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## Outcomes and Impacts of Family and Consumer Sciences (FCS) Programs<sup>1</sup>

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It is important that we as Family and Consumer Sciences (FCS) educators communicate the difference that our programs have in the lives of our target audiences. Whether we are writing the significance section of our Plan of Work, presenting before county commissioners or promoting our program to potential participants and stakeholders, it is paramount that we share information of the knowledge gained, skills developed and behavior/practices changed as a result of our programs.

This paper provides summaries of some of the most current research on the benefits of FCS programs. Also included in this paper are the main findings of the studies.

### Building Parenting Skills: A Program Evaluation

**Description:** The Parenting Skills Workshop Series (PSWS) works “to replace impulsive behavior with rational behavior and ineffective or hurtful parenting styles with effective, child-friendly skills.” This evaluation showed that program activities are consistent with program theory, that participant thoughts and feelings about the program are positive, and that their experiences meet

program designers’ goals. The following questions were asked of 181 parents caring for 318 children to assess the effectiveness of implementation and program outcomes:

1. What was the quality and effectiveness of the PSWS design and implementation, according to both accepted and innovative criteria for parenting programs and according to the perspectives of project staff, the workshop participants themselves, visitation facilitators, and the affected children?
2. How did participants’ knowledge, attitudes and skills change as a result of participating in PSWS?
3. How well were participants able to translate the ideas they learned into changes in behavior, and were participants able to sustain and/or expand their use of the skills after their workshop attendance had ended?

**Authors:** Camille Tischler

**Year Published:** 2001

**Findings:** PSWS’s program design, learning environment and careful program implementation led to significant success. In critical areas of parenting, between 24 and 31% of participants indicated that the program had a considerable impact on their parenting skills. Participants’

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comments revealed that two design elements—creating a safe learning atmosphere and reducing parents' isolation--were critical. These design elements were the learning atmosphere and reduced isolation.

With this foundation for skills transfer, the program had significant success with:

- **Skills acquisition and skills transfer**  
In participant response data, the skills-strengthened through role playing--were the most remarked upon aspect of the program, with 31% of all responses indicating that new-found skills were an important gain.
- **Self control**  
While all the skills are important, the skill the participants commented on most often was self control. Among other things, this is the skill that helps parents change their behavior. Being able to think while under stress makes it possible to remember to apply their new skills.
- **Listening, Understanding and Empowerment**  
Parents commented on the value of learning to notice their own behaviors and reactions, learning to pay attention to what they say to their children, taking a positive approach, and feeling more confident because of the program. Learning to listen and understand both themselves and their children indicates that the participant understood the philosophy of the program. Comments about learning to listen and understand were a significant response (24% of 123 responses) to the question: How have the classes helped you parent your children? Dialogue was replacing anger in their relationships with their children.

## Building Strong Families Evaluation Study

**Description:** One hundred thirty-five parents of young children who were participating in the Building Strong Families parenting program in three Michigan cities during the winter and spring

of 1995 were invited to participate in the study. The 87 parents who agreed to participate were similar in gender, income, ethnicity, household composition and number of children as those parents who did not choose to participate in the study. Fifty parents completed the study. They were similar in all demographic characteristics. Participants in the study were primarily women in their mid-twenties, living in single-parent households (72%) in urban areas. The educational level of the participants ranged from 6 years to 15 years. Half of the sample did not have a high school diploma and 74 percent earned less than \$800 a month. The mean number of children in the home was two children, and the mean age of the child used for the assessment was 19 months. The range of the children's ages in for the study was 1 month to 36 months.

The research questions for the study were:

Do parents' expectations of children change as a result of the program?

Do parenting behaviors change to become more consistent/appropriate for the age/stage of the child?

Are there changes in the physical environment of the child over the course of the program?

Are there changes in parent/child interaction as a consequence of the program?

Does the social support network change as a result of the program? For more on the methodology, please see the complete study, available online.

**Authors:** Dawn Contreras, MSU Extension Family Strengths/Home Economics, et al.

**Year Published:** 1996

**Findings:** As a result of the Building Strong Families program parents were more likely to respond to children in ways that are appropriate for the developmental stage of their child, provide a more positive, safe environment for the child and facilitate changes in their personal development. Here are some of the changes documented, with details available in the complete study online.

