REPORT OF THE DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES ON

# AN EVALUATION OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF EXISTING APPROACHES TO PARENTING EDUCATION FOR CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT PREVENTION

TO THE GOVERNOR AND THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF VIRGINIA



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COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

Office of the Governor

Kay Coles James Secretary of Health and Human Resources

February 8, 1995

TO: The Honorable George Allen

and

The General Assembly of Virginia

I am pleased to submit this report in response to House Joint Resolution 447 which requested a study on the effectiveness of existing approaches to parenting education. The study involved parent education programs in Virginia as well as a review of the research.

The Virginia Department of Social Services contracted with the University of Virginia to conduct the study of existing approaches to parenting education.

Respectfully Submitted,

Kay Coles James Secretary of Health and Human Resources

George Allen Governor

#### PREFACE

House Joint Resolution 447, passed by the 1993 General Assembly, directed the Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS) to evaluate the effectiveness of existing approaches to parenting education. The Resolution cited incidences of child abuse and neglect and of foster care placements in Virginia and noted the need for parents to have adequate parenting skills. The evaluation identifies the most appropriate and effective use of existing parenting approaches, a method for identifying individuals who would benefit from such approaches and the costs of making parenting education available to such individuals.

The Department of Social Services contracted with the University of Virginia to conduct the study of existing approaches to parenting education. The Department of Psychology's Community Research Group conducted the evaluation under the leadership of N. Dickon Reppucci, Ph.D. The evaluation team members, doctoral candidates in the Psychology Department at the University of Virginia, included Preston Britner, Pete Dillon, Deborah Land, Heather O'Beirne, and Jennifer Woolard. Laboratory coordinator Deborah Schutte also worked on this project. VDSS lead staff for the study was Ann Childress, Child Protective Services Unit; other Department staff involved were Carol Baron and Lynette Isbell, Division of Management and Customer Services.

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

#### Background

House Joint Resolution 447, passed by the 1993 General Assembly, directed the Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS) to evaluate the effectiveness of existing approaches to parenting education. The Resolution cited the incidences of child abuse and neglect and of foster care placements in Virginia and noted the need for parents to have adequate parenting skills.

#### **Evaluation** Objectives

This study focused on 25 parent education programs funded through the Virginia Family Violence Prevention Program in 1993 to prevent child maltreatment. Evaluation objectives included analyzing characteristics of existing programs and identifying commonalities and differences in approach and implementation; assessing components of appropriate and effective approaches; identifying populations currently served by existing programs as well as those which would benefit from such programs; and determining the cost of offering different approaches to parenting education.

#### **Evaluation Findings**

The research team conducted a review of existing literature on parenting education and of similar evaluations in other states, initial site visits to all 25 programs, and intensive evaluation of a representative group of six programs. Existing approaches to parent education represent a variety of formats, including structured education classes using standard curricula, workshops, support groups, and home visiting programs. Each may be a viable and vital component of a strategy for the primary prevention of child maltreatment, depending on the needs of a given client population and community. Client populations vary markedly among and within projects. Some include "at-risk" parents and families, while others focus on providing services to parents from the general population.

Successful programs appeared to understand and match the parenting needs of their individual communities, by choosing and modifying appropriate curricula, identifying concrete goals and objectives for their programs, tailoring the format of their programming in terms of intensity and duration, and planning effective client recruitment and retention efforts. The most effective programs also provide staff and volunteer training and supervision, identify and evaluate outcome measures of effectiveness, and balance direct service provision with administrative and fundraising needs.

#### Recommendations

The evaluation outlined in the report provides important information abour the implementation of child maltreatment prevention programs and lays the foundation for long term outcome evaluations. The recommendations should result in better programs for the prevention of child abuse and neglect in the Commonwealth of Virginia.

1. The Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS) should continue its focus on and support of primary prevention programs for child abuse and neglect. Parent education, including education classes, workshops, support groups, and home visiting, is a major avenue by which this can occur. Multiple approaches to parent education should be maintained and VDSS should support universal access to some level of parenting services.

2. The Virginia Department of Social Services should continue to emphasize the diversity of program type and content, matched to community needs. Selection of parenting education approaches and populations served should be community based. The Department should support interagency efforts toward the development of standard needs assessment protocals for communities to decide what services are needed, and how they should be implemented.

3. The Virginia Department of Social Services should distribute to VFVPP and other prevention programs the series of technical assistance briefs developed from this study on topics such as prevention education as a preventive intervention, targeting and recruiting clients, program evaluation, fund raising and volunteers (See Appendix C for complete list).

4. The Virginia Department of Social Services should support and participate in ongoing interagency collaborative efforts to strengthen evaluation of prevention programs.

# I. INTRODUCTION

## Study Charge

House Joint Resolution 447 requested "that the Department of Social Services evaluate the effectiveness of existing approaches to parenting education. The evaluation should include recommendations for the most appropriate and effective use of the approaches, a method for identifying individuals who would benefit from such approaches, and the costs of making them available." (See Appendix A for the resolution.)

## **Study Objectives**

To analyze characteristics of existing parenting education programs in Virginia and the nation.

To identify characteristics of effective approaches to parenting education.

To identify which individuals can benefit from the different approaches to parenting education.

To determine the cost of offering different approaches to parenting education.

## Approach and Methodology

The Virginia Department of Social Services contracted with the University of Virginia to conduct the study of existing approaches to parenting education. The Department of Psychology's Community Research Group conducted the evaluation using the following methodologies:

**Process Evaluation.** This study evaluated the implementation of parent education programs. Interview responses, observations, and program statistics were obtained. Targeting, recruitment, and retention of appropriate client populations were studied as well as development of goals and objectives, and program orientation, design and implementation.

