

Training the next generation of pediatric mental health therapists at Children's Wisconsin

Children's Wisconsin recognized that the pediatric mental and behavioral health care workforce needs to grow to meet the increasing needs of Wisconsin kids – that's why a goal was set to double the number of Children's mental health providers. To meet that need, new training models and fellowship programs were created.

The initial focus has been on the Therapist Fellowship Program which supports future licensed therapists by providing a salary and health insurance while they complete their clinical training hours. This is funded through government grants, philanthropy and Children's investment. Twelve fellows completed their training within the last year and have accepted positions at Children's, with another 18 fellows currently in the program. While it typically takes around five years for prospective therapists to complete the 3,000 hours of state-required clinical training, Children's fellows are completing those hours in less than two years. Without this support and investment, most individuals need to work other jobs at the same time.

"I would absolutely not be where I am today if it weren't for this program," shared Jessica Kotsakis, APSW, a Children's program participant. "As a mother with a family to support, the time commitment alone would have made it impossible to pursue further licensure."

Through their work in this program, these therapists have been serving families statewide, caring for more than 3,600 families with more than 23,00 touch points across outpatient, school-based and primary care clinics.

-Children's Wisconsin-Milwaukee