

## **STRATEGY SPOTLIGHTS: Supporting Parents of Young Children**

### **STRATEGY #1: Family Resource Centers**

Family Resource Centers (FRCs) are places where parents can go to get information on raising and educating their children. While services vary depending on the center, most offer assistance in the following core areas: child health and development; parenting education; and information and referral to other community services. One of the most valuable roles that Family Resource Centers play is in coordinating and centralizing access to key supports for families.

These centers can be an especially important resource for new parents and those with very young children. Even when quality services for families with children from birth to age 5 are available, parents may not be aware of them, or they may not have time to navigate community and social service systems. Municipal leaders who are interested in providing hands-on, local support for families with young children should consider establishing or funding one or more Family Resource Centers in their communities.

### **THE STRATEGY IN FOCUS**

FRCs are set up and funded differently throughout the country, but most share some common characteristics. For example, almost all FRCs provide in-depth information and support for families, including: written materials (such as books, pamphlets, check-lists, or flyers); one-on-one guidance; and workshops and classes. Key subject areas include:

- Quality child care
- Early literacy and school readiness
- Child health and development
- Nutrition
- Parenting classes, with topics such as: child development, coping with stress, healthy meal planning, and parenting skills
- Family counseling
- Home visitation programs
- Transportation assistance
- Family literacy programs
- Access to GED and ESL programs
- Food and clothing distribution
- Child safety
- Discipline
- Parent support groups

The majority of FRCs also provide referrals to other government and community resources, such as financial counseling, mental health services, job training, and temporary financial assistance.

By connecting parents with the information they need to make good decisions for their children and by facilitating access to needed services, Family Resource Centers can create more positive early childhood experiences. Supporting FRCs is a prime opportunity for mayors, city councilmembers and other municipal leaders to strengthen outcomes for young children.

## WHAT CITY LEADERS CAN DO

- **Provide space.** If many of the services that FRCs offer are available in the community but are not accessible in one central location, municipal leaders can provide space in a city building to house a center. It could be a few rooms in a recreation center, an office within a community center, a library, or even a rental space in an apartment complex. Cities also can work with a local business that may be able to donate a location for a center.
- **Push for the expansion of existing Family Resource Centers.** Does an existing center have resources and services specifically geared to young children and their families? Does it have information or classes on the importance of the earliest years of life or on selecting quality child care? Municipal leaders can support the expansion of services at an existing center through supplemental city funding, in-kind assistance, or provision of staff. For example, the city can help make “well-child” check-ups available through a center by coordinating city-sponsored transportation for children’s visits to a doctor willing to donate his or her time.
- **Reach out and publicize center services.** Cities can become advertisers for a center in the community by printing and distributing pamphlets or flyers about the local center at city departments and offices frequented by parents. Municipal leaders also can use the “bully pulpit” to highlight the work of these centers in the community through speeches, media interviews, and other outreach.
- **Provide funding.** A variety of funding options exist for expanding an existing center or starting a new one. Funding sources include: city general funds; Housing and Urban Development block grant monies; parks and recreation dollars; and more. In addition, city leaders should think about creative ways to leverage funds by tapping into community support and linking early childhood issues and school readiness. Funding strategies for FRCs include: combining funds from a variety of public and private sources; applying for grants from foundations or the federal government; and requiring a nonprofit entity that runs a center to secure commitments for matching funds from the community.

## CITY EXAMPLES

- In Lansing, Michigan, 11 local Family Resource Centers are funded as part of the All Children Connected to Succeed Program (ACTS). The ACTS program receives a \$3.9 million grant from the Michigan Department of Education. Additional funding includes \$1.5 million in in-kind and cash donations from the City of Lansing, area school districts, nonprofit organizations, and others. Services offered at the centers include home visits, parent education, and information and referrals.
- The City of Baldwin Park, California provided the space for the Family Resource Center in the city's centrally located municipal complex and park. Seventy-five percent of the center's funding comes from the city's General Fund. The rest is provided by a variety of service providers (such as Kaiser Permanente), local businesses, and grants from foundations and private sources. The center provides on-site assistance with basic needs, as well as counseling, medical care, and education. In addition, each week the "Kids-Kare-A-Van" from the Citrus Valley Medical Center visits the site to provide free immunizations and primary care services for young children.

## RESOURCES

Strategies— A program providing information, training and technical assistance for Family Resource Centers in California. For more information see:

<http://www.familyresourcecenters.net>.

