

Smart Support

Arizona's Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation System

Year 1: Summary of First Findings

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OVERVIEW

Smart Support, Arizona's early childhood mental health consultation system came about through FTF's commitment to the success of Arizona's youngest citizens. And that commitment has been rewarded! Analyses of the first year's data indicate that after 6 months of mental health consultation services, preschool teachers and child care providers report greater confidence in their abilities and a deeper understanding of children's social-emotional development. They also conduct their classrooms with significantly greater emotional sensitivity overall than before receiving consultation. These impressive beginnings support mental health consultation as an effective strategy with child care teachers in Arizona as they work to support children's social and emotional development.

OUTCOMES

The number of participants in *Smart Support's* services from April 2010-May 2011 include:

- 199 child care centers,
- 14 licensed family child care providers, and
- 305 teachers.

Given that positive change reverberates throughout a system, it is estimated that 9,007 children have been impacted so far by *Smart Support* consultation services. *Smart Support* provided intensive weekly services by highly qualified, masters-level consultants. Most visits to child care centers lasted 2 hours. Participants demonstrated statistically significant improvements on the following key outcomes:

- **Teacher's perceptions**- teacher's perceptions of the risk of expulsion for children with challenging behaviors decreased
- **Classroom emotional climate** –teachers increased their capacity to stay emotionally connected even in the presence of strong negative emotions from children and paid more attention to children's emotions overall
- **Staff interaction and cooperation** – teachers were more supportive of each other and more aligned in managing classroom activities, sharing responsibilities
- **Teachers' "self efficacy"** - more confidence in their ability to respond to children and deal effectively with conflicts
- **Teacher-child relationships** - closeness increased and conflict decreased
- **Knowledge of social-emotional development** - A high percentage of teachers reported gains in their general understanding of teaching strategies that meet the social and emotional needs of children in their care.

These preliminary findings are important because they support the national research that demonstrates a link between children's social and emotional development and school readiness (Bowman, Donovan, & Burns, 2000).

First Things First Funded Regions

North Phoenix
South Phoenix
Central Phoenix
NE Maricopa
NW Maricopa
SE Maricopa
Central Maricopa
Pinal
North Pima
Central Pima
Gila
Yuma
Yavapai

Funding Professional Development only
Mohave/ La Paz

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The administrative home for *Smart Support* is Southwest Human Development, which subcontracts with 5 other agencies throughout the state to help recruit and supervise mental health consultants. These agencies include: *Easter Seals Blake Foundation*, *Prevent Child Abuse Arizona*, *Child and Family Resources*, *Scottsdale Healthcare*, and *Scottsdale Unified School District*.