Executive Summary
FINAL REPORT

RIRO-Wellington
Resiliency Skills Leadership Training Pilot Project

“Developing a Resiliency Framework for Child Care Programmes in Guelph-Wellington”

report prepared by

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1. Overview and goals of the project

This pilot project explored the impact of RIRO Resiliency Skills Leadership Training, an intensive 3-day version of Reaching IN...Reaching OUT’s two-part evidence-based resiliency skills training programme with four follow-up working sessions specially designed for supervisors/leaders.

The goal of the skills training for leaders was to teach skills and content to strengthen their resilience so they could pass along these skills to children and adults.

The goals of the follow-up working sessions for supervisors were to:

- aid integration of the skills training
- provide tools for developing a relationship-based reflective practice
- support supervisor mentoring of staff in the resiliency skills
- support resiliency promotion on multiple levels in staff, children, parents, board members and community.
- show how RIRO resiliency skills can enhance the programme’s policies, procedures and guidelines.

The overall purpose of this project was to support young children’s development of resilience by increasing capacity in child care programmes in the Guelph-Wellington area. This supports the Ontario Ministry of Child and Youth Services’ client-level outcome that “every child and youth is resilient.”

The project also examined the added impact on the level of integration of the RIRO skills training into programmes by having all programme staff in pilot centres receive the regular 2-day RIRO skills training at the same time their supervisors/leaders received their specialized training.

The project began in late March 2009 and ended in December 2009. Leaders from 10 centres (5 pilot and 5 non-pilot sites) participated in the pilot, and 12 leaders completed the leadership and skills training. Staff in the pilot centres also received the skills training more-or-less concurrently with their supervisors.

2. Findings related to project goals

The pilot project findings suggest that the major goals as set out above were met.

Supervisors/leaders and staff report an increase in their knowledge about resilience as well as enhancement of their resiliency abilities and capacity to deal with conflict, daily challenges and adversities.

Supervisors/leaders reported a statistically significant increase in their knowledge about: resiliency research, skills and abilities; promotion of mastery and positivity; as well as modeling of resilient thinking and behavior in their programmes ($p<.001$; except $p<.005$ for positivity). They also rated the usefulness of the follow-up working sessions highly in helping them: integrate the skills in their own lives and work; engage in reflective practice; mentor their staff; begin promotion of resilience with their staff, children, parents, programme and community; and examine how their policies and practices incorporate resiliency promotion.

2.1 Impact of the skills training

Use and usefulness of the resiliency skills training

All participating supervisors and 98% staff reported using the resiliency skills on a regular basis in their work as well as outside of work (100% supervisors; 87% staff).

Nearly all reported introducing the resiliency skills and content to the children through role modeling (100% supervisors; 92% staff), by working with individual children (100% supervisors; 87% staff) and through child-friendly group activities (91% supervisors; 80% staff).
Supervisors/leaders rated the usefulness of their enriched skills training experience very highly in helping them understand children’s behavior, their own response to stressful situations and other adult’s behaviour (4.7, 4.8, 4.3 respectively on a 5-point scale). Similarly, staff also rated their 2-day skills training as being useful in understanding children, themselves and others (4.1, 3.9 and 3.7 on a 5-point scale). Overall, supervisors/leaders’ ratings were higher than their staff which would be expected given that they attended an enriched training.

Impact of the skills training on supervisors and staff
Participants in the pilot project report many positive changes in themselves and the children they work with.

On a general level, the areas that supervisors/leaders and staff rated as having changed the most were their:

- reflective practice
- understanding of how to introduce the skills and abilities to children
- understanding leading to greater empathy with children and parents
- ability to communicate more effectively with children, parents and co-workers
- ability to work as a supportive team member.

In addition, staff also added the following three to their top-ranked areas: a greater ability to promote positivity, be more compassionate with themselves and others, and put things in perspective.

More specifically, both groups reported they have made strides in:

- feeling calmer/practicing deep breathing
- thinking/reflecting more before reacting
- looking at situations from several perspectives
- identifying features that are controllable
- not taking things personally
- not blaming others
- not jumping to conclusions
- putting things into perspective
- being more patient
- being more accepting of children’s uniqueness

“The training has had a big impact on me. I am less stressed and more focused on things I can change.”

