

Strengthening the Stronger Families Project



Maximizing student engaged learning to help families achieve meaningful and successful lives



An Invitation

The College of Humanities and Social Sciences (CHSS) is one of the largest colleges at Utah Valley University with more than 5,200 students majoring in one of our degree programs. One of our top engaged learning initiatives is our community involvement through the Stronger Families Project. Since 2008, the Behavioral Science Department has offered an evidenced-based family skills course to families in Utah County. The goal of this program is for UVU students to teach relationship strategies to families in our community so they can improve family functioning and individual well-being.

Sustainable societies depend on strong families. Family policy expert Samantha Callan stated, "Families are essential for social cohesion, the socialization of children, and individual well-being; they are the base from which children and adults can learn, work, and contribute to society." We flourish as a society - economically, socially, and emotionally - when families are a vital, contributing asset.

The positive impact the Stronger Families Project has had on hundreds of families over the last decade is immeasurable. It has strengthened parenting skills, family relationships, and quality of family life. CHSS dedicates resources to this important program to ensure a direct benefit to our communities. I invite you to add your generous support to increase the program's effectiveness for students and families. Even a modest donation translates into significant improvement in the quality of life for our friends and neighbors.

Sincerely,

STEVEN CLARK

Steven Clark
Dean, College of HSS



“In family life, love is the oil that eases friction, the cement that binds closer together, and the music that brings harmony.”

- Eva Burrows



A Healthy Society Begins in the Home

The health of our community begins at home. Unfortunately, too many families face destabilizing challenges that can lead to dysfunction. Financial hardships can strain relationships. Parents can grow frustrated when their child struggles in school. Children can develop behavioral issues in response to the stress they're feeling. Health issues can arise. Sometimes unhealthy communication patterns emerge, which can make family members feel alienated and rejected – or even threatened and unloved. Any one of these issues poses a threat to the family unit and a child's development. Often, parents want to improve their situation but just need a little guidance and support to manage the challenges they face.

Who We Are

In 2008, Utah Valley University's Family Science program launched the Stronger Families Project (SFP) to teach families in Utah County how to build on their strengths and learn new skills to improve their family life and relationships. SFP consists of an evidence-based, nationally recognized curriculum. Family science students teach the curriculum as part of their required internship, and Bachelor of Social Work and Master of Social Work students provide case management and counseling for families that need those services. This unique, nationally recognized program improves the quality of family life. The ultimate goal of this project is to teach parents, teens, and children how to improve their interactions and emotional patterns within the family.

What We Do

Families in the program participate in free weekly classes over the course of eight weeks. Each weekly class begins with a family dinner where a student intern sits with the family and encourages them to connect with one another as they discuss the events of the day. Families attend a class together and then attend

separate classes based on participants' ages. Our students provide relationship strategies, home support, therapy, and hot meals to families who may be overwhelmed or struggling in some way. In doing so, the Bachelor of Social Work (BSW), Master of Social Work (MSW), and family science students benefit from the immersive learning that is part of this internship.

Participants who complete the program experience improved satisfaction with interpersonal relationships. But these improvements go beyond individual families. The evidence shows that the curriculum provided by the SFP reduces truancy, substance abuse, divorce, incarceration, and trauma in the community.

What We Need

The SFP seeks to elevate the family as the fundamental source of happiness and well-being. In the past decade, the program has grown from one to between five to seven sites per semester, with an average of 12 families participating at each location. As of January 2020, we had served 868 Utah County families. Of course, as the interest in our program has increased, so has our need for funding.

We do all this on an extremely modest budget, which puts constraints on the materials we use, the food we serve, and the pay we offer our MSW students as site leaders. We will be able to make an even greater impact with additional financial resources.



868
Families
Served



127,919
Hours
Committed



30,054
Meals
Prepared



Goal 1

Establish healthy family communication patterns and provide nutritious meals to participants

Goal 2

Establish internship scholarships for MSW students

Goal 3

Increase the number of graduating families and the quality of the program



95 percent of Americans wanted to eat more meals together.



“The UVU Stronger Families Project emphasizes the importance of eating dinner with the family. This is a time when families can communicate how each individual member is doing inside and outside of the home. The more my family ate dinner together, the stronger our relationships grew. My mother began to see the importance for me to graduate from high school. I was able to improve my grades and attendance and walk with my class of 2011. Because of the changes in our family and myself, I applied for college and earned a bachelor’s degree in behavioral science, with an emphasis in psychology. I proudly graduated with my degree in spring 2019, something unthinkable years before.”

- Aubrey Bushnell,
UVU Graduate, Class of 2019

Goal 1

Establish healthy family communication patterns and provide meals to participants

Family meals are one of the best ways to create unity and ensure open communication among family members. Numerous studies have shown that eating together as a family promotes healthy relationships and increases physical well-being. Unfortunately, according to recent polls, only 28 percent of American families make it a priority to share meals every night.

