



*There's Got To Be a Better Way* is the title of Dr. Becky Bailey's first book describing Conscious Discipline®, her life's work, and a comprehensive emotional intelligence and classroom management system currently implemented in Knox County Head Start's classrooms, and throughout the Agency. Knox County Head Start (KCHS) has utilized the philosophy and practices of [Conscious Discipline®](#) as a springboard to transform the Agency from a program in constant crisis and providing mediocre services, to a Head Start program well on its way to being known as the premier provider of early care and education services in the Knox County, Ohio community.

Conscious Discipline® provides adults the opportunity to learn new skills and behaviors, enabling them to feel safe, connected and empowered. Adults may then create a healthy environment for the children, families and community served. Knox County Head Start implements Conscious Discipline® at every level – as a classroom management tool and social emotional curriculum; as the foundation of our Child Mental Health program, incorporating teachers and parents in developing positive and consistent interventions in support of children; as a team building tool; as an effective parenting training; and as a human resources management tool that provides both structure and nurture to employees in creating a healthy and successful workplace.

KCHS employees and management began a journey to seek a better way over seven years ago, and while the progress has at times moved more slowly than we might have wished, it has been worthwhile. KCHS has progressed in implementing a conscious way of providing discipline and guidance, to ourselves and to the children and families

we serve, and ultimately refocused our program and the services we deliver, from a place of mediocrity towards excellence. In light of this journey, KCHS was nominated by Ohio Governor Ted Strickland to represent Ohio, along with two other Head Start programs, in a national competition identifying ten Head Start Centers of Excellence, whose innovative approaches to addressing children's education, program quality and continuous improvement had the potential for replication locally, statewide and nationally in Head Start and the early childhood community. KCHS, in the national Centers of Excellence competition, proposed the program's Child Mental Health and Early Childhood Development services, and specifically the implementation of the Conscious Discipline® program for Brain Smart Classroom Management and Conscious Parenting® training, as an example of comprehensive quality programming and continuous improvement that meets the criteria to be defined as a Center of Excellence. KCHS identified that the program's implementation of Conscious Discipline® represented an innovative approach to enhance comprehensive early education, mental health and parenting services to children and families, producing positive and measurable outcomes for children's school success, increasing families' ability to support children's learning, and increasing staff competency. **[KCHS was named one of ten Head Start Centers of Excellence in September 2010.](#)**

KCHS' annual community assessments and self assessments, in 2004 and beyond, repeatedly identified the need to provide sensible and practical supports in the area of classroom and behavior management to teachers and to parents. Parent surveys and the enrollment strengths and needs assessment results consistently placed concerns over discipline and behavior management in the top five needs identified. Teacher and support staff training surveys regularly identified classroom behavioral management strategies as a top need. Teachers tried a number of classroom strategies – stop signs, incentive-based chart systems, and daily behavioral reports to parents -- to address behavioral issues, but continued to see behavioral concerns in children becoming more common, and more severe. The Agency did not present a coordinated agency-wide approach, as in the fall of 2002 KCHS was in crisis – facing the fifth change of agency leadership in a ten-year period. Teachers were increasingly experiencing burnout, and a corresponding unwillingness to comply with Head Start program requirements. Outcomes for children were negatively impacted by poor relationships between classroom staff. The Agency's constant change in leadership left employees ill-equipped to manage external changes impacting Head Start – including the implementation of the newly revised Head Start Program Performance Standards, the impact of welfare reform on families, the technological revolution and movement towards data driven outcomes, and increasing requirements for teacher education. While KCHS was blessed with a core group of employees committed to children and the Head Start program that kept some sense of order in chaos, the end result was an exhausted workforce functioning in an environment of fear, an annual employee turnover rate hovering around 40%, a federal review in February, 2001 that

showed extensive non-compliances, and an increasingly negative perception of the Agency within the Knox County community. KCHS was not meeting the standards necessary to operate a high quality Head Start program, was failing children and families, and desperately needed to find a better way.



KCHS' Executive Director and Early Childhood Center Coordinator were introduced to Conscious Discipline® at the 2003 Head Start Region V Conference, with a presentation by creator Dr. Becky Bailey. A central tenet of the Conscious Discipline® philosophy revolved around adults taking responsibility for their own behavior – to discipline themselves first, and children second, in order to best model appropriate behavior for children and to have adults be the person they wanted their child or student to be. This focus simply made a lot of sense. It incorporated a specific language for creating a safe and positive environment for all children and addressed concerns about both teachers' and parents' abilities to maintain composure and to provide positive guidance to young children. KCHS purchased some Conscious Discipline® materials at the conference, and began reviewing for possible use with teachers and in the classroom. Training in Conscious Discipline® was written into the Agency's 2004-2005 Training & Technical Assistance plan, in order to address teacher concerns around classroom management and classroom quality issues.

