

OHIO'S VOLUNTARY HOME VISITING PROGRAMS: STRENGTHENING FAMILIES, PROTECTING CHILDREN

- WHO WE ARE -

Shepherding the Next Generation is a nationwide movement of Shepherd Advocates: evangelical pastors and ministry leaders who are committed to speaking out on behalf of children at risk so that each child will have the opportunity to grow up in a strong, stable and healthy family.

Summary

As pastors and ministry leaders, we support effective services to protect at-risk children. Over 34,000 Ohio children were victims of abuse or neglect in 2009, and 79 children died as a result. One of the most effective ways to prevent child abuse and neglect is by providing voluntary home visiting to young at-risk mothers. Research on the Nurse-Family Partnership (NFP) home visiting program shows that it cut abuse and neglect nearly in half. NFP serves at-risk mothers and children in Dayton and Franklin County. Continued state and federal funding for effective home visiting is essential to help Ohio's vulnerable children.



*"Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves."
Proverbs 31:8a (NIV)*

The Bible teaches us that God created the family to be the primary place for educating a child on how he or she is to live. It is within the context of the family where values are taught and nurtured (Dt. 6:4-9; Ps. 78:5-8; Pro. 1; Eph. 6:4; 2 Tim. 1:5). However, some parents, including teen mothers, have a more difficult experience in child rearing than others, often lacking the knowledge, resources, or the support of a spouse to raise their children towards lives of health, opportunity and values.

On behalf of children at risk of abuse and neglect in Ohio, we call on our local, state and federal policymakers to support voluntary home visiting for teen mothers. We need increased support to help ensure children at risk in Ohio are protected and families are strengthened.

Parenting Support for Poor Mothers

Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it. Proverbs 22:6 (NIV)

We want all parents to be equipped with the skills and knowledge necessary to raise a healthy, vibrant child - especially young teen mothers. When an at-risk teenager is pregnant, she is facing a teachable moment. Offering the mother-to-be voluntary home visiting before her child is born and continuing for up to two years after the birth of her first child is proven not only to help the mother get her life in order, but also to help her become a competent and caring mother to her child.

One program, **the Nurse-Family Partnership**, found that:

- **Abuse and neglect was cut nearly in half;**
- **The children's involvement in later crime was cut by more than half;**
- **The fathers were more involved in their families;** and
- **The mothers were up to a third less likely to be dependent on welfare.¹**

Dr. Frank Putnam and his team of practitioners and researchers with Every Child Succeeds based in Cincinnati found that in the Cincinnati metropolitan area, "Infants whose families did not receive home visiting ... were 2.5 times more likely to die in infancy compared with infants whose families received home visiting."

Reducing child abuse and neglect is critical to protecting children in Ohio. **Over 34,000 Ohio children were victims of abuse or neglect in 2009, over 90 per day.** At least 79 Ohio children died from abuse or neglect in 2009.² Research on child abuse and neglect shows that the actual number of abused or neglected children is likely to be over three times as high, which would mean over 100,000 children in Ohio were victims.³

Voluntary Home Visiting Can Strengthen Ohio Families

Ohio has provided home visiting for at-risk families since the 1990s. Home visiting in Ohio has been supported by the state's Help Me Grow system, a public-private source of funding available statewide. If Ohio can keep its state funding from being cut, it will remain eligible for new federal funds for home visiting, begun this year.

The Nurse-Family Partnership (NFP) is offered to at-risk mothers-to-be, new mothers, and babies through two program sites, in Dayton and in Franklin County. In Dayton, NFP is provided by nurses through the Dayton Area Hospital Association. In Franklin County, NFP is provided by the Center for Child and Family Advocacy at Nationwide Children's Hospital in Columbus.⁴

Across Ohio, NFP served 358 women and their babies in the past year, and has served over 2,300 women and their babies since the program's inception in Ohio in 1996.⁵

Reducing preterm births is another important way that home visiting can help make a difference for young mothers and babies. Babies born too soon can face serious medical problems, which can also create financial and caregiving hardships for families.

