Strengthening Families Program
Statewide Outcomes 2007-2008

Program:
Strengthening Families is a parent, youth and family skills-building curriculum designed to prevent teen substance abuse and other behavior problems, strengthen parenting skills, and build family strengths developed by professionals at Iowa State University Extension.¹

The program is delivered in 7 two-hour sessions in which parents and youth meet separately for the first hour and then the families practice skills and have fun together during the second hour. Sessions are highly interactive and include role-playing, discussions, learning games, and family projects.²

This report documents outcomes from sixteen series of the Strengthening Families Program offered by Cornell Cooperative Extension educators from January 2007 through December 2008 across seven counties and in New York City. The seven counties offering the program are: Warren (1 series), Jefferson (4 series), Orange (4 series), Tompkins (2 series), Albany (1 series), Rockland (2 series), and Tioga (1 series).

Statewide, 143 caregivers and 147 youth participated with strong attendance overall. Average attendance for parents/caregivers was 77.42%, and average attendance for youth was 81.15%; both groups experienced a drop in attendance during the fifth and sixth sessions.

The following charts illustrate caregiver and youth participation by county.

¹ http://www.extension.iastate.edu/sfp
² http://www.extension.iastate.edu/sfp/inside/curr.php
Caregiver Demographics:
Statewide, the majority of caregivers attending the program were parents: 53.4% were mothers and 19.9% were fathers. Other adults/caregivers attending the Program included grandparents, step-parents, and guardians.

The average age of caregiver participants was 39.75 years. The majority (62.7%) reported their race as White/Caucasian, and the representation of other racial and ethnic groups among participants roughly mirrored the demographics of New York State as a whole.3

Caregivers also reported diverse educational attainment levels, with 6.5% of participants completing less than high school, ranging up to 6.5% who had completed a graduate degree. Approximately one in three participants declined to report their education levels.

3 According to the US Census (2000), New York State’s racial/ethnic composition included 67.9% White, 15.6% Black/African American, 5.5% Asian, 0% Native American, and 15.1% Hispanic. The small differences in distribution between the Strengthening Families participants and the general population may be accounted for in the 7.3% of participants who declined to report their race.
The majority of caregivers were employed full- or part-time (46.8% and 15.1%, respectively), but approximately one in four were not employed in any capacity.

Caregivers’ marital status varied, with over half of participants reporting that they were married or living with a partner (58.8%). Approximately 13% reported that they were single, and almost 30% were separated, divorced, or widowed.

Caregivers reported an average of 2.33 children living at home. Children ranged in age from infancy to 23 years. The average age of the youngest child was 9.28 and average age of the oldest child was 13.83.

**Caregiver Results:**
This study used a pre- and post-test evaluation, in which participants are asked a series of questions at both the beginning of a program (pre-test) and then again at the program’s completion (post-test). This design allows researchers to measure changes in participant knowledge, attitudes, or behaviors that may have resulted from participation in the program (although such a design cannot definitely point to the program itself as the cause of any change; it is possible that caregivers or youth would have experienced changes even if they had not participated in the program).

When looking at the results of the pre- and post-tests given to the caregivers, we see very positive results with statistically significant outcomes for 18 out of 20...
questions asked of caregivers before participating in the Strengthening Families Program and again following Program completion.

Caregivers indicated that the program was highly successful in helping them to calm down before addressing problems with their youth, work collaboratively to solve problems together, follow through with consequences for broken rules, and view situations from their teen’s perspective. Caregivers also felt that they better understood normal teenage development, spent more special one-on-one time together, and talked more often with their teens about their future goals. In terms of family responsibilities, caregivers were both more likely to involve youth in family chores and more likely to compliment or reward their child for completing chores and following rules. Additionally, caregivers reported that they were more likely to show their child love and respect and spend time doing something fun together as a family.

Results for pre- and post-test surveys are determined by interpreting the p-value generated by a statistical procedure called a t-test. The p-value is a numerical estimate of the reliability of our assumption that the difference in means on pre and post surveys is real and not due to chance. In general, researchers say that a p-value of .10 or less is statistically significant, which means that we are 90% certain that the result we see is not due to chance. The following results for the Strengthening Families Program are reported at the p-value levels of .01, .05, and .10.

In comparing the caregiver pre- and post-test survey results, the following eleven questions showed significant positive changes at the 1% level, which means that we are 99% certain that the results are not due to chance.