Site Visits and Intensive Study of Subsample. This study focused on 25 child abuse prevention programs with parent education components funded through the Virginia Family Violence Prevention Program (VFVPP) in 1993 (See Appendix B for a brief description of each program). Each program received an initial site visit by two members of the evaluation team. Team members interviewed program administrators and staff regarding program characteristics and implementation. Based on these interviews, the evaluation team selected six programs which represented the group of 25 using the following criteria: educational curricula, intervention approach, population served, evaluation methods in place, records of program data available and community setting. Evaluation team members visited each of the six sites approximately once per month for six months to interview administrators, staff and clients; review case files; review educational curricula and materials; collect statistical data; interview community members and other service providers; and, attend programs, if feasible.

**Review of Literature and Other State Evaluations.** The evaluation team conducted comprehensive reviews of relevant literature. Topics included available parent education models, assumptions and evaluation of existing curricula, and issues in measurement and evaluation of parenting education programs. The study team also contacted several researchers who had recently conducted parent education program evaluations in other states for information about the projects.

## Organization of this Report

This report is organized into seven sections. Section I gives the objectives of the study and the methodology used to meet these objectives. Section II is an overview of parent education and section III describes how parent education approaches are used in Virginia. Characteristics of successful programs can be found in section IV. Section V deals with individuals who benefit from parenting education and section VI deals with the cost of making these services available. Section VII contains recommendations.

## II. OVERVIEW OF PARENT EDUCATION

A wide range of programs are considered to be "parent education," including support groups, community resource networking, home-based programs, and the more traditional lecture/discussion courses. Service providers include professionals such as nurses, social workers, and trained volunteers. Programs can be sponsored by public or private agencies or organizations and may be available to all parents or specific target populations. Though diverse approaches may be effective, no single program type has emerged as the "best".

Parent Education as a Preventive Intervention. The alarmingly high incidence and prevalence of child abuse and neglect in the United States suggest an urgent need for prevention at the community level. Since a governmental shift in policy in the 1960s encouraged prevention and treatment "in the best interests of the child" when the parents were unable to perform their child-rearing roles adequately, parent education programs of various types have been initiated throughout the United States. Many of the programs are designed to prevent or end child maltreatment or family violence, or to improve family functioning in a more general fashion. Programs, both state-supported and private, have expanded and become diversified. Although not necessarily evaluated, copyrighted curricula have been used extensively throughout the nation and have been endorsed by child abuse councils and task forces.

Given our current state of knowledge about the nature of family violence, does it make sense to expect parent education programs to prevent abuse? It can be argued that these programs benefit families in two separate but related ways:

- (1) by increasing parenting knowledge of child development and effective discipline, and
- (2) by decreasing parental stress through expanding social support networks.

**Parenting Knowledge.** Justifications for parent education as an intervention for generally improving family functioning and specifically preventing abuse and neglect have been based on a number of areas of developmental research. Limitations to each line of inquiry exist in relation to parent education, but these lines of research converge on the conclusion that parental behavior does affect development throughout childhood. On the basis of findings that abusive parents had more inappropriate expectations and demands for their children, some researchers conclude that teaching mothers about the emotional development of young children will minimize the occurrence of child abuse in high risk populations. High risk populations include, but are not limited to, parents from low income or isolated settings and teen mothers.

Mental health professionals working with parents commonly note that many cases of child abuse result from inappropriate expectations of children's abilities. Parents who interpret developmental limitations as deliberate non-compliance are likely to experience frustration and anger in dealing with their children. For example, the difficult phases of colic, awakening at night, separation anxiety, exploratory behaviors, negativism, poor appetite, and toilet training resistance have been described as the "seven deadly sins" of childhood. These are frustrating for any parent, but in the context of high-risk families who are not prepared or able to cope with them, these behaviors are likely to lead to harsh punishment or episodes of abuse. It is one goal of parent education programs to prevent abuse by teaching parents to expect and deal with such difficulties.

Education about non-violent disciplinary alternatives is another focus of parenting classes. Parent education programs provide a means for parents to learn effective parenting practices from sources other than their own upbringing. Bavolek and Comstock (1985), for example, write in their <u>Nurturing Program</u> curriculum that:

To offset the generational perpetuation of dysfunctional parenting practices, education in appropriate parenting and child rearing is viewed as the single most important treatment and intervention strategy. (p. 3)

If one conceptualizes physical abuse itself as an inappropriate and extreme form of discipline, it follows that abusive parents typically lack an awareness of appropriate discipline.

While empirical studies of abusive parents' knowledge of normal child development are few in number (Rosenberg & Reppucci, 1983), several studies on this subject have found these parents to be surprisingly knowledgeable about disciplinary alternatives and describe typical responses to misbehavior that are very often appropriate techniques. In stating that parent education is a worthwhile means of preventing family violence, one must be careful not to assume that abusive parents as a group have poor parenting skills. However, given the resilience demonstrated by children when rearing environments are improved, knowledge of child development and basic child-rearing practices may lessen the stress of parenting for the parent and improve the child's chance for healthy development, in spite of the presence of other "risk" factors.

Stress and Support. Above and beyond the delivery of information and parenting skills, the social support functions of parent education programs are seen by some researchers and practitioners as essential components of comprehensive prevention services. Support-based parent education programs provide information and assistance in a social context, either through parenting group formats or individual home visitors. For many parents who lack a social support network, parent education classes or visits provide a viable way to meet others who are under similar stresses.

The transition to parenthood has been associated with the negative stress factors of increased physical demands, strains in the marital relationship, and emotional stresses, especially for young, single parents. A "real world" paradigm of looking at abuse prevention emphasizes the situational nature of abuse. The paradigm states that the most salient risk factors may be the demands that place the highest levels of stress on those who are predisposed to abuse in the absence of sufficient support systems. Approaches that seek to reduce stresses vary from support systems with ambiguous or broad-based goals to specific behavioral modification programs designed to change a particular type of behavior. Parent education programs for adolescent and adult parents are seen as important means of improving "poor" family environments.

