

The Lasting Impact of Promising Minds

Lessons Learned from Promising Minds can inform the future of children in Hawaii

The Promising Minds Initiative was developed by the Hawaii Community Foundation in 2019 to increase the healthy development of vulnerable children ages 0-5 and build resilience in those who have already experienced the negative effects of trauma. The Promising Minds initiative focuses on trauma-informed professional development approaches for the early childhood workforce and the health workforce, including clinicians from a variety of disciplines: social work, therapy, counseling, behavioral health supports, pediatrics, nursing and more. This three-year initiative aims to create a vibrant statewide network of organizations and individuals addressing early adversity and trauma.

Since its inception, Promising Minds has engaged in evaluation and learning efforts with the support of Engage R+D. To gain insight on the program's lasting impact on practitioners, the evaluation team conducted a focus group with four participants from Promising Minds cohorts 1 (Oahu) and 2 (East Hawaii) in March 2021, a year into the COVID-19 pandemic. These practitioners shared their insights on the personal and professional impact of Promising Minds, what supports they need, and how they are meeting the COVID moment. Parents and Caregivers were also asked to participate in a photo voice project to understand the impact of Promising Minds on families in Hawaii.

This learning brief highlights insights gained from a recent focus group with past Promising Minds cohorts and a photovoice project for families impacted by Promising Minds.

I'm really thankful that we did Promising Minds. [Trauma informed care] services are needed, meaning all of us are needed more than ever."

Learning and Evaluation

In partnership with the Hawai'i Community Foundation (HCF), Engage R+D has supported the learning and evaluation efforts of the Promising Minds initiative since 2019.

The first year of the evaluation focused on **building relationships** with HCF and its key stakeholders, developing a deep understanding of the initiative strategy, building a solid foundation of quality data, and learning from grantees.

In the second year, we focused our attention on **systems changes** related to trauma-informed practices, including the Early Childhood Mental Health Consultants. We also documented and shared **emergent outcomes** in the early childhood settings and the maturation of **program processes**.

Currently, in Year 3 we are synthesizing the collective findings to assess **program impact** and indicators of growth and scale. This case study is part of the synthesis process to understand the lasting impacts of Promising Minds.

Areas of Inquiry



Early Childhood Settings



Coherent System



Children



Parents and Caregivers

WHAT WE LEARNED FROM PRACTITIONERS

Personal Level: Increased awareness and sensitivity to trauma

- Practitioners shared that the Promising Minds program had lasting impacts on their personal lives and professional practice.
- Through the program, practitioners cultivated an increased awareness and sensitivity to the prevalence and impact of trauma on children and families.

"Everybody's going through something. Just knowing that, just being able to see it and be aware, and to address it and support them through that."

Organization Level: Regular staff check-ins and self-care

- Practitioners learned to regularly check in on staff to support them in processing their personal trauma and the trauma that they encounter when working with families.
- Practitioners are actively making space for regular communication with staff and the practice of self-care within their organizations.

"We were always family first, families first and we still are, but we still need to care for our staff or we have nothing to give"

Meeting the Moment: Resilience during the pandemic

- Practitioners were able to pivot and apply trauma informed care practices to meet the needs of families and children during the pandemic.
- They recognize that the need for trauma informed care is increasing within the populations that they serve as families deal with varying forms of trauma related to the pandemic.

"Promising Minds gave us the language, tools, and resources we needed to know how to respond. [We were] more equipped when those conversations came about."

System Support: More trauma informed practitioners are needed

- Promising Minds practitioners recognized the need for more practitioners within the system that are trained or specialize in trauma informed care.
- Practitioners shared that an increase in trained, trauma informed care professionals would ensure that children and families do not get lost when navigating systems.

"We need more trauma informed care resources like people who are specialized in that so when you have a really severe case you have somewhere to go."

Learnings that Last



[Promising Minds] it really helped me with my team knowing where my team's at all the time so that I know when they need support."

The focus group conducted with past Promising Minds practitioners in March 2021 was a follow-up to focus groups that were conducted during practitioners' participation in the program in 2019. By checking in with practitioners over one year after they had completed the program, the evaluation team was able to gain insight into how practitioners applied what they learned in their personal lives and professional practice. The timing of the focus group, one year into the COVID-19 pandemic, allowed the evaluation team to learn how practitioners applied Promising Minds' trauma informed care teachings to their work with children and families during a challenging time. Practitioners also noted necessary supports that would be beneficial within the child and family care system in order for trauma informed care practices to spread throughout Hawaii. The following table provides insights into the learnings that practitioners and includes practitioner quotes and stories from the field.

How Promising Minds Shaped Practitioners' Lives and Professional Practice



1. Raising Awareness: Practitioners shared that the Promising Minds program helped them identify trauma

Practitioners mentioned that they developed a new understanding, sensitivity and awareness that "trauma can look different for different people" and that "everybody's going through something." Approaching their lives and their professional practice with this in mind has helped them identify when and how they can be a source of support for their own families, staff, and families in their care.



2. Increasing the Practitioner Capacity to Engage in Trauma Informed Dialogue: The program also supplied practitioners with the knowledge and the language to engage in trauma informed dialogues with families.

A Story from the Field: [My colleague] and I did a training parenting class at our shelter site. All the families that we were talking to actually are living in that shelter. We did exercise with them about what does stress look like and relate that to what trauma looks like. Trauma looks different to everyone. There's a breakthrough moment at the end of our session when we just had it opened up for them to share and ask questions. One family just broke down and was like, "What if your own family is toxic?" [My colleague] talked to them and was explaining to that guy that absolutely it can be the case. It's okay. Don't feel bad that your family is toxic. The first step is that you're recognizing that. And now how are you going to help your keiki by recognizing that? What are you going to do to protect your keiki? Decide what is going to be the best thing for you to do to help them so that they're not exposed to that toxic stress or abused or traumatized about whatever is happening.



