Family Literacy Programs Show Promise for Preparing Children for School

First 5 LA's Family Literacy programs show promise for promoting children's school readiness and parents' ongoing support for their children's learning, according to an evaluation completed recently by the American Institutes for Research (AIR), a Washington, DC-based research and evaluation firm.

A team of evaluators from AIR examined child and family outcomes of 15 school- and community-based programs in LA County funded by First 5 LA since July 2002. These four-component family literacy programs serve largely low-income, monolingual Spanish-speaking families.

Also participating in the evaluation was the Center for Improving Child Care Quality at UCLA, whose staff conducted individual child assessments at multiple points in time.

The study found that the number of hours parents spent in the program could be directly correlated to increases in parents' reading levels and their use of home literacy activities such as reading to their children.

In addition, children who participated in more hours of early childhood education activities showed greater developmental growth. Children in programs focusing more on language and literacy demonstrated the most growth.

"These family literacy programs are unique in the community, as they integrate both parent and child learning opportunities so important in fostering early literacy and kindergarten readiness," said Heather Quick, a lead evaluator with AIR.

"We found that parents showed a strong commitment to the program- attending an average of more than 40 hours worth of weekly class sessions in ESL and parenting education while their children attended early childhood programs. This is in addition to an average of 11 hours of one-on-one time with their child during the required parent-child interactive literacy component," she added.

Among areas of improvement suggested by the report are increased time for language and literacy activities for children during program activities, and more planning around long-term sustainability issues for the programs themselves.
April 14 & 15, 9 a.m.-4 p.m.: Peaceful Touch®, a Healthy Touch Curriculum for Children: Two-Day Workshop for teachers, health professionals, and parents at The Heart Touch Project, 3400 Airport Ave. #42, Santa Monica 90405. Registration is $200. Call (310) 391-2558 or visit www.peacefultouch.net.

April 16, 8:30 a.m.-noon: Infusing Mental Health Services Into Early Education Programs: Community Examples & Strategies at the Center for Healthy Communities, 1000 N. Alameda St., LA 90012. $25 registration & $15 continuing education fee. Visit www.uscucedd.org or call (213) 383-5992.

April 18, 1-3 p.m.: Infant Mental Health: Addressing Families’ Needs panel discussion presented by First 5 LA Fellowship Program at First 5 LA, 750 N. Alameda St., LA 90012. Free and includes lunch. RSVP by April 13 by contacting marcellshannon@mednet.ucla.edu.

April 21, 10 a.m.-3 p.m.: Community Resource Fair, Celebrating 15 years of the Latino Family Preservation Program, sponsored by the LA County Department of Children and Family Services at Our Lady of Soledad Church, 4561 E. Cesar Chavez Ave., LA 90022. Call (323) 881-1437.

April 21, 9 a.m.-noon: Protecting Our Children From Sexual Abuse; a Parent/Caregiver Workshop at Queen Anne Place Ready For School Center, 1212 Queen Anne Place, LA 90019. Contact Nikki Dana at ndana@lausd.k12.ca.us or (323) 936-8506.

April 24, 5-7:30 p.m.: Protecting Our Children From Sexual Abuse; a Parent/Caregiver Workshop at SPIRITT Family Services, 2000 South Tyler Ave., South El Monte 91733. A professional panel will speak in Spanish and English to parents/caregivers. Sponsored by CARIÑO Partnerships for Families and the Eastside Child Abuse Prevention Council. Call Elvis Torres or Angelica Romero at (626) 442-1400.

April 21, noon-4 p.m.: 7th Annual Raising Readers: A Literacy Festival sponsored by Connections for Children at Santa Monica Clock Tower Quad, 1900 Pico Blvd., Santa Monica 90405. Call Catherine Griffin (310) 452-3325 ext. 237.

April 23, 9-11 a.m.: Prenatal Workshop at Our Lady of Soledad Church, 4561 E. Cesar Chavez Ave., LA 90022. Call (323) 881-1437.

April 24, 5-7:30 p.m.: Preparing Your Child for School; a Workshop sponsored by SPIRITT Family Services, 2000 South Tyler Ave., South El Monte 91733. A professional panel will speak in Spanish and English to parents/caregivers. Sponsored by CARIÑO Partnerships for Families and the Eastside Child Abuse Prevention Council. Call Elvis Torres or Angelica Romero at (626) 442-1400.

For information on the full report, click here or contact First 5 LA’s Bill Gould at bgould@first5la.org or (213) 482-7550.

TELEMUNDO SERIES
Free Assistance Available to New Parents for Infant Health Coverage

Access to health care is a concern for new and expecting parents, especially those who don't have employer-sponsored health insurance. This Wednesday, First 5 LA and Telemundo Los Angeles will give viewers a short course on how to apply for free or low-cost health insurance for infants and young children.

The segment will air as part of the "Primeros Pasos" series on pregnancy and infant development on the 6 p.m. news on KVEA, Channel 52, a local Spanish-language TV station.

"In LA County, children 5 years and younger can qualify for several government-funded programs if their family income is less than 200 or 300 percent of federal poverty level, or about $60,000 for a family of four," said Maribel Ferrer, membership director of L.A. Care Health Plan, a community-accountable health plan serving Los Angeles County residents through a variety of programs, including Medi-Cal, Healthy Families, and Healthy Kids, which is funded by First 5 LA for children 5 years and younger.