Although the long-term scientific studies of NFP have not found that the program significantly reduced preterm births, data from the local NFP program in Franklin County suggest some promising initial results for that program. The Nationwide Children's Hospital data showed that mothers participating in NFP in the county had a lower rate of preterm births than the local average for young, first-time, low-income mothers in central Ohio. **Mothers in Franklin County's NFP program had a preterm birth rate of 10 percent, versus an 18.4 percent rate for other young, first time, low-income mothers, a rate 45 percent lower for the mothers in NFP.**⁶ Reducing preterm births in Ohio is important for infants' health and survival, as preterm births account for almost one-third of infant deaths.⁷ Thirteen percent of infants in Franklin County were born preterm in 2008, as were 12 percent of infants statewide.⁸

Saving Money

Supporting teen mothers in their parenting through voluntary home visiting strengthens families, helps kids, and also produces substantial savings by cutting welfare, incarceration and other costs. For example:

- **The Nurse-Family Partnership home visiting program saved, on average, almost \$21,000 per family and saved \$3 for every \$1 invested.**⁹
- **In Franklin County,** the Nationwide Children's Hospital's NFP program reports impressive savings. If the reductions in preterm births among the NFP children were due to the program, they estimate that **for every 100 NFP participants, approximately \$700,000 NICU (Neonatal Intensive Care Unit) dollars were saved.** The average cost for an infant admitted to NICU in Franklin County was \$66,000, and for some infants the cost exceeds \$2 million.¹⁰

Our Call

Pastors and ministry leaders are already working to strengthen families and help children at risk in their own communities. Therefore, they are in an appropriate position to educate our nation's policymakers about voluntary home visiting that will serve Ohio's most vulnerable citizens early in life. Maintaining and increasing investments in proven programs are necessary to help these at-risk children live with dignity, safety, and health; make positive contributions to society; and someday, raise strong, healthy families themselves.

Endnotes

- 1 Long-term effects of nurse home visitation on children's criminal and anti-social behavior: 15-year follow-up of a randomized controlled trial. *JAMA*, 280(14), 1238-1244; Olds, D. L. (1997). Long-term effects of nurse home visitation on maternal life course and child abuse and neglect. *JAMA*, 278(8), 637-643; Kitzman, H. (1997). Effect of prenatal and infancy home visitation by nurses on pregnancy outcomes, childhood injuries, and repeated childbearing. *JAMA*, 278(8), 6644-652; Nurse-Family Partnership. (2009). *Outcomes of the trials*. Denver, CO: Author. Retrieved on July 9, 2009 from <http://www.nursefamilypartnership.org/content/index.cfm?fuseaction=showContent&contentID=113&navID=101>
- 2 Children's Bureau. (2010). *Child Maltreatment 2009*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Retrieved on September 9, 2011 from <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/pubs/cm09/>
- 3 Sedlak, A.J., Mettenburg, J., Basena, M., Peta, I., McPherson, K., Greene, A., et al. (2010). *Fourth national incidence study of child abuse and neglect (NIS-4)*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Retrieved on July 9, 2010 from http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/abuse_neglect/natl_incid/nis4_report_exec_summ_pdf_jan2010.pdf
- 4 Nurse-Family Partnership. (2011). *NFP program information - Ohio*. Columbus, OH: Author.
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- 6 Ohio Better Birth Outcomes. (2009). *Healthy beginnings: Collaborating to change the numbers on central Ohio preterm births: Ohio Better Birth Outcomes 2009 Report*. Columbus, OH: Author.
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- 8 Ohio Department of Health (2010). CFHS & FP health status profile: Franklin County, Ohio. Columbus, OH: Author. Retrieved on October 24, 2011 from <http://www.odh.ohio.gov/odhPrograms/cfhs/cfhlth/cha/hsprofiles.aspx>
- 9 Aos, S., Lee, S., Drake, E., Pennucci, A., Klima, T., Miller, M., Anderson, L., Mayfield, J., & Burley, M. (2011). *Return on investment: Evidence-based options to improve statewide outcomes*. (Document No. 11-07-1201). Olympia, WA: Washington State Institute for Public Policy. Retrieved on August 12, 2011 from <http://www.wsipp.wa.gov/rptfiles/11-07-1201.pdf>
- 10 Ohio Better Birth Outcomes. (2009). *Healthy beginnings: Collaborating to change the numbers on central Ohio preterm births: Ohio Better Birth Outcomes 2009 Report*. Columbus, OH: Author.

