

Early Childhood Home Visiting Programs

Home visiting provides an important complement to center-based programs for communities seeking to offer young families comprehensive services and supports that promote healthy development. The home visiting programs profiled here all share similar goals—to enhance child well-being and family health—but they use a variety of approaches and may target distinct populations in any given community. Each program profile is followed by a brief case study. These case studies highlight the wide range of positive outcomes experienced by families who have chosen to bring home-visiting into their lives.

Healthy Families America

Healthy Families America is a national program model designed to help expectant and new parents get their children off to a healthy start. The program is designed to promote positive parenting, enhance child health and development and prevent child abuse and neglect. Families participate voluntarily in the program and receive home visiting and referrals from trained staff. The program was launched in 1992 by Prevent Child Abuse America and was developed based on existing research in prevention and child development. Over time, the program model has evolved to incorporate elements of best practice gleaned from evaluations in a large number of communities and from a variety of prevention models.

The program model is built on research-based critical elements that reflect best practice in the implementation of successful home visiting programs. These elements stress service initiation that begins prenatally or at birth, uses standardized assessment to identify families in need of services and positive outreach to build trust; service content that is culturally competent, comprehensive, focused on supporting the parent, the parent-child interaction and child development; linking all families to a medical provider; and staff characteristics that emphasize limited caseloads, building trusting relationship, and thorough and ongoing training.

The program now exists in more than 450 communities in the United States and Canada. Ninety percent of families who are invited to participate in the program accept services.

After hearing reports of loud arguments from concerned neighbors, Angelita Rodriquez, a Resource Mom with HFA, showed up at the door of Magdalena's Matias' unkempt house. Magdalena, a Mexican immigrant who lived with an abusive husband, their infant son and three young children, was afraid; not only was she the target of husband's rage, but he had attacked her 8-year old daughter. Angelita had been there too: Just a year earlier, Angelita has left an abusive marriage that had endangered her young sons. Now, as an HFA home visitor, Angelita brought her personal experience with her, and Magdalena could tell that Angelita spoke from her heart. Angelita helped Magdalena find a counselor for her daughter, used HFA funds to help her pay for sessions, and drove them to the counselor's office. Angelita helped Magdalena summon the guts to call the sheriff to report her husbands attack on her daughter. Three years after that first visit, Magdalena has left her husband, who is serving a nine-year prison sentence, her home is safe and orderly, and her four children are thriving. Angelita still visits Magdalena regularly, and helps her and other moms in need by leading by example—showing them that they too can have a better life.

Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters

Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters is a home-based, family focused parent involvement and school readiness program that helps parents provide educational enrichment for their three, four, and five year old children. Although HIPPY is for any parent who wants educational enrichment for his/her child, the program was designed to assist families who might otherwise not get involved with their children's education because of barriers such as poverty, social isolation or lack of education. HIPPY is an international program that started in Israel in 1969; it came to the United States in 1984.

All HIPPY programs follow the HIPPY model: A developmentally appropriate curriculum with role play as the method of teaching, staffed by home visitors from the community, supervised by a professional coordinator, and with home visits interspersed with group meetings as the delivery methods. The HIPPY curriculum has a strong cognitive emphasis, focusing on language development, problem solving, logical thinking and perceptual skills, but it also fosters learning in other domains. Learning and play mingle throughout HIPPY's curriculum as parents expose their children to early literacy skills. A model HIPPY site serves up to 180 children with one coordinator and 12-18 part-time home visitors.

There are currently 167 HIPPY sites in 26 states and Washington, DC. In program year 2002-03, HIPPY served 16,021 children.

