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WISCONSIN COUNCIL ON
children
&families
Raising Voices to Make Every Kid Count

Early Care and Education Fact Sheets

Home Visiting Programs

An Effective Approach to Strengthening Families

WHAT IS HOME VISITING?

Home visiting is a service intended to improve outcomes for children and families through regular personal visits. Participation is voluntary. Home visiting is a long-standing prevention strategy used by states and communities to improve the health and well-being of women, children, and families. Successful home visiting programs frequently provide comprehensive services to families from the prenatal period to age 3, with some continuing through kindergarten entry. Comprehensive home visiting is often targeted to at-risk families, and many programs are able to make less intense services universally available or are making progress toward voluntary services to all families.

In general, a trained home visitor works to help parents develop parenting skills, helping them to nurture their child's sense of security, social-emotional development, and physical and mental health. Families benefit from the home visitor's knowledge of community resources, developmental screening, and attention to the development of formal and informal support networks. Home visiting programs aim to equip parents with the tools and know-how to apply proven child development practices so that they can be their child's best resource and advocates.

According to an analysis by Stephen Small and colleagues at the University of Wisconsin and UW-Extension, nearly all home visitor programs share three assumptions:

1. Parents play a critical role in well-being and development of their children;
2. Intervening and supporting parents as early as possible is an effective approach; and
3. Making resources and education available strengthens families and helps them to obtain needed services.

RESEARCH ON EFFECTIVENESS

Research has provided evidence that home visiting programs that are well-designed strengthen families and improve outcomes for children. Successful programs enhance parent-child interactions and child development, promote early detection of developmental delays, and help improve literacy skills. Home visiting also helps to prevent child abuse and neglect, to improve birth outcomes, and strengthens later school performance.

Research collected by Deborah Daro of Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago identifies 12 critical elements of home visitation programs that are effective in preventing child abuse and fostering the healthy development of children. A growing body of research is finding positive outcomes from well-designed home visiting programs that meet these evidence-based standards. [2]

APPROACHES TO HOME VISITING IN WISCONSIN

Six major home visiting models have developed a shared vision for effective home visiting at the national level. These programs and are committed to use rigorous research and evaluation to refine best practices: The Nurse Family Partnership, Healthy Families America, Parents as Teachers, Parent-Child Home Program, Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY) USA, and Early Head Start.

In Wisconsin there are 85 agencies that provide home visiting services in 43 counties, according to the University of Wisconsin-Extension Family Living programs. Different models include:

- 44 Parents as Teachers sites
- 14 Early Head Start sites
- 1 Healthy Family site
- 1 Nurse Family Partnership site
- 1 HIPPY site

A majority of programs indicate they use more than one program model/curriculum. At this time most Wisconsin home visiting programs provide intensive services (weekly visits) to a portion of their families, and all of them have funding for a targeted population.

Wisconsin's Early Years Home Visitation Outcomes Project has been working with statewide home visiting programs to establish common outcome measures across the different models and to provide support to help programs evaluate effectiveness and improve quality. Common outcome data is critical to determining what works. The Project's experience is that professional development and training are key to quality services.

RESPONSIBILITY AND FUNDING FOR HOME VISITING

Most home visiting programs are funded and operated at the local level, through such agencies as county human services, family resource centers, private social services agencies, Head Start, and school districts. State funding is earmarked for particular home visiting initiatives, including:

- ***Family Foundations***, an initiative that grew out of prevention of child abuse and neglect legislation in 1997. With an annual allocation of $995,700, this project operates in 9 counties and 1 tribe and is administered by the Division of Children and Families (DCF). The program is targeted to first time parents who are eligible for Medicaid.
- ***Empowering Families of Milwaukee***, a comprehensive targeted demonstration project started in 2005. This project, also administered by DCF, targets pregnant women and families of infants and children through age 4 in high risk areas of the city of Milwaukee.
- ***Children Trust Fund (CTF)***, in partnership with Parents Plus, the Wisconsin State Parents as Teachers Office, provides training to home visitors and supervisors in the Parents as Teachers model.
- ***Birth to Three Intervention Program***, a program to support children with developmental delays and disabilities, provides services in natural environments, including home visits and services in community-based settings.

While home visiting services are expanding, they reach only a small fraction of families with young children identified.

Sources

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2. Deborah Daro, Prevent Child Abuse America, 2001.
http://www.uwex.edu/ces/flp/homevisit/program/pdfs/critical_elements.pdf