expelled, excused children Supportive relationship between parent to parent Build the 5 protective factors in the family unit to prevent child abuse and neglect <p>Providers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Skilled and knowledgeable providers Strong, mutually supportive relationship between providers and parent/caretakers Human and materials – resources are available to deliver PD and TA to all providers statewide Providers understand, support and celebrate parent/caretaker family diversity ECEC programs are connected to resources, services and supports in their communities and integrated into a comprehensive system of care <p>Sustainability</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Policy changes – long term value of parent support and engagement State budget changes Annual Report Card – to all stake-holders <ul style="list-style-type: none"> SF framework is embedded in ECEC programs, QRS and other state initiatives 	<p>Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect</p> <p>Children Healthy and Ready to Learn</p> <p>Sustainable, High Performance Leadership Team in Support of Continuous Improvement</p> <p>Policies and Resources Aligned with Protective Factors</p> <p>Child Abuse and Neglect Programs are Recognized as a Priority in RI</p>

¹ Susan P. Curnan. Managing and Leading Organizational and Policy Changes Case: Strengthening Families Initiative, Rhode Island. January 27, 2009.

Appendix B: Interview Questions

i. Examples of Questions Designed for Head Teachers

- What are the differences between a Head Teacher and a Lead Teacher?
- How would you define success?
- How are you tracking success?
- How do you know when you've seen success?
- In your view, what have been the benefits from the initiative?
- Who are your "right people" (allies)?
- What have you gained from partnerships with the "right people"?
- What does it take to provide an integrated model of service?
- What tools have you learned to engage parents more effectively?
- How have *Five Protective Factors (5Ps)* shown impact on children?
- What difficulties do you face to achieve initiative goals?
- When faced problem/at-risk child, what tools have been used to prevent child exclusion from program? How different from the old way?
- For children who come from different cultural backgrounds, how do you maintain diversity with your feeding strategies?
- To what extent has your previous experience been incorporated into this new shift? Are you organized differently?
- How have you felt supported since initiative implementation?
- Have greater collaborations created better outcomes for children? What outcomes? What has the impact on children been?
- What do you need to know and be able to do in order to be excellent in your job?

ii. Examples of Questions Designed for Teachers' Assistant

- How would you define success?
- How do you know when you've seen success?
- In your view, what have been the benefits of the initiative?
- What difficulties do you face to achieve initiative goals?
- What do you need to know and be able to do in order to be excellent in your job?
- What new knowledge/skills have you learned?
- What motivates you to work here?
- How do coworkers help you strengthen families, and how is that different from the past?
- Who are your "right" people (allies)?
- How does the initiative involve or engage parents?
- What evidence do you see that SFI is helping families to develop the Five Protective Factors (5Ps)?
- When faced problem/at-risk child, what tools have been used to prevent child exclusion from program? How different from the old way?
- For children who come from different cultural backgrounds, how do you maintain diversity with your feeding strategies?

Appendix C: Managing Complex Change Model ²

Managing Complex Change ¹	Managing Complex Change ¹	Managing Complex Change ¹	Managing Complex Change ¹	Managing Complex Change ¹	Managing Complex Change ¹	Managing Complex Change ¹	Managing Complex Change ¹	Managing Complex Change ¹	Managing Complex Change ¹	Managing Complex Change ¹	Managing Complex Change ¹	Managing Complex Change ¹	Managing Complex Change ¹	Managing Complex Change
	+□	Knowledge, Skills and Abilities	+	Resources	+□	Incentive	+	Ownership	+	Action Plan	+□	Evaluation	=	CONFUSION
Shared Vision	+□		+□	Resources	+□	Incentive	+□	Ownership	+□	Action Plan	+□	Evaluation	=	ANXIETY, BOTCHED JOB
Shared Vision	+□	Knowledge, Skills and Abilities	+□		+□	Incentive	+□	Ownership	+□	Action Plan	+□	Evaluation	=	FRUSTRATION
Shared Vision	+□	Knowledge, Skills and Abilities	+□	Resources	+□		+□	Ownership	+□	Action Plan	+□	Evaluation	=	GRADUAL, IF ANY, CHANGE
Shared Vision	+□	Knowledge, Skills and Abilities	+□	Resources	+□	Incentive	+□		+□	Action Plan	+□	Evaluation	=	APATHY OR RESENTMENT
Shared Vision	+□	Knowledge, Skills and Abilities	+□	Resources	+□	Incentive	+□	Ownership	+□		+□	Evaluation	=	FALSE STARTS/SHORT-TERM EFFORT
Shared Vision	+□	Knowledge, Skills and Abilities	+□	Resources	+□	Incentive	+	Ownership	+□	Action Plan	+□		=	PLATEAU
SHARED VISION	+□	KNOWLEDGE SKILLS AND ABILITIES	+□	RESOURCES	+□	INCENTIVE	+□	OWNERSHIP	+□	ACTION PLAN	+□	EVALUATION	=	CHANGE & CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