Family Resource Coalition of America— For more information see: <http://www.frca.org>.

### **Publications:**

*Using Family Resource Centers to Support California's Young Children and Their Families*, Bruce Waddell et. al., UCLA Center for Healthier Children, Families and Communities, August 2001. Although this publication specifically addresses the implementation of Family Resource Centers in California, it gives useful information about types of FRCs and funding strategies. Available at: <http://www.healthychild.ucla.edu/icecs/resource/materials/models/service/waddell.resourcecenters.pdf>.

*Family Resource Centers: Vehicles for Change*, California Resource Center Learning Circle, April 2000. Available at:

<http://www.familyresourcecenters.net/pdf/vehiclesforchange.pdf>.

*Financing Family Resource Centers: A Guide to Sources and Strategies*, Finance Project, April 2002. Available at: <http://www.financeproject.org>.

## **STRATEGY #2: Home Visitation Programs**

Parental care, guidance, and nurturing are essential to promoting positive health and developmental outcomes for young children. Yet many parents, especially first-time parents or those with few support systems, often need advice, assistance, and resources to help them meet their children's needs.

Home visitation programs involving nurses and other professionals have been proven to enhance child outcomes. By providing one-on-one, home-based instruction, these programs can help reduce premature or low-weight births, prevent child abuse and neglect, promote prenatal care and effective parenting, and connect parents to key community resources. Additionally, by reducing potential hospitalizations, emergency room use, or foster care placements, home visitation programs can be a cost-effective family support strategy.

Early childhood offers a window of opportunity for interventions that help improve a child's development and future success. Home visitation programs can be a particularly effective mechanism for reaching out to parents of young children, ages 0-5, who have few interactions with community institutions involving families, such as public schools. For city leaders who want to enhance the development of children and strengthen families, home visitation programs can be an important and successful strategy.

### **THE STRATEGY IN FOCUS**

Home visitation programs are voluntary programs commonly run through a community-based organization, hospital, family resource center, or school district. Some programs target low-income families or those with at-risk children. Many focus on pregnant women and continue services through a child's third birthday. Others direct services to all new parents, regardless of income, or work with families through a child's school entry (age 5).

Home visitation programs can have a number of goals, such as: increasing healthy birth outcomes; reducing the potential of abuse and neglect; helping parents prepare their children for school entry; or enhancing family literacy. Several home visitation models, each with different objectives, are used throughout the country. (See the "Resources" section for more information on each).

Although a range of services can be offered through home visitation programs, common elements include:

- **One-on-one visits** by trained nurses or professionals in a client's home. By observing and working with parents in the setting where they most often provide care to their child, home visitors can offer specific, personalized advice and suggestions on parenting, health issues, and other family matters. Frequent contact (ranging from once a week to once a month) enables the parent and the

nurse or professional to get to know each other well so that parents can feel comfortable asking questions and sharing concerns.

- **Parent education** either during home visits or through classes held at a Family Resource Center or in another community setting. Most home visitors offer parenting information on topics such as: child development, home safety, child nutrition, parenting skills, discipline techniques, quality child care, literacy, and school readiness. Some programs also provide adult education, GED, or life-skills classes to increase parents' self-sufficiency.
- **Health education** for pregnant women emphasizing prenatal check-ups, nutrition, and the negative effects of smoking and alcohol and drug use. Home visitors also provide post-birth information on infant health, well-baby check-ups, immunizations, and healthy child development.
- **Connections to community resources** such as child care services, health care, food stamps, counseling, or other family supports.

Home visitation programs are a unique and proven strategy to promote healthier births, strengthen families, and build the foundation needed for more positive early childhood experiences. By working to advertise, enhance, or establish home visitation programs in their communities, municipal leaders can create better outcomes for young children and their families.

## **WHAT CITY LEADERS CAN DO**

- **Convene community stakeholders.** Mayors and councilmembers can bring people together—including service providers, health organizations, staff from a Family Resource Center, and representatives of other neighborhood groups—to discuss the need for services, mechanisms for delivery, and potential partnerships for establishing a home visitation program. A local hospital or health agency may be able to provide nurses to staff a program, while a community center could advertise the program and recruit parents to participate. City leaders can help build a coalition to support the creation of a home visitation program.
- **Conduct outreach to parents.** Cities can advertise existing home visitation programs through public service announcements, flyers, posters, or interviews and other media outreach. In addition, staff at city offices and agencies can help identify parents who may want to participate in the program.
- **Support existing programs.** If a home visitation program already exists, municipal leaders can offer supplemental funding to expand the number of families served or to make additional services or information available through the program. For example, working with local health service providers, municipal officials can help publish a resource guide that is given to participating parents. Additionally, city officials can work with a local Family Resource Center to start a visitation program as part of the center's services. Cities also can offer in-kind

services such as transportation to help connect nurses or other professionals to their home visitation sites.

