



# ★ Star View Community Services ★

## Parent-Child Interaction Therapy (PCIT)

**BRIEF REPORT** from the Department of Research and Program Practices

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This last year, Star View Community Services (aka Star View) began offering Parent-Child Interaction Therapy (PCIT)<sup>i</sup> to parents/caregivers and their children ages 2 to 7 years with serious emotional or behavioral issues, including those at risk of out-of-home placement. Star View's program is funded by Mental Health Services Act (MHSA) Prevention and Early Intervention (PEI) resources from the Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health. PCIT is an evidence-based practice which supports families to change negative caregiver - child interaction patterns (such as overly harsh discipline methods or a withdrawn, distant parenting style), with the goal of decreasing childhood behavioral problems, decreasing parental stress, and decreasing child maltreatment while increasing the child's pro-social behavior and the quality of caregiver - child relationships. This **BRIEF REPORT** highlights program results through August 2015.

### *Participants:*

To date, there were 63 enrolled clients and 59 discharges. At Star View, the average course of PCIT lasted 15 weeks and included 1.1 service contacts per week.<sup>ii</sup>

The children and caregivers served were predominantly Latino (71.2%) or African American (13.6%). Others were unknown (7%), mixed ethnicity (6.1%) or Caucasian (1.5%). The children were 65% male and 35% female with a median age of 4 years at the start of treatment (range: 2-5 yrs.).

Sixty-eight percent of children were diagnosed with externalizing diagnoses (most commonly, attention deficit, hyperactive, disruptive and/or oppositional) and 32% had internalizing conditions (trauma or adjustment related) or a mixture of diagnoses.

Most (93%) participating children were living with their biological parents, although some (19%) had been removed from home in the past by child welfare; and some (14%) had a recent child protective services report (in last six months). Those not living with parents were in foster care homes.

Most (66%) caregivers were experiencing challenges such as parenting skills needing improvement (55%), recent physical illness (11%), mental illness (7%) and/or domestic violence (7%).

### *Client Vignette:*

**Alex**,\* an energetic 3-year-old African American male who came to PCIT at the request of the court overseeing Alex's adoption by his grandmother.

At their first session, Alex's behavior was wild and aggressive. He was destructive with toys and negative with his grandmother. He tore pages from the office magazines, and defied almost all of his grandmother's comments or efforts to provide discipline. The clinician observed that his grandmother's response to Alex's behavior was rigid and negative and that her expectations were not realistic for a child his age. His grandmother expressed her doubts that the program would be helpful; she just wanted Alex to behave! A previous experience at another behavioral health provider had not been successful.

In the first half of their PCIT treatment, Alex's grandmother practiced the PRIDE skills taught in PCIT child-led interactions: praise, reflection, imitation, description and enthusiasm. Through her persistence and her growing trust of the process, Alex's behavior gradually became more positive. The aggression he exhibited before diminished. Next, his grandmother learned how to lead interactions, and how to provide discipline in a positive way. Alex's behavior really improved; not only did he become more positive, but he would anticipate clean-up times and begin to put away toys on his own.

By the time they graduated from Star View PCIT, Alex's grandmother clearly saw the connection between the attention she gave Alex and his new positive age-appropriate behavior. Going forward, she has the skills to continue to build a warm and positive relationship with her grandson.

**Improvement in Functioning -- School, Home  
Behavior and Mood**  
(PECFAS, n=44 matched pairs, improvement seen as decrease)