Leaders also completed a formal measure developed at the University of Pennsylvania (*Resiliency Quotient Test-RQ*) before and six months after their leadership training. The RQ looks at critical abilities researchers have found associated with resilience. Not surprisingly, considering the findings reported above, there were changes in two areas—impulse control and causal analysis.

Impact on working with children and children’s behavior
When asked whether their resiliency skills training helped them support positive changes in the children they work with, 98% of staff and 100% of the leadership group responded affirmatively. Staff reported that the “children are being empowered with the resiliency skills and abilities” and that “the children are a lot calmer because the teachers are a lot calmer.”

Supervisors/leaders and staff said that their attitude toward children with challenging behaviors had been affected in a positive way:

“I now have a feeling that no child is beyond “rescue” in their behavior. I am trying harder to help them instead of giving up. The result is positive change in their behaviour because of a change in my attitude.”
Nearly all leaders and staff reported seeing changes in children’s ability to calm down and problem solve. About three-quarters saw children as being more confident in their abilities, more willing to try new things and see mistakes as OK, and to help others. And most importantly, 91% of the supervisors and 57% of the staff reported seeing the children mimic with their peers resiliency skills that were modeled for them by staff.

“The staff have brought relaxation/breathing tools to the children which has helped tremendously with group problem-solving and self-control with all age groups.”

“They are problem-solving better.” “The kids are now trying to work things out first before going to the teachers.”

2.2 Impact of the working sessions on integration, reflective practice, mentoring and leadership skills

Impact of working sessions on integration of the resiliency skills and content
Supervisors and lead teachers participating in the leadership group rated the four working sessions very highly in terms of their usefulness to their jobs. In particular, they rated the helpfulness of the working sessions most highly in regard to integrating the skills, developing their reflective practice, and mentoring their staff.

Reflective practice:
Several tools were developed for the resiliency skills leadership group to promote reflection, integration of the skills training, and support for mentoring. Two reflection tools (RRT#1 and RRT#2) were produced to aid supervisors and staff in integration of the adult resiliency skills and to help them promote mastery and positivity in their programmes. Four templates were created providing step-by-step guidelines to help supervisors and staff deal with challenging situations, manage negative behavior, remain non-defensive under personal attack, and cope with perfectionism.

Both of the personal Resiliency Reflection Tools were seen by supervisors and staff as being helpful in keeping track of their practice and integration of the skills training supporting reflection on challenging situations, and promoting mastery and positivity at work. Nearly all supervisors in pilot centres report they plan to use the reflection tools with new staff in the future.

More than half of the supervisors/leaders in pilot sites were using a template to help them deal with challenging situations. Nearly half indicated that their staff had also used the templates, and all said they planned to support staff use of the templates in the future.

Supervisors/leaders also reported a significant change in their use of reflective practice overall. As a group they reported nearly a 2-point shift (on a 5-point scale) when asked to compare their practices before and after the leadership training ($p<.001$), and among pilot site leaders the difference was even higher (2.3 points).

Here is one leader’s comment on her reflective practice:

“I try to think back throughout the day on what I’ve done, how I have used my RIRO skills and maybe anything I could have done differently. This time of reflection also helps me feel grounded and calm.”

Mentoring
The working sessions were rated as very useful by leadership participants in helping them mentor their own staff in the resiliency skills. And the difference in their ratings of their ability to mentor staff in the resiliency content before and after the full leadership training was highly significant ($p<.005$).

They also rated the impact of working sessions and skills training very highly on their ability to mentor and motivate others in handling stress more effectively, using reflective practice, problem-solving, and resolving conflicts. They
report feeling more confident in their mentoring activities and helping their staff mentor their colleagues. They find they can help others and believe they are seen as role models.

“With my increased knowledge, motivation and enthusiasm, I will be a more confident mentor.”

“As mentoring becomes more embedded practice at our centre, the mentoring will not only come from me as I strive to empower others to do the same.”

Leadership skills
Supervisors/leaders remarked that the one of the biggest impacts has been on their leadership skills—being more confident, influential, patient, empathic leaders who can tackle challenging situations and engage in self-care more effectively. They rated the impact on their leadership skills quite highly (4.1 on 5-point scale).

