

The Champion Project

Open Request for Academic Research Partner

Location: Mendocino County, California

Project Start Date: January, 2017

Target Population: Children in families experiencing trauma

Mendocino County Health and Human Services Agency (MCHHSA) is currently **seeking an academic research partner** to work with local project staff on a new **intervention designed to reduce the negative impacts of childhood trauma**. The selected academic research partner will be invited to provide input into the design of the project, help develop and approve project goals and outcome indicators, and will be offered access to quantitative and qualitative data elements of the project participant families and their control-group cohort. This is a long-term, multi-year project with a high probability of yielding a rich and complex data set that is likely to result in useful research related to the prevention of negative consequences of childhood trauma.

Background Information:

Mendocino County is located in a rural, mountainous and geographically isolated region in northern California. Although recognized nationally as a high-end tourist destination, Mendocino County is filled with small towns and villages that struggle with significant negative social and economic factors. Children in Mendocino County face extraordinary challenges.

- ✓ Thousands of children in Mendocino County are being raised by grandparents. The county's rate of grandparent-care (6.5% of children) is twice as high as the state average of 3.3%.
- ✓ Mendocino County's adult arrest rate is 66.9 arrests per 1,000 adults over the age of 18. This rate is almost twice as high as the statewide average.
- ✓ 28% of households in Mendocino County are impacted by severe housing problems (overcrowding, high costs, lack of kitchen, or lack of plumbing facilities).
- ✓ Mendocino County's rate of domestic violence calls for assistance is one of the highest in California (8.6 calls for assistance per 1,000 adults).
- ✓ Mendocino County's age-adjusted death rate due to suicide is more than twice as high as the average for California.

High rates of poverty, substance abuse, and domestic violence, coupled with low literacy rates and geographic isolation lead to hundreds of children in our local community facing multiple traumatic events during their early years. Research shows that childhood trauma creates toxic stress, which may damage a developing brain and thus significantly impact a child's ability to learn, thrive and stay healthy. The correlation between childhood trauma and personal/community health is so significant that many experts describe the impact of childhood trauma as a public health emergency.

Problem Statement:

Community advocates have identified the **need for a coordinated and long-term response for children experiencing trauma**. (Examples of such trauma may include the death of a parent or sibling, the incarceration of a parent, and/or the severe mental illness of a parent or sibling.) Mendocino County is fortunate to have a strong network of service providers, including organizations that help families with homelessness, domestic violence, substance abuse, transportation, school counseling, unemployment, mental health treatment, parenting, food security, Medicaid and other health insurance coverage, and much more. We have a community that cares. But from the point of view of a parent in crisis, navigating through the network of “helpers” can be overwhelming and confusing. And from the point of view of the “helpers”, they lack a single point of contact and the resources to help when a family’s current challenge falls outside their scope of service. In addition, consistent support for a family often declines after the immediate needs are met, even though the impact of trauma can last well beyond the crisis itself.

Proposed Solution:

Families experiencing significant trauma need an advocate, a facilitator, a connector, a navigator, a case manager, and a friend. **A child in trauma needs a Champion**. The Champion Project will develop, train and support **a network of Champions who will support a designated number of at-risk children** whose parents have agreed to accept their support. This is a long-term commitment. Participating children will remain enrolled in the Champion Project until they reach adulthood. During that time, the Champion will stay connected to the family and serve as their navigator and coordinator of services. The Champion is a generalist who will help a family find and use the resources they need to mitigate the impacts of trauma and support resiliency. Participating organizations; including schools, pediatricians, and law enforcement; will be able to refer any child for possible enrollment into the Champion Project. In order to participate in the project, the child must meet a “trauma threshold” (to be defined by Advisory Committee and academic research partner). Once the child is matched with a Champion, participating organizations will be members of a team who can communicate freely with the Champion about their concerns and solutions. In turn, a Champion will be able to request the assistance, advice and service of any participating organization to ensure that the child’s needs are met.

Expected Outcome:

Outcome indicators will be tracked for all identified children who meet the “trauma threshold.” The target cohort will include children who have been offered, and whose parents have accepted, the services of a Champion. The control cohort will include those identified children who meet the “trauma threshold”, but who did not participate in the Champion Project either due to lack of parental agreement or lack of capacity.

Outcome indicators may include, but not be limited, to the following:

- ✓ Percent of children in each cohort who graduate from high school.
- ✓ Standardized test scores of children in each cohort.

- ✓ School attendance rates
- ✓ Percent of children who enter the criminal justice system.
- ✓ Employment and/or college entrance rates.
- ✓ Other indicators as suggested and developed by the Advisory Committee and academic research partner.

Letter of Interest:

Champion Project staff are currently accepting letters of interest from universities and academic researchers interested in partnering with Mendocino County Health and Human Services Agency. To respond to this call for partners, please submit the following information:

- 1) Name and location of university or academic research institution.
- 2) Names and titles of proposed academic staff assigned to the project.
- 3) Brief description of history with similar projects.
- 4) Brief description of capacity to participate in project. When and how often can you travel to Mendocino County to meet with project staff? What kind of academic services can you offer to the project? Do you have the interest and capacity to participate in this project for up to a decade or more?

If you would like more information about the project before responding, please feel free to contact us by phone or email.

Please submit Letter of Interest by email to:

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