

V. Implementation Priorities

The following section summarizes the implementation priorities, Best Practice Indicators, and Quality Improvement Tools. As noted above, the section begins with sample approaches to implementation in order to orient the reader to the recommended priorities, followed by more detailed information and guidance on the BPIs and QI tools.

A. Sample Approaches to Implementation

The following four charts summarize possible approaches that service providers, public officials, funders, parents/guardians, and other stakeholders can pursue to enhance positive children’s mental health. Each chart highlights an approach that emerged as a priority during the project – engaging the community and its leadership in planning for spaces; attending to the need for professional development; making physical enhancements to current spaces; and delivering spaces or initiatives to the families for whom the space is intended for use. These approaches can overlap and often share the same elements.

Importantly, there are overarching themes that cut across all of the approaches. One theme is the value of regular and routine convening and collaborative planning to discuss enhancing the space, to identify or build professional development opportunities, and to identify existing resources for the purposes of sharing or expanding these resources. It should be noted that in addition to convening related to particular initiatives or communities - which could happen for a specified period of time or on a short or long-term basis - convening for the broader purposes of continuing to survey the landscape of efforts within Wake County is highly recommended and should occur regularly and routinely and over the long-term. A second overarching theme is engaging users and potential users of the space and the local communities intended to be served in the planning, execution and overall management of the space or initiative.

The examples in the following tables are for illustrative purposes. While they reflect information gathered and evidence reviewed throughout the project, they are intended neither to be comprehensive nor to establish the “best” approach for any particular entity in Wake County or beyond. They represent a synthesis of a range of strategies that may apply to different settings with the hopes of catalyzing further attention to and action in the critical area of children’s mental health, and in the context of places and spaces. They also may be considered in combination rather than as a single strategy for a particular community or setting.

In many cases, all of the BPIs could be relevant to the implementation approach in question thus there was an effort to emphasize those that appear to be most relevant in each case. Stakeholders of any implementation effort would do well to determine what fits best based on context, available resources, short- and long-term goals, and other factors.

Table 1: Community Engagement and Leadership

A high priority is to make current and new spaces more accessible in terms of physical, financial, and overall user-focused access for community members with a diversity of needs and levels of resources. To do so as effectively as possible, it is essential to involve a range of community leaders and users of the spaces.

Engaging the community in the planning, execution and management of new spaces or enhancing the use of current spaces accomplishes a number of goals. First, it is important to ensure that community input is a primary source of information about why current spaces are underutilized. It may be particularly effective to include community members both in providing and collecting input. Second, community engagement provides a process for identifying the strengths of a community’s people and places and increases the likelihood that new or improved spaces will reflect what is desired

and feasible for the community. Simply put, it is both what the community wants and needs, and can be supported. Developing and utilizing leadership within the community also makes it more likely that the community will “own” the new or enhanced space. Such ownership will help to sustain the space generally and in particular during times of fiscal constraints or other possible community challenges such as leadership changes or neighborhood unrest. The community engagement and leadership approach can play an important role in many space design and improvement processes, processes that have the potential to enhance neighborhood pride and quality of life more broadly.

Table 2: Professional Development

A space is only as good as the relationships that occur within it. There is a need for adults who are responsible for operating the space – and those using it – to understand what benefits should be derived from using the space and how these benefits are connected to children’s well-being. This includes understanding and being able to operationalize how to encourage and guide users in attaining these benefits by engaging in nurturing and responsive interactions with children, and understanding how the space should be managed for maximum positive impact.

There is also a need to help parents/guardians or caregivers understand how to transfer the benefits of the space to other venues including, importantly, the home. To do so, it would be beneficial for professionals to learn how to guide parents/guardians to transfer lessons that they learn from external spaces to opportunities for using space at home.

To maximize the impact of professional development efforts, it is necessary to consider a number of factors when designing professional development activities and to diversify these efforts to account for different learning styles and settings. In particular, activities should account for employee attrition and consider how new employees will be trained; employee capacity for adopting new knowledge, skills, and behaviors; the role of organizational leadership, including culture; and the ability and willingness to make changes.

