

Title: Welcome Groups Support Families, Tiered Model, and SmartStart Hubs

Abstract:

The Developmental Pediatrics and Rehabilitation Program at the Ron Joyce Children's Health Centre/McMaster Children's Hospital initiated Welcome Groups as a transformation of Intake to facilitate early intervention for children and families through a tiered model. Upon referral, the About My Child (Rietzema, et al., 2016), a strength-based exploratory tool is completed with families followed by an opportunity to attend a preschool or school-aged Welcome Group.

Welcome Groups function as a multidisciplinary team in collaboration with families to review a child's strengths and needs, and provide recommendations in a group setting. The 60 to 90 minute groups are led by Early Childhood Resource Specialists or Therapeutic Recreationists in collaboration with Occupational Therapists, Behaviour Therapists, Physiotherapists, and Speech Language Pathologists. Children and youth participate in activities focusing on motor, play, and recreation in a naturalistic setting to facilitate engagement and observation. Groups include the parent/caregiver which facilitates connection to other families, other services, sharing their story, and asking questions. Satisfaction surveys were provided at the end of each session.

Satisfaction surveys (n= 67) show a positive response from families. The surveys captured the child's participation in the group (mean score= 8 of a possible 10), child's enjoyment of group (mean score= 9.2 of a possible 10), parent's satisfaction with child's participation (mean score=4.4 of a possible 5), and quality of the Welcome Group (mean score= 4.7 of a possible 5). Caregivers reported that connection with other families was of the most benefit. Additional reported benefits of the Welcome Groups were the opportunity to learn more about services including the benefit of recreational activities, gaining community connections, and having help navigating services.

Welcome Groups provide an opportunity for early intervention and family connection. Areas for future development include expanding the tiered model of service, running additional groups, and considering ways to customize the About My Child for families where English is not their first language.

References:

Rietzema, A.M., Lach, L.M., Rosenbaum, P, Nicholas, D. (2016). About My Child: Measuring 'Complexity in neurodisability. Evidence of reliability and validity. Child: care, health and development, 42(3), 402-409. doi:10.1111/cch.1236