

## Introduction to Family Strengthening

### Policy Brief No. 1

**The family strengthening approach is a framework for serving children and families that is rooted in the following principles: family is the most fundamental factor influencing the lives and outcomes of children; and families are strong when they are supported by safe and thriving neighborhoods.**

### The State of Family Well-Being

#### Changes and Challenges Facing Children and Families

While most American families are functioning satisfactorily or well, there are many others that are struggling to provide care and support for their children. Their challenges include balancing work and family while providing for essential needs such as housing and health care. These same American families live in a vulnerable context: the social safety net in their communities and states has eroded as states continue to grapple with a fiscal crisis and the effects of a national deficit. These burdens place an added disadvantage on children and families living in poverty. Poverty encompasses more than insufficient income – it represents a lack of access to health care and decent paying jobs, inadequate education and poor nutrition (Children’s Defense Fund, 2004, Family Income section, para. 2). The Children’s Defense Fund asserts that poverty affects child development and long-term opportunities because

“children who are poor are more likely to die in infancy, have a low birthrate, lack health care, housing and adequate food and receive lower scores in math and reading” (Children’s Defense Fund, 2004, Family Income section, para. 2).

The state of the nation’s families is particularly distressing when considering the following data:

- 2003 Census Data reported that the poverty rate among children under 18 jumped from 16.7 percent in 2002 to 17.6 percent in 2003, representing a total of 12.9 million poor children. More than one in every three poor people in 2003 were children (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 2004).
- Poverty is increasingly prevalent among children of working parents. In 1980, 21% of children below the poverty line had at least one parent working full-time. By 1999, the number had risen to 31%. (Kids Count Data Book, 2003)

- 58 percent of low-income households with children have housing costs that exceed the recommended threshold of 30 percent of the family's income. (Kids Count Data Book, 2003)
- Almost half of low-income families had no liquid assets in 1999. (Kids Count Data Book, 2003)
- In 2003, 45 million people—15.6 percent of Americans (almost one in every six)—lacked health insurance throughout the year. 11.4 percent of those uninsured were children (2003 Census, U.S. Census Bureau as cited in Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 2004).

The burdens placed on today's families have become greater in part due to significant changes in the social, economic and political landscape. Over the last several decades, the American family has changed dramatically, as evidenced by a historic level of women in the workforce, a rise in single parent families, and demographic shifts due to new patterns of immigration, resettlement and differential birthrates. While the face of America's families has changed dramatically over the last few decades, government policy, social services and employer practices have not kept pace in response. Three important social changes now create a difficult environment for families:

**1. Changing family structure:** The number of children being raised in single parent households or by guardians and kin is on the rise due to increasing number of divorces, separation, births outside of marriage and the incarceration of parents.

- In 2000, 28 percent of American families with children were headed by a single parent, up from 24 percent in 1990. (Kids Count Data Book, 2003)
- The Bureau of Justice Statistics estimates that 2.3 million children are affected by the 1.1 million parents incarcerated in prisons or jails, up from 500,000 children in 1991. More than 7 million children have a parent under some form of correctional supervision.<sup>1</sup>

**Challenge:** The shift in family structure has placed burdens on single parents and kin raising children, who often struggle to provide adequate financial support and other needed services and supports for children.

**2. Changing roles and responsibilities:** Parents have fewer hours to dedicate to their children due to the time crunch of balancing work and family life.

- Since 1977, the number of hours worked by dual and single earner couples has increased an average of 12 hours per week. In 70 percent of all American families, both parents are working as compared to 1960 when 70 percent of all families had at least one parent at home full-time (Kornbluh, 2004).

**Challenge:** The increase in dual earner families and longer working hours has placed a strain on families to provide quality child care arrangements for their children.

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<sup>1</sup> Taken from the Child Welfare League of America's Federal Resource Center for Children of Prisoners:  
[http://www.cwla.org/programs/incarcerated/cop\\_factsheet.htm#NOTES45](http://www.cwla.org/programs/incarcerated/cop_factsheet.htm#NOTES45)

**3. Changing demographics:** The United States has seen a dramatic transformation in the demographic make-up of its population due to new patterns of immigration, refugee resettlement and differential birthrates.

