

From Ideas to Action

Staying Close to Community

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Strengthening Families Training Institute 2026



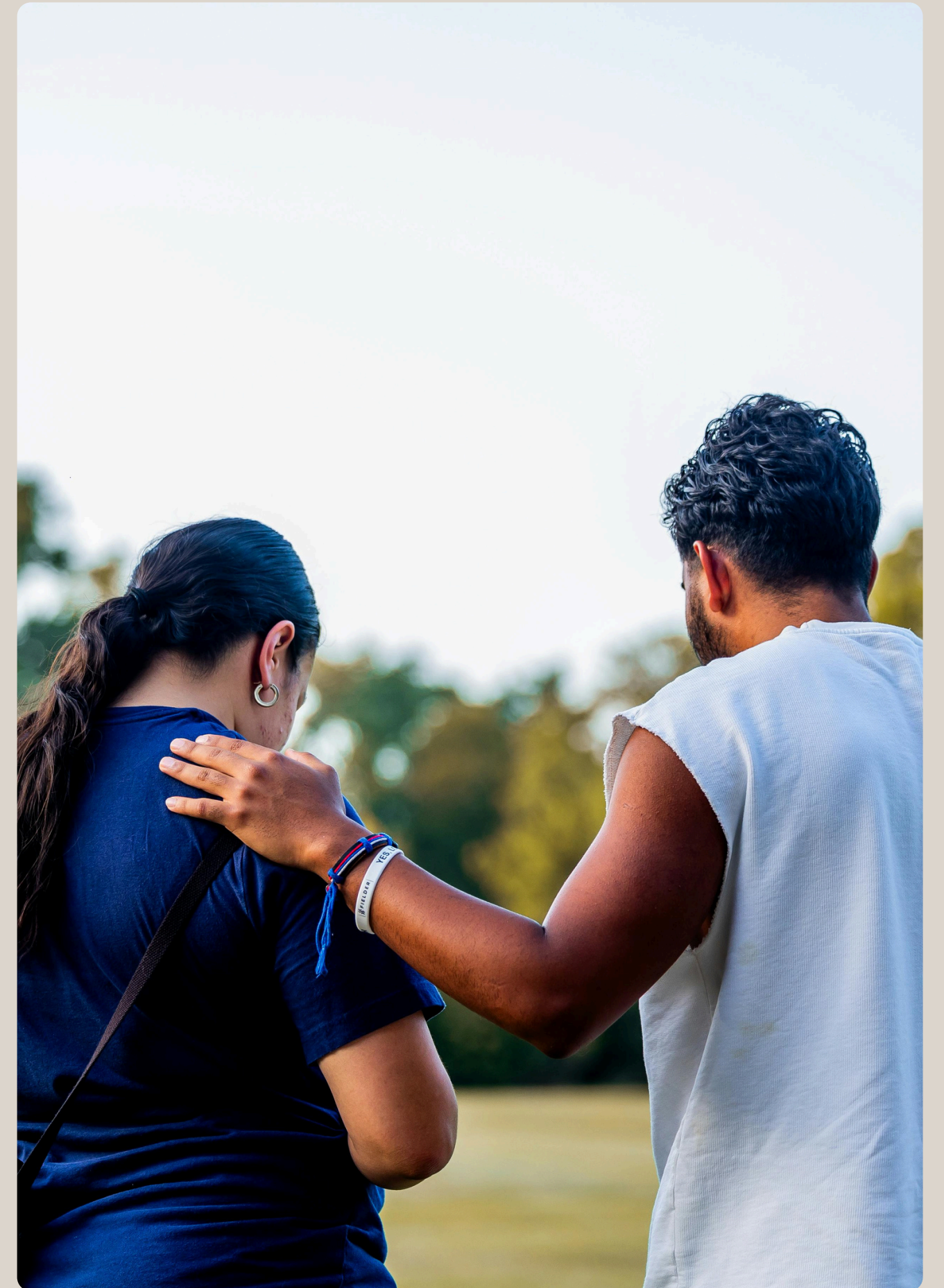
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OPENING REFLECTION

Think of one person

Someone outside your family
who positively shaped where
you've ended up.

**Take a moment.
Picture their face.
Remember their name.**



OPENING REFLECTION



What did they do that made a difference?

| They showed up.

| They knew your name.

| They stayed.

Every child who winds up doing well has had at least one stable and committed relationship with a supportive adult.



Center on the Developing Child
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

We spend millions designing programs.
The research keeps pointing back to something much simpler.