3. Supporting Staff through their Trauma: Through Promising Minds, practitioners realized that their own staff required trauma informed support in order to be effective in the field when working with families.

Practitioners shared that they changed their organizational practices to include more regular check-ins with staff and team members in order to provide ongoing trauma informed support internally. These check-in points proved to be valuable during the pandemic, when staff were dealing with additional stressors and greater responsibilities at home.

One practitioner explained, "That idea of reflective supervision and then how we're assisting them to be able to cope with their trauma as they're assisting others through their trauma. I think that's become even more necessary now through COVID, it's really helped us because so many of our staff are just overwhelmed and at their wit's end but just giving their all to the families they serve and not having enough to give to their families in their home. Then the impacts on their children become negative. So we're really trying to help them find that balance so that that doesn't become an issue and they don't have to deal with that in the future."



Learnings in Action: Responding to the COVID-19 Pandemic

Promising Mind practitioners shared that the impact of the pandemic has been hardest on their most vulnerable families, particularly those that have experienced job loss, homelessness, or are considered undocumented. Practitioners also noted that many families are experiencing depression and family members are at risk of intimate partner violence. One participant mentioned, "For some children and some families, COVID might someday actually be an ace. It's so traumatic to some."

Throughout the pandemic, Promising Minds practitioners have shifted from in-person or at-home care to providing virtual support for families, food distribution, and toolkits with activities for children and families. These efforts are the product of stronger, more cohesive partnerships with community groups and agencies that have been fostered during 2020 in order to meet the needs of families.

Practitioners also mentioned that the teachings of Promising Minds prepared them for how to respond to the stressors of the pandemic and provided them with the vocabulary, tools, and sensitivity to engage in trauma informed conversations with staff and the families they serve.



4. Prioritizing Self-Care: Practitioners have incorporated regular self-care practices and resources into their organizations internal processes.

Self-care is an important component of the Promising Minds curriculum. Practitioners shared that they have incorporated self-care into their personal and professional practice. One practitioner shared that their organization particularly stressed the importance of self-care during their recent retreat. When describing their retreat, they said, “It was all self-care things, and even having people go out and do something that relaxes you.” Practitioners acknowledged that caring for themselves and their staff in this way helps them care for the families in their care.



5. Spreading Trauma Informed Care throughout the System: Practitioners recognized the need for more specialists trained in trauma informed care practices within the system.

With greater awareness of trauma informed care, practitioners identified that a lack of trauma informed specialists exist within the system, particularly agencies that can handle cases of severe trauma. One practitioner shared that an agency told them that a particular case was “beyond them” and was too severe a case for the agency to handle. Practitioners also noted that families can lose themselves within the system, especially if they are referred to practitioners or agencies that have not been exposed to trauma informed care practices. One practitioner explained, “A lot of times when we identified the issues that our families are having and the support that they need, the hand-off is rough, because we’ve built this rapport with our families and they trust us, which takes a while sometimes to build. Then we are telling them, ‘Okay, we’re going to send you off to so-and-so, because they’re going to help you with this part,’ and then they’re not equipped with how to work with young children or equipped with how to work with the families that we serve.” One way Promising Minds is addressing this is through the Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Fellows program to increase the number, confidence and proficiency of professionals in this field. In addition to engaging with families, they would provide support to early childhood practitioners.

Impact of Promising Minds on Families

Through a method called Photovoice, 4 parents/family members shared photos that highlighted the ways in which children in their care are thriving. Parents and families shared pictures of their children (on this page) exploring the rain, playing with their grandparent, visiting the beach, and trying new foods for the first time.

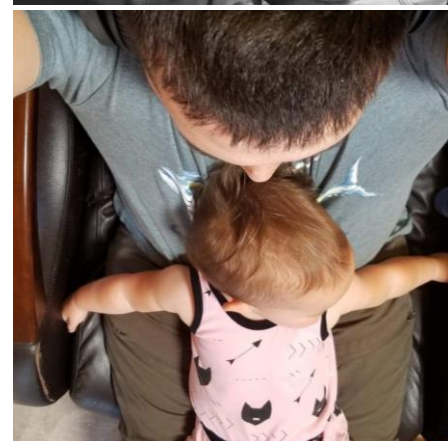
Parents shared that they enjoyed spending time with their children and sharing these experiences with them. One parent explained, “Even if we are busy working parents we can still spend quality time with [our child] and do things with [them] that [they] enjoy.”

Parents/family members also explained what **messages these pictures can send to people who care for their children and other children in Hawaii.** They noted that these pictures described the importance of creating “little moments” to share with their children, such as reading books together, cuddling on the couch, and playing with their children. Parents/families explained that these moments helped introduce their children to new experiences, allows children to learn and grow, and **helps parents and family members build connections and trusting relationships** that can “make a huge impact in their lives and development.”

One parent also shared that their child benefited from the care provided by an organization trained by Promising Minds. This parent shared, “[My child] has greatly benefited from being a part of Imua Family Services. We are very grateful to this organization for all the help they continue to provide to [my child] and many other families in Maui County.”

Note of Gratitude:

The insights collected, analyzed, and shared for and about the Promising Minds program are based on the collaborative efforts of Hawaii Community Foundation staff, Promising Minds program partners, and Engage R+D. We would like to thank Promising Minds program participants and families for sharing their perspectives about Promising Minds. Your insights will shape the future of this program. Mahalo!



This summary was prepared by:



For:

