



2022-2023 Grant Finalist Summary

Families First | Infant Mental Health

The Organization

For over three decades, Families First has been providing a hand up to families so they can find their way back to self-sufficiency and provide safe, loving homes for children. Their services are directed toward family strengthening, health, behavioral health, and housing. Many of the 51,000 children and family members served through their prevention and early intervention services have returned to being contributing, self-sustaining members of the community – saving taxpayers millions of dollars in dependency and criminal justice services, special education, homeless services, and financial aid.

The Program

The Infant Mental Health Program will work in collaboration with the Palm Beach County School District's Head Start Initiative. A licensed clinician will work with six elementary schools. All of these schools are Title 1 and in at-risk communities. The clinician will be in the classroom to observe children ages three to five, to identify any children exhibiting behavior that would be indicative of trauma, neglect or abuse. In addition to the clinician, this program will involve a registered intern as well as local graduate students pursuing their master's degree in social work, providing them with real-life experience needed to have successful careers in serving the community. Following the structured classroom observations, the clinician would meet with the teacher and parents to discuss a treatment plan. Treatment is tailored to a families' needs receiving a minimum of therapeutic weekly home, school or clinic visits to ensure they make progress in providing safe, stable, and nurturing environments for their children. This program utilizes a trauma-informed approach by partnering with other professionals involved with the family. The goal of the program is to heal trauma, keep children out of child welfare, repair the parent/child relationship, increase safety in the home/classroom, and stop the intergenerational cycle of abuse, neglect, and/or violence.

How will this program impact Palm Beach County?

Infant Mental Health is the developing capacity of the child from birth to five to experience, regulate, and express emotions; form close and secure interpersonal relationships; and explore and master the environment and learn all in the context of family, community, and cultural expectations for young children. By age five, the child's brain has nearly grown to 90% of their adult brain. Decades of research show that children's early experiences play a critical role in brain development. Persistent "toxic stress" such as extreme poverty, abuse, neglect, or severe maternal depression can have devastating effects on the developing brain, leading to problems in learning, behavioral, physical, and mental health. The target population is approximately 475 children and families served in Belle Glade, Lake Worth, West Palm Beach and Riviera Beach. 100% of the children are from low income and at-risk families. Approximately 45 children will be identified as needing behavioral/mental health services as indicated by a licensed clinicians' general classroom observation and ongoing monitoring in the classroom.

Measurable Outcomes

- 80% of the children will not be at risk of further abuse and neglect by increasing the safety and security of the parent/child relationship as measured by clinical observations.
- 80% of the families will increase safety and security within the parent/child relationship or classroom relationships so the child will return to a normal developmental trajectory, as measured by clinical observations.
- 80% of children identified as having developmental delays will receive services to address their overall developmental trajectory.

How will Impact Palm Beaches grant be used?

The grant will be used to pay for a full time Licensed Therapist (67,542), a part time Licensed Therapist (19,783), and training, travel and other miscellaneous expenses for staff (12,675).