Two vantage points. The same pattern.

Together our work focuses on helping communities translate good intentions into meaningful action.

HAILEY CLEMENTS

Community Systems & Cross-Sector Collaboration



- Coalition development and community partnerships
- Trauma-informed implementation and organizational wellness
- CRM Facilitator and HOPE Champion
- Strengthening collaboration across organizations and communities

KATIE FRANCIS

Education Systems & Community Leadership



- Statewide training across education, healthcare, nonprofit, and community organizations
- Trauma-informed practice and resilience initiatives
- Professional development and leadership supports
- M.Ed., Ed.S., Doctoral Candidate

THE RESEARCH

What helps people thrive at any age?

1

RESILIENCE

Built through relationships, not born

2

SOCIAL CONNECTIONS

Positive relationships at every life stage

3

KNOWLEDGE & GROWTH

Continuous learning and self-awareness

4

CONCRETE SUPPORT

Access to resources and people in times of need

5

SOCIAL & EMOTIONAL COMPETENCE

A need across all ages, not just childhood

THE RESEARCH

These aren't just questions for childhood.

I have people I can reach out to when things get hard.

There is at least one person in my life who genuinely believes in me.

These supports we need as humans.

These are people, not programs.

Our systems can
design for this.
Communities either
make connection
easier or harder.



THE RESEARCH



Resilience is built, not born.

Resilience is not a fixed trait.
It grows through two things:

- 1 Supportive relationships**
With caring adults who buffer stress and model adaptive behavior.
- 2 Adaptive capacities**
Skills to regulate emotions and navigate adversity.

THE RESEARCH

The need for belonging does not end at 18.

Belonging is a fundamental human motivational drive, not a preference, not a bonus, but a basic psychological need that motivates behavior across the entire lifespan.

QUALITY
over
QUANTITY

Adults need fewer,
deeper connections,
not more shallow ones.

Baumeister & Leary, 1995 | ~30,000 citations

THE RESEARCH

70%



**People with strong social connections
are more likely to recover from adversity.**

American Psychological Association

We know more about communities than ever. But we may be less connected to them.

What we have: INFORMATION

- Needs assessments and gap analyses
- SDOH data mapped to zip code
- Community reports and dashboards
- Survey results from strangers

What we're missing: RELATIONSHIPS

- Trust with the people in the data
- Real relationships with community connectors
- Presence before the ask
- Community voice in design, not just feedback

What the data doesn't tell you.

We collect more data than ever before; attendance, referrals, screening scores, service utilization, risk indicators.

But the file rarely tells you...

- Who families trusts
- Informal support networks
- Cultural leaders in the community
- Who people call when things fall apart
- Who actually holds influence

That gap is a relationship gap.

We have gotten very good at admiring the problem.

Assess | Map | Report | Present | Repeat

Increasingly detailed description and understanding
of a problem, without the relationships and actionable
steps required to move forward.

Social determinants of health gives us categories. It does not give us people.

What SDOH gives us

- Economic instability indicators
- Housing and neighborhood factors
- Education access and quality
- Healthcare access and quality
- Social and community context

What it can miss

- The specific person someone trusts
- What this family is already doing well
- Informal networks that hold communities together
- The human story beneath the risk factor

The framework identifies needs. Relationships mobilize solutions.

When Collaboratives Lose Connection

Across states and systems, we see large collaboratives and initiatives designed to support families.

The intention is strong. But over time something can happen.

The work becomes more connected to meetings and planning structures than to the people those efforts are meant to support.

Families become:

- survey respondents
- advisory voices
- stories shared at conferences

Instead of partners shaping the work.

Communities Already Hold the Knowledge

No statewide initiative can fully understand every community. The most effective initiatives do something different.

They create space and support, and then allow communities and local organizations to determine the best course of action.

Because communities already have:

- trusted leaders
- cultural brokers
- informal support networks
- lived knowledge of what families need

The role of systems is not to replace that knowledge. It is to support it.

Change Requires More Than One Conversation

Many community efforts begin with a meeting, a task force, or a planning group.

But real change does not come from a single conversation.

It requires:

- ongoing relationships
- shared ownership
- time for trust to develop
- structures that allow work to continue

When initiatives are short-term or one-time efforts, there is little incentive for communities to invest in the work.

Sustainable change grows through consistent engagement over time.

Communities Already Have Trusted Connectors

Every community has people who hold relationships and knowledge.

They may not have titles.
They may not run organizations.
They may not have business cards.