Other parent groups focus more on support of "at risk" parents by means of informal discussion and linkage to appropriate community services in an attempt to pay attention to the parents' needs for social support. Whereas traditional parent education classes assume that the dissemination of knowledge will translate into changes in behaviors and attitudes (although little systematic evidence exist on this), the support approach assumes that the provision of social support will have a positive effect on family functioning. However, social support may need to be matched to specific stressors (e.g., child behavior problems or family economic difficulties) in order to be effective. Powell (1989) discusses the value of "kitchen talk," or informal conversations during which group members grow closer by sharing experiences.

Parenting education using these approaches appears desirable. However, the knowledge base is limited. It is unclear whether parent support programs are effective in reducing stress, and, if they are, what characteristics of the program are effective and what specific stressors are being reduced. Whether increased parenting knowledge leads to decreased parental stress or whether parenting groups directly alleviate stress, teasing out the differential effects of parent education and support orientations requires careful research. It is also unclear whether an individualized home visiting program is more effective than participation in a support group for any given individual. Ongoing research is needed.

**Evaluations.** Evaluations comparing the various parent education approaches have yielded tentative support for the use of parent education. Simple evaluative research has generally supported the effectiveness of parenting groups. Many studies of educational parent classes have documented short-term knowledge and attitudinal changes among parents. Other studies have found parent education classes, as they are currently delivered, to be poorly targeted, sparsely attended, and generally ineffective in changing the knowledge of abuse indicators or appropriate expectations for those parents who did regularly attend. This may be attributable to different models of implementation.

On the whole, parent education shows some promise as an indirect means of preventing child maltreatment, with improved knowledge potentially leading to attitudinal and behavioral changes. Most published materials for abuse and neglect prevention programs, however, have undergone little or no experimental testing. The different curricula also vary in terms of reading level and difficulty, target populations, and approaches which may be more or less effective with various participant groups.

Programs that serve "at risk" families most successfully have several characteristics in common:

formal and informal communication occurred across community organizations, such that parent education and support services did not compete with other services;

services for parents were well-coordinated across agencies;

programs served the needs of parents and children; and

staff relied on group process techniques more than a fixed syllabus of topics.

A multi-faceted approach to prevention of maltreatment suggests that education about children's competencies and demands is an important part of abuse prevention. However, it must be accompanied by efforts to give support and reduce the situational problems that are interfering with the parents' child-rearing. Powell (1989) noted a shift from standardized, curriculum-based classes to individualized programs that are culturally responsive and contextually relevant to the family. He also argues for the implementation of programs with sustained contacts (i.e., extending at least three months) in order to achieve the most pervasive and sustained effects on family functioning.

#### **III. PARENT EDUCATION STRATEGIES IN VIRGINIA**

Program strategies for parent education include: education classes, workshops, support groups, and home visiting. These strategies can be used for the primary prevention of child abuse/neglect by meeting specific parenting needs in a community. Their focus on preventing a problem provides unique services which are distinct from existing treatment strategies. Table I indicates the distribution of these strategics among the VFVPP parenting programs.

Programs Approaches



**Parent Education Classes.** Projects most commonly provide parent education through courses comprised of a series of classes which meet two hours each week, from four to 15 weeks. Eighteen of the 25 programs in this study provide formal parent education classes. The specific length of the class sessions and the number of weeks varies from project to project due to curriculum specifications, staff limitations and difficulty retaining clients. The Northumberland DSS offers nine week courses each fall and spring, whereas the Hampton Healthy Families project offers multiple classes of varying lengths throughout the year. Ten of the 18 programs have a designated parent-child interaction or an educational program for children during each class. Ten of the 18 programs which provide parent education classes have created their own unique curriculum, the remainder modify or rely heavily on existing curricula. The modifications are intended to make the cirruculum more understandable to the population served. The most widely-used published curriculum among the projects is the Nurturing Program (NP; eight programs draw heavily from the NP), followed by Systematic Training for Effective Parenting (STEP; four programs draw significantly from STEP).

The Nurturing Program is a 15-session parent education program with versions suitable for use with parents and their children under the age of five (Bavolek & Dellinger-Bavolek, 1989) and ages 4-12 (Bavolek & Comstock, 1985). The program assumes that all members of the family must be involved in the treatment condition to precipitate change, yet growth in the parent must be achieved before the growth of the parent-child interaction can occur (Bavolek & Comstock, 1985).

The Systematic Training for Effective Parenting (STEP) (Dinkmeyer & McKay, 1982) is a nine-week parent program (two hours per session) parent program consisting of lectures and discussion skills training, with an emphasis on the training of communication skills. STEP also provides parents with some basic counseling skills that they can use with their children.

Workshops. Four projects report using workshops as an educational strategy. Some of these projects design the workshops in response to parents' needs and do not intend them to constitute a parent education curriculum. Others plan their monthly meetings according to an existing curriculum and/or expect parents to continue to attend each month for the predetermined length of the program. Although other projects may not use single workshops as an explicit educational strategy, most of the 25 programs offer speaking engagements that often serve as mini-workshops.

**Parent Support Groups.** Eight programs offer parent support groups such as Parents Anonymous, often in addition to parent education classes. Many support groups have developed in response to parents' desire to continue to meet after completion of parent education classes. Support groups often have an educational component, such as raising alternative discipline techniques during a discussion of control issues. Conversely, educational classes often function as support groups as parents share their experiences and seek advice.

Home Visits. Seven projects impart parent education through voluntary home visits, which may be particularly beneficial to those living in rural, isolated areas without access to transportation and those needing more intensive, individualized service. Home visits range in frequency from weekly to monthly. People Incorporated of SW Virginia (in Abingdon) visits teen mothers for 90 minutes each week from before birth until the child is one year old, whereas the Portsmouth project uses an initial home visit to assess the teen mother's living situation and encourage her to attend the parent education classes. A few projects augment their classes with a mentoring component for those needing or desiring additional support. Usually these projects match trained volunteers with interested parents.

