

Building Blocks:

A Glimpse of Our First Year

Healthy Children,
Strong Families,
Integrated Communities



April, 2007



What is Building Blocks?

Strengthening a village to raise a child

New London County was awarded \$9.5 million by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration (SAMHSA). Building Blocks is one of seven early childhood system of care communities across the nation funded by SAMHSA in 2005. Through the support of the Department of Children and Families and the Southeast Mental Health System of Care, Building Blocks has successfully completed our first year of providing services and supports to families with young children facing mental health challenges. Our success is owed greatly to the collaborative partnership of community members who share an integrated vision to support the comprehensive needs families have in raising healthy children, the dedicated and committed staff, and most importantly to the families who have demonstrated the courage to advocate for themselves and their children. For Building Blocks is an honor and a privilege to work alongside families and community partners dedicated to improving the lives of families and children.

The Building Blocks Staff



Building Blocks is an early childhood system of care that connects families with effective services and supports to promote social and emotional wellness for children under six in Southeastern Connecticut. As a free community-based program, Building Blocks uses a wraparound approach that brings a network of supports together around the needs of the family.

Early Childhood System of Care is a coordinated network of families, community partners and providers working together to meet the comprehensive needs of families with young children facing social and emotional challenges. As part of the Southeast Mental Health System of Care, Building Blocks focuses on ensuring that the services and supports available to families with children under six are child-centered, family-driven, culturally competent, community-based and youth guided.

Comprehensive In-Home Services are provided by an Early Childhood Mental Health Partner (a master's level clinician) and a Family Partner (peer mentor) to support the needs and goals of the family. Collaboratively, the team provides information, guidance, emotional and practical support, care coordination as well as clinical interventions directly to families in their homes and in the community. Services and supports available to families are free and voluntary.

Workforce Development efforts focus on increasing awareness and knowledge around early childhood mental health for family members, community partners, medical and mental health practitioners. By doing so, Building Blocks is strengthening the workforce to better serve the needs of families with children that have social and emotional challenges.

Social and Emotional Wellness for All Children

Strong Healthy Families

Building Blocks works together with family members, friends, neighbors, pediatricians, teachers and community providers to support a happy and healthy family. Building Blocks participants are primarily low-income single parents. Our families have typically experienced numerous adverse life situations placing them at higher risk including an inability to meet basic needs, exposure to trauma such as domestic violence, homelessness, substance abuse, and teen parenting.

"I was a frazzled single mom with a child with challenging behaviors. She had language and cognitive delays and would throw explosive temper tantrums... The Building Blocks Team came to my home and worked with us. The Family Partner was great for listening and helping me to problem solve. The clinician helped me to come up with strategies to minimize troubling behaviors." - Parent

Figure 1: Percent of Family Members At, Near, or Below Poverty Level

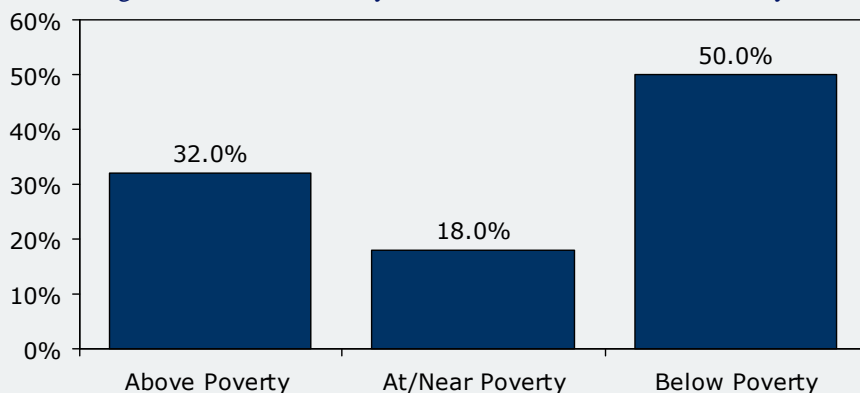


Table 1: Child History

Has the child ever . . .