- Changes in the parents' behavior in responding to children in ways that are appropriate to the developmental stage of the child:

- Changes made by the parents' to create positive and safe environments for children, ages 0-3 years.
  - Changes in the parents' support systems that may lead to increased personal development.
8. Engage public in shaping, understanding, supporting and participating in school reform
  9. Ensure adequate resources and use them effectively.
  10. Be prepared to address all of these priorities together and for the long term.

## Communities & Schools Working Together Making After School Count

**Description:** This impact assessment was conducted in Philadelphia and documents the experience involving a myriad of partnerships between and among the district's 215,000 students, 13,000 teachers and administrators, thousands of parents, and hundreds of community businesses and organizations. Learning in this Philadelphia example has blossomed into a vibrant, colorful, multidimensional experience involving a myriad of partnerships between and among teachers and administrators, thousands of parents, and hundreds of community business and organizations.

**Author:** Yost, A.

**Year Published:** 1999

**Findings:** Ten principles for success were identified as a result of analyzing the results of this community-based school reform effort.

1. Set high expectations for everyone.
2. Design accurate performance indicators to hold everyone accountable for results.
3. Shrink the centralized bureaucracy and let schools make more decisions.
4. Provide intensive and sustained professional development to all staff.
5. Make sure all students are ready for school.
6. Provide students with the community supports and services they need to succeed in school.
7. Provide up-to-date technology and instructional materials.

## Don't Run with the Scissors: Young Children's Knowledge of Home Safety Rules

**Description:** The study examined 4- to 6-year-old children's memory of their parents' home safety rules and to identify predictors of children's home injuries. In an interview, parents listed their specific home safety rules and rated their child's compliance with each rule. They also explained why they did not have certain rules. The parents described maternal supervision and the frequency of their child's injuries.

**Authors:** Morrongiello, B.A., Midgett, C., and Shields, R.

**Year Published:** 2001

**Findings:** Children spontaneously recalled 50% of their parents' home safety rules. Prompting leads to their remembering 40% more of the rules. However knowledge of these rules did not reduce injuries. The best predictors of children's home injuries were the children's compliance with the home safety rules and the extent of parental supervision. In order to reduce injuries interventions must go beyond safety knowledge to maintain consistent compliance and supervision.

## The Effects of Service-Learning on Middle School Students' Social Responsibility and Academic Success

**Description:** This study joins many others in reporting positive effects of service-learning, suggesting that youth, even junior high youth,

would do well as volunteer teachers or assistants in activities with preschool children and their parents. A large, racially and socio-economically diverse sample of students in grades 6 through 8 were enrolled in 3 middle schools. The students who participated in service-learning were compared for one year with students who did not participate in service-learning. The study focused on the students' social responsibility and academic success.

**Authors:** P. C. Scales, D. A. Blyth, T. H. Berkas, and J. C. Kielsmeier

**Year Published:** 2000

**Findings:** Those involved in service-learning maintained their concern for others' social welfare. Control students declined on those concerns. Service-learning students, especially girls, declined significantly less than did controls in their frequency of talking with their parents about school. Compared to other students, students with substantial hours of service-learning, a lot of reflection, and a high degree of motivation attributed to service learning, significantly increased their belief in the efficacy of their helping behaviors. They maintained their pursuit of better grades and their perception that school provided personal development opportunities. They decreased less in their commitment to class work. The results indicate that service learning can positively affect students' social responsibility and academic success.

### Evaluation of Food and Nutrition Programs with Low-income Audiences

**Description:** The Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program and Family Nutrition Program are designed to help low-income families improve the adequacy of their daily diets through increased knowledge and skills. This report describes the involvement of over 300 participants and 10 counties in the development and testing of the learning tools and evaluation of the EFNEP and FNP programs. It describes the participants and

their needs as well as uses the data from the learning tools to evaluate the effectiveness of the program and curriculum in meeting the needs of the low-income target population. It is also intended to help staff and the learning organization use the information to improve programs and maximize resources. Demographic data clearly indicate the majority of participants are low income and diverse as it relates to ethnicity, age, and family composition.

