



Foundations for Success

*Improving early childhood mental health
to support successful families and communities in Ramsey County*

Parent survey results April 2009

Foundations for Success is a five-year initiative designed to develop and implement a county-wide system for early childhood mental health services in Ramsey County. Funded by the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation and coordinated by the Community Action Partnership of Ramsey and Washington Counties, the initiative promotes culturally competent and family friendly services. Services are developed and implemented by a collaboration of more than 100 community agencies, representing local foundations, government, parents, school districts, health, mental health, early childhood professionals, and the University of Minnesota.

Wilder Research evaluates the initiative, which includes interviewing a random sample of parents whose children received services through one of five funded programs. The purpose of the interview is to obtain parents' feedback about their satisfaction with staff and services, perceived changes in their child's and their own behavior, barriers to receiving services, and the appropriateness of services.

This is the final report summarizing information collected from parents of children participating in two of the five programs: Incredible Years Dina Curriculum (74%) and Beginning's Infant/Toddler Home Visiting program (15%), and from parents who participated in the Incredible Years Parent Group (11%). (Parents of children participating in the other funded programs were not included in the original sample because discharge forms were not sent to Wilder Research).

All parent interviews were completed between January 2006 and January 2009. During this time, 261 families were selected for the interview. One hundred thirty interviews were completed, for a response rate of 50 percent. Most others could not be located. Most interviews were conducted in English (89%); an additional eight were conducted in Hmong and six were conducted in Spanish.

Satisfaction with staff and services **Program staff**

Program staff received high ratings from parents. Most (94% to 99%) felt staff were respectful, caring and warm, knowledgeable and skilled, communicated in a way parents understood, were sensitive to cultural backgrounds, gave useful suggestions and were friendly.

Accessibility and ease of receiving services

Almost all parents (95% to 98%) felt services were convenient and affordable. The majority of parents (90% to 95%) also felt it was easy to find out about the program, schedule the first appointment, and contact staff when needed. Most parents (88%) agreed that staff worked with them to develop treatment goals for them and/or their child.

Overall satisfaction

Almost all parents (99%) were "satisfied" or "very satisfied" with the services received. Most parents said that the services met their expectations (94%) and nearly all parents would recommend the program to others (99%). In addition, most parents (98%) were "satisfied" or "very satisfied" with the benefits of the services received.

Perceived changes in parents and children

Children's behaviors

More than three-quarters of parents (81%) said that their child's behavior changed as a result of receiving services. The most prevalent change was improved self-control and related behavior changes. Many parents also observed improvements in their social skills and communication skills. Other parents saw positive changes in their child's motor, speech, and writing skills.

Parents' knowledge and abilities

Although the majority of parents (89%) did not receive direct services, they also experienced positive changes since their child received services. More than 8 out of 10 said they were able to better understand their child's needs (85%) and most were more aware of their child's positive behaviors and strengths (93%). Most parents (87% to 88%) were more confident that they could help their child grow or develop and felt they were able to make better decisions about services for their child. Somewhat fewer parents (78%) "agreed" or "strongly agreed" that their family life is more under control since receiving services.

Parent involvement in children's services

Most parents (93% to 99%) said they had the right to approve services and provide input to staff, knew the steps to take if their child was not receiving good service, and felt their opinion was just as important as staff opinions in determining services needs for their child. Slightly fewer parents (84%) "agreed" or "strongly agreed" that they knew about available services for their child.

Parent-child relationship

Parents felt their children generally have good relationships with them and their families. All parents (100%) said that children generally feel comfortable with the family and trust parents to care for them. Most parents felt that their child would come to them for comfort when upset (96%).

Barriers to receiving service

Parents were asked to rate the extent to which several factors posed a problem for getting their child to the program. Most (88% to 90%) said that transportation, difficulty finding child care for other children, and lack of food, clothing, or other necessities were "not a problem."

However, almost one-quarter of parents (22% to 23%) felt that the lack of information about emotional or behavioral issues in young children and services for those children and parents were at least a "slight problem" in getting their child to the program.

About half of parents (49%) reported encountering any barriers to receiving services. However, when these barriers did exist, they were often not addressed by agency staff. Only 26 of the 64 parents reporting barriers (41%) said that agency staff worked with them to address these problems. Parents identified some ways agency staff did help them, specifically by providing information about referrals and services and providing information and resources.

Child care and school settings

Most parents (94%) said that their child stayed in the same child care, preschool, or kindergarten throughout the program period. Most parents (95%) "agreed" or "strongly agreed" that their child's current child care or school setting was appropriate for their child.

Appropriateness of services

More than 8 out of 10 parents (84%) felt their child received the "right amount" of service. Fifteen percent felt "more service was needed" while only one percent felt less service was needed. Many parents reported that they would not change anything about their child's program or did not know what they would change. Others suggested extending the length of the program or increasing the frequency of classes, making specific changes to the program or curriculum, and increasing communication between staff and parents.

When asked to identify the most positive aspect of the services received, many parents noted the improvement in their child's social functioning and improved family interactions. Parents also noted improvement in their child's behavior and self-control. For those who participated in the parent group, several commented on the positive support received by program staff and other parents. Parents also praised program staff for being helpful, informative, friendly, and caring.

Conclusions and recommendations

- Parents were generally very satisfied with the services their child received, especially the staff/providers working with their child and the amount of service their child received.
- Most observed positive changes in their child as a result of services, especially self-control and

behavior changes and improved social and language/communication skills.

- Parents also reported being involved in their child's services and advocating on behalf of their child. Most reported few barriers in terms of accessing services for their child.
- While most parents provided positive feedback, a few areas continue to present opportunities for enhancing services. These include:
 - Providing all parents with information about emotional/behavioral issues in young children, their child's program, and other available services;
 - Working with parents who encounter barriers to service to identify potential solutions, including referrals to other agencies/supports.

For more information

For more information about Foundations for Success, contact Catherine Wright at Community Action Head Start, 651-603-5813 or cwright@caprw.org.

For more information about this report, contact Monica Idzelis at Wilder Research, 651-280-2657 or mli@wilder.org.

Authors: Mao Thao and Monica Idzelis

April 2009