- The foreign-born population has nearly doubled since 1970 from 5 percent to 11 percent of the total U.S. population (Capps et al, 2003).
- States in the Pacific Northwest, Midwest, Southeast and the Mountain states have seen a doubling in their foreign-born populations between 1990 and 2000 (Capps et al, 2003)
- The countries of origin for the fastest growing immigrant groups have shifted from Europe and Canada to Latin America and Asia (Capps et al, 2003).
- One in four low-income children lives in an immigrant family. Children of immigrant families are generally poorer, in worse health and are more likely to experience hardship such as food insecurity, crowded housing conditions, and a lack of health insurance (Capps et al, 2003).

**Challenge:** These demographics call for a shift in the delivery of services to better address the diverse cultural needs of America's changing population and ensure that services are culturally and linguistically accessible and appropriate.

These social changes affecting families are often exacerbated by racial and ethnic discrimination, substance abuse, domestic violence, parental incarceration, teenage pregnancy and the presence of mental illness. These factors pose special challenges and burdens for families to access quality services, achieve self sufficiency, and secure safety and well being for their children.

## Family Strengthening: Principles and Practices

Family strengthening provides an approach that takes into account these difficult challenges. It goes beyond specific strategies, programs and interventions and identifies a framework based on the belief that the best way to protect and support children is by strengthening and supporting their families<sup>2</sup>.

### Family Strengthening – An Emerging Model

The family strengthening framework has been embraced by the Annie E. Casey Foundation (AECF), which is committed to fostering public policies, human service reforms, and community supports that better meet the needs of vulnerable families. The underlying principle of the foundation's work is that ***children do well when their families do well, and families do better when they live in supportive neighborhoods.***

AECF defines family strengthening as a ***deliberate process of giving parents the necessary opportunities, relationships, networks, and supports to raise their children successfully, which includes involving parents as decision-makers in how their communities meet family needs.***

Building on the Foundation's work, the Family Strengthening Policy Center seeks to mainstream family strengthening practice by making it a public priority. By leveraging the National Assembly's network of nearly 70 human and health service nonprofit organizations, the Center's objective is to influence how family policy is formulated and implemented.

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<sup>2</sup> The Family Strengthening Policy Center includes in the definition of "family" nuclear, extended, foster care or adoptive families.

The Center has identified three core areas essential to strengthening families:

- **Family Economic Success:** Helping families improve self sufficiency through expanded opportunities to work, earn a living wage that provides for the basic needs of the family, and build assets that grow with the family over time, such as homeownership and retirement accounts.
- **Family Support Systems:** Building appropriate and adequate systems of support for healthy family development that encompass health care, child care, education, and other essential components of strong families.
- **Thriving and Nurturing Communities:** Building a nurturing and supportive environment in which healthy families can pursue long-term goals is critical to sustainable family development. Essential components for family success include access to affordable housing, strong neighborhood institutions, safe streets, supportive social networks, and an environment that promotes community and strengthens bonds between families.

These fundamental elements are in part guided by family systems and ecological theories. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Children's Bureau publication on family-centered practice highlights the influence these theories have on family strengthening or family-centered practice (National Child Welfare Resource Center for Family-Centered Practice, 2000, pp. 8-9):

**Family systems theory** assumes that emotional and behavioral problems of individuals are maintained through patterns of interaction within the family. Thus, the goal of the intervention is to evaluate and change these patterns of behavior and to help the family interact in more effective ways.

**Ecological theories** emphasize that the behavior of individuals and families is a function of their adaptation to the demands of the broader context. Thus, the approach to intervention includes strengthening the interactions between the family and other systems in the community that are an integral part of the decision-making and intervention process.

These theories support the following principles:

**Family is the most fundamental factor influencing the lives and outcomes of children.**

Aside from a child's physical needs, such as food and clothing, children need an emotionally healthy home environment and stable and reliable relationships with adults and caregivers.

**Families are strong when they are supported by safe and thriving neighborhoods.**

Strong neighborhoods are an almost seamless web of vital resources and opportunities such as formal and informal social networks, employers and public services. By making these networks, economic opportunities and services more accessible to families, neighborhoods thrive and families have the supports they need to succeed.

These principles, while not universally embraced, can be found in emerging approaches around the country. For example, Family Support America, a network of thousands of members and over 2,500 family support programs, defines family support, a concept that closely parallels and embraces family strengthening as both “a *shift in human services delivery*,” and “a *movement for social change* that urges all of us—policymakers, program providers, parents, employers—to take responsibility for improving the lives of children and families. The family support movement strives to transform our society into caring communities of citizens that put children and families first and that ensure that all children and families get what they need to succeed.” (Family Support America, 2004, About Family Support section, para.4).

