



## **Evaluation of the Contribution of Parenting Classes to Mesa County Prevention Efforts, 2003**

Of those participating in the Community Health Assessment survey in Fall 2001, twenty percent of Mesa County adults had attended either a parenting or family relationships class at some time in the past. This rate was down significantly from the 25% reported in 1997 (PRC, p.123). Because parenting skills are known to be important to the healthy development of children, this decrease was of concern. There are a number of programs for parents that are offered in Mesa County in churches, schools, and nonprofit agencies. Some of these are one-time offerings but most are offered at least on an annual basis. Some are designed to be corrective in nature; they may be part of a treatment plan to regain custody or court-ordered. Others are offered merely as an educational outreach.

**Enrollment.** In summer 2002, the leadership of Drug Free Mesa County requested an evaluation of current offerings in parenting in Mesa County and their contributions to prevention of risky behavior in local children. In July programs were surveyed to learn numbers of participants and graduates from each program listed on the early childhood flier distributed throughout the community. That analysis was motivated by a declining enrollment in some of the larger classes and an effort to determine if publicity about the existence of classes was helping parents to locate appropriate classes. The data was collected for the first six months of 2002. Based on that work and attendance data for the second half of the year, it is estimated that 1,400 to 1,500 people attended such a class last year. That is approximately one percent of Mesa County adults. One class was no longer offered locally (Redirecting Children's Behavior), and another contact number provided no response: they were excluded from further analyses. The parenting group of the Early Childhood Partnership will continue to monitor enrollment in these publicly advertised classes. Other classes are offered in the community but may not have requested to be included in these lists.

**Survey Development.** During fall 2002 in cooperation with a small group of upper division Mesa State College students in a human services course, an instrument was designed to assess the contributions of a human services program to prevention. The instrument was pilot tested with eight local human service programs and revised. The instrument contained questions about program or class objectives, evaluation of participants' progress toward objectives, a brief description of the curriculum or planned activity and its source, target audience, estimated annual enrollment, fees, frequency of offering, and current challenges facing the program.

The survey also included two scales to help determine the prevention emphases program directors believed were stressed with all participants. One scale was the Search Institute's list of 40 developmental assets and the second was Hawkins and Cattalano's list of risk and protective factors. Each scale looks at different dimensions of multiple evidence-based studies of factors

known to relate to positive youth development and avoidance of problem behaviors. A copy of the complete instrument is attached as Appendix A.

A second group of Mesa State students conducted the revised survey with programs listed in the January 2003 parenting flier developed by the InfoLine staff at the Mesa County Department of Human Services. Fifteen programs were considered for this evaluation. Students initially called the contact number listed on that brochure. Information was left for instructors if initial contact was not possible. Two follow-up phone calls were made if program directors did not respond. In two cases, surveys were mailed to program directors at their request, with self-addressed return envelopes; neither was returned. It was reported that three programs were discontinued; upon further checking all of which were still offered. One program had been renamed and relocated; the initial contact person did not have the information on either the new program name or a contact number. The students did find that number. One had not conducted any classes the previous 12 months and declined to participate.

The process reveals how difficult it can be for relatively fragile parents to locate a suitable program even from lists that are updated semiannually. It also reveals the importance of the initial contact in helping people find needed human services; if reception staff do not have current, accurate knowledge of programs and an understanding of previous program names, they will be less able to help provide needed information.

Of the initial 15 programs, 11 completed the surveys. A limitation in the analysis is that three of those not participating were church-based or hosted by local churches and might differ from those represented in this report.

**Findings.** Of the 11 programs, all but 3 stated that they targeted specific subgroups in the population. This outreach to specific audiences is helpful to underserved groups who are targeted. This targeting could become a barrier for those who do not consider themselves part of any such group. For example, although there had been previous classes for parents of adolescents, none with that as a major emphasis was observed at this time, likely due to limited enrollment in the past.

The targeted groups included first time parents, those with special needs children, those going through divorce or anticipating adoption, Hispanic or Latino fathers, young parents and those with children under three years of age. The goals and content of the classes tended to vary, in part, because of felt needs of the target audience. A figure describing the programs is in Appendix B.

Six programs used curriculums developed and tested in other communities. Two purchased commercial curriculums. One used a State mandated curriculum, and others were local. Although most had clear objectives, evaluation was generally not related to desired outcomes for participants.

If evaluation was carried out in the class, it was generally a parent satisfaction survey, although five reported use of pretests and posttests. One reported an external evaluation for which they have not received any feedback, as yet. One reported that observation was used and another reported that participants are followed for three years, although the nature of that follow-up was not reported. One change reportedly due to evaluation for two classes was an increase in contact hours and additions to content, and another class altered content because of parental feedback. A third class limited contact time to attract additional participants and to reduce stress on volunteer facilitators.

