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# Foundations for Success

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

# Follow-up screening survey results June 2006

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.

This initiative includes a screening component, in which county school districts, clinics, and social service agencies administer the Ages & Stages Questionnaires®: Social-Emotional (ASQ:SE). This questionnaire is being used to screen young children for emotional or behavioral concerns. Some families receiving screening were invited to participate in a follow-up interview six months later. The purpose of this interview was to explore perceptions of the screening process and subsequent receipt of appropriate services.

Families were randomly selected for this interview if they provided consent and had a child with a screening score at or above the clinical cut-off (indicating the possible presence of social or emotional concerns). Beginning in early 2006, 25 families were selected each month. Some families screened in late 2005 were also interviewed.

This report summarizes the results of interviews completed between October 2005 and April 2006. During this time, 88 families were selected for the interview. Fifty-five interviews were conducted, for a response rate of 63 percent. Most other families could not be located for the interview. Most surveys (80%) were completed in English. Other surveys were completed in Spanish (13%) or Hmong (7%).

# Ratings of the screening process

Most respondents (89%) remembered completing the Ages & Stages Questionnaires®: Social-Emotional (ASQ:SE) as part of the screening. Those parents who remembered the screening were asked several questions regarding the process. Feedback about the screening was positive. Almost all parents (98%) said that staff answered all of their questions about the screening. Most (87%) "agreed" or "strongly agreed" that staff explained their child's screening score for them and helped them obtain a more complete assessment for their child.

# **Receipt of referrals**

Just over half of the respondents (55%) said that staff gave them referrals to specific programs or agencies that could work with their child. These parents were referred to a range of agencies, especially Head Start.

### Entry into services

Families receiving referrals were relatively likely to access services. Two-thirds of the parents (66%) contacted the agency to which they were referred. Three-quarters of the parents (74%) who contacted the agency subsequently enrolled their child for services.

Most parents who did not pursue referrals felt that services were not needed. Sixty percent of the parents who did not follow-up on the referral felt that their child did not need services to assist with emotional or behavioral issues.

Other parents did not enroll their children due to a range of factors, such as the length of the waiting list, a lack of understanding about services, fears of having their child labeled as having a mental health or behavior problem, and a belief that they could take care of their child's issues without attending a program. These results should be viewed with caution, however, since only a few parents answered these questions.

Parents who did not receive a referral were less likely to access services. Only 13 percent of the parents who did not receive a referral enrolled their child into any new programs in the six months following the screening. These services included a range of psychiatric/psychological services. Parents learned about these services from other service staff, friends or relatives, and their insurance company.

Seventy-one percent of the families who did not receive a referral felt that their child did not need services to address emotional or behavioral issues. Other parents did not enroll their child into services for a wide range of reasons, such as the length of the waiting list, inconvenient service times, a lack of time to pursue services, a lack of understanding of services, a desire to address issues on their own, the amount of required paperwork, and the length or difficulty of the intake procedures. Caution is urged in interpreting these findings due to the low number of parents who answered these questions.

### Service completion and outcomes

Most parents (94%) who enrolled their child into a program (either with or without a referral) said that their child was still attending. The one parent who said that their child was not still attending indicated that services had been successfully completed.

All of these parents "agreed" or "strongly agreed" said that the program had helped their child. When asked how the program had helped, most parents identified opportunities for their child to socialize with other children or improvements in emotions, behavior, and speech/language.

## **Conclusions and recommendations**

- Most parents gave positive ratings of the screening process. Staff conducting screenings should continue their efforts to answer parents' questions about the instrument and their child's score.
- Almost half of the parents (45%) did not receive referrals for services. Since all children had scores at or above the clinical cut-off, it is possible that referrals would have been beneficial for other families as well. Twentynine percent of the parents who did not receive referrals were concerned about their child's emotional or social well-being. Staff are encouraged to increase their efforts to provide referrals. The importance of providing referrals is supported by the finding that families who received referrals were more likely to obtain services within six months of the screening than those who did not receive referrals.
- Most parents who did not pursue services for their child felt that services were not needed. Staff should continue their efforts to explain the child's score and the potential presence of social or emotional issues to parents as appropriate.
- A wide range of potential barriers to service access were identified. However, because relatively few parents answered these questions, it is difficult to identify the most prevalent barriers. As additional surveys are completed, these issues will be examined further to identify strategies for enhancing access to service. Ensuring timely and easy access to service is especially important, given the fact that parents found services helpful for their children.

#### For more information

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