FIRST THINGS FIRST

FTF Family Support Framework

What Is Family Support?

"To thrive, young children need . . . . stable, nurturing families who have enough resources and parenting skill to meet their basic needs. These are the ingredients that put young children on a pathway to success." – Helene Stebbins and Jane Knitzer, National Center on Children in Poverty

First Things First has a vision that all children will have the opportunity to grow up in stable, strong and nurturing families. Families are their children's first and most influential caregivers and teachers, and they play a critical role in shaping their children's lives and future outcomes. Research has confirmed that early relationships between children and adults are the primary influence on brain growth and development. As the National Scientific Council on the Developing Child (2006) notes, "Healthy development depends on the quality and reliability of a young child's relationships with the important people in his or her life... even the development of a child's brain architecture depends on the establishment of these relationships."

Humans are inherently social beings. Infants prefer human faces over other objects and can recognize their mother's voice shortly after birth. This initial preference sets the foundation for a lifetime of learning within a social context. "All learning takes place in the context of relationships and is critically affected by the quality of those relationships" (Edelman, 2004). Intellectual, social, emotional, physical and behavioral development are all affected as young children experience the world in an environment of relationships. For example, the reciprocal interactions which occur between mother and baby during the course of daily routines (i.e. smiles, gestures, vocalizations, touch, and eye contact) builds and strengthens the architecture of the brain as it rapidly develops in the first three years of life. The general home environment, toys, books, activities and other interactions in the family setting are also strongly related to cognitive and early language and literacy development and later academic achievement. Healthy relationships and family environments are associated with stronger cognitive skills and social competence which lead to later success and achievement in school (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child , 2006).

Factors Influencing Families' Abilities to Support Their Children's Growth and Development – Strengths and Risks

Family characteristics significantly impact children's potential for success in school and life. Indicators of a child's well-being and readiness for success include a family's economic stability, parents' understanding of their child's development and the support families receive in order to nurture and teach their children (Kagan & Rigby, 2003).

Economic and Educational Factors

Research studies and policy interventions often focus on the effects of poverty on children's growth and development. Although families at all income levels are vulnerable when they experience challenges that put children at risk, such as domestic violence, child maltreatment and depression, these challenges

are especially prevalent among low-income families. Families with lower incomes cope with tremendous amounts of stress related to various concerns, such as covering the cost of rent, paying for a sick child to see a doctor, or ensuring the family has enough to eat. Sometimes, families must even cope with loss of housing and homelessness. Children raised in such high stress environments are at risk for suffering many adverse developmental effects, such as poor health and school failure, which can create a cycle of poverty across generations.

Research also demonstrates that parents' understanding of child development, beliefs about how children grow and develop, concepts of parenting, and parenting behaviors each differ by socioeconomic status (SES) (Hoff, Larson, & Tardif, 2002). For example, higher SES parents expect their children to attain certain developmental milestones at a younger age than do parents with lower SES, and parents with higher incomes believe they have more control over their children's outcomes than do parents with lower incomes. These differences hold true for Arizona families as well. According to the Arizona Family and Community Survey (2009), "Lower SES parents were more likely to believe that the capacity for children's learning is set at birth, compared to higher SES parents. The belief that children's learning ability is unchangeable may manifest in parenting behavior that is less verbal, less interactive, or that provides fewer learning opportunities (Hoff et al., 2002)."

A mother's educational attainment has also been cited in research as a strong predictor of children's health status, well-being and school achievement (Magnuson and McGroder, 2002) It has been found that "mothers without a high school diploma are less likely than mothers with a high school diploma to provide enriching early childhood experiences for their children birth through five years. [Additionally], children of mothers without a high school diploma score lower on tests of math and reading skills upon entry to kindergarten…" (Building Bright Futures, 2007).

In their seminal study on language development, Hart and Risley (1995) made a significant discovery illustrating the importance of parent education and background on children's learning. Hart and Risley found that children in homes with professional level parents heard an average of 2,153 words per hour compared to 616 words per hour heard by children in homes of families where income and education were typically low. "With few exceptions, the more parents talked to their children, the faster the children's vocabularies were growing and the higher the children's IQ test scores at age three and later."

