

Future of America Learning Center: Devereux Early Childhood Assessment key to success

By Joscelyn Paine, Devereux Communications Specialist



A New York City child care center is crediting the Devereux Early Childhood Assessment (DECA) Program with its success in helping to grow resilient children.

The nonprofit Future of America Learning Center (FALC), which provides educational programs, child care and youth activities to children of a local healthcare workers union, and to those from the broader community, made a commitment to the implementation of the DECA Program more than 10 years ago.

DECA, which was developed by the [Devereux Center for Resilient Children](#) (DCRC), is a strength-based assessment and planning system that allows teachers, child care providers and parents to measure a child's social and emotional skills. The nationally standardized tool is designed to promote resilience in children ages four weeks to six-years-old.

"The DECA offers a very specific look at three protective factors that are fundamental to a child's social competence, including healthy relationships, self-regulation and initiative," said FALC Chief Operating Officer **Bonnie Lou R. Mallonga, Ph.D.** in the center's 25th anniversary publication. "When I learned how the tool was to be completed by teachers and parents – those adults who know the child best – I really felt confident that this was something that staff would understand, embrace, be empowered by and really change the way they teach and treat children."

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Seeing positive results

At FALC, emphasis is placed on ensuring teachers develop the skills needed to conduct accurate, objective and comprehensive observations to help guide their understanding of a child's social and emotional skills. Teachers also have learned to incorporate social and emotional skill building into their everyday activities, routines and interactions with children. When it comes to promoting a child's resilience – FALC understands that family engagement is key.

"Since FALC implemented the DECA Program, the results are clear: FALC is helping children become more resilient," said DCRC Director **Susan Damico**. "A DECA research study conducted over two years found that four-year-olds served by FALC demonstrated overall improvement in social and emotional health. The children also showed significant improvement in the three individual protective factors assessed by DECA – healthy relationships, self-regulation and initiative."

Bright future ahead

Over the years, FALC has worked to ensure DECA materials are included in the center's annual budget; teaching staff are allotted the time to attend professional development; staff meetings and training programs include discussions about DECA; and a process to increase family engagement is developed.

"I am so proud of the environment we have created at FALC and I want others to know that it is possible," Dr. Mallonga said in the center's 25th anniversary publication.

"Fundamental to our success is the focus on social and emotional skills – not only for the children, but for the staff and parents, as well. This focus guides all aspects of our day, looking intentionally at each and every interaction with children and between staff as an opportunity to be strength-based, to teach social and emotional skills and to collaborate."

To learn more about FALC's DECA journey, click [here](#). Questions? Contact [Susan Damico](#).

