

This Full Frame Initiative (FFI) partnership with Missouri Children's Division is engaging and uniting government, nonprofit and community stakeholders in a common strategy to improve the long-term safety and wellbeing of children and families. FFI's Five Domains of Wellbeing has been named the foundation of the state's child welfare practice model, and is being applied by a growing number of connected systems and programs to strengthen inter-agency collaboration, transform practice and policy, and ensure that safety is a stepping stone to long-term wellbeing.

The urgent challenge

Like other state child welfare agencies in the U.S., the Missouri Children's Division (CD), has struggled to ensure immediate safety of children in ways that lead to sustainable change for children and families. Between 2009 and 2015, Missouri's foster care population increased 41%. Over 13,000 of Missouri's children—the most in state history—are in out-of-home placement as of summer 2015. This reflects both an increase in children coming into care, and the sluggish rate that children are being reunified with their families. The federal standard for timely reunification is that at least 76% of children removed from their homes will be returned home within one year of their entry into foster care, but in Missouri, only 68% of children removed in 2010 returned home that year. In 2014, that percentage dropped to 58%. These are some of the statistics that led CD to the decision that a narrow focus on safety, outside of a context of wellbeing, is resulting in efforts and interventions insufficient to improve outcomes for children and families. A new approach is needed.

Project description and impact

CD is building a values-driven, evidence- and data-informed child welfare culture based on seeing families in the full frame of their lives in order to safely reduce the number of children in care. With the support of FFI, CD is using the Five Domains of Wellbeing as the foundation of its work with children and families, in recognition that actions taken to increase children's safety must consider their wellbeing needs. Additionally, because child welfare reaches well beyond the bounds of any one agency, CD and FFI are collaborating across systems and pro-actively engaging community partners so that there can be a consistent, systems-wide focus on child and family wellbeing from the start.

The genesis of this transformation was a series of seven Community Conversations co-hosted by CD and FFI in 2014. Bringing together over 150 child welfare workers from across the state with an equal number of advocates for children and families in other fields—courts, medicine, domestic violence, clergy, schools and more—these events introduced the field to “full frame thinking” and the potential for the Five Domains of Wellbeing to be a common language across multiple disciplines. These events surfaced ideas for change and magnified the desire among diverse stakeholders to re-envision child welfare as a shared community responsibility.

CD subsequently articulated four core strategies to drive its reform efforts: 1) seeing families accurately (in the full frame of their lives); 2) engaging families and communities; 3) making informed decisions; and 4) strengthening frontline practice. In recognition of the universal need and drive for wellbeing, the Five Domains of Wellbeing is the foundation of the practice model that enables these strategies. Because trauma is ubiquitous in the lives of the children and families CD works with, and because trauma, unaddressed, constrains access to wellbeing, trauma-informed care is also

central to this effort. A philosophically aligned safety assessment protocol (Signs of Safety) is being simultaneously introduced to the field, ensuring that the agency's mandate of safety is clear and strong, and that safety becomes a stepping stone to wellbeing.

FFI is supporting CD in making its vision a reality by:

- 1) Strengthening frontline practice, through training and coaching to help workers use the Five Domains of Wellbeing to better engage, assess and support families, and gather a full frame picture of a situation and a family to support informed decisions; and training supervisors to support and coach workers in this practice.
- 2) Supporting policy and program staff to identify potential unsustainable tradeoffs created by policy, and to minimize these tradeoffs if they may undermine lasting change.
- 3) Building the capacity of leaders throughout the agency to assess and revise policies and tools through a wellbeing lens.
- 4) Strengthening worker retention efforts through application of the Five Domains of Wellbeing in the workplace.
- 5) Supporting targeted efforts to bring wellbeing, normalcy and appropriate adolescent developmental supports and activities to the 3550 older youth involved in the child welfare system.
- 6) Working with vendors, community partners and other systems to employ the Five Domains of Wellbeing as a common language across agencies, and repositioning of child welfare as a community responsibility. Because the framework is already central to Missouri's juvenile justice system's approach, the potential for this common language and focus to positively support change for older youth involved in child welfare and juvenile justice ("cross-over youth") is particularly important.

Our charge as a child welfare community is to focus on sustainable changes and enhanced wellbeing for kids and families. The Five Domains of Wellbeing framework has been instrumental in our efforts.
—Tim Decker, Director,
Children's Division

Status

Every new worker statewide now receives a full day of training in the Five Domains of Wellbeing framework in their first week of employment (delivered by a CD staff person, certified by FFI), and retroactive training will ensure that the workforce of over 2000 will all be trained by spring 2016. Intensive training for supervisors is being rolled out in 2016. Training and coaching in specific applications of the framework are ongoing, as are other capacity-building activities.

In 2016, FFI is also working with court systems in St. Louis and other parts of the state to bring the Five Domains of Wellbeing orientation to their work in relevant ways; partnering with the Missouri Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence to bring a wellbeing orientation to the domestic violence field; and working with foster parent groups and other key stakeholders who play a pivotal role in ensuring the wellbeing of thousands of children and families in Missouri.

This project is supported by Casey Family Programs, Missouri Children's Division and private philanthropy.

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The Full Frame Initiative's mission is to change systems so that people and communities experiencing poverty, violence and trauma have the tools, supports and resources they need to thrive.