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Grantee: Robertson Enterprises, Inc.
Request Amount: \$113,696.00
Project Title: Grounded in Care: Embedded Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation at Carousel Child Care Center.
Grant Term: 1/1/2027 to 12/31/2028
Trust Staff: Samantha Ponts

Staff Analysis:

- **What does this project do?**

This project will bring Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation (IECMH-C) into Carousel Child Care Center. A mental health consultant will work on-site across Carousel's seven classrooms to help staff recognize and respond to trauma, attachment disruption, behavioral concerns, and other social-emotional needs. The consultant will provide classroom observation, staff coaching, reflective supervision, training, family engagement, and more individualized consultation for children with elevated needs, particularly children in foster and kinship care.

The project will also build this expertise within Carousel. The center's director will complete formal IECMH consultation training and work alongside the experienced consultant. Over the two years, he will gradually take on the consultation role so Carousel can continue providing this support after Trust funding ends.

- **Who is receiving the funds?**

Robertson Enterprises, Inc., operating Carousel Child Care Center in Anchorage, will receive the funding to implement the project. Carousel has served Anchorage families since 1968 and currently serves approximately 100 children from 12 months through 12 years of age. Of those children, 33 are in active OCS foster placements and at least 10 are in kinship care. Approximately 90% of enrolled families receive financial assistance.

- **Why is staff recommending this project?**

Carousel serves a high concentration of children who have experienced trauma, family disruption, foster care, or kinship placement. While Carousel staff have received trauma-informed training, they currently do not have access to embedded clinical mental health consultation to help them respond to more complex social-emotional and behavioral needs. Without that support, children may not receive intervention until behaviors escalate, an outside referral is needed, or a child's placement in the program is at risk.

The project addresses that gap by bringing clinical expertise directly into the child care setting and strengthening the skills of the adults who work with children every day. IECMH consultation is an evidence-based approach associated with improved staff confidence, reduced staff stress, fewer challenging behaviors, and reduced risk of suspension and expulsion.

- **Will this be a multi-year project?**

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Yes. This is a two-year project designed to transition from external consultation to an internally sustained model.

In Year 1, an experienced IECMH consultant will provide approximately 30 hours of on-site consultation each month across all seven classrooms. At the same time, Carousel's director will complete a 12-month IECMH consultation certificate and shadow the consultant to gain hands-on experience.

In Year 2, the director will progressively take on consultation responsibilities while continuing to receive mentorship and supervision from the experienced consultant. By the end of the project, IECMH practices are expected to be incorporated into Carousel's policies, staff onboarding, and professional development, with an internal IECMH leadership structure in place to continue the work after Trust funding ends.

Trust Five Year Funding History

No previous Trust grants to this organization.

Comp Plan - Area of Focus	Strategic Priority Area
Area of Focus 1: Early Childhood & Youth	Priority 1: Prevention & Early Intervention

Project Description (from grant application)

Purpose of the Project

The purpose of this project is to support the ability and sustainability of Carousel Child Care Center in its provision of Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation (IECMH-C) to its enrolled children and their families. This project is unique in that it will achieve its goal through a combination of formal IECMH consultation training and mentoring by a seasoned mental health consultant. This approach will enable IECMH consultation for enrolled children and families while building capacity within the organization that will allow for sustainability at the end of AMHTA funding.

Background Information

Carousel Child Care Center has served Anchorage families continuously since 1968 and today serves approximately 100 children 12 months through 12 years. Its enrollment is unlike that of a typical licensed childcare program: 33 children are in active OCS foster placements, at least 10 more are in kinship care, and approximately 90% of enrolled families receive financial assistance. Alaska Native children are the largest single group enrolled. This is an exceptionally high concentration of young children affected by trauma and family disruption, gathered in one trusted community setting.

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Carousel has invested in trauma-informed and reflective-practice training over many years, including the FAN approach, which has strengthened staff's ability to attune to children and build trusting relationships with families. That foundation has been valuable. But for the children Carousel serves - especially those who have been separated from their families and carry significant trauma histories - general training and good relationships are not enough on their own. Staff need deeper, clinically grounded support to understand and respond effectively to trauma responses and the behaviors that accompany them. IECMH consultation is the next step: it equips educators with the clinical expertise, coaching, and reflective support to turn their trusted relationships with children into genuine, trauma-informed intervention.

Problem / Need

The problem is a gap between the needs of children and families and the staff's capacity to meet those needs. Carousel's educators observe trauma responses, attachment disruption, and severe dysregulation every day, within sustained caregiving relationships, but without clinical mental health consultation to support that work. Without the support of mental health consultation, children who would benefit from early, low-intensity intervention instead wait until behaviors escalate to an outside referral or a placement in the program fails. The same conditions drive secondary traumatic stress and result in turnover among educators, disrupting the relational consistency children with trauma histories depend on most. Early childhood staff turnover is a critical issue, with national studies indicating that turnover rates often exceed 30-40% annually, roughly double the rate seen in K-12 settings.

The Solution

Grounded in Care is a two-year embedded Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health (IECMH) consultation project built on a simple premise: for young children, trusted relationships are the earliest and most effective mental health intervention available, and Carousel already holds those relationships. This project equips staff, children, and families with clinical expertise to provide early childhood mental health promotion and prevention strategies and builds the internal capacity to sustain them.

Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health (IECMH) consultation is an evidence-based approach that helps adults support infants' and young children's social and emotional development. IECMH consultants are highly trained professionals with expertise in child development, family stress and trauma, early attachment, and the ways adult mental health affects children's development. Unlike direct-service mental health providers, they do not treat young children or the adults in their lives. Instead, they work through relationships with caregivers, educators, and family members to build adults' capacity to promote healthy development before formal intervention is needed. Through relationship-based practices, consultants help prevent, identify, and reduce emerging mental health concerns and support positive developmental trajectories. IECMH consultation is distinct from, and complementary to, other early childhood supports, such as childcare quality coaching or Pyramid Model coaching. Rather than coaching adults directly on a specific curriculum or practice model, IECMH consultation works collaboratively with a child's regular caregivers to strengthen their ability to reflect, problem-solve, and adapt their practices. It also does not duplicate any existing local, state, or federal service: embedded, classroom-based IECMH consultation is not currently available to Carousel through any government

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program, and it is distinct from Alaska's Part C Infant Learning Program, which serves a narrower, eligibility-based developmental population and does not provide reflective consultation within the child care setting.

IECMH consultation is nationally recognized by the Association of Maternal and Child Health Programs (AMCHP) as a best practice.

More specifically, an IECMH consultant can help early childhood educators:

- understand how trauma and other stressors affect behavior;
- implement strategies to prevent and minimize the impact of mental health disorders;
- implement trauma-informed care strategies;
- understand the importance of attachment and responsive caregiving in young children's lives;
- engage family members;
- review policies and procedures related to how the program supports children's social and emotional development;
- engage in discussion on sensitive topics, such as implicit bias and suspension or expulsion;
- implement social and emotional screening and assessment tools;
- increase access to mental health services for young children and their families;
- assist families in accessing needed services, such as substance abuse treatment, shelter for survivors of domestic violence, parenting classes, and health care;
- make necessary reports related to child abuse and neglect; and
- help staff and families talk to children after natural or man-made disasters.

Benefits of IECMH Consultation

Research consistently shows that IECMH consultation benefits both early childhood professionals and young children. For professionals, it can increase self-efficacy and reduce stress; for children, it can strengthen protective factors and reduce challenging behaviors (Brennan et al., 2008; Conners-Burrow et al., 2012; Heller et al., 2011; Perry et al., 2010; Shivers, 2015). IECMH consultation is also recognized as one of the few proven strategies for preventing early childhood suspension and expulsion. Although Alaska has not conducted a recent statewide survey on preschool expulsion, 15% of surveyed early childhood educators reported expelling a child during the previous school year in 2018 (Raviant LLC,

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2018; Raviant LLC, 2019). Suspension rates were even higher: nearly 40% reported suspending one or more children for part of a day or longer during the same period. These exclusionary practices interrupt children's access to high-quality learning environments, separate them from educators with whom they have built close relationships, and increase the risk of negative mental health and academic outcomes. The effects can continue throughout a child's education and are associated with later involvement in the juvenile justice system (Lamont, 2013; Mendez, 2003). Young children who are suspended or expelled are up to 10 times more likely than their peers to be expelled again, drop out of high school, experience academic failure or grade retention, develop negative attitudes toward school, and face incarceration (Lamont et al., 2013). By strengthening adults' capacity to respond early and effectively, IECMH consultation can help improve the life trajectories of many young children in Alaska.

