



center for
CHILDREN & YOUTH
JUSTICE

News from Supporting Early Connections

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Dear Friend,

For almost three years, I have had the honor to coordinate the work of the SEC Team, a group of dedicated professionals who work together to implement the program and address the social-emotional needs of vulnerable babies in South King County.

The SEC Team meets monthly to develop policies and procedures, problem-solve and exchange information and resources. We have also undergone considerable training - ranging from brain science to the legal and ethical duties of each system partner. Together, we've developed a shared understanding of infant development, resolved differences and, in some cases, agreed to disagree.

Like all relationships, collaboration takes dedication and a willingness to consider other points of view. This can be challenging, especially when dealing with decisions that affect the safety and well-being of babies exposed to abuse or neglect. But time and again, I have been impressed by the partners' commitment to SEC, and their willingness to challenge how we think about what infants and toddlers need from us. Together, we have improved the climate in which dependency court cases are resolved for very young children.

The SEC Team will be the ambassadors of this work as we expand SEC to serve all of King County. If you'd like to learn more about our work, just ask one of our partners - or feel free to contact me at kwarner-king@ccyj.org.

In partnership,

Kelly

What SEC Has Meant to Me

Hon. Richard Gallaher, Dependency Commissioner

When the King County Superior Court joined the collaboration with CCYJ and its other partners to implement the Supporting Early Connections pilot project, I didn't know what to expect. I had been exposed to Dr. Sheri Hill's presentations, and I've always been interested in brain science as it affects children of all ages. Through Model Courts, I was also familiar with the Florida Infant Mental Health project and other initiatives aimed at focusing on infants' development while in out-of-home care.

I knew that the goals of the SEC project were to provide early intervention for infants, toddlers and parents; to support parent engagement; to improve our understanding of the needs of very young children; and to develop collaboration between project partners. I didn't know the degree to which the project would result in a personal consciousness-shift in at least two areas:

- The training I received has ingrained young children's relationships in my thought process when making decisions about placement and visitation.
- The collaboration between partners in the legal, social work and mental health fields has been enlightening.

What I *hoped* to see from this project was that the parents who got involved in relationship therapy with their young children would be highly motivated to engage in other aspects of their services. Early results indicate that this has happened with most participants, and that fathers involved in the program have been encouraged to maintain their relationships with their children. Looking at the goals from the court's perspective, it appeared that the engagement goal was one that could lead to a greater success rate for early reunification.

That's fine for the parents, but I didn't anticipate that the knowledge I gained from training in infants' relationship needs would lead to a greater focus on how those relationships are affected by each decision I make for the child--from initial placement, to visitation, to potential changes in placement or visitation or trying to motivate parents to engage and complete services quickly. The information provided in SEC therapists' reports also increased my awareness of how the parent-child relationship affected the overall well-being of the babies and toddlers.

Also, the collaboration between professionals in SEC has been amazing. Dr. Hill emphasizes that infant mental health is all about relationships, but that it is not *only* the infant's relationships that make the difference. It was very interesting to observe the process of professionals from different disciplines learning to communicate with each other, sincerely motivated to understand each others' languages, mental processes and ethical limitations. The project could not have been done without that goal having been met. Even the collaboration between attorneys from different "sides" was essential to the ability to get parents involved with their children in this way.

From my point of view, Supporting Early Connections has met its goals, but the degree to which the project personally impacted me was surprising.

Developing a Deeper Understanding

On November 5th, 2010, a multi-disciplinary group of over 40 professionals gathered at the Green River Community College to learn more about Child-Parent Psychotherapy (CPP), the evidence-based treatment provided to SEC clients. Dr. JoAnne Solchany, Infant Mental Health Nurse and SEC Project Consultant, presented on the components of CPP and the goals of relationship-based treatment, complete with videos and case examples. Over lunch, Dr. Sheri Hill, Infant Mental Health Policy Specialist and SEC Project Consultant, provided a guide to early intervention services for babies and toddlers in King County. The training was co-sponsored by the Center for Children & Youth Justice and the University of Washington's Court Improvement Training Academy.

During the afternoon, child welfare social workers from the King South DCFS Office and Navos' Infant Mental Health staff participated in a facilitated discussion about collaboration. The group explored commonalities across disciplines, identified elements of successful partnerships, and generated ideas for resolving conflict.

Expanding Our Reach to North King County

The Center for Children & Youth Justice has been generously awarded a \$25,000 grant by King County United Way to begin expanding the Supporting Early Connections project to serve all of King County. Funding will be used to convene a multi-disciplinary planning team, develop an expansion plan and provide initial infant mental health training to stakeholders in the Seattle dependency court. Preliminary plans include a cross-system training on early childhood brain science, relationships and the impact of maltreatment on very young children in June 2011.

If you'd like more information about this effort, please contact Kelly Warner-King, CCYJ Mental Health Projects Coordinator, at 206-696-7503, ext. 19. or kwarnar-king@ccyj.org.

