

Evaluation of Rochester Even Start program

Survey of parents

F E B R U A R Y 2 0 0 3

Evaluation of Rochester Even Start (Hand-in-Hand) program

2001-2002

February 2003

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Acknowledgments

The following Wilder Research Center employees helped in processing and analyzing the data and in producing this report:

Mark Anton

Kari Danielson

Louann Graham

Heather Johnson

Melisa Lopez-Aquino

James Meyer

Miranda Messer

Lue Thao

We also extend our thanks to Peggy O'Toole-Martin for providing the list of participants who were surveyed in this report.

Summary

This report describes findings from a parent survey that addressed the impacts of and satisfaction with the Rochester Even Start (Hand in Hand) program. The telephone surveys were conducted by Wilder Research Center staff in English and Spanish. Twenty-eight parents participated in the survey. These parents attended at least 50 program hours between May 1, 2001 and April 30, 2002.

Results of parent survey

Parents reported that they participated in the Hand in Hand program for 2 to 42 months. Half of the parents attended less than 12 months. Thirty-two percent of the parents attended one to two years and 18 percent attended more than two years. The average length of participation was 15 months.

Almost 80 percent of parents mentioned that it was “easy” or “very easy” to get into the program. Those who mentioned it was difficult said that they were put on a waiting list before enrolling in the program.

Satisfaction with program components

Parents were asked to rate whether they were satisfied with the adult education (such as ESL classes, high school diploma and GED preparation), parenting classes, early childhood classes, parent and children together time (PACT), and home visits. Nearly all the parents responded that they were “somewhat satisfied” or “very satisfied” with each of the program components. Almost 80 percent of the parents said that they were “very satisfied” with parenting classes and parent and child together time (PACT).

Parent suggestions for improving program components

Parents were also asked to give suggestions for improving each component area. Many parents were satisfied, and thus, did not give any suggestions. Suggestions for improving adult education classes included providing individualized time and curriculum to meet participants’ diverse needs and abilities. For improving parenting classes, some parents suggested providing new topics or materials. Several parents suggested that PACT could be improved by offering more structured and hands-on activities and by having more time to spend with their children.

Parents were asked whether they were distracted by the presence of babies in the adult classroom. Most parents (82%) said they were not distracted by the babies in the room.

Twenty parents (71%) had a baby in the program. Among the five parents who said they were at least a little distracted, four did not have a baby in the program.

Parents' accomplishments

Parents were asked about their most important accomplishments while they were in the Hand in Hand program. Many parents reported that learning English, making progress toward their GED or high school diploma, and improving their parenting skills were their most important accomplishments.

Program's support for parents to accomplish goals

Almost all of the parents (96%) felt the Hand in Hand program “usually” or “always” gave them the support they needed to accomplish their goals. Parents were asked in what ways they were supported. Some of their comments included that the teachers were supportive, understanding, encouraging, and helpful; the program taught English and parenting; and the program provided daycare so parents could attend classes.

A few parents mentioned that the program could help them more by providing free daycare for parents who did not qualify and by providing one-on-one tutoring.

Best program aspects and other suggestions for improvement

Parents were asked to name the best aspects of the program. About one-third of the parents mentioned learning as well as spending time with their children as the part they liked the most. Other parents said the best thing was learning English, being with other people or liking the program staff.

Several parents gave comments about the ways the Hand in Hand program could be better. Their suggestions included offering transportation and childcare, having a bigger classroom, offering advanced classes in adult education, and providing baby food at lunch. Many parents were satisfied and did not offer any suggestions.

Conclusion and implications

Generally, parents who attended the Rochester Even Start (Hand in Hand) program were satisfied with the program. The strength of the program appeared to center around the Even Start components, which included teaching parenting skills, providing adult education (attainment of a GED or high school diploma and English classes for non-English speaking parents), and preparing children for school through the literacy program (early childhood education). Parents' descriptions of their own accomplishments and the best aspects of the program reflected the goals of the program.

