

January 2, 2019

To whom it may concern,

This letter is written in support of the request for funding for Merrymount, and is to be included in the agenda under the Merrymount presentation to council for the January 17, 2019 meeting.

What will happen to children if essential services are not available to them and their parents, to support children's mental health and overall well being?

There is no other centre that offers such a vast array of services that supports children and their parents. As an accredited children's mental health facility, Merrymount services reduce children's exposure to risk factors and build protective factors to reduce impact when risks exist.

The prevalence of children's mental health concerns according to research by Children's Mental Health Ontario;

As many as 1 in 5 children and youth in Ontario will experience some form of mental health problem.[1]

5 out of 6 of those children will not receive the treatment they need.[2]

70% of mental health problems have their onset during childhood or adolescence.[3]

17% of children ages 2-5 years meet diagnostic criteria for mental health problems.[4]

Some of the important influences on children's mental health include children's physical, social and emotional development, family circumstances, sense of belonging to school, and access to resources and support services.

Based on research findings, certain risk factors make it more likely that children will experience poor mental health.

Children's risk factors include; complications during birth and early infancy, difficult temperament, low self esteem, low intelligence, poor bonding with parents and care givers

Family risk factors include; family disharmony, instability or breakup, harsh or inconsistent discipline style, parent(s) with mental illness or substance abuse, sibling with a serious illness or disability

School factors include; peer rejection and/or bullying, academic failure, poor attendance, poor connection between family and school

Life circumstances include; difficult school transition, death of a family member, emotional trauma, experience of physical or sexual abuse

Societal factors include; discrimination, isolation, socioeconomic disadvantage, lack of access to support services

Protective factors can help to reduce the likelihood of developing a mental health problem.

Some protective factors may help by shielding the child from experiencing a risk factor.

Key protective factors that influence children's mental health include;

Child factors; easy temperament, good social and emotional skills, positive coping style, optimistic outlook on life, good attachment to parents or care givers

Family; family harmony and stability, supportive parenting, strong family values, consistency (firm boundaries and limits)

School factors include; positive school climate, sense of belonging and connectedness between family and school, opportunity for participation in a range of activities, academic achievement

Life events; Involvement with a caring adult, support available at critical times

Societal factors include; participation in community networks, access to support services



Though risk factors increase the likelihood of experiencing mental health difficulties, some people who are exposed to significant risk factors do not develop difficulties. Research into resilience has sought to identify the things that allow children to overcome risk or adversity and 'bounce back'. Resilience is most effectively promoted when children are also connected through supportive relationships with family, friends, school and community, and have access to the resources needed to help them succeed and thrive.

Alongside my colleagues on the Family Resource team, we provide six programs to children and nineteen programs to parents. Having a variety of programs allows for the best match for a parent or child's need. These programs are offered based on registration numbers and delivered as needed.

Merrymount children's programs are designed to help children build skills to cope with situations that are identified to be risk factors for poor mental health outcomes; separation/divorce, low self esteem, social isolation, poor social skills, addictions issues in family. Children's programs are offered at Merrymount as well as schools in partnership with the Thames Valley District School Board and London and District Catholic School Board.

Why offer parenting programs at a children's mental health facility?

Parenting behaviour has consistently proven to be one of the most important contributors to healthy child development and well being (National Research Council and Institute, 2000; National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2004, 2007; Centre on the Developing Child at Harvard University, 2010).

Quality parenting during childhood promotes strong parent-child relationships leading to secure attachments (Benoit, 2004; Appleyard and Berlin, 2007; Ginsburg et al, 2007; Balbernie 2013), protects against child neglect and abuse (Ross and Vandivierre 2009), improves school readiness (Brooks-Gunn and Markman, 2005), promotes children's social development (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2004; Brotman et al, 2008; Sturgeon-Apple et al, 2010), and buffers toxic stress that can have life long consequences on health and development. (Shonkoff, 2012).

All Merrymount parenting programs build parenting capacity and skills to promote positive outcomes for children by identifying these risk factors and building protective factors. These programs are offered at Merrymount, Family Centres in London and other sites throughout the city and Middlesex county.

Without these supports available to children and their parents through Merrymount, there is a likelihood that protective factors for children will be reduced and risk factors will heighten, significantly increasing poor mental health outcomes for children. This will increase the need for more intensive services which are more costly to society both economically and for the future of our most vulnerable but valued members.....our children.

Respectfully submitted by,  
Wendy Tapp-Moore  
Merrymount Group Coordinator