Striving to thrive: A grant proposal for mental health services for children ages zero to five

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Introduction

According to the U.S. Census, in 2010, there were more than 20 million children ages 5 years and younger living in the United States (Howden & Meyer, 2011).

In the first 5 years of life, children are at risk for developing mental health issues (Osofsky & Lieberman, 2011).

These infant mental health complexities can have lasting adverse effects and increase a child's risk for future behavioral problems (Hemmi, Wolke, & Schneider, 2011).

By identifying infant mental health challenges early on, the behaviors can be addressed through the implementation of early childhood interventions such as mental health services (Bolten, 2013).

The overarching goal of this program is to enhance the social and emotional well being of children in the first 5 years of life.

This will be accomplished through implementation of early childhood mental health strategies and interventions.
The NASW Code of Ethics emphasizes that the primary goal of social workers is to serve. The ethical value of service propels social workers to “help people in need and to address social problems” (NASW, 2008, para. 19). Through the implementation of mental health services for the early childhood population, social workers can provide specialized services to children who exhibit maladaptive behaviors and symptoms of mental illness.

Another value of the social work profession is interpersonal relationships. “Social workers seek to strengthen relationships among people in a purposeful effort to promote, restore, maintain, and enhance the well being of individuals, families, social groups, organizations, and communities” (NASW, 2008, para. 22). A key aspect of early childhood is the relationship between parent and child. Through the use of interventions such as parent-child psychotherapy, social workers can enhance the relationship between the child and parent.
In Los Angeles County, the population is composed primarily of 47.7% Hispanic or Latino, 8.3% African American, 13.5% Asian American, and 27.8% Non-Hispanic White (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013). Each of these minority groups, African American, Latino, and Asian American, have perceptions of mental health services that shape how that population utilizes services.

Among the Latino population, barriers to mental health services include stigma associated with mental health services, fear surrounding legal concerns, and cultural miscommunication (Rastogi, Massey-Hastings, & Wieling, 2012). When providing mental health services to the Latino population, it is important to conduct sessions in Spanish and implement strategies that respect Latino values. This includes respecting the role of the father, the importance of family, and the value of relationships (Barker, Cook, & Borrego, 2010).

In a study by Thompson et al. (2013), ambivalent, positive, and negative perceptions of mental health services were found among 32 African American families who received mental health services. Among these families, the majority had positive experiences while receiving mental health services which impacted their perceptions, positive expectations, and motivation to seek out mental health services.

Mental health services are underutilized by the Asian American community which could be attributed to the mind and body approach valued by Asian Americans as well as language barriers (Jacob, Gray, & Johnson, 2013).

The Early Childhood Mental Health Program will provide services to ethnically diverse children which include but are not limited to: Caucasian, Hispanic, African American, and Asian.

Due to the large Hispanic population in the San Gabriel Valley, the program will offer bilingual services in English and Spanish. It is important for the proposed program to implement mental health strategies that will incorporate culturally competent interventions.
Methods

Sources Used for the Needs Assessment

- Information regarding the needs of the population was gathered from reviewing peer-reviewed journal articles, relevant reference materials, literature from government sources, U.S. Census Data, and discussions with current mental health professionals at Foothill Family Service.

Program Budget

- The total amount requested for the program is $255,000. The program budget includes: four full time MSW mental health clinicians, office equipment, supervision hours, office space and supplies, mileage, materials for session, and staff training.
Methods

- **Target Population**
  - The target population for this program is children 5 years of age and younger and the caregiver(s) of those children.
  - Children who qualify for these services must exhibit, or be at risk for developing, challenging mental health behaviors which impair them from functioning according to developmental expectations and do not qualify for the host agency’s current mental health program due to lack of Medicaid insurance.
  - All children included reside in the San Gabriel Valley, a community located in Los Angeles County.

- **Strategies Used in Selecting a Funding Source**
  - Various sources were used to identify a potential funding source for this program including: Internet searches and accessing The Foundation Center Database located at the Pasadena Public Library.
  - The grant writer narrowed the potential funders by comparing the program’s budget, goals, and target population to each foundation’s interests and grant proposal requirements. The grant writer also narrowed the search to foundations that had previously funded projects at the host agency.

- **Funding Source**
  - After reviewing potential funders, The Ahmanson Foundation was selected because the grant requirements were consistent with the program’s budget, goals, and target population.
Program Summary

- The overarching goal of the Early Childhood Mental Health Program is to enhance the social and emotional well-being of children in the first 5 years of life. This will be accomplished by the application of mental health strategies specific to early childhood. These strategies include: play therapy techniques, parent-child psychotherapy, and the Positive Parenting Program.

- The Early Childhood Mental Health Program aims to provide specialized mental health services through weekly, 60 minutes sessions with parent and child.

- The program will aim to serve 60 families with children under the age of 5 years living in the San Gabriel Valley.

- Case management services will also be offered simultaneously to families who are receiving mental health services.

- The program staff will focus on building a secure attachment and positive interactions between parent and child to foster social emotional development.
Grant proposal

Program Objectives

- To increase positive interactions between parent and child among 60 families in the San Gabriel Valley.
- To increase parent awareness of their child’s social emotional development among 60 families in the San Gabriel Valley.
- To increase access to community resources.
- To decrease maladaptive behaviors among 60 children ages 5 years and younger.

Program Evaluation

- The program will be evaluated through a pre and post test survey which will be distributed at intake and termination to evaluate the child’s behavior and caregiver’s current techniques to manage the behavior.
- The clinicians will observe and document the parent and child interactions and any changes in overall behavior throughout the course of treatment.
- A survey will also be distributed to parents and staff at the end of the program to evaluate the program’s outcomes and satisfaction of services rendered.
Lessons Learned & Implications for Social Work

- Locating a Funding Source
  - The grant writer began her search for a funding source by conducting online searches. This proved to be a difficult task as many online grant databases require subscriptions and independent foundations often fund small amounts. The grant writer was able to utilize The Foundation Center at the Pasadena Public Library which was free of cost, well organized, and provided comprehensive information about the potential funders.

- Developing a Budget
  - Due to lack of knowledge of costs for salary, benefits, training, and other general operating expenses, the grant writer was challenged in developing a budget. Reviewing other program budget assisted the grant writer in determining sufficient costs and salaries for the program.

- Implications for Social Work Practice
  - Understanding the grant writing process is a valuable skill within the field of social work. Programs that provide services for underserved populations are often funded by grants. These grants are highly competitive and are difficult for programs to secure. Hence, the knowledge of the application process is vital for a grant writer as it improves the likelihood that a program will receive the funds to continue to assist a program in serving families.
References


Hemmi, M.H., Wolke, D., & Schneider, S. (2011). Associations between problems with crying, sleeping and/or feeding in infancy and long-term behavioural outcomes in childhood: A meta-analysis. Archives of Disease in Childhood, 96(7), 622-629. doi:10.1136/adc.2010.191313