The findings also suggest some areas for possible program improvements or enhancements. In the future, the staff might want to consider the following program and evaluation issues:

- Although only a few parents gave suggestions for program improvements, their comments are useful in identifying issues for consideration. These issues included transportation and child care for low-income but ineligible families, more one-on-one tutoring to meet individual needs and abilities, new topics in the parenting class, more parent-child interaction time, and more resources (bigger space, more computers).
- Parents who participated in the survey were in the program for an average of 15 months. Half of the parents attended less than one year. It may be helpful to examine parents' reasons for exiting the program (which may relate to the parents' comments listed above) to see if there are ways to further promote future parents' attendance and retention in the program. However, retention is already quite strong.
- When describing their accomplishments, parents most often mentioned academic progress, such as obtaining a GED or diploma and learning English. Parents did not describe any accomplishments in employment, which is one of the performance indicators of Even Start programs. This may be an area of programming for staff to examine further.
- Future evaluation might be expanded to include long-term effects of the program. For example, evaluation may want to examine whether: 1) adults continue their progress by continuing to enroll in education and training programs and seeking employment; 2) adults continue to learn about and use community resources; 3) adults become more self-reliant by reducing their dependence on public assistance; 4) children perform as well as or better than average in their classes; and 5) parents are engaged in schools their children attend and in the education of their children.
- In this evaluation, we only interviewed the parents who could speak English and Spanish. However, the program also served parents who come from many different cultures and spoke different languages, such as Cambodian, Somali, Vietnamese, Arabic, and Russian. Thus, the findings may not represent all participants. On the program side, the challenges might be in finding ways to work effectively with families speaking many different languages, representing different cultures and having different needs. One of the examples might be in teaching parenting education. That is, discerning multiple understandings of what constitutes competence across and among cultures and delineating effective ways to build parental competence while nourishing diversity might present a challenge for program staff.

Brief program description

The Rochester Even Start (Hand in Hand) program is designed to provide better coordinated services and fill gaps in family literacy programming for families living in poverty and for non-English speaking families. Eligibility to enroll in the program was determined by several factors which included: 1) low family income; 2) adults (parents) lacking a high school diploma/GED or adults (parents) who were non-English speakers (eligible for English Language Learning services); and 3) parents with children ages 7 or younger.

The program offers the four Even Start components: 1) adult education, which also include an English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) class; 2) early childhood education, 3) parenting education, and 4) parent-child interaction time. In addition, staff made home visits. The average number of home visits per family in 2001-02 was 4 (Minnesota Even Start and Family Literacy Program Evaluation Report 2001-02).

Program evaluation

As part of the Rochester Even Start (Hand in Hand) program evaluation, Wilder Research Center conducted a parent survey in December 2002 and January 2003. The purpose of the parent survey was to obtain parents' perspectives about program impact and their satisfaction with program components. The interview with parents was conducted by telephone. Forty-six parents were eligible, based on 50 hours or more of participation in the Rochester Even Start program between May 1, 2001 and April 30, 2002. Twenty-eight parents completed the interview, for a response rate of 61 percent. Surveys were conducted in English (n=24) and Spanish (n=4). Reasons for incomplete surveys included wrong telephone numbers or disconnected phones and language barriers. Survey questions can be found in the Appendix.

Results of the parent survey

Parents reported that they participated in the Hand in Hand program for 2 to 42 months. Half of the parents attended less than 12 months. Thirty-two percent of the parents attended one to two years and 18 percent attended more than two years. The average length of participation was 15 months (see Figure 1).

1. Number of months in the program

Months	Number	Percent
2-6	7	25%
7-11	7	25%
12-24	9	32%
25-36	4	14%
36+	1	4%
Total	28	100%
Average	14.7	

Twenty-two parents (79%) mentioned that it was “easy” or “very easy” to get into the program. Six parents (21%) said it was difficult. For those who mentioned it was difficult, they were asked “what was difficult?” Many parents mentioned that they were put on the waiting list. Below are their responses about the difficulty entering the program.

What was difficult?

I waited long, one or two months to get in.

They didn't call back for 6 months. Maybe because everything was full.

There was a big waiting list and I had to wait quite awhile.

You had to be on a waiting list. But I got through right away. An open space came through.

It was difficult to find a program like this at first.

I didn't know English and I thought I couldn't get in.

Satisfaction with program components

Parents were asked whether they were satisfied with the adult education (such as ESL classes, high school diploma and GED preparation), parenting classes, early childhood classes, parent and children together time (PACT), and home visits. Most parents responded that they were "somewhat satisfied" or "very satisfied" with each of the program components. Figure 2 shows that 68 to 79 percent of the parents responded that they were "very satisfied" with the program components. Almost 80 percent of the parents said that they were "very satisfied" with parenting classes and parent and child together time (PACT).