As part of the Agency's efforts to explore the concerns around effective behavior management and to consider how to implement successful strategies, an assessment of the Agency's behavioral systems was conducted in the summer of 2004 by a Kenyon College psychology professor. Results indicated that teachers felt the top barriers to effective discipline were a lack of consistency in discipline strategies between the home and classroom environment, a lack of agreement between parents and teachers about

the severity of the behavioral concerns, and a lack of consistent support in the implementation of discipline strategies from the administration. Teachers also felt that Agency management did not historically give new strategies the opportunity to succeed, and cautioned that any program must be given time to work.

Agency leadership considered the results of this assessment and confirmed the pilot of Conscious Discipline® as a possible discipline strategy that would begin to address these concerns, recognizing that the approach would require buy-in across the Agency in order to assure consistent adoption throughout the program. The emergence and stabilization of new leadership during this period, including the promotion from within of a new Executive Director in late 2002, the hiring of a Child Mental Health Coordinator, a licensed independent social worker in 2004, and the promotion of the Early Childhood Center Coordinator, a former teacher and home visitor, into the role of Child Development Coordinator in 2005, enabled the comprehensive implementation of Conscious Discipline® strategies. These new leaders joined with existing leaders to focus on change at the classroom level, while also encouraging improved communications across the Agency, and the program saw gradual improvement and stabilization.



KCHS' initial professional training in Conscious Discipline® was delivered by a Certified Conscious Discipline® Associate (CDA) to all agency staff during pre-service training in September 2004. The training included a simplified review of the impact of stress on the brain, the strategies for creating safety in the classroom, and for using a "Brain Smart Start" each day to support children's learning. During January 2005, the CDA returned to deliver one additional day of training, along with classroom observations and a round table discussion with teachers. KCHS' Child Mental Health Coordinator,

Renee Sutherland, began promoting Conscious Discipline® by noticing the teachers' efforts at implementation through newsletters, and attended a week-long Conscious Discipline® training during the summer of 2005. Renee shared this training with Agency Management in July 2005, and the KCHS' Board of Directors, Policy Council, and Agency Management recognized that Conscious Discipline®, with on-going commitment, could promote positive change across the Agency. During 2005-2006 the funding commitment to Conscious Discipline® was expanded within the training and technical assistance plan, by adding additional on-site training for all employees, and by sending Renee Sutherland to a week-long Conscious Discipline® II in February 2006. Renee developed training for teachers and for parents incorporating Conscious Discipline®, and in June 2006 was named a Certified Conscious Discipline® Instructor (CCDI), becoming an internal trainer and consultant in the implementation of Conscious Discipline® in classrooms and through on-going professional development and parenting training.

Renee developed a pilot parenting training, Conscious Parenting, in the Winter of 2005, funded by the Ohio Children's Trust Fund (OCTF), through the Knox County Family and Children First Council. The training was delivered over eight sessions, and funds from OCTF supported child care and dinner for parents and children, removing barriers to attend. Twenty-five parents attended at least one session, with 15 parents completing all eight sessions. Since 2005, over 350 parents have been trained in Conscious Parenting strategies, funded primarily by the United Way of Knox County. Outcomes from Conscious Parenting trainings regularly exceed expectations, with pre and post testing comparisons showing increases to parents' ability to set limits; improvement in parents' ability to maintain composure; improvement in the establishment of daily routines for children; increases in parents' ability to see from the child's point of view, improvements to communication; and improvements in parental satisfaction with parenting.



The early stages of implementation across the Head Start program was not always comfortable – as Conscious Discipline's® relationship based model challenged a

workplace with barriers between administration and center staff, between centers and between service areas. Conscious Discipline® was also a challenge to implement in a poverty program, with over 25% of Head Start employees former parents, and where a sense of disempowerment was often prevalent. The external world played into the sense of disempowerment and feeling of hopelessness – Head Start employees, overworked and underpaid, were disheartened by attacks on the Head Start program nationally – it appeared as if stories highlighting the reasons Head Start *didn't* work were far more common than those in celebration of the program's benefits.

