

Even Start Evaluation Report

Executive Summary

The Center for Rural Studies, Burlington, Vermont

This evaluation report is for the fifth year of the South Windsor County Even Start program (SWCES), the Fiscal Year period of July 1, 1999 through June 30, 2000. The Center for Rural Studies (CRS) at the University of Vermont has worked with SWCES as local evaluators for the five years that the program has been in service to the area of Springfield, Vermont. This report provides an overview of the national and local Even Start program, a discussion of evaluation methodology, and the demographic profile of SWCES clientele. This report also discusses the findings of evaluation activities, including the revision of indicators of progress, the standards of Equipped for the Future, staff self-assessments, and the Even Start End of Year Review Client Questionnaire. The report concludes with a summary and recommendations for the future success of the program.

Evaluation Methods

This evaluation consists of two components: “process” evaluation and “outcome” evaluation. Process methods include a demographic analysis, program self-assessment, Client End of Year Review, and staff focus groups/meetings to review program strategies. Methods to measure outcomes or performance indicators of families are in the process of being revised to meet the changing needs of the program and the national requirements. This evaluation report reviews measurement techniques for Equipped for the Future and the development of Program Indicators of Quality. To carry out this evaluation, CRS uses both quantitative and qualitative methods.

Findings

In analyzing client demographics over the past five years and comparing this data to national reports, this program has been consistent in providing services to a population in definite need of these services. SWCES provided service for a total of twenty-five families in year five, with 18 families remaining in the program and two associate level families by the end of the fifth year, June 30, 2000. Family successes this past year include high retention rate, several GED and ADP completions and employment in the community.

Self-assessments were completed in the areas of *Retention of Families* and *Adult Education and Literacy* by staff and in the area of *Collaboration* by staff and the Advisory Council to monitor program process and areas in need of improvement. Within the area of *Retention of families* respondents to the self-assessment indicate that SWCES is providing adequate services, support, referrals, respect, and flexibility to foster the long term participation of families so they may achieve their learning goals and make improvements in parenting skills. Responses also show that SWCES is effectively collaborating with service providing organizations to meet the needs and goals of families in the program. Based on the quantitative and qualitative responses to the self-assessment, the program has also been successful this past year in the area of *Adult Education and Literacy*. Improvements have been made this past year on the revisiting of the short and long term goals of adult learners.

Responses to the End of Year Review Client Questionnaire show a positive review of the SWCES program, indicating that respondents feel they are making progress towards their goals at a satisfactory pace and enjoy the programs that they attend. Most families indicated that home visits, field trips, and classes, such as nutrition and parenting/positive discipline were the most favorable aspects of Even Start. Many respondents expressed the desire to become more involved in activities and programs offered by SWCES, in order to further progress towards their goals. However, most indicated that time, financial, and employment issues are major constraints to their involvement. Parents show interest in taking more classes such as follow up nutrition course and a course on communication within relationships and to offer more activities in Windsor.

Within the outcome evaluation, SWCES staff and the evaluators have developed preliminary program indicators of quality and are working towards their revision and implementation. Current indicators focus on early childhood education, as required by Section 1210 of the Amendments to the Reading Excellence Act in 1998, and families progress through the program.

Using the EFF framework to determine participant progress, home visitors highlighted several families and family members as showing progress through the framework within the three Role Maps. One mother who exemplifies the role map of “Citizen/Community” has been very active in her community, has used her first aid skills in an emergency situation, and is taking appropriate and responsible action with her job to adjust her schedule around her family life. Two home visitors discussed how one family has exemplified skills from the “Parent and Family” role map as they have been adjusting to the diagnosis of their youngest child with autism. Both of the parents in this family have recently received their ADP and GED. Further, another home visitor spoke of how another mother has been coping with her dyslexia through developing her own educational games for herself and her family. Within the role map of “Worker”, another mother has made great strides in reaching her goals in Even Start, is working towards her ADP, and is working to buy her own home. As a result of this preliminary EFF focus group, the evaluators and SWCES revised the home visit record to include an EFF Checklist. This will allow home visitors to systematically document families’ progress through the EFF framework.

Recommendations

The following recommendations relating to program improvement and program evaluation have been made for the sixth year of the SWCES program evaluation, based on this evaluation report. In the area of program improvement, based on the findings of the *Even Start End of Year Review*, SWCES should continue to offer nutrition and parenting/discipline courses and possibly have classes that follow up with classes previously offered. The program should also continue to have parents assist in the planning of events, as many had opinions and ideas on activities in which they would like to be involved. Based on the strong response of one parent, the program should try to hold more activities and events in Windsor. The responses indicate that positive change is taking place among families as a result of their participation in SWCES. The program should continue to grow on the path it is on, incorporating feedback from parents to best meet their needs.

Based on the responses to the *Retention of Families self-assessment*, the program could improve in several areas, such as demonstrating high expectations for family self-sufficiency, utilizing program graduates in the program, and involving other family members in activities. Based on the responses of staff and the Advisory Council to the *Collaboration self-assessment*, areas that could use improvement include: development of a protocol to systematically address goals and objectives of families with collaborators; improved collaboration with school systems; increase follow-up with agencies to which families have been referred and possibly include collaborators in data collection for program evaluation; recognition of collaborators constraints; and clarification of the Even Start program and training on family literacy to collaborators. Results from the *Adult Education and Literacy self-assessment* indicate that the program should continue to periodically revisit goals and progress towards their attainment so adults can continue to challenge themselves and strive for success in their education.

The following recommendations pertain to activities of program evaluation. These recommendations are based on the findings of this report and will allow the program to more effectively track and monitor family literacy and education as families progress through the program and after graduation of the program. This will not only document and measure the effectiveness of the program but will enable the program to meet the needs of its participants and make appropriate changes for program sustainability.

- Continue to develop and revise Program Indicators of Quality
- Track Even Start student development
- Document EFF standards through a pilot test of the EFF “checklist”
- Continue with Self-assessment of SWCES
- Develop Even Start Family portfolios, pendent on staff training
- Possible focus group of long term Even Start families
- Track Even Start “alumni”
- Database collection of demographics

Improved communication between evaluators and Even Start staff and the advisory council to ensure that all partners are aware of program activities and are continually re-examining the program process and developing indicators of program/family success.