² Susan P. Curnan. Managing and Leading Organizational and Policy Changes Case: Strengthening Families Initiative, Rhode Island. January 27, 2009.

Appendix D: Responses from SFI Team at Heller Presentation of Findings (3/3/2009)

- Kim aware that more training is required but there are issues the organization must consider when developing new staff training such as new hire/recruits and budgetary problems. There is also high turnover. They train whoever is available at that particular training session. The language of 5P's is not used with staff as such and she acknowledges that they need to use it more often.
- For the TA's, it is true about the cultural change – staff start from beginning to act out the SFI model. Ecstatic about our findings that fostering culture between supervisor & staff builds relationships. There is an opportunity for role models or workshop/training sessions on building culture. Kate will integrate into this into grant making. Would like to have Heller teams go back to the organization & measure same staff.
- New building took most of the financial resources. After initiative, teachers were excited to contribute new ideas and practices, but many have to be put on hold due to financial status of program.
- Kate commented that we should keep in mind that the organization is large & can't just implement events.
- Kim commented that teachers get frustrated with financial limitations.
- Challenge of scheduling conflict during trainings.
- Comment from Susan Curnan – Who has ownership of the initiative?
- Kate said when they first started the initiative there was resistance but 7 years later support came.
- Kim mentioned that in 2004/5 New Hampshire's pilot project thought of going to colleges but the department said that was not their job but now that mentality has changed.
- Initiative implementation has only just begun.
- Kate said they are waiting for pilot sites (7 states) to get benchmarks and tracking. Kim – teachers were given homework & didn't like it at the time but they learned from it and it helped develop their skills.
- Kate suggested that she should sit with Patty to develop an exit strategy for when she discontinues her commitment to the center.
- Susan commented that she has never known any organization that has every element of the managing complex change fulfilled.
- Kate commented that a transition plan among administration should not rely on Kim alone & support electronically should be promoted more efficiently.
- Kate suggested that the message of the initiative to parents should not be “prevent child abuse and neglect.” However, this should be stressed for teachers.

Sources Used

[1] Collins, Jim. (2001) *Good to Great*. HarperCollins, New York, NY.

[2] Letts, C., Ryan, W., Grossman, A. (1999) *High Performance Nonprofit Organizations: Managing Upstream for Greater Impact*. John Wiley & Sons, Inc, New York, NY.

[3] Collins, p. 96

[4] Letts, p.21

[5] Ibid, p.86

[6] Ibid, p.87

[7] Adopted from Xerox benchmarking process. Letts, C., Ryan, W., Grossman, A. (1999) *High Performance Nonprofit Organizations: Managing Upstream for Greater Impact*. John Wiley & Sons, Inc, New York, NY.

[8] Letts, p.91

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Implementation Study of Strengthening Families Initiative, Rhode Island

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Introduction

The objective of our group's visit to the Child & Family (C&F) Services Center in Newport, Rhode Island was to observe the effects of the Strengthening Families Initiative RI (SFI RI) training on early child care providers. SFI RI's approach to child abuse prevention and the promotion of child well-being involves focusing on families' strengths rather than their deficiencies and focusing on "protective factors" rather than risk factors. This philosophy closely matches the spirit of C&F's mission "to strengthen families, their members, and the communities in which they live."¹ The director of C&F's daycare center found the SFI RI training very helpful and noted its positive effects on the organization's culture. To understand how SFI RI has helped C&F to implement change, our group analyzed the findings of our onsite observations through the Managing Complex Change framework.

