

South Windsor County Even Start Evaluation Report

Fiscal Year 2000-2001, Year Six



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Prepared by:

Michele Cranwell, Evaluation Coordinator

Frederick Schmidt Ph.D., Co-Director

**The Center for Rural Studies
at the University of Vermont**

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Executive Summary

This evaluation report is for the sixth year of the South Windsor County Even Start program (SWCES), the Fiscal Year period of July 1, 2000 through June 30, 2001. The Center for Rural Studies (CRS) at the University of Vermont has worked with SWCES as local evaluators for the six years that the program has been in service to the South Windsor County area in southern Vermont. This evaluation report provides an overview of the national Even Start legislation, the SWCES program and evaluation methodology for SWCES. The demographic profile of SWCES clientele are also discussed followed by the findings of evaluation activities and their implication towards best practices and program outcomes. Results discussed include the standards of Equipped for the Future, the Early Childhood Progress survey, focus groups with SWCES families, and the SWCES Client Questionnaire. This report concludes with a summary and recommendations for future success of the program, based on the findings of this report as well as changes in Even Start legislation.

Evaluation Methods

Evaluation of SWCES focuses on *process* and *outcomes*, with recommendations for the future success of the program. Evaluation services are based needs and priority areas of SWCES as determined at the beginning of the fiscal year and based on evaluator recommendations from the previous year. *Process evaluation* components included: analysis of client demographics, client focus groups and interviews, and staff focus groups/Advisory Council meetings. This year, the evaluation team identified six strengths of SWCES, based on the findings of these methods and data from the past six years. *Outcome evaluation* components included: measurement techniques for Equipped for the Future and the Early Childhood Progress Survey. The evaluation also examines the relationship between program delivery and outcomes of the program on clients. Evaluation methods employed are both quantitative and qualitative and include survey instruments, focus groups, interviews, and observations.

Findings

In analyzing *client demographics* over the past five years and comparing this data to national reports, this program has been consistent in providing services to a population in need of these services. This past year, the program provided services for twenty-three families enrolled in the program, with a total of 36 eligible children. Currently, fourteen families, thirty-three adults and twenty-one "target children", children from birth to age ten, have remained in the program. Family successes this past year include 62% retention rate of families, four GED completions, one Bridge to College, earning child care certification and starting a successful registered in-home child care business, U.S. Citizenship, and employment in the community.

Major Strengths of South Windsor County Even Start

Through the past six years of data collection from both families, collaborators, and staff, the evaluation team has identified six major strengths of the SWCES program that have provided for high quality of services and high success rate among families in working towards, reaching their goals, and graduating. These strengths include: home-based

instruction, connecting families with available community resources, strong partnerships and collaboration, program activities and events, high retention rate of families, through these strengths, SWCES continues to work towards their seven program goals. These areas of strengths are consistent with areas from both Family Literacy Core Values and Quality Considerations as identified by RMC Research Corporation in the Revised *Guide to Quality* (2001).

Client Focus Groups

In response to the *Even Start Client Questionnaire*, administered in October 2000 and July 2001, several families discussed goals they have reached and continue to work towards this past year, as a result of their participation in SWCES. Goals reached include: the attainment of a GED, employment, earning a child care provider certification and starting a registered in-home child care business, purchasing a car or a home, and writing a resume to look for employment. Goals in progress include: the development of vocational skills to become employed, improving parenting skills to regain custody of children, receiving a drivers license, and becoming employed. In order to work towards and meet these goals, participants identified several strengths of SWCES and areas in which the program has impacted their achievements. Because of these strengths, families identify improvements in literacy skills of both adults and children and parenting skills. Furthermore, families stress the positive impact of SWCESs ability to connect them to needed resources or services in the community in order to attain their goals.

Equipped for the Future

The SWCES program has successfully begun to integrate the *Equipped for the Future* (EFF) standards into their work with families as a component of the outcome evaluation. This past year, home visiting staff of SWCES piloted the use of the EFF Checklist beginning in July 2000, for home visits with one or several of their families. Home visitors reported that they seldom used the Checklist directly with families, as they found it intimidating and confusing upon introduction. Home visitors also stress that the focus of visits is typically on instruction or working through a family crisis, thus they do not like to overwhelm families with a lot of paperwork. However, home visitors reported using the Checklist in conjunction with their current recording system after a visit is finished. This has been a helpful reflection tool to document family progress and movement towards their goals. Home visitors have also informally used EFF language with families during instruction to help families articulate their learning. Further, this tool has been shared with collaborators to build common ground of understanding of SWCES services and how collaborators provide these services.