# IV. EFFECTIVE APPROACHES TO PARENTING EDUCATION

Successful programs are defined by several characteristics related to the development and implementation of the intended services. These programs have concrete goals and objectives and match community and client needs in program design and curricula. Regardless of the approach used, successful programs attempt to respond sensitively to the practical demands of participants. They offer services at times that accommodate work schedules and minimize any stigma associated with the prevention program by focusing on "strengths" rather than "weaknesses".

Multiple models of prevention serivces are required given the variation among communities in Virginia and the diverse populations served. Successful programs have tailored their service delivery format to meet the needs of their communities. The services offered, incentives necessary to recruit participants, and complexity of the programming need to be matched to the target group's needs, setting (e.g., urban, suburban, or rural), and educational or reading level. The information conveyed by and the approach taken by the staff must be sensitive to cultural differences and relevant for the target group. The focus of the information conveyed and services provided also depend on whether the target population for the prevention of maltreatment is the general public, a group labeled as "at-risk", or a number of known abusers.

Successful programs appreciate that a comprehensive understanding of their community is vital to the development of appropriate prevention services and use information regarding client needs and service gaps to direct program development. A needs assessment is a critical component of planning for service delivery. This process can occur formally or informally. The Northampton program conducted a door to door survey on parenting techniques and child abuse issues to learn about the community's parenting strategies. The Roanoke program benefited from a description of existing services for parents in the Roanoke Valley before designing its program.

The orientation and implementation of parent education programs may need to vary greatly, according to the population being targeted and served. A "classroom" format designed to educate parents about child development and discipline techniques might be adequate for older adults but seem less interesting to teen mothers, who may be more successfully recruited and retained by a "club" format program that offers refreshments and recreation in addition to the educational component.

Intensity and Duration of Programs. Successful programs also tailor the intensity and duration of their programming in order to meet the needs of a specific population. Identifying the level of services appropriate for any given group of parents or a specific family is one goal of effective planning. For example, the Child-Parent Center in Winchester schedules a home visit to a family as a first step; they may determine that this initial visit is sufficient and invite the parents to attend weekly parenting classes to increase skill and support levels. A family in need of more intensive services, however, might be

more appropriately served by weekly, one-on-one home visits by a therapist or paraprofessional.

Analysis of parent education programs suggests that a minimum of six to eight classes is preferable to ensure its success. Programs providing weekly parenting education classes vary in the number of classes they offer. Some offer as few as four sessions per series, while most provide between nine and 15. Most programs tend to need at least one or two class periods to get started, and one or two at the end of the series to synthesize what has been learned. The number of sessions devoted to substantive presentations varies, but more successful programs tend to spend at least four or five sessions on parenting skills, knowledge, and behavior.

Increasing Parental Knowledge. Parent education classes are appropriately targeted to parents who, for a variety of reasons, lack knowledge or have inappropriate or false knowledge about child rearing and development. These classes strive to meet the needs of children by meeting the needs of parents. Parent education programs attempt to benefit participants by increasing parenting knowledge of child development and effective nonviolent discipline, and by decreasing parental stress through expanding social support networks. The assumption underlying the basic parent education orientation is that knowledge of child developmental milestones will minimize inappropriate expectations and thus reduce the incidence of child maltreatment.

This lack of knowledge can be at a variety of levels. Roanoke's "Surviving Motherhood" class serves middle and upper class mothers who already have basic knowledge, so the class emphasizes high literacy readings and advanced topics. Classes run by the Rocky Mount program serve parents with limited knowledge, so they focus on more basic parenting skills.

Social Support Models. Social support models assume that parents can respond positively and effectively to their children when they are given the knowledge, skills, and support necessary, and their own emotional and physical needs are met. Parent support groups thus emphasize the importance of informal conversations and the provision of a network of support to help individuals discuss the difficult and stressful situational demands of parenting. The York-Poquoson program runs an eight week support group for parents going through mediation for custody in divorce, one of the goals of which is to reduce individual stress so parents can focus more on their children's needs and feelings.

Home visiting programs provide services in the form of parent education, social support, and individual crisis intervention for the promotion of healthy infants and mothers and the prevention of child maltreatment. Since services are offered in the home, visitors may be able to reach families unable to access other family support programs. People Incorporated in Abingdon serves teen mothers in several rural counties who lack transportation; it is unlikely the teen mothers could attend a center based program as often as they meet with their home visitor (weekly). Customization of curricula. Projects often design and/or select a curriculum based on what is most appropriate for parents with children within a certain age range, separating the parents into different groups based on their children's ages. In some programs, curricula have been developed over the years or modifications of existing curricula have occurred to meet the needs of the individual program. Many projects have illiterate or low literacy clients, and therefore must adapt curricula and/or form groups according to parents' level of education. Such modifications are necessary, but must be documented in order to evaluate the implementation of the program. In Virginia, several funded programs have modified the Nurturing Program curriculum by adding a substance abuse component.

**Program Goals.** Successful programs have clear ideas about what changes their intervention should make. Clear goals and objectives make explicit the program's purpose and intended impact. A periodic review of the stated goals and objectives during the period of service delivery can help identify when a program has either strayed unneccessarily from its purpose or has intentionally adapted in response to new situations or information, perhaps signaling the need to reformulate goals and objectives. Specific goals and objectives also enable staff to communicate more effectively about program accountability, in terms of identifying particular strengths and weaknesses.

**Recruitment.** Effective programs clearly identify the population(s) they wish to recruit, and outline plans for successful recruiting. Interagency collaboration often is a crucial factor in obtaining referrals for programs. Similarly, programs need to address ways to retain clients once they are recruited.

