

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



Dear friends and supporters,

Thank you to all who helped make our *Early Childhood Initiative* a great success in 2018! The initiative is focused on changing the way we raise boys and includes both the Developing Healthy Boys Training and Children's Book Campaign. Together, these offerings were created as a prevention strategy, aimed at raising socially and emotionally connected boys, and, in turn, helping ensure healthy men, families and communities in the future.

During Fall 2018, MERGE facilitated two one-day trainings, serving more than 90 early childhood educators and family support professionals from Holyoke Chicopee Springfield Head Start. A third training was offered for 25 staff at Square One. All three trainings were held in Springfield, MA and generously supported by a \$2,500 sponsorship from local health insurance provider, Health New England, and \$5,000 grant from the Irene E. and George A. Davis Foundation. MERGE also offered a training in partnership with Preschool Enrichment Team of Valley Opportunity Council, for early childhood educators in Berkshire County, MA.

This report offers a summary of program highlights, images, and future engagement opportunities. We hope you find this a useful resource in our collective work of changing the way we raise boys, and as inspiration for expanding these offerings to other locations, too.

PROGRAM PARTNERS

Holyoke Chicopee Springfield Head Start
Square One
Preschool Enrichment Team
MERGE for Equality



CALL TO ACTION

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*. Engel outlined the MERGE commitment to partner with early childhood serving agencies and professionals to support the call to raise socially and emotionally connected boys today, to help ensure safe and healthy men, families and communities tomorrow.



DEVELOPING HEALTHY BOYS

MERGE senior trainers, Steven Botkin and James Arana, were joined by Early Childhood Literature expert, Megan Dowd Lambert, who together facilitated large and small group discussions and activities, which raised awareness about, and support for, the call to change the way we raise boys. Participant outcomes included:

- Understand how boys typically learn about gender and ways that commonly used masculinity norms and stereotypes harm boys

- Explain the ‘cycle of male socialization’ and understand what is and is not healthy for boys’ development
- Able to support boys feeling comfortable and accepted when feeling and behaving in ways that do not conform to rigid masculinity norms and stereotypes
- Understand the co-constructive storytime model when reading books with children
- Able to use children’s books to promote healthy gender development and a safe learning environment



CHILDREN’S BOOK CAMPAIGN

Weaving together male socialization and books from the MERGE for Equality Book Campaign, participants engaged in group activities to practice using the books in ways that spark 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 three of the Campaign’s books:

- *Drum Dream Girl*, authored by Margarita Engel and illustrated by Rafael López
- *Be Boy Buzz*, authored by bell hooks and illustrated by Chris Raschka
- *Sparkle Boy*, authored by Lesléa Newman and illustrated by Maria Mola



Post Training Activities included:

- Two 90-minute Group Coaching Sessions where training participants connected with peers and MERGE trainers to address both successes and challenges in the work of developing healthy boys
- Discussion Guides for using the books from MERGE’s book campaign in classrooms and with parents
- Additional tools and resources on the MERGE website



PROGRAM EVALUATION

Participants completed both pre- and post-test surveys to assess the impact of the training experience on beliefs, attitudes and readiness for change related to male gender socialization. Survey development, analysis and reporting was conducted by Ethan Hoffman, Doctoral Candidate, and Michael Addis, PhD, Professor of Psychology, both from Clark University.

The results showed that, overall, participants in the Developing Healthy Boys training showed statistically significant improvements in attitudes related to healthy gender development, including participant knowledge

of masculine gender socialization, confidence in discussing gender equality with boys and men, confidence in ability to lead conversations about masculinity with children, confidence using children's books to lead conversations about masculinity with children, and preparedness to encourage parents to participate in conversations about masculine gender socialization with their children.



SPONSORS AND FUNDERS

We are grateful for the ongoing support of Health New England, as a current and previous sponsor; to the Irene E. & George A. Davis Foundation for their program support grant; and an anonymous MERGE donor, whose deep and abiding commitment to the MERGE mission and early childhood prevention efforts, have made this success

possible.



ROAD AHEAD

In addition to the immediate successes and future promise of work with HCS Head Start and Square One, the MERGE partnership with Preschool Enrichment Team (PET), of Valley Opportunity Council, yielded an exciting outcome. MERGE sought and was approved by MAAEYC (Massachusetts Association of the Education of Young Children) to offer CEUs (continuing education units) to early childhood educators who complete the *Developing Healthy Boys Training*. This process was supported by PET staff, who have great working knowledge and experience with the MAAEYC approval process.



Since receiving MAAEYC CEU approval, MERGE has scheduled 10 trainings and conference workshops, including delivery of the full one-day training at the statewide MAAEYC conference in March 2019 and a 3-hour workshop at the New England Regional Head Start Conference in April 2019, more than doubling our 2018 offerings.

Thirty-six years since the founding of the Men's Resource Center (MRC), which along with Men's Resources International (MRI), merged to become MERGE for Equality in December 2015, the legacy of the organization's commitment to engaging boys and men in healthy masculinity and gender equality has found a new niche in early

childhood education. Now - together with our program partners and funders - we are changing the way we raise boys. Healthy boys today, for safe and healthy men, families and communities tomorrow.

With appreciation,

John Engel
Executive Director