- **Provide or leverage funding.** City leaders can use general revenue funds or work with state partners to raise money to support home visitation programs. For example, the City of Lynchburg, Virginia helps fund the Healthy Families program, which offers weekly home visitation by family support workers. In Lansing, Michigan, the city contributes funding to 11 Family Resource Centers that provide home visitation through the Parents as Teachers program. Federal and state funding sources available to support home visitation programs include: Medicaid, Title V Maternal and Child Health Services Block Grant, Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), and the State Children’s Health Insurance Program (SCHIP).
- **Advocate for increased state support.** Municipal leaders also can lobby their state legislators to use a combination of funding to support home visitation efforts. In Oklahoma, \$14 million in state general revenue funds are the primary source of support for a statewide home visitation program, with additional money (\$2 million) coming from Medicaid. In Pennsylvania, as part of the Governor’s Community Partnership for Safe Children, the state is using \$6.7 million in TANF funds to support nurse visitation programs.

## RESOURCES

Parents as Teachers (PAT)— PAT is an international early childhood parent education and support program serving families throughout pregnancy until their child enters kindergarten. There are more than 2,800 PAT programs worldwide. For more information see: <http://www.patnc.org>.

Home Instruction Program for Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY)— HIPPY is a home-based parent involvement and school readiness program. The program teaches parents how to prepare their three-, four-, and five-year-old children for success in school. There are 129 HIPPY programs in 28 states. For more information see: <http://www.hippyusa.org>.

Healthy Families America (HFA)— HFA a national initiative started by Prevent Child Abuse America, helps parents of newborns get their children off to a healthy start. HFA offers home visitation and other services to families in more than 420 communities. The program’s goals are to: promote positive parenting; promote child health and development; and prevent child abuse and neglect. For more information see: <http://www.healthyfamiliesusa.org>.

Nurse-Family Partnership Program— The program is a highly acclaimed, well-tested model developed by Dr. David Olds that improves the health and social functioning of low-income, first-time mothers, their babies, and families. This model is being replicated in 24 states. For more information see: <http://www.nccfc.org>.

**Publications:**

*In-Home Visitation Programs: A Review of the Literature*, Dana Rapoport, Margaret O'Brien-Strain. Sphere Institute, April 2001. Available at:

<http://www.sphereinstitute.org/pdf/OCProp10litrev.pdf>.

*The Benefits and Financing of Home Visiting Programs*, Issue Brief. National Governor's Association, Center for Best Practices, June 14, 2002. Available at:

<http://www.nga.org/cda/files/BENEFITSFINANCINGHOME.pdf>.

*The Role of Home Visitation Programs in Improving Health and Outcomes for Children and Families*, American Academy of Pediatrics, Pediatrics, vol. 101, No. 3, March 1998, pp 486-489. Available at: <http://www.aap.org/policy/re9734.html>.

### **STRATEGY #3: Parent Resource Kits**

Parents are a child’s first teacher. They have the largest impact in their child’s life, helping them grow and learn from the earliest years. Many parents, especially first-time moms and dads, may not be aware of services and resources for young children in their communities. They also may not have immediate access to information about how to get their young children ready for school through at-home early learning activities. Cities can support parents as they nurture the healthy development of their young children by creating and distributing a set of high-quality, practical resources for new parents.

#### **THE STRATEGY IN FOCUS**

The content and scope of a city-prepared parent kit will vary depending on the availability of resources and funding, as well as needs in the community. Municipalities can decide what to include in a kit based the city’s early childhood goals. For example, a town with a low immunization rate may want to make information and materials about the importance of proper immunizations the focus of its parent resource kit.

Commonly, parent kits include information about child development, early brain development, health and safety, and the availability of licensed child care and early learning programs in the community. Often, this information is available in both English and Spanish. The following materials can be helpful to include:

- **Educational videos** that demonstrate health and safety tips and techniques, present information about the stages of child development, or provide tips for increasing school readiness;
- **Written guides** focusing on resources in the community, including child care, health care, public services, Family Resource Centers, and other services helpful to parents with young children;
- **Brochures** on issues such as parenting, brain development, and early learning;
- **Tip sheets** for choosing child care, preschool programs, or proper health services; and
- **Children’s books** that families can read together.