Child and Family Services in Portsmouth targets teen mothers for their programs, and has an arrangement with local hospitals which allows them to visit every new teen mother before she leaves the hospital. They offer incentives to their teen mothers for joining and staying in the program, including free transportation to and from classes and opportunities to socialize with other teen mothers at a variety of events. Other tangible rewards that programs offer to keep parents involved in classes and combat barriers to participation include free child care and/or meals during sessions, and providing materials such as car seats and infant clothing.

Staffing and the Use of Volunteers. Small programs in particular often are challenged to provide direct services while also handling administrative and fundraising responsibilities with few staff members and very little time. One solution used by many programs to varying degrees is the use of volunteers. Winchester's Child-Parent Center created a position for a Volunteer Coordinator, whose job is to recruit and help train volunteers as parent education class facilitators. Other sites use volunteers primarily to handle administrative and special event needs. In order to make good use of staff and volunteers, programs must identify their staffing needs for projected services, and devise plans for training and evaluating both staff and volunteers on a regular basis.

Outcome Measurement. Initial assessment of parents' knowledge of child development may

be helpful in adjusting programming to address specific gaps in the participants' knowledge. Such a use of the measures would be appropriate for adapting curricula to different populations by assessing the concerns of participants prior to formulating a plan to address the concerns. Further, a parenting stress questionnaire can be used not only to assess change over time, but also to give feedback to individual participants concerning their level of stress relative to most parents.

Programs most successful with outcome data collection tend to view the measurement as helpful in program implementation, and program staff are consistent in data collection. When programs view outcome measurement as burdensome paperwork, which is often, they avoid evaluation or give client satisfaction questionnaires following an intervention. Unfortunately, satisfaction measurement usually provides positive but relatively meaningless results.

Child abuse prevention is the ultimate goal of all programs, but it is important to recognize that child abuse is a complex phenomenon occurring within the interaction of the individual, family, and society. Effective programs can measure success by identifying particular factors associated with child abuse that their intervention tries to affect, and measuring change in these factors over time. Programs can choose from a wide variety of outcomes measures of effectiveness. Examples of factors associated with child abuse risk that programs have attempted to change include:

Stress: Individual, family, parenting, and general life stressors, such as poverty and unemployment, are critical factors. The control of anger and use of coping strategies is also relevant. Problems are compounded when stress occurs in the context of little or no social support.

**Developmental expectations:** Problems can occur when parents have a lack of knowledge of child development, skill deficits, or inappropriate expectations.

Child management: This includes parent-child interactions, problem solving skills, attitudes toward parenting, and child control strategies.

Short-term changes are easier to measure, but some programs have the ability to examine long term changes by following up with former clients. Because no program can measure all of the possible outcomes, the choice of outcome measures should be guided by the goals and objectives of the individual program.

Programs should identify what components of knowledge, attitudes, and/or behaviors they are trying to change. Outcome measures should directly correspond to the program's goals and objectives. Programs should develop an evaluation plan in which measures (beyond client satisfaction) corresponding to the goals and objectives are identified and utilized. If possible, standardized measures should be used in addition to adapted or specialized measures. Data from the measures should be examined by the program administrators and used to provide feedback to program staff and suggest changes in program implementation.

To ensure that good ideas are translated into effective prevention projects, programs must be able to document and evaluate what they do. Evaluation can be implemented at a variety of levels, ranging from the documentation of services provided and clients served, to an outcome evaluation of program effectiveness. Whatever degree of evaluation is chosen, all levels require a minimal commitment of resources for entering information, developing record keeping forms, selection of measures, and use of a computer database (if possible). For more advanced evaluative techniques, assistance in project design and data analysis may be necessary. This assistance could be obtained from in-house personnel, community volunteers with relevant experience, or through partnerships with local colleges and universities.

The commitment to evaluation fosters the planning necessary for effective preventive interventions. Although evaluation does require some commitment of time and resources, the information it provides can document who is being served, how the program is being implemented, the strengths and weaknesses of the current approach, and what effects the program is having. This information can be used to improve programming and suggest additional approaches. The benefits of evaluation are illustrated by the Good Beginnings Program in Portsmouth.

The evaluation team conducted a follow-up phone call to a sample of 83 Good Beginnings' program graduates and a sample of 65 monthers who were home-visited but did not participate in the formal program. Though the samples are small and there are possible sample selection biases, the preliminary findings indicate that program participants were somewhat more likely than non-participants to finish high school or complete a GED and take some college courses, and they were significantly more likely to delay subsequent pregnancies.

A second component to the Good Beginnings' outcome evaluation was a search of the VDSS Central Registry data base for abuse and neglect reports. The names of 314 mother and child pairs who were labeled at risk in the hospital but received no services, 96 pairs who were home-visited only, and 123 pairs who were home-visited and went through the 12-week program were searched in the Central Registry system. The mothers, all labeled at risk, were recruited over a five year span from 1987-1992. The results of the search indicate that there were founded reports of abuse or open cases on 6.69% of the hospital recruitment group, 7.29% of the home visit only group, and only 1.62% of the program group. Despite the possibility that program participants were somehow different from non-participants before the program, the data are supportive of the effectiveness of the Good Beginnings program for the prevention of child abuse and delay of subsequent teen pregnancies, and the encouragement of the mothers' educational attainment.

# V. INDIVIDUALS BENEFITING FROM PARENTING EDUCATION

Client populations vary markedly among and within projects. The client composition is often a result of the project's source of referrals and reputation in the community. For projects that utilize referrals, most referrals come from such service agencies as health departments, social services, community service boards, hospitals, or other community agencies. Those programs which have a wider network among agencies may serve a larger number and wider variety of clients.