The SFI RI Approach:

SFI RI's approach to promoting child well-being emphasizes families' strengths rather than their weaknesses. Through onsite training, the program aims to foster among child care providers a positive outlook toward families in need. The providers acquire the tools and skills to identify effectively the early signs of distress in families. They learn to be proactive and create special times to engage parents in conversations and various activities to understand better the family circumstances of each child. When they detect stress or early signs of neglect, the providers are trained to approach families in a professional manner and provide valid help and resources in a friendly environment. Encouraging providers to take a positive attitude toward families and help parents develop positive parenting skills promotes improved communication between providers and parents. The initiative also works to promote parent leadership. It connects families to each other, to their community and to a wide range of social services. Through these techniques, the SFI RI initiative tries to improve family relationships and outcomes. It changes attitudes and behaviors of providers and parents to create a protective atmosphere for children.

In keeping with its positive approach to families, SFI RI avoids using the term "risk factors," speaking instead of the five evidence-based "protective factors" that the Center for the Study of Social Policy has identified as important buffers against child neglect and abuse.² First, "Parental Resilience" looks at parents from the strength-based approach. It provides counseling and support to parents to establish "trusting relationships." Second "Social Connection" helps parents to build friendly relationships with other parents and people in the community to whom they can go for help and advice. Third, "Knowledge of Parenting and Childhood Development" gives parents tools to properly address their children's needs. Fourth, "Support in Times of Need" provides parents with needed assistance to avoid stress. Fifth, "Social and Emotional Competence of Children" promotes the healthy development of the child, which facilitates his or her connection with caregivers and peers.³

¹ http://www.cfsnewport.org/corp_pro.html

² http://www.strengtheningfamilies.net/index.php/about/category/logic_model/

³ <http://www.preventchildabuse-ri.org/children's%20dev.htm>

SFI RI targets parents, providers, communities and policy makers to promote these protective factors in order to ensure the prevention of child abuse and neglect. SFI RI stresses the importance of collaboration among different state departments to create a universal approach to implement the model in child care centers. According to the SFI RI logic model,⁴ on the provider level, the initiative requests that childcare centers create provider leadership teams that would continuously improve the practical implementation of these five protective factors. SFI RI wants to change providers' practice by promoting teamwork in order to facilitate the sharing of knowledge and expertise among them; by improving teacher and family connections; by offering providers tools to obtain and connect to needed resources and services; and by giving them skills to address diversity.

C&F Site Description

The C&F center is a multi-service agency capable of addressing a wide range of the needs of its community. At the Newport site that our group visited, C&F provides service to over 96 children from low-income families, whose ages range from 6 weeks to 5 years old.⁵ C&F's focus on "strengthen[ing] families, their members, and the communities in which they live"⁶ fits well with SFI RI's approach. The daycare center's leadership responded well to the SFI RI training given to staff members. The director stated that SFI RI helped the organization to improve its performance by engaging the leadership and staff to rethink existing practices and providing tools to change the existing environment.⁷ She was enthusiastic about the training's positive practical impact on teachers, families and children.

Methodology of Observation and Analytic Framework

To understand how the SFI RI training affected practices at C&F, our group used the point in time observation method. We made a one-time visit to the site, and conducted interviews with the director of C&F, 6 teachers, and 6 teaching assistants.

Before going to the daycare center, we developed our interview questions using a form of group brainstorming in which each group member put questions on the "sticky wall." After proposing our individual questions, we classified them by categories. We designed our questions according to an "appreciative inquiry" approach, meaning that we consciously chose to focus on identifying the strengths of the program.⁸ Our questions were geared to learn about what is working and promising about SFI RI and C&F.⁹

⁴ See exhibit

⁵ The number was provided by the director of the site.

⁶ http://www.cfsnewport.org/corp_pro.html

⁷ C. Letts, W. Ryan and A. Grossman, *High Performance Nonprofit Organizations, Managing Upstream for Greater Impact*, John Wiley and Sons, 1999 p 17

⁸ http://www.new-paradigm.co.uk/introduction_to_ai.htm

⁹ See the attached list of questions.

