

To: Members of the Juvenile Justice Oversight Committee

From: David Jordan, President, United Methodist Health Ministry Fund

Date: June 27, 2019

RE: Attachment Bio-behavioral Catch-up Program (ABC)

Thank you for the opportunity to provide background information to the committee on the Attachment Bio-Behavioral Catch-up (ABC) Program and the Kansas pilot program. ABC is a **ten-week targeted, manualized program delivered in the home** with two additional assessment sessions (pre- and post-intervention). During each of the ten visits, the staff engage the parents and review very specific information with them focused on the four target areas below. The goal is NOT to “cover the required materials” but to engage the parents and to frequently reinforce their positive behaviors consistent with the 4 main targets of the ABC program:

1. Nurturance – attending to a child who has expressed a need;
2. Synchrony/Following the Lead – interactions follow the child’s lead in play, neither passive nor intrusive;
3. Delight – words or expressions from the parent to the child expressing positive emotion;
4. Avoiding frightening behavior – rough handling, menacing or throwing, threatening behaviors.

ABC was initially developed by the University of Delaware through several randomized, controlled trials to address toxic stress in young children living in adverse environments. It has been in development there for over 18 years. During that time, the program has evolved and developed to the point where it is one of the **highest rated interventions** (and one of the only truly preventative programs) on the California Clearinghouse for Child Welfare (<http://www.cebc4cw.org/program/attachment-and-biobehavioral-catch-up/>).

ABC: Evidence-based intervention that reduces toxic stress and improves school readiness and student success

Research shows that the toxic stress caused by Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) in early childhood has a major impact on the child’s overall development—on school readiness and the ability to learn, on physical and mental health, and on other factors including the ability to exercise self-control. These deficits negatively affect a child’s success both in the school setting and throughout adult life.

As an intervention to address adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), ABC has been shown to lead to increased parental sensitivity and responsiveness to child needs. Children who participated in ABC as toddlers were shown to have better receptive vocabulary than comparison children who did not participate.

Preschool children who receive ABC show more normal levels of cortisol and improved executive function, meaning they have improved their ability to regulate behavior and emotion. Science indicates that vulnerable children who have well-developed executive functioning and emotional regulation are able to do well in school despite experiences of adversity. Executive functioning predicts literacy and math scores, and many teachers contend that competence in terms of executive functioning “is more important at school entry than knowledge of letters and numbers.”

ABC: Opportunity to support development of positive parenting skills to enhance attachment in at-risk populations

We see great promise in the use of the Attachment Bio-behavioral Catch-up (ABC) Program because of the evidence that it builds attachment between children and their caregivers as well as teaches parents critical nurturance skills.

Like many justice involved new parents, families involved in the child welfare system are similarly at-risk and benefited from the ABC program. The child welfare agency in the city of New York is using the ABC program to achieve multiple objectives - to prevent children from entering foster care, to aid in building attachment between foster parents and foster children and as an intervention used in re-integration to build attachment between birth parents and children. We could see ABC playing a similar role in justice involved youth who are new parents. Equipping these children or youth parents with parenting skills and building attachment between the parents and their children would benefit the families and the system.

The ABC Program is deployed in the New York system because it works well in achieving its goals. In fact, the ABC program is one of just two targeted evidence based programs that New York City’s Administration for Children Services used as they cut their foster care caseload almost in half over the last seven years (see attached presentation).

We see great opportunity for improving the parenting skills of justice involved youth in the same ways that parents involved in the child welfare system benefitted from the use of ABC. Parent, equipped with nurturance skills, fared better when re-united with their kids. As detailed above, kids who received the intervention fared better in school and had improved health.

Current Pilot

Currently, United Methodist Health Ministry Fund is coordinating a \$2.4 million three-year project to provide the ABC intervention to high risk families at five sites throughout the state (mapped below). Other funders in this project are the REACH Foundation, Kansas Health Foundation, the Wyandotte Health Foundation, and Hutchinson Community Foundation.

ABC Initiative Grant

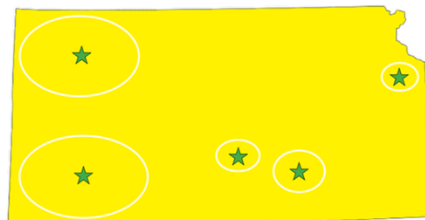
Investing \$2,400,000 in 5 test sites (35 counties)

LiveWell Northwest Kansas

Cheyenne, Rawlins, Decatur, Norton, Sherman, Thomas, Sheridan, Graham, Wallace, Logan, Gove, and Trego

Russell Child Development Center

Greeley, Wichita, Scott, Lane, Ness, Hamilton, Kearny, Finney, Hodgeman, Stanton, Grant, Haskell, Gray, Ford, Morton, Stevens, Seward, Meade, and Clark.



Locations of NeuroNurture Pilot Programs in Kansas

Horizons Mental Health Center Reno County

Project Eagle—KU
Wyandotte County

Rainbows United Sedgwick and (portion of) Butler Counties

Our project evaluators from the University of the Kansas School of Social Welfare found that during the first two years of the ABC Early Childhood Initiative, the project has served 310 high risk families (693 children) from various circumstances and backgrounds including court referrals and children at risk for removal from their homes. Preliminary findings from the evaluation include:

- ABC is having a positive impact on families being served in Kansas
- Results show positive changes after participating in ABC in child functioning as well as parenting skills and caregiver knowledge
- ABC is an evidence-based intervention that is well-liked by parent coaches and families and leads to positive outcomes.

With an investment of \$2 million from the state we estimate that 450 high risk, justice involved families could benefit from this program. This investment is an effective way to improve the parenting skills of the justice involved parents to help them keep their children at the same time as reducing the impact of adverse childhood experiences.

We see an opportunity to potentially reach even more families through utilizing trained home visitors that are being used in existing pilot sites or other sites throughout the state.