

Toronto Public Health Implementation Strategy

Toronto Public Health has delivered the Incredible Years Basic Parent Program (prevention only) since the fall of 2004.

Demographics

Toronto is home to 2.5 million people, and is heralded as one of the most multicultural cities in the world, with more than 140 languages and dialects spoken.

Toronto Public Health is a Public Health Agency mandated by provincial legislation to provide programs targeted at prevention of disease, health promotion and health protection. Funding sources are 75 per cent provincial and 25 per cent municipal.

Toronto Public Health is the largest health unit in Canada. It has 2,000 staff including physicians, nurses, dentists, hygienists, nutritionists, dietitians, epidemiologists, health inspectors, researchers, family home visitors, speech pathologists and support staff. They provide a broad range of programs/interventions, such as Prenatal Classes, Parenting Classes, Breastfeeding Initiatives, Home Visiting to at risk parents, Communicable Disease Prevention, Needle Exchange, Sexual Health Clinics, Dental Clinics, Chronic Disease Prevention, Workplace Health, Food Safety, Safe Water, Health Hazard Investigation, Rabies Control, Environmental Protection, and Emergency Preparedness.

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Delivery of the Incredible Years Basic Parent Program

The Incredible Years program is delivered as part of Toronto Public Health's continuum of parent education and support. It is delivered in community settings, primarily in partnership with Early Years Centres. Early Years Centres are free, community spaces for parents/caregivers that connect parents with other parents, professionals and resources in their neighbourhood to foster parenting and child development.

Currently 25 Public Health Nurses and 19 community partners are trained as Group Leaders.

- Nine of the 25 Public Health Nurse Group Leaders are certified. (three in the process of certification)
- Two Public Health Nurse Group Leaders are mentors in training (one works full time as the Incredible Years Health Promotion Consultant and coordinates the Incredible Years program)
- Nineteen Community Partner Group Leaders (including two Social Workers, a University Professor, a Community Health Worker, Program Workers, Early Childhood Educators)



The 12 week session is offered to 15 participants. Child care, public transportation reimbursement and snacks are provided for the participants. Two group leaders either a Public Health Nurse and a Community Partner, or two Public Health Nurses deliver the program. Since 2004, 63 per cent of groups have been delivered in partnership with a Community Partner.

Target Population

Toronto Public Health delivers a program to high risk parents called Healthy Babies Healthy Children. This program is a home visiting, prevention and early intervention initiative to improve the well being and long term prospects of families with young children up to the age of six.

This program is one of the primary sources of participant identification for the Incredible Years program which targets parents/caregivers who are experiencing one or more of the following stressors:

- at risk for abusing or neglecting their children,
- have difficulty disciplining their children,
- poverty,
- depression,
- social isolation,
- financial difficulties,
- young parents,
- new immigrants,
- interpersonal problems and

Parents/caregivers with (as reported by the parents/caregivers):

- children at risk for conduct disorders,
- children who have social skills and problem solving deficits,
- children with attention problems and
- children who are hyperactive



(l to r): Patricia Alder (Mentor in Training), Carolyn, Maria Crawford (Mentor in Training), Debbie Zanetti (Manager).

In addition to referrals from the Public Health Nurses' caseloads of high risk parents, parents are also recruited from the sites of Community Group Leaders and from Early Years Centres. Group Leaders screen participants prior to registration.

The City of Toronto and United Way have designated 13 priority neighbourhoods defined as areas that need special investment in social services. Given the limited number of programs that Toronto Public Health has the capacity to deliver priority neighbourhoods are targeted for the delivery of Incredible Years programs. Outreach efforts have been made to train Group Leaders from agencies within the priority neighbourhoods.

Support for Group Leaders and Public Health Staff

Toronto Public Health has a Health Promotion Consultant (one of two mentors in training) who is the only person dedicated to the Incredible Years program. The Consultant co-ordinates the Incredible Years schedule, assists Group Leaders with community outreach to establish groups, and supports group leaders in the delivery of the Incredible Years program. Both mentors in training review tapes with individual Group Leaders, as well as collectively at the monthly Group Leaders' support meetings.

Toronto Public Health has been a strong advocate against the use of physical punishment with children and youth and has developed a policy and position statement in relation to physical punishment. To support staff in their daily practice of promoting positive methods of discipline, workshops were facilitated by certified Incredible Years Group Leaders to 350 Public Health Nurses, Family Home Visitors, Nutritionists and Dietitians. All staff involved received the Incredible Years textbook *A Trouble-Shooting Guide for Parents of Children Aged 2-8 Years*. Incredible Years vignettes, strategies and role playing were incorporated into the workshop to demonstrate Incredible Years parenting skills that promote positive discipline and can be reinforced when working with parents. This workshop is provided as part of the general orientation for all new staff working with children up to the age of six.

Challenges

Maintaining both Public Health Nurse and Community Group Leaders within a dynamic work force that changes frequently can be challenging. This results in the ongoing training of new group leaders. Striving to deliver the program to a multilingual/cultural city the size of Toronto is a major goal of the program that can be challenging due to the need for translated program materials and trained group leaders with broad language skills. Finally the limited budget for the program presents challenges in meeting the community demands for groups.

Successes

Since the inception of the program in 2004 we have delivered more than 100 programs reaching more than 1,500 parents. Over the past five years the retention rate for parents completing the program is 74 per cent.

The majority of reasons cited by parents for not completing the program are life circumstances: moving out of the city, long term illness of parent or child, return to work/school, personal crisis.

To address access and equity barriers, efforts are made to train Group Leaders who are multilingual. Twenty-three languages are spoken by the Group Leaders. The program has been delivered in Cantonese three times. Finally, the most significant impact is the difference the Incredible Years program has made in the lives of parents and their children, as reported by parents after attending an Incredible Years program.

For more information

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