Pamela, a stay-at-home mother of three young children, was disappointed when she found out that the Head Start site her son attended was closing. Without a driver's license, she had no way to get to another site. She was thrilled when a local HIPPY coordinator called her and told her about the program. The HIPPY home visitor who began coming to her home once a week to spend an hour with her and her son, role played lessons on shapes, colors and story comprehension. Not only did the home visitor show love for and listen to the children, but she also took the time to talk with Pamela. Pamela felt that HIPPY was really there for her whole family. HIPPY staff helped her get a library card and encouraged her to get her driver's license, as well as a job. Two years after she enrolled in the program, Pamela herself began work as a HIPPY home visitor. She completed the HIPPY training program and took a college course, and in 2002 was promoted to Lead Home Visitor. Pamela has gotten close to her coworkers and has gotten to know families she never would have met. Most important, Pamela now feels she has the skills she always wanted to make sure that her kids could have every advantage possible. She has gotten more involved in their school, requests parent-teacher conferences, and asks for feedback so that she can help her children learn and grow. For Pamela, participating in the HIPPY program made all the difference in the world to her and her family.

The Parent-Child Home Program

PCHP is a home-based early literacy, school readiness, and parenting program serving families with two- and three-year-olds who are challenged by poverty, low-levels of education, language and literacy barriers and other obstacles to educational success. The program, originally called the Mother-Child Home Program, was developed by Phyllis Levenstein in 1965, based on her theory that the most effective way to reduce high school dropout rates, and thus break the cycle of poverty, would be to work with parents and children before the children entered school. Longitudinal research indicates that program participants graduate from high school at the rates of middle-class students.

This research-based, research-validated program emphasizes parent-child verbal interaction through intensive home visiting. For two years, in twice-weekly home visits, Home visitors model parenting techniques and verbal responsiveness through reading play and conversation, using carefully chosen books and toys. The books, often the first in the home, and educational toys are gifts for the family, ensuring that the developmentally enriching interaction continues between home visits and long after the Program is completed. Home visitors from the community reflect the families they work with; many have participated in the program as parents themselves.

PCHP has 137 sites in the United States and 10 sites in other countries. Eighty-five percent of the families who start the program complete the two years of home visits.

Mrs. P., a Mexican immigrant who lives with her husband and two children in one room of a shared apartment, cannot afford playthings for her two year old, and is too fearful of making noise and of the neighborhood to give her young son Moises much opportunity to play; he spends much of the day watching TV in their hot, cramped apartment. At the Laundromat one day, Mrs. P. meets Liliana, who is hanging flyers about a program that offers free books and toys—The Parent-Child Home Program. Although Mrs. P. is wary of having a stranger visit her in her home, she is very concerned about whether Moises will be ready for school when the time comes. When Liliana comes to her home, she is warm and friendly, and brings with her a book which she is soon reading to Moises and Mrs. P. Mrs. P. watches in wonder as Liliana exposes both her and Moises to a whole new way of reading. Liliana reads the book aloud as if she were singing a song, and finds ways to bring Moises into the story and get him talking and laughing about the book. Liliana leaves the book for Moises, and as Mrs. P. reads it to him, his squeals of pleasure are so encouraging and gratifying that Mrs. P. finds herself reading the book with him again and again. At other visits, Liliana brings blocks and encourages Moises to name their colors and build a tower. Mrs. P. finds herself mimicking the warm, encouraging words she has heard Liliana use with Moises. Twice a week for two years, Liliana visits Mrs. P. and Moises at home, brings a book or a toy, and simply through playing with Moises and Mrs. P., shows Mrs. P. how to interact with him in a supportive, stimulating way. Liliana shows Mrs. P. how to turn even a mundane chore like folding laundry into a fun activity she can share with Moises. She helps Mrs. P. out in other ways too, referring her to a housing agency to help her find a better living situation and connecting her with the local Head Start program.

Parents as Teachers

Parents as Teachers is an early childhood parent education and family support organization serving families throughout pregnancy until their child enters kindergarten, usually age 5. Its Born to Learn™ model is designed to enhance child development and school achievement through parent education accessible to all families and can be adapted to fit community needs: It is a national model, but a local program. Family participation is voluntary.

