

**LIVINGSTON COUNTY FAMILY
FOCUS EVEN START
YEAR TWO EVALUATION**

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July 2001



*Research to drive informed decisions.
Expertise to create effective solutions.*

LIVINGSTON COUNTY FAMILY FOCUS EVEN START YEAR TWO EVALUATION

Prepared for:
Livingston Family Focus Even Start

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LIVINGSTON COUNTY FAMILY FOCUS

EVEN START

YEAR TWO EVALUATION

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SUMMARY

The Year One Local Evaluation report (June, 2000) for the Livingston County Family Focus Even Start provided a detailed overview of the program, a description of staffing and staff development in the first year, a description of the planned local evaluation of the program over the next four years, as well as preliminary evaluation results from Year One. This Year Two report provides a more limited overview of the program, and has more focus on the evaluation results from two years of program operation.

As of June 2000, the program served 38 families, and as of June 2001, the number of enrolled families served during Year Two had increased to 54. The rate of growth appears to be manageable for the program as they have had turnover of two out of four Family Educators this year.

The Even Start staff have put forth an impressive effort to align their early childhood educational activities with the NYS learning standards. This is a highlight of the progress made in Year Two. An important component of this alignment is the development of “literacy kits” that address specific objectives within each of the learning standards discussed in more detail in the body of this report.

The Year Two evaluation continues from Year One with the two primary components: a longitudinal assessment of the impact of

the program on its participants, and a process assessment that monitors the program's implementation and how well the program is meeting its goals and objectives. Both components are discussed in detail in the report.

While the Year One evaluation focused on the process assessment, the Year Two evaluation is able to provide more analysis of the longitudinal component of the evaluation.

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INTRODUCTION

The national Even Start Family Literacy program was first enacted in 1988 to provide intensive family-centered education programs that involve both parents and their children, ages birth through age 7. Even Start was designed to break the cycle of poverty and illiteracy by improving educational opportunities for low-income families.

The Livingston County Family Focus Even Start program received initial funding in September of 1999 from the New York State Department of Education. The program began to enroll families as of January 2000. In addition to an ongoing federal evaluation of Even Start, each local program is required to conduct an independent local evaluation.

The Year One Local Evaluation report (June, 2000) for the Livingston County Family Focus Even Start provided a detailed overview of the program, a description of staffing and staff development in the first year, a description of the planned local evaluation of the program over the next four years, as well as preliminary evaluation results from Year One. This Year Two report provides a more limited overview of the program, and has more focus on the evaluation results from two years of program operation.

The Even Start program functions as a partnership on a local level intended to provide family-centered education and intervention to improve literacy among parents and their children. The Livingston County Even Start program serves six school districts: Dansville, Geneseo, Keshequa, Livonia, Mt. Morris, and York, in partnership with Cornell Cooperative Extension. Other agencies provide in-kind services ranging from administrative support to services for families, to supplies.

STAFFING AND STAFF DEVELOPMENT

Current staff include six full-time personnel. In addition to the Coordinator, the staff include four Family Educators (called Family Visitors in Year One), and one Administrative Assistant.

Coordinator—The Coordinator oversees all day-to-day operations of the program. She is responsible for all budget documentation, staff development, program marketing, and for meeting all state and federal guidelines. She meets regularly with both her Advisory Board and her Board of Directors for input, advice, and guidance.

Family Educators—The Family Educators serve as the liaison between the families and the Even Start program. They visit families every week, document their progress, bring educational materials, and plan the next week's activities. In addition, the Educators refer families to various services to help with their individual needs.

Administrative Assistant—The Administrative Assistant is responsible for day-to-day administrative duties around the office. She maintains data on the families enrolled in the program, and provides general support to the Coordinator and the Family Educators.

Between June 2000 and May 2001, the Family Educators underwent intensive training from a variety of sources:

Family Development Training and Credential Program (FDC) — Two new Family Educators were hired in Year Two to replace departing Family Educators. The two new Family Educators attended 120 hours of classes and field advisement presented by Cornell Cooperative Extension.

Parents as Teachers training—This University of Missouri program included a 35 hour training program on how parents can be their child's primary teacher. All Family Educators attended.

Healthy Families, Healthy Communities—The Family Educators all attended this Cornell Cooperative Extension training.

One Family Educator attended a Family Literacy Implementation training session. Another Educator attended the NYS Even Start Conference with the Coordinator. Other training sessions included a speaker on adults with developmental disabilities, resiliency training, and training on using the digital camera for Even Start activities. In addition to extensive training, staff were also involved in developing policies and procedures, and helping the program to evolve as staff learned from ongoing operations.

PROGRAM OPERATION

As of June 2000, the program served 38 families, and as of June 2001, the number of enrolled families served throughout Year Two was 54. The total current caseload at the time of the evaluation interviews in May 2001 was 44. The rate of growth appears to be manageable for the Family Educators as they have had 2 staff replacements in the last year, and it is difficult for a new staff person to pick up large caseloads from their first day on the job. Further, families are not being turned away from the program for reasons other than failure to meet intake criteria.

Forms used in program operation

Referral form, Follow-up form

A number of forms are used at various stages in the Even Start program. While Family Educators feel that the number of forms continues to expand, and seems overwhelming, each form does appear to serve an important and specific purpose.

Families may be referred to Even Start from many sources, including schools, the Department of Social Services or other human service agencies, through self-referral, and others. When a referral is made, a referral form is completed with basic information about the family, including their education levels, income levels (if known by referral person), transportation needs, the number and ages of children in the family, and other information. Once the family has been contacted and Even Start Staff have determined their interest in and eligibility for participation, the Even Start Coordinator responds to the referral source with a Follow-Up form, which indicates the action that has been taken with the family.

Admission Criteria

Criteria for admission are straightforward, and while no set of criteria are perfect, we found general agreement that these criteria capture the most appropriate families for the time being, and they are being consistently applied. To qualify for the Family Focus Even Start program, families must meet the following criteria:

- Families must be considered “low-income,” as determined by WIC or free and reduced lunch guidelines;
- Family must have a child between the ages of birth to seven;
- Adults in the family must have one or more of the following indicators of low literacy levels:
 - No high school diploma,
 - Below a ninth grade reading level,
 - Limited English proficiency, or
 - Teen parent.

Index of Need assessment tool

The above criteria are assessed using an Index of Need assessment form, which was revised in Year Two. The Index of Need also helps the Family Educator identify other needs the family may have. A variety of indicators are scored including family income, educational history, and special needs. The higher the total points, the more likely a family is to be admitted. Out of a total of 49 points, most family members score near 25 points. (See Appendix A for a copy of all forms discussed in this section.)

Intake Form

If the family is eligible for Even Start based on the above criteria, the Intake Form is then administered. The Intake Form collects information about the family members, their phone number and address, income and education levels, and any health concerns they might have. It also addresses the family’s short and long-range goals, and the initial steps the family must take to reach these goals.

***Even Start Family
Literacy Agreement***

Once a family is admitted into the Even Start program, the parent and the assigned Family Educator both sign an Even Start Family Literacy Agreement. The agreement lists several commitments for both the participating family, and for the Family Educator, which are important components for success in Even Start.

Recommendation: The form still uses the term “Family Visitor” in some spots. Ensure consistency of the new term “Family Educator” on all forms.

***What’s Been
Happening Form***

Once the family is admitted and services are provided regularly, staff use a weekly “What’s Been Happening” form to record the family’s weekly activities. This form prompts the Family Educator to ask the family about activities since the last visit, including library visits, computer use, reading with the children, community activities, home activities, interaction with children’s teachers and schools, and time spent on adult education goals. This information is entered monthly into a computer database maintained at the Even Start office for tracking purposes.

***Even Start Family
Literacy Plan—Home
Visit***

A second form used on a weekly basis is the “Even Start Family Literacy Plan--Home Visit.” This form is used to plan the activities for the family for the coming week. Items on this form include the long range family goal, which remains the same from week to week, steps to reach each goal and concerns (in the family’s own words), activities the family will do and when, activities the Family Educator will do and when, materials left in the home by the Family Educator for the week, and progress and obstacles (in the family’s own words). The form also categorizes goals into four areas: parenting education, interactive literacy, early childhood, and parent literacy, and records the activities and outcomes over time in each area.