National organizations can be a good resource for municipal leaders in putting together a parent kit. For example, Zero to Three, an organization that promotes the healthy development of infants and toddlers, offers “Healthy Minds” handouts that can be distributed to parents. The handouts are organized by child age and range from newborn through three years old. They offer ideas for parents on how best to support their child’s development. (See the “Resources” section for additional organization listings.)

## WHAT CITY LEADERS CAN DO

- **Produce family resource kits.** To create a comprehensive resource kit for parents, a city will most likely need to invest municipal funds, staff time, or other support. Cities can collaborate with early childhood, health services, and other community or statewide organizations to make the task more manageable and affordable. These groups may be able to donate materials, help with design, or offer monetary support. In addition, businesses such as a local printer might consider contributing *pro bono* services. Cities should consider partnerships with the following entities to produce the kits:
  - Public libraries
  - Health clinics
  - Hospitals
  - Child care providers
  - Community foundations
  - State Department of Education
  - Child care resource and referral agencies
  - Local businesses
  - Schools
  - Local and national nonprofit organizations
- **Make sure the kits get to parents in need.** Resource kits can be distributed to parents in a number of ways. Local health clinics and doctor's offices can give out kits during prenatal visits. Hospitals can distribute them in the maternity ward to new parents. Local child care resource and referral agencies can offer kits to parents who are looking for child care. Supermarkets and local businesses also can display kits in their stores.

If a parent resource kit is large, it may be more feasible to create a limited number of kits and have them available on loan to parents. Cities can partner with libraries, schools, and Family Resource Centers to offer the kits at these locations for new parents to borrow.

## CITY EXAMPLES

- The City of San Bernardino, California adapted a kit created by the California Children and Families Commission to be used by new parents in the community. The kit is designed to provide practical advice on a range of parenting topics, including maternal and child health issues, bonding and attachment, and child care resources available in the city. The kit is available in English and Spanish and includes:
  - Six videos covering the topics of child safety, health and nutrition, discipline, early literacy, and school readiness;

- Parenting brochures;
- A baby book; and
- A resource guide to connect parents with local services.

The kit is distributed to all new parents at the hospital and is available at family centers throughout the community. Kits also are brought to new parents during home visits.

- As part of its early childhood initiative, Project Lift-Off, Seattle, Washington created the Getting School Ready Resource Kit. A group of parents, child care providers, and early childhood educators helped municipal leaders choose the most helpful materials for new parents to include in the kit. The kit, which is designed to be useful for children from birth through pre-K, is available for new parents to check out from the public libraries and family centers in Seattle. The kit includes the following resources:
  - Getting School Ready booklet;
  - Sing with a Child music CD;
  - New parent resource guide;
  - A “how-to guide” to conducting community conversations about schools;
  - An information sheet on toys and activities parents can do at home;
  - “Ready to Learn” video produced by the I Am Your Child foundation; and
  - An array of booklets and publications, including: Reading Right from the Start: A Parent’s Guide to the First Five Years; Read to your Baby: Tips and Ideas for Sharing Books with your Child; Taking Care of Our Children: A Resource Guide for Informal Child Care Providers; Building Your Baby’s Brain: What Parents Can Do in the First Five Years; and 52 Ways to Help your Child Learn.

For more information, visit:

<http://www.earlylearning.org/gsr/gettingschoolready.html>.

## **RESOURCES**

Child Care Aware— Child Care Aware links parents to their local child care resource and referral agency (CCR&R). CCR&Rs help parents locate quality child care resources in their community. The Child Care Aware website includes “5 Steps to Choosing Quality

Child Care” and other helpful materials on early care and education. For more information see: <http://www.childcareaware.org>.

I Am Your Child Foundation— I Am Your Child is a national nonprofit organization dedicated to raising awareness about the importance of early childhood development and school readiness. IAYC develops a wide variety of resources for parents, early childhood professionals, child advocates, health care providers, policymakers, and the media. For more information see: <http://www.iamyourchild.org>.

National Association for the Education of Young Children— The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) is the nation's largest organization of early childhood educators and others dedicated to improving the quality of programs for children from birth through third grade. NAEYC offers materials and resources for parents including a searchable database of NAEYC-accredited child care programs and brochures about school readiness and child care. For more information see: <http://www.naeyc.org>.