Contact time in class ranged from 4 to 40 hours, a very wide range. Some of the classes were run by volunteers and others by paid staff. Four of the classes charged participants a fee and seven did not. The class with the largest attendance was the Partners in Parenting class that is required of all divorcing parents, and that class included the availability of a Spanish translator for the first time this spring. People completing any of these classes are eligible for the License

**Table 1. Risk and Protective Factors in Parenting Classes—number of responses.**

**RISK FACTORS:**

conditions that predict an increased chance of developing a problem such as violent behavior.

**COMMUNITY:**

- 1. Availability of firearms and drugs
- 2. Community laws and norms favorable toward drug use, firearms & crime
- 3. Transitions and Mobility
- 4. Low neighborhood attachment, community disorganization
- 1 5. Extreme economic and social deprivation
- 1 6. Few opportunities for recreation
- 3 7. Lack of social support

**FAMILY:**

- 2 8. Family engagement in high-risk behavior
- 3 9. Family management problems
- 4 10. Family conflict
- 4 11. Negative parental attitudes and poor involvement
- 5 12. Insecure attachments
- 1 13. Defensive communication

**SCHOOL:**

- 1 14. Early and persistent antisocial behavior
- 1 15. Academic failure in elementary school
- 1 16. Lack of commitment to school

**INDIVIDUAL/ PEER:**

- 17. Alienation and Rebelliousness
- 1 18. Friends who engage in problem behavior
- 1 19. Favorable attitudes toward the problem behavior
- 20. Early initiation of problem behavior
- 21. Substance abuse
- 22. Low social status and rejection by peers
- 23. Poor conflict resolution skills
- 1 24. Poor social cognition (thinking) skills
- 25. Victimization
- 3 26. Intolerance for differences & prejudicial attitudes

**PROTECTIVE FACTORS:**

conditions that offset risk factors or increase resistance to them.

**COMMUNITY:**

- 1. Norms and public policies support non-use among youth
- 2 2. Access to resources (housing, healthcare, childcare, job training, employment, recreation)
- 2 3. Supportive networks and social bonds
- 4. Involvement of youth in community service

**FAMILY:**

- 5. Seek prenatal care
- 5 6. Develop close bonding with child
- 2 7. Value and encourage education
- 2 8. Manage stress well
- 3 9. Spend quality time with children
- 1 10. Use a high-warmth/low criticism parenting style
- 3 11. Are nurturing and protective
- 2 12. Have clear expectations
- 13. Encourage supportive relationships with caring adults beyond the immediate family
- 14. Share family responsibilities

**SCHOOL:**

- 1 15. Express high expectations
- 16. Encourage goal setting and mastery
- 1 17. Staff views itself as nurturing caretakers
- 1 18. Encourage prosocial development
- 1 19. Provide leadership and decision making opportunities
- 20. Foster active involvement of students
- 21. Trains teachers in social development and cooperative learning
- 1 22. Involve parents
- 23. Provide alcohol/drug-free alternative activities

**INDIVIDUAL/ PEER:**

- 1 24. Involved in drug-free activities
- 25. Respect authority
- 1 26. Are bonded to conventional groups
- 2 27. Appreciate the unique talent that each person brings to the group
- 2 28. Social compete

**Table 2. Developmental Assets in Parenting Programs—number of responses**

Search Institute identified the following building blocks of healthy development that help young people grow.

**EXTERNAL ASSETS**

**Support**

- 8 1. Family support
- 7 2. Positive family communications—willingness to seek advice from parents
- 2 3. Other adult relationships—support from three or more nonparenting adults
- 1 4. Caring neighborhood
- 2 5. Caring school climate
- 6 6. Parent involvement in schooling

**Empowerment**

- 2 7. Community values youth
- 2 8. Youth as resources—useful roles in community
- 1 9. Service to others—one hour or more per week
- 4 10. Safety—at home, school, neighborhood

**Boundaries and Expectations**

- 4 11. Family boundaries—clear rules and consequences, monitoring whereabouts
- 2 12. School boundaries
- 1 13. Neighborhood boundaries—monitoring young people’s behavior
- 4 14. Adult role models—adults demonstrate positive, responsible behavior
- 1 15. Positive peer influence—best friends demonstrate responsible behavior
- 5 16. High expectations—encouragement to do well

