

MISSISSIPPI CAST PROGRAM EVALUATION EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2015, Children's Advocacy Centers of Mississippi (CACM) joined forces with the Mississippi Department of Child Protection Services and the Mississippi Office of the Attorney General to implement Children's Advocacy Studies (CAST) in multiple schools throughout the state.

As a result, Mississippi has the largest CAST program presence in America, boosting 28 of the 74 nationwide programs. As other states began seeking support from CACM in implementing a similar statewide initiative, it became imperative for CACM to take a lead in evaluating the effectiveness of this program.



CACM engaged in a two-year study evaluating the impact of CAST. With the help of the University of Illinois's Research Team, the study evaluated and collected quantitative and qualitative data through surveys and interviews from CAST instructors regarding implementing the program and the impact of the courses from students. Thirteen of the 28 Mississippi CAST colleges and universities participated in the study which compares the results of students and faculty from eleven schools that implemented CAST to two schools with CAST trained faculty but had yet to implement the CAST curriculum. The study was conducted August 2019 through May 2021.

CACM remains committed to supporting CAST in Mississippi by providing resources, training and assistance to every CAST program. The following findings and conclusions will be used to further CAST in Mississippi.

"This course opened my eyes to how child advocacy is all around me and how my day-to-day actions affect it."
--CAST Student

FINDINGS

- CAST students in four-year schools had substantially better knowledge and judgment about child maltreatment than CAST students in two-year schools, and somewhat better knowledge and judgment than CAST students in graduate school, though CAST students in all three types of schools had knowledge and judgment about child maltreatment that were superior to comparable non-CAST students.
- Both at the beginning and end of their CAST course, around three-quarters of CAST students reported being interested or very interested in working with children and families affected by child maltreatment.
- CAST certificate and minor students had a large increase on average from the beginning to the end of a CAST course in their self-rating of their skills in responding to child maltreatment.
- Students pursuing CAST certificates and minors had substantially better knowledge and judgement than other CAST students.
- CAST students who we tracked across semesters had large and statistically significant improvements on average in their self-appraisal of their skills and their judgment in response to a vignette about possible child sexual abuse.

- CAST students had a moderate to large increase on average from the beginning to the end of a CAST course in their self-rating of their skills in responding to child maltreatment.

In response to open-ended questions, many CAST students:

- provided testimonies about how CAST enhanced their knowledge about child maltreatment and helped with career choice and preparation.
- Reported the benefit of hands-on experience through simulations.
- Recommended emotional preparation when asked what advice about the course and program they would offer.

In a pilot interview study of six CAST near or recent graduates researchers found:

- Positive impacts of each element of the CAST program they were interviewed.
- CAST had an impact on their career goals and preparation.
- Several credited CAST with helping them be a better person.
- CAST increased their motivation to work with children and families.

"...the information can be used throughout life, not just in a career. You can use the information to help a child in any situation."

-- CAST Student



CONCLUSIONS

CAST students show evidence of having knowledge and skills that could help them be more prepared to function effectively in child-serving careers.

CAST is a promising program that deserves to be maintained and expanded.

Positive results in multiple schools of different types, support a broad approach to CAST education that included both two-year and four-year institutions.

For further information about CAST in Mississippi or on this program evaluation, contact CACM at cast@mschaptercacs.org.

Cross, T., Chiu, Y. (2021) Program Evaluation of Mississippi's CAST Initiative.

Children's Advocacy Centers of Mississippi (CACM) is an accredited chapter of the National Children's Alliance. We bring together multidisciplinary teams to streamline the process of child abuse situations by providing services under one umbrella to conduct interviews and make team decisions about investigation, treatment, management and prosecution of child abuse cases.

We are revolutionizing Mississippi's response to child abuse through leadership, innovation, and education.