

Brazelton Touchpoints Center and Horizons for Homeless Children Partner to Promote Healthy Child and Family Development

February 6, 2019

The Brazelton Touchpoints Center (BTC), a non-profit organization focused on ensuring that every child will be healthy, succeed as early learners and have the opportunity to thrive, is pleased to welcome Horizons for Homeless Children (Horizons) to the BTC Site Network, a national learning community of organizations, practitioners, and systems of care actively using the Touchpoints Approach in their family engagement strategies.

Horizons for Homeless Children improves the lives of young homeless children and their families through high quality early education, comprehensive family support services, opportunities for play, and advocacy work. In delivering these services, Horizons reaches more than 2,000 young homeless children each week in Massachusetts through three early education centers and more than 120 shelter-based Playspaces.

The experience of homelessness is a traumatic one, particularly for young children experiencing family homelessness. Through its work with homeless children and families, Horizons has learned firsthand how important an understanding of early childhood development is in helping young children overcome the impact of their negative experiences.

In recognizing the need for its staff to have a deeper understanding of early childhood development, BTC is delivering Touchpoints professional development to Horizons staff. Touchpoints is an evidence-based approach and training program for family-facing professionals that facilitates a strengths-based mindset to more effectively engage families, giving Horizons staff a toolkit of strategies, tactics, principles and perspectives that helps them engage families and support positive developmental outcomes.

The first cohort of Horizons program participants completes their training in April 2019, with a second cohort scheduled to begin in May. Ultimately, Horizons' goal is to put the tools of Touchpoints in the hands of all of its employees by the end of 2020. Touchpoints training is followed by six months of coaching and mentoring that creates opportunities for reflective practice, where Horizons staff can share individual experiences together and jointly apply lessons to their common practice.

Touchpoints is already yielding real outcomes for Horizons' staff and the children and families with whom they work. "My interactions with parents have changed as a result of this training," said one current training participant. When one of her students was consistently arriving late to school, she used the Touchpoints approach to engage with the parents, and "rather than jumping right into the issue with his mom, I started with a question about how things were going with her family." By fundamentally changing how she engaged the mom, "we were able to look at the situation together, and come up with a plan that was collaborative, not prescriptive. She felt supported and I felt like we'd addressed the issue and found a solution that could work."

Through Touchpoints strategies for building relationships with and positively engaging parents and families, Horizons staff are empowering them as experts on their children, and promoting school readiness among children facing significant adversities on the path of their healthy development. And as was so artfully expressed by Kate Barrand, Horizons CEO and a Touchpoints trainee, the tools provided through Touchpoints have the added benefit of bubbling “over to all our interactions, helping us be more self-aware and respectful so that we can build the relationships that lead to personal and professional success.” Truly, a win-win for everyone involved.

About Brazelton Touchpoints Center

The Brazelton Touchpoints Center was founded in 1996 by T. Berry Brazelton, MD, and colleagues, and is based in the Division of Developmental Medicine at Boston Children’s Hospital, a Harvard Medical School teaching hospital. A pioneer in the field of child development and pediatrics whose keen insights and observations fundamentally changed the way we understand and approach child development and family engagement, Dr. Brazelton’s work continues today, embodied in the Center that bears his name. Working together with families, providers, and communities, the Brazelton Touchpoints Center develops and applies knowledge of early childhood development to practice and policy through professional and organizational development, evaluation, advocacy and awareness, and serving as a resource for proven practices. Since 2010, BTC has been the home of the Office of Head Start and Office of Child Care National Center on Parent, Family, and Community Engagement. More information on our programs can be found at www.brazeltontouchpoints.org.