

Preschool experiences may make or break a young child's chances for academic success

What comes to your mind when you hear about a student being expelled? An aggressive or defiant teen? A kid who brings drugs or a weapon to school?

The fact is the odds of a 3-5-year-old being expelled from preschool, one or more times, are far higher than that of older children and teens.

It turns out that time-out is more likely to be a turn-out for our youngest children.

In 2005, a team of Yale researchers under the direction of Walter Gilliam, PhD, announced a startling finding:

- Preschoolers were being expelled at three times the rate of students in grades K-12, potentially setting these very young children on a path for academic failure, and at the least, leaving them unprepared to begin kindergarten.
- Even more disturbing was the fact that boys were thrown out of preschool more than four times as often as girls; for black boys, the figures were grimmer still.

Although decades of research have shown that high quality child care and preschool programs have a significant impact on a child's readiness for school, especially for those who are disadvantaged, the impact of preschool suspension sabotages the goal of preparing these children for educational success.

So what's going wrong with these little children?

"Preschool expulsion is not a child behavior," said Dr. Gilliam, in a recent presentation at Case Western Reserve's Schubert Center. "It's an adult decision."

That Yale study gave child advocates the data they needed to begin pushing for mental

health services in preschools along with training and support for teachers and child care workers.

Tanya Morrow is the director of Beech Brook's Early Childhood Programs, which, through funding from Starting Point, provide technical assistance in child care centers and preschools. Not to be confused with the IT Helpdesk, this kind of technical assistance means going into child care centers, observing children who have been identified with problematic behaviors and providing strategies to help the teacher manage the child better.

Tanya and her staff agree with the research showing that pre-school expulsion is often tied to the stress level and mental health of the teachers who bring their own anxiety, depression and lack of coping skills to work with them. Add in factors such as large class sizes, long days, and lack of access to resources and support, and too often it's the child who pays the price.

Case Manager Therapist Vanessa Jordan works as a technical assistance provider in the Louis Stokes Head Start Center, among other sites. Last year the center became a Starting Point pilot site for a team approach



Vanessa Jordan of Beech Brook, Connie Loftin of Starting Point, and Sharon Johnson of CEOGC make up part of the team that implemented the Louis Stokes Head Start pilot project.



Yale Professor Walter Gilliam, PhD, headed the initial groundbreaking research which identified the high numbers of preschoolers experiencing expulsion. Dr. Gilliam spoke at a recent event in Cleveland at which Tanya Morrow, Beech Brook Director of Early Childhood Programs, was a panelist.

Continued on page 3

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Message from Debra Rex, President/CEO

Bill Gates once said: "The first five years have so much to do with how the next 80 turn out."



*Debra Rex, M.A., M.Ed.
President and CEO*

At Beech Brook, we know that to be true, and it's one of the reasons why this year we chose to put a greater focus on helping children and families early in life...when we can have a lifelong impact on a child's future.

In this issue, you'll read about our work in child care centers and preschools, as well as our Early Childhood in-home therapy, thanks to funding from the Alcohol and Drug Addiction Services (ADAMHS) Board of Cuyahoga County and from Starting Point, an outstanding resource and referral agency for Northeast Ohio's child care and early education programs. We are so grateful for our partnership with these organizations

who understand the tremendous importance of early intervention in children's lives.

A few weeks ago, Tanya Morrow, our Director of Early Childhood Programs, was invited to appear as a panelist with Walter Gilliam, PhD, of Yale, who first published the shocking research showing that preschoolers were being expelled at more than three times the rate of older children. For children of color, particularly boys, the statistics were far worse. Those results laid the groundwork for many of the early childhood consultation programs we have today at Beech Brook and throughout the country. We were proud that Beech Brook was chosen to be part of this important forum.

As we move forward into a new year, I thank you for your support and look forward to your continuing partnership. Together, we can make a difference in strengthening families and keeping children safe and healthy so that they, and our community, will thrive.

Giving every child every chance

Every child deserves the best possible start in life. The extraordinary learning that takes place in the early years paves the way for success in family life, in school and in relationships throughout life.

Beech Brook's Early Childhood Program serves children from birth through age 6 who have social, emotional and behavioral concerns.

Through direct service, screening and diagnostic assessments, consultation and training, and partnerships with child care providers, mental health agencies and schools, Beech Brook's Early Childhood staff offers:

- Child Care Consultation and Training
- Mental Health Services
- Early Intervention for Families in Transitional Housing

Last year our team of six staff and one intern served more than 700 children and families.