After the visit, we came together as a group again to reflect on what we had observed. During this group session, we used the O.R.I.D. pathway of critical thinking method¹⁰ and the CAROUSEL method.¹¹ O.R.I.D. stands for Objective, Reflective, Interpretive and Decisional. Using this method, we reflected on our feelings about and observations of what we saw at the site in order to generate our conclusions. We also discussed the skills we learned to conduct this observation and how this experience would help us in the future. We also used the CAROUSEL method to facilitate generating and sharing ideas. Following this method, we posted large pieces of paper around the walls of a room and wrote a different heading at the top of each of them. Each member of our group then moved around the room from one poster to the next, putting her or his ideas underneath each heading.

In our case, the heading for each CAROUSEL poster was an element of the main analytic framework that we adopted, the Managing Complex Change framework.¹² This framework contains seven elements: Shared Vision, Knowledge and Skills, Resources, Incentives, Ownership, Action Plan, and Evaluation. According to the framework, an organization that lacks or implements poorly any of the seven elements would as a result face obstacles in putting a process of change into practice. For example, the lack of a shared vision would cause confusion. A lack of skills would cause anxiety. A lack of incentives would mean that the pace of change would be very gradual and slow. A lack of resources would cause frustration. The lack of ownership would lead to apathy or resentment. The lack of an action-plan would lead to false starts. The lack of an effective evaluation system would lead the organization to reach a plateau rather than maintain continual progress. Developing all seven elements is crucial for successfully implementing change in organizations. We applied this framework to our observations at C&F in order to analyze how SFI RI training was helping the center to manage changes in its approach to child care.

Vision:

Providers at C&F shared the vision of the Strengthening Families RI initiative. They were open-minded and proud of the cultural diversity of their students. They expressed the importance of establishing positive relationships with children's parents and caregivers. The teachers acknowledged that Strengthening Families RI training increased their awareness about their role in protecting children from maltreatment, and prepared them to address cultural diversity with more sensitivity. The teachers engage families in various activities. One teacher pointed out the special project display on the wall just at the entrance of the room. She said that parents are glad to notice their children's work and they like to make comments about it. This is just one way to start conversations with parents and to build trust. The center also provides other

¹⁰ O.R.I.D. is designed by the Institute of Cultural Affairs

¹¹ https://www.thrivent.com/community/files/YVYCYM_FS2.pdf

¹² See exhibit. The framework was developed by the Center for Youth and Communities (1996) with acknowledgement and input from The Leadership Spectrum, Mary Lippett, 2002

opportunities for teacher-parent engagement. Almost everyone to whom we spoke mentioned the very successful Thanksgiving Day activity, which had high parent participation. One of the teachers noted that the Thanksgiving activity opened the doors to explore other cultures. The teachers asked children and their parents to share with them how they observe similar festivities. Knowing their students' family circumstances and understanding "parental resilience," teachers become better communicators with families. Two teachers mentioned that just in the last two or three weeks they referred five parents to services which they needed. They acknowledged that SFI RI training helped them to identify signs of stress and gave them knowledge about how to address these issues properly. Family factors have a direct impact on establishing the conditions for engaging children and encouraging positive learning outcomes. C&F shares a vision of what it wants to achieve. Based on the assumptions of the Managing Complex Change framework, C&F's shared vision could explain why we did not observe confusion about the daycare center's goals.

Knowledge and Skills:

Even before receiving SFI RI training, the teachers at C&F, like many childcare providers, had experience in child care, knowledge of child development, empathy, patience, and social and interpersonal skills. However, according to the Center for the Study of Social Policy, 97% of surveyed providers of early childhood development would like to do more to strengthen families.¹³

Through SFI RI training, the providers at C&F developed knowledge about how to strengthen families as well as valuable skills of leadership and teamwork. The teachers at C&F pointed out that they share ideas with each other and are eager to seek help from their peers. They became engaged and proactive in their work. They began to observe actively and to seek solutions to the identified problems. They became resourceful and better equipped to help parents to achieve better outcomes for their children. They developed the skills to build mutually supportive relationships with parents and to understand, support and celebrate family diversity. They learned about how to connect families to resources, services, and support in their communities. For example, one teacher commented that SFI RI training pushed her to find existing resources for support services on her own. She said that in the beginning it was challenging, but then she realized that it gave her power to seek solutions independently. The training enabled C&F providers to make the shift from a "model of family risk and deficit" toward a "strength based" family perspective.¹⁴

