

The Colorado 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, fax: 212-544-4200, or phone: 212-304-7195.

In Colorado, the Bright Beginnings initiative was established in response to the Carnegie Corporation's Starting Points report and became the vehicle for the implementation of the Starting Points grant. Bright Beginnings was launched in November 1995 by then-Governor Roy Romer, Senator Tom Norton, the late Brad Butler (former Chairman of the Board of Procter and Gamble), and a statewide steering committee comprised of prominent civic, religious, government, business, media, and nonprofit leaders. Bright Beginnings became an independent nonprofit organization in 1997. The overall focus of the initiative is on children from birth to three years of age with the goal of "reaching every child to optimize the chance of meeting every critical need for emotional, intellectual, and physical health."

During Phase I, Bright Beginnings implemented the Warm Welcome and Parent-Friendly programs. In Phase II, Bright Beginnings continued to expand the capacity of Warm Welcome and added a new emphasis on language development in the early years. Two new program components have been developed as a vehicle for the language development work—Moving On and I'm Three.

THE GENERAL POLICY CONTEXT

After 12 years of Democratic leadership, the Colorado legislature changed over to Republican control in 1999. Governor Bill Owens, a Republican who also took office in 1999, demonstrated a strong commitment to educational reform during his first year. He has also expressed a desire to connect his focus on school reform efforts with an early childhood focus in the coming year. The governor is on the board of Bright Beginnings along with the state's former governor.

THE COLORADO STARTING POINTS INITIATIVE

Initiative Leadership and Auspices

Colorado's Starting Points initiative, Bright Beginnings, is a private nonprofit organization advised by a Board of Directors that is comprised of political, business, and policy leaders. Although the initiative is not explicitly connected to the private sector, it has the support of public officials, some of whom serve on its board.

Bright Beginnings works with other agencies and programs to build collaboration and infrastructure for families. There are 12 regional Colorado Bright Beginnings sites, serving 57 of the 63 counties in the state. A professional regional coordinator hired by a local steering committee manages each site. Throughout most of the Starting Points initiative, Colorado Bright Beginnings operated through two key programs: Warm Welcome and the Parent-Friendly Workplace initiative.

Warm Welcome is a volunteer-based home visiting program to welcome newborns into the community. It serves as an entry point for young children and families to the "community continuum" of resources available to parents. Parent Friendly engages the employer community in helping to support employees who are also parents through summits for business leaders, recognition of family-friendly companies, and other public engagement techniques. The Parent Friendly initiative was nationally recognized with the 1999 Innovative Excellence Award from the Association of Work Life Professionals.

During Phase II, Bright Beginnings moved to a focus on language development in all of its programs and created two new program components building on Warm Welcome: Moving On and I'm Three, which are discussed further below.

Site-Specific Starting Points Goals

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

GOAL 1: Raise awareness about early childhood development—specifically language development—at the community level.

GOAL 2: Engage and mobilize business around issues concerning parenting and early childhood development.

Site-Specific Activities and Accomplishments

GOAL 1: Raise awareness about early childhood development—specifically language development—at the community level.

Develop programs and improve quality

- Established and expanded the Warm Welcome program, a volunteer-based home visiting program to welcome newborns into the community. Volunteers are trained to conduct home visits and give new parents a baby bag of resources and information. As a follow-up to the visits, parents receive phone calls from volunteers when their children reach two, four, six, and 12 months of age. The phone calls remind parents about immunizations, offer ideas for activities that parents can do with children, and give information about community resources. During Phase II, Warm Welcome meetings were also offered through community and health centers. This change was implemented to reach families in urban settings where it was at times difficult to conduct home visits.
- Warm Welcome operates through the 12 Bright Beginnings regional sites. In 1997, there were 2,437 Warm Welcome encounters, reaching over 4 percent of all births in the state. By 1999, the number had grown to 9,760, or 16 percent of all births in the state. Bright Beginning's long-term goal is to reach 30 percent of the families who have a newborn.
- In Phase II of the initiative, the Warm Welcome initial meeting was expanded to include the distribution of a book of language development activities called Learningames* and a discussion about language development with parents and caregivers. Furthermore, Bright Beginnings has developed (and is piloting) two new program components as a vehicle

for developing the focus on language development in the early years. These two components are: Moving On—involving additional visits when the child is a year old that will focus on supporting parents and caregivers, emphasizing the importance of Learningames activities and explaining the benefits and techniques of encouragement and conversation through play—and, I'm Three—which will involve Community Health and Developmental Screening “fairs” to assess the school readiness of three-year-olds that have gone through Bright Beginnings programs and to identify potential developmental delays. This event will also be a public celebration of three-year-olds in the community.

- These programs are supported by strategies both to reach out to the pediatric community and the child care community around language development and to promote the use of the Learningames activities that are being distributed by Bright Beginnings.
 - Warm Welcome utilizes community mobilization efforts to identify volunteers to participate in the home visitation program. Such efforts contribute to the development of leadership at the community level for young children.
 - Warm Welcome hosted a “Train the Trainer” seminar on brain development in November 1998 for 70 people. It also held an early brain development training for 860 child care providers, teachers, early childhood educators, policymakers, Bright Beginnings regional coordinators, parents, and business and community leaders.
 - Conducted a study to learn more about effective strategies for reaching out to Spanish-speaking families. Outreach to this population has been more successful thanks to this research. In Denver, for example, outreach to Hispanic mothers grew from 1.4 percent to 10 percent of all visits within two years.

Build collaborative partnerships

- Partnered with Child Health Plan Plus to distribute information about signing uninsured children up for health care.

GOAL 2: Engage and mobilize business around issues concerning parenting and early childhood development.

* Learningames was developed through the Abecedarian Project by Joseph Sparling and Isabelle Lewis.

Promote better outcomes for children through partnerships with the business community

- Held two statewide summits: in 1997, the Colorado Employer Summit on the Future of the Workplace; and in 1998, Competing for the Best: Recruiting and Retaining Employees Through a Parent-Friendly Workplace. These summits were part of the Parent-Friendly initiative to engage the employer community, and more than 2,500 business people attended.
- Partnered with *Colorado Parent* magazine to select Top Colorado Companies for Working Parents Awards and Child Champion Awards, and to benchmark parent-friendly workplace practices. There was an increase in the number of companies applying for and attending the annual awards luncheon.
- Launched “Banks Model,” a business partnership providing Parent-Friendly and Warm Welcome services on-site for employees of two statewide financial institutions and designated human resource personnel to deliver services.