Strongest Families INSTITUTE

Strongest Families Partnership Implementation Guide



Newfoundland Labrador

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Improving Mental Health Services for Children and Youth

Background

Effective March 23, 2015, the Provincial Government invested funds to be disbursed among the four regional health authorities to fund Strongest Families Institute (SFI) to support the mental health of children, youth and their families.

No family should feel alone when they are trying to help a child dealing with mental health, behavioural and anxiety concerns. This partnership with SFI provides an immediate and proven support system for children and youth who are dealing with mild to moderate behavioural and mental health issues. This initiative will act as an early intervention and aims to improve parenting and coping skills for children, youth and families.

SFI is the only service of its kind in Canada. Its programming leverages technology and highly skilled staff to provide timely care to families by teaching skills through a distance coaching approach over the phone and internet. SFI provides family-centered customized care to meet each family's unique needs in the comfort and privacy of one's home.

SFI represents a continued commitment to fostering safe, caring and inclusive learning environments for all children and youth in the province. This is a very positive offering for students and families facing these types of issues and will equally benefit residents in both rural and urban regions across Newfoundland and Labrador.

SFI is an award-winning, evidenced-based charitable organization providing telehealth and e-health services to children, youth and families dealing with mild to moderate mental health and other issues impacting health and well-being.

“At the Strongest Families Institute we have been successfully implementing this program across Canada for a number of years now. We provide a creative, cost-effective solution for delivering care by ensuring families receive help quickly and at convenient times. By addressing mental health and behavioural issues early, we can head off potential difficulties for youth and families down the road." - *Dr. Patricia Lingley-Pottie, President & Chief Operating Officer, Strongest Families Institute*

Strongest Families Institute
Q&A

1. **What is the Strongest Families Institute?**
   Strongest Families Institute (SFI) is a charitable organization providing evidence-based services to children, youth and families seeking help for mental health and other issues impacting health and well-being.

   Strongest Families provides a prescribed and customized cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) program to children and youth ages 3-17 and their families over a 14-16 week period for mild to moderate issues as an early intervention response.

   The program supports children and youth with behavioural difficulties (e.g., symptoms related to attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder, oppositional defiance, and bullying behaviours), anxiety, and nighttime bedwetting that results in additional stress on the child and family. Strongest Families provides timely care to families by teaching positive skills through a distance coaching approach over the phone and Internet in the comfort and privacy of the family's home.

   Programs are easy and convenient - Access:
   - No wait
   - Families get help in the comfort of their home
     - Convenient appointment times
   - No need to travel
   - No time off work and/or school

2. **What programs does SFI offer?**
   - **Behavioural**
     Parenting the Active Child (ages 3-12 yrs): presenting with behavioural challenges at home and/or school/daycare causing impairment including oppositional defiance, ADHD, conduct problems, etc.
     - One-to-one coaching or group-based coaching
     - Handbooks/DVDs or Smart web-site (French version available)

   - **Anxiety**
     Chase Worries Away (ages 6-11) and Defeat Anxiety (ages 12-17): presenting with anxiety problems causing impairment with social, specific phobia, performance/generalized and or separation).
     - One-to-one coaching
     - Handbooks/DVDs or Smart web-site (French version available)

   - **Nighttime Bedwetting**
     Nocturnal Enuresis (5-12 yrs): Urine alarm.
     - One-to-one coaching or group-based.

*Behaviour and Anxiety programs are offered in both English and French (family choice)

3. **Where is the SFI located?**
   Based in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Strongest Families' provides services across Canada including: Alberta, Ontario, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, Bew Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador, and Military Family Resource Centres across Canada.

4. **Is SFI evidence-based?**
   Yes. SFI's work has been peer-reviewed and published multiple times. SFI is also endorsed by the Mental Health Commission of Canada. Outcomes are consistently measured and reported.

   Programs are proven to be highly effective:
   - Help thousands of Canadian families each year
   - Have an 85% success rate
     - Improve school performance
     - Improve bullying
     - Improve parental stress
   - Strengthen relationships
   - Families are highly satisfied

   They also have demonstrated improved outcomes and strong parental rating among First Nation families.

