The state of North Carolina has been implementing their Injury-Free North Carolina (IFNC) Academy (Academy) since 2012, as a collaboration between the North Carolina Division of Public Health (NC DPH) Injury and Violence Prevention Branch (IVPB) and the University of North Carolina Injury Prevention Research Center (UNC IPRC). The Academy, centered around immersive and applied learning, gives multidisciplinary teams the opportunity to collaborate on a specific project in the area of injury and violence prevention. In the early years, each Academy focused on a specific injury topic (e.g., teen driver safety, suicide, child abuse and neglect, etc.) with all teams sharing a similar focus on the given topic. In 2017, the Academy started focusing on using a shared risk and protective factor (SRPF) approach to preventing multiple forms of violence. In these Academies, each team identified a project based on prioritizing upstream SRPFs that influenced multiple downstream injury and violence-related outcomes most relevant for their community context and conditions.

REIMAGINING THE ACADEMY
The IFNC planning team received internal and external feedback, prompting changes with the format of the Academy. Internally, participants were commenting on the difficulty in learning and applying SRPF approaches and public health theory (using SMART goals and objectives, developing logic models, creating formal program plans, etc.) while attempting to work on their projects in real-time. Externally, the Academy was seeing momentum across the state from many advocates and grassroots agencies to expand family-friendly workplace policies, accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Alongside these opportunities, the impact of the pandemic also brought additional challenges for the team in reinventing the Academy using virtual elements.

2020-21 Academy Planning Team
• UNC Injury Prevention Research Center
• NC Division of Public Health
  ◦ Injury and Violence Prevention Branch
    ◦ Core State Violence and Injury Prevention Program (SVIPP)
    ◦ Rape Prevention & Education Program (RPE)
  ◦ Women’s and Children’s Health Branch
    ◦ Essentials for Childhood Program
• North Carolina Coalition Against Domestic Violence (DELTA Impact)
• North Carolina Coalition Against Sexual Assault (RPE Technical Assistance Provider)
• MomsRising
• Prevent Child Abuse NC

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One of the first shifts the Academy planning team had to navigate was turning the program’s experience into a virtual one. Condensing the material to fit an engaging virtual format led to the question of what material was essential and what could be let go. Considering various cohorts’ difficulties in grasping detailed public health theory, a choice was made to emphasize hands-on policy and advocacy work in relation to each participating team’s goals. Additionally, this made the Academy more accessible to those without a strong public health background to participate.

A second notable shift was reshaping the original focus of the Academy. While there was continued interest in using SRPF approaches, and the CDC was increasingly promoting this framework, the planning team felt they had reached most of the individuals and teams across the state that were interested in learning the foundational concepts of SRPF approaches and developing a prevention plan for shared risk and/or protective factors they prioritize for their communities. After much thought, the team decided to focus on one specific SRPF—family-friendly workplace policies—as the basis for recruitment and the curriculum. This focus addressed a protective factor that has been tied to every kind of violence addressed by partners on the planning team: intimate partner violence, sexual violence, child abuse and neglect, and ACEs. As such, it garnered strong attention from injury and violence prevention practitioners statewide. Even further, this upstream area of focus incorporated the CDC’s emphasis on community and policy-level prevention strategies.

To start things off, the initial content covered in the Academy included a broad introduction on the concept of “work” with an emphasis on equity and justice. There were discussions around what society considers “work” and what is left out, and how this leads to disparities (for instance, unpaid domestic labor that is not considered work and the burden that women face from it). Further, the Academy covered topics that infuse equity in the world of family-friendly workplace policies: policy and advocacy, message framing, trauma-informed organizations, working on public policy options with local municipalities/counties, and influencing practices within NC-based businesses. This emphasized the ability to go beyond awareness raising (which is often a struggle for community coalitions) into tangible prevention-focused actions.

Because instruction on detailed public health and SRPF theory was condensed, there was room to bring in many facilitators to discuss concepts of equity. For instance, a national advocacy group

“Teams were getting overwhelmed by the public health aspect of it... It felt like teams that didn’t have people with a strong public health background or someone from the local health department were struggling, particularly with the second module, which was very focused on goals, objectives, performance measures, and logic models. So every year we tried to make it less academic, we always tried to make it very hands-on and practitioner focused, with a coach at every table, but still, by the third year, we were still getting feedback that it was too academic.”

