

South Windsor County Even Start Evaluation Report
Executive Summary
August 29, 2003

The Center for Rural Studies at the University of Vermont has provided evaluation services for SWCES since the program's inception in 1994. This evaluation report is for the seventh year of the South Windsor County Even Start program (SWCES), the Fiscal Year period of July 1, 2002 through June 30, 2003. The Center for Rural Studies (CRS) at the University of Vermont has worked with SWCES as local evaluators for the eight years that the program has been in service to the South Windsor County area in southern Vermont. This evaluation report demonstrates that SWCES continues to provide quality program services, as indicated by positive client reviews, identification of program strengths and the progress many families have made in working towards and achieving goals, as well as working through challenging life situations.

SWCES Goals

The conclusions highlighted below, discussed in detail throughout this report, demonstrate that SWCES has met all seven of the program's goals this year. Family demographic data, Vermont State Performance Indicator data, student performance data, and family success stories and examples of goals met presented through the two family case studies and several focus groups, interviews, and self-assessments show that the following goals have been met. These goals include:

1. Assist parents to be full partners in their children's acquisition of literacy skills through parent education and adult education.
2. Ensure that children reach their full potential as learners.
3. Improve economic opportunities of families through increasing the educational level of parents.
4. Strengthen the family's vision of themselves as a learning team.
5. Expand the ability of families to become contributing and self-sustaining members of the community.
6. Continue to serve 20 families while recruiting families identified as most in need of Even Start services.
7. Leave a legacy of intergenerational life-long learners who will positively impact their communities as their communities recognize and commit to delivering family literacy activities beyond Even Start's tenure

Client Demographics

In analyzing client demographics over the past seven years and comparing this data to national reports, this program has been consistent in providing services to a population in need of these services. This past year, the program provided services for twenty-three families enrolled in the program. Currently, sixteen families have remained in the program, with a total of sixteen adults and twenty-nine eligible children. The program continues to have a high family retention rate of 70% with 25% of clients having been enrolled for two to seven years.

Adult and Child Indicators

Under federal legislation, local programs are required to collect indicator data on adults and children to demonstrate measurable growth and improvement in learning and education. This

year, SWCES adults and children showed many academic gains based on the key indicators, as highlighted below. The indicators with a check mark signify that it was met, whereas, the indicators with a dot indicate that the indicator was not met. Three of the four adult indicators were applicable to SWCES this year and all three were met. Four of the six child indicators were applicable to the program this year and two of the four were met.

- ✓ 92% (12) of adults achieved gains in one or more NRS areas of reading (6), writing (3), and math (3);
- ✓ 86% (6) of adults who set a goal related to employment met their goal. Three entered job training, three obtained employment, and one advanced in their career;
- ✓ 80% (4) of adults obtained secondary school credential or its equivalent within two years of Even Start enrollment.
- ✓ 100% (1) of children eligible to take the SERP met or achieved proficiency;
- 66% (2) of children without an individual plan are progressing at a normal or higher rate on the COR, Language and Literacy subscale. The one child who did not meet this indicator showed a gain in three out of the six areas;
- 33% (1) of children met or exceeded the attendance rate of their peers;
- ✓ 100% (3) of students were promoted to the next grade level.

Family SMART goals met

Family self-reported data and staff records demonstrate that families and individuals met a variety of SMART goals for the four components of Even Start. SMART goals are specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and timely.

Adult Education:

- 3 participants completed GRTW
- 3 obtained employment
- 1 advanced in her career
- 4 obtained ADP or GED
- 12 adults made 22 NRS level gains in the areas of reading, writing, and math
- 1 will enter the Employment Preparation Program at SAPCC work site for 20 hours a week
- Improved reading skills as evidenced by a gain in NRS level score
- Worked on ADP and GED completion
- Improved math and writing skills as evidenced by a gain in NRS level score
- Developed resume and cover letter through GRTW
- Gained interviewing skills through GRTW
- One adult is a volunteer receptionist at the Windsor Resource Center and is gaining work experience
- One adult was chosen to represent VAL at the Voices of Adult Learners United for Education Conference (VALUE) and was awarded an all expenses paid trip to Florida to present there in June