2. Satisfaction with program components

	Percentage of parents (N=24-28)				
	Very satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Neutral	Somewhat dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied
Adult education	68%	25%	4%	-	4%
Parenting classes	79%	21%	-	-	-
Early childhood classes	71%	11%	4%	-	-
Parent and children together time (PACT)	79%	21%	-	-	-
Home visits	71%	18%	4%	4%	-

Parents were also asked if they had any suggestions for improving each of the program components. Their comments are described in the next several sections of the report.

What suggestions do you have for improving Adult Education (ESL, diploma, GED)?

Many parents (50%) were satisfied, and thus, did not give any suggestions. Seven parents suggested providing individualized time and curriculum to meet participants' diverse needs and abilities. Some parents also wanted more computers, better transportation, and a bigger space. Their specific comments are listed below.

Nothing, it is good (n=14)

I don't really think there's anything to fix.

I think they are doing perfect. I don't know how they can improve.

I really don't; everything they are doing right now is very good. I really can't think of one thing to change.

No suggestion. It was okay.

I liked the way it is. Keep it the same.

No – ESL is good.

Nothing. It was too good, cool to be in the same room and learn things.

It was fine the way it's going.

Nothing.

Not at all.

No changes (2 respondents).

No (2 respondents).

More individual time, smaller group, individualized program

I didn't get enough one-on-one time; I failed on the GED tests. I think more one-on-one help would be good even for us who speak English.

They put too many people together learning different things.

The study time was two hours. We need more teachers to work individually. We have only one teacher to study with three groups. Not enough time.

They gave us books and we had to read it by ourselves, but they have to teach us to read first. Especially for first time learners it was very difficult.

They were all over the place, because they had a group that worked on English too. I was there for GED. They should use more volunteers to help individuals.

Many different levels of language competency. I think the class for beginners was okay, but those who speak English more fluently should go to an advanced class or a different program.

Offer wider spectrum of curriculum.

Resources (more space, computers, transportation)

We only had two computers so we didn't learn everything we wanted to, but that was pretty much it.

They need to get more space. There are a lot more people now so we need more space. Give more information out sooner than they do.

Transportation was a problem.

Other suggestions

Separate those with babies from those who have older children. Teachers could give more homework. Learn English too slow.

Last year [my child] was in another school and the teachers there were much more involved and helpful.

A see-through window to see [my] children. Like a two way mirror glass.

Don't know.

Presence of babies as a possible distraction

Parents were asked whether they were distracted by the presence of babies in the adult classroom. Twenty-three parents (82%) said they were not distracted by the babies in the room. Four parents said babies in the room distracted them "a little" and one parent said "a lot." Four of the five parents who felt distracted did not have a baby in the program. Twenty parents (71%) have a baby in the program. Four parents who did not have a baby in the program did not feel distracted.

What suggestions do you have for improving parenting classes?

The majority of respondents (79%) had nothing to suggest or were satisfied with the classes. Three parents who had participated in the program for 12 or more months suggested wanting to learn new topics in their class. One parent seemed to have a transportation problem. Specific comments are indicated below.

Nothing, no changes (n=22)

Parenting was okay.

The classes are great. The teachers are very understanding.

I really don't; everything they are doing right now is very good. I really can't think of one thing to change.

Fine. No particular comments.

No, that was good.

Those were pretty good too.

I think the parenting classes were great – no change.

It is good – no change.

Nothing – they gave me ideas on how to make it better for my children.

It was okay.

No improvements needed.

No. I thought those were pretty good.

No, it was good.

We wouldn't know. All you need is the interest to participate.

Nothing.

No (4 respondents).

No changes (3 respondents).

Change of topics, program structure

Make it different each year. It is same thing every year and I have been in it for three years.

Some days we would come and just read. They would speak so slowly like we were [in] special education.

We need to try to find more stuff to come up with. Like we don't get enough topics. We seem to go over the same thing every year. We stay on the same thing. Come up with other things to do.

Other suggestions

Have them more often or all day instead of two hours, once a week. They helped me a lot but I feel I could have used more time. I had a newborn and could have used more help.

The same, last year [my child] felt a lot more comfortable with the teachers at the other school. I did not like it as much as last year, teachers were less involved with parents.