In a focus group with home visitors, the evaluators asked them to identify a family that exemplified one of the Role Maps this past year. Evaluators also collected completed EFF checklists for these three families. Both of these data sources were analyzed to provide a qualitative (focus groups) and quantitative (EFF Checklist) assessment for three families, focusing on how skills they have developed through home visit and center based instruction, assisted them in working towards and achieving their goals.

Early Childhood Progress Survey

The *Early Childhood Progress survey* provided a teacher report of SWCES youth who are enrolled in either preschool or a compulsory education program. The teachers reported on youth school status and assessed them in six general areas in comparison to their classmates who are not in Even Start. Ninety four percent of teachers responded to this questionnaire. Approximately three quarters of youth who are enrolled in a school program attend full time. Of teachers who responded, all of them reported that SWCES youth attend school at the same rate or better compared to non-Even Start youth. Thirty percent of youth had been referred to special education and 20% were on Individualized Educational Programs (IEP). Further, teachers noted that half of the children were receiving special services.

These six major areas in which teacher were asked to report include: academic performance, motivation to learn, parent involvement, relations with other students, classroom behavior, and self-confident. Three trends were seen in the data. The areas of academic performance and motivation to learn received high responses in the “same or above other children” category, suggesting that these are areas of strength in SWCES youth in comparison to their peers. In the areas of classroom behavior and student relations, although the majority of teachers responded in the “same or above” category, almost half were given to the “below other children” category. This suggests that this area is somewhat of a strength of SWCES youth, however it is an area that could use improvement. In the areas of parent involvement and self-confidence, the majority of the responses were received in the “below other children” category, with almost half of responses given to “same or above”. This suggests that SWCES youth and parents could improve in this area.

Recommendations

The following recommendations relating to program improvement and program evaluation have been made for the sixth year of the SWCES program evaluation, based on this evaluation report. In the area of program improvement, based on the findings of the *Even Start Client Questionnaire*, SWCES should continue to build on program strengths that families have identified as having assisted them toward attaining their goals. These strengths include: flexibility and commitment of home visitors, promoting parents to be advocates of their children; connecting families with other families; activities and playgroups; promotion of family learning outside of the program; and providing childcare services. The program should also continue to have parents assist in the planning of events, as many had opinions and ideas on activities in which they would like to be involved. Based on the strong response of one parent, the program should try to hold more activities and events in Windsor. The program should continue to grow on the path it is on, incorporating feedback from parents to best meet their needs.

Based on the responses to the *Early Childhood Progress survey*, the evaluators recommend that home visitors continue to work with children towards more positive behavior, interpersonal skills, and self-confidence through early childhood education and PACT time. Likewise, SWCES staff should continue to integrate parent involvement in their child’s education into parenting and adult education and PACT time.

The following recommendations pertain to activities of program evaluation. These recommendations are based on the findings of this report and will allow the program to more effectively track and monitor family literacy and education as families progress through the program and after graduation of the program. This will not only document and measure the effectiveness of the program but will enable the program to meet the needs of its participants and make appropriate changes for program sustainability.

- ◆ Periodic staff focus groups
- ◆ Client focus groups and interviews
- ◆ Utilize State Program Indicators of Quality
- ◆ Track Even Start student development through the Early Childhood Progress Survey
- ◆ Utilize the EFF Checklist and EFF Standards
- ◆ Self-assessment of SWCES
- ◆ Collection of demographics in database
- ◆ Continue to improve communication

New Strategies for Outcome Measurements

- ◆ Pilot pre and post family self-assessment
- ◆ Comparative analysis of process and outcome relationships

I. Introduction

This evaluation report is for the sixth year of the South Windsor County Even Start program (SWCES), the Fiscal Year period of July 1, 2000 through June 30, 2001. The Center for Rural Studies (CRS) at the University of Vermont has worked with SWCES as local evaluators for the six years that the program has been in service to this area in southern Vermont. This evaluation report provides an overview of the national Even Start legislation, the SWCES program, and evaluation methodology for SWCES. The demographic profile of SWCES clientele are also discussed, followed by the findings of evaluation activities and their implication towards best practices and program outcomes. Results discussed include the major strengths of SWCES, focus groups and interviews with SWCES families, the standards of Equipped for the Future, and the Early Childhood Progress survey. This report concludes with a summary and recommendations for future success of the program, based on the findings of this report as well as changes in Even Start legislation.