1. I wait to deal with problems with my child until I have cooled down.
2. I remember that it is normal for children to be harder to get along with at this age.
3. I take time to do something fun together as a family.
4. I find ways to keep my child involved in family work activities like chores.
5. I follow through with consequences each time he or she breaks a rule.
6. I talk with my child about his or her future goals without criticizing.
In comparing caregiver pre- and post-test survey results, the following four questions showed significant positive changes at the 5% level, which means that we are 95% certain that the results are not due to chance.

In comparing the caregiver pre- and post-test survey results, two questions showed significant positive changes at the 10% level, which means that we are 90% certain that the results are not due to chance.
These results are extremely encouraging. Not only did eighteen of the twenty questions asked of caregivers show significant positive changes, but over half of these changes occurred at highly significant levels.

Please refer to the Appendix for a complete list of Caregiver Questions.

**Youth Demographics:**
A roughly equal split of male and female youth participated in this program. However, approximately 12% did not report their gender which makes it difficult to determine the exact gender composition of youth participants.

**Child's Gender**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>41.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>46.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonresponse</td>
<td>11.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Youth Results:
Like those of the caregivers, youth results were very positive with statistically significant outcomes on almost all of the questions (12 out of 15) asked before participating in the Strengthening Families Program and again following Program completion. In particular, youth reported that they were more goal-oriented, better able to resist peer-pressure, and more aware of their own stress levels. They also felt that they could sit down with their caregivers to calmly discuss problems, reported participating in family meetings, and better understood caregivers’ views and family values. The youth participants gained a greater appreciation for their caregivers and left the program feeling truly loved and respected by their caregivers.

In comparing the youth pre- and post-test survey results, the following nine questions showed significant positive changes at the 1% level, which means that we are 99% certain that the results are not due to chance.
In comparing the youth pre- and post-test survey results, the following three questions showed significant positive changes at the 5% level, which means that we are 95% certain that the results are not due to chance.

These results are highly encouraging as results from pre- and post-surveys administered to youth participants indicate significant statewide impacts for well over two-thirds of the questions asked. The majority of these changes occurred at highly significant levels.

Please refer to the Appendix for a complete list of Youth Questions.

**Conclusion:**
The Strengthening Families Program has had continued success across New York State in 2008, with new counties reporting data and a new group of parent educators receiving training in the Strengthening Families curriculum in September 2008. Rockland County was the first newly-trained county to report data, and many counties featured last year offered additional series of the Program. A combined total of 143 caregivers and 147 youth have participated to date in the Strengthening Families Program. The highly significant results reported by both caregivers and youth demonstrate the substantial impact and success of the Program.
Appendix

**Caregiver Questions:**
1. I wait to deal with problems with my child until I have cooled down.
2. I remember that it is normal for children to be harder to get along with at this age.
3. I help my youth understand what the family and house rules are.
4. I take time to do something fun together as a family.
5. I let my youth know what the consequences are for breaking rules.
6. I find ways to keep my children involved in family work activities, like chores.
7. I follow through with consequences each time he or she breaks a rule.
8. I talk with my child about his or her future goals without criticizing.
9. I often tell my child how I feel when he or she misbehaves.
10. I find ways to include my child in family decisions about fun and work activities.
11. I spend special time one-on-one with my youth.
12. I let my youth know the reason for the rules we have.
13. I listen to my youth when he or she is upset.
15. I work together with my youth to solve problems that come up.
16. I try to see things from my youth’s point of view.
17. I talk with my child about ways to resist peer pressure.
18. I give compliments and rewards when my child does chores at home or learns to follow rules.
19. I show my child love and respect.
20. I explain to my child the consequences of not following my rules concerning alcohol use.

**Youth Questions:**
1. When I have a goal, I make a plan for how to achieve it.
2. I do things to help me feel better when I am under stress.
3. I appreciate the things my parent(s)/caregiver(s) do for me.
4. If a friend suggests that we do something that can get us both into trouble, I am able to get out of doing it.
5. We have family meetings to discuss plans, schedules, and rules.
6. I know how to tell when I am under stress.
7. I listen to my parent(s)/caregiver(s)’ point of view.
8. I understand the values and beliefs my family has.
9. I know there are consequences when I don’t follow a given rule.
10. My parent(s)/caregiver(s) and I can sit down together to work on a problem without yelling or getting mad.
11. I know the qualities that are important in a true friend.
12. I know what my parents/caregivers think I should do about drugs and alcohol.
13. My parent(s)/caregiver(s) are calm when they discipline me.
14. I feel truly loved and respected by my parent(s)/caregiver(s).
15. I am able to tell when my parent(s)/caregiver(s) are stressed or having a problem.
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http://www.parenting.cit.cornell.edu

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