

# FIRST STEPS TO SUCCESS IN ETOBICOKE

*First Steps to Success in Etobicoke* was a pilot project that aimed to strengthen the skills of local service providers, to build a workforce that more effectively provides social-emotional support for infants and toddlers to reduce their risk of future mental health challenges. Our final report describes the intervention selected for the *First Steps to Success in Etobicoke* pilot project, our implementation process, the impact of the project, and the lessons we learned.

Healthy social-emotional development in young children refers to a range of skills including self-regulation, empathy, confidence, and prosocial behaviour. Problems that interfere with this development can result in the onset of challenging behaviours in infants and toddlers that have lasting negative consequences and interfere with social adjustment.<sup>1</sup> The Pyramid Model for Supporting Social Emotional Competence in Infants and Young Children (Pyramid Model) is an evidence-based framework designed to increase the ability of early childhood educators and professionals to foster healthy social-emotional development.

*First Steps to Success in Etobicoke* piloted the implementation of the Pyramid Model at eight sites, including City of Toronto childcares, women's shelter services, community mental health and addiction, settlement services, and a community resource hub. With the inclusion of unconventional settings outside of childcare, the pilot project was experimental in its scope and the cross-sectoral partnerships that were created. A few of our key findings:

- Fidelity of staff practices to the model increased from 78% to 91%, demonstrating a 13% increase during the pilot project. Skills related to responding to the emotions of young children and teaching them about feelings increased dramatically from 29% at baseline to 75% by the end of the project.
- Site leads reported that their practices improved based on the training and coaching. They used simpler language with the children, were more mindful of infants' emotions, and used more materials with children and families. The project gave them more strategies to incorporate their knowledge into practice. Coaches gave them the specific language and skills needed to feel more confident in their ability to interact with infants and support their social-emotional development.
- While the intent of the evaluation was not to explore the impact on children, the infants and toddlers appeared to show improvement in their emotion regulation in how they were calmer, more resilient, and less aggressive. The children were more aware of their emotions and better understood why they were experiencing the emotion. Children also became more attentive and curious about the emotions of their peers.
- *First Steps to Success in Etobicoke* encouraged new and stronger collaboration between community partners. It brought a range service providers in the community onto the same page, delivering the same tools and messages to families about the importance of social-emotional development.

We recommend professional capacity-building to support the promotion of social-emotional development in any setting where professionals regularly interact with infants and toddlers. Implementing and sustaining the Pyramid Model requires a clear investment from the system in the human resources needed for coaching, fidelity assessment, and coordination. Aligning with existing provincial priorities and leveraging system players already doing similar work by reframing their roles can help maximize efficiency and impact.

# CONTACT

**Thank you to the site leads, coaches, and agency leaders from the following partners, whose dedication to this project is what made it a success:**

- Albion Early Learning and Child Care Centre
- Delta Family Resource Centre
- Ernestine's Women's Shelter
- Humber College Child Development Centre
- The Jean Tweed Centre
- Kipling Early Learning and Child Care Centre
- Rexdale Women's Centre
- Rowntree Early Learning and Child Care Centre
- Toronto Public Health
- Toronto Children's Services

The results of this pilot project and continued interest from participants has led to a scale-out called *First Steps to Success Toronto*. Childcare centres will continue to receive coaching from Resource Consultants provided by Toronto Children's Services and Humber College.

If you have questions about the pilot project or the scale-out, please contact:

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1. Fox, L., Hemmeter, M., Snyder, P., Perez Binder, D., & Clarke, S. (2011). Coaching early childhood special educators to implement a comprehensive model for promoting young children's social competence. *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education*, 31 (3), 178-192.