Resources:

SFI RI is effective because it does not require making expensive investments. It uses already existing systems and resources.¹⁵ SFI RI promotes continued learning within organizations. It teaches organizations to expand their capacity by empowering their staff by

¹³http://www.strengtheningfamilies.net/index.php/about/category/the_basics/

¹⁴ Logic Model of Strengthening Families Initiative, RI, 2007 (see exhibit)

¹⁵ <http://www.preventchildabuse-ri.org/what%20is%20strengthening%20families.htm>

creating a supportive environment. At C&F, providers are given professional training, technical assistance, and materials. They receive support from a dedicated team and parents.

The staff is an important resource at C&F daycare center. Through SFI RI training the providers gained knowledge about current practices in the field, parenthood and child development, importance of families' social engagement, and about available supporting resources.¹⁶ As the SFI RI training coordinator noted, the providers were given handouts about these subjects to share them with their peers who could not attend the training. In general, the training encouraged peer to peer networking, as well as promoted independent skills to learn how to search for information on their own and come up with practical solutions. SFI RI also provides online materials and an online support system.¹⁷

Besides the SFI RI training, the director of the center mentioned that providers participate in professional training sessions twice a month. This training aims at developing providers' skills and knowledge to work with children, parents, and other stakeholders better. However, she said that she noted improved teamwork after the SFI RI training at the center. By adding what they learn in these trainings to their prior experience, the providers are more capable of addressing their client families' needs.

The center also looks at families as collaborators. They see parents as a source of strength. The center engages them in various activities. During these activities and daily conversations, parents and staff share their knowledge and advice about a child's needs. It is very important to involve parents in the process of making changes, because they are the main actors in their children's lives. By learning how to interact effectively with their children, parents bring and make the main changes. By working with and having access to other social services, teachers gain additional tools to address children and families' needs. Based on the principles of the Managing Complex Change framework, these resources could explain why we did not observe frustration among C&F providers.

Incentives:

Another important element in the Managing Complex Change framework is incentives. The most important incentive that has been mentioned by the teachers and assistants at C&F is passion for working with and helping children. Incentives like recognition of their work, professional training, and professional experience also play a big role in making teachers value working at the center. Professional experience brings changes and makes teachers grow not only professionally, but also interpersonally.

Positive feedback could help teachers cope with negative emotions that they sometimes experience while working. Receiving positive evaluations from their superiors, hearing compliments from parents, and most importantly seeing the positive effects of their work on the children they care for can all be key incentives. All of the mentioned above factors together with

¹⁶http://www.cssp.org/doris_duke/tools/files/tool_downloads/Professional_Development/RI_16hour_Course_Outline.pdf

¹⁷ http://www.strengtheningfamilies.net/index.php/online_resources/guide_assess/category/guidebook/

financial support keep teachers and assistants from burning out professionally and make them love their jobs.

Ownership:

Based on the Managing Complex Change framework, ownership is another essential component to achieve change and improvement. SFI RI offers providers ownership of the Initiative. They are responsible for upholding the mission of SFI RI to prevent child abuse and neglect. Providers fulfill this mission by placing children in a safe environment, caring for them, and building relationships with their families. They then become more connected to and accountable for the successes or failures of the initiative. Simultaneously, providers are recognized for their hard work, which offers an incentive to continue working on behalf of vulnerable children. Hence, this may reduce the attrition rate of staff. The staff interviewed at C&F all felt well respected and pleased with working at C&F. One teacher mentioned, “Our ideas are respected and we get feedback from upper management.” Many teachers also have the opportunity to participate in the decision-making process. One example was that teachers were able to recognize when parents were either too embarrassed or proud to ask for help. Teachers noticed that parents lacked some basic necessities and therefore the staff offered many of those resources which parents lacked, from clothing to food goods. They provided them with referrals to social service agencies and a box of donated items from which parents can take needed goods.