PBS Ready to Learn— Ready to Learn provides extensive outreach services to communities, including workshops for parents, childcare providers, and other early childhood professionals. For more information see: <http://www.pbs.org/readytolearn>.

Zero to Three— The mission of Zero to Three is to promote the healthy development of infants and toddlers by supporting and strengthening families and communities. Zero to Three’s “Healthy Minds” child development brochures for parents. For more information see: [http://www.zerotothree.org/ztt\\_parents.html](http://www.zerotothree.org/ztt_parents.html).

## **STRATEGY #4: Parent Leadership And Advocacy Training**

In many communities, parents are an untapped voice on behalf of children. Leadership training prepares parents to become stronger, more visible advocates on child and family issues. Through specialized leadership training, parents build the skills they need to be actively engaged in community and civic affairs. As they become more confident and more knowledgeable, parents can be powerful partners in city initiatives for children and youth. They also can help lead efforts to improve neighborhoods and local schools.

### **THE STRATEGY IN FOCUS**

Many parents care deeply about issues related to children and families but lack the confidence to get more involved. Parent leadership and advocacy training programs offer information and tools that help build skills in the following areas:

- Communicating with public school officials, city officials, and other civic leaders;
- Navigating the city government and state legislatures;
- Working with other parents and organizations to promote public policies that are good for children and families;
- Lobbying city and state leaders about the issues;
- Speaking in public; and
- Gaining general and specialized knowledge of key issues related to children and families.

Leadership training programs can be run by local nonprofit training or advocacy organizations, community colleges, civic groups, or city agencies. Training often is offered as a series of classes and can include role playing, specific advocacy assignments or “homework,” and networking with community leaders and neighbors.

### **WHAT CITY LEADERS CAN DO**

- **Partner with local organizations to bring training to the community.** City leaders can convene a planning group to develop a plan for conducting a leadership training program. The group should work on issues including scheduling, logistics, participant recruitment, and financing. Municipalities also can help advertise programs via the city website and other avenues.
- **Provide funding or in-kind resources.** Cities can contribute direct funding or in-kind resources to help support parent training. For example, in Norwich, Connecticut, the city helped with the launch of the Parent Leadership Training Institute program (see below for more) by providing in-kind resources such as

municipal staff trainers. Since then, the city has continued to make a commitment to the program by covering the costs of facilitators' salaries, dinner for parent participants, child care, and transportation.

- **Host trainings.** Some cities have developed and hosted their own leadership training programs based on the needs of their communities. For example, in New Haven, Connecticut, the city designed a “Democracy School” open to all residents in the city. The six-week course offered information about how city hall works and how to become more involved in city issues. More than 40 residents participated.

## CITY EXAMPLES

- The Parent Leadership Training Institute (PLTI) was developed by the Connecticut Commission on Children and is designed to enable parents to become leading advocates for children. Parents are offered a 20-week leadership training curriculum that covers topics from working with diversity and using the media to understanding policy and program budgets. PLTI is under way in 14 cities throughout Connecticut and has also expanded into other states. Communities that wish to bring the PLTI curriculum to their city or town must establish a “civic design” team to plan and organize the program’s implementation. Funding for community programs has come from local donors and foundations, as well as a combination of federal, state and local funds. Most cities also provide in-kind resources to support the program, such as meeting space or city staff time and expertise. For more information: [www.cga.ct.gov/coc/plti.htm](http://www.cga.ct.gov/coc/plti.htm).
- The PLANtoLEAD program is a “democracy school” aimed at helping parents become leaders in children's advocacy. The 20-week course, conducted by the California Partnership for Children, teaches parents a range of skills, from working with schools to lobbying for legislation to building coalitions. PLANtoLEAD also finds field placements where parents have an opportunity to apply what they’re learning. For more information: [www.4children.org/news/plleade.htm](http://www.4children.org/news/plleade.htm).

## RESOURCES

Center for Parent Leadership— For more information see: <http://www.centerforparentleadership.org>.

Boston’s Parents United for Child Care— For more information see: <http://www.nccic.org/ccpartnerships/profiles/united.html>.

Parents as Leaders (PALS), Middletown, Connecticut— For more information see: <http://www.wcgmf.org/CFI/Pals.html#c>.

Parent Leadership Training Institute in Norwich and New London, Connecticut— For more information see: <http://www.wcgmf.org/CFI/Plti.html>.