

First-Time Families Get In-home Assist from Extension-Agency Collaboration

Issue

Each year, more than 560 mothers in Sussex County give birth to their first child. New parents must quickly learn how to promote the development of their children. Parents want information and support, but often are not able to attend meetings because of time constraints or other factors.

What is being done?

Thanks to financial support from the Delaware Children's Trust Fund, agencies that provide services for Sussex County parents are working together to achieve the following goals: optimal development of first-born children and their families; a coordinated continuum of integrated education for first-time families; and high-quality home visiting services for first-time families. Extension is making two major contributions to this effort: to design and implement a training program for home visitors and their supervisors, and monthly *Great Beginnings* newsletters customized to the age of each child are mailed to every first-time parent in Sussex County.

Impacts

The Sussex First-Time Families Program began providing services to parents in September 2002. One set of supervisors and one set of home visitors has been trained. Preliminary evaluations demonstrate that this training has been effective. Participants rated both series of workshops as being very useful, building on their strengths and skills so they can more effectively work with families. *Great Beginnings* newsletters are reaching all first-time parents in Sussex County. In every evaluation completed on the *Great Beginnings* newsletter series, parents report that the newsletter helps them feel more confident as parents. Those who report that they change their behaviors most – as a result of reading the instructional newsletters – are the youngest, poorest, and least educated.

Collaborators and sources of funding:

The Delaware Children's Trust Fund has provided the money for the Sussex First Time Families Project. Collaborators include: Child, Inc., Children & Families First, Delaware Early Childhood Center, Department of Education, Division of Family Services, Division of Public Health, Perinatal Association of Delaware, Prevent Child Abuse Delaware, and University of Delaware faculty.

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