


## The Student Parent Help Center at the University of Minnesota – Twin Cities

*The SPHC supports the “whole student parent” in a way that is indispensable in helping student parents to not only graduate, but to graduate as high-achieving students into meaningful careers as better parents.<sup>1</sup>*

The Student Parent Help Center (SPHC) at the University of Minnesota Twin Cities (UMN-Twin Cities) provides comprehensive services to pregnant and parenting undergraduate students and is one of the oldest and largest parenting student programs in the country. Through interactions with SPHC staff, students can access support groups, receive a broad range of referrals for academic and family needs, apply for two child care grants managed by the SPHC, get help with campus navigational access and advocacy, attend family friendly events, and build community in the SPHC lounge and computer lab.

**1 in 5** COLLEGE STUDENTS ARE STUDENT PARENTS



**Through a photography project and semi-structured telephone interviews, six University of Minnesota alumni who received services from the Student Parent Help Center (SPHC) as undergraduates shared how the SPHC impacted their life during college and after graduation. These are the main themes that emerged:**

Support from the SPHC is necessary for many student parents to remain enrolled each semester and graduate.

*“I wouldn’t be where I am today if I hadn’t had the SPHC there. I don’t think I would have graduated. So if they weren’t there, I would have never made it to my degree. And my degree is what propels me into my career.”*

Student parents learn at the SPHC how to be better parents; parents continue to use the lessons learned at the SPHC with their families for years after graduation.

*“When they were little I used to read my school textbooks to them to read to them, that was an idea I got from the SPHC, just read your textbook it’s not like they’re understanding it, they just want to hear your voice and have you be there.”*

Parents’ pursuit of higher education has a positive impact on their children’s academic success. Through seeing their parents working hard, studying, and succeeding, higher education becomes normalized and expected in student parent households.

*“When I graduated I took both my kids up on stage with me... When he was behind me and as I was shaking hands with everyone, he was behind me shaking hands of all the professors, he was able to see the value and celebration of education.”*

*“My oldest one always saw me going to school, that impacted her. Knew she wanted to follow in my footsteps.”*

The SPHC helps students have fulfilling and well-paid careers that allow them to achieve life goals including having more children, buying a house, or getting married.

*“So with more stability and a job we decided to have another baby and we had another kid, which is like now our family is complete. We’ve always wanted two kids, but just without a degree, I don’t think it would’ve been possible financially for us. So that kind of allows me to have the life that I’ve wanted.”*

<sup>1</sup> United States Government Accountability Office (GAO). (2019). *Higher Education: More Information Could Help Student Parents Access Additional Federal Student Aid* (Report to Congressional Requesters GAO-19-522) <https://www.gao.gov/assets/710/701002.pdf>



## SPHC SERVES THE “WHOLE STUDENT PARENT” THROUGH SUPPORT THAT IS:



Academic



Advocacy



Development of social capital



Emotional



Financial



Parenting



Referrals to resources

In addition to the main themes that emerged, SPHC alumni shared some fundamental components to the SPHC’s successful model:

The **synergy of wrap-around advising and case management supports** the “whole student parent” and leads to the positive impacts of the SPHC, as opposed to one specific program or resource.

*“I mean they just had a lot of resources to help cover a lot of the academic stuff, the studies and writing papers, but they also helped with the other aspects of life, which could have completely derailed my education.”*

The SPHC’s strength lies not only in **the support staff give, but the community that is created** where student parents support and advise each other.

*“Knowing that there is someone else going through something similar, and you’re not the only one, you’re not on an island by yourself, others have gone through what you are going through today.”*

While financial services, such as child care grants and emergency grants, are necessary for student parents to remain in school, **interactions with SPHC staff and other parents** are equally important.

*“Another small thing, at these Wednesday meetings they would have food, easy, in between class you can come in, sit down and connect to other parents who are in similar situation as you, get advice from those who are kind of done and you become that mentor as well, “Hey, last semester I went through that same issue, this is what you might want to try.” So there was a lot of idea sharing, best practice sharing, support, financial with the grants, and just academic support as well.”*

The **dedicated physical space and child-friendly environment** the SPHC provides allows for a true sense of belonging for students who don’t always feel welcome in more “traditional” spaces at the University.

*“I didn’t feel like a regular college kid, since I had children, where when I went to SPHC, I felt better, I felt like I belonged there.”*

*“Other spaces on campus not kid-friendly at all. When you walk into [the SPHC] and realized how many people are there with their kids, like well this is where everybody is, this is where the party’s happening.”*

With funding from Raise the Barr foundation, this summary was written by Wilder Research in June 2020 (Authors: Julie Atella, Virginia Pendleton, Sophak Mom), with photos provided by interview participants.

To learn more about the [Student Parent Help Center](#) and the characteristics and academic outcomes of the students they serve, see [“Academic Outcomes of Undergraduate Student Parents Served by the University of Minnesota’s Student Parent Help Center.”](#) For more information about this project, contact Julie Atella at Wilder Research, 651-280-2658.

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