**Constructive Use of Time**

- 3 17. Creative activities—three or more hours per week in lessons, practice, in music, theater or other arts
- 2 18. Youth programs—three or more hours per week in sports, clubs or organizations at school or in community
- 1 19. Religious community—one or more hours per week in activities in a religious institution
- 4 20. Time at home—out with friends two or fewer nights per week

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**INTERNAL ASSETS**

**Commitment to Learning**

- 3 21. Achievement motivation—to do well in school
- 3 22. School engagement
- 2 23. Homework—doing at least one hour of homework every school day
- 3 24. Bonding to school—cares about his or her school
- 2 25. Reading for pleasure—three or more hours a week

**Positive Values**

- 5 26. Caring—helping other people
- 3 27. Equality and social justice—promoting equality and reducing hunger and poverty
- 5 28. Integrity—acting on convictions and standing up for personal beliefs
- 4 29. Honesty—telling the truth even when it is not easy
- 7 30. Responsibility—accepts and takes responsibility
- 3 31. Restraint—not being sexually active or using illegal substances

**Social Competencies**

- 5 32. Planning and decision making—knows how to think ahead and make choices
- 7 33. Interpersonal competence—empathy, sensitivity, and friendship skills
- 5 34. Cultural competence—knowledge of and comfort with people of different cultural/racial/ethnic backgrounds
- 3 35. Resistance skills—resisting negative peer pressure and dangerous situations
- 5 36. Peaceful conflict resolution—seeking nonviolent solutions

**Positive Identity**

- 6 37. Personal power—has control over things that happen
- 5 38. Self-esteem
- 4 39. Sense of purpose
- 6 40. Positive view of personal future--optimism

to Parent discount card offered through Strong Families Safe Kids. The card provides discounts at selected local retailers. Completion rates for participants varied from 60% to 100% for the one-time class.

**Contributions to prevention.** When the program representatives were asked to select no more than 3 risk and 3 protective factors emphasized in the class, the family domain was predominant, but there was considerable variation in response. Attachment and bonding was mentioned by most but not all respondents. Additional detail is present in Table 1 on the following page.

When asked about which assets for positive youth development are fostered within the class, all 40 assets were cited by one or more programs. One program, Parents Effective Communications Skills, teaches parents about the model and their role in development. The following assets were cited by more than one-half of the programs:

Number of programs      Asset emphasized for all participants

- 11: Family support
- 10: Responsibility
- 9: Positive view of personal future
- 8: Positive family communications, High expectations, Peaceful conflict resolution
- 7: Family boundaries, Integrity, Planning and decision making, Self-esteem, Sense of purpose
- 6: Parent involvement in school, Safety, Honesty, Cultural competence, Personal power

These indicators point to some common priorities among the programs. More details about the variety of cited assets in parenting classes are included in Table 2.

**Challenges faced.** Finding a cost-effective way to deliver quality service was the major challenge that respondents acknowledged for all programs. A related concern was a large enough staff within budget limits. Finding a time of day or week that would suit most potential participants was an additional challenge. Engaging participants who are court-ordered or resistant to the content was also mentioned. For those using volunteers to facilitate a class or as guest speakers, additional problems of retention were mentioned. Enough practice time and cultural sensitivity were mentioned once each.

**Conclusions & Recommendations.** Lack of response from some programs limits the ability to assess the overall impact of prevention efforts with youth in Mesa County. Given that warning, it would be most helpful if people answering the telephone number listed in the parenting programs flyer had enough information to answer questions about that program.

At least two programs are home visitation programs that require one on one time with participants who have to qualify for the program in some way. It is difficult to compare that kind of work to more traditional class work with more diverse participants.

Many of these programs have developed locally across time or have been inherited from others. Few have carefully looked for evidence-based curriculums, perhaps in part due to cost of most of these programs. Feedback from participants is the most usual source of evaluation, and knowledge gained and applied by these participants is less often tracked. The classes may be a community outreach effort by many of these agencies, rather than a primary focus; more rigorous evaluation may seem too costly, particularly for programs that are offered at no cost to the participants.

In spite of the above problems, it is obvious that the classes are attempting to work toward positive youth development through increased parental awareness of their roles in children's lives and understanding of and sometimes practice with skills they can use to facilitate this progress.

