

The **STRENGTHENING FAMILIES** Program



In looking to expand our community-based programs as part of our growing mission, Fairfield Behavioral Health saw the opportunity to add the Strengthening Families Program (SFP) that was sponsored by Children's Trust of South Carolina and the Department of Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse Services. SFP is a nationally and internationally recognized parenting and family strengthening program for general population families. "SFP is a program for ALL families", says Mrs. Karen Dukes-Smith, Program Coordinator and Fairfield's Coach. SFP is an evidence-based family skills training program found to significantly improve parenting skills and family relationships, reduce problem behaviors, delinquency and alcohol and drug abuse in children and to improve social competencies and school performance.

Some of the primary goals of the Strengthening Families Program (SFP) are to:

- Reduce parent and child substance abuse
- Reduce child development and behavior problems

- Increase parent/child attachment and bonding
- Increase positive parenting and parenting skill
- Reduce family conflict and violence
- Reduce depression and stress for parents and children
- Increase children's positive behaviors

Fairfield Behavioral Health Services was invited to apply for a grant and implement 1 cycle of SFP for 12 families with children ages 6-11. "Thanks to the unwavering partnership and support of Fairfield County School District, Fairfield County DSS, Fairfield Community Coordinating Council and Fairfield Career & Technology Center as the SFP site location, we not only demonstrated to the funders that Fairfield organizations can join forces to without hesitation to benefit our community as well as produce tremendous outcomes when the resources are available," states Vernon Kennedy Sr., Executive Director. Even though this cycle of SFP targeted families with children ages 6 to 11 all family members were strongly encouraged to participate in the program. SFP facilitators and staff consisted of Mrs. Melissa Cahoon and Ms. Alana Rabb - ages 6 to 11; Mrs. Jennifer Johnson and Mr. Willie Benson - parent and family sessions; Mr. Keegan Johnson, Ms. Marisa Green & Ms. Shylaya Davis - Childcare for children under 6; Mr. Jeremy Purnell who taught a Life Skills Program, another evidenced-based program for children 12 and older; and Mrs. Veronica Edmonds who served as the SFP Site Coordinator and also the Director of Prevention Services at Fairfield Behavioral Health Services.

SFP included 14 sessions that were delivered in 7 weeks on Mondays and Thursdays evenings from 6:00 pm - 8:00 pm. Twelve families enrolled and began participating on June 27th with 11 families remaining by the last class on August 9th which included 15 parents, 20 children 6-11, 5 children under 6 and 3 children 12 and older for a total of 43. The parents and their children participated separately and together in the family session. Each session began with a family ritual and meal. Meals were provided for the entire family, modeling how to partake in a family meal. Leaders and coordinators had an opportunity to sit with families and build a rapport with them.

Parent Skills:

- Positive communication
- How to make house rules & set up positive routines
- Problem solving and win-win negotiation
- How to strengthen family relationships
- Using positive communication
- Giving mild, predetermined consistent consequences

Children/Teen Skills:

- Stress and anger management
- Coping with criticism and bullying
- Communication
- Feelings identification
- Boundaries
- Saying no to trouble
- Problem solving

After each 1-hour session the parents along with their children from 6-11 combined for the 25-minute family session to model the skills that they learned. Each night ended with a closing family ritual and a prize drawing for the chance to win a \$50.00 visa card was held for families that arrived on time to SFP. Incentives were also given to all the children 0-5, 6-11, and teenagers each night in the form of a gift card, toy or treats for them to enjoy. Parents were also given gift cards in the amount of \$10 for completing their home practice, and a \$10.00 gift card each night.

The SFP participants who successfully completed the program were celebrated with a graduation ceremony which was held on Monday, August 12, 2019 at the Carolina Center. The 11 families who successfully completed the program were thrilled and filled with excitement! Congratulations to the families: Anderson, Ashford, Boyd, Foster, Gibson, Herrera, Jackson, Ramsden, Tate, Woodard and Yarborough. Each family was presented with a double framed certificate of completion and a family photo. Other graduation gifts included a \$150 gift card for each graduation family, \$50 gift card to the first family that enrolled and a \$50 gift card to the family with perfect attendance. "It was a pleasure to work with these families and watch their relationships flourish", says Veronica Edmonds, SFP Site Coordinator. Many parents didn't know what to expect from this program, but as they embraced the skills and applied them to their lives, they were optimistic to accept the change.

"Our children are the best investment we can make. A little time and attention can make all the difference. A big thanks to Children's Trust for providing us with the tools to raise successful children and for giving us the skills to help us," says Nicole Tate a participant from the SFP program.

"I admit that when Mr. Kennedy told to Board about starting the Strengthening Families Program, I didn't really know what it was all about, but from listening to the families reflect on their experiences, the children demonstrate what they learned and watching all of your faces, I'm able to witness the impact the program has had and you have made. Congratulations to all of you!" says Mr. Brian Bonds, Fairfield Behavioral Health Services Interim Board Chair.