

Participants Praise Infant Mental Health Certificate Program

The Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services provided funding during the 2008-2009 academic year for 30 early childhood mental health professionals to enroll in the Infant Mental Health Certificate Program at Chatham University. At the conclusion of the program, they were asked to evaluate their experience. One example of the testimonials received follows:

“The most important thing I learned during my courses at Chatham was the concept of ‘attachment.’ I learned that the quality of attachment will affect a child throughout his or her life, not just in infancy. This early relationship will influence what a child expects from his or her relationships, including how that child will someday parent.

“I now view all the children I am asked to observe through the lens of attachment. I look at the quality of the child’s attachment with staff in the classroom and with parents. Before Chatham, I was more of a behaviorist who looked at the child’s behaviors from the outside in and tried to apply strategies to those. Now I believe we need to give voice to the child’s inner world. I look at a child and ask myself, “what is he or she trying to tell us?” This has affected the way I understand the child’s behaviors and therefore how I go about creating classroom strategies.

“I would resoundingly recommend the program. What a huge gift it was to be offered a scholarship to attend. The learning was invaluable.”



Advisory Committee Advances Recommendations

In September 2009, the Early Childhood Mental Health Advisory Committee presented a wide-ranging set of recommendations to Estelle Richman, who was then the secretary of the Department of Public Welfare. The recommendations were organized in three focus areas: prevention and intervention, workforce and development, and communication and collaboration. In her response to the advisory committee, Secretary Richman affirmed the recommendations and charged the committee with developing an action plan for implementing them. At the December meeting, the three workgroups presented proposed action plans to the advisory committee which will be shared with Harriet Dichter, now the acting secretary of the Department.

The recommendations represent an “important step for sustaining and advancing the momentum that has begun for promoting and improving the social and emotional health and development of young children in Pennsylvania.” This momentum began at the December 2007 Infant-Toddler Mental Health Symposium. Less than six months after the symposium, the first meeting of the advisory committee was held, and 16 months later comprehensive recommendations were presented to the Department. The speed with which the recommendations were developed was possible because of strong leadership from top state officials and hard work by members of the advisory committee all of whom care deeply about Pennsylvania’s youngest citizens and want to ensure that the progress achieved so far will be sustained.

The Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University notes, “What happens in early childhood can matter for a lifetime. To successfully manage our society’s future, we must recognize problems and address them before they get worse....Providing stable, responsive, nurturing relationships in the earliest years of life can prevent or even reverse the damaging effects of early life stress, with lifelong benefits for learning, behavior, and health” (from “The Impact of Early Childhood Adversity on Children’s Development”). The advisory committee concurs and believes that its recommendations will help to improve outcomes for our youngest citizens. The full recommendations document is available at

http://www.parecovery.org/documents/ECMH_Adv_Recommendations.pdf.

Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation

Highlights of the 2008-2009 Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation Report

The goals of Pennsylvania's Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation Project are: to reduce the number of children expelled from child care due to behavior issues; to increase the understanding of social and emotional development and its impact on educational success, and to link and bridge systems and services on behalf of a child, family and program.

The numbers

- 434 individual children received ECMH consultation services
- 837 early childhood educators received on-site ECMH consultation
- 5,054 children were affected by consultation services delivered in their early care and education programs
- Services were provided in 48 of the 67 counties in Pennsylvania to 244 different early learning facilities
- 43 percent of requests for services were for aggressive behavior on the part of young children
- 255 cases or 59 percent were referred to community agencies for more intensive services

Characteristics of ECMH consultation

- **ECMH programming and services are characterized by flexibility.** Consultants work with child care centers to schedule observations and to develop action plans that meet the needs of both the child and educator. Services are customized based on individual needs.
- **ECMH consultants are knowledgeable and skilled.** ECMH consultants are highly qualified Masters level professionals with a strong background in child development, early childhood mental health and early care and education. They are skilled in coaching,

relationship-building, collaboration and accessing community resources.

- **Strong community relationships exist.** Many ECMH consultants have long-standing and valued relationships with their local early childhood communities. Strong support from these community resources enhances the actual quantity and quality of programming.

Testimonials from recipients of services

- "ECMH consultation has been the most valuable resource I have experienced in my 10 years directing this center."
- "Working with the consultant was a wonderful experience. She was insightful and caring. She was sensitive to both the child's needs and the mother's concerns."
- "All children have needs. Behaviors are sometimes not viewed as a symptom of what the child needs. This program helps get the focus in the right place so the child's needs can be addressed."
- "The consultant was a blessing. We have three children in one group that we referred. We evaluated our programming asking, "Is it us?" The consultant assisted us in finding the help we needed for all the children."

