Breaking the Cycle

HOW HOME VISITING CAN REDUCE CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT AND PREVENT CRIME IN NEW MEXICO



FIGHT CRIME: Invest in Kids

A Report by Fight Crime: Invest in Kids

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Executive Summary



Abuse and neglect increases crime. Nothing can fully prepare a law enforcement officer to walk into a home where child abuse has taken place. The terrible experience of removing children from their homes is one reason why the law enforcement leaders of Fight Crime: Invest in Kids are so committed to preventing abuse or neglect *before* children are hurt. Over *5,600 New Mexico children were victims of abuse or neglect in 2011, over 100 children every week, and at least 15 New Mexico children died from that abuse or neglect*. The true numbers are likely much higher because many cases of abuse and neglect are not reported. In addition, law enforcement leaders want to prevent abuse and neglect because maltreatment contributes to future crime. While most survivors of childhood abuse and neglect never become violent criminals, research shows that an estimated *250 victims of abuse and neglect in New Mexico in 2011 will later become violent criminals* who otherwise would have avoided such crimes if not for the abuse and neglect they endured as children.

Home visiting for families with infants and young children can cut abuse and neglect and reduce future crime. One evidence-based program, the Nurse-Family Partnership (NFP), cut abuse and neglect and arrests in half. These large reductions in abuse and neglect and crime mean that home visiting can save far more than it costs. However, only proven, evidence-based programs can realize substantial outcomes for children and families and resulting fiscal savings for states and communities. We need to ensure that public investments are directed to those services proven to work. Promising programs that lack a strong evidence base should be rigorously evaluated to confirm they deliver results. New Mexico is currently using federal resources to expand two evidence-based home visiting programs that can reduce child abuse and neglect, the Nurse-Family Partnership and Parents as Teachers. In addition, the New Mexico First Born home visiting program is currently undergoing a rigorous evaluation.

Stopping child abuse is a critical crime prevention strategy. As law enforcement leaders, we urge state lawmakers to direct federal and state funding to maintain, improve and expand existing home visiting programs even in these tough financial times. In order to leverage federal funding for home visiting, New Mexico *must* preserve existing state efforts to fund evidence-based home visiting. In addition, we urge the New Mexico congressional delegation to protect federal funding of voluntary, evidence-based home visitation services as a proven child abuse and neglect prevention strategy that will reduce future crime and save taxpayer money.

Breaking the Cycle

HOW HOME VISITING CAN REDUCE CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT AND PREVENT CRIME IN NEW MEXICO

The Toll of Abuse and Neglect - More Violence, Suicides and Abuse in the Future

Most New Mexicans hear about severe cases of abuse on the evening news. Few, however, know how widespread the problem is. According to figures reported to the United States Department of Health and Human Services, 5,600 New Mexico children were confirmed victims of abuse or neglect in 2011; over 100 every week.[1] The true numbers are almost certainly much higher due primarily to underreporting. Research indicates that the actual number of children exposed to abuse or neglect is well over three times as high, meaning there may be more than 16,000 victims per year.[2] The youngest children are the most vulnerable. Nationally, one third of all abuse victims are younger than 4 years of age and almost half of maltreatment fatalities are among children under the age of 1.[3]

The long-term consequences of this abuse and neglect include more costly incidences of violence, suicide and other poor life outcomes. Physical abuse can cause post-traumatic stress disorders leaving children quicker to switch into a "fight or flight" mode.[4] The impact of severe neglect can be equally harmful. Dr. Bruce Perry, a neurobiologist and authority on brain development and children in crisis has written, "The systems in the human brain that allow us to form and maintain emotional relationships develop during infancy and the first years of life … With severe emotional neglect in early childhood, the impact can be devastating." Perry explains that severely neglected children frequently respond to mild provocation with aggression and cruelty that "is often accompanied by a detached, cold lack of empathy."[5] Perry further warns: "The most dangerous children [and adults] are created by a malignant combination of experiences. Developmental neglect and traumatic stress during childhood create violent, remorseless children."[6]

Being abused or neglected almost doubles the odds that a child will commit a crime as a juvenile.

