



## Foundations for Success

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

### Parent survey results May 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.

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 report summarizes information collected from parents of children participating in two of the five programs: Incredible Years Dina Curriculum (76%) and Beginning's Infant/Toddler Home Visiting program (24%). (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 February 2007. During this time,

54 families were selected for the interview. Thirty-three interviews were conducted, for a response rate of 61 percent. Most others could not be located. Most interviews were conducted in English, with one conducted in Hmong and another in Spanish.

#### **Satisfaction with staff and services**

##### **Program staff**

Program staff received high ratings from parents. Most (91% to 100%) felt staff were helpful, knowledgeable, respectful, caring, informative, and sensitive to cultural issues.

##### **Accessibility and ease of receiving services**

Almost all parents (91% to 100%) felt services were generally accessible, convenient, and affordable. While almost all parents rated staff and services positively, slightly fewer parents "agreed" or "strongly agreed" that it was easy to find out about the program (87%) and that staff worked with them to develop treatment goals for them and/or their child (84%).

##### **Overall satisfaction**

Parents were very satisfied with the services received. Most parents said that the services met their expectations (94%) and all parents would recommend the program to others (100%). In addition, all parents (100%) were "satisfied" or "very satisfied" with the benefits of the services received and the overall services received from the program.

## **Perceived changes in parents and children**

### **Children's behaviors**

Four out of five parents (79%) said that their child's behavior changed as a result of receiving services. The most prevalent change was improvement in their child's social skills. Many parents also observed improvements in their child's motor, speech, and/or writing skills. Other parents saw positive changes in their child's self-control and ability to make good decisions.

### **Parents' knowledge and abilities**

Although they did not receive direct services, parents also experienced positive changes since their child received services. At least three-quarters said they were able to understand their child better and were more aware of their child's positive behaviors and strengths. Most parents (85% to 88%) also knew how to find resources to help them handle problems and to make better decisions for their child. Somewhat fewer parents (72%) "agreed" or "strongly agreed" that their family life is more under control since receiving services.

### **Parent involvement in children's services**

Most parents (91% to 100%) said they communicated with staff regularly, they had the right to approve services and provide input to staff, and knew the steps to take if their child was not receiving good service. Slightly fewer parents (82%) "agreed" or "strongly agreed" that they knew about available services for their child.

### **Parent-child relationship**

Parents felt children generally have good relationships with them and their families. Almost all parents (94% to 100%) said that children generally feel comfortable with the family, seek care and comfort from parents when needed, and trust parents to care for them.

### **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 (90% to 97%) 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-third of parents (27% to 31%) 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.

Relatively few parents reported any barriers to receiving services. However, when these barriers did exist, they were often not addressed by agency staff. Only 7 of the 19 parents reporting barriers (37%) said that agency staff worked with them to address these problems. Parents identified some ways agency staff helped them, including giving suggestions on how to manage challenging behaviors, accommodating the family's needs by allowing their other children to participate, arranging for a mental health assessment for their child, and referring them to outside resources and support groups.

### **Child care and school settings**

Most parents (91%) said that their child stayed in the same child care, preschool, or kindergarten throughout the program period. More than three-quarters of parents (88%) "agreed" or "strongly agreed" that their child's current child care or school setting was appropriate for their child.

### **Appropriateness of services**

The majority of the parents (84%) felt their child received the "right amount" of service. The remaining 16 percent felt "more 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 making specific changes to the program or curriculum, such as increasing therapy sessions and having the program be year-round, as well as providing more updates and information for parents.

When asked to identify the most positive aspect of the services received, many noted the positive changes and improvements in their child's behavior, especially improved social and language/communication skills. 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, including the 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 improved social and language/communication skills.
- Parents also reported being involved in their child's services, communicating with staff, 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 emerged as 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;
  - Addressing family life issues with parents in order to enhance overall family functioning; and
  - Working with parents who encounter barriers to service to identify potential solutions, including referrals to other agencies/supports.

#### **For more information**

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MAY 2007