Table 3: Physical Enhancements to Current Spaces

Wake County is fortunate to have a high number of quality spaces for children and families. Some of these spaces are models for the promotion of positive mental health for children. Other spaces could be improved in a variety of ways that would make them:

- Safer to use
- Better (fun, age appropriate, promote learning, achieve developmental milestones)
- Used more often
- More comfortable for parents/guardians and caregivers
- More responsive to the need for child supervision and balanced by safe exploration and risk-taking
- Outdoor learning environments
- More accessible
- Attend to the needs of diverse ages, abilities, and cultures.

Wake County is also home to experts in space design, space utilization, and ongoing space management who could assist in recommending and making physical enhancements to current spaces that maximize their impact. It is highly recommended to connect design experts with implementers of current or new spaces with the provision that ongoing maintenance/management of the space is a part of the consultation.

Table 4: Bringing the Space Benefits to Potential Users

There are significant barriers to families using spaces outside of their immediate neighborhoods and home environment. They include lack of adequate transportation, insufficient finances, and the time needed to travel to and

from the spaces and spend time there. They also include not knowing or trusting that the space will meet their interests or believing that the space will welcome them.

In addition to removing the barriers that keep them from accessing spaces near their homes and elsewhere in Wake County, the project recommends that spaces consider offering a mobile option to literally bring the space, such as a library, to people's neighborhoods. If a family develops trust and familiarity with a program through mobile delivery, they are more likely to visit the program's main location. There are museums, libraries, and other programs that visit a neighborhood, establish a relationship, and then encourage families to come to the main program location, which almost always has more options than the mobile versions both in terms of hours of operation and scope of programming.

If families are more easily and frequently able to access and use community programs when the programs offer resources close to home, the hope is that this experience will lead to positive relationships with the program staff and that this in turn will create a pathway for families to access the benefits of the mobile space at the main program sites as well. Another anticipated benefit of delivering spaces and initiatives in families' neighborhoods and the resulting relationships with program practitioners is that the practitioners learn what modifications to their spaces would make the spaces more accessible and welcoming to a larger and more diverse group of users.

Table 1: Community Engagement and Leadership

What is the community engagement effort?	Where would the effort take place?	What are the necessary resources?	Is this effort short-term or long-term?	How great an impact is it likely to have, based on the available evidence?	What are the partnership opportunities?	What are the policy implications?	Which Best Practice Indicators are most relevant?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community meetings to identify, discuss, and prioritize assets and gaps in community spaces with regard to children's mental health 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community halls, early learning organizations, elementary schools, public housing community spaces 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Planning leader and committee, skilled facilitator 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This could be a one-time meeting or multiple meetings over weeks or months; will depend upon the type of space and the continuity of meeting participants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recommended as a critical and early component for ultimate success of all related efforts Careful and intentional selection of community leaders, potential users, and trusted partners is necessary to maximize chances of success 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Extensive partnership opportunities between and among community members, local business and service organizations, users of the space, and funders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Possibility for community to approach policymakers with recommendations and requests regarding improvement to and uses of space 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All BPIs are relevant and should be used as a basis for meetings and discussions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Design audit of current space 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In areas of a community such as unused natural areas, donated commercial sites, underutilized playgrounds or community centers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Donated or purchased technical expertise in design, community convener 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Likely to be relatively short-term effort depending on size and complexity of space and community participation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The design audit itself will have minimal impact Actions stemming from the design audit, such as plans to implement enhancements, have potential for high impact and likely to be on a continuum of cost 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Design and architecture experts, city/county planning departments Observations of how similar communities address needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Possible identification of policies/regulations that need attention and/or could improve conditions such as land use restrictions or subsidies, environmental safety 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> BPIs depend on type and intended use of the space; all may be relevant. For example, an audit may find that a playground needs better lighting and seating for safety and to promote the comfort of caregivers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Needs assessment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An expansive examination of community space needs (of which a design audit may be a part) to identify individuals or groups already working in the community who would be trusted to develop efforts; and to identify what human and other resources exist or could be available 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> May occur in some or all of community (process leaders should determine in advance what space to include) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community leaders and potential users of the space, individuals with expertise in documenting a community's or neighborhood's as, decision makers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Potential for positive impact of education stemming from needs assessment Longer term impact depends on response to identified needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Opportunities for assigning responsibility for components of the needs assessment to range of stakeholders and partners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Possible tie-in to elected officials focus areas, budget requests, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Same as above

