

Evaluation of the Minnesota Family, Friend and Neighbor Grant Programs

Findings and Lessons Learned



Program Overview

In 2007, the Minnesota Legislature enacted legislation allocating \$750,000 over two years for the establishment of programs to promote early literacy, healthy development, and school readiness for children cared for by FFN providers and to foster community partnerships to promote school readiness. Six community-based organizations, nonprofit organizations, and Indian tribes were chosen via a competitive request for proposal process: the Early Childhood Resource and Training Center in Minneapolis; Neighborhood House in St. Paul; the Library Foundation of Hennepin County; the Northland Foundation in Duluth; Thorson Memorial Library in Elbow Lake, and the White Earth Reservation.

Grant Program Goals

General program goals were established by the Legislature. They included:

- Providing training, support and resources to FFN caregivers
- Connecting FFN caregivers and the children's families with community resources as appropriate
- Providing information and resources regarding school readiness activities and opportunities, including funding and program options for children.

Each of the grantees offered programming in different ways to meet these goals, including home visits, play and learn groups, and community-wide events.

Evaluation Questions and Design

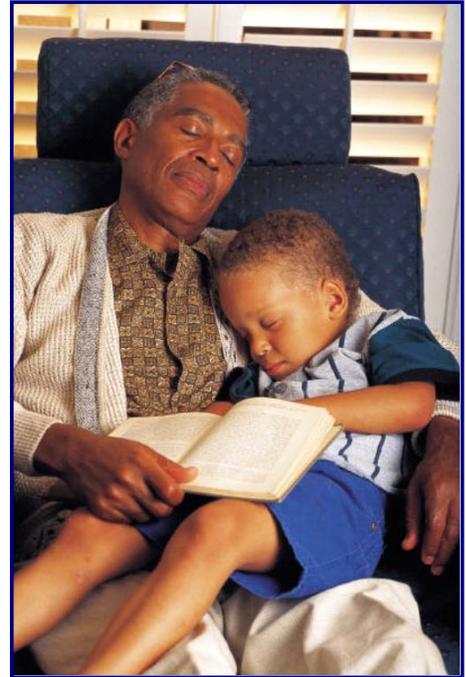
Four main questions, based on the general program goals, were addressed in the evaluation:

- To what extent do children participating in the project demonstrate age-appropriate developmental skills?
- What are the characteristics of FFN caregivers who participated in the FFN grant programs?
- To what extent do caregivers demonstrate knowledge or practice about early child development and school readiness?
- Were the programs delivered as intended? What successes and challenges were encountered?

Caregivers responded to a survey specifically designed for this evaluation and answered questions about the development of children for whom they care. Program staff participated in individual interviews, site visits, and a group session to discuss program implementation successes and challenges.

Evaluation Results¹

- Children whose caregivers participated in the FFN program evaluation demonstrated age-appropriate developmental skills that did not require further developmental screening or evaluation at the time of assessment.
- FFN providers who participated in the evaluation represented diversity in education levels, immigrant status, ethnicity, and languages spoken. Most were related to the children for whom they cared, with grandparents as the most common relationship. Caregivers engaged in a range of activities with children, with some indication that they do not get outside the home often, other than going to local parks. These caregivers reported engaging in everyday learning activities with children on a regular basis, although some small numbers report little to no participation in everyday learning activities. They report having good relationships with the parents of children for whom they care.
- Overall, programs made solid progress as they implemented these new, innovative services with caregivers who are not generally offered education and support services. Five themes describe the successes and challenges of program implementation: raising awareness, building trust and community, connecting FFN to community resources and collaborating among community partners serving FFN populations, responding to context for program planning and delivery; and teaching/training grounded in experience and knowledge of local context.



¹ The evaluation sample was not representative of all the FFN providers who participated; findings cannot be generalized to all FFN caregivers who participated. The results of the survey likely characterize those FFN providers who were most engaged in the programs. Results from the survey provide a data set that functions as a solid baseline since the programs are still in their infancy.

Recommendations

Defining, creating, and supporting a community of FFN practitioners and creating networks of support and information for FFN caregivers emerge as central recommendations of the evaluation. Continued efforts should support professionals working with FFN providers and foster further program development, including staff development.

- Define clearly the FFN population and target it effectively in both program implementation and policy.
- Foster learning and support opportunities, such as an FFN provider network for FFN providers.
- Continue program development with attention to program goals, content and effectiveness.
- Develop education and support for professionals working with FFN providers.
- Continue to evaluate program implementation and effectiveness.



Minnesota Department of **Human Services**