Fourteen projects gear their programs to special populations at-risk for child abuse and neglect. These include teenage mothers; DSS-, community service board (CSB)- or court-referred parents; and parents with low incomes. While DSS, CSB and/or court-mandated referrals comprise part of most projects' client population, usually they intermix anonymously with other clients. Combining different groups of clients prevents projects from being labeled as a program only for "bad" parents and allows parents who may not parent well to observe personally more effective parenting techniques.

Not all projects target a specific client population or receive referrals from other agencies. Eight projects draw from the general population, usually attracting low and middle income clients. The majority serve clients living in rural areas largely due to the location of the projects. A few projects primarily target children and provide them with skills today that will, hopefully, enable them to be good parents tomorrow. Unless some type of specific client restriction exists such as residency requirements, programs usually serve whatever clients come to them.

Since few programs evaluate the effectiveness of their interventions using standard measures, it is difficult to determine what "types" of clients have benefited from each program approach. Until further evaluation procedures are implemented and data collected, it is only feasible to suggest that clients would benefit the most from programs that match their needs.

Teen mothers with little knowledge, skills, or support would probably benefit from more intensive classes or home visits. Parents who have adequate knowledge of parenting practices, but are isolated and stressed would probably benefit from support groups. Risk status varies according to a number of factors including age, income, and circumstance. However, all parents face stress and unfamiliar situations simply by virtue of being parents and probablably most parents would benefit by having access to parenting resources and support.

## VI. COST OF MAKING SERVICES AVAILABLE

Many factors affect the cost of parenting education and support programs. Based on figures provided by some study participants, estimated costs may range from \$66 per parent for parenting education classes to \$2400 for a comprehensive program of home visiting, parenting education, mentoring, and facilitating the parent's access to community resources.

**Program type and phase.** The costs of making parent education services available vary according to the type and phase of the program. For example, weekly home visiting programs may entail more transportation costs than a parent support program. Educational classes may require the purchase of a curriculum and supplemental materials. Because program type must be matched to community need, the costs of implementation may vary.

Costs also vary according to the phase of program development. Initial startup costs may emphasize public awareness; networking and developing community contacts; or reviewing, developing, and purchasing materials, among others. Program maintenance may entail different staff and resource expenditures as programs change priorities or expand.

Location. Physical location is also a cost issue. Some programs require a meeting area; others only need office space for staff. Affiliation with a larger group such as a private or non-profit agency can facilitate sharing of overhead costs, but may entail greater administrative requirements. Free-standing programs can retain flexibility and autonomy, but may lack the structural support and community recognition of a larger agency. Programs located in public agencies such as the departments of social services or health benefit from the resources and stability of local government, but may also be stigmatized by these affiliations.

**Staff.** The number of staff needed to administer a program effectively and efficiently also affects costs. Paid staff may have a greater commitment to the program as well as more time, but entail salary and benefit costs. Community volunteers can provide free assistance, foster community ownership, and provide outstanding service, but they engender administrative management, recruitment, retention, and training efforts and may feel less commitment to the program than paid staff. Even so, many programs currently funded by VFVPP rely heavily on volunteers (by choice or by necessity) to maintain their desired level of services under limited budgets, and this is probably a positive situation in most cases.

If staffing is a concern, programs should examine the potential benefits for using volunteers (including members of service organizations, local college students, senior citizens, etc.) and explore the costs (time, administration, monitoring) involved in creating and maintaining a volunteer program. Coordination of volunteers should also be addressed.

Administration. Providing direct services to parents and families requires a significant amount of administrative and, in most cases, fundraising work. Programs often feel a tension between direct services and administrative concerns. More successful programs seem able to meet minimal administrative conditions; completing paperwork for funding sources, maintaining records on program activities, and preparing recruitment and class materials. They perform this in a variety of ways. Some are housed within larger social services organizations with administrative help, while others delegate administrative work to a staff member or volunteer as a portion of their job duties.

Specifying who is responsible for administrative concerns and setting aside priority time for this work is key, even if this requires taking some time away from direct service provision. Although the bulk of resources will understandably be committed to some level of service provision, a minium level of administrative support is necessary to all programs, even if it comes at the cost of incrementally reducing services provided. Programs with computers may be better able to complete paperwork and store information in a timely fashion, as long as staff are trained appropriately or have access to technical assistance.

#### VII. RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations contained in this report should result in better programs for the prevention of child abuse and neglect in the Commonwealth of Virginia. The process evaluation outlined in the report provides important information about the implementation of child maltreatment prevention programs and lays the foundation for long term outcome evaluations.

1. The Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS) should continue its focus on and support of primary prevention programs for child abuse and neglect. Parent education (including education classes, workshops, support groups, and home visiting) is a major avenue by which this can occur. Multiple approaches to parent education should be maintained and VDSS should support universal access to some level of parenting services.

2. VDSS should continue to emphasize the diversity of program type and content, matched to community needs. Selection of parenting education approaches and populations served should be community based. The department should support inter-agency efforts toward the development of standard needs assessment protocals for communities to decide what services are needed, and how they should be implemented.

3. VDSS should distribute to VFVPP and other prevention programs the series of technical assistance briefs developed from this study on such topics as prevention education as a preventive intervention, targeting and recruiting clients, program evaluation, fund raising and volunteers. (See Appendix C for the complete list.)

4. VDSS should support and participate in ongoing inter-agency collaborative efforts to strengthen evaluation of prevention programs.

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# **GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF VIRGINIA--1993 SESSION** HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 447

Requesting the Department of Social Services to evaluate the effectiveness of existing approaches to parenting education.