***Transitions for target
adult and target child***

Finally, a set of forms is available to record transitions for the target adult and target child in each family. In Year One, these forms were not used extensively because such transitions take time to occur. In Year Two, the families were more likely to experience a transition, but the Family Educators were not using the forms as much as they could. Transitions of interest for children include entry into preschool/daycare, entry into school, and exit as the family target child. The form prompts the Family Educator to

discuss with the family any critical issues involved in the given transition, what type of action might be needed, steps to take to implement the action, and when to start and finish such steps. Similarly, a transition form for adults records upcoming transitions in or out of vocational training, educational instruction, and employment. Critical issues might include childcare, transportation, housekeeping, financial issues, family environment, food/meal preparation, laundry, medical issues, program preparation, self-preparation, recreation or social needs, and others.

Recommendation: The Family Educators should make a more concerted effort to complete the transition forms in Year Three, for all participating family members.

Teacher/Even Start Communication

Other Livingston Even Start forms include a Teacher/Even Start Communication form, given by the Family Educator to the teachers in participating childrens' classrooms. This form is used to inform the teacher of the role of Even Start in one or more of their students' lives, and to encourage contact and communication between the teachers and the Family Educator.

Publicity Consent form

Participating families are also asked to sign a consent form for videotape/photographs/written/verbal quotes to be used for public display or knowledge in newspapers, published reports, and other public forums. One family was not willing to sign the consent form. When pictures or other visual images of this family are taken, and Even Start wishes to use the pictures, they clear this with the family ahead of time to ensure the family is comfortable sharing the image publicly.

New York State Learning Standards

The New York State Department of Education has developed a set of learning standards in seven distinct areas. Specific objectives exist for different grade levels in each of the following areas.

- English/Language Arts;
- Math, Science, and Technology;

- The Arts;
- Social Studies;
- Language other than English;
- Health, Physical Education, Home Economics; and
- Career Development and Occupational Studies.

The Even Start staff have put forth an impressive effort to align their early childhood educational activities with the NYS learning standards. An important component of this alignment is the development of “literacy kits” that address specific objectives within each of the learning standards listed above.

Literacy kits Based on Learning Standards

Livingston Even Start staff have developed a substantial number of “kits” in the second year of operation. Each kit addresses a specific issue, such as relationships, math concepts, letter recognition, addressing changes, etc. For each kit, the NYS Learning Standard(s) addressed as well as the Developmental Assets addressed are listed at the top of a Kit Summary Sheet. The Summary Sheet also lists the book(s) to be used with the kit, the materials in the kit that are used in the related activities, and the types of activities in the kit that address interactive literacy, early childhood, parenting education, and parent literacy.

The standards were added to the literacy plans in the Fall of 2000. In addition, “Assets” addressed by the literacy plans were added to the plans in the Spring of 2001. Asset development is a strengths-based, positive approach to developing healthy children and youth. The asset development approach identifies assets children need to live healthy lives, be successful in school, be prepared for future challenges, and resist risk behaviors such as drug use and premature sexual activity. The learning standards and asset development provide a more formal structure to the lesson plans brought to participants’ homes.

The kits are expanding substantially in number. Educators appear to have their “favorite” kits to use. One Educator suggested that

the usefulness of the kits and the applicability of the kits to different types of families needs to be better defined.

Recommendation: Better define the best use of each Literacy kit in terms of the type of family or the age of the children that would most benefit.

YEAR TWO EVALUATION RESULTS

Even Start programs nationwide are being evaluated to help determine whether they impact National Education Goals. The U.S. Department of Education is finishing the Third National Evaluation of Even Start, which ran from the 1997-1998 program year through the 2000-2001 program year. This third evaluation generated the Even Start Performance Information Reporting System (ESPIRS) as the primary data collection instrument.

While the national evaluation is geared towards tracking trends over time and providing performance information, the local evaluation has traditionally been designed to help improve services and help demonstrate positive results to appropriate stakeholders (Department of Education, 1998). As such, the local evaluations are designed to meet the needs and interests of the local partners. The Livingston County Even Start local evaluation is based on the following parameters:

- Evaluation is ongoing, not isolated;
- Evaluation must involve all stakeholders, including program participants;
- Building capacity to conduct self-evaluation is an important long-term goal;
- Evaluation should form the cornerstone of future planning;
- Evaluation should account for successes as well as problems;

- Evaluative results should be reported and shared;
- Evaluation should be seen in context of community, policy, and collaboration;
- Short-term indicators of long-term impacts must be a part of understanding evaluation;
- Evaluation should spark continuous improvement;
- Evaluation must minimally examine issues of access, availability, and quality of service;
- Evaluation will be conducted annually, and will take both formal analytical and anecdotal forms.

Each of the above components is incorporated into the local evaluation of the Livingston County Even Start program. The Evaluation is underway for the second year of a four-year process. The evaluation has two primary components: a longitudinal assessment of the impact of the program on its participants, and a process assessment that monitors the program's implementation and how well the program is meeting its goals and objectives. Each of these components has been implemented and will continue through the tenure of the four-year grant period.

Since this is the second year of operation, we are able to begin to evaluate effects from Even Start in the longitudinal assessment.

Longitudinal Assessment of Program Impact

Surveys

In order to assess the impact of the Family Focus Even Start program, it is necessary to track participating parents and children over time.

Three surveys were developed to collect data anonymously from the four Family Educators, and from the 44 families currently enrolled in Even Start as of May 2001. The first survey asked Educators about their own perceptions of the Family Focus program, its start-up process, and its impact, and is discussed later in the Process Assessment section. The second and third surveys asked the families and Family Educators, respectively, to address the progress made by each family, and are discussed in this

section. Copies of the survey instruments can be found in Appendix B.

***Family perception
versus Family
Educator perception.***

Each actively enrolled Even Start family was asked to complete a survey regarding their experience thus far with the program. Of the 44 currently enrolled families, 34 completed the survey, compared to 21 in Year One. Similarly, the Family Educators were asked to complete a separate survey for each family they visit. While 40 surveys were completed by Educators, a total of 33 surveys were matched to family surveys, so these 33 are included in the matched analysis. In some cases a family did not answer a question, or an Educator did not answer a question, so the sample size for each individual question ranges from 18 to 33.

The two surveys were nearly identical in the questions asked. The goal of these surveys was to determine whether progress is being made while in the Even Start program, and whether the families and Educators have similar perceptions of the progress the families are making. While the surveys were anonymous, a unique identifying number was assigned to each survey so that the family survey and the Educator survey for that family could be matched in the analysis process.

All questions were answered on a scale of 1 to 5. In these two surveys, a score of 5 is the most desirable response for each question. Please see Appendix C for the tabulated survey results. This report discusses the results of the two related surveys below. Areas of concern include those in which the family or the Family Educator indicate a “below average” score of 1 or 2. In addition, questions in which a family and the corresponding Educator provided answers that differed by more than two points raise a red flag and will be discussed (e.g., the family answers a 5, while the Educator scores the same family as a 2 or lower on the same question, or vice versa).

***Do you understand
what Even Start is
about?***

The families self-report that they have a very good understanding of Even Start. Of the 32 sample observations, 23 families said they “understand well (5)” what Even Start is about. Only two responded with a value of 2, and no families responded with a 1. The Educators have a slightly less positive perspective on whether the families understand the program, but none of the Educators

gave a family a value of 1, and only one provided a value of 2. There are two observations in which the family rated itself with a value of 2 or 3, and the corresponding Educator rated the family with a 5. While this is a low number of mismatches, the Educators should double check that the families understand the program as well as the Educators perceive the families to understand.

Recommendation: Educators should confirm that the families understand what Even Start is about.

Does your family participate regularly and enthusiastically?

All of the families feel that they participate at least somewhat, (n=6) or more regularly (n=27) in the Even Start program. Educators feel similarly, although in two cases the Educators believed the family participates less than somewhat. There is one case in which a family rated itself with a high score of 5, while the corresponding Educator rated the family with a 2. However, in most cases the family and Educator scores were very similar.

Has your family defined specific goals?

All of the families indicated that they have begun to identify, or have identified their specific goals in Even Start. Similarly, the Educators indicate that all families have at least begun to identify goals, except for one family, which was given a value of 2. Families and their Educators were in general agreement on their ratings for this question.

Do you know what your goals are under Even Start?

While defining goals is a first step, it is equally important for a family to continue to be aware of their goals over time. Thirty of the 33 matched respondent families scored themselves with a 4 or 5 on this question, and the remaining three scored with a 3. Similarly, most of the Educators scored families with a 4 or 5, with only one rating a family with a score of 2.

How much progress have you made towards your goals?

Families and Educators were somewhat less positive about the families' progress towards reaching their defined goals. Of the 33 matched respondent families, 14 rated themselves with a 2 or 3, while the remaining 19 rated themselves with a 4 or 5. Educators were even less positive. Out of the 33, 8 families were given a rating of 1 or 2 by their educators (little or no progress), and an additional 6 families were rated with a value of 3. In one case a family rated itself with a 5, while the Educator rated the family with a 1.