The complete annual report is available at www.parecovery.org (Statewide Initiatives/Early Childhood Mental Health)

Child Psychiatrist Provides Case Consultation

Since September 2009, Dr. John Biever, a child psychiatric consultant to the Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services, has facilitated weekly conference calls with the ECMH consultants. The purpose of the calls is to support the consultants who often work alone and encounter very difficult situations when they are called into early learning facilities on behalf of a particu-

lar child. Dr. Biever facilitates discussion among the consultants about the cases they present and offers his clinical expertise. Sometimes he does a brief presentation on a topic related to ECMH, such as team building with others on behalf of a young child and reflective supervision. The consultants have benefitted considerably not only from Dr. Biever's considerable professional knowledge and experience but also from his emotional support and wry sense of humor.

Additional Funding Increases Number of Consultants

With some additional funding being made available for the ECMH Consultation Project, there will now be at least two consultants in each of the six Regional Keys. There will be 15 individuals working as ECMH consultants, including some who are part-time. The addition of consultants supports the recommendation of the ECMH Advisory Committee to expand ECMH consultation so that eventually there will be at least one in every county in Pennsylvania.

New Publications on ECMH Consultation

- **Integrating Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation with the Pyramid Model**, a policy brief by Deborah F. Perry and Roxane K. Kaufmann, November 2009. Available at <http://www.challengingbehavior.org/d/resources/briefs.htm>
- **What Works? A Study of Effective Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation Programs**, by Frances Duran et al., August 2009. Available at <http://gucchd.georgetown.edu/78358.html>

Around The State in Early Childhood Mental Health

Starting Early Together Grant Plans for Sustainability

The Starting Early Together program in Allegheny County promotes social and emotional wellness in young children and their families. It was funded by a six-year Systems of Care grant from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. With grant funding scheduled to end in 2011, stakeholders in the program met in January for a retreat to plan for sustaining the project beyond the grant period. Based on input from focus groups and discussion at the retreat, three priorities were established for the final 18 months of the grant: more public awareness through information, education, stigma reduction; 2) workforce development across systems; and 3) providing family support with the philosophy of “whatever it takes” and “do it right, do it together.” Staff will develop action plans based on these priorities to plan for sustaining progress.

Grant Project Promotes Parent Well-Being and Healthy Child Development

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Local Funding Partnership recently awarded a three-year \$500,000 matching grant to Community Care Behavioral Health in Allegheny County. Called Healthy Families Raise Healthy Children, the grant project serves primary caregivers and children ages 0-3. The project recognizes that parental depression is a potential risk factor for developmental delays in young children and aims to keep track of young children in Allegheny County where parental depression may exist.

Local funders of the initiative include the Highmark Foundation, UPMC Health Plan and the Pittsburgh Foundation. Community Care is partnering with the

Alliance for Infants and Toddlers, the coordinator for early intervention services for Allegheny County. According to Michele Myers-Cepicka, executive director of the Alliance and a member of the state Early Childhood Mental Health Advisory Committee, “Getting help to caregivers who may suffer from depression is not always easy. Many of these parents are overwhelmed by their young children’s needs, as well as other daily life challenges, and often they are not aware of, cannot get to, or do not feel comfortable accessing behavioral health services.”

To address these issues, the project intends to “change the way care is provided so that families’ most urgent needs are met, parental stress is reduced and the overall functioning of the family improves.” The collaborative involved in the grant includes the four local Medicaid managed care organizations and more than 30 organizations representing physical and behavioral health providers, early intervention specialists, and community and maternal and child health staff.

– from a *Community Care Behavioral Health Organization news release, October 28, 2009*

Room to Grow Pilot Project Report Discusses Lessons Learned

The Pennsylvania Health Law Project, in collaboration with the Pennsylvania Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics and with the assistance of a grant from the William Penn Foundation, sponsored a pilot project to “encourage the adoption of validated developmental screening for children enrolled in Medicaid and the Children’s Health Insurance Program.” The project was called Room to Grow. Six pediatric practices were part of the pilot, representing urban, suburban and rural areas spread across the state. Two practices used the Parent Evaluation Developmental Status (PEDS)

screening tool and four used the Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ). Outcomes of the implementation of screening in these six practices included the following:

- Use of the screening tool enhanced the quality of the well-child visit.
- Somewhat surprisingly, the rates of referral to specialized services did not increase significantly. This is perhaps attributable to the particular populations of these practices, the failure to respond appropriately to the information obtained or the fact that they were already effectively screening their young patients.
- All practices recommended the use of validated screening tools.