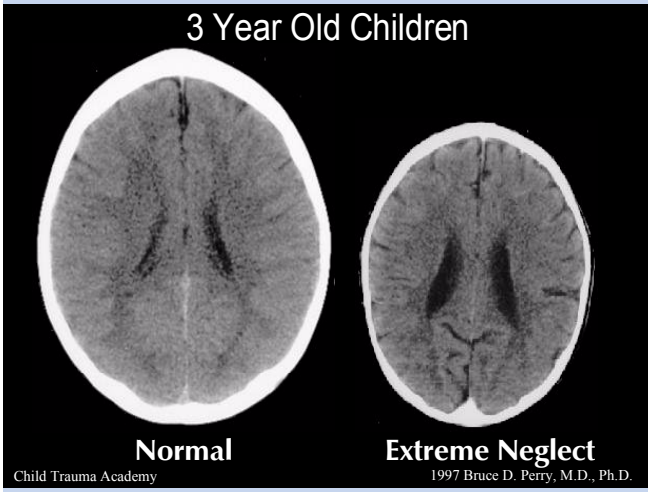
Cathy S. Widom, Adjunct Professor of Psychology, University of Medicine & Dentistry of New Jersey,(2000)



More than 5,400 children are abused and neglected in New Mexico each year - enough to half fill the Albuquerque Isotopes Stadium.

Flickr Creative Commons, 2012

Although surveys report varying numbers, one review of the literature on prior abuse and neglect concluded that approximately half of the youths arrested for delinquency had been abused and/or neglected earlier in their lives.[7] Research by Dr. Cathy Spatz Widom found that even after isolating other risk factors for crime, like growing up in poverty or with high-crime peers, child abuse and neglect is a significant driver of crime rates. Compared to youth from similar backgrounds and neighborhoods, being abused or neglected almost *doubles the odds* that a child will commit a crime by age 19.[8]



These images are from studies conducted by a team of researchers from the Child Trauma Academy in Houston led by Bruce D. Perry, M.D., Ph.D.

As for violent crime, Widom found that 18 percent of abused or neglected youngsters went on to be arrested for a violent crime as juveniles or as adults, compared to 14 percent of similar individuals who shared the same other advantages and disadvantages as these children but who had not been abused or neglected as children – a difference of four percentage points.[9]

Applying Widom's four percentage point figure to New Mexico's 5,600 cases of abuse and neglect in 2011 produces a figure of over 250 additional New Mexicans who will be arrested for at least one violent crime beyond the number of those who would have been arrested had the abuse or neglect never occurred.[10]

Perhaps most disturbing, researchers who conducted extensive interviews with extremely violent offenders are convinced that severe abuse or neglect was a defining influence in almost all of these violent offenders' lives.[11] Dorothy Lewis and Jonathan Pincus interviewed 14 of the 37 juveniles facing death sentences in 1986 and 1987. They found that only one of those interviewed had not suffered childhood family violence and severe physical abuse.[12] John Douglas, one of the experts who helped the FBI develop violent criminal profiles, reached similar conclusions from his studies.[13]

Widom's research shows that an increased risk of criminality is not the only negative outcome abused or neglected children face. She found that children without exposure to abuse or neglect were 40 percent more likely to be employed and 50 percent more likely to have stable marriages than individuals who were abused or neglected. Victims of abuse or neglect were also more than twice as likely to attempt suicide.[14]

Further, abuse victims are more likely than non-victims to become abusers themselves, continuing the cycle of family violence. Study results vary, but one study comparing extreme cases found that poor mothers who had been severely physically abused as children were 13 times more likely to abuse their own children than mothers who had emotionally supportive parents.[15] More generally, evidence suggests that an estimated one third of adults with a history of abuse may maltreat their own children.[16]

Many abused or neglected children grow up to lead productive lives, and these children can often be helped with proper care and services. Unfortunately, however, some injuries cannot be undone. New research emerging from neurobiology, endocrinology, immunology and genetics reveals serious lifelong physical and mental health consequences that have never before been connected to early abuse and neglect. These include increased risk of heart disease, diabetes, obesity, depression and addiction.[17] For states like New Mexico, the best and most cost effective way to reduce the short- and long-term costs, both financial and emotional, of abuse and neglect is to invest in services with a proven record of preventing maltreatment and improving child and family wellbeing. One such program is quality, voluntary home visiting for families with infants and young children.