***How much progress
have you made
towards Goal 1?
Goal 2?***

Recommendation: If the Educators feel that the families are not making progress, this may need to be better communicated to the families, or the goals may need to be reviewed and /or changed.

For this question, the Educators were asked to write in specific goals that the family is working on, such as GED, parenting skills, drivers' license, etc. For Goal 1, responses were similar to the previous question on progress overall, although there were two cases where the family scored themselves with a 4 or 5 (indicating substantial progress), while the Educator scored them with a 1 (no progress). The question about Goal 2 elicited some interesting results. For instance, while five of the families indicated that they had completed Goal 2, only one of the Educators agreed with this response. Similarly, in three cases the family self-rated themselves with a 5, while the Educator rated the family with a 2 or 3.

Recommendation: The Educators should ensure that they communicate more regularly with the families about the level of progress towards specific, defined goals, and discuss expectations of both parties more clearly. Using the transition forms will help in this process.

***Have things gotten
worse, stayed the
same, or gotten better
since you started Even
Start?***

Overall, families appear to believe that things have gotten better for them since they entered Even Start (29 of the 32 matched respondents for this question). Two of the families rated themselves with a 2, but none of the families gave themselves a 1. The Family Educators appear at a slightly lower level to think families have overall gotten better (22 of 32) or at least stayed the same (7). But in three families, the Educators give a rating of a 1 or 2 (indicating a decline since entering a program). In two cases a family rated themselves with a score of 5 (gotten better) while the Educator rated the family with a 1 or 2.

Recommendation: Educators may want to consider more detailed discussion with families, at least monthly, regarding what has been happening with the family. Again, using the transition forms will help in this process.

Are you aware there are services available to you in the community?

Families seem reasonably well aware that services exist, although two families rated their awareness with a 1 or 2, and an additional 11 families rated themselves with a 3. Educators were more likely than the families themselves to think that the families knew about services. In only three cases did the Educators rate a family's awareness as a 3 or lower. This indicates some level of difference of opinion between families and the Educators' perceptions of families' awareness of services. Educators should consider increased communication with families regarding awareness of services available in the community.

Recommendation: Since families may not be willing to admit they are unaware of services, the Educators must ensure they provide information about services on a regular basis.

Do you know how to access services in your community?

Responses to this question were nearly identical to those regarding the previous question on the level of awareness of services. However, in one instance a Family Educator rated a family with a 5, while the family gave themselves a 1, indicating a major difference in perception. Again, the results indicate that Educators should increase communication with families surrounding available services and the methods of access.

How has your awareness of services changed since Even Start?

Of the 33 matched surveys, 7 families feel their awareness of services has stayed the same, while the remainder feel they are more aware of services since becoming involved in Even Start. Similarly, the Educators gave all the families a rating of 3 or higher on this question. Families and Educators were generally in agreement on this question.

Has Even Start helped you understand how to access services?

Two families indicated that Even Start has not helped them to understand how to access services, while in both cases the Educators indicated that Even Start has helped somewhat (score of 3). The remainder of the families scored themselves as a 3 or higher on this question.

Recommendation: Family Educators should be sure that families feel they are learning from Even Start how to access services.

Are you less or more comfortable with your child's teacher since becoming involved in Even Start?

Many of the families do not have a school-aged child, so there are only 18 matched respondents to this question. Of the 18, 5 families indicated that they are about the same in their level of comfort with their child's teacher, while the remainder are more comfortable since becoming involved with Even Start. Educators' perceptions matched the families' perceptions very closely on this question.

Are you less or more involved with your children's schoolwork?

Of the 19 matched respondents to this question, 4 families feel they are at the same level of involvement since joining Even Start, while the remainder are more involved in their child's schoolwork. These responses match the Educators' responses quite closely.

Case Studies

While we have analyzed a variety of data from the interviews, surveys, and quantitative data collected during the first two years of Even Start, we also believe it is useful to conduct more in-depth case studies with a selected number of families participating in the program. The case studies give us a more thorough understanding of the program and the families' perceptions of the process. Working with Family Educators, we re-interviewed the two families interviewed last year, and we added a third family.

Family 1

"Julie" is a mom with three children, ages 6, 5, and 16 months. Julie was interviewed last year for the evaluation, so she has been involved with Even Start for over a year. Julie has a very positive impression of Even Start. She feels the program has evolved nicely over the last year, to a point where the paper work is much easier, and the Family Educator is very fast at determining what resources the family needs to progress.

Mom reads to daughters more often.

Julie feels that as a result of Even Start she reads to her daughters much more than she did before. In particular, she finds that she points out words to the children as she reads, and encourages them to try to read themselves. Julie has also learned that she is the children's primary teacher, and she has learned to use daily activities as opportunities for learning. With the 16 month old, Julie finds that she talks to the child much more than she did with her other girls.

Julie reports that her oldest daughter now wants to read more than she wants to watch television, which is a big turnaround. The girls also love to work on crafts, and Julie feels that this is because of the focus on activities from Even Start.

Daughter is in Head Start as a result of information from Family Educator.

The middle daughter is in a Head Start classroom. The family learned about Head Start from the Even Start Family Educator.

One of Julie's primary goals last year was to complete her GED. She has not yet achieved this goal, but was planning to take a practice GED on the day of the evaluation interview. She then hopes to take the actual GED exam in about two months.

Julie has some frustrations with her GED teacher. The teacher seems to continuously reschedule the GED for Julie, while Julie would prefer to take the test and then re-test on the sections she fails, if any. When pressed, Julie wondered if the Even Start Family Educator could intercede with the GED teacher on this issue.

Family 2

"Cathy" is a single mom with mild mental retardation. She has a 10 month old daughter. She recently divorced and moved from an urban area to a more rural area. Because of this move, and the fact that she does not drive, Cathy feels very isolated and bored. She stays at home full-time to care for her daughter.

Cathy has only been with Even Start for a month or so, and is our new family addition to the evaluation for Year Two.

Cathy's goals through Even Start are to complete her GED and to obtain her driver's permit, and ultimately a license. Cathy reports that she tried for seven years to get her GED, and that she likes math and spelling but that reading is difficult for her.

Even Start makes this Mom feel she is a better parent.

Cathy believes that Even Start helps her to be a better parent. She reads to her daughter, and has learned to encourage her daughter to problem-solve using blocks and other games. Cathy also believes that Even Start is helping her with literacy, because the Family Educator brings her reading materials.

Cathy could not think of any other services she has become involved with as a result of Even Start. She also could not think of anything she would like to change with Even Start.

Family 3

“Heather” is a single mom with three children, none of whom reside with her. When Heather was interviewed last year as part of the evaluation, she had her two youngest children living with her. In the last year one child went to live with her father and the youngest child was placed in foster care. The third child, who lived with his grandmother in Year One, remains with the grandmother.

One of Heather’s goals through Even Start is to complete her GED. She recently started the process again, and finds the coursework very difficult. However, she likes the program because it gets her out of the house once a week.

Her second goal is to find employment. She indicated that she is working with VESID to find a job.¹ She is currently going through the testing and assessment process and is waiting to hear back from VESID on possible job training opportunities.

Heather would also like to work on learning to drive. This was one of her goals last year. It’s a lower priority for her now since she cannot afford to pursue a license.

In the last year Heather has seen Even Start move towards more group activities with all the families. She also says she enjoyed Even Start more when she had the children living with her because she feels Even Start is more geared towards families than towards her as an individual.

When the children were living with her, Heather thinks that Even Start helped by teaching her age-appropriate activities, punishments, etc. She learned how to play games with them in an educational manner, learned how to change their focus if they

¹ Even Start staff indicated that Heather’s work with VESID is due primarily to mental health issues.

were doing something inappropriate or dangerous, and learned how to handle two children at once.

At the time of the interview, Heather was trying to determine if she could locate some less expensive housing. With the children no longer residing with her, she has lost some of her public assistance benefits. She would like to move to be closer to one of her children.

As an example of how Even Start has helped Heather, she described a time when she ran out of food because she isn't getting as many food stamps as she used to get. The Even Start Family Educator helped Heather to get some food.

***New Performance
Indicator
Requirements***

With the end of Year Two drawing to a close, several families have been involved in Even Start long enough to take pre-tests and post-tests on important data indicators, which measure performance on literacy criteria. Even Start staff have collected the necessary data for the evaluation of the following performance indicators, and provided CGR with the final tallies of the proportion of their participants who passed each indicator.

