



Memorandum

TO: Satpal Sidhu, County Executive
FROM: Erika Lautenbach, Director
RE: Whatcom Center for Early Learning (WCEL) – Healthy Children’s Fund Mental Health Expansion Contract
DATE: **SEPTEMBER 12, 2024**

Attached is a contract between Whatcom County and WCEL for your review and signature.

▪ **Background and Purpose**

This agreement supports expansion WCEL’s Early Childhood Mental Health Support Program to low-income children. The expansion of services will address significant barriers to accessing mental health services in Whatcom County by providing direct to support to children and families in a current mental health crisis or extreme stress while removing barriers in navigating insurance and access to outside providers. WCEL directly serves children with complex medical needs and their caregivers through early support and early learning programs. Expansion of mental health support services will include:

- Employing licensed staff who will serve substantially more children through the provision of clinical and non-clinical mental health services to children and families.
- Implementing a Master of Social Work internship supported by the professionals describe above, to develop a workforce with skills in providing mental health services to children ages 0-5.
- Offering parenting classes using The Incredible Years, an evidence-based framework that builds long-term parenting skills and provides parents with the support network to help manage their mental wellness beyond WCEL’s programming.
- Providing staff development and training opportunities in mental health topics for the intended populations.

Access to early childhood mental health care is a critical gap in Whatcom County. This lack of access has serious and lasting consequences on children’s physical, emotional, social, and cognitive health. With early identification and investments in mental health treatment for young children and their families, expenditures in healthcare, education, criminal-legal system, and the labor market are reduced. Early identification and intervention also supports families in learning simple strategies for support, which leads to healthy development of the child and a healthier home environment and a reduction in the risks of childhood mood disorders.

This contract is awarded as a result of RFP 24-60 and supports Strategy 7 of the Healthy Children’s Fund, intended to expand behavioral and mental health services for vulnerable children, pregnant parents, and parents with young children.

▪ **Funding Amount and Source**

Funding for this agreement, in an amount not to exceed \$398,709, is provided by the Healthy Children’s Fund. These funds are included in the 2024 budget. Council authorization is required per WCC 3.08.010 as funding for this contract exceeds \$40,000.

Please contact Ann Beck, Community Health & Human Services Manager at 360-778-6055 (ABeck@co.whatcom.wa.us) if you have any questions.