Family Demographics and Environmental Risks

The first three to five years are a critical time for children's growth and development. The greater the number of risk factors children experience during that time, the more likely their outcomes will be poor. A variety of family demographic and environmental risk factors can increase the need for targeted family support strategies. Examples of such risks include: low birth weight, food insecurity, maternal depression, child abuse or neglect, and environmental hazards, such as lead exposure. A research study examining maternal mental health, substance use and domestic violence in the first year of a baby's life found that exposure to these types of risks can result in a wide variety of behavior problems which often hinder children's healthy physical and developmental growth (Whitaker, Orzol and Kahn, 2006).

In addition to the various environmental factors affecting young children's development, the very make-up of the family unit also plays an important role. Both the people who make up each family and how it is structured impact how families function. Closely tied to culture, today's families vary greatly and may include single mothers or fathers, traditional, two-parent families, foster families, grandparents raising

grandchildren, stepparents, and gay or lesbian families. Extended family members may also play a large role in raising children within some cultures and communities.

Family make-up can contribute to or inhibit the development of stable families that are then able to meet the comprehensive needs of their children. Therefore, understanding the structure of families and how they function must inform the development of appropriate family supports services.

Community Characteristics

Internal supports within families are further affected by several characteristics of the community in which a family lives. Whether a community is in an urban or rural area often determines the quantity and sufficiency of the resources available. For example, Cochise County in Arizona cites its massive land area and mostly rural communities as strong factors in creating several challenges such as lack of public transportation and access to information and service providers (Needs and Assets Report Cochise Regional Partnership Council, 2008). Without sufficient services available, and with limited access to information, families living in geographically isolated or remote areas lack important support structures on which many families often rely.

Economic strength of communities also influences family stability. Loss of local businesses such as mining or agriculture can create situations of poverty where booming towns and communities once existed. Facing such financial stresses places families at high risk and creates greater need for external support networks and structures.

Components of a Strong Family Support System

First Things First demonstrates its commitment to the family by including a component of family support as a part of Arizona's comprehensive early childhood system. To understand what creates a statewide early childhood system, leaders from across the country such as Zero to Three, Center for Law and Social Policy, and the Smart Start Technical Assistance Center, formed the Early Childhood Systems Working Group and developed a framework for building strong, statewide early childhood policies. The workgroup defined family support as "economic and parenting supports to ensure that children have nurturing and stable relationships with caring adults." According to the national workgroup, elements of a family support infrastructure include: varied and targeted voluntary services, economic supports, cultural responsiveness, strong and safe communities, and statewide information systems. Together, these components provide a system of support that strengthens families in ways that allow them to provide stable and enriching environments for their children.

Varied, Voluntary Services for Families

All children need caring parents and adults who provide nurturing and stable relationships for good developmental outcomes and success in school and life. "But even the most educated parents cannot provide all of the learning tools children need, and many parents have not been prepared with an understanding of how children learn and develop" (Tangible Steps Toward Tomorrow, 2007). Many parents receive support and information from their extended family, as well as their friends, neighbors, faith communities, schools and other community agencies. For some families, this informal support network is sufficient to help them succeed in their parenting roles. However, a variety of circumstances that families face often require more formal, targeted family support strategies. Parents' access to these targeted supports is essential to ensuring optimal outcomes for children.

Effective program models of family support meet standards of practice and are matched with the various populations that require some level of support. The approaches that have proven to be most effective in producing positive outcomes for families and their children include the following characteristics:

- Varied Types of Intervention and Methods of Delivery: Models may include short-term or ongoing home visitation, parenting classes, parent support groups, or parent-child playgroups. Regardless of type, families must be provided opportunities to practice new skills and to reflect on their new knowledge.

- Comprehensive Service Provision: Services focus on the comprehensive physical, social, emotional and educational needs of children and their families, rather than take a narrow, one-dimensional approach. An example would be to embed literacy development and overall well-being of the child within the support of the parent-child relationship rather than limiting a home visitor to only discussing with parents how to read to their children.

- Use of Family-centered Practices: In a family-centered model the focus is on both the strengths and the needs of each individual family. The family is also engaged as a partner in setting goals, determining methods to achieve those goals and evaluating the outcomes.

- Evidence-based Curricula and Practice: Standards of practice for family support programs have been developed based on evidence related to the elements which produce the best outcomes, i.e. strong, stable families which produce children who are healthy and successful in school and life.

- Targeted Service Delivery and Type of Intervention: The type of service matches what is most appropriate for the targeted population of families.

- Continuum of Intensity and Duration: The level of intensity must match the needs and wishes of the families involved.

