

Together, we will realize a future where everyone is safe, connected, and valued.



Dear friends,

Thank you to all who helped make the *Developing Healthy Boys* pilot training a great success!

On November 29-30, nearly 60 early childhood educators and community leaders gathered for the Developing Healthy Boys pilot training. The event was convened by MERGE for Equality in partnership with Holyoke Chicopee Springfield Head Start, Square One, and Preschool Enrichment Team, a program of Valley Opportunity Council. The event was held in downtown Springfield, MA at the La Quinta Inn and Suites, and was generously sponsored by Health New England.

This report offers a summary of participant demographics, program highlights, images, participant feedback, and future engagement opportunities. We hope you find this a useful resource in our collective work raising emotionally and socially connected boys, and as inspiration for expanding this pilot to other locations, too.

DEMOGRAPHICS 58 participants attended, representing 33 organizations

Participants serving children and families in diverse geographies participated, including 50% from Hampden County, 25% from Hampshire County, and the remaining participants from the Berkshires, Boston and Cape Cod, as well as Connecticut and upstate New York.

Participants' professional roles included:

Teachers / Educators	Youth Services Librarian
Family and Community Service Coordinator	High Risk Advocate
Community Educator	Para Educator
Curriculum Coordinator	Program Director
Domestic Violence Prevention Coordinator	Social Worker
Parenting Education Grants Manager	Youth Advocate
Para-Educators	Children's Shelter Advocate
Preschool Educator	...and more
Peer Minister	

Organizations represented at the training include:

Amherst Regional Schools	Harvard Kennedy School
Arts Are Essential, Inc.	HCS Head Start
Cape Cod Family Resource Center	MA Dept. of Transitional Assistance (DTA)
Cathedral in the Night	Medway Public Library
Child and Family Agency	New North Citizens Council, Inc.
East Forest Park Library	Nonotuck Community School
Family Resource Center	POAH Communities
Hartford Public Schools	ROCA

Safe Passage
Shutesbury Elementary School
Springfield City Library
Square One
State of Connecticut-DCF
Sunnyside Child Care Center
The Center for Hope and Healing
The Children's Trust

The Common School
Time To Tell
UMass Amherst
Valley Opportunity Council
Williston Northampton Children's Center
Womanshelter / Compañeras
YWCA of Western MA

PROGRAMMING

In his opening remarks, John Engel, Executive Director of MERGE for Equality, outlined a call for changing the way we raise boys, anchored in the MERGE core belief: *All boys are born loving, caring and sensitive*. A summary of Engel's remarks are offered here.



The state of manhood in the U.S. and globally is alarming...

As a class, men experience:

- emotional disconnection, from themselves and others at alarming rates
- difficulty feeling sensations in our bodies and expressing emotions
- social isolation in the form of fewer close relationships and friendships
- lower levels of educational attainment
- higher levels of suicide, substance abuse and unprotected sex
- higher rates of violence, as both perpetrator and victim
- higher rates of domestic violence and sexual assault as perpetrators
- decreased likeliness to access mental and physical health services

Developing socially and emotionally connected boys is our response...

Boys are trained to be men starting from an early age:

- In families and classrooms
- In doctor and dentist offices
- In libraries and toy stores
- On playgrounds and in parks
- On school buses and in locker rooms

Our training goal is clear...

To create a learning community in which we explore and analyze the current approaches used to train boys to be men, and lift up an alternative approach, one where boys are supported to retain their natural capacities to be loving, caring and sensitive.

And our call to action is imperative...

Together we have an opportunity to create lasting impact on the life of boys - and all children – and their families and communities, too. Together we must change the way we raise boys!

Male Socialization

MERGE senior trainers, Steven Botkin, EdD, and James Arana, facilitated large and small group discussions and activities, which raised awareness about and support for, the call to change the way we raise boys. Activities included:

- Unpacking the Man Box, an experiential and group analysis of gender norms and stereotypes that limit boys, and the men they become, from realizing their full potential
- Examination of the cycle of male socialization, including violence and trauma, as conditions from which boys - starting from a young age - are trained to be men
- Exploration of racism and ways racism and gender socialization conspire to harm boys and the men they will become, as well as the families and communities in which they are located



Early Childhood Literacy



On the second training day, children's literature expert and Senior Lecturer in Children's Literature at Simmons College, Megan Dowd Lambert, presented 'Using the Whole Book Approach to Foster Children's Critical Engagement with Picture Books.'

