

# Healthy Social Emotional Development and Family Support Program

## Year 2 Annual Update

### OVERVIEW

The Healthy Social Emotional Development and Family Support (SED) Program is a unique collaboration between Meridian Behavioral Healthcare, Inc. (MBHCI), Partnership for Strong Families, Inc. (PSF) and the Child Advocacy Center (CAC), using the strengths of each individual organization to enhance early childhood learning experiences, strengthen families and improve outcomes for children ages 0-5, along with their siblings of any age. MBHCI is the lead agency for the program, providing program oversight.



### Program Services and Population Served



**Meridian Behavioral Healthcare** provides two Mental Health Consultants who offer services to families and to early learning center staff. Two tiers of services are offered. Tier 1 consists of classroom observation using evidence-informed practices and behavioral management strategies, relationship building, and improvement of social-emotional skills. Tier 2 includes all of Tier 1 plus more intensive behavioral services in school and/or home. All family members can be referred to other Meridian services as needed.

#### Since the start of our program:

- **126 children ages 0-5** have received Behavioral and/or Mental Health Consultation services. (Year 1=76, Year 2=50)
- **52 early learning staff** received coaching/support related to effective management of classroom behaviors (Year 1=34 staff, Year 2= 18 staff)



**Partnership for Strong Families** has expanded their Resource Center Model to provide two Early Childhood Family Support Facilitators who meet with families where they are, both in terms of location and readiness to engage in services. Program participants are provided a range of family support services. They also receive the benefit of the robust array of services available at PSF's network of **Resource Centers in Gainesville**, which are strengthened by more than **75 community partners**. All services and supports at the Resources Centers and through the SED program are provided at no charge to patrons and are connected to one of five protective factors, which when present in families, have been shown to reduce the likelihood of abuse and neglect.

#### Since the start of our program:

- **332 individuals from 110 families** (120 caregivers, 151 children ages 0-5, 61 children ages 6+) benefited from family support services
- **70 families** were served in Year 1, and **76 families** were served in Year 2



The **Child Advocacy Center** hosts trainings for early learning center staff and parents, including Child Abuse Reporting and Prevention and the "No Hit Zone" to promote safe and calm learning environments. The CAC also provides expertise related to treating children who have experienced trauma, and acts as a referral source for families as needed.

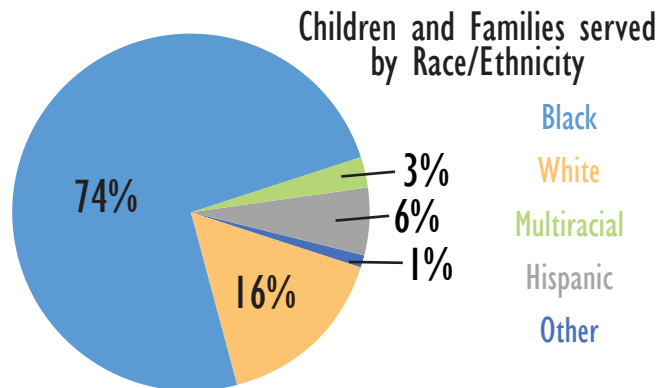
#### Since the start of our program:

- **4/5 Early Learning Centers** participated in Child Abuse Reporting and Preventing Child Abuse in Child Care Settings, including information about Adverse Childhood Experiences.
- **76 early learning staff** received the training.

## TARGET POPULATION

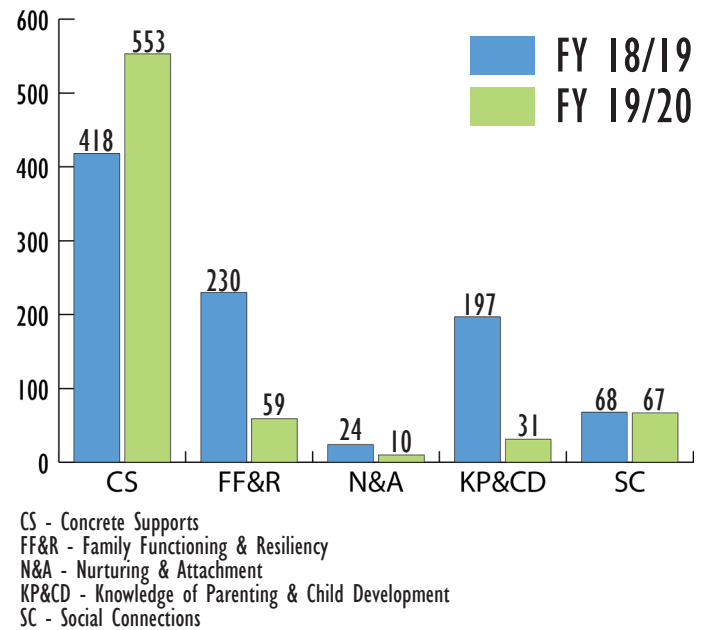
The five participating early learning centers are strategically located within historically under-served communities.