National Even Start Legislation

Even Start is a national family literacy initiative that was first authorized in 1988 under Even Start Law, Part B of Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 and reauthorized and amended by the Literacy Involved Families Together (LIFT) Act of 2000 (Appendix A). Even Start focuses on teaching literacy, parenting, and family skills to eligible families. The goal of the program is to help break the cycle of poverty and illiteracy by improving the educational opportunities of the Nation's families at the lowest ends of the literacy and economic spectrum. Even Start accomplishes this through the integration of four major components including: adult education (adult literacy or English as a Second Language), parenting education, early childhood education, and parent and child together time (PACT time). The criteria for entrance into the program is based on factors including: 1) existing literacy levels 2) income, 3) age of children, 4) lack of current services, and 5) family composition. Special emphasis is given to teenage parents and English speakers of other languages. Reauthorization of Even Start under the LIFT Act of 2000 has required the following major changes and areas for further emphasis:

- Promote academic achievement/reading readiness
- Instruction programs based on scientifically based reading research
- Prevention of reading difficulties
- Set asides for special groups or activities
- Minimum sub-grant for ninth (and succeeding year) projects
- Consistent definition of "Family Literacy Services"
- Staff qualifications
- Other program elements including: summer services, regular attendance and retention, local evaluation and program application, continuity of family literacy services, indicators of program quality.

Success of an Even Start program requires collaboration among community resources, such as local service providers, the school system, and families participating in the program. This collaboration is a critical component as service agencies and schools act as a major referral source for potential Even Start families and provide additional services for families external to Even Start services. Through these support services, Even Start offers a comprehensive menu of services to meet family needs.

Overview of South Windsor County Even Start

The SWCES program is administered and operated out of the Springfield Parent/Child Center in Springfield, Vermont, and offers both home-based and center-based services to families in need. SWCES service area includes: Springfield, Cavendish, Weathersfield, and Windsor. The program has completed six years of family literacy education and outreach with the renewal of their grant in FY 1999-2000 through June 30, 2003. Vermont Adult Learning (VAL), a major collaborator of Even Start, is also an employer of Even Start staff. VAL staff working with families in the program on the adult and parenting education component. For the sixth year, SWCES has outlined seven overarching goals to be met through program activities and services. The seven goals are identified in Figure 1.

Figure 1
Seven Goals of South Windsor County Even Start

1. Assist parents to be full partners in their children's acquisition of literacy skills through parent education and adult education.
2. Ensure that children reach their full potential as learners.
3. Improve economic opportunities of families through increasing the educational level of parents.
4. Strengthen the family's vision of themselves as a learning team.
5. Expand the ability of families to become contributing and self-sustaining members of the community.
6. Continue to serve 20 families while recruiting families identified as most in need of Even Start services.
7. Leave a legacy of intergenerational life-long learners who will positively impact their communities as their communities recognize and commit to delivering family literacy activities beyond Even Start's tenure

The Even Start administrators and staff recruit and obtain referrals for families who are most in need of the program's services and are willing to commit to the rigors of an intensive program. This campaign for enrollment ensures that this program serves the appropriate population. Some of the potential clients may already be participating in other local service programs to help meet their needs. Others, however, are sought out through the school system, local advertising, and through word of mouth. After recruitment and referral procedures, potential clients must apply to the program to see if they fit the program requirements. The eight criteria, presented in Figure 2 are the initial descriptors of all clients in the program, as every client must meet these entrance criteria.

Figure 2 Eight Criteria for Participation in South Windsor County Even Start
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Income – Special consideration is given to families with and income less than 125% of the poverty level. 2. Level of Literacy – The last grade completed is considered, and an informal literacy interview is used to assess current function level in English literacy. Candidates with the lowest literacy are given the most consideration. 3. Age of Children – Families with children ages 0-3 years are given the most consideration. The program serves children from age 0-7 years. 4. Age of Parent – All mothers or fathers below age 18 receive more consideration, followed by parents between the ages of 18-25 who had their first child as a teen. 5. Family Composition – Single parent families receive the most consideration, as well as families with a disabled parent. 6. Level of Isolation – More isolated families (i.e., lack of transportation and telephone service) receive higher priority. 7. Current Services – Families with little or no current services receive the most consideration. 8. Other Need-Related Indicators – Other risk factors are considered that are not included in the above list, but may affect acceptance to the program.

