



KANSAS
HOME VISITING



www.kshomevisiting.org

2016



Family perspectives on home visiting in Kansas: The start of something great

It would be great if babies came with instruction manuals, wouldn't it? For parents, a home visitor is the next best thing. When families invite home visitors into their living rooms — and their lives — they have the opportunity to gain the skills, support, and knowledge they need to give their child a great start in life.

Expectant mothers and families and home visitors work together to help families prepare for the ups and downs of parenting, and ensure that their children are healthy and developmentally strong. Home visiting programs help:

- Increase school readiness
- Improve maternal and child health
- Build critical pre-literacy skills and improve achievement
- Strengthen the bond between a parent and child
- Support healthy and developmentally thriving children
- Promote family self-sufficiency

For Kansas families, there's no place like home

To ensure that Kansas' most vulnerable families have the support they need to help their children thrive, the Kansas Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) Program was launched in 2011 to increase the number of pregnant women and families with children birth to age 5 who receive voluntary evidence-based home visiting services.

The MIECHV program, funded by the Health Resources and Services Administration of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and administered by the Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE),



targeted two high-risk communities: urban Wyandotte County and rural southeast Kansas starting with Montgomery, Cherokee, and Labette counties and, in 2015, expansion to Neosho and Wilson counties. These communities face the state's highest rates of poverty, child abuse, domestic violence, teen and single parenthood, and unemployment. Kansas MIECHV has added 36 home visitors and caseloads to serve families in these areas through three evidence-based home visiting models: Early Head Start, Healthy Families America, and Parents as Teachers. Also, in Wyandotte County, a "promising approach" model, Team for Infants Exposed to Substance abuse (TIES), has been implemented.

Families opened their homes and their hearts and great things happened

KDHE, in partnership with the Center for Public Partnerships and Research at the University of Kansas, wanted to better understand the relationships that develop between families and their home visitor. Specifically, what characterized their relationship? What were families' perceptions of home visiting and of home visitors? To help us answer these questions, we interviewed 23 MIECHV program families. We also collected survey data on the family-home visitor relationship using the Working Alliance Inventory (Horvath, 1992) from 192 families and 25 home visitors. This Brief details themes that emerged from the interviews and survey.

Home visiting exceeded expectations. Most families began home visiting services with no expectations. However, many respondents were quick to describe ways they were pleasantly surprised by the program, from the abundance of resources available to them to the deep affinity they developed for their home visitor. By enthusiastically listing the unforeseen benefits of being a part of the program, the families revealed they really did have expectations that were exceeded.

Many families shared that in their communities, there are a lot of misconceptions about home visiting. People often don't know what home visiting is and are not aware of the opportunity to participate. Busy working parents don't think they can fit visits into their schedules.

Families also reported that people they knew who had actually participated in the program were extremely positive about their experiences. And, as families share their positive stories with their friends, the attitudes in their communities may also change for the better.



REAL FAMILIES: REAL LIFE CHANGE

Mom gains confidence through home visiting

"When I learned I was pregnant, I did not know anything about raising a child, and my home visitor gave me a lot of information that helped me. Anytime I need to know something, she finds the information for me and brings it. It has helped me with being more confident as a mother."

Getting personal wasn't a problem. When families enter home visiting programs, they are asked to complete a lot of paperwork, including screenings for developmental delays, depression, substance abuse, and domestic violence. While



some families said the forms and questionnaires were a bit overwhelming, most said the information-gathering process wasn't a problem for them. A few families shared that they even found it helpful, and a good way to start their relationship with their home visitor.

Most respondents said they felt comfortable being open and honest about even the most sensitive questions, like whether they were experiencing depression or domestic violence. But others said that they were not comfortable revealing such intimate details to a stranger and it took a while to be comfortable sharing that information.

REAL FAMILIES: REAL LIFE CHANGE

Domestic violence survivor strives to provide safe, happy home for children.

Tamara, a domestic violence survivor, took a big step toward stopping the cycle of abuse with her children when she signed up for a home visiting program. Tamara learned that it was normal when her baby fussed and that instead of getting angry and abusive, she could put her new-found parenting skills to work. The home visitor reported: "When she starts to get frustrated with the baby for getting into things, she takes a deep breath and tells herself, 'Ok, but Shelly* says she's just a baby — this is expected for her age,' and will then redirect the child or distract her with a book or another toy. They have been doing outstanding."*

*Names changed to protect privacy.

Teamwork empowers and engages families. Helping children meet developmental milestones is a key component of the home visiting program. Families reported they really liked the collaborative goal setting approach used by their home visitors. They loved working together with their home visitor to select appropriate goals and craft action plans for achieving them.

Families value strong relationships with their home visitors. Consistently, families indicated they had established very strong relationships with their home visitor. They valued that their home visitor was a good listener, accessible, and responsive to their needs. They liked that they could talk with their home visitor about the issues that were important to them and that the home visitor was open-minded and non-judgmental. They also appreciated their home visitor being willing to work around their family's schedule.

REAL FAMILIES: REAL LIFE CHANGE

Dad embraces fathering, thanks to home visitor's invitation.

Father-to-be Michael was very skeptical of the home visiting program and urged his partner Ashley* not to participate. The home visitor encouraged Ashley to keep inviting Michael to participate. Finally, he said yes. Michael went from skeptic to believer, and jumped into fatherhood with both feet. Now he takes part in each visit, attends play groups and parent meetings. To this day he is very involved.*

Families and Home Visitors Agree: A Good Relationship is Key to Success

Families and home visitors overwhelming reported a positive professional relationship. The Working Alliance Inventory survey was gathered from families and their home visitors at three times over the course of two years. The findings from this survey found across time, 99% of families and 92% of home visitors felt they were on the same page about a family's goals and the ways to achieve these goals. Families and home visitors also agreed that their relationship was trusting and that they liked one another. This matches well with what we heard from interviews.

Home visiting helps Kansas families

As families invited home visitors into their lives, their attitudes and behaviors toward their children and themselves changed dramatically. They gained a wealth of new life skills, discovered how to access critical resources, became more self-confident as parents, and changed their behaviors for the better.

985

pregnant women
and families with
infants and young
children served
2012-2015

MIECHV PROGRAM AIMS:



Increase school readiness



Improve maternal and child health



Reduce child injuries, child abuse and neglect, and domestic violence



Promote family self-sufficiency



Improve linkages with other community resources

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