Quote of the Month

"Very young children develop within the context of their primary relationships...Since first relationships are primary, we must take a relational approach to case planning for infants and toddlers, by helping parents learn how to have a reciprocal loving relationship with their child. Since first relationships are primary, we must not allow multiple placements of infants and toddlers and find more permanent placements sooner. Since first relationships are primary, we must reframe visitation. Visitation should be a therapeutic opportunity to promote, enhance, and shape the bond between parent and child and not just a 'right' of the parent to spend time with the child."

Healthy Beginnings, Healthy Futures. A Judge's Guide, 2009, pg.v.

Resources You Can Use

For Caregivers: Free Resources for Improving Social Emotional Outcomes for Young Children

Technical Assistance Center on Social Emotional Interventions (TACSEI) takes the research that shows which practices improve the social-emotional outcomes for young children with, or at risk for, delays or disabilities and creates free products and resources to help decision-makers, caregivers, and service providers apply these best practices in the work they do every day. Available at: <http://www.challengingbehavior.org/>

For Advocates: Courts and Young Children- ABA Brief

The American Bar Association (ABA)'s Health of Court - Involved Infants, Toddlers, and Preschools project recently released "Advocating for Very Young Children in Dependency Proceedings: The Hallmarks of Effective, Ethical Representation" by Candice Maze, JD. The policy brief explains how attorneys representing very young children can profoundly influence the health, development, and well-being of their clients through advocacy. It sets out four hallmarks of advocacy to enhance effectiveness of representation and strengthen an attorney's ability to handle ethical dilemmas. The brief is available online: <http://new.abanet.org/child/Pages/baby-health.aspx>. Hard copies are also available at no charge.

For Policy Makers: Promoting Social Emotional Outcomes and School Readiness: A Model

The Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning (CSEFEL) is focused on

promoting the social emotional development and school readiness of young children birth to age 5. CSEFEL developed the Pyramid Model for Supporting Social Emotional Competence in Infants and Young Children. CSEFEL offers extensive, user-friendly training materials, videos, and print resources which are available directly from their website to help early care, health and education providers implement this model. Available at: <http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/>

For Policy Makers: Policies that Support Young Children- NCCP Brief

The National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP) has published a new paper entitled "Addressing the Mental Health Needs of Young Children in the Child Welfare System: What Every Policymaker Should Know" (2010), by Janice L. Cooper, Patti Banghart, and Yumiko Aratani. The brief explores what is currently known about the prevalence of young children (ages birth to 5) in the child welfare system, how maltreatment or neglect affects their development, and the services currently offered versus needed for these children. To learn more, go to http://www.nccp.org/publications/pub_968.html. This brief is also available at the King County Law Library.

You Can Keep Babies Healthy

It is easy to agree babies need to be kept safe and have loving, supportive relationships with those around them. You know this is true, and you are familiar with the research and proof supporting these statements. You can make a difference in the lives of the infants and their families by making a commitment to support the innovative work of SEC. Join your fellow community members and show your support today by making a contribution. Click here to donate; put "SEC" in the "In Honor of" box. Thank you for your dedication to healthy babies and families.

SEC Featured Agency for Infants and Toddlers

Children Encouraged by Relationships In Secure Homes (CHERISH) Infant Mental Health Program at Kindering



SEC works with babies and biological parents. We often refer foster parents and kinship providers raising babies and toddlers to Kindering. Kindering provides free infant mental health services designed to meet the needs of foster children and their foster parents or relative caregivers through the CHERISH program.

CHERISH supports both child and caregiver as they discover each other and journey through the child welfare system by providing support for such issues as:

- Forming secure relationships after change and loss
- Challenging behaviors
- Visitation with birth families
- Working through the experience of abuse and neglect

Depending on the needs of the foster or relative family, licensed social workers offer in-home

therapy services and/or caregiver support groups. Foster children must reside within King County to be eligible for CHERISH services and be under age 3 when referred. Anyone can refer a foster child.

Please contact Julie Fisher, LICSW, at 425-747-4004 Ext. 4314; or email at julie.fisher@kinding.org. [Click here](#) to visit the CHERISH website.

Courts and Infant Mental Health - Ideas from Other Communities

SEC's work has been informed by other model programs around the country.

For example, Michigan has a statewide court-community model with a strong infant mental health focus. Therapists undergo a rigorous certification process with the Michigan Association for Infant Mental Health, and then provide comprehensive developmental assessments and recommendations to the court.

Another model is ZERO TO THREE's Court Teams for Maltreated Infants and Toddlers, in which judges and community coordinators partner to address the needs of young children. The main focus of this model is accessing developmental and behavioral services for infants and toddlers. ZERO TO THREE has established programs in a number of states, including Iowa, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas.

While each approach is different, we are all working to improve outcomes for infants and toddlers.

For more information on the Michigan model, see the Michigan Association for Infant Mental Health's 2008 publication "Courts, Child Welfare and Infant Mental Health: Improving Outcomes for Abused/Neglected Infants and Toddlers." The publication can be purchased [here](#). It is also available in the King County Law Library. For more information on the Zero to Three model, click [here](#).

STUART FOUNDATION

SEC is made possible by a grant from the Stuart Foundation.

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