The obstacles are plenty. Families work long days. Family schedules are increasingly hectic. Cooking a meal at home takes time. Families are more apt to eat out and often make unhealthy fast food choices. But the SFP strives to eliminate these burdens at least one day per week while providing a working model for healthy mealtime options that are easy and affordable. The dinners we serve give us the opportunity to mentor healthy family mealtime discussions that create a sense of belonging.

A free, nutritious meal is enormously helpful to our underprivileged families. For that one night, they are relieved of the cost and preparation of serving a meal at home. The meals provide an incentive for them to be on time and to attend

every session. Right now, we are doing our best to serve well-balanced meals, and the food we provide is truly appreciated by the program participants. But we know that with extra financial support we can supplement our menus with more nutritional options and variety. We want to introduce children to new, fresh foods that broaden their palettes and help them make healthy nutrition decisions in the future. The goal of our program is to encourage healthy interpersonal relationships and to promote physical well-being by inspiring the mealtime ritual to continue at home.

During the meals, we use conversation kits as a resource to get our families talking. These kits provide prompts that initiate a supportive dialogue that we encourage them to continue at home. Currently we do not have enough conversation kits to send home with our families. Our goal is to be able to offer these kits as gifts to participants who complete the program.

Estimated Philanthropic Investment:
\$16,500 annually

Most children are in households where a parent says it is important that the family eats together, but for almost half (46%) this is difficult to do - largely because of work for the adults and extracurricular activities for the children.





“The presence of parents during mealtimes likely provides young children with firsthand social interaction, discussions of social issues and day-to-day concerns, and vicarious learning of prosocial interactions in a familiar and emotionally secure setting.”

- Linda S. Pagani,
Journal of Developmental & Behavioral Pediatrics, 2017



The Stronger Families Project provides



Therapy



Workshops



Home Visits

Goal 2

Establish internship Scholarships for MSW students

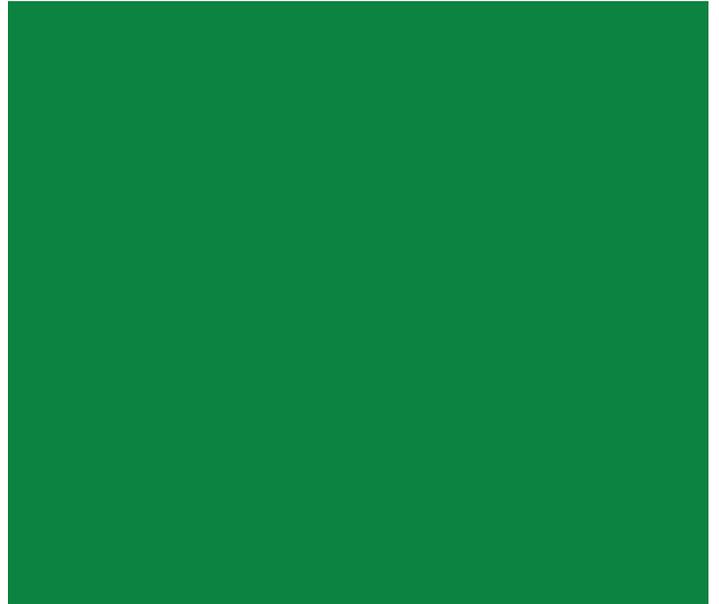
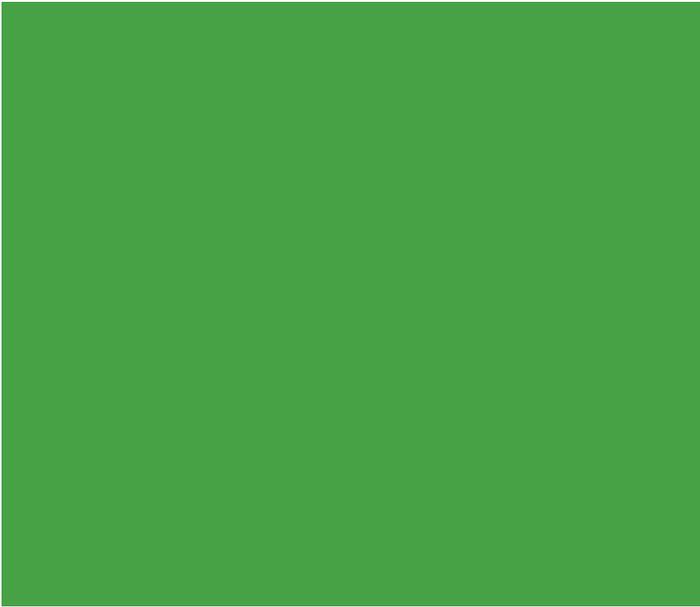
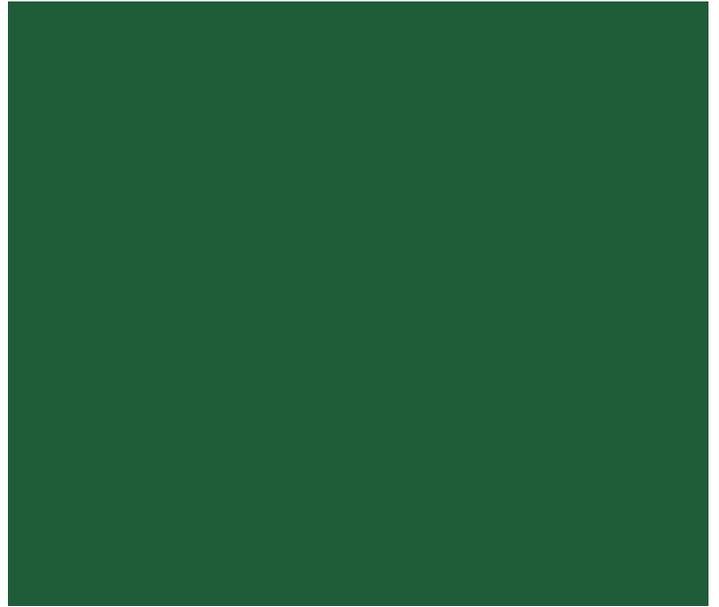
The SFP is committed to UVU's mission of student success. Certified faculty supervise student interns each semester as they work in the SFP. During the weekly sessions, our students teach classes about communication, self-care, interpersonal effectiveness, and a variety of other topics intended to help strengthen the family unit. But the support the students offer does not stop there. Our MSW interns also serve as both site leaders and clinical coordinators. They provide essential leadership for the program and also provide therapy, case management, supplemental workshops, and home visits for participating families.