5. **What are the SFI staff qualifications?**
   The program uses highly trained, para-professional coaches who are supported by regular consultation with a licensed health professional. SFI staff live and work all over the country. Coaches are also highly monitored and follow a scripted program which includes an online platform that both the coach and family use to support their work together. The success of this program is in part due to its evidence-based treatments within highly scripted protocols staff follow.

   SFI is led by Dr. Patricia Lingley-Pottie, co-founder, President and Chief Executive Officer. She is assistant professor in the Department of Psychiatry and a scientist at the IWK Health Centre. She has 26 years of pediatric nursing experience with 14 years of expertise in psychological research, specifically the use of technology to deliver distance cognitive behavioural interventions.

6. **Who will the program help?**
   The service is being offered to children/youth (ages 3-17) and their families seeking mental health services across the province to overcome behaviour, anxiety, and nighttime bedwetting issues.

7. **How will I know which families to refer to SFI? Who is eligible?**
   SFI will likely be a good fit for most families that would meet mental health criteria for services; this includes new referrals or anyone that is currently on the waitlist for services. Families classified as urgent and priority 1's are typically not wait-listed for long periods, and may be best served by professional counsellors. Families who are identified as priority 2's and 3's and/or have mild to moderate behavioural and anxiety issues, with significant impairment, would be good candidate to refer to SFI. Please view the chart below for more information. SFI follows this criterion closely when accepting referrals.

Criteria	SEND	DO NOT Send
Behaviour Program (ages 3-12) Anxiety Program (ages 6-17) Bedwetting (ages 5-12)	√	
Significant symptoms ≥ 6 months **AND** **Significant impairment** (child or parent/family)	√	

Active psychosis or primary depression		x
Imminent risk of harm to self/others and/or active suicidal thoughts		x
Past suicide attempts		x
Substance use		x

Notes:

- Child will be in the caregivers' care ≥ 6 months
- Problems must be present for at least the past 6 months
- Co-morbid conditions accepted
- Programs have 14-16 weekly sessions (including intake and exit assessments, consent to services, and a one-month follow up)
- No wait. Referrals processed with a call to families within 24-48 hours of the receipt of the referral

8. Who can refer?

In Newfoundland and Labrador, referrals to Strongest Families institute will be received by professionals working in mental health and addictions, Child Youth and Family Services, Schools (teachers, guidance counsellors and school psychologists), nurses, physicians, social workers and other professionals working with children and youth. Families cannot self-refer at this time as a qualified professional must consider the eligibility criteria and refer to the most appropriate service. (i.e., either to SFI or other services within the community or regional health authority).

9. **How to refer families to SFI?**

- Staff can make referrals to SFI either via fax or email depending on your agency's policy.
    - Email: faxes@strongestfamilies.com
    - Fax: 1-866-470-7222
- If you are unsure if a family may or may not be a good candidate for the SFI program, please feel free to contact Strongest Families to discuss with their management team
    - Naomi LeBlanc, Evaluation and Bilingual Services Manager: 1-866-470-7111 (press 1, then 2, then ext. 9512) or nleblanc@strongestfamilies.com
    - Kati LaVigne, Director of Operations: klavigne@strongestfamilies.com

10. What happens when consenting families are referred to SFI?

Once a referral is received by SFI, protocol dictates a first call is made within 24 to 48 business hours. Families are then scheduled with a call to be assessed by an intake specialist who gathers demographics, presenting concerns, this call takes approximately 45 minutes. The family's intake is reviewed and then assigned to a coach to engage the family in a specific program (based on the results of the intake assessment and the recommendation of the referring professional) at a time of the family's choosing.

Families will receive multiple call attempts at varying times of the day by SFI to initiate service. If a family cannot be reached a letter is sent to the family to acknowledge the call attempts and asking the family to contact SFI directly. In cases where families do not engage in service with SFI after consenting to do so, if they wish to later avail of RHA mental health and addiction services, a new referral will be required.

11. What should families expect from SFI program?

Families can expect to speak to coaches who are recovery focused and interested in tailoring a program to best fit the needs of each individual family.

Families can expect to speak with a highly trained and personable coach that will work with their individual needs and strengths using evidence-based skills to help address and prevent presenting challenges they are experiencing with their child.