The SWCES Advisory Council also meets on a monthly basis to discuss future program activities, provide updates on past and current projects, and program evaluation. Members of the Advisory Council include: Springfield Area Parent/Child Center, Vermont Center for the Book, Vermont Adult Learning, school representatives, the Department of Health, Health Care and Rehabilitative Services, Head Start, Southeastern Vermont Community Action (transportation services), Early Essential Education Coordinators, and other community members. These agencies and organizations make

referrals and help in decision making, community development and project planning. The meetings of the Advisory Council help to maintain communication and foster a strong partnership among these organizations, another strength of SWCES program. These meetings also serve as a forum to monitor the success of the program on a regular basis. Other collaborating agencies who attend quarterly meetings include the Department of Social Welfare, the Vermont Council on the Humanities, local public libraries, New Beginnings, and the Visiting Nurses Alliance.

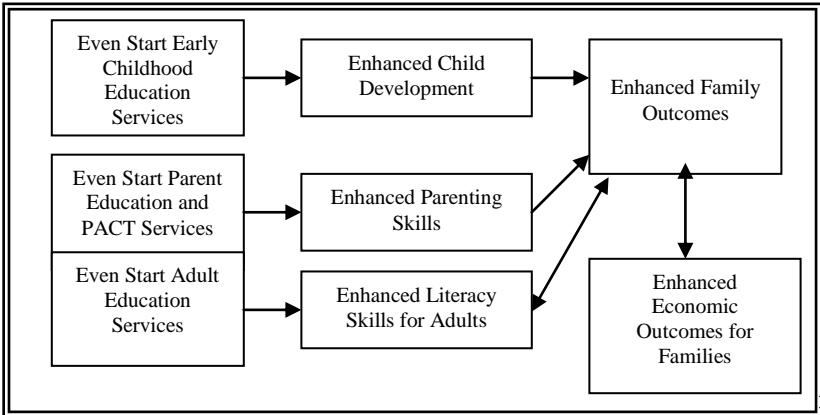
II. Evaluation Methods

Evaluators from the Center for Rural Studies (CRS) at the University of Vermont have worked with SWCES as local evaluators for the program's six years of service. The sixth year of SWCES evaluation covers the 2000-01 time/funding period. Due to the evolving nature of the program and changes in national requirements, evaluation is a continuous process, as well as the evolution of the methods employed. Evaluation services are based on needs and priority areas of the program, as determined at the beginning of the fiscal year and recommendations from the previous year. Evaluation of SWCES focuses on *process* and *outcome*, with recommendations for the future success of the program (Caudle, 1994). *Process evaluation* examines the quality of program delivery to identify strengths and weaknesses of the program, best practices, and areas in need of improvement (Scheirer, 1994). *Outcome evaluation* examines whether anticipated changes (both short and long term - i.e. attainment of GED/ADP, employment, improved relationship between parents and schools, etc.) among program participants have occurred as a result of program activities (Affholter, 1994). The evaluation also examines the relationship between program delivery and outcomes of the program on clients.

This past year, process evaluation components included an analysis of client demographics, participant focus groups and interviews, and staff focus groups/Advisory Council meetings. Based on the findings from these methods and data collected over the past six years, the evaluators have identified six major strengths of SWCES. These strengths have provided for high quality of services and success rate among families. These areas of strengths are consistent with Family Literacy Core Values and Quality Considerations, as identified by RMC Research Corporation in the Revised *Guide to Quality* (2001). Outcome components included measurement techniques for Equipped for the Future and the Early Childhood Progress Survey. Evaluation methods employed are both quantitative and qualitative and include survey instruments, focus groups, interviews, and observations.

The overall evaluation of SWCES is based on the model of Even Start's Hypothesized Services and Effects (Figure II-1). This model, presented at the Evaluation Workshop by RMC Research in January 2000, shows how participant outcomes are developed within the four components of the program.

