



CHAPIN HALL

CENTER FOR CHILDREN
AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

An Evaluation of The Cuyahoga County Home Visitation Programs for New Parents

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EVALUATION REPORTS:

*Welcome Home and Early Start - Participant
Perceptions of Services and Program Impacts*

*The Early Start Program -
An Assessment of Program Quality*

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BACKGROUND:

Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago, in collaboration with Westat Associates, designed and implemented a comprehensive evaluation of two home visitation programs from the Cuyahoga County Early Childhood Initiative in the vicinity of Cleveland, OH – Welcome Home, a universal home visitation program that provides a single home visit to all first-time and teen parents; and Early Start, a secondary prevention program targeted to new parents facing significant challenges. Data collection methods included comprehensive surveys at baseline, 3 months and 11 months post enrollment with 289 Welcome Home participants; 325 Welcome Home-Early Start referrals; and 193 Ohio Works First (OWF)-Early Start referrals between February 2001 and January 30, 2002. In addition, in-depth qualitative interviews were completed with a stratified random sample of 87 of these participants 2 and a half years after enrollment (e.g., between August 2003 and March 2004). The evaluation also drew on the county's administrative data to assess overall program performance and the rate of subsequent reports for child abuse and neglect among those receiving these programs.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Newborns and their parents are accessing supportive services sooner and are receiving 68 percent more home visits in their initial 3 months in Early Start than was true during the program's first operating year.
- Welcome Home is well received and is accomplishing the majority of its stated early and instrumental outcomes.
- The average Early Start participant receiving a minimum number of home visits (15) demonstrated signifi-

cant improvement in her level of depression, perception of stress, and sense of competence and comfort in caring for her child.

- Although a substantial proportion of Early Start participants were reported for child abuse following referral to the program, these children tend to be reported at a younger age than those who are referred for services but do not engage.

Despite these encouraging trends, only one-third of those referred to Early Start received the service dosage our work indicates is necessary to achieve these outcomes. Further, the probability of an infant enrolled in Early Start being reported for child abuse is about two and a half times that of the general population of all 1 year-olds in the county. These patterns, coupled with the substantial number of unmet needs expressed by the Early Start referrals we interviewed 2 and a half years post-enrollment, suggest that new thinking may be needed in how the program is structured.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- An increase in the initial reach and scope of Welcome Home services
- The development of an outreach team trained specifically to respond to those cases where enrollment in Early Start services is proving problematic
- More effective use of the Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) process to identify and address the full range of a family's needs including basic support
- Stronger linkages with income maintenance programs and child welfare services
- Increased training for direct service providers on relationship building and cultural competence