**Appendix A.  
PARENTING CLASS SURVEY**

**1. Please describe the objectives of this class for participants (up to 4)**

Objective 1: \_\_\_\_\_

Objective 2: \_\_\_\_\_

Objective 3: \_\_\_\_\_

Objective 4: \_\_\_\_\_

**2. Is the class developed using**

<input type="checkbox"/>	a curriculum that was commercially developed. Please specify: _____
<input type="checkbox"/>	a curriculum that was locally developed
<input type="checkbox"/>	a commercial curriculum with changes made locally
<input type="checkbox"/>	Other: please specify: _____

**3. What specific results do you hope to see for participants (up to 4)**

Result 1: \_\_\_\_\_

Result 2: \_\_\_\_\_

Result 3: \_\_\_\_\_

Result 4: \_\_\_\_\_

**4. Are there any measures you use to note participants progress toward goals of the class:**

No

Yes

**4a If yes, please list those measures: (up to 4)**

Measure 1: \_\_\_\_\_

Measure 2: \_\_\_\_\_

Measure 3 \_\_\_\_\_

Measure 4 \_\_\_\_\_

4b

**Have these measures led to any changes in how the class is offered:**

<input type="checkbox"/>	No
<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes: Please describe _____

**5. Who are you trying to reach with this class (what is the target audience):** \_\_\_\_\_

**6. Is the class open to people outside the target group:**

No

Yes

**7. How often is the class offered:**

<input type="checkbox"/>	Once a year
<input type="checkbox"/>	Twice a year
<input type="checkbox"/>	Three times a year
<input type="checkbox"/>	Four or more times a year

**8. How many contact hours are there with each class: \_\_\_\_\_ Hours**

**9. How regularly are sessions offered:**

<input type="checkbox"/>	a one time class
<input type="checkbox"/>	a weekly class for 1 hour
<input type="checkbox"/>	a weekly class for 2 or more hours
<input type="checkbox"/>	Other: please specify _____

**10. How many participants do you have a year: (using last year as an example)**

\_\_\_\_\_ participants

What percent of participants complete the entire class: \_\_\_\_\_%

**11. Is there a charge for the class:**

<input type="checkbox"/>	no
<input type="checkbox"/>	yes

Please describe: \_\_\_\_\_

**12. Please describe the major content areas of this class:** (top 10)

- Content 1: \_\_\_\_\_
- Content 2: \_\_\_\_\_
- Content 3: \_\_\_\_\_
- Content 4: \_\_\_\_\_
- Content 5: \_\_\_\_\_
- Content 6: \_\_\_\_\_
- Content 7: \_\_\_\_\_
- Content 8: \_\_\_\_\_
- Content 9: \_\_\_\_\_
- Content 10: \_\_\_\_\_

**13. What are three major challenges you face in offering this class:**

- Challenge 1 \_\_\_\_\_
- Challenge 2 \_\_\_\_\_
- Challenge 3 \_\_\_\_\_

**Appendix Table B. Description of Programs Participating in 2003 Evaluation.**

<b>Program</b>	<b>Target audience</b>	<b>Curriculum</b>	<b>Evaluation</b>	<b>Contact hrs.</b>	<b>Annual Enrollment</b>	<b>Cost</b>
Adoption Alliance	Adopting parents	Developed by State	Unknown	12	30	\$350/couple \$200 out of area
CSU Extension, Early Childhood Connections	Parents, providers with special needs children	From Mesa Developmental Services	Observation, satisfaction survey	9 (in 6 monthly meetings w meals)	15	No
Families First: general	Any	Growing Great, Morning Glory Press;U of Missouri, Self Reliance	Parenting surveys @ 6 mos., satisfaction surveys, child abuse reporting	2 hrs. wk	80	No
Families First: young dads	Fathers aged 15 to 30	“	“	“	38	No
Families First: young moms	Mothers age 24 and under	“	“	“	40	No
Family Steps	Parents of 0 to 3 year olds in a set of medical practices	Healthy Steps	Pre and post test at 3 month intervals	26	63	No
Los Padres	Hispanic fathers	Local	Follow fathers progress for 3 years (measures not reported)	250	40	No
Parenting Partnership	Low income women with a child less than 6 months of age	Healthy Steps	In process, external, no feedback yet available	Varies, home visits 1 hr. each, weekly or monthly	50	No
Parenting that Works (was Parent Training Institute)	Any, especially targeting parents of those age 0-6	STEP	Pretest/posttest	7.5 hrs. (5 weeks, 1.5 hrs. each, down from 7 weeks)	200	\$30/individual \$45 couple
Parents Effective Communications Skills	Any, prefer those w children 18 months through adolescents	Parent Effectiveness Training	Yes, details unknown	20 hrs (2 hrs. wk/ 10 wks)	30	\$150/family
Partners in Parenting	Divorcing parents	PIP (purchased from Colorado Springs therapist	Satisfaction survey	4	650	\$60 full fee, \$20 if proven eligible for free divorce