Presentation highlights included:

- An introduction to the Whole Book Approach, which Dowd Lambert developed in association with The Eric Carle Museum of Picture Book Art
- Modeling use of the Whole Book Approach as a co-constructive (interactive) story time model where books are read *with* children rather than *to* children, thus empowering the children
- Selecting and using books with children to unpack harmful and limiting messages about gender and race



Children's Book Campaign

Weaving together male socialization and early childhood literacy, participants engaged in group activities to practice the Whole Book Approach to engage children in literature, which sparks facilitated conversation about gender norms and stereotypes. Utilizing the Campaign's books, each participant gained experience in connecting with the material and with a listening audience, enabling them to effectively incorporate these books into their work with children. Each participant received free copies of the Campaign's first three books:

- *Be Boy Buzz*, authored by bell hooks and illustrated by Chris Raschka
- *Sparkle Boy*, authored by Lesléa Newman and illustrated by Maria Mola
- *Made by Raffi*, authored by Craig Pomranz and illustrated by Margaret Chamberlin.



Book activities included:

- Small group reading, with a listening and observation activity with each of the three books
- Discussion of practical applications of books with young children, including anticipated challenges and strategies for success
- Identifying and sharing resource ideas generated by participants

Next Steps

MERGE invited participants to engage in post-training activities designed to advance the call to change the way we raise boys. Next steps include:

- Three 90-minute Coaching Sessions, to be convened in January, February and March 2018, for participants to connect with each other and MERGE staff to glean lessons and address challenges in the work of developing healthy boys
- Production of a MERGE for Equality children's book, *The Story of a Little Boy: Journey to Manhood*, with funding support from the Beveridge Family Foundation
- Production of MERGE for Equality video, *Beliefs About Boys and Men*, with funding support from the Beveridge Family Foundation
- Selection, funding and distribution of additional titles for the Children's Book Campaign
- Additional tools and resources on the MERGE for Equality website
- MERGE and community partners will evaluate the pilot and develop a plan for advancing this model to reach many more early childhood educators in 2018 and beyond

PROGRAM EVALUATION

Participants completed both a pre- and post-test survey to assess the impact of the training experience on belief, attitudes and readiness for change related to male gender socialization, which was developed in partnership with Michael Addis, PhD, Professor of Psychology at Clark University. Results showed training participants reported statistically significant increases in male gender competency on each of the 13 items in the survey. Additionally, participants completed a general event evaluation, where feedback was overwhelmingly positive, including comments such as:

- "If we want to stop violence against women, we must allow our boys to be vulnerable and free to be themselves rather than fitting traditional male stereotypes."
- "I would love to see all early childhood educators attend this training!"
- "This training will help me start conversations with parents and educators about the harmful impact of gender norms and stereotypes on boys as they grow into men."

PARTNER PERSPECTIVES

MERGE for Equality is grateful for the opportunity to collaborate with three remarkable early childhood serving agencies, whose expertise and daily commitment to children and families helped guide the development and implementation of this successful, early childhood pilot initiative. Reflections from agency leaders offer a glimpse of the impact felt by each of these partners.

"Square One is proud to be a part in this very important work. Collaborations like this are critical to the health and long-term success of our children. Together, we are building a brighter future, one child at a time."

--Dawn DiStefano, Chief Finance and Grants Officer, Square One

"Deep, high-level training for early childhood educators is essential to improve the quality of care provided to children. When educators are provided the opportunity to reflect on their practice they are then able to make lasting change. This training provided the depth of knowledge and reflection opportunities to support educators to improve practice."

--Kimm Quinlan, Program Coordinator, Preschool Enrichment Team of Valley Opportunity Council

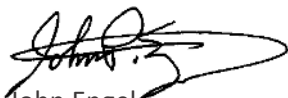
"The real value in this training is that the learning is not just applicable to our professional lives, but our personal lives as well. I couldn't have been happier to hear from one of our staff that this training immediately changed the way that she thought about and spoke to her son. It's incredibly humbling to know that in a single training, which included deep reflection and critically important learning, we could simultaneously offer our staff an opportunity to develop their skills as educators and an opportunity to enrich their personal lives through a change in perception."

--Arielle Ortiz, Social Service Coordinator, Holyoke Chicopee Springfield Head Start

The Road Ahead

MERGE for Equality is committed to working with our collaborating early childhood education partners to further evaluate the impact of this pilot training, make program design upgrades where warranted, and develop a vision and implementation plan for expanding the pilot to reach many more early childhood educators in 2018 - and beyond. Together we are changing the way we raise boys!

With appreciation,



John Engel
Executive Director

SPONSORS AND FUNDERS

We are grateful for the ongoing support of Health New England, as a current and previous sponsor, and grant support from the Beveridge Family Foundation and the Irene E. & George A. Davis Foundation.