1. Small World Daycare and Learning Center (32601)
2. Cuddly Kids Academy (32601)
3. Angel's Christian Academy (32641)
4. Oak Tree Learning Academy (32609)
5. Lee's Preschool (Alachua, 32614)



## Services Provided by Protective Factor

Services divided by Year 1 and Year 2, with 1,657 unique services provided.



## How Well? Our Quality of Care

The SED program is supported by a wealth of knowledge and experience through MBHCI, PSF and CAC, all of which are widely recognized for the quality of their programs.

- MBHCI has served the community since 1972 with vast service offerings to promote health, recovery, and well-being for those with mental health and substance abuse needs. Their use of office, community, and telehealth based appointments allows them to provide services to meet the needs of all.
- PSF's nationally-recognized network of Resource Centers provide family-strengthening services that help keep children out of foster care. They are currently supported by a five-year federal grant from the Children's Bureau to rigorously evaluate and expand the Resource Center Model.
- The Child Advocacy Center has been working for over 20 years to improve outcomes for children in our community that have experienced trauma and maltreatment. In January 2020, the Child Advocacy Center completed the purchase of their new building, ensuring the CAC has roots in the community and a child friendly place for children and their families to heal from trauma.

The **collaboration** among our three agencies is strong. Meetings occur monthly along with ELC and TPD. This has resulted in increased collaboration, joint trainings for Early Learning Centers and cross-referrals.

### Quicks Facts

- 0 participants have been expelled/suspended due to classroom behaviors.
- 100% (n=110) of participants were linked to services.
- Staff spent a combined total of 2,801 hours with program participants.
- 100% of early learning staff agreed SED program staff were available when needed.
- Other groups have requested Child Abuse Reporting and Prevention of Child Abuse in child care settings.

"I would recommend these services to others. The services my child received was helpful during the participation in this program. My child communicates needs more clearly. I can better understand my child's speech when she talks... My child can now formulate sentences when communicating instead of two and three word phrases. **I can see a big improvement in my child since beginning the program.**"

- Parent of a student participant

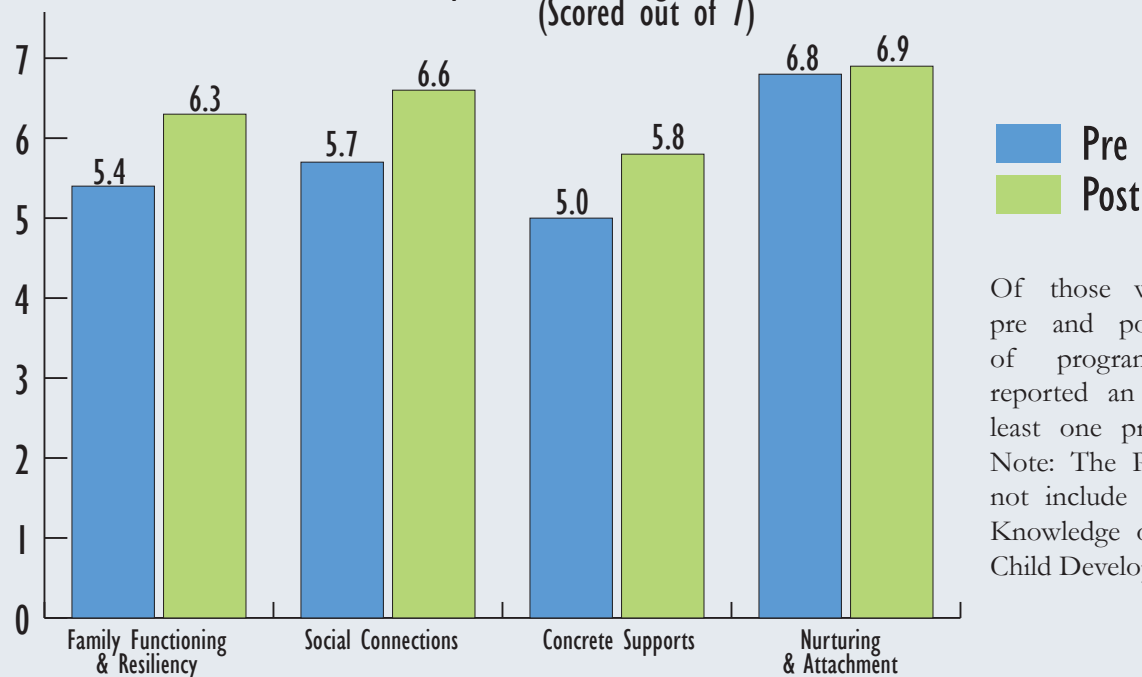


"The SED program is a blessing to parents by talking to them one-on-one and providing supports."  
- Early Learning Center Director

Our teams are committed to a process of continuous quality improvement. As we move into our third year of the SED Program, we will enhance our existing evaluation methods. In addition to the current tools, Meridian will begin utilizing the Ages and Stages 3 and the Ages and Stages Social Emotional Questionnaire, and an enhanced survey tool for teachers, parents and site directors. PSF will begin to document SMART goals for families, measuring the success of goal attainment with parent input. Parents/guardians who have received family support services will also be asked to complete a post-service survey to help identify program strengths and potential areas for improvement.