> Agreed to by the House of Delegates, February 7, 1993 Agreed to by the Senate, February 16, 1993

WHEREAS, in Virginia, while children and youth constitute one-fourth of the population, approximately 6,000 are known victims of child abuse or neglect, and another 6,000 will be committed to foster care at any given time; and WHEREAS, current services under the 1980 Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act

emphasize keeping a child within the family if possible and treating family problems in a holistic manner, and

WHEREAS, child protective services, under the aegis of the Department of Social Services, assists abused children through mandated services to (1) protect the child, (ii) prevent further abuse or neglect, (iii) preserve family life, where possible, by enhancing parental capacity for adequate child care, and (iv) provide substitute care if necessary; and

WHEREAS, in each case of alleged abuse, protective services workers must conduct an investigation to determine if the allegations are "founded," "unfounded, with reason to suspect," or "unfounded" based on available evidence; and WHEREAS, to carry out federal mandates, all "reasonable efforts" must be made to either keep the child in the home or to return him home as soon as possible; and

WHEREAS, without the necessary skills to provide adequate parenting, the cycle of abuse will continue and the child will be placed in jeopardy; now, therefore, be it RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, the Senate concurring. That the Department of Social Services evaluate the effectiveness of existing approaches to parenting education. The evaluation should include recommendations for the most approaches to parenting education. The the approaches, a method for identifying individuals who would benefit from such approaches, and the costs of making them available to such persons. The Department shall complete its work in time to submit an interim report to the Governor and the 1994 Session of the General Assembly and a final report to the Governor and the 1995 Session of the General Assembly as provided in the procedures of the Division of Legislative Automated Systems for the processing of legislative documents.

APPENDIX B

#### VIRGINIA FAMILY VIOLENCE PREVENTION PROGRAM CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT SELECTED PROJECTS 1992-94

THE JUNIOR LEAGUE OF RICHMOND RICHMOND, VIRGINIA

Funds will be used to support the Family Resource Program at the Sacred Heart Center serving the Bainbridge/Blackwell inner city section of Richmond. The program is open to parents with children between the ages of 2 1/2 and 5 years old. Families must attend together. Components of the program are intended to enhance parenting skills of participants and the developmental growth of their children in an effort to decrease child abuse and neglect, family violence and high risk behaviors.

GOOD BEGINNING CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES OF SOUTHWEST HAMPTON ROADS PORTSMOUTH, VIRGINIA

Grant funds will support the continuation of the "Good Beginnings' program. "Good Beginnings" is designed to meet the need of training and supporting young mothers between the ages of 12-22 in responsible parenthood. Contact is made with the mothers while they are still in the hospital and program support continues in the form of home visits and support groups for at least three months.

#### COORDINATORS/2 RICHMOND, VIRGINIA

This project is a secondary prevention program that targets high risk adoptive families who reside within 60 miles of Richmond. Funds will be used to develop one family and three child educational/therapeutic support groups designed to prevent maltreatment, reduce inappropriate expectations and increase parents' capacity to cope with stress.

\$35,000

\$14,493

\$24,068

parent aides will also be provided and the coordinator will

WINCHESTER, VIRGINIA Funds will be used for a Prevention Coordinator who will provide

CHILD-PARENT CENTER

comprehensive array of child abuse prevention services. The services include public awareness and education, advocacy, training and technical assistance to communities for development of parent education and support groups for parents in the community as well as in jails and prisons, teenaged parents, teens with family problems, and children.

VIRGINIANS FOR CHILD ABUSE PREVENTION (VCAP) \$110,000 STATEWIDE ORGANIZATION BASED IN RICHMOND, VIRGINIA

SCAN of Northern Virginia works to prevent child abuse and neglect through programs which promote education and awareness of child abuse issues. Services include coordination of the court appointed special advocate programs. Northern Virginia SCAN serves Fairfax County, Arlington County, Alexandria and Falls Church and is a regional affiliate of Virginians for Child Abuse Prevention (VCAP).

STOP CHILD ABUSE NOW (SCAN) OF NORTHERN VIRGINIA ALEXANDRIA, VIRGINIA

Funds will be used to provide 10 parenting education programs consisting of 7-week Early Childhood STEP classes to approximately 150 parents with children ages one to five years of age. Course materials will be adapted for the target population.

CHILD ABUSE PREVENTION SERVICES ST. MARY'S INFANT HOME NORFOLK, VIRGINIA

\$ 7,250

\$15,000

Virginians for Child Abuse Prevention (VCAP) will provide a

parent education services to referred families and will

assist in operation of the Parents Anonymous program.

facilitate Nurturing Program groups. Recruitment and training of

\$23,000

THE CHILD CARE AND LEARNING CENTER WASHINGTON, VIRGINIA

Funds will be used to support a Child Abuse Prevention Program at the center located in Rappahannock County. The center will enroll 20 at-risk pre-school children in their full-time program and serve the parents and siblings of these families through home visits, parenting workshops and in-center volunteering. The monthly parenting workshops will be open to the public at no charge.

THEATER IV STATEWIDE PROJECT BASED IN RICHMOND, VIRGINIA

Funds will be used to support 40 performances of "Hugs and Kisses," a child sexual abuse prevention program to be presented in elementary schools throughout Virginia in the fall of 1992. These performances will be part of an 88 performance tour which is expected to reach 20,000 children.

#### CHARLOTTE COUNTY SCHOOLS CHARLOTTE COURTHOUSE, VIRGINIA

Funds will be used to incorporate the nurturing skills curricula for junior and senior high school into the school programs to enrich the current health and family life curriculum. It is anticipated this curricula will help reduce child abuse and neglect by increasing self-esteem and communication skills.

#### FAMILY SERVICE, INC. CHARLOTTESVILLE, VIRGINIA

Funds will be used to support the Parent Group Education Project which will reach clients of existing community services in Charlottesville, Greene, Nelson, and Albemarle with the goals of decreasing causes of child abuse while increasing factors which empower parents of children ages 0-18 who are at high risk due to limited resources and extreme stress.