Description of the Project

This proposal is for a two-year project focused on building in-house sustainability of IECMH consultation. A staff member will receive training in IECMH consultation and be mentored by an experienced IECMH consultant so that Carousel Child Care can sustain consultation services at the end of the project.

Year 1

In Year 1, Robin Wolffe, LCSW, an AK-AIMH registry consultant with direct experience serving Alaska children in foster care, will provide 30 hours per month of on-site consultation across all seven classrooms: structured observation, prioritized consultation for OCS and kinship-placed children, teacher coaching and mentoring using the consultative stance, reflective supervision, foundational IECMH training for all staff, and family engagement activities. Because consultation operates program-wide, every enrolled child benefits from better-supported teachers and more stable classrooms, while children with identified elevated needs receive prioritized, individualized consultation support.

Simultaneously, Carousel's Director, Sean Shawcross, an early childhood professional with more than 23 years of leadership experience, will complete Georgetown's Thrive Center Practical Certificate in Infant & Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation, beginning with the October 2026 cohort. Georgetown's Thrive Center is the home of the only federally funded national Center of Excellence for IECMHC. The 12-month certificate covers foundational knowledge in attachment, trauma, child development, and observation and learning, as well as the competencies of effective consultation, and is completed within Year 1 of the project. Carousel is funding this certificate directly as an organizational contribution (see Other Funding Sources), demonstrating its commitment to sustaining the work. During this training, Sean will shadow the IECMH consultant in her classroom work and with families to integrate theory into practice. It is the combination of formal training and the opportunity to shadow an experienced IECMH consultant in the field that sets this project apart from other models, and it is the hands-on mentoring that leads to the sustainability of IECMH services at Carousel at the end of the project.

Year 2

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In Year 2, consultation responsibilities transition progressively to this internal leader under Robin's supervision. The contracted consultant continues to mentor the internal IECMH consultant and support him in delivering promotion and prevention activities, reducing the need for external consultation. IECMH practices will be embedded into Carousel's policies, staff onboarding, and professional development calendar before the grant closes.

Expected Outcomes

Expected outcomes include documented consultation support within 30 days for every child identified with elevated social-emotional needs, a documented social-emotional assessment reviewed with the IECMH consultant within 45 days of enrollment for every OCS-placed child, a measurable reduction in behavioral incidents against a Year 1 baseline, completion of foundational IECMH training by 100% of staff, and a formally established internal IECMH leadership structure by grant close.

Community Support

The project carries committed support from Robin Wolffe as clinical partner, technical assistance from Gail Trujillo of the Alaska Association for Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health, and the direct organizational commitment of Theresa Robertson, President of Robertson Enterprises, Inc. Carousel will maintain active relationships with AK-AIMH and the Alaska SEED Network for ongoing training access and future funding pathways.

Grantee Proposed Evaluation Measures (from grant application)

Carousel will track all measures through pre/post staff surveys, behavioral incident logs, child-level consultation records, family engagement participation records, and shared observation instruments, with quarterly reviews conducted by project leadership, Robin Wolffe, and Gail Trujillo.

How much did we do?

- 360 hours of on-site IECMH consultation delivered in Year 1 (30 hours per month across all seven classrooms). In Year 2, Robin Wolffe delivers up to 22 hours per month as consultation transitions to the internal consultant, who assumes the remaining consultation duties (approximately 12 hours per month).
- Every classroom receives IECMH consultation contact each month, with hours allocated according to classroom need.
- 100% of staff - approximately 20 people across the 24-month term, including new hires through onboarding - complete the foundational IECMH training series; current staff complete it by end of Year 1.
- A minimum of four structured family engagement activities delivered annually.

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- One internal consultant (Sean Shawcross, Director) completes Georgetown University's ECMH Consultant Training.

How well did we do it?

