



FEBRUARY 11<sup>TH</sup>, 2015

# Mitigating the Impacts of Trauma in Young Children: Lessons from Program and Policy Strategies in Illinois

**2015 Child Health, Education, and Care Summit**



It's amazing what they absorb before they're five.





## Today's Agenda

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- The Challenge
- Our Strategies in Illinois
  - Through Policy
  - Through Program
- Discussion
  - Your Experiences
  - Implications for Your Work



# The Challenge

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## The Impact of Trauma on Brain Development in the Early Years

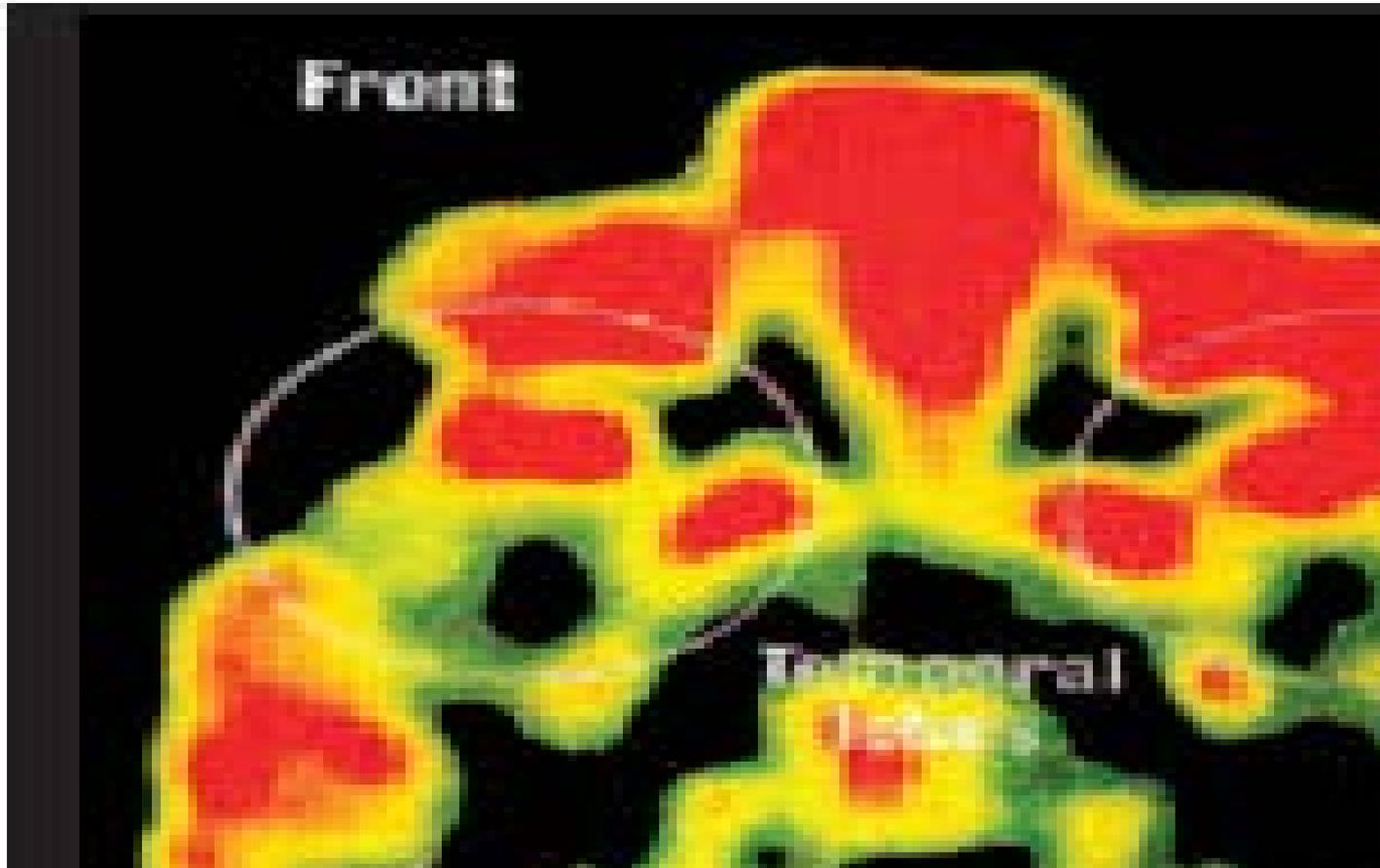
- Key principle: The prenatal period through the first three years of life is a critical developmental period that lays ***either a strong or a fragile foundation*** for later health, cognitive, and social-emotional development, and behavior
- Brain Development 101:
  - The bulk of brain development occurs from the prenatal period to the third year of life
  - Brains develop from the bottom up
  - The brain's capacity to change decreases over time
  - Much of the brain's development depends on each individual's experience interacting with their environment