The four performance indicators for *adults* are as follows:

1. 30 percent of all adults who have completed a 100-hour block of adult education and who pre-tested below a score of 8.9, on the TABE (math or reading), will demonstrate a one grade level gain as measured by the TABE (math or reading).²
2. 33 percent of all adults who have completed a 100-hour block of ESL and who pre-tested below level VI on the NYSPLACE will demonstrate a one level gain as measured by the NYSPLACE.³

² The TABE is a standardized test used to measure academic achievement in reading and mathematics (NYS Even Start Literacy Performance Indicators Guide, 2000).

³ The NYSPLACE Test is an ESOL placement test for adult and continuing education programs (NYS Even Start Literacy Performance Indicators Guide, 2000).

3. 50 percent of participating Even Start adults who have a goal of High School Diploma or equivalent and who score 9.0 and above in reading and math on the TABE, will earn a high school diploma or equivalent during the program year.
4. 25 percent of Even Start participants who have this goal will enter into post-secondary education, job training or re-training, non-subsidized employment, or the military, or obtain career advancement during the program year.

The four performance indicators for *children* involved in Even Start are auditory and expressive indicators, attendance at school, being promoted to the next grade level on schedule, and reading at the appropriate grade level.

5. 50 percent of all Even Start children age 12 months to 5 years old who score at the 50th percentile or below on either the auditory comprehension or expressive communication will increase their percentile rank on auditory comprehension and expressive communication as measured by the PreSchool Language Scale (PLS-3) after one year of participation.⁴
6. 75 percent of all Even Start children in public school pre-K through grade 3 will have attended school at the same or better rate as the building attendance rate.
7. 90 percent of all participating Even Start children who are enrolled in Even Start by November 1 and who attend school, pre-K through grade 3, will be promoted to the next grade as reported by the child's school district.
8. 50 percent of children, who are enrolled in Even Start by November 1 and who are in school grades 1 through 3, will read on grade level or above as reported by the child's school district.

⁴ The PLS-3 is designed to assess young children's auditory comprehension and expressive communication ability (NYS E.S. Family Literacy Performance Indicators Guide, 2000).

Of the 58 adults enrolled in Livingston Even Start over the course of Year Two, not all were eligible for evaluation on the four adult indicators. For example, not all the adults have set a goal of employment or post-secondary education, so they would not be included in the evaluation of Performance Indicator 4. In other words, different numbers of adults are included in each indicator, because different “slices” of the adults being served by Even Start fall under the appropriate criteria for each indicator. The number of adults in each slice for the four adult Performance Indicators ranged from zero to a maximum of 17 (see Table 1 below).

Indicator 1: Of the 11 adults who had initial scores below 8.9 in reading or math on the TABE at the start of Year Two, and who had 100 hours of adult education during the year, 64% increased by one grade level based on their TABE score at the end of Year Two. The target percentage for this indicator is 30%, so Livingston Even Start surpassed the target. *Nonetheless, the program must place more focus on obtaining consistent TABE scores so that this indicator can be more fully evaluated in Year 3.* Not all adults were tested at the same time. The Even Start Coordinator has already begun to take steps towards more consistent TABE testing; she has proposed TABE group sessions. In addition, the Coordinator has suggested TABE testing in home visits by the Genesee Valley BOCES Adult Education program.

Recommendation: The Livingston Even Start Coordinator should continue to pursue improved avenues for consistent TABE testing in Year 3.

Indicator 2: The program has been unable to serve non-English speakers in the past year, after losing a bilingual Family Educator at the end of Year One. Therefore, there are no adults on which to assess Indicator 2. The program is moving towards incorporating more non-English speaking families. A new English class is starting in the Genesee area. They will all be tested with the NYSPLACE assessment tool.

Recommendation: Continue to reach out to the Hispanic population to ensure that a language barrier does not lead to inaccessibility of Even Start for this population.

Indicator 3: Of the 7 adults who had set a goal of achieving a GED or HS diploma, and who had tested at a 9.0 or higher on the TABE at the start of the year, 4 accomplished the goal, for a rate of 57%. This is higher than the 50% target goal. While the rate seems good, this is still a very small number of adults accomplishing this important goal. Further, all four adults who accomplished this goal were younger parents who achieved their HS diploma. No adults have completed their GED, although several adults were scheduled to take the GED test in July or October. In addition, because the GED test is changing substantially in content in the year 2002, many individuals are trying to complete the GED in 2001, and there has been a shortage of seats at the testing sites.

Parent literacy and adult education has been acknowledged by all stakeholders as an area in which Livingston Even Start needs to place more emphasis in Year Three.

Recommendation: The Advisory Board should explore how to make the GED programs more accessible to the Even Start adults.

Indicator 4: Of the 17 adults who set a goal of employment, additional schooling, etc., 82% achieved the goal, which is much higher than the target rate of 25%. However, most of these adults are now in low-paying jobs, many without benefits, and the primary reason they set employment as a goal is because they will reach the five year lifetime maximum for public assistance in December of 2001. Livingston Even Start continues to provide support to these adults to encourage additional educational goals, while working around their employment demands.

Recommendation: The Advisory Board and Even Start staff might explore new approaches to encouraging educational progress for adults who are in low-paying, low-prospect jobs.

Of the 97 children enrolled in Livingston Even Start at the end of Year Two, not all were eligible for evaluation on the four indicators. For example, indicator 5 is only for children ages 12 months to 5 years. Further, none of the indicators are used on children under one year of age. The number of children eligible

for evaluation on each indicator ranged from 11 to 24 (see Table 1 below).

Indicator 5: This indicator has proven to be a challenge, because the Family Educators are not adequately trained to conduct diagnostic assessments of children based on the PLS-3 tool. As a result, scoring of the assessments from the start of the year were not done by a qualified person until several months after the assessments were done, and planning based on the results was substantially delayed. Further, assessments at the end of the year were not always valid because in some cases the children were non-cooperative. Of the 11 children who were assessed at the start and end of Year Two, 5 improved their rank, or 45%, which is slightly lower than the target rate of 50%.

Livingston Even Start plans to contract with a Speech Therapist familiar with the PLS-3 tool, who will accompany Family Educators on home visits to administer the tool. In the future, all children will be assessed at enrollment, and annually thereafter.

Indicator 6: Of the 24 children ages pre-K to 3rd grade, 22 attended school at a rate equal to or higher than their school building's average (92%). This is much higher than the target rate of 75%. Even Start plans to emphasize the importance of attendance in group meetings on curriculum plans. Discussion will include acceptable reasons for absence, barriers to attendance, and procedures parents should follow when absences are unavoidable.

Recommendation: Family Educators should emphasize the importance of attendance in individual meetings with parents. Educators could ask the parents if their school-aged children have missed any days each week, and explore the reasons for such absences.

Indicator 7: The target goal for the percentage of children to be promoted to the next grade level is 90%. Of all 24 school-aged children, 22 will be promoted next year, or 92%, which exceeds the program goal of 90%. The two children who will not be promoted have been identified as having special needs, and will be in support programs next year.

Indicator 8: The target goal for children grades 1 through 3 who read at grade level is 50%. Among the 18 Livingston Even Start children in grades 1 through 3, 15 read on grade level, or 83%.

Recommendation: As the Family Educators spend more time in the schools, they should be able to incorporate more reading-level appropriate literacy materials into their home curriculum plans.

Even Start seems to recognize the steps it needs to take to collect appropriate data on indicators, and to make changes in the program based on the indicator results.

Table 1: Results on New York State Even Start Family Literacy Performance Indicators

	Total Evaluated on Indicator	Total passing	Livingston passing rate	<i>Statewide passing goal</i>
Adult Indicators (total adults served in Year Two = 58)				
1. TABE score increases by one grade level	11	7	64%	30%
2. NYSPLACE score increases by one grade level	0	0	NA	33%
3. Attain HS Diploma or equivalent	7	4	57%	50%
4. Meet goal of post-secondary education, job training, employment, military	17	14	82%	25%
Children Indicators (total children served in Year Two= 97)				
5. Children at or below 50th percentile on auditory/expressive communication will increase their rank on PSL-3	11	5	45%	50%
6. Children in pre-K through grade 3 will have average or better attendance	24	13	54%	75%
7. Children will be promoted to next grade level on time	24	22	92%	90%
8. Children will read on or above grade level	18	15	83%	50%

Process Assessment

This component of the evaluation focuses on the program's implementation, its evolution over time, and how well it does in meeting and remaining true to its stated goals and objectives. Information gathered in this process is shared with the Family Focus staff so they may consider the information as part of a continuous improvement process. A process evaluation can help managers assess the start-up of a new program, and assess both ongoing program strengths and problem areas that develop over time. In a program like Even Start, program managers are interested in such issues as whether they are getting the right type of referrals, whether schools understand what is expected of them, whether the Family Educators are comfortable with their role, and other indicators. CGR conducted surveys and interviews to elicit this information.