Don't know – transportation.

What suggestions do you have for improving early childhood education?

There was no clear theme among parents who offered suggestions for improving the early childhood education component. Most of parents (79%) did not offer any suggestions for improvement. See specific comments below.

No change, nothing (n=22 respondents)

It was okay.

The kids are learning so much. It's great.

It was wonderful.

Nothing. They are learning more than us.

Fine.

It was good.

I really don't; everything they are doing right now is very good. I really can't think of one thing to change.

Very good – no change.

Don't know – it was okay.

No. The kids learn how to read and write. My kids read three years and five years. The classes were very good for kids.

It was okay.

It is good too – no problems.

Nothing (2 respondents).

No changes (2 respondents).

No; none (6 respondents).

Program structure, new materials and more time with teachers

Kids should have more activities such as reading, coloring, and learning the alphabet.

They could update the stuff. We do the same book. They could get more books – some old books – we need fresh stuff.

I did not like it as much as last year. Teachers did not spend as much time with us.

Don't know or not applicable (3 respondents)

What suggestions do you have for improving parent and child time together (PACT)?

Several parents suggested having more structured and hands-on activities and more parent-child time. Most parents did not give any suggestions for improvement. Their comments are indicated below.

Nothing, no changes (n=19)

The activities are very good. Don't know how to make them better.

I really don't; everything they are doing right now is very good. I really can't think of one thing to change.

I don't know. It is fine. I see nothing wrong with it.

Those were good.

Okay. Kids respect parent more now.

No improvement.

No changes it was very good.

I thought it was good. My daughter was too young for reading but she listened to the songs.

No change.

No problems.

Very good – no change (2 respondents).

Nothing (2 respondents).

No (5 respondents).

Program structure, longer time

More activities and hands-on things. My child is anxious and can't sit in a circle for very long nor listen to a book for very long.

Maybe a little more structured.

Could be longer – I learned a lot.

I don't think we are getting enough time together with our children – we have lunch and it cuts out our time together. After lunch we seem to rush everything.

Other suggestions

The same, last year was better, teachers were more involved.

The parents need to put more attention and need to listen but the classes seem okay.

Don't know or not applicable (3 respondents)

What suggestions do you have for improving home visits?

Most parents were satisfied with the home visits and did not offer suggestions for improvement. A couple of suggestions offered were providing a home visit plan for parents and having home visits as a voluntary instead of mandatory component. One parent said that she did not benefit from the home visits. Specific comments are listed below.

Nothing, no changes (n=22)

No suggestions come to my mind.

I only had one visit for admission purposes and it was fine.

No improvement – they were perfect.

I really don't; everything they are doing right now is very good. I really can't think of one thing to change.

Good.

Very good – no changes.

No improvements needed.

They were fine.

No. Very good home visits.

They were fine.

No problems.

Nothing.

Nothing. They were fine.

No change (2 respondents).

No; none (7 respondents).

Suggestions

If it was a voluntary thing rather than having to have someone come.

They could bring out more ideas. Get some kind of plan together. More leadership on home visit – they say, “what do you want us to do.” They don't have a plan. I don't have a plan.

I couldn't see anything new I learned from the home visits.

Did not get any home visit (1 respondent)

Don't know (2 respondents)

Parents' accomplishments

Parents were asked about their most important accomplishments while they were in the Hand in Hand program. Many parents reported that learning English, making progress toward their GED or high school diploma, and improving their parenting skills were their most important accomplishments. See specific comments below.

Learning English

I'm learning English thanks to them.

Learn to speak more English.

I feel good about ESL.

I learned to write English and speak it and read it.

To start learning English. My goal is to be able to understand the nurses without a translator.

I now know how to communicate better in English.

It is a great program because it helped me and my kids to speak English.

Education; learning English and numbers.

Learning English, and the parenting.

Getting a GED, high school diploma, making progress toward GED

To graduate.

Getting my diploma.

Finally got my GED.

That I graduated.

Graduated from high school a year earlier with a diploma.

I got my GED and I learned plenty of English.

Learning English and getting my GED.

If it weren't for the Hand in Hand program I would never graduate from high school.

I started with 15 credits and now I am just two credits from graduation. I will graduate within the next two months.

Every credit I get is an accomplishment.