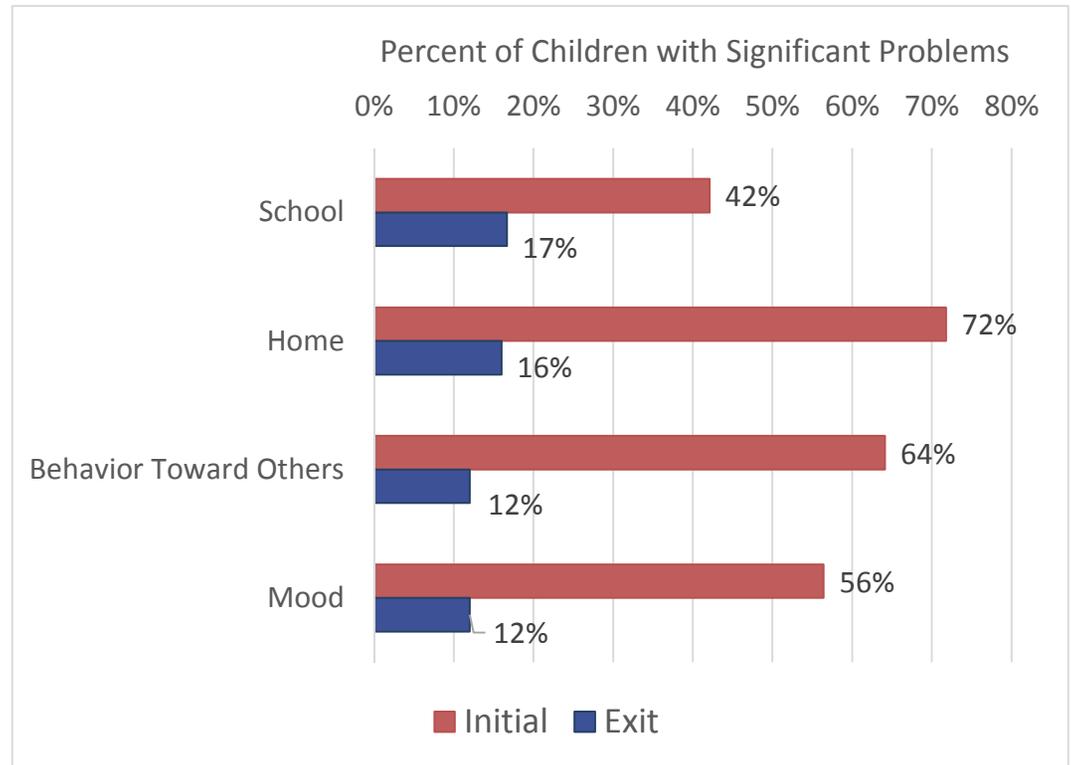
**Results:**

PCIT helps families even if they are unable to finish the entire program. Our results include all families for whom we have repeated measures (N=44 or 70%), not just those that were able to complete all sessions and meet every milestone.

When they entered treatment, children were struggling with their behavior toward others and with their moods and emotions. As seen in the chart on the right, **the proportion of children experiencing significant problems in their behavior toward others and their moods and emotions decreased significantly during treatment.**

The issues experienced by the children affected their functioning both inside and outside the home. **With PCIT, functioning at school (or age-appropriate care settings away from family) and at home improved significantly.**

Overall, the children were helped by the program; in Alex's story (see previous page), the benefits of PCIT participation for caregiver / child relationships and child behavior are clear. According to the change in total scores on the *Preschool and Early Childhood Functional Assessment Scale* (PECFAS), **67% of children improved in a reliable and clinically significant manner by exit from the program.**



***Families are our Stars!*** Parent-Child Interaction Therapy is an evidence-based practice designed for young children and their families, where there are difficult child behaviors, caregiver strain, and risk of maltreatment and out-of-home placements. At Star View, PCIT therapists work with the children and parents/caregivers together to improve their interactions, ease caregiver strain, and improve the children's behavior and social-emotional functioning. Star View's outcomes demonstrate that PCIT is working for families and the staff are dedicated to helping families like Alex's stay together and grow together!

\*Alex's name and some details have been changed to protect his and his family's privacy

<sup>i</sup> The EBP [Parent Child Interaction Therapy](#) was first developed by Dr. Sheila Eyberg at the Oregon Health Sciences University in the 1970's, and is included in the SAMHSA National Registry of Evidence-based Programs and Practices ([NREPP](#)) and the National Child Traumatic Stress Network ([NCTSN](#)).

<sup>ii</sup> PCIT is a rigorous practice in which parents and children must reach a series of behavioral milestones; many challenges can prevent full participation and completion. Participation involves daily homework for parents and caregivers and weekly appointments for the family. Parents receive instruction and coaching on specific behavioral interactions (for example, unlabeled and labeled praise). In national/state studies, a completed course of PCIT is achieved by 33% to 55% of participants. This first report addresses Star View's training and implementation year; we will report completion rates in the future.