

Strong and Peaceful Families

2006 – 2007 Summary

In partnership with the Joint Domestic Abuse Prosecution Unit (JPU) and the Saint Paul – Ramsey County Department of Public Health¹, Violence Prevention and Intervention Services (VPIS) of the Amherst H. Wilder Foundation developed the Strong and Peaceful Families program in January 2006. Select families with cases related to domestic violence in JPU are referred to the Strong and Peaceful Families (SPF) program for case management and other services related to their health, safety, and other basic needs. Through the provision of case management and other services, the program strives to reduce the damaging effects of domestic violence on children and youth, and to stop the cycles of abuse that occur in families which often arise due to children's exposure to serious and persistent violence in their homes.

The program was designed to serve between 15 to 30 families per year. This allows staff adequate time and resources to fully assess and address families' needs and issues, as well as work with adults and children so that they can live fulfilling, independent lives despite the violence they have witnessed and endured.

SPF families

Between 2006 and 2007, 33 families (including 49 children) have received intensive case management services through the SPF program. Families are coping with multiple challenges at the time of their referral to the program. In addition to their experiences with abuse, many of the women are also managing mental health issues, experiencing chronic financial and housing difficulties, and lacking other supports. For

most, housing and basic needs like food and energy assistance are the most critical issues. Nearly all of the children served by the program have witnessed violence between their parents or caregivers. Some have also experienced violence or neglect themselves, and many are coping with a range of emotional issues when their family enters the program.

Despite these challenges, families also possess a number of strengths. Many parents are substance-free, employed, and have good family relationships at program entry. About two-thirds of the children have strong ties to extended family and other adults, and are active in social and/or religious activities.

Program services and referrals

Upon entering the Strong and Peaceful Families program, families are referred to and access a broad range of services. As needed, families receive case management, individual therapy, family therapy, and/or group therapy. Of equal importance, participants in the program have someone they know that they can turn to for support and affirmation. In total, over 880 hours of direct service were provided to families during 2006 and 2007.

Participants are also referred to services both within Wilder and to other community-based programs. The most prevalent referrals for both parents and children have been for mental health services, followed by referrals for housing and basic needs. Between 2006 and 2007, referrals have been made to nearly 50 different agencies or programs.

¹ JPU is a joint effort of the Ramsey County Attorney's Office and the Saint Paul City Attorney's Office (JPU), as well as Saint Paul – Ramsey County Public Health.

Program impact

At the time they left the program, many families were no longer experiencing violence and had developed strategies for promoting safety in their lives and the lives of their children. Given the small number of families served through the program, it is too early to draw broad conclusions about the outcomes for these families. Nevertheless, preliminary evidence suggests a potentially profound impact on families, as described by one parent following her participation in the program:

“I cannot believe how much madness I put up with for all those years. I really feel, now, like there are bigger plans for me...that I have a lot to do in this life. I am so happy.”

The impact appears to be extending to the children as well. According to one parent, after participating in the program:

“My kids seem happier now... more outgoing and talkative. When [my partner] was around, they were usually quiet because they didn’t want to make him mad, but now, they play and have fun. They laugh.”

As more families are served through the program, additional information about the impact of services will be gathered.

**Wilder
Research**

www.wilderresearch.org

451 Lexington Parkway North
Saint Paul, Minnesota 55104
651-280-2700; FAX 651-280-3700



For more information

For more information about the Strong and Peaceful Families program, contact Megan Vertin at mnv@wilder.org or 651.280.2054. For more information about this report, contact Monica Idzelis at mli@wilder.org or 651.280.2657.

Author: Monica Idzelis
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