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The goal of *First Steps to Success in Etobicoke* is to strengthen the capacity of the system to intervene early and prevent the development of mental health challenges in vulnerable infants. Enhancing the skills of service providers in a variety of settings, including child care centres and community-based family services, will help to build a workforce that more effectively provides social and emotional support for infants and reduces their risk of future mental health challenges.

This project is supported by the Provincial System Support Program (PSSP) at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health. Visit [www.camh.ca/pssp](http://www.camh.ca/pssp) to learn more.

SUCCESS  
MIDPOINT  
BRIEF

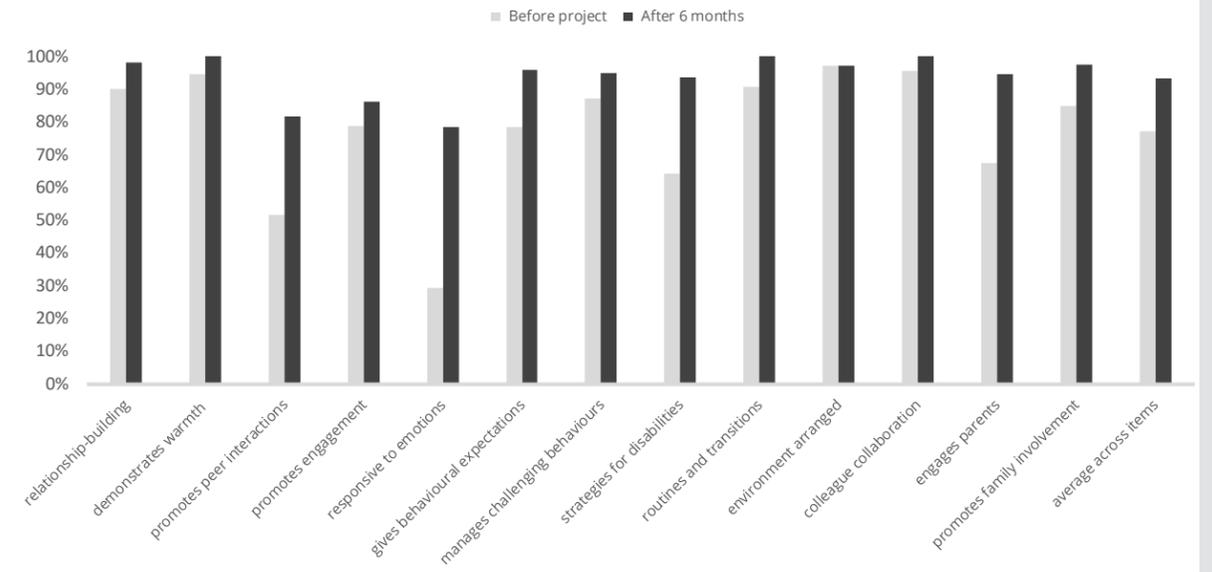
**OUR 1-YEAR PILOT HIT ITS HALFWAY POINT IN OCTOBER 2018. THIS REPORT SUMMARIZES WHAT WE'VE LEARNED.**

# CONFIDENT

Through a series of one-on-one interviews, site leads (the people directly applying what they've learned about children's social-emotional development) spoke about how much they value the relationship with their coach (the person helping them put their new skills into practice). Even though the role of the coach is to support staff, not evaluate them, being observed by a new person can still be an awkward experience. What site leads appreciated was their coach's openness, her warmth, and her strength-based, non-judgmental approach to giving feedback. Through this collaborative relationship, the coach has built staff confidence. By pointing out opportunities to foster social-emotional competence in infants and toddlers, providing important resources, and sharing new perspectives, coaches have helped site leads better understand how their behaviours help children grow in positive ways.



[Click to play video](#)



**The Teaching Pyramid Infant-Toddler Observation Scale (TPITOS) is a tool we're using to assess how staff are able to put their new skills into practice, and how their behaviours change over time. Site leads were observed before the project began, again at the midpoint, and will be assessed one last time after the pilot is over. As you can see up in that graph, average scores increased in every category! In particular, site leads really improved their ability to promote positive interactions between children and to respond to children's emotions in meaningful ways.**

As a result of the project, site leads are incorporating new activities into their programs that weren't happening before. Despite some challenges finding enough time to actively work on all of their goals, staff have still been able to change how they work – like talking more to infants during routine interactions to build emotional connection, and staying closer to the toddlers in order to foster better interactions between them. Many have spoken about the impact that learning about the 'serve and return' has had on their capacity to create nurturing relationships with the children in their care.

“Now we're talking to parents about ways that they can discuss these things with their children ... I feel more confident explaining this information to them.”  
- Site Lead

“Being excited about it ourselves and bringing that enthusiasm to parents to get them involved. I think that’s a major component.”  
-Site Lead

”

One common thread that came up repeatedly was how this project has brought to life many of the things staff were already doing. As human beings our behaviours tend to fall into a routine of familiar patterns, but First Steps to Success has made staff more self-aware and more intentional about the ways they interact with children. The project’s training workshops and coaching relationships have helped site leads “dust off the cobwebs” and enhance their skills.