**Authors:** Bruce E. Haas, Lynn Himebauch and Gayle Coleman, MSU Extension Food, Nutrition and Health Programs

**Year Published:** 1997

**Findings:** Data from the pre- and post-assessments of participants' food and nutrition behaviors indicate the need for the programs and the program's impact. Significant differences were found in almost all of the goal areas of the learning tool, including food safety, budgeting, food preparation, planning, basic nutrition (food guide pyramid and eating breakfast), and using food labels. Participants reported high levels of satisfaction and helpfulness that focused around basic nutrition, food preparation, and food safety. Instructors reported high levels of effectiveness on the majority of the participants and rated the use of the curriculum high. Significant relationships were found between the learning tool, the participants' perspective of program satisfaction and helpfulness, and the instructors' assessment of both the effectiveness of the program and curriculum. Overall, the results of the evaluation indicate the programs make a difference in the lives of the participants through increased knowledge and skills that changed behaviors.

### Evaluation of Videotaped Delivery of Parent Immunization Education

**Description:** The objective of this research was to study the effect of an educational videotape, produced by Michigan State University, about polio vaccination and choices of schedules on parent knowledge and decision making. The methods used were prospective, randomized, non-blinded cohort study conducted in five pediatric offices (two

university-based practices, two HMO staff model offices, and a private practice) and a health department immunization clinic. Parents of two-month-olds were randomized to either videotape + Vaccine Information Statement (VIS) or VIS only, and completed questionnaires before and after the intervention. Mean scores of knowledge were compared using ANOVA or Kruskal-Wallis H test.

**Authors:** Denny R Martin, Ruth Ann Dunn, Abbigail J Schultz, Pamela E Shenouda: Michigan State University

**Year Published:** 1998

**Findings:** 287 parents/guardians participated: 143 in the videotape + VIS group and 144 in the VIS only group. The two groups had similar demographics and pre-test scores. Both interventions resulted in increased knowledge, however, the videotape + VIS group had significantly higher post-test scores ( $P < 0.001$ ). Fifty-three of 54 (98%) undecided parents who watched the videotape chose a schedule after the intervention compared with 40/47 (85%) of undecideds in the VIS only group ( $P = 0.02$ ). The sequential schedule was most often chosen after either intervention. The conclusion is therefore that a videotape on polio vaccination and choices of schedules was effective in increasing knowledge and facilitating decision making for parents/guardians across educational levels and race/ethnicities. As immunization schedules increase in complexity, videotaped information may make the offering of informed choice feasible and more readily adopted by practitioners.

## Family Violence: Improving Social Support and Social Networks

**Description:** This study examines the nature and quality of mothers' relationships with others, their perception of the supportiveness of these relationships, and other characteristics such as reciprocity in the relationships. The authors explore differences between similar mothers (all single with low incomes, but not all involved in the child welfare system) in terms of these characteristics.

The qualitative research utilizes repeated, open-ended interviews to obtain information on the ways that people around the parent (i.e., neighbors, mothers, and other family members) are involved in parenting. Three groups of women have been recruited from the Twin Cities area and outlying counties to participate in the study. The first represents women with a history of child neglect. The comparison group is made up of low-income, high-risk women in the community who are successfully parenting their children. The third group, recently added to the study, is comprised of women involved in child protection services who are themselves victims of domestic assault. The results of the research will be made available to all participating agencies and will be used to make recommendations for improving the design and delivery of social network interventions in general.

**Authors:** Sandra Beeman, Minnesota School of Social Work

**Year Published:** Ongoing: To be published by 2003

**Findings:** Child abuse, neglect, and others forms of family violence as a whole are believed to incur high costs to individuals, families, and communities when resources must be directed toward their prevention and intervention. One goal of this research is to more effectively integrate natural helpers into prevention and intervention programs, which could mitigate the need for more costly services such as intensive in-home services and foster care. Informal or natural sources of support to children and parents have the potential to prevent violence and ameliorate the negative effects of violence on children, thus allowing parents and children to develop into healthy, functioning citizens who contribute to society. The degree to which agents can positively impact communities overall will be determined to some extent by how much agents can improve the quality of life for individual families. Social service providers can also benefit from this project as we design better programs. The authors expect that this project, if successful, will likely serve as a model for similar projects around the U.S.