## The Case for Family-Centered and Neighborhood-Based Services

When families and communities face multiple challenges, an infusion of support, strength and resources can ensure resiliency. Protective factors are assets that enable families and communities to successfully adapt to stressful events or circumstances (CWLA, 2003, p. 13). Examples include:

- Ability to endure hardship
- Love for children
- Capacity to nurture
- Cooperation with agencies and other formal and informal helpers
- Knowledge of what a parent should do
- Ability to delay gratification
- Ability to be assertive

Family-centered and neighborhood-based services recognize the presence of these protective factors in families and communities. They foster them by placing families and neighborhoods at the center of the design and delivery of family supports and services.

The family-centered approach to family strengthening empowers families and builds on their capacities to be the leaders in nurturing their children, families and communities. This is achieved when parents, family members and neighborhood residents work in partnership with service providers and community agencies to define, assess and allocate resources to address local needs and concerns in a way that is empowering and builds on local assets.

Neighborhood-based initiatives are rooted in the principle that underserved communities possess important resources, such as social networks and institutions that support local families (i.e. faith institutions, community-based organizations, schools, clinics) and are committed to the betterment of the community. One way to make services more accessible—geographically, culturally, and linguistically—is to base them where people live—in their neighborhoods.

While family strengthening programs, interventions and services vary and are used in a number of fields—child welfare, youth development, and community building, there are common characteristics that can be found across all human services. They are:

- **Family-Centered:** Policy and services intentionally address the needs of the family as a whole or collective unit instead of serving only individuals. Services are tailored to help the individual in the context of family and community.

- **Place-based:** Families are supported to thrive within the context of their neighborhoods and broader communities. Job opportunities are created by utilizing economic assets and the vast social networks prevalent in one's community. Families are able to access public services comfortably and without stigmatization in their own neighborhoods.
- **Collaborative:** Partnerships are created across service systems such as health, education, or workforce development; community based organizations; local government; businesses and employers; and the faith community to create a seamless web of services and supports that address the needs of families. Local realities and the diversity of needs are incorporated into a flexible and accessible delivery of services that are connected by common intake, eligibility and planning procedures.
- **Focused on Family Self Sufficiency:** Strengthening the capacity of families to function effectively is emphasized so that families become more capable of carrying out their responsibilities.
- **Accountable to Families:** Practitioners actively engage families in the decision and goal-making process to set goals and determine outcomes so that services are individually tailored, culturally responsive, and relevant to the specific needs of the family (NCREL, 1996, Definition of Terms Section, para. 4).
- **Preventative and Promotional:** Services and interventions are provided at the *front end* to prevent problems rather than at the *back end* when families reach a crisis and may require more costly, crisis intervention and treatment services.

Other components that can be found in various family strengthening approaches include life-skills training, parent classes and support groups, parent-child groups and family activities, information and referral services, crisis intervention, family counseling, child care, and auxiliary support services like clothing exchanges, food pantries, and transportation.

### Origins of Family Strengthening – A Grassroots, Community-Based Movement

The present family strengthening movement dates back to policies, practices and research findings that emerged in the 1970s. A number of important milestones have shaped today's work in family support and strengthening:

1. **“Family Preservation” through child welfare legislation:** The Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) of 1978 and the Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980 represented a shift in child welfare policy by mandating child welfare agencies to support greater involvement and decision making of families in protecting the welfare of their children. The focus of the legislation was to prevent unnecessary placement of children outside the home, to reunify families whenever possible and to find alternative family settings for children in cases when they could not remain in the home. The legislation encouraged the development of practices that would strengthen families in their care giving roles (CWLA, 2003).
2. **Research in early childhood development:** Growing evidence has shed light on the importance of the first three years of life for human development and a child's long-term outcomes. Researchers have also documented that early care and education of infants and young children greatly affects their outcomes as adults.

From a policy standpoint, this has elevated the importance of early intervention and prevention programs in healthy childhood development. This has also elevated the importance of a priority focus on parents and caregivers. Programs that address parenting needs early on, including prenatal care, and teaching parents to be their child's first teacher, have been shown to contribute to the parents' ability to support and nurture their children.

### 3. **Development of "Family Support Services":**

Family support services grew out of and were influenced by parent education efforts, self-help groups, the early settlement houses, and home visiting. These approaches recognized the interdependence of family and community; the need for strong networks of groups who shared common interests and concerns and the need to overcome the isolation often experienced by families. Today's family resource centers build on these ideas – they are community based and provide comprehensive health and social services to families as well as opportunities to link up with other families and neighborhood services (CWLA, 2003).