# The Challenge

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## The Impact of Trauma on Brain Development in the Early Years





# The Challenge

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## Child Abuse and Neglect

- Abuse and neglect:
  - Pose a major threat to a secure attachment relationship, and therefore to healthy cognitive and social-emotional development

AND

- Infants and toddlers are more likely than older children to be involved in the child welfare system

SO....it is particularly important that these children have access to services that mitigate the impacts of the trauma they have experienced.

Unfortunately, in Illinois we found that isn't always the case...



## Home Visiting

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- Voluntary home visiting programs promote positive parenting practices and build healthy parent-child relationships, which makes them an essential strategy for reducing child abuse and neglect, improving health outcomes for mothers and children, and increasing school readiness.
- Illinois:
  - \$50M annually appropriated in state and federal dollars
  - Funds ~300 programs statewide serving ~17,000 families
  - Serving less than 10% of eligible families
  - Risk factors increasing; not reaching most at-risk
- A solution???



## The Policy Strategy in Illinois

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- Efforts to Date:
  - Project Link Recommendations
  - Gauging interest from the field
  - Finding a champion
- Current Work - statewide work group to focus on:
  - Get on the same page about systems: services, terminology, eligibility, opportunities and challenges
  - Pregnant and parenting teens who are current or former wards as starting point



## The Policy Strategy in Illinois

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- Goals for the Future:
  - Short-term
  - Long-term
- Challenges:
  - Foster parents and attachment
  - Changes in administration/champions
  - Differences in philosophy/approach/mandates
  - Capacity to implement recommendations
  - Expectations of/implications for both workforces



# The Program Strategy in Illinois

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## Educare Chicago New Beginnings



# Organizational Culture

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New Beginnings is an **approach and philosophy** for instruction

**Provides** ongoing emotional support throughout the year

Quality of relationships core to the quality  
of the child care experiences

Learning and healthy development begins  
with active and meaningful engagement  
with people and environment

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Gains in child outcomes  
Teacher-family interactions  
Social-emotional focus  
Self-regulation and executive  
Functioning  
Family stress and trauma



# Learning environment was Critical

Must create a **trusting, safe and secure**

School community

**Reduce stimulation in**

Classrooms

Create **calming**

Environments

Help children with **routine**



## Why New Beginnings?

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Focus on **relationships**  
Foundation of **social/emotional**  
development  
**Approach** for **how** we work  
with children  
Creates **consistency** in  
**practice**  
Creates consistency in **language**



## What We're Experiencing

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Deeper interactions  
Children's self-regulation  
Parents' goodbye rituals  
Shifting relationships...  
parents, children, staff  
Deeper cognitive activities  
More creativity  
Members of classroom  
community  
More language, earlier





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## Development

Involved staff, a lot of  
feedback

Found culture and contact  
Critical

## Implementation

Bold new approach  
Needed to effectively  
Engage, Motivate, Support



Add to and refine the approach  
Simplify to increase implementation  
More in-classroom  
support for teachers  
Expand our Parent  
Advisory Committee



## Discussion

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- Questions?
- Your Experiences?
- Potential application to your work?

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