



Foundations for Success

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

Outcome Assessment results: Incredible Years, Wheelock ECSE 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*. This final report summarizes all findings from the outcome evaluation of Incredible Years (Dina curriculum) as implemented at Wheelock Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) over the duration of the initiative.

Overview of completed SDQs

Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaires (SDQs) are completed for children at the beginning (intake) and end (discharge) of their time in Incredible Years. A total of 148 matched pretest/posttest SDQs from Wheelock ECSE were submitted to Wilder Research. The SDQs were completed between May 2005 and June 2009.

Most of the questionnaires (85%) completed at intake were completed by teachers, while the remaining 15 percent were completed by parents. All but one of the

SDQs completed at intake were in English (99%); the remaining questionnaire was completed in Spanish. Questionnaires were completed for more males (68%) than females. Children represented varied racial/ethnic backgrounds, including: Caucasian/White (32%), Asian (24%), Hispanic (18%), African American/Black (16%), and multi-racial (10%). At the time the intake SDQ was completed, children ranged in age from 2 to 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=148). The major SDQ findings are as follows:

- Overall, children showed statistically significant improvements in four domains of behavior assessed by the SDQ (prosocial behavior, peer problems, hyperactivity, and emotional symptoms), as well as an improvement in their total difficulties score.
- The most significant gains, and largest effect sizes, occurred in the areas of peer problems and prosocial behavior.

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- Between 9 percent and 33 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 peer problems scale, in which 33 percent of children improved by at least one clinical category between intake and discharge.
- About one-quarter of the children also demonstrated improvement in their total difficulties scores, improving by at least one clinical category.
- Fifty-eight percent of children’s total difficulties scores were “normal” at intake, compared to 69 percent at discharge.
- Parents and teachers reported that fewer children had “at least minor” difficulties with emotions, concentration, behavior, or getting along with others at discharge (47%) compared to intake (54%).

Conclusions and recommendations

- In general, the results of the outcome assessments suggest that children at Wheelock ECSE are showing improvements in their social-emotional behavior as a result of their participation in Incredible Years.
- In particular, children showed considerable improvements in terms of their problems with peers. There were also significant gains in children’s prosocial behavior.

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