

# **Strong Communities for Children in the Golden Strip**

## **Overview of the Evaluation**

The Strong Communities evaluation has process and outcome components, each consisting of several related studies. The findings from all of the studies taken together form a picture of the overall impact of the initiative for the families and neighborhoods being served. The two components and their studies are:

### **Process Evaluation**

- Volunteer study
- Project Archives study
- Organizational Involvement study
- Occasional child care assessment
- Strong Families administrative data

### **Outcome Evaluation**

- Neighborhood survey
- Strong Families study
- Child injuries and illness study
- School and family study
- Neighborhood observation study

## **Process Evaluation**

### Core questions

The process evaluation focuses on seven core questions:

1. What are the trends in volunteering and volunteer activities over time?
2. What are volunteers' views of community needs and resources, the impact of volunteer activities on selected program outcomes, and the impact of the intervention as a whole?
3. What is the impact of volunteer activities on the how organizations capacity of and relationships among organizations in specific sectors of the community?
4. What factors influence the implementation of the intervention in a specific community and selected components of the intervention across communities?
5. What is the "market penetration" and intensity of institutional/organizational involvement over time?
6. What is the availability of occasional child care over time?
7. What is the level of activity for families with young children enrolled in early childhood programs and what benefits accrue from the activity?

## Process studies

The *volunteer study* involves annual interviews with “exceptional” volunteers, nominated by Strong Communities staff members for their outstanding contributions, and more general volunteers to assess their sense of community and family needs and resources; how volunteers help meet these needs and secure needed resources; the characteristics of volunteer activities; and how volunteers see the initiative and its impact on the families and communities served. The volunteer study also analyzes the volunteer data base to better understand the characteristics of volunteers, including age, race, sector of employment, and sector of recruitment; and the characteristics of volunteer experiences, including the focus of volunteer activities, how long volunteer activities lasted, and how long volunteers stay involved with the initiative.

The *project archives study* uses staff work logs, interviews with staff members, and other documents to look at how specific strategies, events, and settings have influenced the development and implementation of the initiative over time.

The *organizational involvement study* assesses the kinds of organizations that take part in the initiative, how much these organizations are involved, and how organization work together to help achieve the initiative’s outcomes.

The *occasional child care assessment* collects data on the type of care available (drop-in, emergency), number of slots available, types of families served, costs and form of payment, and other data.

The *Strong Families administrative data* is used to assess the types of services families with young children are getting and how involved these families are in the services available to them.

## **Outcome Evaluation**

### Key questions and hypotheses

The outcome evaluation is based on five key questions:

1. What are the effects of key elements of the initiative on child safety and well-being?
2. What is the extent of involvement of community organizations in project activities?
3. To what extent were the elements of the Strong Families program implemented?
4. What is the extent of school-family relations in the initiative’s service area?
5. How do neighborhood characteristics influence the initiative’s outcomes?

The questions, in turn, lead to the following hypotheses:

1. In contrast to parents in the comparison sample, parents in the Strong Communities service will demonstrate greater a) concern for children's well-being; b) neighbor-to-neighbor involvement; c) neighborhood collective efficacy; d) perceived institutional and organizational support; and e) parenting efficacy.
2. In contrast to neighborhoods in the comparison sample, neighborhoods in the Strong Communities service area will show lower rates on indicators of child maltreatment
3. In contrast to children living in the comparison area, children in the Strong Communities service area will show lower rates of child injuries due to maltreatment.

#### Outcome studies

The *neighborhood survey* collects data from a random sample of households with a child between the ages of 1 and 10 drawn from neighborhoods in the Strong Communities service area and a matched sample of comparison neighborhoods elsewhere in South Carolina. The survey was first administered in 2004 and data will be collected every three years. The neighborhood survey looks at:

Knowledge of neighborhood children	Mutual support
Neighboring activities	Parenting stress
Neighborhood satisfaction	Child household safety
Collective efficacy	Child neglect observation and action
Institutional/organizational supports	Child medical care
Social support	Observed and self-report parenting
Parenting efficacy	behavior

The *Strong Families* study is an annual survey of families taking part in various support programs for families with young children, including Welcome Families, Extra Care for Caring Families, Family Watch, and other. The Strong Families study collects data on many of same factors as does the neighborhood survey but also asks families about their experiences in Strong Families and their views on the availability of community resources.

The *child injuries and illness* study uses data collected by the State of South Carolina on children with particular kinds of injuries and illnesses who have been seen in hospital emergency rooms or who have been admitted as an inpatient to hospitals serving the Strong Communities service area and the comparison area.

The *school and family* study uses data collected by the State of South Carolina on teacher, student, and parent perceptions of parent involvement in the child's school, perceptions of school and family relations, and children's safety at school and en route to school.

The *neighborhood observation* study collects data on the physical and social characteristics of neighborhoods in the Strong Communities service area and the comparison area. The data are collected solely by observing the neighborhood and rating the a) physical appearance (e.g., condition of dwellings); b) social appearance (e.g., resident social interaction); c) safety (e.g., resident/police vigilance); and d) public amenities (e.g., bus stops). These data are used to understand how neighborhood characteristics influence the Strong Communities outcomes.