The **Family Preservation and Support Services** program (FPSSP) of the 1993 Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1993 (P.L. 103-66) authorized \$1 billion in new state funding to provide family preservation and family support services. The program defined family support as "...community-based services to promote the well-being of children and families designed to increase the strength and stability of families through such activities as parent support groups, home visits, drop-in family centers, and child care" (Ahsan, 1996, p. 157).

The National Resource Center for Family Centered Practice (1994) has defined Family Preservation Services (FPS) as comprehensive, short-term, intensive services for families delivered primarily in the home and designed to prevent the unnecessary out-of-home placement of children or to promote family reunification (CWLA, 2004, Family Preservation Services section).

FPSSP created a legislative environment in which to develop programs and service delivery models that are (Ahsan, 1996):

- **Preventative:** to assist families at risk before they enter the child welfare system through services such as parent education, access to family support centers and child care. The idea was to reach families early with preventative services that were less intensive and costly than crisis oriented child welfare interventions.
- **Comprehensive:** States were required to develop family support and preservation plans that offered a range of services to address the comprehensive needs of families, such as child care, respite care, child development services, vocational training, parenting classes, individual and family counseling, housing assistance, information and referral services, home visiting and outreach and more. To streamline families' access to services, state plans had to propose strategies for coordinating these services across agencies.
- **Engages a Broad Diversity of Stakeholders:** To make the child welfare system more responsive to the diverse needs of families and communities, the legislation called for the service design and planning process to engage parents, families, caregivers, youth, community-based organizations, local government representatives, advocates, professional agencies and child welfare agency staff and administrators.

### **Community Based Family Resource and Support Program (CBFRS):**

Established by Title II of the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) Amendments of 1996, CBFRS was intended to support efforts to create and operate statewide networks of community based, family centered, and prevention focused family resource and support programs to strengthen families and reduce the incidence of child abuse and neglect. Like other family support and family strengthening programs that preceded it, CBFRS featured the following key characteristics typified by the family support movement (CWLA, 2003):

- **Family-centered:** agencies involve families in design, implementation and evaluation of programs and services;
- **Coordinated Services and Programs:** efforts focus on streamlining and avoiding duplication of services and programs. Programs become part of a larger, seamless web of services that are user friendly, effective, and complimentary;
- **Assets based:** Programs honor and build upon the strengths and needs of families instead of stigmatizing and focusing on weaknesses, and
- **Preventative:** A strong outreach component is built into programs to work with families before crisis erupts and to engage hard-to-reach families who may fall through the cracks of the traditional social service system.

While much of the family strengthening movement has evolved from the child welfare field, there is growing recognition among practitioners that the family strengthening approach can be applied to diverse fields that serve children, families and communities.

### **Family strengthening approach as contrasted with prevailing practice**

Family strengthening, though not a new or revolutionary concept, certainly represents a shift in the approach to serving children in fragile or isolated families. It is designed to intentionally overcome some of the barriers inherent in the prevailing system of service delivery. These barriers can directly affect the accessibility and relevance of services available to families trying to maneuver through this complex system. The North Central Regional Educational Laboratory (NCREL 1996) provides a summary of some of the central barriers within the current system:

- Prevailing funding and service delivery systems are fragmented, overlapping, and categorical, making it difficult for agencies to deliver comprehensive solutions to complex problems. Program specific funding silos create a roadblock for agencies and departments seeking to pool or coordinate funding to help solve problems in a coordinated, comprehensive, and integrated fashion. Ultimately, these problems make it difficult for families to obtain the relevant services and supports they need as quickly as possible (Hutson, 2004).
- Current human services system tends to be more *top down* and prescriptive, limiting the flexibility and autonomy of communities to determine their own needs and develop their own solutions. There is often little opportunity for consumer or client participation in seeking solutions and defining desired outcomes.

