

**Primary Prevention and Early Investment Proposal**  
Presentation to the Child Abuse Prevention and Permanency Advisory Council  
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A significant body of research (e.g., on family formation, child development, and economic well-being) has shown that early investments – in prenatal and health care, in high quality affordable early learning programs, in family support and education programs, in helping communities support families in their role as children's first and most important teachers – yield tremendous financial and social benefits. Likewise, what the research shows is that parents are more than teachers; they are their child's primary family support professional. National studies have shown savings up to \$17 for every \$1 invested in early education and care for young children. In Florida, Brevard Cares has shown that for the amount it takes to serve one child in child welfare (especially foster care); it could serve 10 children in diversion programs or possibly as many as 100 children with universal primary prevention programs.

With this well-documented and researched evidence, it is clear that the best way to prevent the devastating impact of child abuse is to prevent the abuse from occurring in the first place. This can happen only through comprehensive prevention efforts including supporting parents, strengthening families, and creating strong communities.

Multiple task forces, multiple agencies and organizations and current state and federal funds provided via contracts with Florida's Community Based Care lead agencies focus on intervening so that child abuse does not re-occur. Additionally the state is developing plans for providing diversion services so that many children can be served at home safely and not removed from the family and placed into shelter or foster care after the call to the hotline. While this is certainly important and billions of dollars are being invested in this area, Florida's prevention plan should take a broader, big-picture approach to child abuse prevention with a specific focus on preventing abuse before it ever occurs. It is in this area that Florida's children, families and communities need a voice.

Through the Governor's Child Abuse Prevention and Permanency Council, Florida has the opportunity to frame a proactive primary prevention and early intervention strategy to promote child well-being holistically through such avenues as high quality, affordable health care and early learning programs, family support and education investments, and helping communities support children and families. Recommended guiding principles for the Council's work are:

- Be proactive vs. reactive.
- Adopt a long term view and high return on investment in human and fiscal resources.
- Ensure that plans and courses of action are data driven and evidence based.

By taking a more proactive and holistic approach, the work of the Council will be able to connect and partner with other sectors and projects that affect the health and well-being of young children, maximizing all of our efforts in Florida. Early engagement of the public, community leaders, the private sector and elected officials is crucial for laying the groundwork for success.

### ***Primary Prevention and Early Investments Framework***

A number of states and some forward-thinking communities have made significant progress in promoting the health and well-being of young children and their families in recent years. These states ‘began with the end in mind’ and developed a results-oriented framework and strategic roadmap for improving the lives of children and their families. Consequently, there has been measurable progress toward the goals they have set for their states. Among other benefits, a framework for primary prevention and early investments in Florida could:

- Serve as the tool to guide decision-making by Florida’s Children and Youth Cabinet;
- Enable the Governor’s Child Abuse Prevention and Permanency Advisory Council to work on its priorities more effectively as they would be in the context of broader work;
- Allow the Council to better coordinate with other councils, commissions, and advisory bodies to improve child health and well-being;
- Better facilitate cross-agency, cross-community and cross-partner collaboration;
- Create a vehicle for system reform that better serves the needs of young children, their families, and their communities.

Developing a framework would help the Council with its work in the following ways:

- Identify, in broad, strategic terms, the context in which state and local agencies and communities can pursue their own specific missions and priority goals;
- Provide a clear and common basis for action that allows local and state stakeholders to effectively collaborate, coordinate and integrate efforts for young children;
- Make planning, policy and program development, and resource allocation more rational;
- Shift the focus from compliance with rules and processes to how children are doing, whether community programs and institutions are actually preparing them for a productive adulthood, and whether the neighborhood feels safer;<sup>1</sup>
- Facilitate agreement among stakeholders;
- Promote the ability to track progress; and
- Help funders more clearly and realistically connect investments to outcomes.
- Provide opportunities for long term cost savings.