Children’s Bureau Prioritizes Early Childhood Mental Health

Thinking ahead to January 2011 and the arrival of a new governor, the Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services is preparing a transition plan. The Bureau of Children’s Behavioral Health Services has named several priority issues for this transition plan, including early childhood mental health. The information being prepared on early childhood mental health initiatives addresses the rationale for attention to this issue, actions that have been taken and what has been accomplished, and what actions are still needed.

FOCUS on Early Childhood Mental Health Handouts Available

Approximately every month, a brief and easy-to-understand article on some aspect of social and emotional development is prepared and distributed to early learning facilities for staff and parents. They are also available online at www.parecovery.org/services_child.shtm #focus. Recent topics include “You Choose” and “Flexible, Fearful or Feisty.



2010 Children's Mental Health Awareness Day Focuses on Early Childhood

National Children's Mental Health Awareness Day is Thursday, May 6, 2010. This year the emphasis is on the social and emotional development of children from birth through age eight.

A highlight of the observance this year will be a Nationwide Art Action. The theme is "My Feelings Are a Work of Art." Communities across the United States will engage young children in art activities to help adults and young children talk about having and expressing feelings. The American Art Therapy Association will provide materials to help parents, teachers and caregivers work with young children. Register to receive materials and support at www.americanarttherapyassociation.org/chmad.asp. Go to www.samhsa.gov/children/index.aspx for additional ideas on how to plan events for May 6 and for materials you can use for publicity in your own community.

This is the fourth edition of a periodic early childhood mental health update. Previous editions are available online at www.parecovery.org (Statewide Initiatives/Early Childhood Mental Health). Contributions to future updates are invited. Please send information to:

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Why Invest in Early Childhood Mental Health?

In February, the Infant-Toddler Systems Committee of the Pennsylvania Early Learning Council released recommendations for "Improving the Development of Pennsylvania Infants and Toddlers." They assume that investing early in young children is effective, not only in terms of improved outcomes but also in cost-savings. On what evidence is that assumption based, beyond what common sense would say? Consider the following:

1. Children develop most rapidly during the first five years of life; their early experiences influence the development of their brains. According to Zero to Three, "early childhood social and emotional development is firmly tied to every other area of growth and development.... Children who are emotionally healthy have a significantly greater chance of achieving success in school compared with those who have emotional difficulties." ("Science to Public Policy: Promoting Policies That Support Early Childhood Social and Emotional Development," Zero to Three Policy Center)
2. A working paper from the National Scientific Council on the Developing Child states that "many children show clear characteristics of anxiety disorders, attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder, conduct disorder, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, and other problems at a very early age." The paper also emphasizes that adversity in early life can damage brain development and "increase the likelihood of significant mental health problems that may emerge either early or years later." ("Mental Health Problems in Early Childhood Can Impair Learning and Behavior for Life," Working Paper 6)
3. A study of an early intervention program in Chicago showed that children who had received psychosocial interventions during preschool were more likely to complete high school and less likely to be arrested for violent crimes. ("Early Childhood Mental Health: Services That Can Save a Life," *Journal of Pediatric Nursing*, April 2004)
4. The benefits to society are greater than the program costs of early childhood programs. The Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University states: "Extensive analysis by economists has shown that education and development investments in the earliest years of life produce the greatest returns. Most of those returns, which can range from \$3 to \$16 per dollar invested, benefit the community through reduced crime, welfare, and educational remediation, as well as increased tax revenues on high incomes for the participants of early childhood programs when they reach adulthood." ("Early Childhood Program Effectiveness," Center on the Developing Child, Harvard University)
5. One state, Michigan, has quantified the savings of investing in programs for young children that prepare them for school cognitively, physically, socially and emotionally. Cost savings from this investment over the past 25 years were estimated to be about \$1.15 billion. For example: \$69 million less in spending for children with disabilities that were prevented or helped with early intervention; \$214 saved in juvenile corrections; \$106 million saved in fewer cases of substantiated child abuse and neglect. In addition, the study estimates that 80,000 adults are currently in the Michigan labor force who may well have dropped out if the state had not invested in them when they were very young. ("Cost savings analysis of school readiness in Michigan," Wilder Research)

Applying this evidence to Pennsylvania the Early Learning Council's Infant-Toddler Systems Committee states, "The societal cost of ignoring early childhood development is high.... Pennsylvania can make a difference by investing in strong families, good health, and positive learning experiences for all its infants and toddlers." The full report with recommendations is available at www.parecovery.org (Statewide Initiatives/Early Childhood Mental Health).