What is Home Visiting?

High-quality, voluntary home visiting teams parents with trained professionals who provide information and support during pregnancy and throughout the child's first years of life. Quality home visiting is proven to improve short- and long-term outcomes for participating children and families.

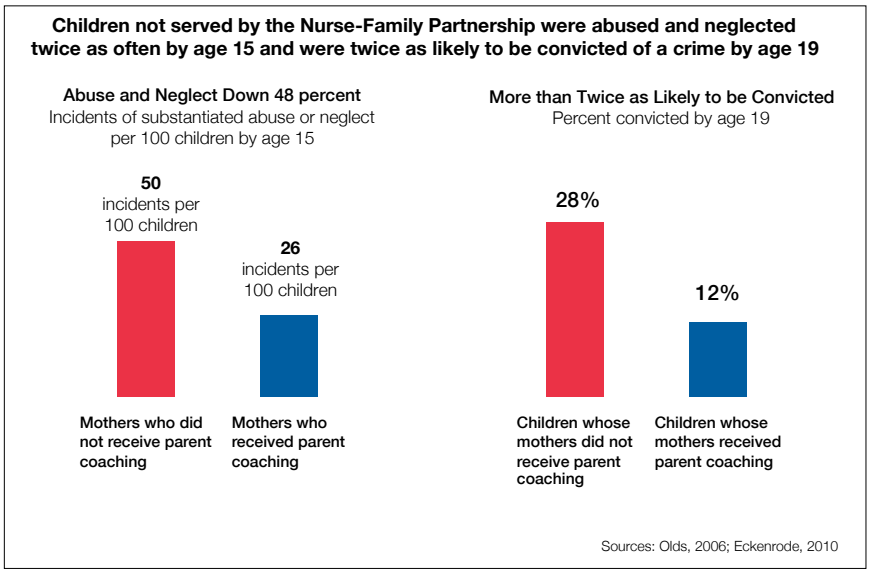
By reaching expectant mothers early, home visitation helps them adopt healthier behaviors at a critical time that can impact child development. After the baby's birth, home visitors help parents understand and support healthy infant development; provide responsive, nurturing care; and ensure a safe, stimulating environment. In addition, home visitors promote the parent's own personal growth and development by working with them to improve their own education, find employment and build stronger, more stable relationships with the people in their lives. All of these changes can lead to less maltreatment and better outcomes for children.

Quality Home Visiting Cuts Abuse and Neglect, Prevents Crime

Research has shown that home visiting can prevent child abuse and neglect, give kids the right start in life and reduce crime. Of the main models used in New Mexico, one has been shown to reduce abuse and neglect and decrease criminal behavior among the children served.

- **The Nurse-Family Partnership** (NFP) will serve families in the South Valley of Albuquerque, the program's first New Mexico site.[18] NFP pairs nurses with young, poor women who are experiencing their first pregnancy. The visits, which are voluntary for families, start before the birth of a

child and last until the child is two. Researchers conducted a long-term study of their Elmira, New York program, tracking abuse and neglect and crime results. The randomized controlled trial showed that children of participating mothers had 48 percent fewer substantiated reports of abuse or neglect than the children of mothers in the control group, indicating that home visiting can cut abuse and neglect nearly in half among at-risk children.[19] The children left out of the program also had more than twice as many arrests by age 15, and they were twice as likely to be convicted by age 19.[20]