Been physically abused? (n = 48)	6.3%
Been sexually abused? (n = 46)	0.0%
Run away? (n = 51)	9.8%
Had substance abuse problems? (n = 50)	2.0%
Ever talked about attempting suicide? (n = 51)	2.0%
Witnessed domestic violence? (n = 51)	49.0%
Lived with someone who was depressed? (n = 51)	68.6%
Lived with someone who had a mental illness (other than depression)? (n = 49)	42.9%
Lived with someone who was convicted of a crime? (n = 49)	46.9%
Lived with someone who had a substance abuse problem? (n = 49)	42.9%

"I found a supportive net, a cohesive team of professionals that are truly committed to the principle of "the earlier the better," a supportive team that understood my son's and family's unique needs. The program has exceeded my expectations in all areas. As a result, in Building Blocks, families play a vital role in early intervention services and strategies, through proactive involvement and participation my son continues to make tangible progress both at school and at home. I have also received indispensable emotional and moral support to guide me through the challenges any mother with a special needs child must endure to help her son." - Parent

Traumatic Events Screening Inventory (n=51)

Mean Number of Traumatic Events 2.96 (SD=2.35) MIN: 0 MAX: 9

Most Frequent Type of Event Reported

Witness or heard physical assault	36% (18)
Been separated from caregiver	35% (18)
Witness or heard family member being threatened with physical harm	30% (15)
Known or seen a family member arrested/taken away	22% (11)
Experienced severe illness of someone close to him/her	22% (11)
Undergone a period where child lacked appropriate care (being left alone, lacking shelter...)	14% (7)
Other: unspecified	52% (26)



Program Impact

As one of the SAMHSA funded communities, Building Blocks is required to participate in a national evaluation that includes the collection of descriptive information for all families enrolled in the system of care and the collection of outcome data every 6-months for 3-years from families who elect to participate in a longitudinal outcome study. This summary contains information from evaluation conducted by The Consultation Center at Yale University.

Characteristics of Children Served During the First Year

Within our first year, 65 children and their families enrolled in Building Blocks services. See Table 3 for children's characteristics.

Other notable characteristics of the children and families served in our first year include:

- ◆ More than half (68%) of children and families are living at or below the poverty level,
- ◆ Almost half (43%) of Building Blocks' children are in the custody of the biological mother only and one-third (35%) are in the custody of two parents,
- ◆ Nearly half (49%) have witnessed domestic violence,
- ◆ More than half (68%) live with someone who is depressed and 42.9% lived with someone with a mental illness,
- ◆ Nearly half (46.9%) lived with someone convicted of a crime,
- ◆ About 42% lived with someone with a substance abuse problem.

When considering the impact of their social and emotional challenges, children presented the following:

- ◆ One quarter (25%) had been expelled or suspended from school in the 6-months prior to enrollment in Building Blocks.
- ◆ During the 6-months prior to enrollment, the children experienced serious levels of problem behaviors
- ◆ Slightly more than one-third of children had been exposed to at least one traumatic event in their lifetime.

After 6 months of services, families reported significant improvements including:

- ◆ A reduction in caregiver strain
- ◆ A reduction in maternal alcohol use
- ◆ A reduction in child problem behaviors
 - ◆ An increase in the child's ability to socialize with others
 - ◆ An increase in the child's competencies
 - ◆ An increase in the child's ability to use self control



Table 3: Child Characteristics

Demographics

Gender (n = 65)

Male	72.3%
Female	29.7%

Average Age at Intake (n = 65)

Average Age	3.9 years
-------------	-----------

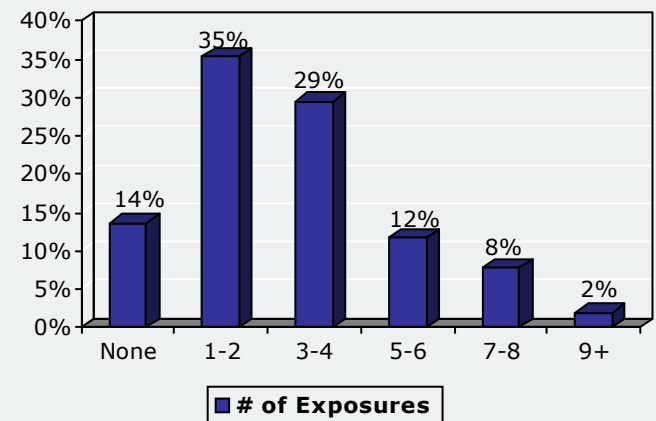
Age Group (n = 65)

