



Foundations for Success

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

Overview of mental health services for young children in Ramsey County June 2007

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.

In the fall of 2006, Wilder Research began working on a comprehensive assessment of early childhood mental health services in Ramsey County. The goal of the assessment was to identify the existing mental health providers working with young children, and to describe the types of services offered. To be included in the assessment, providers had to provide mental health services to children ages 0-5, and meet at least one of the following criteria: a) provide services at a Ramsey County site; b) provide in-home services to Ramsey County residents; or c) provide transportation to Ramsey County residents receiving services in other counties.

Introductory letters, explaining the Foundations for Success initiative, provider survey, and directory, were sent to a list of 353 mental health providers in Ramsey County. Thirty-seven providers returned a postcard stating they provided mental health services to children in Ramsey County and were interested in completing a telephone or online survey. Mental health providers

who participated in the 2006 survey and directory were also called by Wilder Research staff and specifically asked to participate in revised survey and directory.

The survey was completed by 23 of the 37 agencies or independent mental health providers who met the eligibility criteria, for a response rate of 62 percent.

This report summarizes the mental health services currently available to children in Ramsey County as reported by these 23 agencies. The data included in this report do not represent all early childhood mental health providers in the county.

Services provided by Ramsey County providers

- All providers (n=23) who participated in the survey offered services to children ages 0-5. However, fewer providers served infants (n=10) or toddlers (n=14).
- The most common services available for young children in Ramsey County are diagnostic assessments (n=19), family outpatient counseling (n=17), play therapy (n=16), and individual outpatient counseling (n=15).
- These services are also most prevalent in terms of program capacity. Combined, Ramsey County early childhood providers estimated that they could provide 223 children with diagnostic assessments, 194 children with play therapy, 171 families with outpatient counseling, and 161 children with outpatient counseling.

- Fewer agencies provided in-home services (n=9) or crisis stabilization (n=6), while only one provider was identified as a provider of day treatment or inpatient services for young children.
- Survey respondents had limited capacity to provide young children with inpatient services and therapeutic classrooms, available to 10 and 56 children, respectively.
- Eight respondents provide culturally-specific mental health services for young children. Multiple providers serve African-American (n=3), Latino (n=3), and Hmong (n=2) children. Culturally-specific services were also available for Native-American, gay/lesbian, and adoptive families.

Profile of clinical staff at Ramsey County mental health agencies

- While most respondents (n=14) represented mental health agencies or child-serving organizations, others identified themselves as independent mental health providers (n=5) or a representative of a group practice (n=4).
- Nearly three-quarters of the respondents (73%) have fewer than five FTE staff who work specifically with children, while three agencies have 25 or greater staff members.
- Approximately one in five respondents (18%) employed clinical staff fluent in languages other than English. Spanish, Hmong, and French were the only languages identified by providers.
- Half of the respondents (n=11) reported that “all” clinical staff have training and experience providing services to children ages 0-5, while the remaining half said that “some” had this training.

- At least three-quarters of providers identified the following areas of specialization: aggression/violence, anxiety disorders, attachment, depression, family issues, post-traumatic stress disorder, and self-regulation.

Waiting lists

- Nearly three-quarters (73%) of the survey respondents generally had a waiting list for children needing mental health services.
- Of those providers, one-third had waiting lists less than 15 days, while nearly half (46%) reported a typical wait of one month or longer. Only two of these providers reported a typical wait of over three months.

Funding sources and free services

- Most agencies accept the following types of insurance: Straight MA (91%), Blue Cross Blue Shield (91%), Medica (87%), Health Partners (82%), UCare (77%), Minnesota Health Programs, (77%), and Preferred One (64%). A few providers also identified United Behavioral Health or United Health Care.
- Over half of the respondents (55%) provide free or low-cost services to the community, especially diagnostic assessments, in-home counseling, individual or family outpatient counseling, and play therapy.

Geographic restrictions of agencies

- Less than half of the service providers (41%) have geographic restrictions in terms of whom they serve. Most agencies focused on serving Saint Paul, Ramsey County, and/or East Metro residents.

Key recommendation

- Examine how current service availability aligns with the identified mental health needs of young children in Ramsey County.

For more information

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