

To Whom It May Concern:

Early childhood programs have experienced an increasing need for mental health support services. Lack of social services/mental health consultants were cited as a primary cause of preschool expulsions. The research, presented by Walter Gilliam from the Zigler Center at Yale, came to national attention about six years ago. State-funded programs generally have more resources available than private programs. Even then, agencies such as Clifford Beers cannot handle the caseload. There are very few therapeutic educational settings for children diagnosed with acute developmental delays or children who are deeply emotionally disturbed.

Our program had children with acute issues the past few years. Initially consultants from the School Readiness Multidisciplinary Team observed these children, and validated the need for intervention. The Early Childhood Consultation Partnership (ECCP) provided teachers with individual/environmental strategies to work with children. ECCP also worked with families, and in some cases, made home visits. ECCP deserves commendation as some of children/families benefitted greatly from their support. Our social service consultant, college faculty working pro bono, a licensed/practicing psychologist, also completed evaluations when requested, and made recommendations to program staff and families.

The program encouraged two families to enroll in Child First, a grant-funded program at Clifford Beers that works with the child and the family. There was a time lapse in parents booking appointments to apply, and while eventually the sessions started, our program could not handle their children during the wait. The 211 hotline for emergency intervention (Clifford Beers) was utilized. Ultimately we worked with the families to set up a PPT (planning/placement) meeting with the public schools. The outcome was outplacements for these children, where they could receive individual support in an educational setting. The successful outcome (outplacement) was due to the strong advocates present at the PPT. (agencies and consultants aforementioned), and careful documentation. The process took over six months. That is too long in the life of a child and family needing help. The classes and program were profoundly affected, as program staff worked very hard with the children until they received the help they needed.

Our program is fortunate that we have resources such as the School Readiness Multidisciplinary Team, Clifford Beers, ECCP, and a skilled social service consultant. Most programs do not, and the result is expulsion. The mental health issues disappear under the radar, until there is a tragedy as our state recently experienced. The program struggled to help these children, even with these resources. Preschools need these supports in order to identify mental health issues, and facilitate appropriate interventions.

Sincerely,
Marge Weiner, Director
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The Early Learning Center