In 2003, First 5 LA committed $100 million over five years to providing free and low-cost health insurance to all LA County children ages 5 and younger whose families fall below 300 percent of the federal poverty level and regardless of immigration status.

Healthy Kids covers doctor visits, immunizations, hospitalization, surgery, prescription drugs, dental care, vision care, eyeglasses, and more.

To date, more than 8,000 youngsters in that age group have been enrolled in Healthy Kids, tens of thousands more in other health plans as a result of First 5 LA-sponsored outreach.

For information on how to qualify and apply for children's health insurance, call (888) FIRST5LA or visit www.lacare.org.

DVD Update of Kit for New Parents Now Available Free by Calling 800-KIDS 025

First 5 LA joined with First 5 California last week to announce the launch of the updated Kit for New Parents, a free set of books, pamphlets, and a DVD containing practical advice on prenatal care and a child’s first five years.

With more than 150,000 babies born in Los Angeles County each year, the free kit, valued at $75, is designed to help parents best prepare for their new child.
"We hope that new parents across the county will take advantage of this free resource and use it to ease their transition into parenthood," said First 5 LA Executive Director Evelyn V. Martinez.

Parents can refer to the kit for information on nutrition, safety, quality child care, health, discipline and early learning. It provides practical information in an easy-to-use manner and can help build parents' confidence as they undertake their new role.

Since 2001, First 5 LA has distributed more than 500,000 of the original kits on VHS format. Now, the new kit has been completely revised to include technological upgrades, user-friendly improvements, and the latest early childhood development information. Spanish and Asian language versions of the updated kit will be released later this year.

Direct orders for a single kit can be placed by calling (800) KIDS-025. For more information, visit www.ccfc.ca.gov/kit.
June 16, 10 a.m.-4 p.m.: American Diabetes Association’s Diabetes Expo at the Long Beach Convention Center 300 East Ocean Blvd., Long Beach 90802. Free health screenings, entertainment and more. Visit www.diabetes.org/losangelesexpo.

GRANTEE PROFILE

Lynwood Hospital Embarks on Journey Toward Becoming “Baby Friendly”

At St. Francis Medical Center in Lynwood, newborns, at the moment of birth, are placed on their mother’s chest, where immediate bonding often results in breastfeeding within the first hour after birth.

Mother and baby are then moved to their hospital room, where they remain unseparated until it’s time to go home. Until then, doctor exams and lactation consultations are all done bedside.

This scenario is repeated 6,000 times a year, with each birth at St. Francis, but it is far from commonplace in other hospitals. Typically, newborns are separated from mothers to be cleaned, weighed, and formula-fed.

In fact, there are only 55 U.S. hospitals that are designated by UNICEF and the World Health Organization as “baby-friendly,” meaning that they meet ten strict requirements, such as maintaining a written breastfeeding policy that is routinely communicated to all health care staff and giving infants nothing other than breast milk, unless medically indicated.

Of the 13 “baby-friendly” hospitals in California, only one, Glendale Memorial Hospital, is in LA County. Recently, St. Francis embarked on a multi-year process to become the second LA County hospital to earn the coveted designation by 2009.

One of the first steps is training all its 300 maternity nurses in the Breastfeeding Peer Counselor Support Project, funded by First 5 LA.

“Becoming baby friendly is a process of putting together the puzzle pieces- rewriting the policy, teaching the evidence-based practices and even restructuring jobs,” said Deborah Myers, chief of Nutrition Services at South LA Health Projects, and manager of the breastfeeding project.

“Breastfeeding provides the best start for babies, so this fits into St. Francis’ goal of creating a healthier community as a whole,” said L’Tanya Simien-Robnett, clinical director of the Family Life Center at St. Francis.

For information, call St. Francis Medical Center at (310) 900-2058 or visit www.babyfriendlyusa.org.

CHAMPION PROFILE

Tina Allen Teaches About Importance of Healing Touch

Champion Profile features individuals who exemplify First 5 LA’s tagline, “Champions for Our Children.”

Tina Allen is director of the children’s program at The Heart Touch Project, an LA-based non-profit educational organization dedicated to the training and delivery of compassionate and healing touch therapy.
As manager of the nation’s first comprehensive pediatric massage program at Childrens Hospital Los Angeles, she also trains massage therapists, health care providers, and family members to provide touch therapy for hospitalized rehabilitation patients, premature babies, and children with retinoblastoma (eye cancer), spina bifida and cerebral palsy.

She is currently developing new pediatric massage programs at Mattel Children's Hospital at UCLA and Cedars-Sinai Medical Center, as well as programs focusing on introducing gentle and compassionate touch to women and children who have survived domestic abuse.

**Which book has most influenced your life?**
*Touching: the Human Significance of the Skin* by Ashley Montagu.

**What makes you angry?**
Apathy.

**Which historical figure do you most admire?**
Audrey Hepburn, who understood that real beauty comes from within.

**What is your idea of a perfect world?**
Where everyone begins life having the same opportunities available to them.

**What is the greatest challenge faced by LA County children and families?**
Lack of money and quality family time.

**Who was your favorite teacher?**
Shawnee Isaac Smith, founder of The Heart Touch Project, who taught me how to be present in the moment.

**What is your motto?**
"Children are our greatest gift-- treat them with extraordinary care!"