

**North Hartford Ascend**  
**Strengthening Families Protective Factors Framework**  
**Community of Practice**  
**Summary Report for the Fall 2025 Cohort**

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# Strengthening Families Protective Factors Framework

## North Hartford Ascend Fall 2025 Cohort Summary Report

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# Strengthening Families Protective Factors Framework

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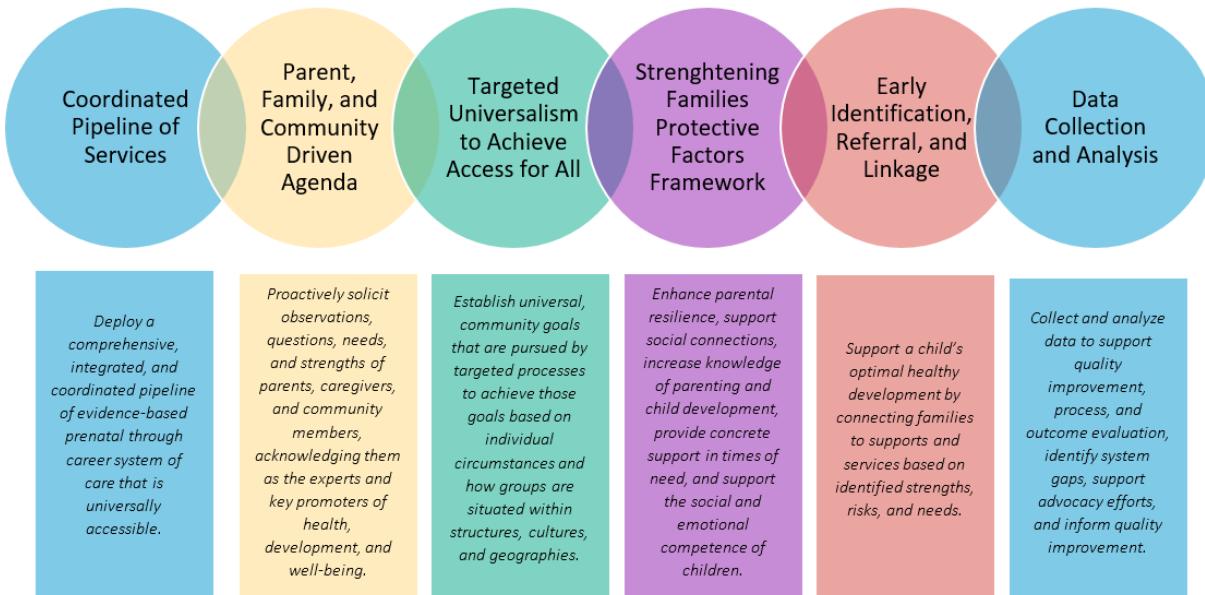
### Introduction

In July of 2025, Childhood Prosperity Lab launched a Strengthening Families Protective Factors Framework Community of Practice for North Hartford Ascend (Ascend). The Community of Practice (CoP) aimed to provide a collaborative and engaging platform for organizations and programs affiliated with North Hartford Ascend to learn about and explore core principles of the Strengthening Families Protective Factors Framework and how it can be leveraged to support the well-being of children and families living in the North Hartford Promise Zone. Through collaborative learning and mutual support, participants enhanced their understanding of the five protective factors that comprise the Framework, why they matter, and how to integrate protective factors more intentionally into their work to help children and families thrive. This effort highlights the commitment of both Childhood Prosperity Lab and North Hartford Ascend to help children and families thrive where they live, learn, work, play, and pray.

### North Hartford Ascend

North Hartford Ascend is a prenatal-to-career initiative designed to ensure children and families living in the North Hartford Promise Zone, which includes Clary Arsenal, Northeast, and Upper Albany, have the support they need to reach their full potential. Facilitated by Connecticut Children's and its Office for Community Child Health, Ascend's affiliated organizations are working to create a comprehensive, integrated, and coordinated network of programs, services, and other resources that are universally available to children and families. Funded by a U.S. Department of Education Promise Neighborhoods Grant, Ascend promotes systems transformation by focusing on six core components, as outlined in Figure 1: Ascend Core Components (below).