Figure 3. Model of Even Start's Hypothesized Services and Effects (Dwyer, 2000)



Process Evaluation Methods

This past year, process evaluation components included: analysis of client demographics, client focus groups and interviews (Krueger, 1988), staff focus groups, and Advisory Council meetings. Through a review of these data and data collected over the past six years, the evaluators have identified six strengths of SWCES that have provided for high quality of services and success rate among families. These areas of strengths are consistent with areas from Family Literacy Core Values and Quality Considerations as identified by RMC Research Corporation in the Revised *Guide to Quality* (2001).

Client demographics

SWCES submits quantitative data collected in the ESPIRS database by SWCES staff, to a national evaluator, FU Associates. These data are used to construct a summarized report at both a national and state level (As of January 3, 2001, ESPIRS will no longer be used by Even Start). To allow comparison of SWCES client demographics to the national data, CRS provides an examination of the demographic characteristics of the program. This information was received by SWCES through a demographic questionnaire that was filled out by each family, ensuring complete confidentiality. Section III of this report provides a summary of the SWCES client population generated from this data. This section also discusses the services that Even Start participants are using outside of the program.

The demographic questionnaire provided the information necessary to look at the characteristics of program participants presented in Figure 4.

Figure 4 Data from the Client Demographic Survey

- Focus of families - adult literacy or ESL
- Number of target children in the program
- Number of siblings above ES age limits live with the family
- Ethnicity
- Marital status
- Housing type of the family
- Access to reliable transportation
- Highest level of education completed by parent/guardian upon enrollment in SWCES
- Educational achievements of families this past year
- Income sources of adults in participating families
- Client carried services

Strengths of South Windsor County Even Start

Through the past six years, the evaluators have collected data on program quality through process evaluation measurements. Through analysis of data collected this year and data from previous evaluation reports, the evaluators have identified six major strengths of SWCES. These strengths provide the backbone to the program, providing for high quality services and success among families. These areas of strengths are consistent with areas from both Family Literacy Core Values and Quality Considerations as identified by RMC Research Corporation in the Revised *Guide to Quality* (2001).

Even Start Client Questionnaire

Section VI of this report provides an analysis of the *Even Start Client Questionnaire* (Appendix B), as administered at a focus group and interviews in October 2000 and July 2001. This questionnaire was revised this past year by evaluators to assess participants' progress towards goals, areas in which the program has impacted participant achievement towards these goals, and strengths and areas in need of improvement of the program. The findings also present examples of family stories from in-home interviews.

Outcome Evaluation Methods

As the program has matured over the past six years, it has reached the stage in program evaluation where it can document outcomes of family participation. Outcome components included: Documentation of Equipped for the Future for several families and an analysis of the Early Childhood Progress Survey.

Equipped for the Future Documentation

For the past two years, SWCES has incorporated the standards of Equipped for the Future (EFF), an initiative of the National Institute for Literacy, into their program. EFF recognizes that literacy instruction takes place in all components of the program. Moreover, the knowledge gained is meaningful to families' lives and needs and will allow them to carry out roles and responsibilities in society as workers, parents and family members, and citizens and community members (Stein, 2000). This past year, SWCES piloted the *Equipped for the Future Checklist* (Appendix C), developed last year by CRS, that was completed by home visitors with their home visit record. This checklist is divided into the three "Role Maps", including Parent/Family Role Map, Worker Role Map, and Citizen/Community Member Role Map (Appendix D). This report discusses the use of the EFF Checklist by home visitors and suggestions for improvement. This section also presents both a qualitative (focus groups) and quantitative (EFF Checklist) assessment of three families this past year. This assessment shows how family skills and focus of home visit instruction have allowed them to work towards and achieve their goals. This knowledge has also been applied to working through difficult life situations. Home visitors state that this tool has allowed them to track changes in skill development of a family as they move from one role to another through various learning activities.

Early Childhood Progress Survey

Based on recommendations from last year, SWCES staff piloted the Early Childhood Progress survey (Appendix E) to document the progress of Even Start children in school in the areas of school readiness and progress, social interactions, parent involvement and attendance, and special education eligibility. This tool was completed by teachers of SWCES children asking them to provide specific information on the child and compare the child to other students who are not in Even Start. This data provided a baseline of child progress in schools, with insight on areas SWCES can work with children to improve their performance. Recommendations for improvement of this tool have also been made.

This report concludes with a summary of the evaluation and recommendations for the future based on the findings this year and changes in Even Start legislation.