- 100% of children identified with elevated social-emotional needs receive documented consultation support within 30 days of identification.
- 100% of OCS-placed children receive a documented social-emotional assessment, reviewed with the IECMH consultant, within 45 days of enrollment.
- 100% of classrooms participate in structured coaching, mentoring, and reflective supervision throughout both project years.
- Family engagement participation tracked by demographic background to confirm the program is reaching the families facing the greatest access barriers.
- Measurable improvement in consistent use of the shared observation and documentation protocol.

Is anyone better off?

- Measurable reduction in behavioral incidents requiring administrative intervention, tracked quarterly against the Year 1 baseline.
- At least 80% of families of children receiving consultation report increased understanding of their child's social-emotional development and needs (pre/post family survey).
- At least 90% of staff report increased confidence in recognizing and responding to social-emotional and trauma-related needs (pre/post annual survey).
- Internal IECMH leadership structure formally established and documented, and IECMH practices integrated into program policies, procedures, and staff onboarding systems, by end of Year 2; post-grant sustainability plan adopted by organizational leadership at grant close.
- Carousel achieves or maintains Learn & Grow Level 3 designation during the grant period.

Proposed Project Performance Measures (developed by the Trust)

Performance Measure 1

How much did you do?

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- a. Number (#) of children receiving individualized IECMH consultation during the grant reporting period.
- b. Number (#) of OCS/kinship-place children receiving consultation during the grant reporting period.

Performance Measure 2:

How well did you do it?

- a. Provide a narrative describing the timeline, activities, successes, challenges, and lessons learned during the grant reporting period. Be sure to include information describing the activities of the on-site consultation with the IECMH consultant, as well as the process of Carousel's director completing their 12-month IECMH consultation certificate and shadow experience.
- b. Number (#) and percentage (%) of Carousel staff completing IECMH training during the grant reporting period.
- c. Number (#) and percentage (%) of children identified with elevated social-emotional needs who receive consultation support within 30 days.
- d. Percentage (%) of planned consultation hours/activities completed. Please provide a list of activities.

Performance Measure 3:

Is anyone better off?

- a. Number (#) and percentage (%) of staff demonstrating increased knowledge and skills in responding to trauma, attachment, and social-emotional needs from pre-to post-assessment.
- b. Provide examples of the impact that individualized IECMH consultation has had on enrolled children and their families.

Sustainability (from grant application)

Yes. This project is designed so that what the Trust funds does not end when the funding does. The sustainability model rests on a simple principle: by the time this grant closes, the expertise Robin Wolffe brings in Year 1 will be embedded in Carousel's organizational structure - in its policies, practices, professional development systems, and leadership.

Year 2 is where that principle is tested. Carousel's Director, Sean Shawcross, who brings more than 23 years of early childhood program leadership experience, completes Georgetown University's ECMH Consultant Training and progressively assumes defined consultation responsibilities under Robin's supervision. By the final months of the grant period, a trained internal consultant will be coaching teachers, facilitating reflective supervision, and supporting families. Because that capacity resides in an

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existing salaried member of Carousel's leadership rather than a contracted provider, the core consultation function continues after the grant term within Carousel's existing operating budget.

The model is also built not to depend on any single person. Before the grant closes, IECMH practices will be embedded in staff onboarding, written policies, and the annual professional development calendar, and a post-grant sustainability plan - developed with Robin Wolffe and Gail Trujillo - will be formally adopted by organizational leadership. Theresa Robertson, President of Robertson Enterprises, Inc., has committed to the policy changes, structural adjustments, and resource allocation this requires.

Carousel is already contributing to this project directly: it is funding Sean's Georgetown certificate, and the internal consultant's Year 2 consultation time is provided as an organizational in-kind contribution (see Other Funding Sources). For future enhancements and continued training, Carousel will pursue CCDF quality improvement resources, Municipality of Anchorage early childhood grants, and future Trust opportunities, and will maintain active relationships with AK-AIMH and the Alaska SEED Network for ongoing access to training, professional connections, and peer support.

Who We Serve (from grant application)

This project serves Trust beneficiaries experiencing mental illness, with a focus on the youngest and least visible members of that group: children ages 12 months through 12 years who are exhibiting trauma responses, attachment disruption, anxiety, and severe emotional dysregulation, most of them before any formal diagnosis has been made.