Figure 1: Ascend Core Components



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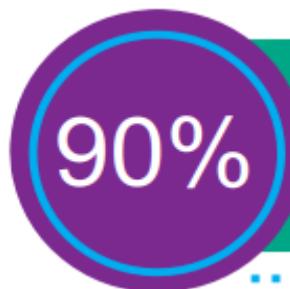
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### Childhood Prosperity Lab

Research shows that 90% of children's health is driven by the complex interplay between social, behavioral, environmental, and genetic/epigenetic factors (McGinnis et al., 2002). Established in 2015, Connecticut Children's [Childhood Prosperity Lab](#) (the Lab) is one of seventeen community-oriented programs in the [Office for Community Child Health](#) supporting the development and impact of strong child- and family-serving systems and sectors. The Lab focuses on advancing [social innovations](#)<sup>1</sup> by:

- 1) **Co-designing with Families and Communities:** families and communities are engaged in the design, implementation, and evaluation of social innovations they are intended to access, utilize, and benefit from.
- 2) **Advancing Systems Thinking and Change:** changemakers use systems thinking to understand how their innovation fits within the network of supports and services available to children and families, understand how their innovation might generate change, and then work across organizational and sectoral boundaries to lead change.
- 3) **Strengthening Protective Factors:** social innovations strengthen protective factors, including parental resilience, social connections, knowledge of parenting and child development, concrete support in times of need, and social-emotional competence of children.

The Lab offers a range of services in support of each of these core components to support changemakers and advance social innovations, including Mastermind Sessions, technical assistance, and training. Team members of the Lab were certified by *Butterfly Trainings that Transform* to provide training on the Strengthening Families Protective Factors Framework.



of children's health is affected by a combination of social, environmental, behavioral, and genetic factors.

### The Strengthening Families Protective Factors Framework

The Strengthening Families Protective Factors Framework (SFPFF) is "a research-informed approach to increase family strengths, enhance child development and reduce the likelihood of child abuse and neglect" (Center for the Study of Social Policy, 2023). In 2003, The [Center for the Study of Social Policy](#) (CSSP) developed the Framework as a resource for programs helping children, families, and communities to build protective factors

<sup>1</sup>Childhood Prosperity Lab defines social innovations as creative strategies that support the health, development, and well-being of children, families, and communities. Social innovations: 1) are implemented where children and families live, learn, work, play, and pray to support accessibility; utilization, and impact; 2) build upon the existing strengths and assets of families and communities; 3) are developed in partnership with families and communities to ensure they align with their lived experiences, goals, preferences, and needs; and 4) are integrated into existing organizational- and community-level infrastructure, relationships, and systems.

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in their everyday lives. While many protective factors strengthen families, the five protective factors that comprise the Framework are outlined in Table 1: Protective Factors.

Table 1: Protective Factors<sup>2</sup>

Parental Resilience	Managing stress and functioning well—facilitated by individual, relational, community, or societal factors—when faced with stressors, adversity, or trauma.
Social Connections	Healthy, meaningful, trusting, sustained relationships with people, institutions, communities, or a higher power that promote a sense of connectedness, belonging, and mattering.
Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development	Learning about prenatal, infant, and child development, and using developmentally and contextually appropriate parenting practices.
Concrete Support in Times of Need	Identifying, accessing, advocating for, and receiving high-quality and equitable support including the basic necessities everyone deserves and specialized services to address specific needs.
Social and Emotional Competence of Children	Providing environments and experiences—grounded in early relational health—that build positive social skills; enable children to regulate thoughts, emotions, and behaviors; and promote effective communication, problem-solving, and decision-making skills.

## Strengthening Families Protective Factors Framework Community of Practice Approach

The Lab defines a Community of Practice as a facilitated approach to disseminating promising, evidence-informed, and/or evidence-based social innovations to new settings, contexts, and/or communities. Key activities that underpin the Lab's approach to Communities of Practice include:

- **Learning Sessions:** curriculum-based, interactive workshops that provide a foundational understanding of the Strengthening Families Protective Factors Framework and each protective factor while allowing participants to practice emerging skills in a peer-to-peer setting;

<sup>2</sup> Strengthening Families Protective Factors Framework (The Center for the Study of Social Policy, 2023)

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- **Collaboration Sessions:** application-based workshops that support participants' practice change and active skill-building via peer-to-peer learning and semi-structured discussions, including the implementation of Plan-Do-Study-Act cycles (PDSAs)<sup>3</sup>; and
- **Data Collection and Analysis:** a data collection and analysis strategy that measures knowledge change, practice change, and participant value and satisfaction with all activities.