The concept for Parents as Teachers was developed in Missouri in the 1970s when kindergarten teachers noticed children were beginning school with varying levels of learning readiness. Supported by research, early childhood professionals suggested that helping parents understand their role in encouraging their child's development would help prepare children for success in school. Through the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary education, Parents as Teachers began in 1981 as a pilot project for first-time parents of newborns. After demonstrating its benefits and effectiveness in 1985, the state of Missouri began providing access to Parents as Teachers services to all families through their local school districts.

The personal visit (monthly, bi-weekly or weekly) is the program's major service delivery component. During these visits, parent educators share age-appropriate child development information with parents, help them learn to observe their own child, address their parenting concerns, and engage the family in activities that provide meaningful parent/child interaction. The program model also includes group meetings for parents, developmental screenings, and help with identifying and connecting families with needed resources.

PAT serves families in all 50 states as well as internationally, and served approximately 400,000 families in 2003. The Parents as Teachers Born to Learn™ model is often offered alongside other program services, such as Even Start, Head Start, Early Head Start and Healthy Families America.

When Scott was born, the Johnsons begin receiving home visits from a Parents as Teachers parent educator. As new parents, they found the services invaluable. Not only did they learn about child development and positive ways to care for their child, they also received emotional support when needed. They attended group meetings where they had the opportunity to discuss parenting and development issues with other parents. More importantly, during one of the parent educator's monthly visits, she discussed the possibility that Scott may have a speech delay. Without pressuring the family, she referred the Johnsons to Early Intervention, a service they had never heard of. Since that home visit, over one year ago, Scott has been receiving speech therapy services on a weekly basis. According to the Johnsons, if the parent educator had not brought this to their attention as early as she did, Scott would not have received therapy as soon, which could have led to other problems. The Johnsons felt, like many families do, that being a parent was quite stressful at times, and they had a lot of unanswered questions. PAT helped answer their questions and reinforced what they did know. It gave them the tools to be great parents.

Early Head Start

Early Head Start is a Head Start program that can begin before birth and serves children and their families until children reach three years of age. Early Head Start is a federal program funded through the Administration on Children and Families (ACF), and, like all Head Start programs, follows the Head Start Program Performance Standards. Early Head Start serves poverty-level families and children and gives preference to those with greatest needs as determined at the community level. At least 10% of all enrollment is reserved for children with disabilities. The Early Head Start program was initially funded by Congress in 1994 through the Head Start Act.

Early Head Start children and families receiving home-based services are visited weekly and have the option to attend bi-monthly group socializations in which they interact with other children and parents. As Early Head Start is a child development program, emphases during home visits are on activities to enhance children's development, but because the program is a two-generation program, there is also a focus on the parents and family support as needed. Health screenings and assessments are also emphasized. The Early Head Start Research and Evaluation Project (ACF, 2002) reported that children in Early Head Start home-based programs demonstrated better social emotional development than control group children, as determined by analyzing video tapes of parent child interaction. Parents were more supportive and reported less parenting stress than control group parents. They demonstrated gains related to self sufficiency over the control group.

As of 2004, Early Head Start served 62,000 children in over 7,000 American communities. Early Head Start children can be served in home-based, center-based or a combination of home-based and center-based services.

When Mary enrolled in Early Head Start, she was addicted to drugs and at times homeless. She gave her children to her mother to raise and she disappeared. An Early Head Start Home Visitor continued to work with her mother and her children while Mary entered into a rehabilitation program. The children received child development services through home visits and center-based child care. After two and a half years in Early Head Start, Mary finished her college degree and became a certified counselor, bought her own home, found a steady job, and brought her children home to live with her. She now has a steady job and although she has graduated from Early Head Start, she calls two or three times a year to keep in touch. She is involved in community volunteer groups and is proud that her children are on the honor roll. Mary credits Early Head Start with not judging her when everyone else in the world seemed to and for convincing her that she is the most influential teacher in her children's lives. She feels that her successes in Early Head Start motivated her to achieve higher goals and helped her to feel better about herself as a parent and a person.