Child Education:

- Read to child every night
- Enrolled child in Head Start
- Received speech evaluation resulting in speech therapy
- Children enrolled in Learning Partners, PlayWorks, and Pine Street Preschool.
- One child graduated preschool and will start Kindergarten in the fall

Parenting Education:

- Attended Mom's groups in Windsor every Thursday
- Attended parent-teacher conferences
- Attended classes on: Positive Discipline for Preschooler; How to Talk so Children will Listen; Parenting for Prevention

Parent and Child Together:

- Field trips with child, such as the visit to the Montshire museum
- Attended story time at local library with child. Received free books to read together at home.
- Learning about child's development and progress as early childhood educator works with child during home visits.

Other SMART Goals:

- 1 voter's registration
- 1 learner's permit
- 1 driver's license
- 2 moved into better housing

Program Impact on Family Achievements

During focus groups and interviews in June 2003, families discussed several ways in which the program has impacted or supported their achievements. Similar to the findings of previous years, families cited examples related to the Life Works program, adult education, parenting education, early childhood education, and the positive impact the program has had through connecting families to resources or services in the communities.

Family Self-Assessment Questionnaire

SWCES staff piloted the use of a family self-assessment tool, "A Measure of My Family's Well-Being" in the fall of 2002. In the fall of 2003, staff followed up with returning families (approximately one year after their initial completion) and newly enrolled families completed the initial assessment.

- ❖ Results showed that the areas of shelter, family relationships, and physical health and safety are considered to be of **least concern** to most families;
- ❖ The areas of nutrition and clothing, children's development and education, social and emotional health, parenting, legal, and community relationships are considered of **low to medium concern** to most families, with new families showing some significantly higher concerns compared to returning families;

- ❖ The areas of transportation, finance and income, and adult education are considered of **medium to high concern** to many families, with new families expressing a significantly higher level of concern compared to returning families;
- ❖ The areas of employment and work skills and habits are considered of **most concern** to many families.

Overall, it is important to notice that at a low level of concern, there is no significant difference in responses from newly enrolled to returning families. However as concern grows, results show a greater number of areas that are significantly different from new families to returning. When concern is at the highest for an area, there is no significant difference because all individuals, regardless of work with Even Start or not, are concerned. This suggests that working with Even Start for at least a year may assist families in reaching goals that alleviate their concerns in several areas.

Parent Education Profile Structure

Baseline data from the Parent Education Profile Structures shows that families are consistently at level 2 for 14 of the 15 sub-scales, with parenting behavior performing at 40% to 47% of the highest possible score. Level 2 indicates that parents are beginning to show awareness and some interest in ways to improve but may be inconsistent; parents may need lots of support; and parents show low comfort level. The sub-scale of “parent-school communication” received an average rank of level 1. This level indicates that there is little or no evidence of desired behaviors; parents show limited awareness and limited acceptance; parents are frustrated and not comfortable. This poor level of parent and school communication is consistent with teacher reports on the Early Childhood Progress survey, as this was noted as an area below other non-Even Start students.

Early Childhood Progress Survey

The SWCES staff administered the *Early Childhood Progress (ECP) survey* (Appendix F) in June 2003 to teachers of SWCES students in preschool to grade four. Nine teachers completed the survey out of ten to whom it was mailed, for a 90% response rate. This survey documents the progress of these children in school in comparison to their peers who are not in Even Start. **Students are assessed in the areas of:** school readiness and progress, social interactions, parent involvement and attendance, and special education eligibility. **Vermont State Performance Indicators 1, 2, 4, and 5** were also addressed on this questionnaire.

Comparing the changes in the entire data set from 2001 to 2002, several trends in the six major areas of SWCES Early Childhood survey can be noted.