- Coordinated and Seamless in Delivery: Providers work together across communities, create mutual referral systems and coordinate program eligibility so that families can access a range of services and supports without duplication.

Economic Supports

Economic stability is often considered as whether or not a family falls within a poverty designation. However, researchers have determined that it actually takes between 1.5 and 3.5 times the poverty level to provide for a family's basic needs (National Center for Children in Poverty). In considering how economic stability plays a role in the family support infrastructure, the Early Childhood Systems Working Group (2006) defined economic supports as those that "provide for financial stability and self-sufficiency." According to the National Center for Children in Poverty (2009), "State policies that support parenting and promote families economic security improve the odds that families have the resources they need to meet the basic needs of their children."

There are a variety of economic supports recommended by policy makers across the country. Some examples of these supports include the following (adapted by recommendations from NCCP 2009):

- Paid Medical/Maternity Leave for Families: As the only industrialized country without a paid family-leave policy, states must take on this issue locally. Family leave policies assure parents who cannot afford to stay home with their children during the critical period after birth are still provided with such an opportunity. Some states now offer partial wage replacement, but such benefits are often limited to only larger businesses and corporations which choose to provide it.

- Various Tax Credits: Tax credits which would assist family economic security include a refundable earned income credit and/or state dependent care credit. Credits reduce a family's taxable income and thus reduce tax liability.

- Maintain Copayments for Child Care Subsidies at or below 10 Percent of Family Income: Some states may choose to eliminate copayments, or use a sliding scale dependent on income. Keeping payments at a maximum of 10 percent of family income maintains a rate that is more closely in line with a national average of seven percent paid by most families for child care services.

Cultural Responsiveness

Culture refers to "shared and learned ideas and products of a society. It is a shared way of life of people, including their beliefs, their technology, their values and norms, all of which are transmitted down through the generations by learning and observation" (Responsiveness to Family Cultures, Values, and Languages, 2002). Building upon the concept of learning in the context of relationships, it is important to consider each family's culture, the culture of local communities and the state in ongoing policy and strategy development.

An effective family support system ensures that as policies and procedures are developed, they are viewed through a lens of cultural sensitivity and appropriateness. A culturally responsive system is one which responds to the varying backgrounds and cultures by providing materials which have been translated into the language of the participating families and delivers curricula that reflect the lives of the families served. In addition, the staff working with families reflect the racial, cultural and linguistic backgrounds of those families. Families are always treated with respect, regardless of their parenting beliefs and practices which may differ among cultures.

Strong and Safe Communities

For young children growing up, it is just as important for their neighborhood to be a safe, violent-free place as it is their home environment. Eiseman, Cove, and Popkin (2005) indicate that children living in communities where violence and drug use are rampant "…confront numerous obstacles, including a social world dominated by the drug economy, bad schools and, frequently, parents coping with problems of their own. These obstacles place them at risk for serious consequences including developmental delays, behavior problems, and poor school outcomes." Children have greater rates of success when living in neighborhoods where they do not have to cope with the worries of an unsafe environment.

Healthy physical development of young children can also be affected by the presence of toxins in an environment. Presence of lead in paints or waste in dumps close to public spaces add to the dangers. Families must be afforded safe choices of where to live and raise their children, regardless of income.

Having access to quality recreational and educational opportunities is also considered to act as a potential contributor to positive outcomes for children (Eiseman, et. al. 2005). How neighborhoods are

designed impact children's health in other ways as well. "Today's children are spending less of their free time outdoors in the neighborhood, with negative consequences for health" (Handy, Cao, and Mokhtarian, 2008). In their study on neighborhood design and children's play, Handy, et. al found "support for a causal relationship between neighborhood design and outdoor play and point to cul-de-sacs, larger front yards, lower crime, and increased interaction among neighbors as key characteristics that influence outdoor play by increasing parents' perceptions of safety."

Particularly, safe and strong communities include:

- Safe neighborhoods
- Family activities
- Parks and other recreation spaces
- Sports activities
- Family friendly libraries
- Safe places - for children to socialize, gather, and play such as Boys and Girls clubs
- Faith based opportunities such as churches or synagogues

Statewide Information Systems

Having "accurate information about raising young children and appropriate expectations for their behavior" has been cited by the Doris Duke Strengthening Families Initiative as one of five key protective factors that improve child outcomes and reduce the incidence of child abuse and neglect (Center for the Study of Social Policy, 2008). All families, regardless of background can benefit from education and information related to child development and health, as well as access to resources, supports and services. At some point during the course of parenting, all families have questions and seek information. Some families may be searching for nearby family child care providers, while others may be concerned about their child's learning. Still families may be trying to cope with the everyday issues of parenting like toilet training and feeding a picky eater.