III. Even Start Participant Demographics

Through initial research for Even Start funding, and through collaboration with other social service agencies in the South Windsor County area, a population with a need for Even Start services was found to exist. To demonstrate that the program is serving this targeted population, the evaluators have included a description of the South Windsor County Even Start program's client base.

SWCES provided service for a total of twenty-three families in the sixth year of service, with fourteen families remaining in the program by the end of the sixth year, June 30, 2001 (61% retention rate). Nine families withdrew from the program before the end of the fiscal year, as three families graduated from the program and six families withdrew. Reasons for leaving the program include: completion of goals (GED and employment) and graduation (3 families), moved out of service area (2), lack of participation (2), and crisis situation preventing further participation (2). SWCES also has high long term retention of families (Table 1). Almost 50% (11) of families have been enrolled for at least two years, with 3 families (13%) being enrolled for three years, one family for four years (4%) and two families for five years (9%) (since the onset of enrollment in the program). The Program Coordinator of SWCES states that long term enrollment in the program is based on the need of families (i.e. learning disabilities and in and out of crisis situation). Their retention increases the likelihood that they will eventually meet their goals and graduate.

Table 1. Number and percentage of families enrolled in SWCES over time

Number of years	N	Percentage
<1 year	9	39%
1.5 years	3	13%
2 years	4	17%
2.5 years	1	4%
3 years	3	13%
4 years	1	4%
5 years	2	9%

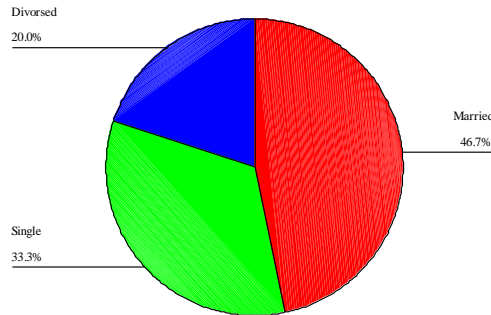
A total of thirty-three adults were involved in the program, with 73% (24) being female and 27% (9) being males. Thirty-six eligible children were involved in the program. Even Start targets children from birth to age three and supports children through age ten. As depicted in Table 2, eleven (48%) of the families in the South Windsor County Even Start program have 1 target child. Eight (35%) families have two target children, two (9%) families have three target children, 1 (4%) have four, and 1 have five target children.

Table 2. Number and Percentage of Target Children Per Family

	1 Target Child	2 Target Children	3 Target Children	4 Target Children	5 Target Children
Number of Families	11 (48%)	8 (35%)	2 (9%)	1 (4%)	1 (4%)

Twenty-two percent of the families have children that are older than the target age living in the household. The ethnicity of the families in Even Start is 87% (20) white. There is one Cambodian family, 1 Polish family, and 1 interracial family (white/Hispanic). Thirty-nine percent (39%; 9) of SWCES households are married, 35% (8) of families are single parent households, and 26% (6) are divorced. Figure 5 depicts the marital status of SWCES families by percentage.

Figure 5. Marital Status (Self-Reported) of Even Start Families by Percentage



Looking at the housing of families in SWCES, half of families (50%; 12) live in an apartment and a quarter (25%;6) live in a house. Twenty-one percent (21%; 5) reside in a tenement and one family (4%) is homeless. Although one third (33%; 8) of SWCES has access to reliable transportation, approximately two thirds (67%; 16) do not.

The highest level of education that the adult participants completed as of July 1, 2000 varied from grade 1 through having attained a GED and ADP. This information is displayed in Table 3. This table demonstrates that the highest percentage of families (27%) had at least one member who had completed the tenth grade.

Table 3. Highest Grade Level Completed for Even Start Adults*

Highest Grade Level Completed	Number of Persons (%)
Grade 1	1 (3%)
Grade 8	1 (3%)
Grade 9	1 (3%)
Grade 10	9 (27%)
Grade 11	6 (18%)
Grade 12	8 (24%)
GED**	2 (6%)
ADP**	3 (9%)

*Data was missing for two adults

**Attained in previous FY through Even Start assistance

The focus of the majority of families (87%; 20) involved in the program is to improve upon family literacy skills. One family (4%) is focused on literacy skills, but also working towards attaining her ADP. There is one family (4%) whose focus is to improve upon their English language skills through both English as a Second Language (ESL) and family literacy skills. One family (4%) is focused solely on ESL as they have literacy skills in their native language but need to improve upon their literacy in the English language.