**Highlights of the Family
Self-Assessment Questionnaire**

Areas of least concern:

- Shelter
- Family relationships
- Physical health/safety
- Parenting

Areas of low to medium concern:

- Nutrition and clothing
- Child development and education
- Social and emotional health
- Legal
- Community relationships

Areas of medium to high concern:

- Transportation
- Finance and income
- Adult education

Areas of most concern:

- **Employment**
- **Work skills and habits**

The findings demonstrate that most of the SWCES youth (whose teachers completed the survey) are performing at the same level or above other non-Even Start children in the areas of self-confidence, relations with other students, motivation to learn, and classroom behavior. However, teachers ranked many students to be performing below other non-Even Start children with regards to academic performance, and especially their parent’s involvement in their school life.

- ❖ SWCES staff should continue to work with youth on their **academic skills** through early childhood education intensive services, and address issues and make appropriate referrals as needed.
- ❖ SWCES staff should continue to and encourage and support **parent involvement** in children's schools, in ways such as encouraging parents to attend school meetings or attending these meetings with parents, assisting parents to advocate for their children, and encouraging them to take an active role in their child's lives through intensive PCIA time hours. SWCES should also continue to address parent's needs and barriers relating to low parent involvement and refer parents were appropriate.

**Summary of Findings from the
Early Childhood Progress**

Areas below other children:

- Academic Performance
- Parent involvement

Areas at the same level as other children:

- Motivation to learn
- Relations with other students
- Classroom behavior
- Self-confidence

Areas above other children

- Motivation to learn
- Classroom behavior

- ❖ The findings indicate that the majority of SWCES youth are **motivated to learn** at the same or better level compared to non-Even Start youth. Staff should consider working specifically with children who received low marks in this area to address these issues and make referrals to other collaborating services as appropriate.
- ❖ Although many SWCES children are reported to have average or higher **peer relation** skills, these results suggest that SWCES should consider working with children to improve their skills in relating to other peers. Staff could either provide support on a one-on-one basis or possibly hold more child-focused events where children can gain more experience in interacting with their peers in a positive learning environment.
- ❖ Similar to the results of self-confidence, results on **classroom behavior** indicate that several of SWCES youth behave similar to or better than class peers. SWCES staff should continue to work with children who received poor marks in this area on a one-on-one basis during home visits for early childhood education services and PCIA time hours. This issue should also be addressed during any center-based group activities and field trips as needed.
- ❖ Although most of the youth were reported to have average or higher **self confidence** levels, SWCES staff should continue to encourage youth self confidence through planning activities (both home and center based) that can provide children with a sense of success and accomplishment to build their self esteem in learning and life. Further, they should encourage all parents to help build their child's self esteem at home on a daily basis.

Major Strengths of South Windsor County Even Start

Through the past eight years of data collection from families, collaborators, and staff, the evaluation team have identified and added to the list of major program strengths of SWCES. The seven strengths highlighted this year stand out above other strong program areas because they provide the "something extra" needed for high quality services and high success rates among families. Through these strengths, SWCES continues to work towards their seven program goals and families continue to work towards their individual goals. These areas are consistent with those from Family Literacy Core Values and Quality Considerations as identified by RMC Research Corporation in the Revised *Guide to Quality* (2001).

Major Strengths of SWCES

1. Center-based Programming
2. Home-based Instruction
3. Connecting Families with Community Resources
4. Partnerships and Collaboration
5. Program Activities and Events
6. High Retention Rate of Families
7. Long-term Enrollment of Families

These **strengths** include: center-based instruction, home-based instruction, connecting families with available community resources, strong partnerships and collaboration, program activities and events, high retention rate of families, and long term enrollment of families. These areas are consistent with those from Family Literacy Core Values and Quality Considerations as identified by RMC Research Corporation in the Revised *Guide to Quality* (2001).