Distinctions between the family strengthening approach to working with families and the traditional services delivered through the prevailing model is presented in this chart (Family Support America, 1996, p. 24):

| Family Strengthening Approach  | Traditional Services                               |
|--|--|
| Helps to prevent crises by meeting needs early                         | Intervenes after crisis occurs and needs intensify |
| Offers assistance meeting basic needs, special services, and referrals | Only offers specific services or treatments        |
| Responds flexibly to family and community needs                        | Program and funding source dictate services        |
| Focuses on families  | Focus on individuals                               |
| Builds on family strengths   | Emphasize family deficits                          |
| Reaches out to families  | Have strict eligibility requirements               |
| Often offers drop-in services  | Have rigid office hours                            |
| Responds quickly to needs  | Often have waiting lists                           |
| Offers services in family's home or in home-like centers               | Services are office-based                          |

## Meaningful Outcomes

Though the family support and family strengthening approach poses particular challenges to measuring outcomes and does not easily lend itself to precise measurements of success, there is some promising evidence that it can affect the well being of children, families and communities. A number of outcomes include (Family Support America, 1996, p.13):

- Improved academic performance and behavior of children in school
- More families achieving economic self-sufficiency as they move from welfare to work
- Increased self-confidence, knowledge of child development, and parenting skills among parents
- Reductions in youth violence and juvenile delinquency
- Fewer teenage pregnancies

- Increased educational achievement of youth
- Greater educational attainment among parents
- Reductions in incidents of child abuse and neglect
- Increased parental engagement in their child's education and community life

The Family Strengthening Policy Center will identify those programs and policies which have made efforts to present evidence-based outcomes and have demonstrated clear indicators of success. The Center's primary goal for promoting family-centered policy is to advance community policies and practices that contribute to family economic and social empowerment. Through this series of briefs and related efforts, the Center will identify and advocate for policy changes that can make family strengthening more a reality than an ideal and take effective practices and policies from the margins to the mainstream, making them the rule rather than the exception.

## Family Strengthening Resources

Interested in learning more about family strengthening?  
We recommend the following resources:

### **Alliance for Children and Families**

[www.alliance1.org](http://www.alliance1.org)

The Alliance for Children and Families provides services to more than 300 nonprofit child and family serving and economic empowerment organizations in the U.S. and Canada. Motivated by a vision of a healthy society and strong communities, we work to strengthen America's nonprofit sector and through advocacy assure the sector's continued independence. Alliance members routinely address drug and alcohol abuse, family violence, teenage pregnancy, juvenile delinquency, family preservation and homelessness. The Alliance's website features research, publications and public policy position statements and updates.

### **Annie E. Casey Foundation / Making Connections Initiative**

[www.aecf.org](http://www.aecf.org)

[www.aecf.org/initiatives/mc/](http://www.aecf.org/initiatives/mc/)

The primary mission of the Annie E. Casey Foundation is to foster public policies, human service reforms, and community supports that better meet the needs of vulnerable families. The foundation's work in child welfare is grounded in two fundamental convictions: first, there is no substitute for strong families to ensure that children grow up to be capable adults. Second, the ability of families to raise children is often inextricably linked to conditions in

their communities. The foundation's goal is to help neighborhoods build effective responses to families and children at risk of abuse or neglect. The foundation believes that community centered responses can better protect children, support families, and strengthen communities.

Started in 1999, *Making Connections* is a ten-year investment by the Annie E. Casey Foundation to improve outcomes for families and children in isolated neighborhoods. The *Making Connections* Network includes 22 site teams involved in each *Making Connections* city, as well as the residents, community leaders, businesses, government officials, schools, faith communities, community organizations and others working to revitalize these neighborhoods.

### **Child and Family Policy Center**

[www.cfpciowa.org](http://www.cfpciowa.org)

The Child and Family Policy Center is working to develop more outcome based approaches to address child and family needs, with a particular focus on community building efforts within disinvested neighborhoods. The Center provides technical assistance to many Iowa communities to develop more seamless and preventive responses to children and families. On a national level, the Center operates the publication clearinghouse and technical assistance resource network of the National Center for Service Integration (NCSI) and provides technical assistance and support for those constructing more comprehensive, community based systems of support to families and children.

### **The Child Welfare League of America**

[www.cwla.org](http://www.cwla.org)

The Child Welfare League of America (CWLA) is an association of more than 1,000 public and nonprofit agencies devoted to improving life for more than 3.5 million at-risk children, youth and their families. CWLA establishes standards of excellence as goals for child welfare practice. The public policy staff concentrates on passage of child welfare legislation to protect abused and neglected children and strengthen vulnerable families. CWLA is the largest publisher of child welfare materials in the world, is involved extensively in consulting with both governmental and voluntary child welfare organizations to improve services to at-risk children and families, and convenes numerous conferences, seminars, and training sessions throughout the year.

### **ConnectforKids.org**

[www.connectforkids.org](http://www.connectforkids.org)

ConnectforKids.org practices civic journalism in the service of making communities better for children and families by providing coverage of key issues, successful programs, and ideas for action in the areas of child welfare, poverty, education, health, and more.

