

# The Baltimore Starting Points Initiative

Note: The following profile describes one of the 11 sites that were funded by the Carnegie Corporation of New York as part of the Starting Points initiative. It was developed in conjunction with the Learning from Starting Points project, an assessment of the four and one-half year initiative, and approved by the Starting Points site as of July 1999. For more information see *Learning from Starting Points: Findings from the Starting Points Assessment Project*, prepared by Dr. Jane Knitzer with the assistance of Fida Adely and published by the National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP), Mailman School of Public Health of Columbia University, 2001. This publication is free on the NCCP Web site: <<http://www.nccp.org>> or copies are obtainable at \$5.00 each prepaid at NCCP Attn. Publications, 154 Haven Avenue, New York, NY 10032. For further information, e-mail: [nccp@columbia.edu](mailto:nccp@columbia.edu), fax: 212-544-4200, or phone: 212-304-7195.

**B**altimore Starting Points is administered and directed by the city's Healthy Start initiative, under the leadership of the Baltimore City Health Department. The primary aim of Healthy Start/Starting Points (HS/SP) is to expand the city's Healthy Start program to include young children as well as infants. Currently the program focuses on the zero to six population, serving families who are in need but ineligible for Healthy Start services because the mother either is not currently pregnant or is past the six-month post-partum cut-off for eligibility. HS/SP has also been involved in public engagement efforts and a "Reach Out and Read" (ROR) campaign.

During Phase I of the Starting Points grant, HS/SP focused on the expansion of services to families with children from birth to six years of age in the Harlem Park, Sandtown Winchester, and East Baltimore neighborhoods in Baltimore City. Each site offers intensive client recruitment, case management, home visiting, life planning, and early childhood development activities. During Phase II, HS/SP continued to work to expand this model in the two target neighborhoods but also expanded the range of its work through its involvement in the Baltimore Safe and Sound campaign.

## THE GENERAL POLICY CONTEXT

Baltimore is the fourteenth largest city in the United States, and almost half of Maryland's poor live there. In 1991, Baltimore was chosen as a demonstration Healthy Start site by the federal government. The goal of Healthy Start is to reduce infant mortality, targeting women who are pregnant or have a child six months old or younger. Families are eligible to remain in the program until their children reach three years of age. Baltimore Healthy Start, which is operated as a quasi-public nonprofit organization of the Baltimore City Health Department, has been viewed as a model Healthy Start

site. Despite its success, however, the initiative faces financial uncertainties. Federal funding for the project has declined from a high of \$8.4 million in 1995 to \$2.5 million in fiscal year 2000, and finding sustaining funds for core operations remains a challenge.

As a means of sustaining Healthy Start's work, HS/SP has been working closely with the Safe and Sound campaign, another major initiative that has been underway in the city since 1996. The Safe and Sound campaign is a citywide systems change initiative to improve the lives of children birth to age 21 funded through the Robert Wood Johnson's Urban Health Initiative. HS/SP participated in the Safe and Sound campaign's "Baltimore's Promise Summit" in September 1997. At this summit, more than 7,000 citizens identified community priorities from among 12 essential goals and selected strategies for reaching those goals. One of the top priorities was improving the health and well-being of families with children from ages birth to six. This goal, which has been developed into the Family Support Initiative, is now being implemented in seven communities of Baltimore City, including the two areas in which Healthy Start is operating. The initiative is funded by the United Way of Central Maryland, the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the State of Maryland, and others.

## THE BALTIMORE STARTING POINTS INITIATIVE

### Initiative Leadership and Auspices

Healthy Start was created in 1992 as a quasi-public, nonprofit organization overseen by a board of directors appointed by the city's mayor at the time, Kurt Schmoke. Baltimore Starting Points is based in the Baltimore Healthy Start Program and is directed by the president of Healthy Start.