Taking that energy, that excitement, and applying it to their relationships with families is how the real change happens. Site leads are thinking outside of the box to help parents feel more engaged and more interested in understanding how important these first years are.

An indirect benefit of the project has been the social-emotional well-being of the site leads themselves. They expressed having become more reflective not just about how their emotional expression affects children, but about their own feelings. Insightfully, one remarked that while you can never be too old to have emotional needs, as adults we tend to push those down. Their new learning is helping them to recognize the physiological signs of their emotions, pause, and breathe.

From the perspective of the site managers involved in the project, they appreciate knowing that the approaches their staff are taking are based in scientific evidence, not just habit. They’ve really seen the value of an external coach coming in to inspire new thinking. In order to maintain their focus, some agencies are even devoting one day per week to really dive into the social-emotional strategies they’ve developed!



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**If you choose to implement this project at your agency, know that other staff will get curious and ask to receive the same professional development opportunities!**

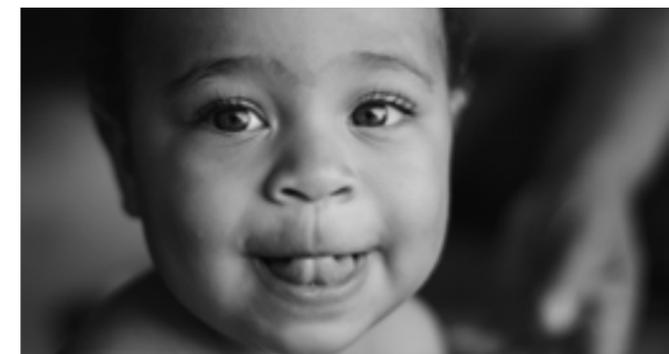
Something articulated by both site leads and managers is how the information about social-emotional wellness is spreading throughout their agency despite only one person receiving coaching. This will only become more important as children begin moving on to other classrooms or programs within the agency and will benefit from consistent staff approaches based on their emotional needs.

Because site leads have the benefit of their coaching relationship, they understand how that mentorship works and many are acting like a “junior version” of that with their peers. They’ve explained to other staff what their goals are and how they’re achieving them.

As a result, there’s been a ripple effect of knowledge sharing. Other staff in the agencies are asking questions about the new social-emotional strategies the site leads are using. What managers are seeing is that other staff are picking up on it and informally trying out new skills themselves.

“They’re jumping in because they see what’s going on. They see that it’s not as intimidating as they thought it would be. And they’re doing it!” – Leadership

# EXCITED





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### “BEING ABLE TO SHARE IDEAS WITH EACH OTHER”

- Site managers see the value of agencies working together

Community is what First Steps to Success is all about. City childcares and programs supporting children and families have come together to pursue a shared goal. As part of a focus group evaluating the project, agency leaders spoke to how integrating these different perspectives has led to a rich source of knowledge-sharing between sites. Hearing from others about what's working well and what's challenging has helped with problem-solving and contributed to the work becoming more aligned.

It is also these strong community partnerships that have made the coaching role possible. A neutral person coming in from an external organization creates a different feeling for site leads than if their own supervisor was providing that coaching. It also helps staff connect their work to the larger context of services across Etobicoke.

With a commitment from everybody who's been working together thus far, the project will be able to grow in new and exciting ways.

# CONNECTED

### “IT MADE ME ASK HER MORE QUESTIONS, MADE ME UNDERSTAND HER CHILD A BIT MORE”

- Site leads are using their new skills to build trust with families and improve communication about their home life

## FAMILIES ARE BUSY. BUT IF WE FIND THE TIME TO HAVE THESE IMPORTANT CONVERSATIONS, IT CAN HAVE REAL BENEFIT.

How do you help families improve their relationship with their children without making them feel judged? That was the question our site leads had to answer this year.

Starting from a place of openness, staff have built trust by exploring what families need, understanding their situation, and valuing them as important members of the learning team. Supporting families to recognize all of the good things they're already doing has helped create an ongoing conversation. It's from this foundation that site leads have been able to work with parents to shift their thinking and adjust some of their behavioural patterns.

For example, some parents may assume infants only cry because of their physical needs but through this project they've become more aware of the social-emotional reasons this happens. As a result, they're better able to meet their child's needs. Some of the tangible resources staff have shared with families include information sheets and handouts to build their social-emotional language. They're also taking photos of parents playing with their children and posting them around the room to draw attention to the positive behaviours families are already engaged in.

When it comes to families who have experienced trauma, improving the ability of site leads to work from a trauma-informed lens will be an important consideration moving forward. As a result of this project, they're thinking more about the effects of trauma than ever before and they've acknowledged the need for more training. Knowing specific strategies to use to engage parents from this lens and how to support them through those vulnerable conversations would be helpful.

DIGITAL VERSION AVAILABLE AT [IMPROVINGSYSTEMS.CA](http://IMPROVINGSYSTEMS.CA)

TOOLS FOR SUCCESS  
MIDPOINT  
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Prepared by  
Provincial System Support  
Program, CAMH

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