But they are the people others turn
to when things get hard.

Often these are:

- cultural brokers
- parents navigating systems
- elders and long-time residents
- informal helpers and connectors

They hold one thing systems often
struggle to build: **TRUST**

The goal is not to manufacture relationships

Strong communities do not force connection.

Instead they:

- recognize the relationships that already exist
- learn from the people who hold them
- invite their perspective into decision-making
- build solutions with communities, not for them

Instead of becoming the expert:

Find the people who already understand the community.

The People Who Hold Communities Together

These individuals already exist in every community.

They may not appear on organizational charts.

But they hold deep relational knowledge.

IN FAMILIES

Grandparents raising children

IN COMMUNITIES

The person everyone calls when something goes wrong

IN ORGANIZATIONS

The quiet connector who knows how people actually work together

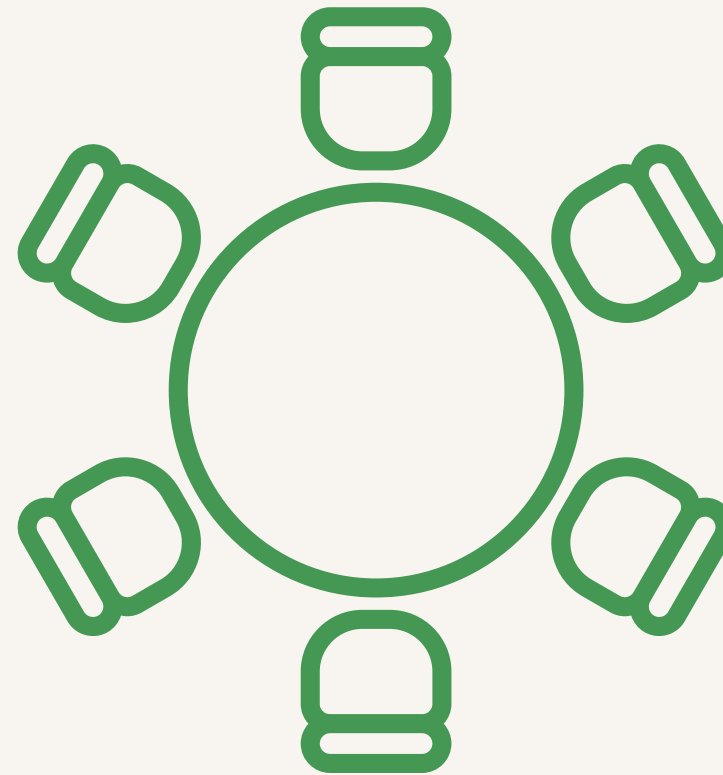
These individuals often carry the real knowledge of a community.

Who gets invited to the table?

Who We Often Invite:

- Directors and program managers
- Agency representatives
- Grant administrators
- Policy leaders
- People with titles and credentials

These voices are important.
But they often represent systems.



Who Often Holds the Real Knowledge

- Parents navigating the system
- Kinship caregivers
- Cultural brokers
- Long-time community members
- Informal helpers and connectors

These voices represent lived experience and trust.

Many communities try to solve problems without the people who actually live them.

Small Group Discussion

8 minutes

Think of a coalition, committee, or planning group that was convened to solve something real.

01 What were they trying to fix or what was the issue being addressed?

02 Who was at the table?

03 Who should have been there but wasn't

What did the missing person know that the room didn't?

Why a trauma-informed perspective matters in community work?

- 1 Changes the first question — from "what is wrong?" to "what happened, and what is working?"
- 2 Explains why people don't show up — not disengagement, but a rational response to past harm.
- 3 Builds psychological safety — so participation is real, not performed.
- 4 Shifts the power dynamic — from extracting input to genuine co-design and shared decisions.
- 5 Makes relationship skills learnable — these are tools, not traits. They can be trained.

These are skills. They are learnable.

Trauma-informed practice is not a credential reserved for clinicians.
It is a set of tools that change how any person or system shows up.

These are skills communities can learn and practice.

Write down one name.

Someone in your community:

- families already trust
- understands the real challenges
- is rarely invited to planning meetings

That name may be the most important person missing from the table.

**Communities don't change
because of better plans.**

They change because the **right
people are in the room.**

The goal is not creating more
meetings.

The work is **building at the right
table.**

*The question
is whether
what we build
makes that
more possible
or less.*

Want to learn more? Contact us today!

www.theshiftedmindset.com/contact

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