

IMPACT



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Supporting Rural Family Childcare Providers through Parents as Teachers Programs

The Situation

According to the Institute for Women's Policy research 3 out of 5 women in Idaho and the US with children under age six are in the labor force and are in need of child care. National studies indicate that only 12-14 percent of children are in childcare arrangements that promote their growth and learning. Most rural childcare providers operate out of their home. Often a mother decides to provide childcare as a means of employment while staying home with her children, but is not fully prepared to handle the pressure and challenges associated with operating a childcare facility. Long work hours and travel distances make professional development for family childcare providers a challenge in rural areas.

At the request of Bonners Ferry Mayor and City Council, and Boundary County Commissioners, 3000 county residents were surveyed to assess the community perception of childcare needs and quality of childcare in Boundary County. The survey and corresponding Town Meeting pointed to two strategies to improve care for children: 1) involve more childcare providers in professional development, and 2) hold a forum/fair for childcare providers and those interested in starting a childcare facility.

Needs assessment in Jefferson County revealed childcare providers also had expressed a need for professional development and wanted to create a coalition to meet monthly to exchange ideas and offer support to others concerned with the care and education of young children.

Our Response

University of Idaho Extension was in a unique position to meet the professional development needs of rural childcare providers through the Parents as Teachers program (PAT). PAT is a voluntary in-home parent education program that helps parents be the best teacher for their children in the early years. It translates information on early brain development into concrete advice for parents. A trained parent educator tailors monthly personal visits to meet the individual family's needs. PAT also includes monthly parent group meetings, developmental screenings and referrals to meet deficiencies identified through the screening process.



Candy Kelly, Boundary County PAT educator with Tiny Town childcare providers.

Boundary and Jefferson counties were selected to pilot the nationally recognized PAT Quality Care for Family Child-Care Providers curriculum. Through the program, a trained parent educator brings monthly research-based professional development lessons to providers in their childcare home or center. The visit also includes activities for the children and parent handouts to send home with parents. Since literacy and school readiness are key components of PAT, an Idaho Public Television First Books grant was written and funded to provide children under the care of enrolled family childcare providers with a free book each month.

Seven Boundary County and three Jefferson County family childcare providers were recruited to participate in the pilot study. Providers ranged in experience from 15 year veterans to new business owners. The program has grown to include 26 providers and 9 assistants. Approximately 236 more children and their families are receiving Parents as Teachers research-based child development information.

Program Outcomes

After one year of participation, the ten initial providers were surveyed to assess the impact of the program on the care providers and the children in their care. All providers reported that they learned new ideas and information about how children grow and develop and that they increased their ability to help parents be more effective in their parenting. Seven reported that their memories were refreshed about how a child's brain grows and develops while eight reported a renewed awareness of the importance of reading to children at an early age. Half of the care providers changed something about the way they cared for children. One provider incorporated more rhyming in songs and stories when a Ready to Read screening showed a deficit in her four-year-old group. All 7 children in the group showed improved screening scores and entered kindergarten ready to read.

Providers found the topics covered in monthly visits to be very helpful along with the children's activities and handouts for both themselves and parents. Questions from parents after handouts had been taken home indicated that families were reading and using the information.

Providers appreciated the support of another early childhood professional as well as the opportunity to get professional development without leaving home after working a 50-55 hour week. One provider wrote, "It gives me the opportunity to talk out problems and bounce ideas off a person who is just as concerned with the children I care for as I am," All providers strongly agreed that hands-on learning with the children in their care setting made it more valuable to them. All agreed that they would encourage other childcare providers to participate in Parents as Teachers Quality Care for Family Child-Care Providers.

For More Information

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