Continued from cover

to helping kids stay in preschool. The team is made up of their staff from Starting Point, Beech Brook, and the Council for Economic Opportunities (CEOGC), which operates the Head Start centers.

It's the team approach that sets this service apart from the other centers. Each team member has a different role.

CEOGC staff member Sharon Thompson reviews DECA (Devereux Early Childhood Assessment) scores to guide the strategies the team puts in place for the children, the classroom and the teachers. If she sees a classroom where there are multiple children identified as behavior problems, that's a red flag. "When I see one that's top-heavy, I know there may be a problem with the teacher."

The first step is building trust and a good relationship with the teachers, says Vanessa Jordan who works in the classroom, observing the children and providing strategies for the teacher. "I want them to know I'm not coming in to police them. I'm coming in to coach."

Often the identified child has no idea whom she is there to observe, but as she blends into the classroom, she's watching how the child behaves and interacts with others and with the teachers. Then she can begin to implement the strategies recommended by the DECA as well as from her own experience as a clinician.

Another member of the Starting Point team, Connie Loftin, provides "boy friendly services" in the classrooms. Why is that needed? Because the most likely children to be expelled are known as the three B's: big, black, boys.

"I go in the classroom to see if it's conducive to the way boys learn. They need more space for movement and fewer sedentary activities. Is there room for them to stand or lay on their stomachs while they play? Are there enough appropriate toys?"

As important as it is to provide support and coaching to the teachers, there are certainly

children – and parents – who need mental health services and parent education.

She learned that one child, who was exhibiting very aggressive behavior toward girls in the classroom, was exposed to domestic violence whenever his estranged parents were together. Even though he wasn't physically hurt, he was frightened and

"If we really want to effect change in the 0-6 population, it's imperative to begin with the adults who care for them, whether it is their parents or their teachers, since they are the ones who will guide that change in the children."

traumatized, and he was playing out those behaviors in the classroom, particularly verbal abuse, against the girls.

"I asked if it was okay to bring the dad in, and he came," said Vanessa. I explained the situation and told him about the impact on his son. Once he realized that, he really softened up and became more careful in front of his son."

In-home child therapy makes a difference early – when it matters most

Since Beech Brook also provides in-home Early Childhood Mental Health services, Vanessa and other Beech Brook staff are able to provide therapy and consultation with parents and children in their own environment.

While the child may be the one identified for services, early childhood therapy is not just about sitting and talking to the child. It's mostly about working with the parents, helping them address their own issues and parenting techniques and creating a safe and structured home environment for their child.

Vanessa has been working with one mom who has depression, anxiety, a history of abuse, and a childhood spent in foster care. "I told her, 'you have to get better for your kids,'" she says, "and I worked with her on strategies to do that."

"I helped her understand how her poor diet was affecting how she felt, as well as her children's health. I suggested activities to get them out of the house, like taking a walk, or having her kids help her at the grocery, to improve her interaction with them. Her 3-year-old was really taking over the house, and I helped her learn to take back control," she says. "And she's looking better! She's lost

weight, she has more energy, and her house is cleaner now. She's really coming around so she can parent her kids better, and she's proud of the progress she's making."

"The biggest part of ECMH is to strengthen and empower the parents," Tanya explains.

She feels positive and encouraged about the direction early childhood services are taking, and particularly grateful for the support of the ADAMHS Board.

"We're on the right track when it comes to helping very young children by focusing on the parents, teachers and all the other factors that impact them rather than just giving a diagnosis to a child," says Tanya. "If we really want to effect change in the 0-6 population, it's imperative to begin with the adults who care for them, whether it is their parents or their teachers, since they are the ones who will guide that change in the children."

ADAMHS Board CEO William Denihan, a strong supporter of Beech Brook and the importance of early intervention, agrees. "The range of services provided by Beech Brook is exceptional, including the Early Childhood Program which provides children and families with the help needed for healthy development by identifying and addressing problems early," he said. "The fact that Beech Brook has been helping children and families for 164 years is extraordinary and illustrates the agency's commitment to the community."



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Beech Brook's Mission

To advance the well-being and self-sufficiency of children, youth and families by providing effective, innovative physical and behavioral health, permanency, educational and related services and by serving as a strong voice for children, youth and families.

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Beech Brook is a contract agency of the Alcohol, Drug Addiction and Mental Health Services Board of Cuyahoga County.



BEECH BALL WE'RE SAVING A SEAT – FOR YOU –



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