

# Strengthening Families

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## A White Paper in Support of The Schenectady Foundation's Strategic Focus

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*The Schenectady Foundation's plan to support a continuum of integrated community resources that strengthen families -- building self-reliance, improving academic, social and life skills and promoting wellness – leading to the achievement of positive outcomes for children and youths.*



# **Strengthening Families**

## **A White Paper in Support of The Schenectady Foundation's Strategic Focus**

### **Introduction**

The Schenectady Foundation has invested significantly in a variety of Schenectady County nonprofit organizations and projects. Total grants have eclipsed \$11 million over TSF's 45 years – more than one-third (\$3.7 million) of that over the past five years. Now, following a strategic planning process, TSF has recognized that its growing pool of unrestricted funds, in combination with changes in the nonprofit sector and shifts in other funding sources, point to the need for it to act and grant more strategically if desired changes are to be realized in the community.

This has also been acknowledged by community leaders and nonprofit organizations which, through a series of interviews, focus groups, community meetings and a leadership summit, have supported TSF's intent to adopt a strategic focus, and to intensify its efforts.

In developing a strategic focus TSF hopes to:

1. Build and lead a concerted coalition of investors and stakeholders in the development of a sustainable effort in the selected focus area.
2. See positive, measurable change in at least one area of the community.
3. Leverage funds from inside and outside the community to maximize resource utilization.
4. Heighten its importance and relevance by having a notable impact, and in turn attract additional funds and contributions.
5. Become an advocate for change, thereby improving the likelihood of success and sustainability, i.e. grants alone are not enough.

### **Selecting a Focus**

Following its Leadership Summit in November 2007, the Foundation's Distribution Committee selected three strategic areas for consideration and further investigation as its potential primary focus:

1. Primary Health Care
2. Youth Success
3. Maternal and Child Health & Development

TSF formed Advisory Teams to develop recommendations for Youth Success and Maternal/Child Health & Development. As there was already a community planning effort underway in the area of Primary Health Care as a result of the Berger Commission Report, the closing of Bellevue Woman's Hospital and intended merger of Ellis and St. Clare's Hospitals, the Committee chose to consider the issues and needs that arose from that endeavor, rather than initiate their own planning.

Members of the Advisory Teams were:

### **Youth Success**

Rev. Van Stuart  
 Herbert L. Shultz, Jr., TSF  
 Thomas O. Maggs, TSF  
 Michael Saccocio, City Mission  
 Joseph Gallagher, Child Guidance  
 Laura Combs, CAPIT BOCES  
 Eric Ely, Schenectady City Schools  
 David Olsen, Samaritan Counseling  
 Gabriel Basil, SCCC  
 Services  
 Laurie Bacheldor, United Way  
 Ed Kosiur, Schenectady County  
 Families

Foundation

### **Maternal/Child Health & Development**

Dr. Grace Jorgensen, TSF  
 Dr. Kevin Karopowicz, Ellis Hospital  
 Patricia Skinner, Child Care Council  
 Debra Schimpf, SCAP/Head Start  
 Raymond Schimmer, Parsons  
 Sarah J. Schermerhorn, TSF  
 Beth Relyea, Catholic Charities  
 Lucy Pulitzer, Community Cradle  
 Dennis Packard, SC Dept Social  
 Services  
 Lynn Streifert, SC Early Intervention  
 Peggy Sheehan, Healthy Schenectady  
 Foundation  
 Wendy Hopkinson, Parsons/Early Head Start  
 Joy Griffith, Maternal & Early Childhood

After several meetings of the Advisory Teams, it became distinctly clear that they were not so much urging TSF to focus on the specific issues of their respective populations of concern, but to initiate an alternative approach. That is, each team articulated that the key to success in improving the lives of children and youth was to strengthen families. The message: by supporting families to function more effectively: parents to lead, and children and youth to become engaged in their schools and community, and by developing the capacity of nonprofits to work collaboratively -- the welfare of the entire family as the driver of their services-- we can realize better results.

The advisory teams voiced their belief that a more comprehensive approach to serving families would improve results across all fields, from maternal and child health, to education and youth success. Many existing programs address a specific issue of an individual or family. Integrating all services needed by families, such as medical, mental health, counseling, literacy, education, housing etc., would be far more likely to encourage and achieve self-sufficiency among family members.