A total of 14-16 calls are provided to participants: one intake call; one call to consent to provide service; 10-12 coaching sessions (depending on the program), one end of service and evaluation call; and one booster/check-in call at one-month period.

Families will have access to a variety of tools including DVD's, workbooks, an online SMART website platform option, and weekly telephone support. Families also have the option of weekly 1:1 telephone appointments with a coach, or selecting a group-based option in which they join a toll-free conference call facilitated by a coach and attended by other parents that are experiencing similar behavioural challenges. Youth also have a choice of 1:1 coaching or a group based option with other youth of similar age and issues.

What families can expect:

- Weekly coach telephone calls (4-5 months)
- Review weekly skill information and videos (either handbook or online)
- Learn skills to help their child
- Use the skills with their child, consistently, every day to overcome their problems
- Strong relationship with their coach
- Customized coach support to meet their needs

12. What happens if a family is referred but needs more intensive support?

SFI estimates 10-15% of program participants may need to be referred back to the mental health system for more intensive services. In cases where families have engaged in Strongest Families program, but require additional, more intensive support, an internal transfer will be facilitated by SFI with parental consent. The Newfoundland and Labrador contract with SFI acknowledges SFI as part of the circle of care allowing the transfer of relevant information with referring agents when required. Strongest Families copies referring sources on the progress of each family they refer with the family's consent.

13. What is their drop-out rate?

SFI removes many barriers to care such as travel, cost, loss of time from work, loss of time from school, and stigma, especially for marginalized, rural and remote populations. There is a less than 10% drop out rate.

Families that have completed the SFI programs report high satisfaction with the overall quality of the service and report having a strong therapeutic alliance with their coach.

14. Will the program be evaluated?

Yes! The Department of Health and Community Services will provide oversight and leadership for this initiative and will be responsible for the monitoring and evaluation.

SFI will track and monitor all referrals and provide updates to the referral source/person. SFI uses the *Brief Child and Family Phone Interview (BCFPI)* and weekly improvement ratings from families to track family progress at mid and end of program. They also track customer satisfaction scores.

The Department of Health and Community Services will also conduct its own evaluation of the program including RHAs, Dept. of CYFS and the Dept. of Education on satisfaction scores and other metrics.

14. How will SFI support the mental health and addictions system?

Partnering with SFI means Newfoundland and Labrador will be offering an innovative e-health solution to a system where demand and wait-times continue to grow. With significant numbers of families currently waiting for service, and many more who have yet to reach out, referring families with mild to moderate mental health and behavioural problems to SFI can begin to relieve current pressures on the mental health and addiction system and allow trained professionals to focus on children, youth and families with more complex issues. In sum, SFI will complement existing services within the RHAs, as well as Dept. of CYFS and the Dept. of Education.

SFI not only enhances access to services, it focuses on building stronger families, by strengthening parenting and coping skills. SFI offers an early intervention to support families to positively impact their mental health now and into the future.

15. Has the Program seen success in other jurisdictions?

Yes. SFI is available in Alberta, Ontario, Nova Scotia, PEI, New Brunswick and by Military Family Resource Centres across Canada. SFI is also being offered internationally (e.g., Finland and soon to be New Zealand).

16. Who do I contact if I have a question about the SFI program?

Department of Health and Community Services	**Niki Legge** Program Manager Consultant, Mental Health and Addictions Division Department of Health and Community Services 709-729-2507 nikilegge@gov.nl.ca
Strongest Families Institute	**Naomi LeBlanc** Evaluation and Bilingual Services Manager 902-442-9512 nleblanc@strongestfamilies.com **Kati LaVigne** Director of Operations 902-442-9522 klavigne@strongestfamilies.com **General Inquires** info@strongestfamilies.com 1-866-470-7111 FAQ section on website: www.strongestfamilies.com

Appendix A: Script to introduce SFI to families via phone

"Hello, is <***parent listed***> there please? My name is _____ and I am calling from <***insert name/title of affiliated agency***>. We know that you have been interested in receiving help/services for <child name>. We are pleased to get you started right away with one of our services called the Strongest Families program. Strongest Families helps thousands of families each year across Canada. It is known for its high level of quality service that is customized to meet your needs. Also, it is very convenient because services are provided to you in the comfort and privacy of your home at convenient times (daytime, evening or night time coach calls). This means there is no need to travel or take time from work or miss time from school. You will receive program materials and be assigned a Strongest Families coach who will work closely with you each week over the phone. Would you like to avail of this program?"