# Impact of Services

**Protective Factor Survey Results**  
Comparison of Average Sub-Scale Scores  
(Scored out of 7)



Overall child functioning has been “Better” over time for 85% of the children who participated in mental health consultative services, as measured by the CFARS. This result has been consistent over the past two years. The Children’s Functional Assessment Rating Scale (CFARS) is a measure that evaluates a child’s baseline level of functioning as well as outcomes following treatment over time.

## Problem Behaviors Addressed

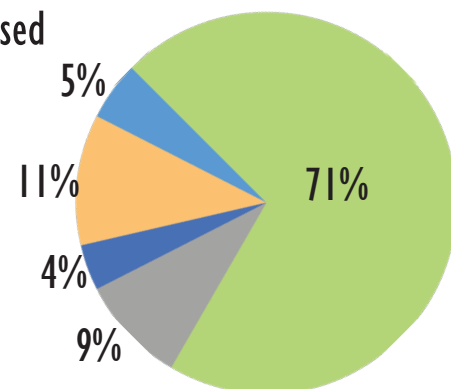
Social Concerns

ADHD Concerns

Academic/Educational Problem

Language Disorder

Adjustment Disorder



## Success Stories

A pregnant mother and her two children were experiencing homelessness and unemployment. She actively engaged in the SED program with the immediate goal of finding affordable housing. With the assistance of the Early Childhood Family Support Facilitator (ECFSF), she was able to move into an apartment, complete the Library Partnership Resource Center’s Fight for Your Money financial literacy program and receive concrete supports including diapers, clothing and a pack-n-play. Due to this mother’s diligence, she was eventually able to find full-time employment. The children (both under age 4) were also struggling to adjust at their early learning center that resulted in the mother being called on multiple occasions. With the support of the mental health consultant, the children quickly began to adjust, managing classroom transitions better and reducing instances of crying.

A relative caregiver was seeking assistance due to struggles she and her grandchildren were experiencing after the children disclosed past abuse. The mental health consultant and the ECFSF met with the grandmother together to complete an individualized plan to identify the children’s needs. In addition to on-site observations and consultation by the mental health consultant and receipt of needed concrete supports, the girls were also referred for trauma counseling at the Child Advocacy Center. The grandmother has since stated the girls are now “thriving” both at home and at the early learning center.

A mother who had only recently found employment as a housekeeper was laid-off from her job during the pandemic. The ECFSF worked with mom to develop a resume that highlighted her strengths and regularly provided mom with job vacancies listed with CareerSource. The mother took the initiative to follow these leads and she found full-time employment, making more money than she was as a housekeeper.



# Impacts of COVID-19

The effects of the global COVID-19 pandemic have made an impact not only on the SED program, but on each of the three agencies involved in the program. Despite some setbacks, our team was able to quickly adapt our services to benefit families who needed them during this unprecedented time.

- SED staff were able to quickly implement telehealth and/or safe in-person services to provide supports for families at home, also allowing for much needed personal contacts (social connections).
- 120 family friendly outreach packets were distributed consisting of fun at-home activities and resources to support social and emotional development, encourage family-time and promote self-care.
- All SED families also benefited from PSF Resource Center supports, including but not limited to regular food distribution days in partnership with Bread of the Mighty and Gainesville Harvest, grab-n-go lunches provided by the School Board of Alachua County, family-style meals donated by the Working Food Group along with a number of local restaurants, and access to emergency food pantries and other concrete supports. Families may also participate with upcoming, virtual events including employability and financial literacy programs, among others.
- On-site outreach continued helping to meet the changing needs of those families impacted by the virus.
- Staff were able to quickly shift to providing emergency assistance related to COVID impact, allowing families to experience increased stability in the most basic of areas including food insecurity, job instability and health concerns.
- Moving forward, the CAC will be providing regular virtual training options for the early learning centers, so that there can be “drop in” options for ANY early learning staff that is able to participate.
- Virtual outreach and family engagement opportunities are also being developed for the coming months.



## Barriers

- Many of the Early Learning Centers were closed for several months, making service provision and obtaining teacher and parent surveys very difficult.
- Once centers started opening, there were significantly reduced child numbers.
- Since opening, there have intermittent closures due to COVID exposure.
- CAC trainings were nearly halted due to the effects of the pandemic.

