

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee,

I would like to offer my opinion on HF 1402/SF 1152, a bill that would authorize funding for the Greater Minneapolis Crisis Nursery. Please know I whole heartedly endorse it.

For almost three years I have supported the Crisis Nursery's efforts to develop, implement and export the Nursery Way, a trauma informed program designed to reduce the stress experienced by young children and their parents. Children in residence at the Crisis Nursery come from families presenting risk factors for abuse and neglect. Families access the Nursery when they are in crisis. Most of the children have been exposed to adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and thus need more intensive and strategic support than children from less challenging backgrounds. For children whose parents use the Crisis Nursery repeatedly throughout the year, the Nursery Way supports the acquisition of self-regulatory capabilities that facilitate healthy interaction with peers and caregivers, improve emotion recognition and regulation, and reduce the experience of toxic stress despite living under highly stressful conditions. The protective care of the Nursery Way allows a distressed child to use adult support to adopt new ways of managing overwhelming emotions and relating to other people.

The Nursery Way is based on research. Neurobiological studies indicate that severe and prolonged or "toxic" stress in children, with too little adult support, compromises brain development and adaptation with lifelong consequences. Being in a high state of arousal ("survival mode") interferes with children's ability to explore, interact with others, and develop to their potential. Crisis Nursery staff are trained in the Nursery Way to increase their competency in addressing symptoms of ACEs and to integrate the research on toxic stress into culturally appropriate, trauma-informed, relationship –based practices.

Presently I am working with the Crisis Nursery to research the benefit of adding stress-reduction mindfulness exercises to the Nursery Way. The Crisis Nursery has also been working with one of my graduate students at the Institute of Child Development, who has adapted an assessment tool to measure the frequency of problem behaviors seen in children during their stay at the Nursery.

The Crisis Nursery has done an exceptional job of incorporating research into practice. Their commitment to best practice has drawn the attention of the Center for the Developing Child at Harvard University, and the Crisis Nursery is currently working with the Center to develop and assess training materials that can be used to export their Nursery Way practices to other nonprofits.

Funding for the Crisis Nursery will be a worthy investment in this organization's effort to end child abuse and neglect and create strong healthy families, not just in greater Minneapolis but across the state. I strongly encourage your support of HF 1402/SF 1152.

Sincerely,



Megan R. Gunnar
Regents Professor
Institute of Child Development