

Parenting & Family Life Education

Summary of Significant Trends:

Rapid changes in society create multiple family challenges and stressors. Normal stressors of maturity, communication, and family dynamics often are compounded with external forces such as lack of extended family support, substance abuse, or domestic violence. The past two years families have had to endure more than the normal stressors of growth, communication and change. Families have had to learn to deal with natural disasters, terrorism, war, violence, and economic loss. These added challenges create family situations that are extraordinary but they also lead to changes in family living situations that are difficult to endure. As the basic unit of society, families need support of the larger community and they need access to good information to learn skills to raise and protect their children.

In North Carolina, there is a need to provide support for those who care for children when their parents are unavailable due to work, child removal from the home, or incarceration. Of the more than 620,000 children under age six, 66% have mothers in the labor force. Eighty percent of mothers of children 6-17 are in the labor force. Children whose parents have a serious problem such as substance abuse or mental health problems are often placed with their grandparents or otherwise placed in the foster care system. There are 18,000 fathers in North Carolina prisons. In North Carolina 80,000 grandparents are respon-

sible for meeting the needs of one or more grandchildren under age 18 (US Census, 2000). Nearly 33,000 children were confirmed as victims of child abuse or neglect (Prevent Child Abuse, North Carolina, 2002) putting many of them (11,234) under the supervision and custody of social services in North Carolina.

Emerging Trends and Issues:

While abuse and neglect cut across all socioeconomic levels, families with limited resources are ill equipped to cope with high levels of economic and emotional stress. North Carolina has a disproportionately high population of “working poor” families and is above the national average for the percent of children living in single parent families. Many children and families have been removed from public assistance programs and children whose parents have serious problems such as substance abuse or mental health problems are often placed with their grandparents or otherwise placed in the foster care system.

With rising child abuse rates, there are serious concerns about how a tumultuous childhood affect ultimate school success and productive adulthood. Being maltreated places a child at higher risk for negative behaviors such as involvement in crime, substance abuse, and poor performance in school.

Relevance of Trends to County Programs:

Family and Consumer Sciences Cooperative Extension programs support families with education about how to be a caring parent and nurture productive children. Parents has been broadly defined in recent years to specifically tailor educational programs to the family based on their relationship to the child as an adult parent, teen parent, grandparent raising their grandchildren, single parents, dual earner families, divorcing parents, and fathers, in particular. Programs that teach parents to spend time with their children and provide positive role models for their children, children then can learn the importance of reading, school success, and healthy lifestyles.

Parents learn through family support programs to be nurturing, read to their children, and feed their families nutritiously. Children who are supported in this way perform at higher levels than their peers from grade school and beyond and are less likely to drop out of high school, have early pregnancies, and are more likely to go to college or work at a skilled job (Abcedarian Longitudinal project, 2000). When parents learn to be nurturing and supportive of their children's learning, the children are less likely to be arrested, have a greater chance of earning more in competitive jobs, and complete high school (Highscope/Perry Preschool project). The combination of family support/parenting services and high quality early childhood education make a long term difference in preventing juvenile delinquency.

Investments in prevention programs to support families saves communities in re-mediation costs, reduces costs related to prison and social and legal services, and reduces the load on the foster care system. Parenting education as a prevention program is cost effective. Parenting education costs only about .80 per family per day. More intense educational programs for families such as home visitation could cost nearly \$3.83 per day, however, compare these minimal costs to interventions such as foster care which costs

\$23.75 per child per day or incarceration of young adults which costs \$68.50 per day per person.

Audiences who will benefit from prevention educational programs include all parents, and specifically:

- Incarcerated parents
- Court mandated or Department of Social Services referred parents
- Grandparents raising grand children
- Parent Educators to assure quality education for parents and other caregivers

Sources of Supporting Data:

Households and Families Statistics:

<http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/hh-fam.html>

Kids Count: <http://www.aecf.org/kidscount/census/>

North Carolina Child Trends
<http://www.ncchild.org>

CYFERnet: <http://www.cyfernet.org/>

U.S. Census Bureau: <http://www.census.gov/>

Sustainable Measures
<http://www.sustainablemeasures.com/>

Office of State Planning:
<http://www.ospl.state.nc.us/>

Prevent Child Abuse North Carolina:
<http://www.preventchildabusenc.org/>

Abcedarian Longitudinal Project:
<http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~abc/>

Highscope/Perry Preschool project :
<http://www.highscope.org/Research/PerryProject/perrymain.htm>

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