Case Study Proposal
URP 5122
Taylor
Development of a Statewide System of Infant Mental Health Services for Florida:
The Strategic Planning Process

The Issue: An expanding body of brain development and behavioral research indicates that the most critical period of social, moral, and behavioral development for people takes places during the pre-verbal stage. Many life-long behavioral problems are now linked to circumstances surrounding the pre-natal period and the first three years of life. Research indicates that the sooner a psychological or behavioral issue is addressed the better the chance of a successful intervention. Contrary to this logic most mental health services address only issues which present themselves once an individual has begun to use verbal communication, usually around age five. The principles of infant mental health are based on the need to address behavioral problems on three fronts: education, prevention, and treatment. Florida, like many states, was lacking any system for addressing mental health issues for children zero to three and their families prior to 1999.

The Proposed Solution: In response to the growing body of research and a perceived need several organizations, which already address issues relating to families in Florida, created a contract for the development of strategic plan for creating a statewide system of infant mental health services for the state. The Florida State University Center for Prevention and early intervention Policy was charged as the contract’s executor and coordinated the strategic planning process. The planning process involved over two-hundred stakeholders from all over the State of Florida and around the United States. These stakeholders represented the following areas of interest:
- Mother and Child Health Groups
- Juvenile Justice Workers
- Health Practitioners (working with children zero to five years of age and their families)
- Family Advocacy Groups
- Training Groups
- Universities
- Divisions of the Florida Departments of Health, Children and Families, Education, and Justice
- Families and private citizens with an interest in the principles of infant mental health
- Child-Care Providers
- Researchers working on subjects related to human development, sociology, behavior, and psychology.
- Assorted social assistance and advocacy groups
The Process: The involvement of such an enormous number of people in the planning process dictated that a strict structure be developed to control the planning process. A series of three meetings were held over the course of several months Feb. 2000 through Aug 2000. Using trained facilitators each meeting consisted of three components. One informational component designed to raise the level of technical knowledge of the stakeholders with respect to Infant mental Health Principles. The Next was a series of brainstorming sessions designed to collect ideas and facts from participants about how infant mental health services could be established in Florida. The final component was a series of panels held in a question and answer format in order to provide information on how immediate action could be taken in terms of finding funding sources, establishing training programs, and understanding the availability of infant mental health services. After each meeting the information and ideas gathered from stakeholders was synthesized into a draft of a strategic plan of action for implementing infant mental health services in Florida. The draft was revised at the end of each meeting. The final product was revised again by an advisory committee, which prioritized proposals for action within the plan in terms of importance and feasibility.

The Result: Ultimately the plan was distributed to persons who were identified as key to the implementation process. The final strategic plan was also shared with other states and national and international groups dealing with issues related to infant mental health. Some of the plans initial steps have been made while others have not or have failed. Among the successes are seven pilot projects, some trainings, the expansion of coursework on infant mental health at several universities, the establishment of the Florida Association for Infant Mental Health (FAIMH), and the broadcast of a series of informative cable shows in Miami-Dade on infant mental health.

Data Collection: Documentation on the planning process such as agendas, drafts of the plan, and the plan itself will be included. Supporting data on infant mental health research and programs in other states and around the world will be examined. Problems that arose during the process will be looked at as well as its many successes. The state of infant mental health services available in Florida today will also be examine as a measure of success and a blueprint for action in this arena in the future.