This past year, several families besides those who have graduated from the program, have reached their goals. As of June 2001, four persons earned their GED and one completed her GED and became a certified child care provider for her in home child care business. One adult completed Bridge to College and two adults became US Citizens. Persons who earned their GED had previously completed between tenth and eleventh grade. The adult who completed bridge to college had completed up to the twelfth grade. Thus, assistance from SWCES and other services has fostered this achievement among many adult learners in the program.

Table 4 depicts the income source of all adults in SWCES families. Data this year shows a change in the majority of income source. Last year, 44% of families were relying on TANF and 24% were employed full time. However this past year, 33% of families are relying on TANF and 41% of adults are full time employed. This may indicate that SWCES is assisting families towards maintaining employment and decreasing their dependence on welfare. Three adults (11%) receive their income from TANF and SSI (Social Security Income) or disability. Two adults (7%) are employed part time. One adult (4%) is employed and receives TANF and one adult (4%) receives TANF, SSI, and is part time employed. Thus, there are varying sources of income for the families in this program, reflecting the individual needs of each situation.

Table 4. Income Source of Adults in SWCES Families

Income Source	Number	Percent
Full time employed	11	41%
TANF	9	33%
TANF/SSI	3	11%
Part time employed	2	7%
TANF/Employed	1	4%
TANF/SSI/PT employed	1	4%

Client Carried Services

Even Start is a collaborative program and would not be successful without productive interactions with the families, service providing organizations, and social institutions in the area. Figure 6 depicts service providers who collaborate with SWCES. The beginning of this list of services are services that the clients of the program carry, often prior to program entry. As the list progresses, the services are more often services provided by the community, but not "carried" by the clients. Each service provider plays a key role in the program. Many of the providers make referrals to the program and they are all working with the families to improve the lives of those using the services.

Figure 6
Collaborating Service Providers

- Welfare (TANF) – Temporary Assistance to Needy Families. Provide funds to support family until the family can find employment.
- Reach Up - caseworker involved for classes, finding employment, childcare, transitions, clothing, etc
- Medicaid/Dr. Dinosaur – physician, dental
- WIC – dairy, eggs, cereal (good sized food parcel) delivered to the door
- Food Stamps
- Family/Infant/Toddler (Parent/Child Center) – helps develop IFSP (Individual Family Service Plan) for children with medical difficulties and developmental delays, home visiting
- EEE (Early Essential Education – home visitor and speech pathologist - helps develop IEP (Individual Educational Plan)
- Head Start (Center/Home Visitor)
- Healthy Babies
- Health Care Rehabilitation Services (HCRS) – caseworker, also involved with women's group "Been There Done That" and respite for parents. They also offer two family advocates, intensive family based services, and mental health counseling.
- Schools (Preschool, Gateway, Kurn Hatten)– parents and children, teachers may make referrals
- Police – off duty, still maintaining order, especially in Windsor
- Institutional Support (i.e. churches, libraries, etc.) are not playing a very significant role, although space is provided by a local church
- Food Shelf
- VT Department of Health
- Children's Upstream Services (CUPS)
- Social Rehabilitative Services (SRS)

IV. Major Strengths of South Windsor County Even Start

Through the past six years of data collection from both families, collaborators, and staff, the evaluation team has identified six major strengths of the SWCES program that have provided for high quality of services and high success rate among families. Through these strengths, SWCES continues to work towards their seven program goals and families continue to work towards their individual goals. These strengths include home-based instruction, connecting families with available community resources, strong partnerships and collaboration, program activities and events, high retention rate of families, and long term enrollment of families. Areas in need of improvement are discussed in the Recommendations section of this report. These areas of strengths are consistent with areas from Family Literacy Core Values and Quality Considerations as identified by RMC Research Corporation in the Revised *Guide to Quality* (2001).

- **Home-based Instruction**

Although the program operates out of the Springfield Parent/Child Center, SWCES is a home-visiting based program. This allows the program to reach more rural and isolated families that otherwise might have limited access to quality education and services. Providing service through home-visiting is one of the many strengths of the program, because most of their families live in rural areas and only one third of families have reliable transportation. Families have also identified that home visitors flexibility and strong commitment to work with families is a major strength of this home based program.

