

# **Program Overview: Addressing Early Childhood Mental Health**

**Fall 2018**



## Introduction

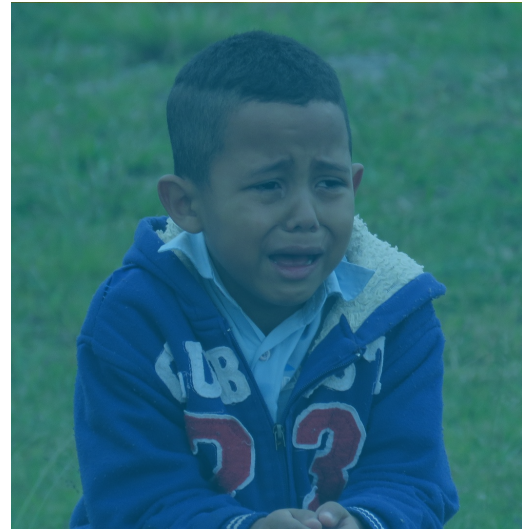
A child's first experiences outside of the immediate family have lasting effects.

Babies and young children learn to trust that the world-at-large is a supportive place to explore by developing stable, responsive relationships with early childhood caregivers. From these safe beginnings, children are able to develop the skills they need to be successful in school and throughout their lives. As a

result of these skills, children begin the process of learning to manage impulses and regulate their own behavior; identify, understand, manage, and express their emotions in appropriate ways; learn to recognize feelings and emotional cues in others; develop a sense of empathy; form trusting relationships; and cooperate and communicate with others.

Early childhood programs can play a major role in building these skills by providing mental health and behavioral supports services for young children and their families. However, insufficient training and knowledge in evidence-based practices limit the ability of Boston's early childhood education (ECE) workforce to fulfill this critical function.

This project addresses the issue through the development of a sustainable workforce capacity-building system that crosses multiple early childhood networks, such as home visiting programs; home-based, center-based, and school-based childcare providers; local preschools; and other early childhood-serving systems. The successful launch of the project in 2018-19 will ensure training for 100 ECE professionals, as well as access to much-needed services to approximately 600 of Boston's most at-risk young children and their families.



## Program Goals

Boston's GBT Youth & Family Services will lead a network of mental health service providers in the development and expansion of the Children's Mental Health Project (CMHP), an intensive professional development training program for community-based organizations and clinical partners. The CMHP has two primary goals:

- **Goal 1:** Improve workforce capacity to provide mental health services to at-risk young children and their families. Utilizing a multi-tiered system, the project will initiate training based on the Pyramid Model, a promotion, prevention, and intervention support framework that early childhood professionals can utilize in fostering young children's social and emotional development, and in preventing and addressing behavioral challenges.

Achievement of this goal will not only increase the ability of early childhood staff and programs to meet the needs of children and families, but will also result in improved changes in classroom and program climate; an increase in the number of kids who are ready for kindergarten; and a decrease in staff turnover.

*Objective:* Provide training to an estimated 100 ECE professionals.

- **Goal 2:** Increase families' access to and improve outcomes for infant and early childhood mental health services. As direct service staff in ECE settings receive training on evidence-based practices through the proposed project, it will increase families' access to much-needed services. This improved access will result in a number of outcomes for young children and their families, including improved mental health and social skills of children; reduced levels of challenging behaviors; and enhanced attachment between children and their families.

*Objectives:*

- 1) Delegate site staff to provide direct services to approximately 300 of Boston's most at-risk young children and their families;
- 2) Master cadre to provide observation and a maximum of 3 follow-ups for each child requiring Tier 3 services ( estimated at 790);
- 3) Provide referral services to approximately 300 families.

## **Program Description**

In order to improve outcomes for children who are at risk for, show early signs of, or have been diagnosed with a mental illness or emotional disturbance, CMHP will increase the capacity of the mental health clinicians and providers serving child and family through specialized training in the evidence-based *Pyramid Model*, a positive behavioral intervention support framework that target serious emotional disorders in children displaying challenging behavior.

Created by the Center for the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning (CSEFEL), the Pyramid Model was specifically designed for implementation by early educators within child care, preschool, early intervention, Head Start, and early childhood special education programs. As such, the Model incorporates evidence-based practices that include universal promotion practices for all children (Tier 1); practices for children who need targeted social-emotional supports (Tier 2); and individualized behavior support practices for children with significant social skill deficits or persistent challenging behavior (Tier 3). Participants who undergo Pyramid Model training acquire the skills and knowledge to promote socio-emotional competence, prevent emotional disruption, deal with challenging behaviors, and comprehend the value of positive, nurturing relationships on children's health, learning, and well-being.

The development of this training network also serves a second purpose by maximizing the effects of collaboration between participants. This serves to strengthen partnerships between agencies, subsequently strengthening the

infrastructure in terms of delivering coordinated services and in connecting families to appropriate resources that will help them become more competent in the social emotional of all children ages birth to five in all environments.

## **Core Elements**

The effectiveness of CMHP lies in the successful establishment of four core elements:

- *Central Pyramid Leadership Team:* CMHP will develop the criteria and identify members for this intersectoral group that will be responsible for the planning, implementation, and oversight of a sustainable network of Pyramid Model trainers, and the development of partnerships with delegate sites.
- *Master Cadre:* Working with the Central Pyramid Leadership Team, CMHP will also be responsible for the identification and development of master cadres-- professionals who receive the initial training and support in order to become Pyramid Model experts.
- *Delegate Sites:* Working with the Boston Department of Family and Support Services (DFSS), the Central Project Leadership Team and the CMHP staff will cultivate the development of partnerships with delegate sites that provide direct services to children ages 0-5. These sites will consist of organizations that are funded by DFSS and provide direct services to children ages 0 to 5.

**Evaluation Process.** In order to assess both the impact of the training provided on staff capacity and the effectiveness of the interventions subsequently provided to families by staff trained in the Pyramid Model, CMHP will hire a Lead Evaluator who will be responsible for the development and implementation of surveys and other appropriate evaluation tools throughout the project.