

The Child First program is a vital service for the youngest and most vulnerable children in our State serving 1000 children birth through 5 years old each year. There is currently insufficient capacity to meet the needs of our communities and the recommendation to reduce DCF funding to Child First sites in 2016 and 2017 is a poor choice and short-sighted. I must emphasize that intervening when children are very young is effective and a proven strategy to prevent serious struggles later. Those struggles carry a large economic cost. This program improves the health and well being of both parents and children, including decreasing child mental health problem and maternal depression, improves child development and decreases the need for DCF involvement. Child FIRST children were A) 5.1 times less likely to have aggressive and defiant behaviors and B) 4.3 times less likely to have language problems; C) families were 5.7 times less likely to be involved with DCF; D) mothers receiving intervention evidenced reductions in mental health symptoms, E) falling average levels of maternal depressive symptoms into the normal range.

The program initiated in Bridgeport CT and has expanded throughout the State. We provide a two-generational approach intervening in their home with intensive support and care coordination. The Clinician and Care Coordinator supports the caregiver to promote strong families and healthy child development. Other States are requesting information and looking to expand this vital early childhood service-- This program has shifted the trajectory for these vulnerable children. CT must not take steps back in caring for our youngest children.

Clifford Beers Clinic has been providing Child First services since 2009 in the New Haven community. We have met parents with significant chronic stress and trauma. These parents are taking steps forward to buffer their young children from the stress in their environment and build healthy relationships. Below is a summary of one our recent families:

*Alex \* a four year old little boy was being asked to leave his preschool for extreme behaviors several days a week. Three different Birth to Three evaluations, a comprehensive medical and psychological exam, and occupational therapy, along with constant consultation with the Social worker did not reduce the problematic behaviors that Alex experienced both at home and in school. The family was referred to the Child First team by the school social worker when an expulsion looked like the only viable option. Child First met with Alex and his mother and father weekly for seven months. In that time the team was able to work closely with the family to find a new school that better suited Alex. The team attended planning meetings with the new classroom teacher to support the transition. Linking Alex's mother to community supports became the team's next focus. Support groups, applications for sliding scale recreational programs, and places to address concrete needs such as food pantries were provided to the family. Upon reflection Alex's mother shared that she felt much warmer feelings towards Alex and far less stress in her everyday life now that he is no longer failing in preschool. She expressed gratitude towards the team for helping connect her to her own treatment, helping introduce her to the need for her to be "bigger, stronger, wiser, and kind", and helping support her family by connecting them with the resources to address their concrete needs. During our last Child first session, Alex's mother smiled and asked Alex, "now that you have graduated Child First what are we going to do?" Alex looked at her with excitement and stated "Play!" Alex's mother walked the team to the door and shared that she feels a new sense of confidence and success as a mother.*

*She now sees how her own feelings of confidence as a parent support Alex's healthy development and success as learner.*

I am asking that you restore the level of funding for the Child First program in the Governor's proposed DCF budget for FY 2016 and FY 2017. Our children deserve more.

Thank you,  
Christine Montgomery

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