

Effective Home Visitors Empower Families of Milwaukee



“They helped me be healthy while I was pregnant and now they help me with the baby. They give me a lot of information on how to keep the baby safe and to grow.”

—Young mother enrolled in Empowering Families of Milwaukee

“Training really opened my eyes. It’s important to look at our work from a family and child perspective.”

—EFM home visitor



Situation

The rate of mortality and disease among infants is a good indicator of a community’s overall quality of life.

In the City of Milwaukee, disproportionately high rates of poor birth outcomes, such as preterm births, low birth weights, fetal and infant deaths pose a serious challenge to the community.

To address this compelling issue, in 2006 the City of Milwaukee Health Department and the State of Wisconsin’s Department of Health and Family Services (DHFS) cooperated to form Empowering Families of Milwaukee (EFM), a grant-funded, five-year, intensive in-home visitation program that is projected to work with more than 700 pregnant women, new mothers and children up to age six in high-risk areas of Milwaukee.

EFM serves families residing in a six-zip-code target area (53204, 53205, 53206, 53208, 53212 and 53233) in the central city that has high rates of poverty, infant mortality, low birth weights, late entry to prenatal care, teen pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, lead poisoning and child welfare reports.

EFM enrolls pregnant women and women with infants up to two months old who live in the target area.

Comprehensive services are provided based on the 12 Critical Elements of Home Visiting and *Parents as Teachers (PAT) Born to Learn* home visiting curriculum. EFM promotes optimal child development, healthy birth outcomes and positive parent-child interaction.

The long-term goals of EFM are to improve birth outcomes, enhance family functioning, support child health, safety and development and prevent child abuse and neglect. Pregnant women of any age or women with infants up to two months old can enroll.

The success of Empowering Families of Milwaukee hinges on teams of home visitors. Each team includes the expertise of a public health nurse, a social worker and a community outreach worker whose effectiveness is enhanced by team-based training. These teams work intensively with families on preventive prenatal and infant health education, developmental screening and positive parent-child interactions up to the child’s fifth birthday.

A collaboration of public and private stakeholders, including the Bureau of Milwaukee Child Welfare, Milwaukee Housing Authority, Reproductive Health Services, Department of Workforce Development, Mental Health Services, hospitals, health care systems and others contribute resources.

Key community partners include the University of Wisconsin-Extension Milwaukee County, St. Vincent de Paul-Vincent Family Resource Center, La Causa, Children's Services Society of Wisconsin, and Black Health Coalition of Wisconsin.

Response

UW-Extension Family Living Programs has been involved in state and national home visitation research, training and technical assistance for more than ten years. In Milwaukee, Family Living provides low-cost, comprehensive home visitation training for health, social service and community-based family and youth organizations.

Because of UW-Extension's experience in this area, DHFS contracted with Family Living Programs to provide training and technical assistance for EFM home visitation.

In 2005, DHFS authorized \$180,000 for UW-Extension to provide training to home visitation programs in Milwaukee County through 2010.

Family Living Programs developed and continues to provide training and technical assistance for Empowering Families of Milwaukee that:

- Focuses on best practices based on current research from the field of home visitation to develop curricula and workshops.
- Builds skills in supervisors and staff that support best practices.
- Builds skills in home visitors so that they are effective with the vulnerable families they serve.
- Ensures quality family support services for Milwaukee families.

Based on these strategies, Family Living Programs staff:

- Aligned the EFM training plans with the 12 critical elements for a successful program.
- Surveyed EFM home visitors to determine training needs.
- Shadowed home visitors on their early encounters with families.
- Cooperated with DHFS administrators and consultants to plan the content of training workshops.
- Drew on the expertise of UW-Madison and UW-Extension faculty in areas such as child development and parenting.
- Managed all aspects of training events, such as communicating with program presenters, developing resources, handling registration, contracting with training facilities, facilitating workshops, providing materials and reviewing training evaluations.

Outcomes

EFM home visitation programs and training and technical assistance began in late 2006. Since then, UW-Extension has held more than 30 training events. Total participant contacts number over 1,000.

Some program highlights include:

- Data from 2007 and early 2008 show EFM has had positive impacts on healthy birth outcomes among families in targeted zip code areas.
- Since its start, EFM home visitors provided 9,980 face-to-face home visits to more than 350 women and their children.
- EFM currently enrolls up to 90% of participants in the prenatal period. Research tells us that women who enroll prenatally are more likely to stay in the program.

- Home visitors reported that 304 infants have received preventive health services and regular developmental screenings.
- All participants' homes have been assessed for home safety hazards, with documented decreases in these hazards.

Under the guidance of UW-Extension Milwaukee County, EFM home visiting training programs have maintained consistency in the basic training received by all staff. Advanced training, conducted by Family Living along with the new Department of Children and Families, continues to elevate the skills of EFM home visitors and supervisors.

The training and workshops developed by UW-Extension and implemented by the City of Milwaukee Health Department have had a significant impact that translates to effective support for at-risk families.

Because of its successful track record, the approach used by the EFM program is now being used as a model around the state.

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