



Sample Communications

These materials apply the tested frame elements to external communications opportunities such as editorials, social media updates, and program descriptions. They can be adapted to local contexts (for example, adding local references or site-specific information) or restructured for different formats (for example, repurposing an editorial as a blog post or public remarks.)

Editorials

Op-Ed:

Tennessee's System of Care

This editorial uses an annual event, Child Mental Health Awareness Day as an opportunity to educate its readers about the philosophy behind the System of Care. It opens with the tested Value of *Ingenuity*, establishing that we already have solutions to problems which may seem insurmountable. The editorial then uses the metaphor Resilience Scale to explain the System of Care philosophy by calling attention to factors that disrupt development but also what positive outcomes might look like. A positive Tone is important to circumvent unproductive cultural models like crisis thinking, which can leave the public with a sense that a problem like addressing our state's child mental health needs may be too big to solve. Lastly, the op-ed closes with a nod to the tested Values *Human Potential* and *Civic Potential*.

As we prepare for Child Mental Health Awareness Day organized by SAHMSA on May 7th 2015, we here at the Tennessee Commission on Children and Youth (TCCY) are reflecting on out of our longstanding partnership with SAHMSA over the years as part of the System of Care.

The theme of this year's Child Mental Health Awareness Day is Inspiring Resilience, Creating Hope. And if we think about the task of cultivating resilience as a balancing scale, we can think about the work that we do here at TCCY as tipping the scale towards the positive. The goal of every community is to have as many kids as possible experience positive outcomes – which we can accomplish by stacking positive factors, and offloading negative factors, so that scales tip toward the positive. Because weights can be added to or taken from either side at any time, positive outcomes are greatly influenced by the community, including through supports and interventions.

One such example is a coordinated “System of Care” (SoC) approach to providing children’s mental health supports for children and their families. Under this philosophy, educators and mental health providers work together to create positive, supportive environments where children and youth can be identified and connected to needed support services that have the potential to increase individual and school wide academic achievement. Evidence demonstrates that the SoC approach improves prospects for long-term success for the child, family, and community by coordinating the network of supports which can add influences to the positive side of the scale and work to offset negative experiences, for example, providing access to full array of mental health and other services to meet the diverse needs of children with serious emotional disturbances or other children who require services from multiple systems.

Under a System of Care, children’s mental health care is guided by participant youth, their families, and communities. Also the principles and philosophy include providing services that are both culturally and linguistically competent, which means that they are effectively designed to be accessible and actionable by the people they are designed for. Outcomes include reduced school suspensions, expulsions and dropout rates, reduced use of hospital or residential placements, reduced commitments to state custody, and reduced juvenile court involvement. Children and youth identified with serious emotional challenges benefit from supports and services that are intensive and are provided by multiple systems in the community. Their caregivers benefit from having increased supports at multiple levels. The community benefits because giving children a strong start in life gives the community a start toward becoming the strongest it can be.

When we can get the outcomes scale to tip positive even though it’s stacked with negative weight, that’s resilience! As Tennesseans, we must continue to invent and replicate such effective policies and programs for young children doing everything that we can to support factors which lead to positive outcomes for our children, enabling them to become their best selves, which in turn enables them to contribute fully to our communities

Blog post:

The work ahead: Supporting TN’s children in 2015

This blog post uses the end of a System of Care funding cycle to reflect on the future for the JustCare Network, and its work in serving Tennessee’s children. It opens with the tested Value of *Human Potential*, establishing why the work of this and coordinating organizations matter and what’s at stake. To inform the reader’s understanding of why such programs work, the blog post uses the metaphor *Serve and Return* to show how development works, which echoes coordinated interactions which comprise a System of Care. The post closes with a call to the Value *Civil Responsibility* to engender engagement and a sense of ownership.

As we change over our calendars to 2015, it is a time to look back on successes we have achieved here in Tennessee providing supports for our children and also a time to look ahead to the work that lies ahead. Child well-being is of fundamental importance for community and economic development. Young children with strong mental health are prepared and equipped to develop skills and capacities that begin in early childhood. These children then become the basis of a prosperous and sustainable society — contributing to things like good school achievement, solid workforce skills, and being strong citizens. When we ensure the healthy development of the next generation, they pay that back through productivity and responsible citizenship.

As one example of an investment in Tennessee's children, JustCare was founded in partnership with Tennessee Voices for Children, the Shelby County JustCare Family Network, Dr. Leon Caldwell with Rhodes University, and Comprehensive Counseling Network (Frayser Millington Mental Health Center), and the Tennessee Department of Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities. Why this coordinated approach? Well, as their motto states, "because no one does it alone." However, this program is only funded through to the end of Dec, 2014.