Family Identified Strengths of South Windsor County Even Start

During focus groups and interviews in June 2003, families were asked to discuss several strengths of SWCES that have made this an enjoyable program and assisted families in working towards and achieving their goals. In this discussion, they were asked to talk about the advantages and disadvantages of center-based and home-based programming. Overall, the adults interviewed enjoy and benefit from a combination of home and center-based learning, however limited transportation and childcare can often thwart on a person from attending center based events. Strengths identified by the families correspond to the Family literacy Core Values and Quality Considerations, as discussed in the Revised Guide to Quality (RMC Research, 2001). These strengths are incorporated in the seven major strengths of the program, as identified by the evaluation team. These strengths include: Center and home based programming, support, flexibility, and commitment of staff, promoting parent advocacy, family networking, activities and playgroups, promotion of learning outside the classroom, and child care services.

Program Accomplishment and Improvements

The evaluators highlighted several program accomplishments and improvements of SWCES, based on staff questionnaires and interviews, and Advisory Council meeting observations and minutes. These program improvements are a part of the natural progression and growth, prompted by the needs of SWCES staff, families, collaborators, and the local community, as well as the previous years of learning experience. Program accomplishments and improvement to highlight this evaluation period include the Life Works program and community learning and resource focused Advisory Council meetings.

The **Life Works program** is an on-site program at the SAPCC, which was established in January 2002 through grant funding. This program consists of the Getting Ready to Work program (GRTW), Teen Parent Education, and Even Start. Families involved in this program commit to an intensive 20-hour a week option to receive education, parenting, and job skills through a twelve-week session.

- ❖ The Life Works program provides families with ***more opportunity to participate in planning aspects*** of the program. Life Works families help to plan activities and shape the direction of the program based on their needs and goals.
- ❖ The Life Works program has enable SWCES to ***increase the intensity of services*** offered in adult education, job training, and parenting education skills. It also may fulfill the Reach Up work requirement of 20-30 hours a week, depending on family status as "pre work" or "work ready".
- ❖ Participants in the Life Works program cited ***gains in employment and life skills***, such as learning to use a computer, writing a resume and cover letter, conducting a job search, interviewing successfully, managing finances, and buying a home.
- ❖ The Life Works program has enabled rural families to ***gain social capital*** as they come out of isolation and work in a group with others in a similar situation towards their goals, network, and build a support system.
- ❖ The Life Works program has ***improved the collaboration among SWCES staff and partners***, as they now work together in a more tight knit fashion to carry out a successful session. The Life Works program is a large part of the new direction of the Even Start program and collaborators are more aware of this direction and have begun to make more referrals that are appropriate to the changes in the program.

**Areas of Program
Accomplishment and Improvements**

- ➔ ***Center-based Programming***
 - o Improved family involvement in planning
 - o Increased intensity of services
 - o Employment and life skills
 - o Social and human capital
 - o Improved collaboration
- ➔ ***Advisory Council meetings*** as forums for community learning, networking, and information sharing

Areas in need of improvement for the Life Works program include the addition of an on-site childcare center, specifically one that serves infants, and transportation services. Staff also note that they need to work with families to transition them into and out of the program.

Another significant program accomplishment and improvement has been the use of Advisory and Quarterly Council meetings to focus on community learning. These meetings have focused on substance abuse issues and support available to parents, changes in the No Child Left Behind legislation that affect education, a review of the past, present, and future of SWCES, and grant writing collaboration. Council meetings also hold an important role of collaborator networking and information sharing, providing valuable resources for Even Start staff and others.

Recommendations

Through eight years of experience and service as an Even Start family literacy program, the SAPCC has a wealth of knowledge that it may draw upon in developing other family literacy or family-centered programs. The following recommendations should be taken into consideration if the program decides to apply for future Even Start to meet the requirements of federal legislation. These recommendations will strengthen current services towards program sustainability and enable families to continue to work towards and reach their goals.

- Work with parents to improve their relationships with schools
- Work with parents to improve their parenting skills using the PEP Structure.
- Work with parents to improve child attendance
- Work with children to improve their performance in school
- Use of PEP structure for curriculum development
- Transition to a center-based model of family literacy
 - Establish an onsite infant/toddler center
 - Provide or support transportation to and from the center
- Continue to build on program strengths and experience