## Site-Specific Starting Points Goals

As a way to achieve the overall Starting Points goals, the Baltimore Starting Points Initiative focused on two major site-specific goals:

**GOAL 1:** Ensure the continuity of integrated and comprehensive services and supports for young children and their families.

**GOAL 2:** Mobilize and engage communities around early childhood issues, particularly brain development and early learning.

## Site-Specific Activities and Accomplishments

**GOAL 1: Ensure the continuity of integrated and comprehensive services and supports for young children and their families.**

### *Develop programs and improve quality*

- Expanded the comprehensive Healthy Start model of outreach, case management, home visiting, and neighborhood centers to serve families with children from birth to six years of age within the Healthy Start target areas in two neighborhoods. HS/SP has enrolled 90 percent of eligible women in the program, two-thirds of them during their pregnancy.
- HS/SP is also working closely with the Safe and Sound campaign on a citywide rollout strategy to take the HS/SP model to all families with children from birth to six years of age in Baltimore City. Currently seven neighborhoods have received funding from Safe and Sound to implement this model, two of which are Healthy Start sites.
- Implemented an Early Learning program for families with children from birth to three years of age at the Westside Healthy Start Center, which provides structured developmentally appropriate learning and stimulation activities, parenting instruction, parent-child interactions, and child observation. Received funding from the federal Early Start in January 1999 to transform this Early Learning program into an official, licensed Early Head Start program offering wrap-around child care services.
- HS/SP contracted with the Baltimore Child Care Resource Center (BCCRC) to identify and recruit existing and new family child care providers to increase the number of infant care slots in the West Baltimore Community through the provision of intensive training, support, and technical assistance.

Although 35 new family care providers were trained in Phase I, this effort did not expand in Phase II, but it helped to create a working relationship with BCCRC that has persisted.

**GOAL 2: Mobilize and engage communities around early childhood issues, particularly brain development and early learning.**

### *Build public/private partnerships*

- Established Baltimore Starting Points Coalition with the goal of building consensus on the essential components of early childhood services. Members of the coalition include: the Family League of Baltimore, the United Way of Central Maryland, the Ready at Five Partnership, Friends of the Family, and the mayor's office. This group was initially convened in April of 1997 and eventually became incorporated into the Safe and Sound campaign.

### *Engage the public*

- Healthy Start formally became the lead organization coordinating the Reach Out and Read initiative in Baltimore, which involved the pediatric community in promoting parents' reading to children. This early literacy program is in place at 11 pediatric clinics in Baltimore, and there are plans to roll it out citywide, focusing on areas where ROR does not currently have a presence. This expansion effort began in spring 2000.
- Organized an ROR training at Johns Hopkins Hospital for clinic staff, non-ROR staff, and local pediatricians that covered a variety of literacy issues. More than 100 persons attended the presentations and more than 60 participated in the ROR training.
- Based on data about the lack of community knowledge about early development and the recent findings from brain development research, Starting Points launched an initiative to engage the faith community in spreading information about emerging knowledge to their congregations.
- Initiated Children's Day workshops and created a brain development bulletin for the faith community to distribute to congregations on Children's Day.
- Commissioned Dr. Sarah Reading to write a play, "Connections," to convey key messages on brain development to parents and other members of the community. HS/SP plans to produce the play with the Children's Theater Association.

### *Increase and manage information capacity*

- HS/SP contracted with the Ready at Five Partnership to conduct focus groups and research regarding the level of community knowledge about recent brain development research and its implications for early learning and parenting.
- HS/SP collaborated with the Safe and Sound campaign and the Family League of Baltimore to co-fund a cost-benefit analysis of the HS/SP case management/family support model.
- HS/SP contracted with the Ready at Five Partnership to conduct an assessment of the capacity of a variety of early childhood programs to collect and track data related to each program for monitoring and evaluation purposes. This project, which was developed with guidance from the Baltimore Starting Points Coalition, was intended to inform the Safe and Sound family support strategy.