

# The Pittsburgh 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.

Pittsburgh's Starting Points initiative has focused on growing and sustaining effective prevention strategies in the areas of family support, health, and early literacy in the face of a changing political climate. In its role as catalyst, Starting Points has worked with, initiated, or staffed and helped to sustain partnerships with other groups, including Community Voices, (a parent advocacy organization), the Family Support Policy Board (FSPB), the Early Literacy Campaign, and the Consumer Health Coalition. It has provided and will continue to provide a focal point for activities related to child development and family support by leveraging new resources and reaching out to policymakers and others.

## THE GENERAL POLICY CONTEXT

Pittsburgh is an urban area set in the midst of what is essentially a rural state. State level leadership is generally conservative. At the county level, after a long period of stable democratic leadership, the last five years have seen four different Republican county governments. The community has a number of local foundations that have been willing to support early childhood and other public initiatives, resulting in multiple early childhood initiatives in Allegheny County.

## THE PITTSBURGH STARTING POINTS INITIATIVE

### Initiative Leadership and Auspices

Pittsburgh Starting Points is housed within the Office of Child Development (OCD) at the University of Pittsburgh and is co-led by the co-director of OCD and a former director of human services for Allegheny County. OCD was created by the Heinz Endowments in 1987 to help leverage public dollars for children.

## Site-Specific Starting Points Goals

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

GOAL 1: Strengthen the focus on family support.

GOAL 2: Ensure that all Allegheny children have universal access to health care.

GOAL 3: Engage and mobilize communities to support young children and families.

## Site-Specific Activities and Accomplishments

**GOAL 1: Strengthen the focus on family support.**

### *Leverage resources and support for family support*

- Strengthened the role of family advocates by developing, staffing, and supporting Community Voices (CV), an advocacy training program for parents. CV has strengthened the role of families in running family support centers and encourages them to play a part in advocating at the state and local levels for public support of family resource centers. Through the efforts of CV parents and other advocates, \$1 million for family support centers was restored to the county budget and \$2 million to the state budget in Phase I. In addition, throughout the period of the Starting Points grant, this advocacy has resulted in an increase in county funding from \$1 million to \$5 million, with additional support anticipated.
- Reorganized and revitalized the Family Support Policy Board with greater parent representation. Through the FSPB, Pittsburgh Starting Points has also worked to create stronger links between family support centers, Healthy Start, the Early Literacy Campaign, Youth Places (youth-driven centers that have been developed during the same time period),

and the Early Childhood initiative in Allegheny County. It is also working to develop infrastructure and quality assurance measures for family resource centers.

- Assisted two local housing authorities in collaborative planning with state leaders to acquire \$1 million in HUD grant money for the establishment of early childhood centers in public housing areas

**GOAL 2: Ensure that all Allegheny children have universal access to health care.**

*Promote partnerships to increase access to health coverage for children*

- Helped to facilitate the reinstatement of 32,000 families across the state to Medicaid as well as to implement a streamlined application process for both Medicaid and Pennsylvania's State Child Health Insurance Program (CHIP) through collaborative efforts with local coalitions and state partners.
- Helped to enroll 1,500 uninsured children in Allegheny County in CHIP through media and public engagement campaigns with a partner, the Consumer Health Coalition.

**GOAL 3: Engage and mobilize communities to support young children and families.**

*Use partnerships to promote a prevention agenda*

- Used a Youth Crime initiative to engage law-enforcement personnel and others around the need for a focus on early prevention rather than punishment.
- Implemented a multi-pronged Children and Family Transition 2000 agenda. Through new collaborations, this agenda addresses issues such as reducing smoking among pregnant women (Pittsburgh ranks last among 50 cities in percentage of pregnant women who smoke); cross-training among the child development and mental health communities; developing local and more effective data capability; and looking comprehensively at family support.

*Use public education to promote a prevention agenda*

- Launched an Early Literacy Public Awareness and Engagement Campaign to increase the number of people reading to young children. The campaign has three components: (1) A media campaign was developed based on research about parental knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors in early literacy; (2) The campaign has included targeted efforts in four neighborhoods to help translate the media campaign into action; and (3) Starting Points has worked to engage

other partners, including the pediatric and school community, around early literacy. Starting Points has done outreach to 28 pediatric sites and 19 school districts. The campaign received initial funding of \$100,000 from the Heinz Endowments and as of 2000 was funded at \$600,000. The campaign has also led to the establishment of a countywide early literacy task force engaged in coordination and benchmarking of literacy activities in Allegheny County.

- Produced and disseminated Starting Points Briefs for Policymakers to more than 850 policymakers six times a year. These briefs focus on promoting the larger prevention agenda. Topics addressed include brain development information, information on smoking risks, and the impact of family support.
- Developed strategies to promote understanding of the costs and benefits of prevention, first by developing a substantive analysis, then by trying to identify ways to market the findings, and finally by trying to use the information to reach out to the business community.
- Held a Nurturing Neurons conference on early brain development for 300 public and private leaders in April 1997 and New Brain Research training for 50 public school superintendents in 1999.

*Work to develop an infrastructure to sustain the focus on prevention*

- Successfully garnered private funds (primarily from the Heinz Endowments) to sustain the initiative, including a 3-year grant for \$600,000 in Phase II and a commitment for five years of funding beyond Phase II and the end of the Carnegie grant. As part of this transition, OCD will have its first Policy Division, with funds from the university.