While there is no one single support strategy or solution to providing information to families (Daro, 2006), an integral component of an effective family support infrastructure ensures that information is available in a variety of forms and addresses the varying concerns families may have. Information provided must do the following:

- Connect programs across communities
- Be available in a variety of forms
- Be culturally appropriate
- Build on family strengths and knowledge
- Provide accurate information
- Offer opportunities for sharing among and between families through various family and social networks

The Existing Family Support Components in Arizona

Arizona currently has a number of family support components in place. However, these services are often disjointed, have limited scope and lack the coordination which might produce the best outcomes. While many improvements are necessary to assure all Arizona families have what they need to provide nurturing, stable and caring environments for their children, the state does have some existing integral pieces of a family support infrastructure.

Across the state, several agencies provide a variety of programs targeted to specific populations to assist families with a number of different skills. Some programs target prevention of abuse and neglect while other programs support adult education and family literacy. Some examples of these programs include:

- Healthy Families Arizona
- Newborn Intensive Care Follow-up
- Early Head Start/Head Start
- Arizona Family Literacy

Other ways which Arizona currently provides a family support infrastructure are with a variety of economic supports. Arizona provides several of the economic policies recommended by the NCCP which include the following:

- An established minimum wage which exceeds the federal level
- Personal income tax exemption for single parent families of three at or below poverty
- Possible eligibility for child care subsidies for parents in school

With 21 federally recognized tribal nations located in Arizona, and a population where almost one-third speak a language other than English in their home (Building Bright Futures, 2007), it is clear that Arizona residents are a widely diverse group of people. Such diversity requires significant efforts to understand and be responsive to the varying family cultures in our communities. Ways in which Arizona currently responds to families of diverse backgrounds include the following:

- Recognition of tribal sovereignty and incorporation of tribal liaisons within each state agency.
- Migrant education programs provided through the Arizona Department of Education
- Refugee relocation programs through various agencies
- Community based programs which provide parenting information, materials and services in languages other than English.

Ensuring Arizona families have opportunities to raise their children in safe and strong neighborhoods is imperative to building a strong family support infrastructure. The desire to create communities in which people feel safe and residents want to raise their children is demonstrated with the following services, programs, and policies across the state:

- Public libraries (city, county, state)
- Public park and recreation areas (private, city, county, state & national)
- Variety of family friendly museums
- Lead abatement programs
- New construction safety regulations (e.g. pool fencing)
- Good neighbor programs (e.g. Block Watch)
- Family and community resource centers

Families in Arizona may or may not choose to participate in the various targeted programs such as home visitation or parenting classes. However, most families at some point seek information related to children and/or parenting. As noted pediatrician T. Berry Brazelton explains, parents have two universal worries regardless of background or income. These include, “Is my baby alright?” and “Am I a good

enough parent?" Arizona assists families in answering these concerns through a variety of venues. These include:

- Birth to Five Helpline
- Arizona Parent Kits
- Resource and referral services

Gaps in Arizona's Family Support System

Although Arizona programs and services contain elements of each of the essential family support infrastructure components, current data reveals that many gaps remain.

Service Gaps

Many of the important services considered to be integral to a family support system are being discontinued or drastically reduced hindering their capacity to produce significant outcomes. For example, as of 2007, funding to Arizona Family Literacy programs had been reduced by 72% causing more than 800 families to lose services (Building Bright Futures, 2007). These losses often occurred in some of the neediest communities within Arizona, such as Flagstaff where the target population included homeless families. More recently, reductions to the budget for DES has impacted services through Healthy Families, a home visitation program targeted to high risk families with the purpose of preventing abuse and neglect. Loss of existing services coupled with the lack of available services in remote or otherwise outlying communities creates a considerable deficit in the family support infrastructure.

