

PARENTS AS TEACHERS

Parents as Teachers Program

-Arianna Keil, Birth to 3 Professional Development Specialist

For nearly 25 years, the Parents as Teachers Home Visiting Program (PAT) has been working with families to validate and support their role as children's first and most important teachers. PAT is an international early childhood parent education and family support program that begins in the prenatal period and continues through age 5. Parents Plus, Inc. is the State Lead Office for PAT programs in Wisconsin.

PAT is offered in many communities across the State, including Appleton, Menasha, Oshkosh, Sheboygan, Fond du Lac, Red Cliff, Medford, Stevens Point, St. Croix Valley, Wausau, Viroqua, Eau Claire, and several sites in Racine, Madison and Milwaukee. Some communities, such as Sheboygan, offer PAT programming to all children and families, whereas other programs focus on high-risk populations or children within certain age ranges.

PAT programming consists of four main components: home visits, group meetings, developmental screening, and resource connection. Karen Apitz, PAT and Early Learning Coordinator, notes that each component is individualized to the child's and family's needs. "Home visits can occur as often as one time each week, or as infrequently as every two months," states Apitz. The Born to Learn Curriculum shapes the content of home visits, as well as group meetings of parents, their children, and early childhood professionals. "The Born to Learn Curriculum has a neuroscientific basis. It is translated into language that parents can understand," notes Apitz. Some of the curriculum has stand-alone elements for individual trainings.

Children enrolled in PAT programming receive regular screening of their hearing, vision and general development. The Home Observation and Measurement of the Environment (HOME) scale is used to assess family poverty status, dimensions of the home environment, and child cognitive and emotional development. Families of children with concerning screening results are referred to appropriate supports and services, including Birth to 3 Programs.

Community resource connection is the final element of PAT programming. "Parents as Teachers refers to this component as *Resource Network*," states Apitz. "Families are helped in accessing other needed community services that are beyond the scope of the Parents as Teachers Program. The Resource Network is [designed] to provide families [with] resources in their community such as the medical community, assistance community, educational community, and support groups. A parent educator works to build a trusting relationship with the families to give the parents information so they can make choices for the healthy development of their children, therefore empowering the parents." Families are connected with local library story hours, community play groups and Family Resource Centers, among others. This connection occurs for all PAT families, regardless of screening results.

For children determined eligible for Birth to 3 programming, the PAT Program qualifies as a Family Education Service outlined on the IFSP. PAT would also be useful for those families with children not determined eligible for Birth to 3 programming as a way to ensure ongoing support for these children and families. ☎

To learn more about PAT and find out if there is a program in your area, visit:

<http://www.parentspluswi.org/earlylearning.html>

To listen to the March 13, 2008 Birth to 3 Wisline teleconference on Parents as Teachers, go to:

<http://www.uwex.edu/ics/stream/waisman/BT3/index.htm>

