

Snapshot: Highlights of Workforce Development – Together for Kids MA (Targeted IECMHC Program)

Program Overview

The Together for Kids program (TFK) in Worcester, Massachusetts, is one of six regionalized grantees funded by the Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care (EEC) to provide early childhood mental health consultation (ECMHC) across the state. Through this EEC-funded initiative, TFK is charged with offering ECMHC to programs and family childcare providers located in approximately 65 cities and towns in Central Massachusetts. Since the inception of the initiative, TFK has been the grantee for Central Massachusetts.

TFK was part of **What Works? A Study of Effective Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation Programs**

(<http://gucchdtacenter.georgetown.edu/publications/ECMHCStudyReport.pdf>) as one of six consultation programs that demonstrated positive outcomes.

Staffing and Staff Qualifications

TFK has approximately 15 clinicians on staff, as well as 2 doctoral-level interns, who provide ECMHC to the designated region. TFK's partner organization Y.O.U., Inc., contributes another five clinicians. In total, 22 clinicians and clinicians-in-training provide ECMHC through TFK and its partner organization.

TFK hires only clinicians with master's degrees in social work, mental health counseling, and/or related fields. During the hiring process, the agency looks for clinicians who have their independent licenses and both training and experience in regard to young children and families; however, it is not always possible to find people with these exact qualifications. In the interview for this "snapshot," Lynn Hennigan, TFK's Director of Services for Young Children, talked about the difficulties of recruiting staff with both training and skills in the wide-ranging areas of competence that make for a ready-from-day-one ECMH consultant. As a result, TFK has both a set of *ideal* qualities it seeks in candidates for jobs involving ECMHC and a set of *bottom line* requirements for new hires.

Requirements for new hires:

- ◆ A master's-level degree in social work, mental health counseling, and/or a related field
- ◆ Experience working with children (note, however, that some hires come directly from a master's-level program and may only have internship-related experience)

Ideal attributes and training:

- ◆ Independent license (for example, LICSW)
- ◆ Experience working with young children and families



- ◆ Experience working in and/or consulting with early childhood education or school-based settings
- ◆ Previous experience offering ECMHC
- ◆ Training in Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health (IECMH) and/or IECMH consultation (IECMHC)

Orientation

New hires go through an orientation that lasts for approximately two weeks and includes the following:

- ◆ An overview of the agency structure, functioning, and purpose; agency-wide policies; and expectations (e.g., record-keeping, accountability, scope of work, ethical conduct).
- ◆ Time to explore print and Web-based materials related to early childhood development, early childhood education, social and emotional development, and ECMHC. In particular, clinicians are asked to familiarize themselves with these four resources:
 1. The Center for Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation’s “Best Practice Tutorials” (http://www.ecmhc.org/materials_consultants.html)
 2. The Center for the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning (CSEFEL)’s website and extensive Web-based materials (<http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/>)
 3. The Committee for Children’s “Second Step” materials (<http://www.cfchildren.org/second-step>), which are available onsite at TFK’s central location and are used in many Central Massachusetts early care and education (ECE) settings to support young children’s social and emotional development and well-being
 4. Marcia Garcia Winner’s “Social Thinking” curricula (e.g., *The Incredible Flexible You*) (<https://www.socialthinking.com/>)
- ◆ Time to begin reading two IECMHC-related texts provided by the agency to each new hire: *Mental Health Consultation in Child Care: Transforming Relationships Among Directors, Staff, and Families* (Charles Brinamen and Kadija Johnston, 2006) and *Collaborative Intervention in Early Childhood: Consulting with Parents and Teachers of 3- to 7-Year-Olds* (Deborah Hirschland, 2008).
- ◆ Ample opportunities for the new hire to shadow one of TFK’s experienced clinicians during consultative work (e.g., observing children; meeting and collaborating with ECE staff and/or families; consulting with supervisors or administrators).
- ◆ Initial meetings with the new hire’s clinical supervisor.



Supervision

- ◆ All clinicians engage in clinical supervision for one hour per week.
- ◆ All clinicians attend a weekly clinical team meeting, which includes case discussion and thematic exploration and/or training.
- ◆ There are ample opportunities for extra supervision and/or team-based consultation in urgent, complex, or crisis situations or as needed.
- ◆ New hires are encouraged to seek extra supervision or guidance as needed during and after the initial orientation.

Training

Throughout the year, training is offered regularly (though not on a set schedule) to TFK and Y.O.U., Inc., staff. Training topics range widely and might include, for example:

- ◆ Principles of consultation
- ◆ Confidentiality and ethics
- ◆ Cultural and class-related sensitivity and competence
- ◆ Infant and toddler developmental and educational needs
- ◆ Typical and atypical development in the preschool years
- ◆ Sensory issues, autism spectrum disorders, and other developmental vulnerabilities
- ◆ Interventions in support of relationship-building and attachment
- ◆ Assessing and supporting the development of children's play skills
- ◆ Classroom intervention philosophies (e.g., CSEFEL, Pyramid Model, Second Step)
- ◆ Classroom-related behavior management, communication, structure and routines, teamwork, and administrative support
- ◆ Family assessment and intervention
- ◆ Understanding and helping with grief, depression, and anxiety in both children and caretakers
- ◆ Caretaker neglect and its impact on development, attachment, and early character formation



- ◆ Domestic violence and physical abuse; common forms of conflict or aggression vs. abuse-reactive behavior
- ◆ The impact of addiction on families, and recovery resources for all family members
- ◆ An integrated health-mental health care philosophy
- ◆ Overview of child, family, and state services: entitlements, Department of Mental Health, Department of Children and Families, Department of Developmental Services, Department of Youth Services, 766 services
- ◆ Court system and process for children and families (e.g., probate, juvenile, housing)
- ◆ Child advocacy and provider collaboration

Note that during the “What Works” study and for a significant period thereafter, TFK received funding from the Health Foundation of Central Massachusetts to offer an in-depth (32-hour) seminar on IECMHC to all new hires. That funding is no longer available, and the seminar is not currently offered. The Director of Services for Young Children at TFK hopes to re-institute a similar training as soon as comparable funding can be accessed, and/or to collaborate with other program directors in the state to offer such training on a regionalized statewide level.

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