



Youth Research, Inc. Receives \$675,000 from Robin Hood Foundation to improve the lives of youth and families in New York State

June 2021

Rensselaer, N.Y. – Youth Research, Incorporated (YRI), received a \$675,000 grant from the Robin Hood Foundation to increase its organizational capacity and implement its mission-critical Mental Health Consultation (MHC) pilot project. Funding from the Robin Hood Foundation will help YRI expand its ability to implement pilot projects and emerging initiatives that support New York State agencies serving youth and families. YRI will hire project management and organizational development staff; develop processes and procedures to position the organization to respond to emerging and immediate needs; and establish the organization as a Research and Policy Center.

At the same time, YRI will work with Robin Hood’s Fund for Early Learning (FUEL) team to improve access to mental health services for children enrolled in early childhood education programs throughout New York State. The FUEL program funds programs that serve children from birth to age three – the most critical developmental period. Early childhood experiences are sedimentary, their effects – whether negative or positive – compounding through childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. Young children living in poverty are especially vulnerable because the disadvantages they face put them at risk of trailing behind their peers, both academically and emotionally, for years to come. Because of this, consistent access to high-quality early childhood education opportunities is critical to preparing children for success in kindergarten and beyond. Research indicates that use of Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation (ECMHC) improves the quality of early childhood education programs and decreases behavior-related pre-school expulsion ([https://www.jaacap.org/article/S0890-8567\(16\)30283-0/fulltext](https://www.jaacap.org/article/S0890-8567(16)30283-0/fulltext)).

In partnership with OCFS, YRI and Robin Hood Foundation will work with The Edward Zigler Center in Child Development and Social Policy at Yale University, Adelphi University, and Docs for TOTS to pilot and study a statewide Mental Health Consultation (MHC) program using the [Climate of Healthy Interactions for Learning & Development \(CHILD\)](#) toolkit Infant Toddler Assessment (IT-CHILD). YRI will collect and analyze MHC implementation data to inform OCFS-led statewide implementation of proven MHC practices that improve early care and learning. Using the data gleaned from this project, YRI and its partners will define best practices; prescribe specific MHC dosages based on community size and demographics; determine optimal provider caseload, frequency and mode of consultation to ensure equity; and determine linguistic needs of providers to equitably serve children and families.

The Robin Hood Foundation will provide technical assistance to support the project using the Harvard University Center on the Developing Child Frontiers of Innovation IDEAS Impact

Framework and University of Oregon Center for Translational Neuroscience Early Childhood Precision, Innovation, and Shared Measurement (EC PRISM) Technical Assistance to Early Childhood Programs guidance.

“Too many New Yorkers are born into poverty, growing up against a backdrop ripe with racial and economic injustices,” said Dr. Kelvin Chan, Managing Director of Early Childhood at Robin Hood. “YRI’s Mental Health Consultation project will help to transform New York into an environment where all infants and toddlers have an equitable opportunity at a bright future.”

Cassie Pustilnik, Executive Director at YRI, said, “We are incredibly excited to partner with the Robin Hood Foundation. Our shared deep commitment to enhancing service provision for families impacted by racial and economic injustice is the catalyst for this critical Mental Health Consultation work we are embarking on. In conjunction with Robin Hood, the NYS Office of Children & Family Services, Yale University, and other nonprofit partners, our aim is to ensure children and families across the state have more equitable access to high quality childcare; an essential resource that plays a critical role in shaping early childhood development and has a lasting community impact.”

For more information, please contact Morgan Horton, Grants Administrator for YRI, at morgan.horton@yriny.org.