So what does this coordinated interaction look like as part of a System of Care? For school-aged children, Coordinated School Health Programs include an emphasis on health promotion for all the people at that child's school including staff (health educators, physical educators, health and nutrition service providers) as well as those focused on healthy school environment, counseling, psychological and social services and ultimately their families and communities.

The JustCare network has taken the efforts of many individuals, agencies and organizations to come together to create JustCare, and it's approach is similarly informed by coordination and collaboration, for example bringing together trained local parents/caregivers as care coordinators with support from mental health consultants and an emphasis on school-based mental health delivery. Their philosophy is informed by an evidence-based, empirical approach to early childhood development. Namely, that scientists now know that the interaction of genes and experience shape the developing brain, which is the foundation for intellectual, social and emotional development. The active ingredients are "serve and return" interactions, the back-and-forth that children have as they cultivate relationships with their parents, family members and the community.

As we look forward to 2015, we need to look for continued opportunities for educators and mental health and other service providers to partner with families and children to assure needs are met in a comprehensive, coordinated manner. When we work as a team and in systems, outcomes are better for all of us – not just children and their families, but their schools and their communities and all of us here in Tennessee. Strengthening the systems that provide education, health care, and supports for parents is a matter of living up to our duties to children and to our state.

Letter to the Editor:
The Tennessee we wish to create

This letter to the editor uses the release of a report to reflect on opportunities for the state to better support children. It begins with an appeal to the tested Values *Civic Potential*, and *Human Potential*. To establish the need for these interventions, it explores that which supports healthy development using the *Levelness* Explanatory Metaphor. Finally, it introduces solutions and closes with the Values of *Ingenuity* and *Civic Responsibility*, sharing a sense of optimism by arguing that we can and must meet the challenges ahead.

The Tennessee we wish to create requires that all of our children share in the opportunity to develop to their fullest potential. Their healthy development supports our well-being as a state and enables us to accomplish our goals but only if we support healthy child development and effective learning. Giving children a strong start in life gives Tennessee a strong start toward becoming the state it can be. To this end, the X project has just released a report calling for better evaluation of programs for children with mental health problems, because if we don't strive to meet the needs of our children, the problems that they face will get worse – and we run the risk of Tennessee not meeting its potential.

As the report notes, children's early experiences shape the developing architecture of the brain, providing either a strong or weak foundation for all future learning, behavior and health that follows. When this architecture is supported, children can experience good mental health. One way to think of children's mental health is that it's like the levelness of a piece of furniture, such as a table. The levelness of a table is what makes it usable and able to function, just like the mental health of children is what enables them to function well in many environments. Some children's brains develop on floors that are level. These children have access to good nutrition and health care, and have healthy, supportive relationships with caring adults. Other children's brains develop on more sloped or slanted floors. Perhaps they are exposed to abuse or violence, have unreliable or unsupportive relationships, and don't have access to key programs and resources. For these children, the emotional or behavioral issues that result frequently require mental health services.

We have many opportunities as Tennesseans to provide this levelness in the conditions and environments to which our children are exposed, by working to stabilize the environment of relationships and experiences that form the contexts of children's development. For some, this means removing them from situations in which continued exposure to toxic stress erodes their levelness. For others, it means providing the safe, secure and reliable back and forth that puts a child on a level ground. For many, this means making sure children and their families have access to comprehensive, integrated, quality services, either before a mental health problem becomes serious or once a mental illness develops. Contrary to this practical ideal, however, the report found that the mental health services infrastructure in Tennessee continues to be fragmented and services are not reaching every child that needs them.

This new report is important for what it can tell budget and policy makers as they make funding decisions about children's mental health programs. There are dozens of initiatives and programs, some of which appear to have good results. But we need to measure the effectiveness and evaluate the outcomes of all mental health services for children, so that we can expand and replicate the most effective programs and develop a comprehensive system that really supports the levelness in a child's developing foundation. By identifying the effectiveness factors that make programs successful, the X team have done a great service with this report. It's a welcome voice toward Tennessee becoming a leader in addressing children's mental health. We know that a healthy society depends on providing healthy environments and positive relationships for ALL children in Tennessee, and yet gaps in our programs prevent many children from getting what they need to thrive. We have the resources, knowledge and innovation to fill those gaps and make sure all children have opportunities for good outcomes. Because the Tennessee we wish to create has strong the systems in place that provide education, health care, and supports for parents, ensuring that these goals are met is a matter of living up to our duties to children and to our state. We all need a Tennessee where everyone can be a responsible citizen and contribute, and thus ensuring that children are given their best chance to grow, thrive, and fulfill their roles as citizens should continue to be among our top priorities.