- **Parents as Teachers (PAT)** is being restored and expanded in McKinley County. PAT's *Born to Learn* curriculum is currently used in 12 counties.[21] A randomized controlled trial found that teen mothers who participated in PAT, combined with case management to help families find any needed psychological, health, educational, or vocational services, were less likely to be investigated for child abuse and neglect than teen mothers who did not participate.[22]
- The **First Born** program was developed in Silver City in 1997 and is currently state-funded in Grant County and other communities.[23] The program is offered to all first-time parents in the county and serves approximately 100 parents, working with pregnant mothers and children up to age 3. The program offers up to 40 home visits in the prenatal period and the child's first year of life, with less frequent visits in the latter year of the program. First Born is not currently considered evidence-based, but it is undergoing a randomized field trial evaluation.[24]
- New Mexico has additional state- and locally created home visiting models funded by the State and managed by the Children, Youth and Families Department. These programs serve families during the prenatal period until children turn 3 years of age.[25] These models should be rigorously evaluated to ensure they produce the desired results or programs should transition to evidence-based models.

Federal Funding

Thanks to the solid research on evidence-based home visiting, the federal Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program (MIECHV) provides $1.5 billion over five years to fund the expansion of such programs nationally. New Mexico was awarded $1.2 million in formula funding and $1.1 million in competitive development funding from MIECHV in Fiscal Year 2011.[26] Among the models used in New Mexico, two are already approved as eligible for evidence-based home visiting funding by the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA): the Nurse-Family Partnership and Parents as Teachers. Born to Learn is undergoing a rigorous evaluation and can thus be allotted up to 25 percent of New Mexico's federal funding while it is under evaluation.[27] New Mexico also contributes over $3 million in state funding to support additional home visiting programs.[28]

After an extensive needs assessment process, New Mexico is using its formula funding to implement a Nurse-Family Partnership program in South Valley of Albuquerque and a Parents as Teachers program in McKinley County. These two communities have the highest numbers of at-risk young children, as well as the infrastructure to successfully implement proven programs. In addition, New Mexico was awarded competitive funding to further develop its home visiting system of care. This additional funding will be used in three communities. Grant County will continue to expand and improve the First Born model, while Quay and Luna Counties will conduct further exploration and select

The Washington State Institute for Public Policy found that NFP produced a net savings of over $13,000 for each family served.

Washington State Institute for Public Policy (2012)

an evidence-based or promising home visiting model to implement.[29]

As of 2009, approximately 4,400 New Mexico families with young children were served by home visiting. Given the 29,000 births in that year, home visiting services are only reaching a small proportion of the families that could benefit. Nine counties appear to have no home visiting services available.[30]

The federal legislation requires that federal dollars supplement existing state home visiting spending, not replace it. New Mexico must maintain the same level of state spending to remain eligible for federal funding. This requirement makes it even more crucial that New Mexico, at a minimum, maintain existing funding for its state programs.

Cost Savings

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recently concluded that, "the total lifetime economic burden resulting from new cases of fatal and nonfatal child maltreatment in the United States in 2008 is approximately $124 billion."[31] In New Mexico alone, total FY 2006, federal, state, and local child welfare spending on services like foster care totaled over $70 million.[32] When the Washington State Institute for Public Policy applied a cost-benefit analysis to the findings from a range of rigorous studies of NFP programs in the U.S., they found that the program produced a net savings of over $13,000 for each family served.[33]

Conclusion

The over 60 law enforcement and crime survivor members of Fight Crime: Invest in Kids in New Mexico and the over 5,000 members nationally know that the most powerful weapons we have against crime, violence and abuse are the proven programs that help kids get a good start in life. High-quality home visiting for families with infants and young children can deliver strong crime-fighting results, in part by cutting abuse and neglect, so it is essential that New Mexico continue to support and expand home visiting funding and fully utilize new federal funding for home visiting. If New Mexico invests wisely in what works, fewer of our officers and deputies will find themselves carrying children away from abusive or neglectful homes, and fewer New Mexico residents will become victims of violence in the future.

Law enforcement leaders look forward to working with the governor and legislature to maintain state funding while expanding services – including using new federal and private-sector resources. The New Mexico congressional delegation must also protect federal home visiting funding. Supporting home visiting will prevent suffering from abuse and neglect now, reduce future crime and save taxpayers millions of dollars.[34] Breaking the cycle of child abuse and neglect is one of the wisest investments New Mexico and our nation can make for our children and our future.

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