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“What worked really well to get folks to pick a shared protective factor was to zoom in on one approach: family-friendly workplace policies. It’s really hard to get people to develop a plan and prevention strategies from the wide array of possible SRPFs, especially if you’re meeting three times in person over a period of time. We wanted to get folks to focus on this, and then guide them through the process of building their initiative.”

1 All quotations are from discussions between state IVP practitioners/stakeholders and the Safe States Alliance that took place for the development of this case study.
with a strong local presence in NC—MomsRising—was brought in since they had an existing campaign on family-friendly workplace policies and workplace justice, and were enthusiastic about partnering with the Academy. This group brought experience in promoting family-friendly workplace policy agendas. Further, Prevent Child Abuse NC shared expertise from years of legislative and policy advocacy. Finally, Family Forward NC, an initiative of the NC Early Childhood Foundation, was able to share knowledge on working specifically with businesses. There were also guest speakers invited to the sessions, such as county managers and business owners discussing their reasons and process for adopting family-friendly workplace policies.

From this common foundation of information, practical advice, and specialized support, Academy teams developed project plans that they implemented across the state. The list below exemplifies the kinds of projects teams developed:

- **The Elevate Watauga Early Childhood Stakeholder Group** is working with the local chamber of commerce on local economic development, and specifically focusing on implementing a living wage. Right now, they are in the stages of reaching out to organizations in Asheville, who have successfully increased the minimum wage to a living wage, to learn from their work.

- **The Safelight, Inc.** team sought to revamp their personnel policies to inspire retention. They have expanded their maternity leave plan to help employees transition back to work, have included flexible healthcare benefits in their budget, and incorporated more trainings in relation to safety and self-care.

- A team from **Be Resilient OBX** is honing in on their counties’ largest employers, including county government and six municipal governments, and analyzing their sick leave and family leave policies. They will identify key areas for improvement and create a plan for making change. Down the line, they also seek to engage local businesses in thinking about economic reactivation and workplace policies, with the goal that recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic can be improved if equitable policies both incentivize individuals to return to the workforce, and allow them to stay at home as needed.

- **An Onslow County** team is working on resiliency training for staff to enhance understanding of employee needs and support the challenging roles they hold providing services to their community. The team is also focusing on resiliency utilizing the TASCO (Turning Adversity into Success for Children in Onslow County) Task force to teach resiliency to parents and other community members.

- **The New Hanover County Resiliency Task Force** sent a team that is focusing on influencing two large employers in Wilmington. The goal is for these two employers to encourage their contractors who are small businesses to have better PTO policies for their employees and subcontractors. They are hoping to get the two large employers to prioritize awarding contracts to small businesses that improve PTO for their employees.
THE FUTURE OF THE ACADEMY

Academy teams attended three, two-day virtual sessions which concluded in July 2021. Some teams were still in the process of connecting with partners, while others were already well underway with project implementation. Going forward, the ideal is to follow up with the teams in two years and analyze outcomes. As a whole, the Academy planning team felt that this curriculum was the most successful yet, since teams were able to jump into their projects as opposed to giving priority to the theory, and since working towards one protective factor increased project specificity. Participants reported increased confidence in their ability to engage partners and implement this work, feeling extremely supported by the Academy, and being excited to continue developing their projects. One participant stated that, after the Academy, they felt that there is “a real opportunity here to underpin what we do at local levels in a way that moves the conversation towards progress”.

An additional important indicator of success is that new partnerships are flourishing as a result of the academy. MomsRising and Prevent Child Abuse NC are now part of a team within IVPB whose purpose is to improve cohesion and collaboration across violence prevention organizations. While the shift in the Academy focus was in part prompted by limitations caused by the pandemic, the success of offering a training experience focused on a single protective factor that affects many injury and violence outcomes was undeniable.

“The diversity of approaches really speaks to our academy’s implementation in terms of who we had access to as content experts. We had a lot of folks who were able to offer training and capacity building from lots of different angles so teams could choose what made most sense for their community. We are lucky to have such great support in North Carolina.”