In collaboration with state partners, The Policy Group for Florida’s Families and Children developed *The Florida Vision: A State that Promotes the Well-Being of All of its Children* (Ghazvini & Foster, 2003). This research-based report provides a foundation for improving child well-being using strategies that lead to these outcomes:

- Healthy children;
  - Prenatal care
  - Physical health
  - Appropriate child development
  - Social, emotional and mental health
  - Access to health insurance
  - Affordable and accessible health care and medical homes
- Children safe in their families and communities
  - Free from harm, family violence and abuse
  - Crime free
- Children ready to learn and succeed in school;
  - High quality early learning programs
  - Support for family, friend and neighbor caregivers
- Stable and nurturing families;
  - Parent knowledge and skill building

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<sup>1</sup> Pathways Mapping Initiative, 2008. Retrieved from [www.pathwaystooutcomes.org](http://www.pathwaystooutcomes.org)

- Promoting adoption as primary prevention
- Economically self-sufficient families;
  - Living wages
  - Educated parents and workforce
  - Adequate housing
- Supportive communities
  - Family friendly workplaces
  - Family friendly neighborhoods
  - Community involvement

Over the next 18 months, the AWI Office of Early Learning, the DOE Office of Early Learning and the DCF Child Care Licensing Office are taking a leadership role in developing an *Early Childhood Framework for the Future of Florida's Children*. This work along with recent work by a variety of state agencies and working groups could lead to the development of a proposed child well-being framework which would serve as a good starting point for the work of both the Council and the Children and Youth Cabinet. When goals related to these areas are achieved, research has documented that communities will gain and recognize significant benefits, including:

- Decreased health care costs
- Increased school achievement
- Reduced grade repetition
- Lower crime rates, safer streets
- Minimized gang violence
- More productive teens, jobs instead of jail cells
- Improved graduation rates
- Less strain on already overburdened law enforcement officers
- Greater potential for higher-wage jobs - break the poverty cycle
- Decreased jail populations
- Saved money

States that have successfully developed frameworks for young children have followed similar steps, such as:

- Agree to goals and desired outcomes
- Prioritize indicators of child and family well being
- Determine evidence-based strategies that already exist
- Identify those that are needed to produce desired changes
- Determine existing and needed resources to support the strategies
- Develop a work plan and timeline
- Work together to implement plan

***Focus on Parenting Education and Support as a Primary Prevention Strategy Using Early Education and Care as an Opportunity to Reach Parents and Children***

The research literature and recommendations from Council members in earlier meetings underscore the importance of early investments in young children. From the perspective of the Council, places that serve young children pose prime opportunities for assisting parents in becoming positive and nurturing parents and productive employees. Both of these help build parents' ability to cope, their social connections and knowledge of parenting and child development, build the social and emotional competence of their children and offer concrete support in times of need. These "protective factors" help reduce child abuse and neglect (Center for the Study of Social Policies, n.d.).

Infant and toddler care providers are uniquely positioned to recognize and respond to families' needs for information and support. The Center for the Study of Social Policy (n.d.), examined how early childhood programs help prevent child abuse and neglect, and found that such programs, with their daily contact with families and children, have ample opportunity to help build protective factors that can reduce the likelihood that a family will experience child maltreatment.

Providers have greater success when they are able to recognize and respond to the range of family issues that impact young children's development (Seibel, Gillespie & Temple, 2008). Some early childhood programs, understanding these multiple issues, have added family support professionals.

### ***Upskilling Professionals who work with Parents and Families around Parenting and Parent-Child Issues***

Each year, countless families seek and are assisted by professionals who help them with such things as child support, adoption, economic self-sufficiency assistance, child care, health care, marriage counseling, child abuse prevention and intervention, mental health, elder care services, etc. They could be employed by the Agency for Workforce Innovation, Department of Children and Families, Department of Education, Department of Health, Department of Juvenile Justice, and many other state agencies. They could be employed by child welfare, early education and care providers, community health and mental health providers and many other service industries. Regardless of their employers, they strive to help parents and families improve their current situations and plan for future successes.

Parents are primarily responsible for their children's health and well-being; therefore families need to be strengthened so that child can prosper (Bowman, 2003). Parents not only need information, they also need opportunities for empowerment and to also find rewarding work and a supportive social life; all components of a healthy self-image (Salisbury & Dunst, 1997).

Thus, the state should seek a means for enabling workers, regardless of their employers and service delivery systems to competently and consistently provide to families, high quality services, resources, and information based upon the latest family development research and evidence-based practices. This should be done by making available to them, evidence-based curricula and programs, delivered by staff qualified to deliver these programs. These evidenced based programs, curricula and interventions should be proven to support and improve parenting skills, parent child bonding and parent child relationships.

Redlands Christian Migrant Association has been providing training to family service workers in conjunction with two community colleges in Florida. This curriculum was developed at Cornell and may well inform and serve as one avenue for upskilling professionals that work with parents and families in Florida. Its applicability for use across the variety of service systems that work with parents would have to be assessed. Additionally, the Council has explored the potential for piloting Triple P (Positive Parenting Program), an evidence based program geared to enable professionals to assist parents with specific behavioral questions concerning their children. This too is an avenue that could be assessed further for Florida.

