

“One telling criterion of the worth of a society—a criterion that stands the test of history—is the concern of one generation for the next. A nation’s child and family policy is the measure of that concern.”

--Brofenbrenner & Weiss



The Economics of Maine Families

The Importance of Family

Many people believe that children learn to read and write in kindergarten or first grade. But developing literacy skills begins at birth through everyday loving interactions—sharing books, telling stories, singing songs, talking to one another, or pointing out and naming objects. Even painting, drawing or picking up things serve a purpose. These activities help develop hand muscles and coordination—skills necessary for learning how to write.

Adults—parents, grandparent, neighbors and teachers—play a powerful role in preparing young children for future school success and in becoming self-confident and motivated learners.

What Maine Families Look Like

Currently, the median income of Maine families is \$41,647. 43% of children age 5 and younger in Maine live in poverty (Federal Poverty Level is \$20,450 for family of four)

- For single parents with one child, only 37% of jobs pay a livable wage.
- For Two parents (one earner) with one child, 30% of jobs pay a livable wage
- For single parents with two children, only 16% of jobs pay a livable wage.

Now let’s factor in that one of the greatest predictors of a child’s academic success is the

education of the mother. 38% of Maine’s young children have mothers with a high school diploma or less.

What This Means

Underdeveloped literacy skills can create enormous difficulties for adults, their children, and their families, including:

- Lower educational achievement for children as a result of reduced support from the parent;
- Restricted access to health care as a result of difficulty reading and comprehending printed information;
- Inadequate nutrition due to inability to read food labels and nutritional content;
- Increased periods of unemployment and reduced annual earnings due to low educational attainment.

What is in Place

Family Literacy Programs

Family literacy programs provide high quality education services to Maine’s poorest and most vulnerable families. Rather than separate interventions for adults and children, family literacy is a holistic program that embraces the whole family. Children of adults who participate in family literacy programs improve their grades and test scores, improve their reading skills,



and are less likely to drop out. This contributes to breaking the cycle of low literacy, high poverty, and unemployment that has often existed for generations.

See: <http://www.maine.gov/education/aded/dev/mefli/mefli2005.htm>

In Maine in FY 2006:

- 63% of children between birth and age 2 who received services in federally funded family literacy programs showed improvement in individual growth and development indicators on state approved assessments.
- 77% of the pre-school aged children demonstrated statistically significant improvement in receptive and expressive language on standardized tests.
- 91% of school aged children demonstrated progress of at least one grade level or its equivalent in reading or reading readiness.

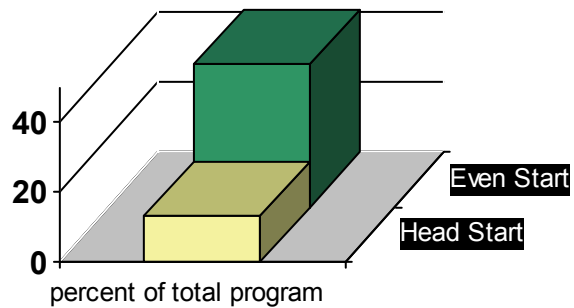
Maine Family Networks

The goal of **Maine Family Networks** is to encourage self-established networks of parents of infants and toddlers in a town or neighborhood, so that through their connections, parents and other caregivers can:

- Support each other through the joys and trials of parenting;
- Keep up to date on discoveries about how infants learn, remember, and develop;
- Share experiences and gain new parenting skills from each other; and
- Talk with other parents about the pros and cons of recommended best practices.

Further, parents can identify the strengths and needs of their community and expect, request and receive coordinated support from their primary health care office, local schools, and other community resources such as libraries, churches, and businesses. See: www.mainefamilynetworks.com

Families in Head Start and Even Start (Family Literacy Program) with Annual Incomes of Less Than \$6000



Maine Home Visiting Programs

The Maine Home Visiting Program is available universally to any teen parent and first time family throughout the state. An effort is made to enroll women before they have given birth to help assure proper prenatal care. The program provides home-based parent education and support services on a range of topics—from child health and nutrition to caregiver behavior—to improve outcomes for associated with healthy growth and development of infants and children.

Services are delivered by more than 80 home visitors affiliated with 15 community-based programs serving all 16 counties in Maine. Operating on a total budget of \$4.5 million, in



fiscal year 2007, the program served over 5,600 families and conducted more than 20,000 visits. The program is administered by the Maine Department of Health and Human Services. See: www.maineamilies.com

Examples of Successful Home Visitation Outcomes in 2007:

- 99.4% of enrolled children and 96% of caregivers had **access to a primary care provider** (significantly higher than the Healthy People 2010 goal of 85%)
- 98.5% of enrolled children were **up-to-date on their well-child checkups**
- 96% of enrolled children were **up-to-date on immunizations** at age two (compared to the median coverage of 78% in Maine for two year old children)
- 98% of enrolled children had **health insurance** (more than half through MaineCare)
- Enrolled families demonstrated significant improvements in **overall home safety** from enrollment to the most recent home visit (ranging from 12-30% points improvement using the home safety assessment categories)
- 14.8% of enrolled children were **identified with developmental delays**, and most (74%) are receiving early intervention services from home visiting partner agencies

Parent Education Programs

Though many supports are available to parents and caregivers when children enter public school, there is only sporadic offerings of parenting education currently available for the parent who is not mandated by child protective services. Parenting can be frustrating, and the skills of parenting are not often intuitive. Formalizing the provision of parenting education in Maine has the potential to serve all families and help families enhance their skills, prevent child abuse and neglect and foster positive childhood experiences. We recognize that the availability of support services to support families prenatally and with children through the critical first years of life is shown to be a wise social and financial investment.

A Family Story

Chris juggles supporting his girlfriend and mother of their 9-month old son, completing high school, gaining a technical education in the electrical field, working 25+ hours per week, acquiring skills as a new dad, and improving his reading skills with the help of his Literacy Volunteer tutor. His girlfriend is a stay-at-home mother, care-giver, and participates in the PATT (Parents are Teachers Too) home visiting program to help her learn more about the cognitive, physical, and verbal development and care of their son.

In June, Chris will graduate from high school – a significant accomplishment in its own right, considering his many challenges this year. His girlfriend along with their son attends all the literacy-based activities sponsored by Voices in Reading, on behalf of the family. Chris is currently looking for work in a similar field to his technical training and doesn't rule out post secondary education for his future. The entire family plans to continue working toward their individual and family literacy goals.