Of approximately 100 children enrolled at Carousel, 33 are in active OCS foster placements and at least 10 are in kinship care. These are children whose exposure to abuse, neglect, or family separation was significant enough to require state intervention. Research consistently links these experiences to disrupted social-emotional development, and Carousel's educators observe the manifestations daily. Few of these children carry diagnoses - not because the need is absent, but because they are young, because Anchorage's children's behavioral health system has limited capacity, and because the families most affected face the greatest barriers to accessing it. This is the population the Trust's Prevention & Early Intervention priority describes: children whose needs can be identified and addressed before they escalate into crisis, system involvement, or preschool expulsion.

Because IECMH consultation operates program-wide across all seven classrooms, all approximately 100 enrolled children benefit from more stable classrooms, better-supported educators, and earlier identification of emerging needs. Within that, an estimated 45 children with identified elevated social-emotional needs will receive individualized consultation support, beginning with OCS and kinship placements and expanding through teacher referral. These children will be better off in specific, measurable ways: consultation support within 30 days of identification, a documented social-emotional assessment within 45 days of enrollment for OCS-placed children, reduced behavioral incidents, and preserved placements in a stable early learning environment with consistently supported caregivers.

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Approximately 90 secondary beneficiaries - the parents, foster parents, and kinship caregivers of enrolled children - will be better off through direct family engagement contacts, structured family engagement activities, and increased understanding of their children's social-emotional development. For many of these families, a trusted child care program is the only mental health access point that carries no stigma, no waitlist, and no cultural distance.

Approximately 20 staff will be trained across the project period, building a permanent IECMH-informed workforce serving Trust beneficiaries well beyond the grant term.

Estimated Numbers of Beneficiaries Served Experiencing (from grant application)

Mental Illness:	100
Secondary Beneficiaries (family members or caregivers providing support to primary beneficiaries):	90
Number of people to be trained	20

Project Budget (from grant application)

Personnel Services Costs	\$87,360.00
Personnel Services Costs (Other Sources)	\$20,160.00
Personnel Services Narrative	Personnel: contracted Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health (IECMH) consultation by Robin Wolfe, LCSW. - Year 1: 30 hours/month x 12 months x \$140/hour = \$50,400. - Year 2: up to 22 hours/month x 12 months x \$140/hour = \$36,960. Trust-funded Personnel total: \$87,360. Consultation hours are documented in Robin Wolfe's attached needs assessment and letter of support. Personnel funded by other sources (in-kind): internal consultant Sean Shawcross, Director, provides Year 2 consultation time of approximately 12 hours/month (144 hours/year) at \$140/hour = \$20,160, delivered within his existing salaried role. Other-source Personnel total: \$20,160.
Travel Costs	\$1,000.00
Travel Costs (Other Sources)	\$0.00
Travel Costs Narrative	Local mileage for Robin Wolfe's on-site consultation visits and community-based family engagement.

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Supplies Costs	\$3,500.00
Supplies Costs (Other Sources)	\$3,500.00
Supplies Narrative	Materials and resources for the foundational IECMH training series completed by all staff.

Other Costs	\$21,836.00
Other Costs (Other Sources)	\$2,500.00
Other Costs Narrative	Other costs cover three items: - Family engagement activities (\$4,500): a minimum of eight structured family engagement activities across the two-year term (at least four annually), supporting parents, foster parents, and kinship caregivers. - Evaluation and data collection (\$7,000): in-house program evaluation, including pre/post staff and family surveys, shared observation instruments, and data collection tools, with quarterly review by project leadership, Robin Wolffe, and Gail Trujillo. - Administrative/indirect costs (\$10,336): 10% of direct costs, covering administrative overhead for grant management, reporting, and financial administration. Trust-funded Other total: \$21,836. Other-source funding for this category: \$2,500 (Georgetown ECMH Consultant Training tuition, funded by Carousel Child Care Center as an organizational contribution).

Other Funding Sources (from grant application)

Robertson Enterprises, Inc. (Carousel Child Care Center) - in-kind Year 2 consultation time, Sean Shawcross (SECURED)	\$20,160.00
Robertson Enterprises, Inc. (Carousel Child Care Center) - Georgetown ECMH Consultant Training tuition (SECURED)	\$2,500.00
Total Leveraged Funds	\$22,660.00