“I'm able to take on new things better and be a more helpful leader.”

“The resiliency training has had the most positive impact on me as a leader. I have noted times that my resilient reaction to [challenging] situations has been modeled in similar situations by staff.”

“Now I can say “tomorrow will do” and forgive myself if I take some time for myself.”

“I was a catastrophic thinker. I went from 0 to 10 very fast and always thought the worst. Now I look at situations and think about them realistically and realize things aren’t as bad as they seem.”

2.3 Creating a “culture of resilience” – integration of resiliency skills and content on multiple levels including policies, procedures and practices

One goal of the leadership training was to help supervisors/leaders promote resilience on multiple levels, not only with the children, but also in their staff, parents, board and community. Another goal was introducing supervisors to resiliency promotion at the level of policies, procedures and practices. These are not short-term goals; working to promote resilience on a programme-wide basis is an ongoing process.

The resiliency skills leadership training devoted one working session to this topic and created tools and handouts to help supervisors begin and keep track of their progress in this multi-year process.

A Resiliency Checklist was developed to help leaders look at each area and rate how frequently, if at all, it was being addressed in their programmes. The checklist covered use of the skills and content with: children in programme, staff with each other, parents, as well as at the level of programme resources, policies and procedures, personnel practices (e.g., hiring, orientation, supervision) and board and community.

Leadership group participants rated the overall usefulness of the Resiliency Checklist in their integration of the leadership skills training on a programme-wide level quite highly (4.0 on a 5-point scale). And 80% of the pilot centres reported they would continue to use the checklist in the future to track their progress.

“It shows the leader exactly where you are in your programme with resilience, and then it is easier to integrate more into your work.”

“It pointed out strengths and areas to focus on.”

While most of the leaders say that they are modeling the skills routinely with children, they report slightly slower progress in staff using the skills to solve their own challenges or use the skills with parents.
Integration by staff for themselves
About half of the leaders reported that staff are routinely using the skills to handle challenging situations, identify/challenge their own iceberg beliefs, understand each other better through B-C Connections, and conduct ongoing reflective practice. Less than half said that staff routinely assess their own strengths and challenges using the resiliency abilities.

“Staff are more receptive and compassionate with each other.”

“They are dealing with situations much more calmly and seem to be less stressed.”

“We are more likely to recognize and praise each other when we feel our colleagues have handled stressful situations well.”

Integration with parents
More than three-quarters of leadership participants reported routine modeling of the skills with parents, planning interventions to support families and using B-C Connections to understand themselves and families better. Less than three-quarters said that they use the skills to assess family strengths and challenges and explore possible iceberg beliefs. More than half reported that staff/supervisors are introducing strategies to parents to support children’s resilience. Less than half said they have already offered, or plan to offer, parent information sessions to support resiliency awareness.

“Staff are being more empathic with families and, in turn, parents are more understanding.”

“I give parents resiliency techniques for home and I feel more open with them now.”

“The parents are interested and have accepted the idea of a parent information session on resilience.”

Supervisors are also beginning to look at how resilience can enhance their programme resources, policies and practices.

Integration into programme resources
More than three-quarters reported that they are routinely considering their programme’s physical layout as a means to support children’s natural resilience. More than half said they routinely consider resiliency skills in supporting an emergent curriculum, in selecting learning resources and the children’s menu. However, only 10% reported that there is parent involvement in planning and implementing of learning resources, food, and physical layout to support inclusion, diversity and cultural competence.

Integration into programme policies
More than half of the leaders said that the resiliency skills and abilities are now considered in developing their policies, guidelines and strategies. More specifically, three-quarters of the leaders reported they are looking at their policies in respect to their support of resilience in the areas of confidentiality and anti-gossip, conflict resolution, behavior guidance, cultural competence, inclusion, special needs and communication with parents. Nearly three-quarters indicated that development of policies is routinely a collaborative effort with staff and in some centres they are gathering input from parents.

“This will come in time—we need to make changes to our philosophy, parent handbook, articles in our newsletter and handouts to parents.”
Integration into personnel practices
All leaders said that supervisors in their programmes are using the skills and abilities in their mentoring of staff and nearly all report the training content is used as a framework for supervision of staff. Nearly three-quarters report they are considering the resiliency skills and abilities in hiring of new staff and in supporting the development of a culture of resilience. However, less than half are using RIRO resiliency materials in staff orientation. And finally, more than half said that resiliency skills and abilities are considered in evaluation and planning and making professional development opportunities available.