## North Hartford Ascend Spring 2025 Community of Practice

*"The entire series was extremely helpful, I wish all our staff could attend it. I personally enjoyed connecting with other attendees and building those community connections."*

In July of 2025, The Lab launched its third Strengthening Families Protective Factors Framework Community of Practice with partners of North Hartford Ascend. North Hartford Ascend is a place-based initiative that provides access to the children and families living in the North Hartford Promise Zone to the services and supports they need to reach their full potential from prenatal-to-career.

Ten participants registered for the Community of Practice, representing six different agencies/organizations affiliated with Ascend, including Connecticut Children's North Hartford Ascend & Childhood Prosperity Lab, United Way of Northeastern and Central Connecticut, Community Health Services, 2-4-1 CARE, Hartford Health Initiative, and Intercommunity. Most of the participants were direct service providers and frontline staff.

## Implementation Approach

The Lab's training model consists of seven learning sessions (an introduction, five separate courses on each protective factor, and a wrap-up) as well as three 90-minute, monthly collaboration sessions. Collaboration sessions are a unique activity of the Lab's Community of Practice on the framework.

In addition to knowledge change, The Lab believes that practice change leads to stronger and more intentional implementation of the theories and skills introduced to participants in the learning sessions. Collaboration sessions are peer-to-peer, semi-structured discussions designed to cultivate skill/practice change, and serve as a space to discuss the adaptation of strategies tested. In between each



<sup>3</sup>PDSAs are defined as a four-stage model for improvement. The tool provides structure for testing a change by developing a plan to test the change (Plan), carrying out the test (Do), observing and learning from the outcomes (Study), and determining what modifications should be made to the test whether that is abandoning, adapting, or adopting the change (Act).

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collaboration session, participants are provided a PDSA cycle template to plan and monitor their practice change.

PDSAs are defined as a four-stage model for improvement. The tool provides a structure for testing a change by developing a plan to test the change (Plan), carrying out the test (Do), observing and learning from the outcomes (Study), and determining what modifications should be made to the test whether that is abandoning, adapting, or adopting the change (Act). In collaboration sessions two and three, participants were expected to report on their PDSAs.

Table 2: Community of Practice Structure and Timeline

Date	Activity	Theme
7/10/25	Learning Session and Feedback Survey	Introduction
7/17/25	Learning Session and Feedback Survey	Resilience
7/24/25	Learning Session and Feedback Survey	Social Connections
2/27/25	Learning Session and Feedback Survey	Concrete Support in Times of Need Guest Speaker: <b>Terren Thompson</b> , <i>The Village for Children and Families</i>
7/31/25	Learning Session and Feedback Survey	Social and Emotional Competence of Children Guest Speaker: <b>Erika Rivera</b> , <i>Assistant Director of Support Services at Hartford Public Schools</i>
8/7/25	Learning Session and Feedback Survey	Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development Guest Speakers: <b>Nicole Flynn</b> , <i>211 Child Development</i>
8/14/25	Learning Session and Feedback Survey	Wrap-up
9/16/25	Collaboration Session & Feedback Survey	Strength-Based Theory & Positive Childhood Experiences
10/14/25	Collaboration Session, PDSA Report Out, & Feedback Survey	Active & Reflective Listening Skills
11/13/25	Collaboration Session, PDSA Report Out, & Feedback Survey	Strengthening Families Jeopardy

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### Value and Satisfaction

Community of Practice participants were asked to complete a feedback survey after each learning session and each collaboration session to document perceptions of value and satisfaction while supporting continuous quality monitoring and improvement. Participants were prompted to complete the value and satisfaction survey at the end of each activity, and then again in a follow-up email that was distributed the day after each activity.

### Learning Sessions

- 97% agreed or strongly agreed they were satisfied with the quality of the sessions;
- 100% agreed or strongly agreed that the session content was relevant to their role;
- 100% agreed or strongly agreed the facilitators effectively communicated session content and guided discussion;
- 95% agreed or strongly agreed they understand the importance of using strength-based approaches in North Hartford Ascend;
- 100% agreed or strongly agreed they understand the importance of culture in strengthening families' protective factors; and
- 96% agree or strongly agree they can make small yet significant changes to strengthen families' protective factors in their role.

