

**For Immediate release**

Contact: Patricia Gray  
p: 206-826-3039  
[pgray@wellspringfs.org](mailto:pgray@wellspringfs.org)

## **Innovative Classrooms to Help Behaviorally At-Risk Preschoolers**

SEATTLE -- It's a hidden epidemic: preschoolers expelled from their classrooms because of behavior problems at rates double that of children in state K-12 classrooms. Such expulsions can lead to further behavior problems and great difficulties in achieving both school readiness and later academic success.

A new preschool program called Cornerstone Classrooms at Wellspring Family Services that opens Feb.1 aims to help these children with special classrooms staffed with teachers and therapists that can support their emotional development and guide them to better relations with other children and adults.

The program, located at Wellspring Family Services new Rotary Support Center for Families, is open to 3 - 5 –year-old children who struggle in adjusting to typical preschool programs. Problems such preschoolers exhibit include hitting or biting, the inability to adjust to classroom routines, out-of-control crying, language delays and sleep difficulties.

Helping these children couldn't be more urgent: several national studies have found that delayed social and emotional development is one of the biggest predictors of school failure. Children who don't have these problems addressed are tough to teach, lose motivation for learning and face social isolation. They are more likely to be expelled from elementary schools as well as preschools. But there are few, if any, programs in

the region to help such children, according to the Childcare Directors Association of Greater Seattle.

This new program uses the Cornerstone Method of Reflective Therapy, in which staff meet with the children in a natural setting, a classroom, and intensively work one-on-one with them through play and socialization. In the classroom, staff verbalize reflections about a child's behavior and feelings, so the child is better able to articulate his or her own feelings, and ultimately, better regulate them.

"Cornerstone is a unique therapeutic approach that focuses on the thinking and feelings of the child," says Judy Burr-Chellin, director of Parent/Child Services for Wellspring Family Services. "Children sometimes get overwhelmed by their big feelings and just do not know how to regulate or manage them. In a Cornerstone classroom, we show the child that what he/she is feeling is important and that we want to understand so we can help him/her have the feelings without having to hit, or scream or bite.

"When children's feelings and thoughts are understood they can be communicated through words instead of behavior, and then behavior can be changed."

The ultimate goal of Cornerstone Therapy: stabilizing the children by giving them the social and emotional development skills they need to succeed in school and life.

The teachers and early childhood therapists join in partnership with parents as part of the process, touching base briefly every day, with more in-depth private weekly family conferences to further help children progress. An established Cornerstone program in San Mateo reports that many children are able to return to regular classrooms and thrive.

####

## **About Wellspring Family Services**

Every night in King County, more than 2,900 children and families are homeless. Approximately 23,000 children witness violence between adults each year. And 25% of the population experiences mental health issues. These are not merely sobering statistics; these are our neighbors.

Since 1892, Wellspring Family Services, a non-profit organization, continues to provide a breadth of services that address the sources of instability for families. We help homeless families find and hold onto a place to live, teach abusive partners non-violent behaviors, provide counseling for at-risk families and individuals, and empower parents to nurture their children. Together, we are working to build a community where everyone can thrive. For more information visit [www.wellspringfs.org](http://www.wellspringfs.org) .