These MSW interns complete a minimum of 600 hours per academic year working for SFP. Right now, the stipend we can offer translates to a wage of less than \$2 per hour. This barely covers the cost of the gas they use traveling to sites and families' homes.

We believe that compensating these interns is the right thing to do and will attract the best students to participate in this program. A scholarship that offers \$15 an hour for MSW interns will be competitive with the pay at comparable community agencies. By making six paid scholarships available, we will be able to ensure that the best MSW students will participate and provide stability and quality leadership in the program.

Estimated Philanthropic Investment:
\$45,900 annually





Goal 3

Increase the number of graduating families and the quality of the program

In spite of the benefits of the Stronger Families program, it can be difficult for families to participate and complete the program. Our goal is to ensure that the families we enroll stay in the program and achieve graduation. In order to encourage completion of the program, we would like to offer three levels of rewards to families.

First, we would like to incentivize good attendance and participation. The ability to give small tokens of appreciation to all families for on-time attendance at all sites will improve our retention and graduation rates.

Second, we would like to offer graduation gifts for the participants who complete the full program. These families work hard, and they deserve recognition for all their achievements and progress.

Third, we would like to offer gifts to participants who take the time to make the program better. We need to collect extensive data about the program and the families' participation via rigorous and time-consuming surveys in order to further understand the impacts of the program and to make it better. To encourage families to complete the questionnaires and to provide thoughtful answers, we would like to extend gifts to each family that completes a survey. Their time is valuable, and we want them to know how much we appreciate their insights and experiences.

Estimated Philanthropic Investment:
\$6,150 annually



Summary

The SFP is making great strides in bettering the lives of individuals and families in Utah County. Research on our program demonstrates improved parenting skills and family relationships, a reduction in problem behaviors, and improved social competencies and school performance. The impact we have on the community is undeniable. Our mission is to make our sessions even better for our participating families.

Weekly dinners are a pivotal piece of what we do. Inviting families to come together for a nutritious meal encourages communication and active listening. With more funding, the meals we offer will open up a new world of nutrition for children and parents alike. With the addition of more fresh fruits and vegetables as well as a variety of delicious food, we hope to encourage physical health.

As the SFP proceeds, we want to continue to attract quality students. While many of our MSW interns choose this program for the experience and impact they can have, we know that compensating their hard work will relieve them of financial pressures.

Our ability to provide better meals and more professional services will encourage more families to make the program a priority. And we want to reward them for their hard work in completing the classes. Rewards and gifts of thanks for completing our questionnaires are sure ways to increase our graduation rates and collect invaluable data that will make the SFP even stronger.

Join us in strengthening our community.

By sharing your means with Utah Valley University, or any of its educational programs, you are able to enrich the lives of students and faculty who, in turn, will lift others.

To learn more, please contact

Natalie Okeson
Director of Major Gifts
natalie.okeson@uvu.edu
801-863-6380