Family Educator Surveys

The four Family Educators each filled out a survey regarding their perceptions of Even Start overall, their experience with barriers or problems, and their perceptions of the training they have received.

Tables 2 through 4 below show the Family Educators' responses both from the Year One survey as well as the Year Two survey. One question about the initial start-up process was dropped in Year Two, while three new questions were added.

All four Educators feel that the Even Start program is functioning very smoothly or extremely smoothly overall. This response is similar to the response in Year One. Further, all of the Educators feel that the program has high/much value or impact overall.

When asked how well the referred families match Even Start admission criteria, three of the Educators stated that most match well, while one believes that many match well. Again, these results are similar to the results from the Year One survey.

*Family Educators
appear to have
increasingly positive
overall impressions of
Even Start*

Overall, in each of the questions discussed above, the results show slight improvements from Year One to Year Two in the total number of Educators who respond to the top, or most desirable response.

Table 2: Family Educator Perceptions of Even Start

	Year 1*	Year 2
How well was start-up process organized?		
Not well organized	0	NA
Fair organization	0	NA
Somewhat organized	0	NA
Well organized	2	NA
Very well organized	2	NA
No answer	1	NA
How smoothly does program seem to be functioning overall?		
Not very smoothly	0	0
Less than somewhat smoothly	0	0
Somewhat smoothly	0	0
Very smoothly	4	2
Extremely smoothly	1	2
What is your perception of overall value/impact of program?		
No value or impact	0	0
Small amount of value or impact	0	0
Some value or impact	0	0
High Value or impact	3	1
Much value or impact	2	3
How well do the referred families match the Even Start program criteria?		
Very few match well	0	0
Some match well	0	0
About half match well	0	0
Many match well	3	1
Most match well	2	3

*In Year One, the Administrative Assistant was asked to complete a survey as well.

Table 3 shows the Educators' perceptions of barriers or problems they experience on the job. While in Year One, all four Family Educators said they experience "occasional" barriers or problems, the answers were more diverse in Year Two. In addition to two Educators who said they have occasional problems, one Educator has few problems, while one has more than occasional problems.

Family Educators are much less likely to experience problems with school representatives in Year Two than they were in Year One. Three of the Educators said they experience no barriers or

problems in Year Two, while one Educator reported experiencing some barriers or problems with school representatives.

Educators have fewer problems with school representatives and service agency representatives in Year Two as compared to Year One.

Working with the service agency representatives is also mixed. While two of the Educators said they experience no problems, one experiences few and one experiences occasional problems. Nonetheless, the Educators overall appear to be having fewer problems with both school representatives and service agency representatives in Year Two as compared to Year One.

When asked overall if the Educators have fewer or more problems this year as compared to Year One (or compared to when they first started at Even Start), three of the Educators responded that they have fewer problems, and one responded that she has slightly fewer problems. None of the Educators stated that the level of problems has stayed the same or increased.

Table 3: Family Educator Perceptions of Barriers or Problems

	Year 1	Year 2
Do you experience barriers/problems in working with assigned families?		
No barriers or problems	0	0
Few barriers or problems	0	1
Occasional barriers or problems	4	2
Some barriers or problems	0	1
Frequent barriers or problems	0	0
Do you experience barriers/problems in working with school representatives?		
No barriers or problems	0	3
Few barriers or problems	2	0
Occasional barriers or problems	2	0
Some barriers or problems	0	1
Frequent barriers or problems	0	0
Do you experience barriers/problems in working with service agency reps.?		
No barriers or problems	0	2
Few barriers or problems	2	1
Occasional barriers or problems	2	1
Some barriers or problems	0	0
Frequent barriers or problems	0	0
Do you experience more or fewer problems or barriers now than you did during Year One (or when you first started at Even Start) with families, school representatives, and agency representatives?		
Fewer barriers or problems	NA	3
Slightly fewer barriers or problems	NA	1
About the same barriers or problems	NA	0
Slightly more barriers or problems	NA	0
Many more barriers or problems	NA	0

Table 4 shows the Family Educators' perceptions of their training experiences with Even Start. All four Educators in Year Two indicated that the individuals who present during their various training sessions have a high level of knowledge and experience on the training topic. Further, all four Educators feel that the training activities continue to build on their own knowledge and skills. These responses are similar to those in Year One.

When asked if staff development is adequate for their needs, three of the Educators feel it is very adequate or more than somewhat adequate, while one Educator answered with a middle score of

somewhat adequate. Similarly, while three of the Educators feel that the staff development is very timely, one Educator feels that the training is only somewhat timely. Nonetheless, the responses regarding timeliness are an improvement over the Year One responses.

Two new questions were asked in Year Two regarding the need for training and level of complexity of training in Year Two. Three Educators indicate that the training is too complex, while one Educator feels it has about the right level of complexity. While two Educators feel that the need for training has dropped off somewhat, one Educator feels the need has dropped off only slightly, while the fourth feels that the need has not dropped off. Since these surveys were anonymous, we cannot determine if those Educators who feel the need for training has dropped off are the Educators who have the longest tenure at Even Start.

Recommendation: with 3 out of 4 Educators stating that the need for training has dropped off, but with 3 of 4 also stating that the training is too complex, the Coordinator may need to discuss more openly with Educators the type of training they feel is necessary.

Table 4: Family Educator Perceptions of Training

	Year 1	Year 2
Do individuals who present during training have adequate knowledge and experience?		
No knowledge	0	0
Little knowledge	0	0
Average knowledge	0	0
More than average knowledge	1	0
Much knowledge	3	4
Do staff development training activities build on your knowledge and skills?		
Do not build on skills	0	0
Build a little bit	0	0
Build somewhat	0	0
Build a good amount	1	2
Build greatly	3	2
Do you feel staff development is adequate for your needs?		
Not adequate	0	0
Slightly adequate	0	0
Somewhat adequate	1	1
More than somewhat adequate	0	2
Very adequate	3	1
Do you feel that staff development is timely? (Occurs regularly, when you need it)		
Not at all timely	0	0
Slightly timely	0	0
Somewhat timely	3	1
Quite timely	0	0
Very timely	1	3
Has training maintained the right level of complexity?		
Not complex enough	NA	0
A little bit complex	NA	0
About the right complexity	NA	1
Slightly high on complexity	NA	0
Too complex	NA	3
Has the need for training dropped off?		
Need has not dropped off	NA	1
Dropped off slightly	NA	1
Has dropped off somewhat	NA	2
Dropped off substantially	NA	0
Need has dropped away completely	NA	0

Interviews

CGR completed interviews with all four Family Educators, and a selected number of Advisory Board members.

Family Educators

We individually interviewed the four Family Educators as well as a regular volunteer about their perceptions of the evolution of Even Start over the last year and whether the program is meeting its objectives. We also asked the Family Educators about their specific roles and tasks, and how they perceive their impact on families. We tried to determine whether the Educators experience any problems or barriers to performing their jobs, and whether they have any suggestions for changes to the program.

Family Educators find it difficult to get everything done in 35 hours.

The Family Educators appear to have a difficult time fitting all their assigned tasks into their 35-hour workweek. One staff member indicated that an additional staff person could provide relief for the Educators when they are out on sick or vacation days. Further, 35 hours is not enough time for the planning and organizing that needs to be done to properly provide coordinated services to families. One staff person indicated that the last year has involved constant change in the program in terms of paper forms, the types of tests done with clients, data collected, and reports to be prepared. Staff noted that there is “no breathing time.”

15 family caseload may be too high.

At the start of the Even Start program, a goal of 15 families per Family Educator was set. At this time, all Family Educators, as well as the Coordinator and the Advisory Board agree that this is too high, and the current total simultaneous caseload goal has been dropped from 60 to 44. One Educator indicated that 7 families is the maximum limit, while another felt that 10 are manageable. The current goal of 44 simultaneous families results in an average caseload of 11 families per Family Visitor.

The number of families managed by each Educator varies substantially. At the time of the interviews the four Educators had caseloads of 5, 11, 13, and 15.

Demands on the Family Educators' time includes the following: newsletter submissions, home visits, planning for home visits,

travel time, office meetings, computer work (entering data), phone calls for appointments, contact log, putting books away, phone log, talking over cases internally, contact with schools, and driving clients to BOCES and other appointments. Using estimates of time spent on the above activities, one Educator estimated needed time at over 40 hours per week, as shown in the table below.

