Stanford
Center on Early Childhood

PEOPLE'S COMMUNITY CLINIC



Key Learnings about People's Community Clinic's Early Childhood Programs

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Introduction

People's Community Clinic (People's) is a nonprofit healthcare provider in Austin, Texas dedicated to improving the health of underserved patients and families by offering high-quality, affordable medical services with dignity and respect. Established in 1970, the clinic provides comprehensive primary care, including preventive services, chronic disease management, and specialized programs for women's health, adult health, adolescent health, behavioral health, and pediatrics. People's partnered with the Continuous Improvement Rapid Cycle Learning and Evaluation (CIRCLE) team at the Stanford Center on Early Childhood (SCEC) to begin exploring how to share key learnings about their programming for young children and their families using existing data. This brief shares the essence of People's early childhood programs and what People's has learned so far about how these programs are working.

People's Early Childhood Programs

People's leverages a holistic approach, integrating medical, social, and educational support to address the broader determinants of health for young children and their parents/caregivers. People's offers comprehensive, coordinated care and also supports families in accessing specialty care, services, and community supports outside of the clinic. Within the clinic, services related to children include

prenatal care, evaluations of newborns, anticipatory guidance for parents/caregivers, immunizations, health and developmental screenings, well child examinations, medical assessments, and treatment for chronic and acute conditions.

Key to People's early childhood programs is a focus on early relational health (ERH), which is the emotional security and positive connections that young children develop with their parents/caregivers in the early years. ERH emphasizes the importance of safe, stable, and nurturing relationships in shaping a child's well-being, brain development, and long-term health (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2022). By promoting ERH, healthcare providers can support caregivers in creating a strong foundation for children's health, well-being, and success (Williams, 2023; Willis & Eddy, 2022).

The overarching goal of People's early childhood initiatives is to support families in setting their children on a trajectory for lifetime health and well-being by making the promotion of ERH and early brain development the organizing principle of well child care for young children. To achieve that goal, People's provides three tiers of early childhood services: universal, short-term, and comprehensive. In addition to trainings to orient staff to this approach, People's has adopted and established several early childhood programs, including, but not limited to:

Program	Description
Reach Out and Read	Reach Out and Read is a national nonprofit that integrates early literacy into pediatric care by providing books and guidance to families during well child checks (WCCs). The program helps develop critical early reading skills, fostering strong parent-child bonds through shared reading (Reach Out and Read, 2023).
Filming Interactions to Nurture Development (FIND)[1]	FIND is an evidence-based video coaching program that strengthens caregiver-child interactions by highlighting and reinforcing responsive behaviors like "Serve and Return" that support healthy brain development in young children (Fisher et al., 2016).
HealthySteps	The HealthySteps model leverages primary pediatric care and routine WCCs to deliver key screening and counseling, which has positive impacts on children, their families, and the providers and staff that serve them (ZERO TO THREE, 2025). The HealthySteps Specialist provides support to families related to developmental or behavioral concerns, care coordination and system navigation, and, for certain families, ongoing, preventive team-based well child visits.
Play to Learn	Play to Learn is a preschool readiness group with a primary focus on preparing young children for Pre-K or Kindergarten. It is available as a comprehensive support for families with children ages 2-4 years who have not attended or are not currently attending Pre-K or Head Start.

[1] Filming Interactions to Nurture Development (FIND) is a video coaching program that the SCEC's Director, Philip Fisher, developed. The SCEC administers FIND in partnership with organizations across the United States.

Key Learnings

By implementing initiatives like HealthySteps and FIND, developmental screenings, and intentionally bringing ERH into conversations with parents/caregivers, the clinic is better able to support maternal health, infant care, and early childhood development to foster healthier beginnings. While opportunities exist to continue to document fidelity and increase the robustness of each program's evidence base, we are encouraged by the following key takeaways about how People's early childhood programs are working:

- **People's reconfigured WCCs to embed ERH within the visit, which is a major shift from traditional pediatric practice.** A new platform (Well Visit Planner) used for screenings and the creation of anticipatory guidance videos facilitated this shift to create more time and space in the WCC for the provider to talk with families about their priorities and about ERH. Depending on the level of care each patient needs, additional early childhood staff (e.g., community health workers, the HealthySteps Specialist) also join WCCs, integrating broader, team-based support directly into the visit. Additionally, trainings support staff in understanding the rationale and developing skills for incorporating ERH into visits.

- **Across People's early childhood programs, parents/caregivers reported an increase in responsive parenting skills following participation.** Play to Learn survey responses suggest positive changes in parents'/caregivers' responsive caregiving behaviors, and FIND participants reported high levels of engagement in Serve and Return interactions that support responsive caregiving at least once per day or more.

- **Across People's early childhood programs, parents/caregivers reported a decrease in stress following participation.** Data from FIND suggests even participating in just one program session can decrease parents'/caregivers' perceived levels of stress. Play to Learn participants also reported improved well-being and an increase in their sense of support.

- **After participating in People's early childhood programs, parents/caregivers reported an increase in their understanding of how powerfully their interactions can promote children's brain development.** After the Play to Learn program, parents/caregivers reported increased agreement with statements such as "I know the ways in which I can help my child's brain development during our daily routines." Qualitative data from FIND also shows increased parent/caregiver awareness of how interactions influence brain development:

  > "*It helped me a lot because… her little brain… it's like a little sponge and they absorb everything…. They are learning from everything we do. And I say, 'yes, my love, we're going to walk or we're going to run' and I even said to my oldest boy, 'Mijo, she's showing us a serve when she's crying' and my boy says, 'my sister is crying.' And I say, 'Yes, she's giving us the [serve] that she's bored or that she doesn't want that, so we're going to… see what's something new that she needs' and the boy says, 'oh, ok, sounds good.' And so it [had been that] I was completely unaware of it…*" - FIND participant

Next Steps

Scientific research over decades has established what families have always known: early experiences and nurturing relationships are critical for early brain development and for the long-term health outcomes of children. Pediatric well child care—with frequent preventive visits over the first 3 years of life—offers a tremendous opportunity to support parents/caregivers in setting their children on a trajectory for lifetime health and well-being. People's early childhood programs leverage this opportunity, showing promise for supporting the development and well-being of families and young children through the integration of ERH into pediatric practice. As People's continues its data collection and evaluation efforts, there are valuable opportunities to establish best practices and strengthen the evidence base across programs. The promising data shared here—along with future data collection—will inform the development of a dissemination package designed to support other clinics seeking to embed ERH into their services.

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