



Foundations for Success

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

Outcome Assessment results: Incredible Years Parent Group February 2010

Foundations for Success was 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 promoted culturally competent and family friendly services. Services were 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.

The initiative was evaluated by Wilder Research, including an annual analysis of outcome data collected through the project. Outcome data were collected for children participating in Incredible Years using the *Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire*. Outcome data for parents participating in the Incredible Years Parent Group were collected using the *Parent Practices Interview*. This final report summarizes all findings from the outcome evaluation of Incredible Years parent group over the duration of the initiative.

Overview of completed SDQs

Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaires (SDQs) are completed by parents about their children at the beginning (intake) and end (discharge) of their time in Incredible Years parent group. A total of 26 matched pretest/posttest SDQs were submitted to Wilder Research. The SDQs were completed between May 2005 and June 2009.

Most of the questionnaires (73%) completed at intake were completed by mothers, and all were done so in English. Questionnaires were completed for more males (73%) than females. At the time the SDQs were completed, children ranged in age from 3 to 8, with a mean age of 5 years.

Results of the SDQ

The SDQ is comprised of five subscales: emotional symptoms, conduct problems, hyperactivity-inattention, peer problems, and prosocial behavior. In addition to subscale scores, a total difficulties score (sum of scores on all scales except prosocial behavior) was calculated for each child.

All scores can further be classified into one of three clinical categories: normal, borderline, or abnormal. An abnormal total difficulties score can be used to identify children who may have mental health concerns.

Changes in scores from intake to discharge are based on individually matched cases (n=26). The major SDQ findings are as follows:

- Overall, children showed statistically significant improvements in three domains of behavior assessed by the SDQ (conduct problems, hyperactivity, and prosocial behavior), as well as an improvement in their total difficulties score.
- With the exception of the prosocial scale, between 28 percent and 42 percent of children demonstrated clinical improvements from intake to discharge (i.e., they improved from “abnormal” to “normal” or “borderline,” or from “borderline” to “normal”).

- The largest clinical improvement was on the conduct problems scale, in which 42 percent of children improved by at least one clinical category between parents' intake and discharge.
- More than one-third of the children demonstrated improvement in their total difficulties scores, improving by at least one clinical category.
- Twenty-seven percent of children's total difficulties scores were "normal" at intake, compared to 35 percent at discharge.

Overview of completed PPIs

The Parent Practices Interview (PPI) is completed by parents participating in the Incredible Years Parent Group at intake and discharge. This report summarizes the results of 48 matched PPIs (intake and discharge only) completed between March 2005 and June 2009.

Most of the parents who participated in the Parent Group were female (83%), Caucasian (89%), between the ages of 30 and 49 (72%), and married (68%). Almost half, however, (43%) were heading single parent households.

Results of the PPI

The PPI is comprised of seven domains that assess parenting in the following areas: appropriate discipline, harsh and inconsistent discipline, positive verbal discipline, monitoring, physical punishment, praise and incentives, and clear expectations. Parents' scores in each domain can also be classified as "clinical" or problematic/high-risk if above established cut-offs.

Changes in scores from intake to discharge are based on individually matched cases (n=45 to 48, depending on the subscale). The major findings from the PPI are as follows:

- Parents demonstrated significant improvement from pretest to posttest in six of seven parenting skill areas: appropriate discipline, harsh and inconsistent discipline, positive verbal discipline, praise and incentives, physical discipline, and clear expectations.
- The most significant improvement was the decline in self-reported use of harsh and inconsistent discipline between pretest and posttest; the increase in parental use of praise and incentives and positive verbal discipline was also highly significant.
- Almost one-third of parents (29%) moved out of the "clinical" range on the harsh and inconsistent discipline domain by posttest, which was highly significant; one in five parents (19%) also moved out of the clinical range in the area of physical punishment, which was significant as well.
- Although not statistically significant, between 7 percent and 19 percent of parents moved out of the "clinical" range on the remaining five domains by posttest.

Conclusions

- In general, the results of the outcome assessments suggest that children and parents are showing improvements in their social-emotional behavior and parenting skills, respectively, as a result of parents' participation in the Incredible Years parent group.
- Children demonstrated their largest gains in the area of conduct problems, while parents showed significant improvement in reduced use of harsh and inconsistent discipline.

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Information. Insight. Impact.

451 Lexington Parkway North
Saint Paul, Minnesota 55104
651-280-2700

www.wilderresearch.org



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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.

Author: Monica Idzelis

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