Economic Support Gaps

In addition to gaps in services available, Arizona is faced with an economic situation causing great strains on families. Almost one in every four children in Arizona under the age of six lives in poverty (NCCP, 2009 update). An additional 32% live in families where the income is between 100% and 200% of poverty. With over half the population of young children in Arizona living in families of low income, it is clear that family supports must include a wide array of financial assistance strategies. Although there are a few economic supports in place, additional strategies to provide the financial stability and move families toward self-sufficiency are needed. Arizona continues to only provide child care subsidies to families at or below 165% of poverty leaving many working families without necessary supports to assure their children receive the care they need. Currently, the economic situation across the state has caused a wait list for any newly eligible families. As more families lose income and become unemployed, fewer supports are available. Other gaps in economic supports include a lack of strong family leave policies for the state and few family friendly tax credits.

Information Systems Gaps

In the First Things First *Building Bright Futures: 2007 Statewide Needs and Assets Report*, families commented that a reliable early childhood development and health information system was lacking in this state. The report cited the "high number of rural areas and significant differences in family needs" as major barriers to assuring families had access to necessary information and support structures. First Things First Regional Needs and Assets reports further illustrated a lack of awareness among families that existing supports and services were available to them.

Additional validation of the state and regional reports' findings includes the results of the First Things First Family and Community Survey. The survey presents clear evidence that Arizona families have some understanding of child development but that further information and education outreach is necessary.

Brain development	About a quarter (22%) of respondents indicated that the capacity to learn may be or is definitely set from birth.
Language and literacy development	Almost one-half (48%) of respondents indicated that television may promote language development as effectively as personal conversation.
Emotional development	More than one quarter (27%) of respondents believed that children sense and react to their parents' emotions only after they reach seven months of age or older.
Developmentally appropriate behavior	Approximately 40% of respondents held the expectation that 15 month-olds should share, and 26% believed that three year olds should be expected to sit quietly for an hour.

These findings tell us that a significant number of parents in Arizona do not have realistic expectations for their young children's development and behavior. They indicate that although we have several services which distribute information in the state, a need for broader, more connected, statewide dissemination of clear and accurate information about young children, their healthy development, and their needs is necessary.

FTF Addresses the Gaps in Arizona's Family Support System

First Things First has begun to address the gaps in the family support infrastructure by funding both statewide and regional strategies. Each of the currently funded strategies connects to one or more of the key components of a strong family support infrastructure.

Strategy Development

To ensure that regional and state activities related to family support truly meet families' needs and lead to good outcomes for children, a family support strategy development team was formed. This team was primarily comprised of staff from FTF Policy and Research, Regions, Evaluation and Finance. The team also solicited input from state agency partners, providers and other critical stakeholders to design standards of practice and scopes of work for regional family support RFGAs and expedited funding decision processes. The team completed an extensive literature review, analyzed existing evidence-based models, and synthesized the solicited feedback from the various content experts and community members. The team's work resulted in two critical elements of framing effective family support strategies: standards of practice and scopes of work.

Standards of Practice include but are not limited to:

- Comprehensive programming
- Use of a family-centered, strengths-based, and culturally responsive approach
- Recommended staff qualifications, caseload size and/or class size

- Effective supervision activities
- Alignment with existing standards (early learning standards)
- Intensity, frequency and duration of services
- Evaluation and monitoring practices (i.e. regular data collection and reporting, performance measures, and pre and post assessment).

Scopes of Work include but are not limited to the following activities:

- Developmental screening
- Family assessment
- Development and implementation of an individualized service plan
- Service coordination
- Family outreach, engagement and retention practices

Regionally Funded Family Support Strategies (Formula Funding)

Family support strategies account for 29% of the $24.5 million dollars allocated in regional funding plans. Several of the strategies focus on supports within the programs and services component of family support and include activities around home visitation (including pre-natal support), family literacy, crisis intervention and community-based parent education. Other strategies address issues of dissemination of information by expanding the distribution of Arizona Parent Kits to additional programs and locations such as community libraries. A small percentage of funding plans included strategies to address economic supports through the use of childcare scholarships (prior to emergency response allocations).

Strategy	Framework Component	# of Regional Partnership Councils who have funded	% of total Regional Allocation for Family
Home Visitation (including Pre-natal Support)	Available, varied & voluntary services	21	43%
Family Literacy	Available, varied & voluntary services	20	10%
Regional Arizona Parent Kit Distribution and Use	Available, varied & voluntary services,	8	1%
Other Family Support Strategies: (e.g. community based parent education , resource centers, and crisis	Available, varied & voluntary services; Economic supports; Cultural Responsiveness	16	46%

Regionally Funded Family Support Strategies (Discretionary Funding)

In addition to their initial funding plans, regions were recently given the option to expedite strategies which assist families with child care costs, prevention of abuse and neglect, and food insecurity. These three areas were considered as an early childhood emergency response to fill a necessary and urgent need for family support. All 31 Regional Partnership Councils chose to expedite child care scholarships and food strategies, while 17 Regional Partnership Councils expedited strategies to meet the urgent and immediate needs of families facing tremendous financial and emotional stress.