Table 2: Professional Development

Where would the effort take place?	What are the necessary resources?	Is this effort short-term or long-term?	How great an impact is it likely to have, based on the available evidence?	What are the partnership opportunities?	What are the policy implications?	Which Best Practice Indicators are most relevant?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use of indoor and outdoor space and the impact of certain design elements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Training could be in a central location and include different types of providers of spaces (child care centers, homeless shelters, parks, playgrounds, neighborhoods and outdoor common areas), or by similar organizations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Short-term with regular updates to accompany management and sustainability efforts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> High for activities or design elements that promote child development Small adjustments may have lasting impact Low impact if not attentive to relationships within the space 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Peer learning through coaching and mentoring Joint use of space Joint training 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parks and recreation design policy Child care center ratings that considers design 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use of nature and outdoor space Supporting positive interactions for all types of space Safety and support
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhancing knowledge and understanding of the importance of relationships within the space between parent/guardian or caregiver and child 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All types of spaces 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Intended to be ongoing and long-term, dependent on staff retention and extent of focus on implementation of professional development learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Potential for high impact as this understanding is what yields benefits of any space 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Peer learning through coaching and mentoring Joint use of space Joint training 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Primarily related to organizational policy for employee credentials and training requirements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supporting positive, developmentally appropriate interactions among caregivers, parents/guardians, providers and children
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interacting with children to promote safe risk-taking for the key developmental tasks of exploring/ experimenting, and self-regulation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Early learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Long-term/ ongoing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Difficult to predict given changing nature of makeup of children 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Possible ad hoc and strategic interaction with other child-serving organizations such as schools, and government and private recreation organizations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Primarily implications related to organizational policy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Safety and support Diversity of space and activities

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Table 2: Professional Development *continued*

Where would the effort take place?	What are the necessary resources?	Is this effort short-term or long-term?	Is this effort short-term or long-term?	How great an impact is it likely to have, based on the available evidence?	What are the partnership opportunities?	What are the policy implications?	Which Best Practice Indicators are most relevant?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Working with parents/guardians to promote an understanding of the benefits of space and the importance of parent/guardian and child interaction with an emphasis on the key developmental tasks of exploring and experimenting, self-regulation, mastery and challenge and coping 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All types of spaces 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Need for willing and available parents/guardians and individuals with expertise Possible need for translators 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Both short-and long-term. Potential for one-time and sustained work with parents/guardians 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Level of impact highly depend on availability and level of commitment by parents/guardians and consistent participation in process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Possibilities for collaboration with existing parent/guardian groups of faith-based organizations and other entities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minimal policy implications other than policies specific to individual organizations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supporting positive, developmentally appropriate interactions among caregivers, parents/guardians, providers and children
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Technical expertise in design, use and maintenance of space 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> On-site at relevant space as well as in instruction-focused settings such as trainings and workshops 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Specific training and expertise regarding design of certain types of spaces specific to organizations' work and needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Short-term with potential for updates 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> High and potentially long-lasting impact 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Possible partnerships with design and architecture firms and education institutions such as NC State University 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Possible federal, state, and local policy implications concerning allowable use of space and required updates 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Diversity of space and activities (then Accessibility and inclusiveness
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Instruction on strategies to transfer the benefits of spaces to the home or to spaces close-to-home 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> At spaces or organizations currently delivering these benefits Spaces could include unstaffed play areas, homeless shelters, early learning organizations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support for purchase and sharing of tangible resources (e.g., books and educational toys) Infrastructure for outreach to potential users about value of such resources for children's mental health Signage in unstaffed spaces that convey the benefit and how to transfer the benefit 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Long-term and ongoing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Potential for long-term and high impact depending on take-up rate of households and understanding of positive effects May be difficult to document impact given spaces are personal homes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Partnership with neighborhood groups, parks and recreation departments, public/mental health entities for information about resources available for in-home use 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Less likely to have policy implications than other efforts, given focus on individuals' homes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supporting positive, developmentally appropriate interactions between caregivers, parents/guardians, providers, and children