### **Vision Statement**

The advisory teams provided input in facilitated sessions toward the development of a vision statement for the initiative:

***Families will have the capacity to support the success of their children as individuals, and as members of their family and community.***

The teams identified certain key characteristics present in “successful” families. Families:

- Embrace their community, and actively seek appropriate and needed resources to assist themselves
- Are guided by effective “executive”, parental, leadership and decision-making
- Are engaged in their children’s schools and educational advancement
- Have an understood value system and behavioral boundaries
- Possess effective communication and negotiation skills
- Have respect, warmth, intimacy and humor present in their interactions
- Have support for their most basic needs (e.g. health, food and housing)
- Believe in the ideal that all people strive for advancement and self-sufficiency, and support their community.

The Team discussion reflected available research pointing to the importance of the presence of certain “protective factors” in families. A statewide Strengthening Families initiative in Illinois identifies these characteristics of strong families:

## **Protective Factors**

1. Parental Resilience (Being strong and flexible)
2. Social Connections (Parents need friends)
3. Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development (Being a great parent is part natural and part learned)
4. Concrete Support in Times of Need (We all need help sometimes)
5. Social and Emotional Competence of Children (Parents need to help their children communicate)
6. Healthy Parent Child Relationships (Give your children the love and respect they need)

This initiative has found that quality preschool, Head Start, and other early childhood programs are the best places to build these Protective Factors.

## **Research Base**

A handful of projects – from pilots to large-scale initiatives – have demonstrated that a comprehensive focus on families and early child health & development can realize significant return on investment in the form of economic, social welfare and health benefits. Furthermore, most of these program evaluations point to the engagement of family as a key factor in success, and in achieving higher returns. A growing body of research suggests that we cannot continue to “treat” children outside of the context of their family and living environments. Among the projects that have shown measurable results are:

- Abecedarian project
- High/Scope Perry Pre-School
- Chicago Child-Parent Center
- Head Start/Early Head Start
- Home Visiting Programs

The appendix of this white paper includes a review of the evaluations of these programs.

While the methodology of the studies and the results of these programs have varied, all point to the success of early intervention programs in achieving measurable change over the long term for children and families. Furthermore, recent studies on the impact of nonprofit collaboration in early child care and education show positive results in both management and program areas. Effectively collaborating early childhood programs experienced increases in

student school readiness, decreases in staff turnover, and improved diversity of services available to families and children.

Comprehensive and intensive programs, beginning at early childhood and continuing through elementary school, show significant results when we intervene early, often and effectively.

### **Return on Investment**

While program evaluations and research most often focus on effectiveness, it should be noted that the area of early childhood education has been the subject of analysis by economists in an attempt to understand what the return on investment of these programs has been, or could be.

The Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis has provided leadership to this effort, and has discovered that the economic returns from investment in early childhood can be substantial due to productivity gains in the workforce and cost savings to society. Their analysis suggests that the higher the quality and intensity of the programs, the better the ROI. In fact, their analysis indicates that when programs are not intensive enough or of high quality, there may be no economic benefit. Based on the research, we believe that adding a family component to early childhood programs, and sustaining support through later childhood, will improve further on their results.

### **Outcomes**

TSF is firm in its commitment to investing its resources in programs that achieve results. TSF's interest in strengthening families is firmly rooted around the assumption that family strength contributes to the strengths and abilities of children. Outcomes in the following areas will be pursued as part of our initiative (see appendix C for outcomes and indicators).

#### **Maternal and Child Health**

- Women receive early and consistent prenatal care throughout pregnancy
- Children will be born healthy
- Women make healthy choices during pregnancy (e.g. avoid alcohol and tobacco)

#### **Healthy Start**

- Families form effective long-term relationships with a patient-centered medical home

- Newborns and infants receive regular well-care check-ups, and avoid serious health problems
- Newborns and infants receive proper nutrition
- Parents establish and sustain early bond with their newborn

### **Child Development**

- Children achieve appropriate developmental milestones
- Children enter kindergarten capable of performing at grade level or above
- Families have sufficient options for quality pre-school and family-centered child care
- Parents/guardians are active in their child's pre-school program and capable of engaging in effective early learning strategies

### **Education**

- Children will achieve a level of literacy that enables them to be successful students

### **Youth Success**

- Parents/guardians are engaged in their children's education, and embrace educational achievement as a core value
- Youth maintain at least one positive mentoring relationship with an adult
- Youth obtain a high school degree and are prepared to enter into post-secondary education, training or work

### **Healthy Neighborhoods**

- Families are able to raise their children in safe, stable home environments
- Families and their children will be supported by, and engaged in supporting, their neighborhood and community