I got to meet friends. Got to know people. I'm working towards my diploma.

Parenting skills

I got more schoolwork done than ever before in any school. I learned stuff about kids that I didn't know before. Like when they are sick and how to interest kids.

I learned how to teach my kids; and I learned English.

Potty training my daughter.

I went everyday. The parenting classes gave me more confidence in child raising.

Parenting and working on my GED.

Others

Daycare for my child so I could go to school and learn without worrying for my child.

We all worked together.

Don't know (2 respondents)

Program support for parents to accomplish goals

Nearly all (96%) of the parents felt the Hand in Hand program “usually” or “always” gave them the support they needed to accomplish their goals, while one parent (4%) said “sometimes.” Parents were asked in what ways they were supported. Some of the comments included that the teachers were supportive, understanding, encouraging, and helpful; the program taught English and parenting; and the program provided daycare so parents could attend classes. Specific comments are indicated below.

Those who responded “always”

Because since my accident, we were at home doing nothing, but at the program we spend the time learning instead of being at home thinking nonsense.

It has even helped in my health because it has made me happy by keeping me busy with many things instead of getting bored at home without learning anything.

Because my teacher is always there for me; encouraging me to keep going and helps me to reach my goal.

Clarifying doubts I had with English.

I got my GED and learned enough English for work, etc.

They understood my situation and helped me whenever I needed anything.

I was young when I had my child, so Hand in Hand is really flexible. I could get up, get ready, get the kids ready and go. They are always understanding about all issues.

I think the teachers would go above and beyond what they would have to do for their job description.

My teachers were always pushing me and making me feel good about myself.

Every time I needed a ride, they were there to help and things like that. They would teach me how to drive.

I could learn English and they took care of my children while I was in class. Teacher was wonderful and supportive.

If I have any problems I'd tell teacher and she would give me anything.

I like the school. They teach more English.

Because I need to learn English and I didn't have money for daycare and they provided it.

They helped me a lot in my work.

Program is good for teens with kids. They help encourage me even when I was tired.

We had a lot of teachers in the room for more one-on-one.

I'm happy.

My child was in the daycare so I could go to school and it didn't cost me anything. It was very good.

Very good.

I think they have given me support. They let me know how to deal with my son. To learn about safety, being a parent. They have given me options and ideas.

Because the program was excellent. The teachers were an excellent crew.

Those who responded “usually”

I learned English and I asked my teacher to fill out an application. They did it. If I called because my child was sick they helped me.

I'm pretty stubborn, but they helped keep me on track. They gave me stuff that I could finish. They worked with me so I could get my work done. Kept me on track.

I have a reading problem and not good at math. I'd ask for help and I didn't really get it. I failed the tests. I waited 10-15 minutes every time I asked a question because they were helping other people.

Teacher always sets the time and usually on time.

They would go out of their way to help. Teacher would return your books to the library. They would go over your homework and give you personal explanations to the homework.

Parent who responded “sometimes”

The books were difficult – sometimes we get an easy book and we say “no” and the teacher gives us a harder book.

What kind of help do you need from the program?

Five parents mentioned that they needed more help from the program. Some of parents' remarks included they did not have enough time to accomplish their personal goals, could not pay for childcare, and needed someone to work one-on-one with parents. Below are their individual comments.

Preparation for the citizenship test which I did not have a chance to take the first year, not because the program did not offer it, but because I was focused on my GED and did not have the time for both.

I need to go to college and take ESL classes.

Books to read.

I'm staying home now because I make too much money. They tell me I can't go back to school because I would pay for my own daycare; but I can't afford it.

Just more volunteers to work with us individually. We had one but then she quit.

What parents liked best

Parents were asked to name the thing they liked best about the program. About one-third of the parents mentioned learning and spending time with their children as the part they liked the most. Other parents said the best thing was learning English, being with other people, or liking the program staff. Their specific comments are listed below.

Learning and spending time with children

We can bring the kids. They are learning at the same time as we are.

I liked that I could bring my baby to have more time with my daughter.

Everything was good, but I liked the PACT time especially.

Parents and child time.

Different things to do instead of just book work. I liked working with my kids. Keep things lively instead of just sitting there in class.

When we have to get together with the kids, relate to them, play with the kids and it was sort of like parenting and learning.

Learning to take care of my kids.

