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Project Improves Early Referrals and Services for Young Children With ASD

Center for Persons With Disabilities

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PROJECT IMPROVES EARLY REFERRALS AND SERVICES FOR YOUNG CHILDREN WITH ASD

November 29, 2010 by cpehrson

A young child receives services in the Up to 3 classroom.

Young children with autism will now have a better chance of being identified and receiving the appropriate services sooner than ever before in Utah.

A pilot project at the CPD set out to find ways to increase the number of early referrals for young children exhibiting symptoms of autism spectrum disorder (ASD), increasing their chances for early diagnosis and services.

Symptoms of ASD begin before the age of three years, but many children do not receive a final diagnosis until much older. This delay means that children with ASD might not get the help they need as soon as they need it. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), current research shows that early intervention treatment for children with autism can greatly improve their development.

The Utah ASD Development Project began launching a public awareness campaign aimed at early intervention providers, parents, child care providers, doctors, and the general public.

The campaign consisted of surveys conducted with parents and doctors. Responses indicated that most doctors were not discussing ASD concerns with parents, and that little to no ASD or developmental screening was regularly occurring. Learn the Signs/Act Early materials, developed by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, were then distributed to doctors, community programs, and put into local newspapers. Early intervention staff were trained on signs of autism to watch for as they worked with infants and toddlers, and ASD questions were added to their program intake paperwork.

The results of the project are impressive. During the first year of the project, more than twice as many young children at the Up to 3 Early Intervention program were referred for ASD testing. The average length of time from referral to services was reduced from 12 months to 3 months.

The ASD Project developed several recommendations for early intervention programs that would give young children a greater chance to increase their development through early detection, diagnosis, and services. These included adding ASD questions during initial meetings with parents and having staff screen for ASD symptoms during ongoing assessments. Also recommended were providing inservice training to staff on identifying Red Flags of autism and teaching them effective ASD interventions.

The impact of this project will greatly improve the outcomes for children with autism for years to come.

The Utah ASD Systems Development Project was funded by the Utah Department of Health, through the Maternal and Child Health Bureau.

Note: This is the fifth in a series of blog posts summarizing presentations made by CPD staff members in late October and early November. They attended the 2010 conference for the Association of University Centers on Developmental Disabilities. Those of you who can stop by our building can check out the research posters in the hallway leading to the CPD’s southwest door.