If Yes – complete ***enrollment form*** and state "Great. With your consent I will refer your contact information to Strongest families and one of their staff member will connect with you in the next few days to provide more details and get you started".

If no – Advise them if they should change their mind to call the office and notify staff. Reassess if necessary regarding priority status and explain relevant wait list procedures.

If needed because of questions, staff can use the below facts:
Strongest Families programs (www.strongestfamilies.com)

- proven effective in helping families and children overcome their problems
    - behaviour challenges including inattention/hyperactivity (3-12yrs)
    - anxiety (6-17 yrs)
    - bedwetting (5-12yrs)
- families rate very high satisfaction with the services because it is convenient and highly effective because families and children learn valuable skills to use now and long after the program is over to prevent the issues from escalating again.
- the program helps parents and children strengthen coping skills and deal with stress effectively
- programs run for about 16 weeks.
- Coaches support and problem-solve with the family to match the skills to overcome the challenges they are having
- 85% or better success rate in resolving presenting issues; those 15% or so are referred back to the referring agent for further evaluation and need for additional services; the referring agent is copied on progress correspondence to maintain the continuum of care
- Less than 10% drop out rate; families that start services generally stick with the program and enjoy the service.

Appendix B – letter to introduce families to Strongest Families Institute

Dear <Parent>,

We are pleased to inform you that you have been placed with one of our services called the Strongest Families program to receive help for your child.

Strongest Families provides high quality services that are customized to meet the needs of families. Thousands of families each year across Canada receive Strongest Families services. Strongest Families is very accessible because help is provided to you in the comfort and privacy of your home at convenient times. This means there is no need to travel or take time from work or miss time from school. You will receive program materials and be assigned a Strongest Families coach who will work closely with you each week over the phone. A Strongest Families staff member will connect with you in the next few days to provide more details to you and get you started.

Attached please find the Strongest Families pamphlet. You are also welcome to connect with a Strongest Families' staff member toll-free at 1-866-470-7111 (option #1) to discuss their programs, as well as review their website at www.strongestfamilies.com.

If you wish to follow-up with someone at the <insert NL-RHA name>, please call us at <insert NL-RHA telephone #>.

Sincerely,

_____

<***insert name/title of affiliated agency***

Strongest Families Referral Form
Fax to: 1-866-470-7222
faxes@strongestfamilies.com

Strongest Families provides a prescribed and customized cognitive behavioral therapy program to children ages 3-17 and their families over a 14-16 week period for mild to moderate anxiety and behavioural issues as an early intervention response. The program supports children and youth with anxiety, behavioural difficulties (e.g., symptoms related to oppositional defiance, attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder and bullying behaviours) and nighttime bedwetting. Strongest Families provides timely care to families by teaching positive parenting and coping skills through a distance coaching approach over the phone and Internet in the comfort and privacy of the family's home. Families are contacted within 24-48 business hours of the referral being received. Please fill this form out **in full** to the best of your ability.

CHILD / YOUTH SECTION (p*lease print)*

Child's Name: _____

Date of Birth (dd/mm/yy) _____ **Gender:** _____ **MCP #:** _____

Child's Main Presenting Concern: _____ Behaviour (3-12 years)
_____ Anxiety (6-17 years)
_____ Nighttime Bedwetting (5-12 years)

PARENT / LEGAL GUARDIAN SECTION (p*lease print)*

Parent/Guardian Name: _____

Phone #: _____ **(home)** _____ **(cell)** _____ **(work – if you can take calls)**

Best days/nights/times to call to book an apt.: _____ **Email address:** _____

Mailing Address: _____

_____ **Postal Code:** _____

REFERRAL SOURCE SECTION (p*lease print)*

Name: _____ **Phone #:** _____ **Fax #:** _____

Check one:
_____Mental Health and Addictions
_____School -Teacher/Guidance Counsellor
_____Child Youth Family Services
_____Nurse
_____Physician
_____Other