1 Year	7.7%
2 Years	20.0%
3 Years	21.5%
4 Years	32.3%
5 Years	18.5%

Race/Ethnicity (n = 65)

American Indian or Alaska Native	0.0%
Asian	0.0%
Black or African-American	16.9%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	0.0%
White	53.9%
Hispanic/Latino	21.5%
Multi-racial	10.7%
Other	6.2%

Figure 2: Child Exposure to Traumatic Events



Stay Tuned. . .

Future reports will reveal how children and families are impacted by Building Blocks over time including child and family functioning after services have ended, the types of services families are receiving, and any identified barriers that families may experience as a result of trying to access services.

Building Awareness and Strengthening Knowledge

One of the goals of Building Blocks is to increase the awareness and knowledge of parents, childcare providers, and medical providers working with children under six through a comprehensive infant and early childhood mental health training structure.

The Workforce Development Plan was created with six goals with a planned outcome to ensure that families, providers, and the medical community have the knowledge, practice and experience to identify and meet the social and emotional needs of children under six.

Family and provider development was strengthened by implementing the Social Emotional Wellness for Young Children Curriculum. From September 2006-September 2007, Building Blocks staff, families, and community partners attended approximately 58 different trainings, 26 of which were sponsored or co-sponsored by Building Blocks. Partners include: Birth to Three, Child and Family Agency, Connecticut Association for Infant Mental Health, Department of Children and Families, Families United for Children's Mental Health, LEARN, The Consultation Center, State Police, United Community and Family Services, Zero to Three, professors from local colleges, local schools, local businesses, and presenters from other states. More than 600 participants, including parents and family members, youth, community partners and providers, participated in Building Blocks training events this past year.



The social and emotional wellness of a child is shaped by secure relationships with his or her primary caregivers in nurturing environments. Social and emotional wellness in a child under six is reflected through healthy attachments and the ability to confidently explore, regulate and express emotions in natural settings. Infant and early childhood mental health is healthy social and emotional development.

- ◆ Six qualified and trained clinicians specializing in early childhood mental health are in the process of completing a Training of Trainers program through Zero to Three for the DC: 0-3R.
- ◆ In partnership with The State Education Resource Center (SERC) and Birth to Three, Building Blocks will be hosting three trainings focusing on early childhood mental health.
- ◆ Connecticut Association for Infant Mental Health, The Child Health and Development Institute, Child FIRST and Building Blocks is planning an Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Conference for April 2009.
- ◆ Statewide discussions continue on how to successfully bring an infant and early childhood mental health endorsement or credential to Connecticut.

Upcoming events can be found on www.BuildingBlocksCT.org

Strengthening an integrated early childhood community

As an early childhood system of care, Building Blocks' vision is to connect families with effective services and supports to promote social and emotional wellness for children under six in Southeastern Connecticut. As a free community-based program, Building Blocks utilizes a wraparound approach that brings supports together around the needs of the family. Building Blocks aims to support New London County in our efforts to ensure all children, starting with our youngest, reach their full potential based on this integrated vision.

Family members and community partners are the key components to strengthening and building an integrated community. In an effort to comprehensively meet the needs of our youngest children, we have successfully brought together a collaborative of community partners who share the same goal and vision for healthy children and strong families. This initiative is only as successful as the diversity of partners that we have been able to bring to the table, these include: family members, family organizations and our advocates, early care and education programs, homeless shelters, transitional homes, domestic abuse shelters, local hospitals and school systems, community health centers, the housing authority, nurturing programs, faith based organizations, youth bureaus, early childhood collaboratives, as well as a host of other community agencies, foundations and institutes.



In partnership with:

families United for Children's Mental Health
Department of Children & Families
Yale Consultation Center
United Community & Family Services
Child & Family Agency
Eat Smart Grow Healthy
LEARN