The element of ownership is not only a benefit to providers but also to SFI RI. It increases efficiency and improves results in achieving the goals set out by the initiative, making this project more likely to be sustainable. According to Kim Ash, Statewide Coordinator of Prevent Child Abuse RI, to achieve sustainability, “an electronic system has been developed through Yahoo for providers to depend on a ‘community of learners’,” not just on the agency or on Ms. Ash. For C&F to become independent from Prevent Child Abuse RI, it must make use of “a support group for things to move along efficiently,” according to Ms. Begin, director of the program. Furthermore, ownership of the program helps C&F to develop an “adaptive capacity,” being attentive and responsive to the needs of its clients and motivating its staff by promoting learning and encouraging innovativeness.¹⁸

C&F also realized the importance of extending ownership to parents as well. Parental involvement was crucial to the success of the initiative. Involving parents in activities and events such as parenting workshops or leadership meetings and incorporating their suggestions are all important aspects of ownership. Throughout the nation, Ms. Begin noticed that many staff of early care and education had limited knowledge of parental support and engagement. Consequently, SFI RI emphasized trainings on parental support and engagement, recognizing its importance in creating safe and stable families. Based on the principles of the Managing Complex Change framework, the fact that there was ownership in the initiative, participants were far from feeling resentment or apathy.

Action Plan:

¹⁸ Letts, C.; Ryan, W.; and Grossman, A. *High Performance Nonprofit Organizations, Managing Upstream for Greater Impact*. John Wiley and Sons, 1999 p 21-23.

Another component of the Managing Complex Change Framework to make effective change is the use of an action plan. In this case, an action plan is based on a program's self assessment. The national SFI established clear guidelines in an action plan, which C&F is utilizing for its program's success. This action plan defines the goals and steps required to achieving the desired outcomes. The goals set out by SFI for states include: (1) building awareness of SFI within the early care and education community, this means relaying information of SFI and its protective factors to the appropriate environment; (2) seeking an example of excellent practice, this requires emulating good state programs that are clearly successful and building on the knowledge and lessons learned there; (3) implementing SFI in all early care and education programs, this goal is sought as a means of improving family strength, just as its name implies and; (4) building learning communities for centers that implement SFI, this method facilitates the sharing of information and learning of participants.¹⁹ SFI RI is a leading national example in fulfilling the goals of its action plan.

Through this action plan, trainings have been initiated to offer providers professional development. Ms. Begin stated that "through trainings, the culture of the center will show, especially the professional development trainings to support, assist, and engage parents around the protective factors." From the trainings, Ms. Ash was hopeful that teachers could "beg, borrow, and steal" ideas in order to complete their work successfully. Although a lack of resources places limitations or restrictions on what can be achieved, they could still be effective with the resources that they possess. It is understood that teachers who have great ideas cannot implement all their ideas without sufficient financial backing. However teachers can refer to each other for guidance. It is not necessary to simply use a vertical chain of management; they could actually use one another's experience and expertise. Having a foundation such as the action plan, C&F has been able to apply the goals created by the action plan in their work with children and families. Their trainings for instance have allowed them to make use of the knowledge and skills learned and put them into practice as they work with children and families.

When questioned, many teachers understood that an action plan would not be effective without it being flexible. One teacher stated, "My style of teaching has to be flexible." It was obvious that teachers had to be flexible in order to make the necessary changes to satisfy the needs of children. One factor that was certainly important to them was the fact that they could get feedback from other staff as a way to identify the strengths and weaknesses of SFI RI and alter their styles to fit the project goals. Teachers could share their ideas of best practices and use those suggestions in their classrooms. Again, based on the principles of the Managing Complex Change framework, C&F was able to create long term goals and avoid false starts.

Evaluation:

¹⁹ Strengthening Families through Early Care and Education. *The Center for the Study of Social Policy*. Retrieved http://www.cssp.org/doris_duke/tools/files/tool_downloads/Evaluation_Section/Evaluation_Creating_a_Successful_Action_Plan.pdf

Evaluation here is defined as the process of looking back at previous work as well as ongoing work as per the action plan. Evaluation includes reviewing the progress of the action plan and suggesting solutions for the problems that are detected. Unlike supervision, evaluation is a continuous process which is done from time to time in the project. The evaluating process involves asking questions such as how well have we done the project, what are the gaps and how can we address these gaps?