In terms of the early education and care focus, the Center for the Study of Social Policy (n.d.) found that merging family support with early childhood programs takes many forms. Some early childhood programs have placed family support workers on staff with a discrete job function, while others provide a more informal arrangement involving all child care staff. No matter what the method, "child care programs are ideally suited to build partnerships with families to promote children's healthy development and help reduce the risk of maltreatment" (Seibel, Gillespie & Temple, 2008, p. 40). Training and support for this function are extremely important to its success and are strongly encouraged.

### ***Universal Primary Prevention Campaign that would initially Target Early Education and Care providers***

A universal primary prevention campaign could be developed and launched in a variety of venues. Two that would improve and add skill sets for parents and child care settings include providing information and resources to early education and care providers, and conducting a companion multi-media campaign that would be available through newspapers, radio, television and the Internet.

Child care providers are likely to be the professionals and care givers who most frequently interact with families with young children. Infant and toddler child care providers are uniquely positioned to recognize and respond to families' needs for information and support. Thus, the initial effort of such a campaign could provide to all early education and care centers and licensed home care providers materials and information that would seek to change the way parents think about "how we treat our children and families", remove the stigma associated with parents seeking parenting assistance and support, enable child care providers to respond to inquiries from parents and offer developmentally appropriate and evidence-based parenting assistance and advice, and provide information and encouragement to help parents to seek parenting assistance and supports.

In addition to providing materials, information, training and supports to early education and care providers, the companion campaign could develop and disseminate a year's worth of newsworthy briefs and articles for print in newspapers, newsletters and Internet blogs and discussion arenas as well as a series of PSAs to broadcast year round in English, Spanish and Creole through television, radio, iPods and the Internet. Its goal would be to change community norms about "how we treat our children and families", remove the stigma associated with parents seeking parenting assistance and support, and offer developmentally appropriate and evidence-based parenting assistance and advice.

Such avenues would be invaluable to expanding awareness and encouragement to both providers and all parents in the communities supported by those media markets. The multi-media products should role model one-time positive parenting behaviors and advertise resources where parents and caregivers can find more information. Such products could show parents effectively demonstrating developmentally appropriate discipline and child guidance techniques that are simple and easily remembered; parents talking in a support group about common challenges they are facing with raising children and easy, positive solutions being discussed; community members in common settings simply reaching out to support parents as they are struggling with a child that is acting out; or divorced parents working together to make the best decision regarding raising their child in a consistent environment. The purpose of the series will be to normalize difficult challenges that many parents face, normalize the act of giving and receiving help with parenting issues, and demonstrate positive activities that can be easily imitated and adopted by the audience. All would be consistent with the information and materials published for the early education and care providers.

## ***Summary Recommendations to the Council***

Summary recommendations for the Governor's Child Abuse Prevention and Permanency Advisory Council to consider:

1. Develop a Framework for Primary Prevention and Early Investments, building upon the work that has been started in Florida, learning from the accomplishments of other states and created as a joint endeavor with Florida's Children and Youth Cabinet.
2. Set a priority for focusing upon the early years as a "two-fer" by creating opportunities for improving protective factors for young children and using this as an opportunity for reaching their parents.
3. Seek the development of avenues for upskilling professionals who work with parents and families around parenting and parent-child issues.
4. Seek the creation of a universal primary prevention campaign that would provide to the public and to early education and care centers and licensed home care providers materials and information that would change community norms about "how we treat our children and families", remove the stigma associated with parents seeking parenting assistance and support, enable child care providers to respond to inquiries from parents and offer developmentally appropriate and evidence-based parenting assistance and advice, and provide information and encouragement to help parents to seek parenting assistance and supports.

The Council's planning efforts should take a long-term view of change and develop a two-stage planning process.

Stage 1: The 18-month plan could focus on developing priorities, identify partners and funders to support and where possible to lead the efforts, articulating action steps necessary to fund and accomplish the recommended strategies articulated in this brief, and where possible, put into place all of the prerequisites for funding and implementing a five-year effort. It may be determined during this planning effort that the five-year plan should expand beyond licensed early education and care providers and licensed family child care providers to a larger population.

Stage 2: The 5-year plan would continue and build upon the priorities, articulate action steps necessary to fund, accomplish and evaluate the impacts of the recommended strategies during its five-year implementation.

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