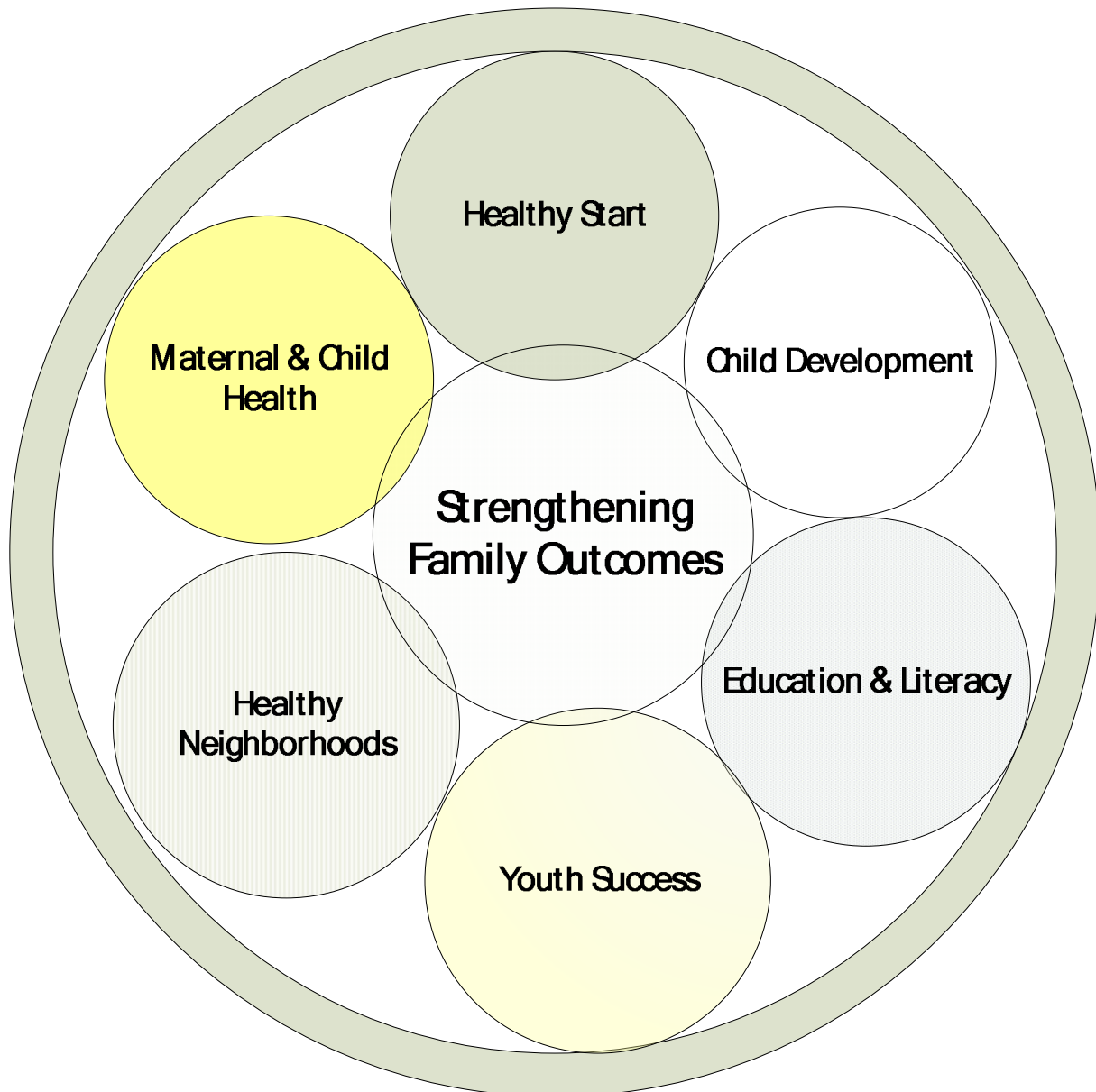
### **Grant Program Strategy**

The overarching strategy for The Schenectady Foundation's strategic grant program is as follows:

***TSF will support a continuum of integrated community resources that strengthen families -- building self-reliance, improving academic, social and life skills and promoting wellness – leading to the achievement of positive outcomes for children and youths.***

***Community resources and services are bridged by a common strategy to engage and support the entire family.***

# Strengthening Families Model



## **Investment Focus**

The Schenectady Foundation's grants and programs should build integrated, multi-faceted programs that provide prevention and intervention services at key stages of development. All services are bridged by the strategy of engaging and strengthening the family.

