

## Family Living Programs

### Home Visiting Programs Improve Child Health and Reduce Abuse and Neglect

#### Situation

“Every year, at least 9000 Wisconsin children are victims of child abuse and neglect. Too often their bruises go unnoticed, their cries go unheard—but their pain is very real”. This quote from Governor Jim Doyle’s 2004 State of the State message was followed by the announcement that a pilot home visiting program (POCAN-Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect) made a big difference in children’s lives. A recent evaluation showed that kids in POCAN were 30% more likely to be immunized, half as likely to go to the emergency room and one quarter less likely to be abused or neglected. Research tells us that parents who understand their children’s development and are connected to their communities are less likely to abuse or neglect their children, resulting in fewer out-of-home placements for children and stronger, more successful families. The success of home visiting programs is dependent upon the skills of the home visitors. Family Living Programs has provided training and technical assistance to home visitors and their supervisors in these 10 POCAN sites since 1999.

In 1997, new legislation allowed the Department of Health and Family Services to establish grant-funded Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (POCAN) projects throughout the state. The 10 projects chosen for funding were Brown, Door, Fond du Lac, Manitowoc, Marathon, Portage, Vernon, Waukesha, and Waupaca Counties, and the Lac Courte Oreilles Tribe. Family Living Programs worked with DHFS and the 10 sites to provide:

- Overall training and site technical assistance to project staff and community partners on family-centered practice principles, building community support and program sustainability.
- Skill training for beginning and advanced home visitors and their supervisors based on best practice standards for home visitors, research that links practice with positive outcomes for families and children.
- Content training on topics such as domestic violence, health, mental health, child growth and development, father involvement, and parenting practices.

#### Response

In 1999-2003, Family Living Programs conducted 124 training events totaling 178 days. These events reached 2,533 people working in the 10 POCAN sites. Areas of training included parent-child interaction and child development (beginning and advanced), maternal depression, domestic violence prevention, brain development, Medicaid eligibility training, Basic and Advanced Skill training for home visitors. In addition, technical assistance was provided through site visits and phone conferences to aid in program development and implementation. Sites participated in quarterly ETN meetings and face-to-face meetings with DHFS staff, and attended annual statewide conferences for home visitors.

### Outcomes for training:

- **Sites will improve practice in the areas of program development, program sustainability, and building community support.**  
Sites are required to design their programs to meet the Best Practice Standards for Home Visitor Programs. Quarterly meetings and/or ETN's allowed DHFS state staff and UWEX training staff to answer questions and to schedule training and on-site technical assistance as needed.
- **POCAN programs will change program practices to reflect their understanding of family-centered principles.**  
Family-centered principles are ways that programs work in partnership with families using a strengths-based approach. A longitudinal evaluation in 2003 showed that 62% of training participants reported their program had changed practice or maintained a strengths-based approach to working with families as a result of training.
- **Home Visitors will use principles of family-centered practice to involve fathers and other family members in the POCAN project.**  
100% of the participants in training said they encourage father involvement in the program and in parenting. 100% also reported that they encourage parents to involve other family members to support them as parents.
- **Home Visitors will improve over time in the following skills: communication skills, planning skills, boundary setting, confidentiality, and personal safety skills.**  
One year after training, home visitors reported:
  - 87% used communications skills learned in training,
  - 89% regularly developed action plans with families,
  - 83% reported improvement in their abilities to maintain appropriate professional boundaries with families,
  - 70% reported improvement in their confidentiality practices,
  - 80% developed methods to ensure their personal safety while on the job.

**Why is this partnership successful?** Family Living Programs were able to assess the training needs of the project sites and provide training and technical assistance in keeping with the legislative guidelines for these programs. This was accomplished with the expertise and research foundations for training found with the University of Wisconsin - Extension. Project success was also based upon a shared commitment between the University of Wisconsin - Extension and DHFS to improve services and education to Wisconsin's families. The positive outcomes for families and child show us that well trained staff can make big differences in children's lives.

### Contact

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