## Feeling Economic Distress

**Description:** This study examines how economic well-being is a factor in psychological health. A telephone survey of 366 individuals, 221 women and 145 men, was conducted in a metropolitan Southern state. Individuals were asked about their level of employment instability (having been or were currently laid off) and employment insecurity (the anticipation of keeping one's current job). If a second adult resided in the household, an attempt was made to gather this information from he or she also. If the second adult was not available or would not answer the questions, then the first respondent was asked about the likelihood of continued employment but not about level of job worry. The employment insecurity factor was derived from three questions that asked about the stability of the person's own job as well as all jobs within the company. Two other variables examined the level of economic well-being in the household. The first measure was economic deprivation or sufficiency. This measure was an objective measure of total household income. The second measure, perceived economic well-being, was a purely subjective measure. Finally, the authors examined a variety of psychological dependent variables that are suggested to be influenced by one's feeling of economic well-being. Those indicators include the individual's psychological distress, degree of self-affirmation, family accord, family conflict, and, if married, satisfaction with marriage.

**Authors:** Fox, G. L. and Chancey, D.

**Year Published:** 1998

**Findings:** The possibility of job insecurity will continue to be a factor in today's U. S. economy. That insecurity is found to be a factor in a variety of factors of one's psychological health. As noted in the study, men and women react differently to these fears. Women in the study appear to be more affected overall and specifically noted economic well-being and partner's job insecurity as having a large impact. For men, economic well-being also was important, as was the partner's actual job loss or job instability.

## Housing in Rural Community Vitality

**Description:** This ongoing project takes a macroscopic approach toward examining the relationship between housing and levels of rural community vitality, with "community" being defined as a county. The analysis compares information compiled from 1980 and 1990 census data. 2000 census data will be incorporated when the figures become available. Counties will be identified by high and low vitality. Comparisons will help researchers identify how housing influences those counties. Comparisons between regions, states, and counties will also be examined. Each cooperating researcher is also formulating summaries for use in their respective states. For example, findings will be adapted for Extension outreach, and be presented to policymakers at various levels.

**Authors:** Becky Yust - Design, Housing and Apparel  
Marilyn Bruin - Design, Housing and Apparel: University of Minnesota

**Year Published:** 2000

**Findings:** This project underscores the link between housing and economic development as an important indicator of quality of life in determining a community's overall vitality. The project will expand its focus, as researchers consider how communities with certain levels of vitality might interact with neighboring communities having complementary levels of housing vitality, thereby forming a larger interdependent community. By assessing the economic traits of communities with various levels of housing vitality, the authors hope to enable policymakers to develop strategies that draw on the optimal combination of economic and housing factors for greater overall community vitality. Complete results of this research are being published in the Journal of Housing and Society.

## Literacy and Community Development

**Description:** The Rural Literacy Initiative combined research with training and organizational development to address a variety of rural issues. Using a critical literacy framework, this participatory action research project focused on:

- The problems facing rural literacy programs;
- The linkage between literacy education and community empowerment;
- The training needs of volunteers and staff; and
- The relationship of world view to the philosophy and practice of community-based literacy education.

**Authors:** Douglas Capagrossi, D. Merrill Ewert, J. David Deshler, and Jennifer Greene

**Year Published:** 2001

### Findings:

**Learners generally lacked experience in formal group operations.** Nevertheless, they contributed effectively, accepted assignments, and assumed leadership roles within the group.

**Learners had little knowledge of, or experience with, community development.** This limited the scope of activities undertaken by the study groups. In both counties, however, the learners successfully gathered viable qualitative data and selected a project for the group.

**Learners were active group participants along with LVA staff and tutors.** While most, initially, assumed that the LVA coordinator would provide leadership to the group, the learners increasingly contributed to the work of these committees.