<u>Activity</u>	<u>Time per day</u>	<u>Time per week</u>
Home visits	1.5 hours per family * 15	22.5
Planning time	30 minutes per family per week*15	7.5
Travel time	45 minutes per day	3.75
Office meetings	3 hours per week	3
Computer work	3 hours per week	3
Miscellaneous (newsletter, phone calls, client transport, etc.)	?	?
TOTAL		39.75 + misc.

Paperwork

The staff feel there is a tremendous amount of paperwork to keep up with. While the move towards computerization may help to alleviate the paperwork problem, few of the staff are using their laptops regularly. One staff member noted that she realizes the information is in the computer, but she doesn't know "how to get it out." In addition, there is a perception that additional forms are continuously generated.

Recommendation: Staff do not appear to be using their laptops in the most appropriate and efficient manner. Additional training might be necessary here.

Staff mentioned several meetings that are required on a regular basis, and that they don't necessarily find useful.

Recommendation: The Coordinator should evaluate whether all required Educator meetings should be mandatory, and discuss the content of the meetings, and whether adjustments are needed in the future.

All agree that the children are benefiting from Even Start.

The Educators agree that the families benefit from Even Start. They see children doing better in school, and they see changes in parenting approaches. The parents also appear to be more aware of their children's growth and developmental abilities.

The adult education component needs more attention.

The adult education component, the Educators agree, is the more difficult piece for them. They have trouble determining what they can do to encourage parents to pursue their GED. At the same time, two Educators acknowledged that the GED may not be what the parents really need. In some cases they may have other goals that are more important in the short run. Further, one Educator acknowledged that while there has been a shift away from a social work approach, and more towards a literacy approach, there is still too much focus on the early education and parenting components, and not enough on the adult education component. One Family Educator pointed out that it is difficult to address literacy issues when you have a family that is out of food. One Educator suggested that Even Start develop more projects that are adult education oriented such as recipe books, newsletter items, etc.

Recommendation: Continue to use every day activities such as recipe books and newsletter submissions as opportunities for adult education.

Clarify the role of the referral persons

In one school, a Family Educator believes the designated Even Start referral person feels that the referrals should come from someone other than herself. However, it is up to the schools themselves to determine who will call the referrals in to Even Start.

Recommendation: Clarify with the Family Educators the role of referral persons, and the prerogative of each school to identify their own preference for the referral person.

Barriers to GED

None of the adults have obtained their GED in the first year of Even Start. One Family Educator feels that this is due to two primary reasons: (1) many families have infants; (2) people already have jobs they are happy with, and they would not necessarily make more money with a high school degree. The barriers to obtaining a GED are discussed in more detail below in the section on the Advisory Board.

Mixed opinions on new educational requirements for Family Educators.

Family Educators have mixed views on the new requirement that they obtain their Associates' degrees. Several Educators feel that they should not be required to pursue a college education. Reasons primarily include lack of time and lack of compensation. In addition, one staff member feels that pursuit of education should be a "personal choice." One Educator indicated that the current staff should be grandfathered in. Three of the five staff interviewed feel that if they were qualified for the job when they were hired, then it does not make sense that they can suddenly be deemed unqualified. The other two staff feel that the requirement is reasonable. One issue to explore is whether it will be difficult to hire individuals with Associates' or higher degrees for the current pay scales.

Currently, Family Educators are assigned to one or more school districts. One Educator raised a question about whether this is the best way to allocate staff. Another approach would be to assign staff who are stronger in certain areas to families whose focus is on that area. While this idea has much merit, it would require some careful planning. It is unlikely that the distribution of families needing focus on different issues would be evenly divided. Further, it would require the Educators to spend a substantially larger amount of time on the road.

Currently the Educators do not have formal performance reviews with the Coordinator. The Educators wrote up their goals in November of 2000, but have not undergone any formal review.

Recommendation: The Livingston Even Start Coordinator should hold semi-annual performance reviews with each Family Educator to review goals, accomplishments, office politics, etc.

Family Educators feel they are accumulating a high level of mileage on their cars. They expressed frustration over the delay in obtaining four vans for their use in transporting themselves to appointments, and also to transport families for various purposes. In lieu of the vans, two suggestions were to increase the frequency of mileage reimbursement checks, and also to provide a higher reimbursement rate. However, the reimbursement rate is the federal rate, used by Cornell Cooperative Extension and is the typical reimbursement rate used professionally. Further, the reimbursement checks are processed by the Dansville school business office, and must abide by the office's payment schedule.

Staff indicated that they would like to have additional training on education issues for older children. While they feel that they have received adequate training on early education for the younger children, it is the older children age group that still proves challenging.

Recommendation: Provide targeted training for the Family Educators on educational and literacy issues for older children.

Advisory Board

Five Advisory Board members were interviewed as a single group; some members also serve as referral persons for Even Start. The Advisory Board members all have connections with schools or social services targeted towards children.

Even Start has made great strides in the last year.

The Advisory Board feels that Even Start has made great strides in the last year; those involved directly in Even Start have a much better picture of what the program should be about, and that in turn has led to other community organizations, including the schools, developing a better picture of Even Start's mission.

Collaboration is the most successful tool to broaden the reach of Even Start.

However, despite the fact that the community has a better understanding of Even Start, there is still room for improvement. The Advisory Board members agreed that collaboration is the most successful tool to broaden the reach of Even Start in the community. They believe that as more people learn about Even Start, more organizations will want to use the program's resources. Simultaneously, the Board believes it is critical for Even Start to

stay true to its mission, which it has done very successfully thus far.

One example of a successful collaboration was the Summer Reading Program. This program involved Even Start, Foster Grandparents, Jobs First, the Child Protective Association, county libraries, and the county parks. Through the Summer Reading Program, Even Start gained substantial exposure to these organizations as well as the families that participated.

Development of educational kits based on NYS Learning Standards regarded highly.

One important change in Even Start over the last year is the development of educational packets (“kits”) based on New York State learning standards. Family Focus Even Start was asked to present this concept at the Even Start state conference, and received many kudos for the initiative. Using the NYS Learning Standards approach is a boon to Even Start from the school districts’ perspective and helps to bring the schools on board with the Even Start program approach to family literacy.

The Advisory Board feels very fortunate to have an Even Start Coordinator with an educational background, who can understand the NYS Learning Standards and their importance.

Parental involvement is still lacking on the Advisory Board.

The Advisory Board members see their role as important to the success of Even Start. The Board has been very stable over the first two years of operation, with the addition of one member representing the Child Care Council. The Board members could not think of any relevant organizations that are not currently represented on the Board. However, they do feel that parental involvement is lacking. While selected parents have been formally invited to participate on the Board, their attendance has been sporadic. Board members believe the sporadic attendance is due to lack of transportation and child care.

Recommendation: Provide transportation and child care for parents attending Advisory Board meetings.

The Advisory Board meetings are currently held monthly, and members feel the program may be ready to move to bi-monthly meetings at this point.

Recommendation: Cut Advisory Board meetings to six per year so as not to lose members due to over-commitment.

Family referral process works, but still struggles somewhat.

Board members feel that the referral process for families works well, although they still see some struggle with school teachers and their level of comfort with Even Start. At the same time, Board members have recognized that school teachers are starting to recognize Even Start as a valid program, and to build such a reputation simply takes time. The Even Start Coordinator has been a consistent presence in the schools, and one goal for Even Start is to have a more permanent presence in the schools so that Family Educators can interact directly with teachers of the children in their family caseloads. *This shift would move the “base” of Even Start from the community to a joint base of the community and the schools.*

Board would like to see two additional Family Educators on staff.

When asked how Even Start should grow in the coming years, the Board members said that they have discussed adding two Family Educators at some point. Currently, no families are being turned away for lack of Family Educator capacity, so that has not yet become an issue. However, Board members feel strongly that as the community becomes more and more aware of Even Start, demand will increase and additional Family Educators will be necessary. Staff expansion is also partially dependent on continued funding.

Recommendation: Begin now to plan for the expansion of Even Start from four to six Family Educators. Evaluate funding requirements, rate of growth of families in Even Start, and develop an expected time table for the addition of such staff.

At the end of Year One, Even Start had 38 enrolled families, with an estimated maximum capacity of 60. At the end of Year Two, the program had 54 enrolled families. Several families in one school district fell out of the program due to a variety of reasons including the abrupt departure of one Family Educator. The Board is interested in ensuring that the program grow at the appropriate rate, and maintain a level of quality, rather than grow just for the sake of growth.