Evaluation done under the auspices of the Managing Complex Change framework can prove very useful if it is carried out on a continuous basis. It can serve as an alarm to the SFI RI leaders when the project work drifts away from the normal forms it should take.

The providers at C&F were mostly satisfied with their work. They expressed the usefulness of the training they received in developing their skills and knowledge related to the five protective factors to strengthen families. The “Core Training Evaluation Form” in which the staff members wrote their feedback showed their positive reactions to the training on the five protective factors. The providers practice these five protective factors. Parent-teacher relationships have increased over time. The staff is more competent and knowledgeable about parenting and child development. The organization makes good use of the SFI RI logic model to reduce child abuse and neglect through building resiliency rather than reducing risk. While C&F providers were effective in putting the spirit of the five protective factors into practice, they did not always share a common terminology for discussing them. Developing a common language about the five factors could help them to become even more effective in implementing them.

Conclusion:

Overall the observation of each step of the “Manage Complex Change” was promising. We observed that the SFI RI implementation was successful at the C&F childcare center. All the participants in the trainings showed enthusiasm about the skills and knowledge that they acquired. The providers were happy to point out that it changed the culture of the organization. They developed useful leadership and teamwork skills that facilitated communication not only between the providers and parents, but also among the coworkers. The training gave providers confidence and the ability to seek resources and solve problems for their students’ families. Knowing that they are there to help and that they can help increased their job satisfaction. The mission of SFI RI is to prevent child abuse and neglect. The initiative trains teachers to support parents in parenting from a healthy perspective. Accordingly, as Ms. Begin stated, the agenda of the training is to “cultivate providers to be strong advocates for children and their families.”

All the participants in the SFI RI training gave high marks to the usefulness of the SFI RI initiative. On the other hand, we noted the gap in knowledge of five protective factors between the participant staff in these trainings and nonparticipant ones. For example, the teaching assistants and a new teacher, who did not participate in the trainings, were not informed about the five protective factors, but they were familiar with the trainings and expressed interest in participating in them in the future. This gap underlined the necessity to address the sustainability of the program. In discussing the action plan, we reviewed some strategies and activities through which the SFI RI has helped C&F to continue to improve its services. It teaches providers self-reliance and provides them many useful online tools for continuing improvement. For example,

the self-assessment survey helps providers to develop an action plan.²⁰ However, the gap in knowledge between the trained and untrained staff could suggest that establishing a more formal structure or accountability system at the site may be useful to ensure the successful continuity of the program.²¹

During our visit to the C&F daycare center in Newport, we observed the strengths of both C&F and the SFI RI program. What we saw suggested that SFI RI training can promote positive changes in the culture of early child care and education centers. We also observed how C&F found effective ways to use what it learned from the trainings as it works to improve the well-being of children and their families. By adopting the SFI RI initiative, C&F providers changed their attitudes and behaviors toward families, understood the influential role of positive parenting, and contributed to a stronger and more competent agency. They started convening more parent teacher meetings. Additionally, the parents were asked to take part in events such as festivals for Christmas, which enhanced the interaction between teachers and the parents. This interaction provided the teachers an opportunity to make the parents understand the importance of good parenting. The center has used the SFI RI initiative to try to achieve what American business consultant Jim Collins talks about in his model of leaping from being good toward becoming great. As Collins puts it, “Greatness is not a function of circumstance...it is a matter of conscious choice.”²² Clearly, C&F has chosen to improve itself. The trainings offered to the center have taught providers to focus on their responsibilities, and to “restlessly push... the heavy flywheel” to build the foundation for future success. As a result, the C&F center learned that they can better serve their core values by adopting new approaches to “how to do things.”²³ Overall, the SFI RI initiative is a well thought out and guided program, which should be supported and promoted.

²⁰ http://www.strengtheningfamilies.net/self_assessment/

²¹ C. Letts, W. Ryan and A. Grossman, *High Performance Nonprofit Organizations, Managing Upstream for Greater Impact*, John Wiley and Sons, 1999 p 97

²² Collins, Jim. *Good to Great and the Social Sectors: A Monograph to Accompany Good to Great*. New York, Harper Collins, 2005.

²³ <http://www.jimcollins.com/pdf/Diagnostic%20Tool.pdf> p 5