While these activities respond to the current crises families face, the gaps are only addressed temporarily. Arizona must further consider the long-term family support needs in each of these emergency response areas.

Statewide Family Support Strategies (Statewide Initiatives)

In March 2008, the Board approved the expanded distribution of the Arizona Parent Kits in collaboration with the Virginia G. Piper Charitable Trust. Through the effort of statewide distribution to birthing hospitals and health centers, all parents of newborns in the state will have access to this vital information. These kits contain resources and basic information on child development and health related topics, providing an important first step in addressing the gaps in the family support system. Additionally, the kits act as a resource to other parenting support programs such as home visitation and child development workshops for families.

Statewide Family Support Strategies (Statewide Competitive Grant Initiatives)

In February 2009, the First Things First Board also awarded three statewide competitive grants to programs that support development of a comprehensive early childhood system. The Birth to Five Helpline and Reach Out and Read Arizona were two of the grant recipients, each having the capacity to address significant family support gaps in the state.

The Birth to Five Helpline fulfills a fundamental need in Arizona to address the lack of access families have to information. Characteristics of this funded strategy include:

- A toll-free number which allows this service to be available to virtually all families across the state regardless of location, education or income.
- The Helpline is a free service to anyone who accesses it.
- Calls are answered by child development specialists who respond to each caller's individual questions and needs.
- The Helpline combines sensitive, supportive listening with sound information from professionals who have expertise in early childhood development and parenting.

Reach Out and Read Arizona (ROR AZ) promotes literacy education as a standard part of pediatric care, with the goal of helping all children grow up with books and a love for reading. ROR AZ is fully supported by research and demonstrates that participants are significantly more likely to read to their children than non-participants. Statewide funding of this strategy will be used to expand this vital service to all areas of the state, but with particular focus on underserved and high need locations. Characteristics of this funded strategy include:

- Training to medical providers to integrate literacy into well child visits by giving new books to children between the ages of six months to five years.
- Books are developmentally and culturally appropriate for recipient families.

Strategy	Framework Component
Arizona Parent Kit	Statewide Information System
Birth to Five Helpline	Statewide Information System
ROR AZ	Varied Voluntary Services

Statewide Initiatives (Approved Unfunded Strategies)

Several strategies approved in the March 2008 FTF Strategic Roadmap address the improved coordination of services and collaboration between FTF and other state and community agencies. Including family support services which have been funded by both the regions and the state within these coordination efforts will be critical in ensuring families receive what they need effectively and timely, as well as ensuring FTF attains its goals.
Strategy characteristics of coordination activities include the following:

- Policy and Research and Regional staff working with grantees, state agencies, providers and other community stakeholders to develop and ensure a coordinated and collaborative system of family support in Arizona.
- Efforts to ensure that duplication of service provision is avoided.
- Continued review and development of standards of practice as new data is collected and analyzed.
- Collaborative efforts with the Evaluation Division to ensure development and data collection of quality assurance measures.

Collectively, these regional and statewide strategies will help Arizona's families better understand their young children's development, practice appropriate parenting skills, and make informed choices about good health practices and quality early care and education.

Proposed First Things First Statewide Family Support Strategy

Recommendation: Develop a web-based education and information system targeted to families and to serve as part of a Statewide Information System.

First Things First Policy and Research and Communications staff will develop and maintain a web-based system to educate and inform families on the topics related to early childhood development and health.

Summary

Though FTF has forwarded many family support strategies to date, one fundamental gap remains. Arizona has yet to offer families a comprehensive, connected, one-stop place for statewide information access. Data gathered from the state needs and assets report, the regional needs and assets reports, and the recently completed Family and Community all outline a critical need for greater access to accurate information. FTF has begun to address this problem with the funding of the Arizona Parent Kits and the Birth to Five Helpline. These projects will be integral resources in creating a comprehensive Statewide Information System, particularly for families without access to the internet.