## **Initial focus of grant program should develop or enhance models that:**

- Strengthen prenatal care and healthy birth outcomes

- Expand home visiting and new born/infant health programs
- Provide consistent, high-quality enriched child care
- Build parent effectiveness, education and support
- Improve family functioning, and provide a therapeutic aspect to all programs

**The keys to success for The Schenectady Foundation are to:**

1. Start projects at a manageable and measurable size, and build/intensify services as progress is demonstrated;
2. Sustain our investment in the program for a span of at least 6-8 years;
3. Make the investment considerable – don't short change what is needed to do the job right;
4. Become more knowledgeable about our focus area;
5. Work with non-profits as though they are partners, not simply grantees;
6. Invest in leadership, and build partner capacity (i.e. don't just "fund programs");
7. Innovate where we see need and opportunity; i.e. test new approaches to enhance results;
8. Leverage resources from other funding sources and organizations; engage them as partners, not just as funders;
9. Actively seek grants directly to TSF, as well as in concert with our partners, to supplement our own resources;
10. Expect commitment, excellence and measurable progress, but don't expect immediate results. This will take time.

**The keys for our community partners are:**

1. Leadership needs to be at the table, and actively focused on the project;
2. Trust – between partners and between partners and TSF;
3. Commit to and build the capacity to measure progress and results;
4. Take the time to (learn how to) be effective collaborators;
5. Use evaluation as a way to support continual improvement and quality;

**How will we start Strengthening Families?**

The following are recommended steps for launching, then sustaining the initiative through year one:

**Step 1: TSF Makes Commitment**

Distribution Committee adopts plan with funding target for cumulative investment over time; e.g. \$5-6 million\* over next 6-8 years, including:

1. Grants
2. Partner capacity-building & support
3. Technical assistance
4. Evaluation
5. TSF staff support and leadership

**\*Assumes 3% straight-line growth in TSF assets**

**Step 2: Establish initial program focus**

Focus resources on early-childhood cluster of programs

1. Maternal Health
2. Healthy Start
3. Child Care & Development (& Mental Health)
4. Family Therapy & Support

Work with a limited number of established “centers” where families can be served

1. Early Head Start
2. Head Start
3. Family-Centered or high quality child care programs
4. Other established family models with strong potential

**Step 3: Release planning grant opportunity to potential partners (October 2008)**

1. Small grants will help partners develop integrated models, evaluation methodology, grant proposals and identify leveraged resources

**Step 4: Communicate with the Community**

1. Leadership Summit II – October 20<sup>th</sup>
2. Newsletter and website
3. Outreach and personal meetings with stakeholders

**Step 5: Develop Project Infrastructure**

1. Establish Advisory Council
2. Technical assistance and research to support Council, partners & TSF
3. Commission evaluation project

- i. Program/collaboration effectiveness and efficiency
- ii. Family success measures
- iii. Return on Investment

**Step 6: Leverage Resources, Funding and Influence**

1. Outreach to and engagement of potential resource partners
  - a. Foundations
  - b. United Way
  - c. County government
  - d. State & Federal officials
2. Research grant opportunities

**Step 7: Release 1<sup>st</sup> Request for Proposals**

1. Winter 2009 Release
2. June 2009 Grant Commitments

**Step 8: Advisory Council Reporting**

1. Quarterly Progress Reporting
2. Semiannual meetings
3. Annual conference

**Step 9: Evaluation**

1. Modify strategies and programs as suggested by annual evaluation and conference feedback

**Step 10: Provide planning grants for second cluster of services**

1. Develop models to integrate Education & Literacy; Youth Success; Neighborhood Development components

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Universal Prenatal/Postpartum Care and Home Visitation: The Plan for an Ideal System in New York State; Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy; October 2007

The Power of Outcomes: Strategic Thinking to Improve Results for Our Children, Families and Communities; Cornelius Hogan; June 2001

Promoting Young Children's Mental Health in Early Childhood Programs: A School Readiness Strategy; New York University; The Steinhardt School of Education; August 2002

The Impact of Nonprofit Collaboration in Early Child Care and Education on Management and Program Outcomes; Selden, Sowa and Sandfort; Public Administration Review; June 2006

Strengthening Families: A Guidebook for Early Childhood Programs; Center for the Study of Social Policy; July 2007

Schenectady County Community Profile 2003; United Way of Schenectady County; September 2003

Schenectady County Community Health Assessment 2005-2010; Schenectady County Public Health Services

## **HELPFUL WEBSITES**

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

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

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