When asked about the most helpful ideas, concepts, or theories from the session series, participants reported:

- “Focusing on the health and well-being of caregivers and parents to understand strengthening protective factors of youth and families.”
- “The videos helped to connect real life experiences.”
- “The statistics that we review are helpful to understand the significance and impact of building protective factors.”
- “Learning about the North Hartford Ascend Community Resource Map and how to use it.”
- “One of the most helpful messages was related to the stress that accumulates from multiple factors over time. The ‘balls in the air’ exercise was a powerful reminder of all the invisible ‘micro’ stressors the families we serve experience.”
- “I loved having both guest speakers come to share real world examples from the Hartford community and how relevant emotional intelligence is to children and families and the large impact it can have on everyone.”
- “This workshop was a great refresher for my work and helped remind me of the importance of children's developmental stages and parenting styles and how they can differ in many ways such as through culture.”

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### Collaboration Sessions

- 100% agreed or strongly agreed collaboration sessions helped them feel more confident about applying the Strengthening Families Protective Factors Framework to their work; and
- 100% agreed or strongly agreed they learned something helpful from another participant or the facilitators of the session.

When asked about the most helpful components of the sessions, participants reported:

- “The activity of making statements and questions more strength-based was a helpful activity. It helped me use the information from the trainings into action.”
- “Just using the scenarios and statements to think about responses a little differently than what I might’ve approached them.”
- “It was helpful to meet in small groups to review our PDSA cycles and as well as practice our reflective listening skills.”
- “The role-playing activities are intentionally designed and helpful for having us practice what we have learned. They’re great for me in the sense of stopping or slowly down to think of the different things I am doing or different strategies I am using.”
- “The Jeopardy was so helpful in making me think back to what we had learned in the sessions. I missed one but I feel confident in at least being able to explain the factors to others and use the tools in everyday work.”
- “I loved the Jeopardy game. It served as a great refresher!”

### Evidence and Impact of Knowledge & Practice Change

#### Knowledge Change

To understand whether the Community of Practice impacted knowledge change, a survey to measure knowledge and understanding of the protective factors was administered in advance of the first learning session and after the last collaboration session.

The survey assessed the following:

- The degree to which participants understand the importance of protective factors as it relates to child-, youth- and family health and well-being outcomes;
- The degree to which participants understand strength-based theory;
- Self-perceived knowledge and skillset to apply the Strengthening Families Protective Factors Framework;
- Tools and strategies that participants are leveraging to strengthen child-, youth- and family health and well-being outcomes;

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- The degree to which participants can correctly identify protective factors, as measured by an exercise that prompts them to match a fictitious scenario of a “protective factor in action” to one of the five protective factors that comprise the framework (see Appendix A).

Nine participants completed the baseline and end-of-project survey. Based on the data, all nine participants reported a notable increase in their self-perceived knowledge and skillset to apply the Strengthening Families Framework; the importance of protective factors; and the importance of recognizing family strengths.

### Practice Change

Community of practice participants were prompted to explore, integrate, and understand the impact of *small but significant* practice changes throughout the project. At the end of each learning session, participants were prompted to identify one *small but significant* practice change they intended to focus on the following week. At the start of the next learning session, participants were prompted to provide an update indicating if they incorporated the *small but significant* practice change and if so, what they observed upon its implementation.

As described previously, PDSA cycles were a core activity of collaboration session 2 and 3. PDSA cycles served as a more formal mechanism for participants to commit to, document, and understand the impact of *small but significant changes* (see Appendix E).

### Collaboration Sessions

At collaboration sessions 2 and 3, participants were asked to share examples of how they integrated the concepts, theories, and skills from the Framework into their practice. Approximately twelve examples of practice change were documented in these sessions. Themes that emerged from the collaboration sessions as it relates to practice change include reimagining team dynamics and community-based partnerships to strengthen social connections and intentionally and meaningfully connecting families to services to strengthen concrete support in times of need. A few examples are highlighted below.

Organization/Agency	Example of Practice Change
Connecticut Children's, North Hartford Ascend	Introduce a quick, relevant ice breaker at the start of the next five Co-Chair meetings where each attendee reflects on how they have—or plan to—incorporate the current month’s protective factor into their work. The ice breaker/s reflect each of the five protective factors.
United Way of Northeastern and Central Connecticut, 211 Child Development	For one month I will encourage families to keep doing what they are doing as caregivers, congratulating them, and giving encouragement to keep going to strengthen parental resilience.