The Advisory Board may want to focus more on the distribution of families throughout the county. Out of the 42 current formally enrolled families in May 2001, 11 were in Keshequa, and 9 were in Mt. Morris school district, while Dansville school district had only 5 families and Livonia had only 3. However, the number of families in each school district fluctuates substantially over time.

Recommendation: The Coordinator and Advisory Board may want to consider strengthening the outreach efforts in all school districts.

Advisory Board members are in favor of the new educational requirements for Family Educators.

The Advisory Board members agreed that the Even Start Family Educators have grown tremendously in their professional capacity in the last year. Board members continue to believe that the FDC training program is a key component for all new Family Educators. A new state requirement that all Family Educators have their Associate's Degrees will impact three of the four current Educators who have only their High School diplomas. The Board members feel the new requirement is appropriate and will give the Educators another way to identify with parents who are working towards an educational goal. The FDC training that all Family Educators receive provides them with seven college credit hours, which is a good start.

Several challenges face the community.

The Board members listed the following as the primary challenges facing families in their community. For each challenge the Board described actions that Even Start currently takes, or actions Even Start could consider taking to address the challenge.

Family moves between school districts. When children change school districts during a school year, it upsets their education process. Current Even Start policy assigns Family Educators to certain school districts. The implication is that when a family moves, they must simultaneously change Family Educators. The Board feels that this is too much change for a family, and particularly for a child to adjust to at once. While the Board does not want to see the Educators driving all over the County, they suggest that the Educators provide a transition period after a family's move, to allow the family to adjust to the new Family Educator and build a trusting relationship.

Since the time of the Advisory Board meeting, the Even Start Coordinator has been given approval by the partnership to keep Family Educators assigned to families, even if the family changes school districts. Past experience has shown that changing Family Educators leads to a high rate of attrition of families.

Employment challenges. Farming is the big industry in rural areas such as Livingston County, and without other big industries, employment opportunities are not always plentiful. While VESID is a good resource for persons in Monroe County, these Board members feel that VESID is not helpful to persons in Livingston County.

The Board members feel that the Even Start Coordinator has tapped into all job placement organizations that are available to her such as Jobs First and the County Employment Training program. However, these services are not adequate for Even Start families.

Recommendation: Pursue VESID more aggressively. Meet with the Director on a regular basis. Try to determine why VESID does not serve the rural counties more adequately.

Lack of transportation. Transportation is a persistent problem in a rural population, with many parents who do not have a driver's license, nor the money to pursue obtaining a license, nor the money to pay for and maintain an automobile. Even Start has taken an important step in obtaining four vans that can be used to transport families for group outings and other activities.

Recommendation: Ensure that the vans are obtained as soon as possible.

Teen parenting. Several Board members are currently involved in a grant proposal to establish an Early Head Start program that would cover prenatal moms through children age 3. Even Start is a collaborator in this proposal. This would substantially expand the program that currently covers only children age 4, and would provide more services to pregnant teenagers and their very young children.

Substance abuse. Even Start Family Educators serve an important role in identifying substance abuse as well as mental health problems in families. While the Family Educators are not charged with addressing these problems directly, they can ensure that other resource organizations are notified and that the families receive appropriate help for such problems. The presence of Family Educators in these households may lead to earlier identification of substance abuse and other mental health problems.

Recommendation: Ensure that the Family Educators feel sufficiently trained to identify substance abuse in families.

Lack of cooperation between schools and parents. School teachers feel that they know ahead of time which parents will show up for parent-teacher conferences, and which parents will not show up. On top of the transportation and child care challenges involved with attending such conferences, many parents feel intimidated by teachers and feel they will just receive blame for their child's poor school performance.

Advisory Board members feel that Family Educators could help to address this problem in several ways. First, Educators could simply talk to parents about their concerns, and perhaps encourage parents to attend the meetings. Second, Educators could role-play a teacher-parent conference with the parents to give them a better idea of what to expect. Third, Educators could actually accompany the parents to these meetings to serve not as enablers but as empowering advocates. If an Educator attends one meeting with a parent, she could then encourage the parent to attend the next meeting on his or her own.

Recommendation: Explore coordinating with schools on timing of parent-teacher conferences, to ensure that Educators know to ask the parents about their scheduled time, and to allow the Educator to arrange for transportation and child care if necessary.

Recommendation: Discuss parent-teacher conferences with parents, consider role-playing a conference, and consider attending conference with the parent.

Lack of GED completion.

None of the parents enrolled in Even Start in Year One or Two has completed a GED. Since this is one of the primary goals of most parents in the enrolled families, this result is of concern. The Advisory Board members indicated that they are not surprised at this outcome. Board members feel there is a lot of red tape involved in getting a GED, and that the process is not community-friendly. There is no child care or transportation provided, which makes it difficult for rural populations with little access to vehicles or public transportation. Further, while a new distance learning GED program makes it possible for students to stay at home, they must be able to access PBS television, which requires cable access in that area.

The Board members would like to explore obtaining a grant that would allow for the design of a much more accessible GED program, especially for the recent dropouts and teenaged population. The program could involve transportation, child care, a meal, and socialization opportunities.

Recommendation: Encourage the Board members to work with Even Start in pursuing grant dollars to design a GED program that would serve Even Start families as well as others in the community in a more productive manner.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Livingston County Even Start program has certainly had a successful Year Two overall. Family enrollment is increasing, albeit slowly, and in spite of Family Educator turnover, the staff are well trained to handle the challenges they face with their caseload.

As the program has matured, many of the start-up issues have been resolved, but other operational issues have arisen. The recommendations listed throughout the report are summarized below, and are categorized into three sections: Recommendations for Family Educators, for the Coordinator, and for Advisory Board action.

Recommendations for Family Educators

- The Family Educators should make a more concerted effort to complete the transition forms in Year Three, for all participating family members.
- Better define the best use of each Literacy kit in terms of the type of family or the age of the children that would most benefit.
- Educators should confirm that the families understand what Even Start is about.
- If the Educators feel that the families are not making progress, this may need to be better communicated to the families, or the goals may need to be reviewed and /or changed.
- The Educators should ensure that they communicate more regularly with the families about the level of progress towards specific, defined goals, and discuss expectations of both parties more clearly. Using transition forms will help here.

- Educators may want to consider more detailed discussion with families, at least monthly, regarding what has been happening with the family. Again, using the transition forms will help in this process.
- Since families may not be willing to admit they are unaware of services, the Educators must ensure they provide information about services on a regular basis.
- Family Educators should be sure that families feel they are learning from Even Start how to access services.
- Family Educators should emphasize the importance of attendance in individual meetings with parents. Educators could ask the parents if their school-aged children have missed any days each week, and explore the reasons for such absences.
- As the Family Educators spend more time in the schools, they should be able to incorporate more reading-level appropriate literacy materials into their home curriculum plans.
- Discuss parent-teacher conferences with parents, consider role-playing a conference, and consider attending conference with the parent.
- The Even Start Family Literacy Agreement form still uses the term “Family Visitor” in some spots. Ensure consistency of the new term “Family Educator” on all forms.
- The Livingston Even Start Coordinator should continue to pursue improved avenues for TABE testing in Year 3.
- Continue to reach out to the Hispanic population to ensure that a language barrier does not lead to inaccessibility of Even Start for this population.
- With 3 out of 4 Educators stating that the need for training has dropped off, but with 3 of 4 also stating that the

***Recommendations for
Even Start Coordinator***

training is too complex, the Coordinator may need to discuss more openly with Educators the type of training they feel is necessary.

- Staff do not appear to be using their laptops in the most appropriate and efficient manner. Additional training might be necessary here.
- The Coordinator should evaluate whether all required Educator meetings should be mandatory, and discuss the content of the meetings, and whether adjustments are needed in the future.
- Use every day activities such as recipe books and newsletter submissions as opportunities for adult education.
- Clarify with the Family Educators the role of referral persons, and the prerogative of each school to identify their own preference for the referral person.
- The Livingston Even Start Coordinator should hold semi-annual performance reviews with each Family Educator to review goals, accomplishments, office politics etc.
- Provide targeted training for the Family Educators on educational and literacy issues for older children.
- The Coordinator and Advisory Board may want to consider strengthening the outreach efforts in all school districts.
- Pursue VESID more aggressively. Meet with the Director on a regular basis. Try to determine why VESID does not serve the rural counties more adequately.
- Ensure that the vans are obtained as soon as possible.
- Ensure that the Family Educators feel sufficiently trained to identify substance abuse in families.