Table 3: Physical Enhancements to Current Spaces

What is the physical enhancement to the current space?	Where would the effort take place?	What are the necessary resources?	Is this effort short-term or long-term?	How great an impact is it likely to have, based on the available evidence?	What are the partnership opportunities?	What are the policy implications?	Which Best Practice Indicators are most relevant?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Installation of natural elements in outdoor spaces that promote learning, safe physical activity that encourages risk-taking, and supervision by a parent/guardian or caregiver 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Playgrounds, open natural spaces, school yards, outdoor space at service organizations including family shelters 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Repurposed, donated or purchased rocks, logs, plants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Short-term 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Likely to have a significant degree of impact 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organizations that are successful in utilizing natural elements in outdoor spaces as relates to positive mental health, including museums and efforts such as the Natural Learning Initiative at NCSU 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Following national and NCSU's Natural Learning Initiative's guidelines for natural learning environments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use of nature/natural elements Supporting positive, developmentally appropriate interactions between caregivers, parents/guardians, providers, and children Safety and support
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Planting trees, bushes, and natural grasses to enhance shading for users of the space and their caregivers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Child care centers' outdoor play areas, family shelters, playgrounds 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Donated or purchased plant materials 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Short-term 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increasing comfort in the space should impact the amount of time and quality of time spent in the space by children and parents/guardians or caregivers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Partnerships with other organizations and users of the space 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Technical assistance in the design of the space and planting guide 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use of nature/natural elements Supporting positive, developmentally appropriate interactions between caregivers, parents/guardians, providers, and children
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Installation of ramps, accessible play equipment to promote comparable play experiences for children with sensory integration concerns or physical disability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indoor play areas in child care centers, family shelters 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Technical/design assistance and donated or purchased materials 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Short- and long-term and ongoing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Likely to have a significant impact on accessibility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collaborative planning for multiple users/organization 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Compliance with manufacturers' guidelines for play equipment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Diversity of space and activities Accessibility and inclusiveness Safety and support

Table 4: Bringing the Space Benefits to Potential Users

What is the space/initiative to bring to potential users?	Where would the effort take place?	What are the necessary resources?	Is this effort short-term or long-term?	How great an impact is it likely to have, based on the available evidence?	What are the partnership opportunities?	What are the policy implications?	Which Best Practice Indicators are most relevant?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Food production/gardening/hunger reduction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In neighborhoods, e.g., common parking areas, common community spaces, playgrounds, community centers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Human resources to deliver information and guidance about gardening to parents/guardians and children, gardening materials including plants, equipment Vehicles to deliver the human resources, the initiative or both 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Short-/long-term and ongoing Short-term guidance and production of food and long-term relationship building to establish the initiative and to create potential for families to leave the community to pursue resources associated with mobile provider Long-term and ongoing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Impact is significant for potential to build relationships in neighborhoods that increase the likelihood that residents will use other existing spaces Also significant impact through removing important barriers without intensive resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Museums such as Marbles Kids Museum, mobile space initiatives such as Read and Feed Service providers willing and able to deliver services directly to neighborhoods 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Possible organizational policies to support integration of physical health considerations with mental health-related efforts and to connect community-based healthy eating efforts to potential for related home-based efforts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supporting positive, developmentally-appropriate interactions between caregivers, parents/guardians, providers and children Accessibility and inclusiveness
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Child care/after school/natural learning environments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In neighborhoods, e.g., common parking areas, common community spaces, playgrounds, community centers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Human resources to deliver services, mobile space or existing space within the community to deliver services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Long-term and ongoing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lacks evidence? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wake County Smart Start 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Natural learning environment guidelines, child care rating guidelines 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use of nature Accessibility and inclusiveness
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase availability of positive children's mental health opportunities at home and in spaces close-to-home 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> At home, in public areas of community such as parks and community centers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Residents willing to participate Possible needs for translator Funds to bring opportunities to peoples' homes or home environments on short-term or permanent basis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Could range from one-time to ongoing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Potential for short-term impact in form of one-time opportunities Potential for long-term impact in form of community members' increased knowledge of available opportunities and increased use of positive spaces in home environment and throughout community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bring mental health experts into the community via mobile units and at community events Develop connections between education-focused efforts and their potential for positive impact on children's mental health 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Outreach to self-described partners such as public and non-profit museums, health institutions, and out-of-school enrichment programs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Safety and support Accessibility and inclusiveness