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Connecticut Children's Childhood Prosperity Lab	Develop and introduce a tailored PDSA cycle for the Data & Evaluation (D&E) work group in Ascend to help document systemic change efforts. Integrate prompts to assess alignment with Strengthening Families Protective Factors Framework (SFPFF) and GPRA data.
United Way of Northeastern and Central Connecticut, 211 Child Development	For one month I will focus on encouraging parents to try and strengthen their social connections by reaching out to friends, family, and their communities for support. In our department we often follow up after the first call to make sure parents have connected with resources and followed through with their goals. This is another opportunity to encourage the parent.
2-4-1 CARE	Within the first two seasons of 2-4-1 CARE's TOP Self Sports outside of school time programs, I will work with my team to develop ways to strengthen parents' awareness and understanding of social emotional strategies that they can use at home with their children to build capacity around self-awareness and self-regulation. One way will be communicated through a family newsletter; second will be through a TOP Self end of session event; a third will be through a school or district hosted event.
United Way of Northeastern and Central Connecticut, 211 Child Development	I worked with the Read to Grow agency to launch a pilot around the Prenatal Literacy program. There will be one upcoming training with 211CD staff and Read to Grow staff to discuss the pilot implementation and there will be a meeting to look at the data and discuss the results of the pilot.
Intercommunity	Increase patient awareness of transportation services that are available to them, prioritizing free and low-cost options, that are offered by "Health on the Go" to reduce transportation as a barrier to health services.
Community Health Services	The Pediatric and Adolescent Department will enhance its immunization recall process by incorporating a brief education moment during calls to families of children who are behind on their vaccine schedules. Nurses, medical assistants or patient care coordinator will share a simple, age-appropriate fact about the importance of the specific vaccine (e.g., "This helps prevent whooping cough, which can be very dangerous for babies").
Hartford Health Initiative	For one month, during the intake process I will be discussing with the clients their goals and needs around their health and signing up for our Care Coordination during our intake phone call conversations.
Community Health Services	Increase visibility of food pantry locations available in the Hartford area so that patients can access them as needed by posting flyers in the waiting room.

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### Keep, Change, Add

When asked about what they might keep, change, or add to their practice differently as a result of participating in the Community of Practice, participants reported the following:

<b>What are you going to KEEP doing in your practice to strengthen families' protective factors?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>“Active listening and reassuring patients.”</li><li>“Incorporating the protective factors into my work (use my PDSA cycle tool).”</li><li>“I am going to focus on ways to support parents’ awareness of their children’s social emotional development.”</li><li>“Social connections are key! I will continue to build them in my work every day.”</li><li>“Active listening over the phone with patients.”</li><li>“I plan to continue and strengthen my active listening skills.”</li><li>“I am going to continue collaborating with other agencies that support children and families to strengthen how we offer concrete support in times of need.”</li><li>“Pass along the learning to our other staff in our department.”</li><li>“I will continue to focus on building strength and resilience of caregivers by having open conversations, giving positive feedback, and providing helpful resources to families.”</li><li>“Focus on family strengths.”</li></ul>
<b>What are you going to CHANGE in your practice to strengthen families' protective factors?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>“Refrain from just responding so that I can practice active listening.”</li><li>“Incorporate the protective factors into my work by leveraging the PDSA framework.”</li><li>“One thing I am going to change is to be more cognizant of ways to support parent engagement in our before and after school activities.”</li><li>“Having patience and being a more intentional active listener.”</li><li>“Stop to think about the different strategies or resources I can use to support families rather than rushing to do things.”</li><li>“I will not change what I do per se, but work on strengthening my practice.”</li><li>“I am going to start talking about protective factors with staff so that they implement them in their daily work with families.”</li><li>“When hiring new staff, I will spend time educating them on the protective factors.”</li><li>“I will give parents and families a little more grace.”</li></ul>

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<b>What are you going to ADD to your practice to strengthen families' protective factors?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• "I will use different materials/ strategies that I learned in the Community of Practice and incorporating it in my everyday work."</li><li>• "One thing I am going to add is providing more concrete support for families available through North Hartford Ascend."</li><li>• "I am going to be an advocate for others and practice being comfortable with quiet times in conversations."</li><li>• "Ask more open-ended questions to my intake process with families."</li><li>• "I am going to add information and questions about protective factors to our case discussion meetings."</li><li>• "I am going to keep educating families on their child development, but meeting them where they are at."</li><li>• "I am going to evaluate family strengths and in addition to focusing on challenges and goals."</li><li>• "Add information about the protective factors and framework to share during our staff meetings."</li><li>• "Focus on building parental resilience and increasing social connections."</li><li>• "The PDSA strategy I came up with!"</li><li>• "I really liked PDSA cycle and the reasoning behind it, I liked that it helped me put together my plan and see how I would feasibly accomplish it."</li></ul>
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## Stay connected

- Email: [childhoodprosperitylab@connecticutchildrens.org](mailto:childhoodprosperitylab@connecticutchildrens.org)
- Facebook: Connecticut Children's Community Child Health
- LinkedIn: Connecticut Children's Office for Community Child Health
- [Advancing Kids Blog](#)

## Appendix

**Appendix A:** The section of the baseline survey that measures knowledge of the individual protective factors using fictitious yet relevant scenarios.