### **Family Support America**

[www.familysupportamerica.org](http://www.familysupportamerica.org)

Family Support America promotes family support as the nationally recognized movement to strengthen and support families and places the principles of family support practice at the heart of every setting in which children and families are present.

### **National Child Welfare Center for Family-Centered Practice**

[www.cwresource.org](http://www.cwresource.org)

The National Child Welfare Resource Center for Family-Centered Practice is a service of the Children's Bureau. The Resource Center seeks to enhance the capacity of State and Tribal child welfare agencies to plan, implement, and evaluate family-centered services for children and families. The mission of the Resource Center is to assist State and Tribal child welfare agencies in implementing family-centered practices to achieve the goals of safety, permanency, and well being for children and families.

### **National Conference of State Legislatures**

[www.ncsl.org/programs/sfn/sfn.htm](http://www.ncsl.org/programs/sfn/sfn.htm)

A partner in the Annie E. Casey Making Connections Initiative, the National Conference of State Legislatures examines legislative issues related to family strengthening in the areas of economic development and commerce, education, human services and natural resources.

### **National Governor's Association, Center for Best Practices**

[www.nga.org/center/topics/1,1188,D\\_6518,00.html](http://www.nga.org/center/topics/1,1188,D_6518,00.html)

The NGA Center for Best Practices has a number of activities underway to help states improve services to low income children and families through cross system integration. Relevant resources on this site explore eliminating federal funding and service delivery silos, case studies of service integration, and both service and systems integration.

**National League of Cities,  
Institute for Youth, Education, and Families**

[www.nlc.org/nlc\\_org/site/programs/institute\\_for\\_youth\\_education\\_and\\_families/index.cfm](http://www.nlc.org/nlc_org/site/programs/institute_for_youth_education_and_families/index.cfm)

The NLC's Institute for Youth, Education, and Families helps municipal leaders take action on behalf of children, youth, and families in their communities. NLC launched the Institute in January 2000 to recognize the influential and unique roles that mayors, city council members, and other local leaders play in strengthening families and improving outcomes for children and youth.

**National Resource Center for  
Community-Based Family Resource  
and Support Programs (FRIENDS)**

[www.friendsnrc.org](http://www.friendsnrc.org)

FRIENDS provides training and technical assistance to lead agencies implementing the Community-Based Family Resource and Support (CBFRS) grant program in the following key areas: parent leadership training, family resource and support programs and services, services to diverse populations, establishment of respite care programs, and creation of funding strategies. Requests for services are initiated by CBFRS State lead agencies.

**National Resource Center for  
Family-Centered Practice, University  
of Iowa School for Social Work**

[www.uiowa.edu/~nrcfcp/](http://www.uiowa.edu/~nrcfcp/)

The National Resource Center for Family Centered Practice provides technical assistance, staff training, research and evaluation, and library research on family based programs and issues to public and private human services agencies in states, counties,

and communities across the United States. The Center has worked in child welfare, mental health, juvenile justice, community action, county extension, Head Start, and job training programs.

**Promising Practices Network**

[www.promisingpractices.net](http://www.promisingpractices.net)

The Promising Practices Network (PPN) web site highlights programs and practices that credible research indicates are effective in improving outcomes for children, youth, and families. The information offered is organized around three major areas: Proven and Promising Programs, Research in Brief, and Strengthening Service Delivery.

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**This series of policy briefs produced by the Family Strengthening Policy Center (FSPC)** seeks to describe a new way of thinking about how to strengthen families raising children in low-income communities and how this approach can and should influence policy. The premise of “family strengthening” in this context, and as championed by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, is that children do well when cared for by supportive families, which, in turn, do better when they live in vital and supportive communities. The series describes ways in which enhancing connections within families and between families and the institutions that affect them result in better outcomes for children and their families.

The Family Strengthening Policy Center is funded by the Annie E. Casey Foundation and is an initiative of the National Human Services Assembly, an association of the nation’s leading national nonprofits in the fields of health, human and community development, and human services.

This brief reflects the findings and views of the Family Strengthening Policy Center, which is solely responsible for its content. Additional policy briefs are available at [www.nassembly.org/fspc](http://www.nassembly.org/fspc).

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**Peter Goldberg**, Chair, *Alliance for Children and Families*

*For more information about the Family Strengthening Task Force and its membership, please see the Family Strengthening Policy Center website at: [www.nassembly.org/fspc/aboutus.html](http://www.nassembly.org/fspc/aboutus.html).*