Families who do not have internet access typically seek information through other resources such as face to face contacts, referrals from friends and family and print materials found in community locations such as libraries, community centers, and markets. Regional expansion of the Arizona Parent Kits into these types of community locations and through other distribution venues was funded by eight regions, mostly in rural areas. These regions acknowledge the particular need of their communities related to filling the gaps in access to information. Additionally, the statewide competitive award to the Birth to

Five Helpline provides information to all families who have access to a telephone. These two key strategies will support information dissemination to families for whom the internet is inaccessible.

However, without the addition of a strong internet presence with accurate, connected and collective information for families, a significant opportunity to provide information to all families will be lost. Internet usage has increased greatly and has become a part of daily routines and activities. According to a December, 2008 survey conducted by the Pew Internet & American Life Project, 74% of American adults use the internet to find information (Fox, 2009). Interestingly, households in the western region of the country (which includes Arizona) had the highest rates of access to internet technology as compared to the Northeastern, Southern or Midwest regions (US Census Bureau, 2003).

Other states across the country with comprehensive early childhood systems are currently developing or implementing web-based information and education delivery systems as a component of their infrastructure (Dworkin, 2006). These states all recognize that parents and families are seeking information on their children's development and health by accessing the web at increasing rates. (Zaidman-Zait, 2007). The web provides easy access to information and resources and is also a conduit for emotional support in the form of on-line chats and message board forums.

These trends hold serious implications for Arizona as we continue to build the early childhood system. A web-based strategy that would be accessible to a large part of Arizona's population can be easily developed and implemented thereby, filling in one of the singular most significant gaps in the current family support infrastructure.

Strategy Activities and Characteristics

Note: In the fall of 2008, this strategy was proposed as a collaborative partnership with the AZ 2-1-1 system. However, AZ 2-1-1 was recently discontinued due to budget cuts, leaving a significant infrastructure gap in information on health and human services resources.

- An FTF site will be expanded with an area titled Families First. Similar to the Quality First area, it will be accessible via the FTF internet site or via its own URL address (www.azftf.gov/familiesfirst).

- Parents and families will be the primary audience target with service providers and various early childhood practitioners as secondary users.

- The policy and research staff will collaborate with the communications staff to ensure that the initial content and site messages align with the identified needs from the Family and Community Survey as well as the planned FTF communications strategies

- General content will include
    - Parenting tips
    - Resources for families such as links to child care resource and referral
    - Resources for providers and professionals
    - Information on typical and atypical child development
    - Information on how to effectively partner with schools and children's health professionals

- To ensure the site is user friendly and meeting the goals of FTF, usage data collection and usability testing will be conducted to include:

    - Number of users accessing the site
    - How long users stay on the site
    - Where did the user come from (e.g. unique Internet Service Provider address, links from other sites, etc.)
    - Whether users would recommend the site to others
    - Ease of use
    - Content relevance
    - Content requests

- A media campaign (using no cost methods) will be used to create awareness of the availability of this section of the website; *Families First* (e.g. blogs, other online resources, press releases, video clips produced in partnership with Az Children's Association, etc).

- For those without internet access, alternate ways of providing education and information to families with young children include previously approved statewide and regional strategies.
    - Arizona Parent Kits provide the foundation of information to parents of newborns.
    - All families can directly access experts for specific questions through the Birth to Five Helpline.
    - Home visitation programs and community-based parent education and information programs provide comprehensive family supports and services that include the provision of education and information.
    - Families without home access can use the internet via community centers and libraries.
    - Any electronic pages will be available in print format which can be downloaded and available through a variety of agencies and family support systems such as school programs, child care programs, social service agencies, and medical providers.

<u>Expected Impacts and Change</u>

Families of children birth to five will report they are satisfied with the accessibility of information and resources on child development and health

- Families of children birth through age five will report they are competent and confident about their ability to support their child's safety, health and well-being
- Arizonans will report that early childhood development and health issues are important

<u>State Funds Requested to Support Strategy</u>

Due to previous work completed for the existing FTF site (www.azftf.gov), there is no additional cost for the development and design of the *Families First* area on the internet. However, funds are requested for the following uses:

ITEM	FY 2010
Usability Testing and User Survey $50,000.00	$185,000.00
Market Research and Focus Groups $50,000.00	
Print Material (brochures, handouts) $10,000.00	
1 FTE (.5 FTE Web Designer; .5 FTE Content Expert salary and ERE) $75,000.00	

Recommendation to the Board

Approve the requested amount from Statewide Grant funds to develop web content for a Families First area on the azftf.gov website.

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