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Mr. Phillips notices that his son, Kamari, is using sign language to communicate that he wants more food. Mr. Phillips excitedly writes down this milestone to share at their next well-child visit.

Select or enter value

Taylor is a recent youth graduate of Weaver High School and is searching for employment. Taylor reaches out to Capital Workforce Partners to learn more about opportunities in the area, and accesses the Ascend Community Resource Map to search of bus routes.

Select or enter value

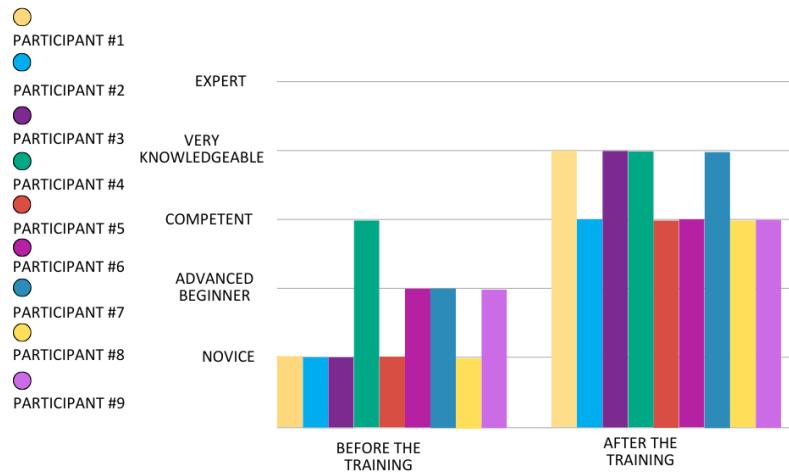
Parental Resilience  
Social Connections  
Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development  
Concrete Support in Times of Need  
Social and Emotional Competence of Children

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**Appendix B:** Responses from nine participants who completed the baseline and end-of-project survey measuring their knowledge of the Strengthening Families framework.

### SELF-PERCEPTION OF KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS OF THE STRENGTHENING FAMILIES FRAMEWORK

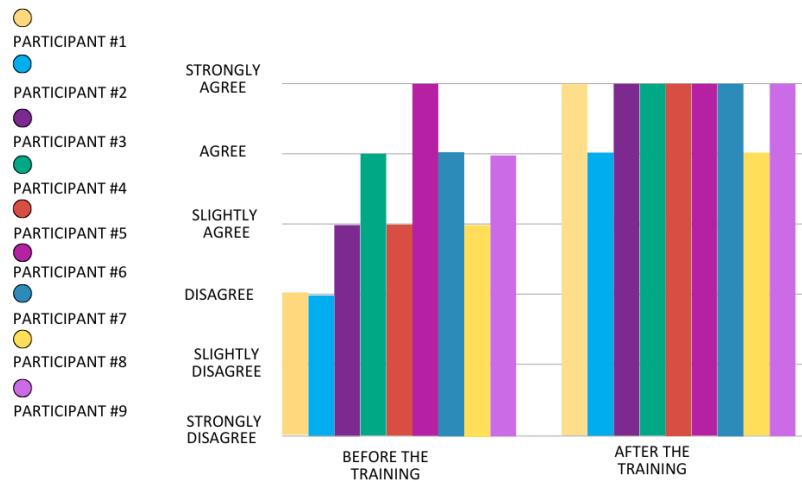


**Appendix C:** Responses from nine participants who completed the baseline and end-of-project survey measuring their understanding of the importance of family strengths.

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### SELF-PERCEPTION OF UNDERSTANDING THE IMPORTANCE OF FAMILY STRENGTHS



**Appendix E:** The PDSA template that participants used to document and track practice change.

#### PDSA #1



Beginning Date for Test: April 7th

Completion Date for Test: May 5th

PLAN Who, what, when, where	DO Record data and observations. What are the implications?	STUDY What happened?	ACT Will you abandon, adapt, or adopt the strategy? What did you learn?