That I could take my kids there while I was learning.

My son got to go to it. I got a second chance to go back to school. My son makes me come back to school.

Learning English

Learn English!

To learn English.

Learning English.

It helped me learn English fast.

I learned English.

ESL.

Staff

I like it all; but I like my teacher. If she wasn't there I don't think I'd go.

The teachers. They hold up the entire program. Without them there would be no program.

They help and give support in everything they can. Even with problems at home.

We came to program and didn't feel alone. The teachers made us feel comfortable. They were nice and make it safe for us.

Everything, multiple aspects of the programs

Everything.

Everything! I have a lot of positive things to say – they're wonderful.

The teachers; learning English and the daycare.

All the help that was there. It was really neat.

Other people

The people that I was with and met there.

How they made you feel – the classroom felt like home. Everyone was working together.

Everyone was a friend. We helped each other.

Working as a team and I liked the parenting section.

I was encouraged and received feedback and motivation to go on.

Do you have any other suggestions on how the Hand-in-Hand program could be better?

Several parents gave comments about the ways the Hand-in-Hand program could be better. Their suggestions included offering transportation and childcare, having a bigger classroom, offering advanced classes in adult education, and providing baby food at lunch. Many parents were satisfied and did not offer any suggestions. Their specific comments are listed below.

Teachers should be more involved with parents so we can feel more comfortable. I liked the first school I participated in more than the second. It was a different experience and I enjoyed it more.

No, not really. Maybe, the classroom could be bigger, but that's it!

One thing – the school lunches weren't always infant-friendly, and I sort of had to pick and chose.

I think it is a very good program. No changes could be made except the adult class to have more conversations in English and offer advanced classes.

No transportation – some students can't go anymore because there is no transportation – I have no transportation.

They stopped transportation to school too, and I can't go because I have no transportation of my own or childcare of my own.

No suggestions for improvement (n=22)

I wouldn't know. It seems like a great program and they teach us how to take care of the kids.

No, nothing I guess. I'm very happy with the program.

No. I like the way it is.

No. I like it very much.

I've said everything already. I think it is a great program.

No, I don't see anything wrong with it.

No, nothing (16 respondents).

Appendix

Parent survey

Parent survey

Organization Code: 3760-1

Client ID #: _____

Time: _____
(24 hour clock)

Rochester Even Start

1. How long were you in the Hand-in-Hand program?

_____ Number of months

2. How easy or difficult was it for you to get into the Hand-in-Hand program? Would you say...

- Very easy, (GO TO Q. 4A)..... 1
- Easy,..... (GO TO Q. 4A)..... 2
- Difficult, or 3
- Very difficult?..... 4

3. What was difficult?

4A. How satisfied were you with the following parts of the program?

	Would you say...							
	Very satisfied,	Somewhat satisfied,	Neutral,	Somewhat dissatisfied, or	Very dissatisfied?	Ref	DK	NA
a. Adult education (ESL, diploma, GED)	5	4	3	2	1	7	8	9
b. Parenting classes	5	4	3	2	1	7	8	9
c. Early childhood classes	5	4	3	2	1	7	8	9
d. Parent and children together time (PACT)	5	4	3	2	1	7	8	9
e. Home visits	5	4	3	2	1	7	8	9

5. With regard to the adult classroom, were babies in the room a distraction to you? That is, did they bother you?

Yes, at lot 1
Yes, a little 2
No 3

6. Did you have a baby in the program?

Yes 1
No 2

7. What suggestions do you have for improving the following parts of Hand-in-Hand program?

a. Adult education (ESL, diploma, GED)? _____

b. Parenting classes? _____

c. Early childhood classes? _____

d. Parent and child time together (PACT)? _____

e. Home visits? _____

8. What was your most important accomplishment while you were in the Hand-in-Hand program?

9. Do you feel the Hand-in-Hand program gave you the support you needed to accomplish your goals while in the program? Would you say...

- Always, 1
- Usually, 2
- Sometimes, 3
- Rarely, or 4
- Never? 5

10. Please explain.

11A. Is there any other kind of help you would have liked from the Hand-in-Hand program?

- Yes 1
- No(GO TO Q. 12)..... 2

11B. What kind of help is that?

12. What did you like best about the program?

13. Do you have any other suggestions on how the Hand-in-Hand program could be better?

THANK YOU.