



Strengthening Families

Situation:

Poverty, limited resources, parenting alone, limited education, stress and substance abuse all present challenges to families raising children in Sullivan County. The resulting problems, child abuse/neglect, lack of school readiness, behavior problems, school dropouts, teen pregnancy and youth substance abuse are daunting and seemingly impossible to overcome. In August of 2002, the Sullivan County Task Force compiled an inventory of youth needs with regard to substance abuse behavior. Task Force findings showed most risk factors that contribute to substance abuse among young people were prevalent in the county.

Parenting children today can be difficult because of this social context. Parents today need support and information to raise their children to be contributing members of society. Through focus groups in Sullivan County, the local substance abuse coalition found that 91 percent of participants agreed or strongly agreed with the statement: "I am concerned with underage drinking in my community." Youth Risk Behavior Surveys conducted in Newport and Claremont this past year have provided some basis for this concern.

Extension's Public Value:

Iowa State University researchers calculated that brief family intervention programs designed to discourage teen drinking are both beneficial and cost-effective. Their study found that each dollar spent on intervention programs for adolescents was returned many times over in savings by preventing future costs associated with alcohol problems in adulthood.

Researchers conservatively estimate that prevention of a single case of adult alcohol abuse produces an average savings of \$119,633 in avoided costs to society. Factoring these savings into the costs and effectiveness of the Strengthening Families Program revealed this intervention saved \$9.60 in future costs for each dollar invested. Other youth risky behaviors also are reduced through this family strengthening intervention.

UNHCE Response:

With a \$30,000 state grant to the county, Sullivan County Extension educators brought the Iowa State University Extension-developed Strengthening Families Project (SFP) to the county. In Sullivan County, SFP focused on increasing opportunities for youth and their families to participate in evidence-based programs shown to be effective at preventing youth substance abuse.

Delivered by Sullivan County Extension Educators Gail Kennedy, Family and Consumer Resources, and Nancy Berry, 4-H Youth Development, the project includes training local adult community educators to deliver SFP to 10-14 year-olds, their parents and/or caregivers. This effort extends the impact of the program. Over the past three years, the program reached more than 50 families comprised of 122 youth and 133 adults.

Strengthening Families Project has been expanded to reach larger numbers of youth and parents through *Teen Talk* lessons for parent and community groups. Seventh and eighth grade families in Sullivan County middle schools received *Teen Talk* fact sheets on 10 timely topics. Sullivan County UNH Cooperative Extension also provided assistance in development of a strong, diverse, substance abuse prevention coalition for the county.

In addition to the Strengthening Families Project, a Family Focus Parent Education Series, "Parenting the Young Child" and "Parenting the School Age Child" reached parents with information focused on child development and positive discipline. "Cradle Crier and Toddler Tales," age-paced newsletters, were received by 365 families with infants and toddlers. Professionals working with grandparents raising grandchildren came together to raise awareness of issues and possible responses. Thirteen professionals received training in the Cornell Cooperative Extension award-winning curriculum, "Parenting a Second Time Around" to use in their work with relatives as caregivers.

How We Make a Difference:

- Parents surveyed at the end of the SFP 10-14 program reported they increased their positive parenting practices, including using appropriate discipline strategies, communicating effectively, accessing child/family supports and resources, supervising and monitoring children/teens, and managing stress.
- SFP 10-14 youth surveys showed gains in all protective factors targeted by the program, including handling stress, improvement in parent-child interactions, appreciation of parents, listening to a parent's point of view and awareness of house rules/consequences.
- In research conducted by the University of Minnesota Extension in 2007, families receiving Teen Talk newsletters reported they found them to be an easy-to-read source of information about parenting teens. Fact sheets increased parental monitoring, parental responsiveness and communication, particularly with families negotiating poverty or some other risk factor. They provide a low-cost way to efficiently disseminate research-based educational materials to large numbers of hard to reach families.
- A Strategic Prevention Frameworks grant of \$232,000 awarded annually to the county has resulted in the hiring of a coordinator to lead the "Communities United for Substance Abuse Prevention," (CUFSAP) developing a strategic plan for Sullivan County based on stakeholder input, data collection/analysis and collaboration.
- The county manager continues to host monthly meetings with Extension, the county jail, CUFSAP coordinator and local service providers attending and collaborating on projects.
- Parents receiving Cradle Crier and Toddler Tales age-paced newsletters reported they found the information timely, pertinent and useful.

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