Integration of training content at the board and community level
Nearly all supervisors leading programmes having a board of directors said that they model the skills training content with the board to promote positive relationships and handle challenging issues. Less than a third, however, said they have directly educated board and community members about the importance of resilience.

Overall, supervisors/leaders participating in the leadership training rated the leadership training and working sessions quite highly in helping them to begin integrating resilience at the level of staff, children, families board and community (4.1 on 5-point scale). And they rated the leadership training similarly in helping enhance programme policies, procedures and guidelines (4.0).

In summary, all of the supervisors/leaders participating in the leadership training worked throughout the pilot project to integrate the resiliency skills training content in various aspects of their programme and report they are planning to continue now that the pilot is completed. As this is a long-term process, understandably, the greatest gains have been on the personal level and with the children. However, most leaders are beginning to look at how they can incorporate resilience into their practices with parents and in their policies, procedures and practices on a programme-wide basis. At this point, here are some comments that sum up their progress:

“In our programme there is just a more positive atmosphere for children and staff.”

“I believe we promote a culture of resilience here each and every day.”

3. Barriers experienced and supports needed

Barriers
Supervisors in the pilot centres encountered a number of barriers in integrating the resiliency skills and content in their programme. Some of the major ones were: the loss of RIRO-trained staff, insufficient or conflicting information from pilot organizers about staff training and what to expect, difficulties in meshing the timing of staff and supervisor training, as well as problems associated with the training itself such as working sessions that felt were too short and a summer break that was too long and decreased momentum. They also found they needed more information and assistance in “how to” integrate the skills with staff and children, not just “what” to roll out as well as more support and discussion about integrating the skills on a programme-wide basis including their policies and procedures.

Supports needed
Supervisors suggested several supports that could help in overcoming obstacles. The most prominent were: providing financial support for staff release time to attend the training, increasing the overall number of working sessions and ensuring that they are continuous so momentum is not lost, lengthening the working session format to increase time for discussion especially how to integrate the skills training content with staff and children, having supervisor and staff attend some of the training together, and providing in-centre consultation and ongoing follow-up to supervisors and staff about implementation of the skills training
4. Planning for the future

Based on the findings from this pilot project, the following suggestions are made to improve outcomes for participants and increase dissemination of the resiliency skills leadership training programme to other centres in the Guelph-Wellington area:

1) Supervisors/leaders were unanimous in expressing their wish to have the follow-up working sessions continue beyond the project so that they can continue to seek and offer support to each other and receive help in dealing with challenging leadership issues. They suggested that a RIRO trainer or outside consultant with greater knowledge about RIRO than themselves be asked to facilitate the group. Generally, they were uncertain that a peer support group would be effective without this assistance.

2) Given the feedback from supervisors/leaders about needing more support in the “how-to” of rolling out the skills training in their programmes and more time for discussion, it seems reasonable that these additional supports be offered:
   - Offer more follow-up working sessions that deal specifically with the “how-to’s” of rolling out the skills training and content
   - Lengthen the follow-up working sessions to offer more time for discussion and coverage of specific integration strategies. One option would be to hold the sessions from 9-1pm (over the lunch break) or from 9-2:30, instead of 9-12.
   - Offer in-centre consultation visits by RIRO-trained consultants from QCCI to assist staff in integration of the skills and supervisors in their mentoring activities.

3) Consider ways to allow all staff within a centre to be trained within a brief period given the feedback from pilot centres on the advantages of having all staff trained together so they can act as a team in implementing the skills training in their programmes.

4) Consider alternative models for training supervisors and staff, i.e., having supervisor trained first allowing for time for integration of the skills personally and then provide support in how to mentor and roll out the skills before staff training begins.

5) Consider ways to offer assistance (e.g., financial incentives, alternative training delivery models) to programmes who would like to receive the training but who cannot afford the release/replacement time for staff to attend the training.

6) Consider ways to help supervisors to increase voluntary participation in the skills training by staff to increase involvement and buy-in.