

Planning for Intentional and Effective Places and Spaces for Children's Positive Mental Health

Integrated Plan



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I. Executive Summary

THE LEADING APPROACH RECOMMENDED BY THIS PROJECT IS TO FOCUS ON KEY STRATEGIES CUSTOMIZED TO THE SETTING, WITH ATTENTION TO SHORT- AND LONG-TERM MANAGEMENT OF THE STRATEGIES AND AN UNDERSTANDING OF HOW THEY RELATE TO ONE OR MORE OF THE FIVE KEY BEST PRACTICE INDICATORS.

This is the Integrated Plan of the Planning for Intentional and Effective Places and Spaces for Children’s Positive Mental Health project. The project, supported through funding from the John Rex Endowment, examined the intersection between what contributes to the positive mental health of children – with a focus on children ages birth to 8 years – and how the physical and social elements of places and spaces affect those contributory factors.

Information from a literature review, case studies, expert and stakeholder interviews, surveys and focus groups, formed the basis for developing a framework of Best Practice Indicators (BPIs) and accompanying Quality Improvement Tools (QI) for implementing strategies to improve outcomes for children. Best Practice Indicators are areas of practice that have been determined to be central to address in order to maximize the impact of environment on children’s positive mental health. Each of these areas of practice are linked or anchored to one or more key developmental tasks.

This Integrated Plan provides both broad and specific opportunities for participation, engagement, and investment within Wake County and beyond. The Plan also envisions

building upon the many resources and initiatives already in place in Wake County and leveraging those through new and ongoing collaboration and partnership. The process revealed that complementary initiatives involving experts in the field and direct service providers serve not only as models of some of the implementation strategies featured in the Integrated Plan but also are potential providers of technical assistance and consultation to organizations seeking to implement those strategies.

Best Practice Indicators

This Plan highlights five best practice indicators:

- Supporting positive, developmentally-appropriate interactions among caregivers, parents/guardians, providers, and children
- Use of nature/natural elements
- Diversity of space and activities
- Safety and support
- Accessibility and inclusiveness

The list of strategies that accompany the Best Practice Indicators are meant to provide guidance and to support innovation. They are not exhaustive. Moreover, the Best Practice Indicators are universal and the strategies for implementation are customizable.

Approaches to Implementation

This Plan highlights four approaches to implementation:

- Focusing on the active engagement and leadership of the community in which the strategies are intended to be enhanced or developed;
- Designing and delivering professional development that promotes understanding of the BPIs and implementation of the strategies;

- Physical enhancements to current spaces; and
- Strategies that use mobile services to bring a space such as a library to the community where families live or work.

The Integrated Plan focuses on maximizing the current initiatives and resources within Wake County but also is designed for the use and benefit of others. The project encourages and will promote the adoption of the Integrated Plan and the implementation of its suggested strategies by the broader Wake County community and hopes that its lessons and recommendations will be useful across North Carolina and beyond.