KCHS' implementation of Conscious Discipline ® was gradual, and it was not made a requirement that any teacher fully embrace Conscious Discipline®. Teacher trainings were focused on creating classroom safety, and developing rituals and structures for creating a school family, as well as increasing the use of movement and music to encourage healthy brain development in young children. While teachers were not required to implement Conscious Discipline®, we found that as employees became comfortable with a common language of Conscious Discipline®, and as the Child Mental Health Coordinator coached teachers through difficult classroom management situations, most teachers became open to practicing concepts and were sold on the “magic” of the strategies. The common language used in Conscious Discipline® is one of the strongest methods of implementing the practices, and a significant reason that the implementation of Conscious Discipline® improves quality across the program – it provides consistency across centers – when collaborators work within our classrooms, when children transition between centers due to family changes, and when substitute employees move between centers, they notice a common language that creates cohesiveness and safety. In classrooms and in hallways, employees remind each other and students to breathe; to be a STAR (Stop, Take A Deep Breath, and Relax); to recognize that “It is what it is,” to assume positive intent when dealing with difficult situations, and to approach conflicts as an opportunity to teach. Human resources management improved, with the concept of progressive discipline for employees, utilizing the “Discipline Without Punishment” program, fitting well with Conscious Discipline® by clearly documenting and defining expectations for improving performance, and by focusing on a positive approach to disciplinary situations. Annual employee surveys showed improvements in employee morale, and the Agency accomplished its goal of reducing employee turnover from close to 40% in 2002 (PIR reporting identified 44 employees leaving employment in the 2001-2002 program year) to under 15% from 2005-2006 to date with only 4.7% in 2010-2011. Teachers reported increased satisfaction with teaching and with classroom skills, and KCHS improved teacher qualifications by retaining degreed teachers and hiring new teachers with degrees. Currently 67% of KCHS Head Start teachers hold Bachelor's degrees or better, and 87% have AA degrees or better.

KCHS continues to promote excellence by incorporating Conscious Discipline® practices in a comprehensive and holistic approach to Child Mental Health Services. KCHS' Behavioral Intervention process is grounded in the language and strategies of Conscious Discipline®. The process utilizes Intervention Meetings between teachers, parents and agency leaders as the opportunity to provide one-on-one mental health and Conscious Discipline® consultation to the parents of children with behavioral needs. KCHS also serves as a field placement site for senior Social Work majors from the Mount Vernon Nazarene University and the Ohio State University. Field placement students are trained in Conscious Discipline® in August, and spend at least 15 hours on-site per week providing classroom support for children using Conscious Discipline® strategies during the first semester's placement. During second semester, the student's responsibilities are expanded to include one-on-one Conscious Discipline® training, utilizing the Conscious Discipline® training DVDs, with parents who are unable to attend the evening parenting sessions. Finally, KCHS has shared its Conscious Discipline® based approach with the area community mental health provider, Behavioral Health Partners of Central Ohio, resulting in expanded early childhood mental health services through a state funded early childhood mental health consultant, providing direct support within the program, and also through services provided under the "Jump Start" program providing enhanced supports to children and families with severe behavioral and mental health needs. Enhanced child mental health services, with expanded community partnerships, resulted in significant increases in the number of children referred for child mental health services to outside agencies (from 3 in 2005/2006 to 16 in 2008/2009) and in the number of children receiving services (from 2 in 2005/2006 to 11 in 2008/2009), an increase of more than 500% in the number of children receiving services.

Finally, KCHS' journey in discovering, embracing and continuously improving through the use of the Conscious Discipline's Brain Smart™ Approach to Classroom Management and Conscious Parenting trainings has led to increasing recognition within the community of the importance of providing positive behavioral management strategies. KCHS has provided training to area child care center staff, to Child Protective Services caseworkers, to foster parents, and to early intervention providers in the Help Me Grow program, and to Mental Health America of Knox County. KCHS has also opened parenting trainings to the larger community whenever possible, and has provided trainings to the clients of multiple community programs, including WIC, Help Me Grow, Early Intervention, the Knox County Educational Service Center, the probation program for parents who have had their children removed from their custody and CareNet Pregnancy Services. KCHS' comprehensive embrace of Conscious Discipline® principles has created the safety and the structure from within the Agency to improve quality at all levels, and has restored the Agency's reputation within the community, as a program embracing innovation and change, reducing barriers to service delivery and providing high quality services to children and families. Conscious

Discipline® has also made the program more resilient to the constant change that is a fact of life within the early childhood and social services worlds.

The foundation of success that Conscious Discipline® represents has enabled Knox County Head Start to transform ourselves, our classrooms, centers, the Agency, and the Agency's reputation within the community. This success begins with an understanding of the importance of safety -- management embraces the role as "safe keeper" for employees and for the reputation of the Agency within the community. Program coordinators and center managers create safety for employees in providing clear direction and support for each service area, and in the daily operation of centers. Teachers create a healthy school family in each individual classroom, meeting children's need for safety, security and connection so that the classroom becomes an optimum place for learning and growing. Training, consultation and intervention strategies support parents in their role as the first and most important teachers – and safe keepers – for their children. These comprehensive strategies support excellence at every level of operations within Knox County Head Start, as we work to continuously improve program operations in support of quality services to children, families and the Knox County community.

