

# Celebrate children's week



**MARIO  
HERNANDEZ**

This first week in May has been designated National Children's Mental Health Week. The National Federation of Families for Children's Mental

Health has declared the 2010 theme "Promoting Positive Mental Health from Birth to Adulthood."

USF's Department of Child and Family Studies at the Louis de la Parte Florida Mental Health Institute in the College of Behavioral and Community Sciences is joining with the federation and the Federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration to urge our community to make a deeper commitment to children's mental health through supporting programs that intervene early to prevent emotional and behavioral problems.

Estimates show that almost 21 percent of children in the United States ages 9 to 17 have a diagnosable mental or addictive disorder, including depression, anxiety, conduct disorder, substance abuse and suicidal thinking.

Unfortunately, 79 percent of these children do not receive necessary mental health care. As a result, their lives are negatively impacted, and the children end up in the juvenile justice and child welfare systems or on the streets.

Current research and practice shows that prevention and early identification offer the best opportunity for children to achieve positive outcomes.

The Tampa Bay community is investing in numerous programs supported by the Children's Board of Hillsborough County and other local groups aimed at promoting positive youth development and en-

hancing the abilities of children and their families to take advantage of educational opportunities.

One local example is the internationally recognized Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters (HIP-PY), a home-based, early intervention literacy program serving families across Florida. HIPPY lays the foundation for success within families by improving literacy through family participation in learning. Research demonstrates that when children succeed in schools, their mental health also benefits.

A large-scale longitudinal study of HIPPY has shown that children who successfully participate in the program later have fewer school suspensions and display more positive classroom behavior.

Our community can gain inspiration from programs like HIPPY.

Our children deserve to live in communities where they can't "slip through" and end up being placed into forms of treatment and services that are costly to taxpayers and that separate them from their families and communities.

During our current economic challenge it seems wise to invest our precious tax dollars in a manner that helps positively support children and their families instead of spending taxes on costly services and out-of-home placements. This prevention message is not new.

In the words of one of our past local leaders, Sen. Louis de la Parte, "It costs more to keep a man in prison than to keep a boy in college."

For more information, visit <http://www.samhsa.gov/children/>.

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