Health Region:
_____ Eastern
_____ Central
_____ Western
_____ Labrador-Grenfell

Send Correspondence (i.e. progress reports): _____ **Yes** _____ **No**

Exclusionary criteria: Children requiring more intensive support should be referred to their local mental health and addictions office. Examples include those who are at imminent risk to harm self and/or others, active psychosis, current significant involvement in the criminal justice system with severe presenting issues, and/or active youth substance abuse/dependency issues. Questions regarding program fit can be directed to Naomi Leblanc at 1-902-442-9512 or email nleblanc@strongestfamilies.com or Kati LaVigne at klavigne@strongestfamilies.com / www.strongestfamilies.com. ***Please Note:*** **Availability of this program is based on first come first serve as funding allows.**

Last updated January 2018

Formulaire de recommandation – Familles solides – Envoyer par télécopieur au : 1-866-470-7222

Qu'est-ce que Familles solides? L'Institut Familles solides offre un programme de thérapie cognitivo-comportementale recommandé et personnalisé d'une durée de douze semaines visant les enfants de 3 à 17 ans. Il constitue une intervention précoce à l'anxiété faible ou moyenne et à des problèmes de comportement. Le programme aide les enfants et les jeunes souffrant d'anxiété, de difficultés de comportement (p. ex. de symptômes liés au trouble oppositionnel, au trouble déficitaire de l'attention avec hyperactivité et aux comportements d'intimidation) ou d'énurésie nocturne. L'Institut fournit des soins pertinents aux familles en leur enseignant des pratiques parentales positives et des stratégies d'adaptation grâce à son approche d'accompagnement à distance qui permet de soutenir les familles par téléphone ou par Internet dans le confort et l'intimité de leur foyer. Nous communiquons avec les familles dans les 24 à 48 heures ouvrables suivant la réception de ce formulaire.

ENFANT OU JEUNE (*à remplir en caractères d'imprimerie)*

Nom de l'enfant : _____

Date de naissance (jj/mm/aa) : _____ **Sexe :** _____ **Nº MCP :** _____

Principale préoccupation relative à l'enfant : _____ Comportement (3-12 ans) _____ Anxiété (6-17 ans) _____ Énurésie nocturne (5-12 ans)

PARENT OU TUTEUR LÉGAL (*à remplir en caractères d'imprimerie)*

Nom du parent ou tuteur : _____

Téléphone : _____ **(maison)** _____ **(cellulaire)** _____ **(travail – si possible)**

Meilleurs jours/soirs/moments pour téléphoner pour prendre rendez-vous : _____
Courriel : _____

Adresse : _____

_____ **Code postal :** _____

SOURCE DE LA RECOMMANDATION (*à remplir en caractères d'imprimerie)*

Nom : _____ **Téléphone :** _____ **Télécopieur :** _____

Cocher une réponse :
_____Santé mentale et lutte contre la toxicomanie
_____École – enseignant / conseiller en orientation
_____Services à l'enfance, à la jeunesse et à la famille
_____Infirmière
_____Médecin
_____Autre

Régie de la santé : _____ Est
_____ Centre
_____ Ouest
_____ Labrador-Grenfell

Envoi de correspondance (rapports de progrès) : _____ **Oui** _____ **Non** *(selon le consentement du parent)*

Critères d'exclusion : Les enfants qui ont besoin d'un soutien plus intensif devraient être recommandés à leur bureau local de santé mentale et de lutte contre la toxicomanie. Ce serait par exemple le cas s'il y a risque imminent de se blesser ou de blesser autrui, psychose active, démêlés actuels importants avec le système de justice pénale et présence de plusieurs problèmes graves, ou encore problèmes de toxicomanie ou de dépendance. Les personnes qui veulent savoir si le programme convient à un enfant peuvent s'adresser à Kati LaVigne au 1-902-442-9522 ou à klavigne@strongestfamilies.com / www.strongestfamilies.com. ***Remarque :*** **Le programme est offert dans l'ordre d'arrivée des demandes et selon les fonds disponibles.**

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