Advisory Board Issues

- Explore coordination with schools on timing of parent-teacher conferences, to ensure that Educators know when to ask the parents about their scheduled time, and to allow Educator to arrange for transportation and child care if necessary.
- The Advisory Board should explore how to make the GED programs more accessible to the Even Start adults.
- The Advisory Board and Even Start staff might explore new approaches to encouraging educational progress for adults who are in low-paying, low-prospect jobs.
- Provide transportation and child care for parents attending Advisory Board meetings.
- Cut Advisory Board meetings to six per year so as not to lose members due to over-commitment.
- Begin now to plan for the expansion of Even Start from four to six Family Educators. Evaluate funding requirements, rate of growth of families in Even Start, and develop an expected timetable for the addition of such staff.
- Encourage the Board members to work with Even Start in pursuing grant dollars to design a GED program that would serve Even Start families as well as others in the community in a more productive manner.

APPENDIX A: FAMILY FOCUS EVEN START FORMS

APPENDIX B: SURVEY INSTRUMENTS

APPENDIX C: SURVEY DATA RESULTS

Family Responses Crossed by Family Educator Responses

Families were asked to complete a survey about their experience with the Even Start program, and their assigned Family Educators were asked to complete an identical survey regarding each family to which they are assigned. The goal of these surveys was to determine whether progress is being made, and whether the families and their Educators have similar perceptions of the progress the families are making. While the surveys were anonymous, a unique identifying number was assigned to each survey so that the family survey and the Educator survey for that family could be matched in the analysis process.

The tables below are cross-tabulations that cross the responses of families with the responses of their respective Family Educators. For example, in the first table below, a total of 23 families responded "understand well," or a value of 5 to the question. A total of 11 Family Educators also responded with a 5. Of those 23 families who responded with a 5, 9 of their Family Educators also gave them a 5, while in 12 cases, the Family Educator assigned the family a value of 4, and in 2 cases the Educator assigned a value of 3.

		Family: Do You Understand What Even Start is About?						
		Do not understand	Understand Somewhat		Understand well	TOTAL		
		1	2	3	4	5		
Family Educator: Does This Family Understand What Even Start is About?	Do not understand	1	0	0	0	0	0	
	2	0	0	1	0	0	1	
	Understand somewhat	3	0	1	1	2	6	
	4	0	0	2	0	12	14	
	Understand well	5	0	1	1	0	9	11
TOTAL			0	2	5	2	23	32

		Family: Does your family participate regularly and enthusiastically in Even Start?						
		Does not participate	Participates somewhat		Participates regularly	TOTAL		
		1	2	3	4	5		
Family Educator: Does this family participate regularly and enthusiastically?	Does not participate	1	0	0	0	0	0	
	2	0	0	0	1	1	2	
	Participate somewhat	3	0	0	2	1	4	7
	4	0	0	1	5	7	13	
	Participates regularly	5	0	0	3	2	6	11
TOTAL			0	0	6	9	18	33

		Family:Has your family defined specific goals?						
		Has not identified...	Has begun to identify		Has identified	TOTAL		
		1	2	3	4	5		
Family Educator: Has this family defined specific goals?	Has not identified goals	1	0	0	0	0	0	
		2	0	0	1	0	1	
	Has begun to identify	3	0	0	1	2	3	
		4	0	0	3	1	7	
	Has identified goals	5	0	0	2	4	12	
TOTAL			0	0	7	7	19	33

		Family: Do you know what your goals are under Even Start?						
		Do not know goals	Sort of know		Know exactly	TOTAL		
		1	2	3	4	5		
Family Educator:Does this family know what its goals are under Even Start?	Does not know goals	1	0	0	0	0	0	
		2	0	0	0	1	0	
	Sort of knows	3	0	0	0	2	2	
		4	0	0	0	5	8	
	Knows exactly	5	0	0	3	2	10	
TOTAL			0	0	3	10	20	33

		Family: How much progress have you made towards your goals?						
		No Progress	Some Progress		Great Progress	TOTAL		
		1	2	3	4	5		
Family Educator:How much progress has this family made towards their goals?	No Progress	1	0	1	0	1	3	
		2	0	0	5	0	5	
	Some Progress	3	0	0	3	2	1	
		4	0	0	3	6	4	
	Great Progress	5	0	0	1	2	3	
TOTAL			0	1	13	10	9	33

Family: How much progress have you made towards Goal 1?

		No Progress		Some Progress		Great Progress	Completed Goal	TOTAL	
		1	2	3	4	5	6		
		1	2	3	4	5	6		
Family Educator:How much progress has this family made towards Goal 2?	No Progress	1	0	0	3	1	1	0	5
		2	0	1	2	0	0	0	3
	Some Progress	3	1	0	4	0	1	0	6
		4	0	0	1	4	1	0	6
	Great Progress	5	0	0	2	1	5	1	9
	Completed Goal	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
TOTAL			1	1	12	6	8	1	29

Family: How much progress have you made towards Goal 2?

		No Progress		Some Progress		Great Progress	Completed Goal	TOTAL	
		1	2	3	4	5	6		
		1	2	3	4	5	6		
Family Educator:How much progress has this family made towards Goal 2?	No Progress	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
		2	1	0	0	0	1	1	3
	Some Progress	3	0	0	4	1	2	0	7
		4	0	0	2	1	4	2	9
	Great Progress	5	0	0	0	2	5	1	8
	Completed Goal	6	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
TOTAL			1	0	6	4	12	5	28

Family: Have things gotten worse, stayed the same, or gotten better since you started Even Start?

		Gotten worse		Stayed same		Gotten better		TOTAL
		1	2	3	4	5		
		1	2	3	4	5		
Family Educator:Have things for this family gotten worse, stayed same, gotten better?	Gotten worse	1	0	0	0	0	1	1
		2	0	0	0	1	1	2
	Stayed same	3	0	2	0	2	3	7
		4	0	0	0	5	7	12
	Gotten better	5	0	0	1	4	5	10
TOTAL			0	2	1	12	17	32

Family: Are you aware there are services available to you in the community?

			Unaware		Know of some		Know of many svcs		TOTAL
			1	2	3	4	5		
Family Educator: Is this family aware there are services available in the community?	Unaware of services	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
		2	0	0	1	0	0	1	1
	Know of some services	3	0	0	1	1	0	2	2
		4	1	1	4	7	3	16	16
	Know of many services	5	0	0	5	3	6	14	14
TOTAL			1	1	11	11	9	33	33

Family: Do you know how to access services in your community?

			Do not know		Know how to access some		Know how to access many		TOTAL
			1	2	3	4	5		
Family Educator: Does this family know how to access services in the community?	Do not know	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
		2	0	0	1	0	0	1	1
	Know how to access some	3	0	0	1	1	0	2	2
		4	0	2	7	4	4	17	17
	Know how to access many	5	1	0	3	4	5	13	13
TOTAL			1	2	12	9	9	33	33

Family: How has your awareness of services changed since Even Start?

			Less aware		About the same		Much more aware		TOTAL
			1	2	3	4	5		
Family Educator: How has family's awareness of services changed since Even Start?	Less aware	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
		2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	About the same	3	0	0	3	6	2	11	11
		4	0	0	4	10	4	18	18
	Much more aware	5	0	0	0	0	4	4	4
TOTAL			0	0	7	16	10	33	33

Family:Has Even Start helped you understand how to access services?

		Has not helped	Helped somewhat			Helped greatly	TOTAL	
		1	2	3	4	5		
Family Educator:Has Even Start helped this family access services?	Has not helped	1	0	0	0	0	0	
		2	0	0	0	1	1	
	Helped somewhat	3	2	0	3	2	10	
		4	0	0	3	11	19	
	Helped greatly	5	0	0	0	3	3	
TOTAL			2	0	6	14	11	33

Family:Are you less or more comfortable with child's teacher since Even Start?

		Less comfortable	About the same			More comfortable	TOTAL	
		1	2	3	4	5		
Family Educator:Is family less or more comfortable with child's teacher since Even Start?	Less comfortable	1	0	0	0	0	0	
		2	0	0	0	0	0	
	About the same	3	0	0	2	3	5	
		4	0	0	3	4	10	
	More comfortable	5	0	0	0	1	2	3
TOTAL			0	0	5	8	5	18

Family:Are you less or more involved with your children's schoolwork ?

		Less involved	About the same			More involved	TOTAL	
		1	2	3	4	5		
Family Educator:Is family less or more involved with children's schoolwork?	Less involved	1	0	0	0	0	0	
		2	0	0	0	0	0	
	About the same	3	0	0	2	0	3	
		4	0	0	0	5	4	9
	More involved	5	0	0	2	1	4	7
TOTAL			0	0	4	6	9	19