\$24,736

\$20,000

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\$ 3,455

\$10,000

#### NEW RIVER COMMUNITY ACTION CHRISTIANSBURG, VIRGINIA

Funds will be used to support the Parenting Potentials Project for teen parents in Montgomery County and Radford. Teen families in the project will receive in-home parenting skills training and will be linked with a parenting partner. Parenting partners are families who are willing to be mentors for teen families. Thirty teen families will be served.

#### YMCA OF ROANOKE VALLEY ROANOKE, VIRGINIA

The Parents' Place, established at the YMCA in conjunction with the Child Abuse Prevention Council of Roanoke Valley, serves as a central location of information, resources, education, support, and activities for parents in the Roanoke Valley. Parenting education classes, parent discussion groups, and support groups will be offered. A day room, newsletter, and warmline are also provided. The Parents' Place goal is to be widely recognized as a positive resource that will effectively reduce the stresses that often place families at risk of child abuse.

#### NORTHUMBERLAND DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES HEATHSVILLE, VIRGINIA

This project is designed to establish two nine-session training/ therapeutic groups for parents who are at risk of abusing or neglecting their children and to provide developmental day care services for "at risk" children to improve their functioning level and reduce conflict in the home. Funds will be used to purchase transportation and supplies for the twenty parents who will participate and transportation and services for twenty children.

#### FRANKLIN COUNTY OFFICE ON YOUTH ROCKY MOUNT, VIRGINIA

\$13,000

\$ 7,860

Funds will be used to support a parenting skills resource center which will be made accessible to the community through a mobile unit. Parenting classes will be offered at various sites in Franklin County.

\$15,000

\$16,178

GOOCHLAND FELLOWSHIP AND FAMILY SERVICES GOOCHLAND, VIRGINIA

The grant will be used to help support a Family Development Center. Services include a comprehensive pre-school education center for children ages 2 1/2 - 5 years, parent interaction activities with their children in the center and at home and parenting education classes for parents of all children in the pre-school center as well as for the other parents in the county.

#### PEOPLE INCORPORATED ABINGDON, VIRGINIA

Funds will be used to support the Resource Mothers program offered to pregnant teens and teen parents in Buchanan and Dickenson Counties. Each teen parent enrolled in the program will receive weekly home visits from a Resource Mother during the child's first year of life. Parenting instruction will be provided. Support groups will also be held quarterly.

NORTHAMPTON COUNTY COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE EASTVILLE, VIRGINIA

Funding for this program will be used to continue the implementation of the parent nurturing parenting education programs and for coordination of community education and activities for child abuse prevention. Fifty-five families will be served by the nurturing program.

WASHINGTON COUNTY SCHOOLS ABINGDON, VIRGINIA

This project will continue a coordinated program of parent and child education and parent support groups designed to prevent child abuse in Washington County. The collaboration effort of schools, agencies and volunteers will offer a variety of education programs to the community. These will include Parent Nurturing, school based parenting groups, a child abuse prevention curriculum for 4th grade students and sexual abuse prevention programs.

\$17,881

\$17,373

\$11,250

25

\$25,000

HAMPTON DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES HAMPTON, VIRGINIA

Funds will be used to support the Hampton Family Resource Center's Healthy Family program. Services will include parenting education, self-help groups, and public education designed to prevent child abuse and neglect.

#### ALTAVISTA AREA YMCA ALTAVISTA, VIRGINIA

Funds will be used for a child abuse and neglect prevention coordinator to serve Campbell County. The coordinator will develop monthly parenting seminars; coordinate the Parents' Lending Library; provide information on child development and guidance to parents through individual and small group discussions; and implement a curriculum emphasizing non-violent conflict resolution and self-esteem.

#### FAMILY SERVICE OF CENTRAL VIRGINIA LYNCHBURG, VIRGINIA

Funds will be used to support the Teen Parent Project/Family Resource Program which serves Lynchburg and surrounding areas. The Teen Parent Program provides 10 education sessions for adolescents age 19 and under who are either pregnant or parents. The Family Resource Program provides one-on-one, ongoing contact and a variety of support. Both components are designed to prevent child abuse and neglect.

#### FAMILY FOCUS OF RICHMOND COUNTY WARSAW, VIRGINIA

Richmond County will continue operation of its family development center serving at-risk pre-school children and their parents in this rural area. Children are involved in activities to enhance their developmental and social skills. Parents attend once weekly to participate in activities and receive instruction in parenting techniques.

#### \$11,820

\$10,000

\$22,271

#### THE PREVENTION CENTER FOR CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT LYNCHBURG, VIRGINIA

The Prevention Center's purpose is to prevent child abuse and neglect through comprehensive community-based services including sponsorship of Parents United, Parents Anonymous, Parent Nurturing parenting education program and community education. Funding will be used to support the program coordinator position for these services. The service area will include the Lynchburg area and Amherst County.

#### YORK-POQUOSON SOCIAL SERVICES GRAFTON, VIRGINIA

\$11,000

This proposed project will provide service to a special population of families who have been identified as being at risk of abusing or neglecting their children due to serious family conflict involving either a step-parent issue, divorce, or other family caregiver conflict. Services will include mediation counseling, educational/support group, coordination of services, and individualized support.

#### PARENT-CHILD DEVELOPMENT CENTER WEST POINT, VIRGINIA

\$ 9,365

Funds will be used to support the Center's Family Resource Program. The program offers parent education and support groups, parent-child activities and counseling.

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#### APPENDIX C

# Prevention Papers Series Technical Briefs

Parent Education as a Preventive Intervention

The First Step: A Needs Evaluation

Evaluation: Making It Work for You

Using Goals and Objectives to Improve Programming

Targeting and Recruiting Clients

How to Improve Client Retention

Volunteers: A Valuable Resource

Managing Staff and Volunteers

Interagency Collaboration

Working with an Advisory Board

Fundraising