



# A Smart Investment in Florida's Future

## Healthy Families Florida Prevents Child Abuse and Neglect

Healthy Families Florida is a nationally accredited, evidence-based home visiting program that is proven to prevent child abuse and neglect in Florida's highest-risk families by promoting healthy child development and increasing family stability and self-sufficiency, all of which contribute to our state's economic prosperity.

Last year alone, 49,289 children were abused or neglected. Over 21,000 of these children (43.6%) were under the age of five. Investing in Healthy Families Florida not only saves children's lives but also saves taxpayers millions of dollars. Failing to invest in effective prevention has costly consequences. Conservative estimates for child welfare services, hospitalization, school dropouts, special education and juvenile justice costs alone come to \$72,709 a year per abused child. Healthy Families Florida effectively prevents child abuse and neglect for an average of just \$1,800 a year per child.

## Key Elements of Success

**Services begin early** - The most rapid period of brain development occurs in the first five years of life, the period when most child abuse and neglect occurs. Research shows that the key to preventing child abuse and neglect is intervening early when parents are eager to learn. Healthy Families engages parents during pregnancy or shortly after the birth of a baby so they gain the knowledge and skills they need right from the start, before abuse ever begins.

**Services are voluntary** - Parents choose to participate in Healthy Families Florida because they want to be good parents and learn the skills they need to handle the toughest job they will ever have. Eligible families share a number of factors that place their children at high risk of abuse and neglect. Some of the prevalent risk factors are:

- Economic stress
- Limited awareness of positive, non-violent discipline options
- Multiple children under the age of five
- Lack of a high school education
- Single parent
- Domestic violence, substance abuse or mental health issues
- Prior involvement in the Child Protection System
- Experienced abuse or neglect as a child

**Services are tailored to meet the needs of families** - Families receive weekly home visits that decrease in frequency as families make progress in providing safe, stable and nurturing environments for their children. During visits, family support workers:

- Teach parents child development milestones and positive parenting skills that promote bonding and healthy child development, including non-violent discipline techniques
- Provide information on safe infant sleep, home safety, water safety and ways to cope with crying
- Empower parents and caregivers to set goals that lead to family self-sufficiency
- Teach healthy coping and problem solving skills and how to build a supportive network they can rely on during times of crisis
- Connect parents and children to medical providers and other community resources based on need
- Screen for maternal depression and child developmental delays
- Educate parents on the importance of immunizations and well-child checks

## **A Proven Program with Positive Results**

A rigorous five-year independent evaluation and follow-up study show that Healthy Families Florida prevents child abuse and neglect and achieves other positive outcomes. Since the independent evaluation, Healthy Families Florida continues to be successful in preventing child abuse and neglect. As of June 30, 2013:

- 98% of children were free from abuse and neglect during services.
- 98% of children were free from abuse and neglect within one year after program completion.

A recent analysis shows that 95% of children were still free from abuse and neglect within three years after program completion.

Other key measures of success achieved during 2012-2013 include:

- 98% of mothers do not have a subsequent pregnancy within two years of the target child's birth. Mothers with less frequent pregnancies have fewer pregnancy related complications and are less likely to give birth to low-birth weight and premature babies.
- 99% of participants and their children are connected to a primary health care provider, which reduces the use of costly emergency room visits and increases the consistency of care received by the mother and child.
- 94% of children in Healthy Families Florida are fully immunized by age two, exceeding the state and national averages of 81% and 71% respectively. This is especially significant given that Healthy Families Florida serves high-risk families and the state and national rates include the general population.
- 94% of children received age-appropriate developmental screening at prescribed intervals. Early detection of developmental delays allows for early treatment and reduces the likelihood that more serious and costly problems will develop.
- 89% of participants were screened for postnatal depression, a research-based risk factor correlated with child abuse and neglect.

Healthy Families also contributes to workforce development by promoting personal responsibility that leads to family self-sufficiency:

- 84% of participants improve their self-sufficiency by getting their GED or a college degree, enrolling in job skill development training, getting a job, finding more stable housing, learning English as a second language, attending literacy classes or obtaining a driver's license.
- 72% of program completers who were unemployed at enrollment gained employment while receiving Healthy Families services.

In 2012-2013, Healthy Families Florida served 8,572 families and 15,241 children using state and local cash contributions. During the last Legislative session, the Florida Legislature recognized the value and success of the program by investing an additional \$3 million in the program allowing Healthy Families Florida to serve more families and expand into new areas around the state. Today, Healthy Families Florida provides services in 58 of Florida's 67 counties (31 entire counties and targeted high-risk zip codes in the remaining 27 counties).

***For additional information about Healthy Families Florida, contact Carol McNally at [cmcnally@ounce.org](mailto:cmcnally@ounce.org) or (850) 488-1752 ext. 129.***