- **Connecting Families with Community Resources**

SWCES further fulfills a need in the community by connecting families with available community resources, including services provided by collaborating agencies. This strength of the program offers families comprehensive services to meet their needs. For example, one parent received her GED, became a certified child care provider, and established her own registered in-home child care business through the network of services provided by her Even Start home visitors. An ESL family from Poland became U.S. Citizens this past year because their adult educator connected them to the necessary services and resources to achieve this goal. Their parent/child educator also connected this family to a Polish speaking physician, who assisted in translation at parent-teacher conferences. When the youngest child of another family was diagnosed with autism, their home visitor assisted them in establishing contacts with services needed for their child. Because of this assistance, both adults in the family have since received their GED/APD and have reached other goals (employment), placing them in a position to graduate from the program. The needs of their child continue to be met through other social service agencies as referred by SWCES. Putting families in touch with necessary resources has promoted parents to become better advocates for themselves and their children. Families also note that connecting them with other resources promotes learning to occur outside of the program.

- **Partnerships and Collaboration**

Over the past two years, SWCES has improved their relationship with collaborating agencies. Two major reasons for this improvement has been the expansion of their Advisory Council to other service provider representatives and the addition of quarterly meetings for regional collaborators. This change was implemented last fiscal year to improve the communication among coordinating agencies and increase attendance at these meetings. The SWCES Advisory Council also meets on a monthly basis to discuss future program activities, provide updates on past and current projects, and program evaluation. Included on the Advisory Council are SWCES administration and home visitors, evaluators, service agency and school district representatives, SWCES parents, and interested community members. The meetings of the Advisory Council help to maintain communication and foster a strong partnership among these organizations, another strength of SWCES program. These meetings also serve as a forum to monitor the success of the program on a regular basis. Sharing the EFF Checklist with collaborators established a common ground of understanding, as they were able to better understand the services of SWCES and carry out SWCES services.

- **Program Activities and Events**

Focus groups and interviews with families indicate that SWCES continues to improve its services by offering a wide variety of events and activities that serve the needs and interests of families. Participating families speak highly of the program and of the program's impacts on their lives. As many families have been involved in Even Start since the onset, several parents in the project have begun to take an active role in planning and promoting activities this past year and for next year. Parent participation in the planning process is a tremendous breakthrough of the project, suggesting that their involvement in SWCES has assisted in the development and improvement of leadership skills among several clients. Parents also commented on how their participation in SWCES has facilitated them to connect with other families in their communities. Activities and playgroups have offered parents an opportunity to leave their home, meet new people, and receive needed peer social interaction.

- **High Retention Rate of Families**

This past year, SWCES retained 61% (14 of 23) of families enrolled on July 1, 2000. Nine families have left the program for various reasons, including: completion of goals (GED and employment) and graduation (3 families), moved out of service area (2), lack of participation (2), and crisis situation preventing further participation (2). Two of the families who moved out of the service area had completed their adult education goals of attaining a GED and employment.

- **Long-term Enrollment of Families**

SWCES also has high long term retention of families, as depicted in Table 1 (p. 14). Almost 50% (11) of families have been enrolled for at least two years, with 3 families (13%) being enrolled for three years, one family for four years (4%) and two families for five years (9%) (since the onset of enrollment in the program). The Coordinator and home visitor of SWCES states that long term enrollment in the program is based on the need of families (i.e. learning disabilities and in and out of crisis situation). Their

retention increases the likelihood that they will eventually meet their goals and graduate. Many families, besides three who have graduated, have reached goals this past year, which is related to the high long-term retention rate of families in the program. Four parents have received their GED with one of these parents receiving her child care provider certification for her in-home business (mother enrolled for two years). A husband and wife team, along with two of their children received their U.S. Citizenship (five year enrollment). One adult who received her high school diploma completed Bridge to College (two year enrollment). Data from the National Center for Family Literacy (2001) show that of all families who enrolled in the program in 1997-98, 71% left the program having participated for 12 or fewer months. The long term enrollment of SWCES families is a great success of the program and is a direct result of program strengths that assist families to continue to work towards their goals.

VI. The South Windsor County Even Start Client Focus Groups

In October 2000 and July 2001, the evaluators held a focus group with SWCES families to document participants' views on SWCES, including family's progress towards their goals throughout the year, impact of the program on family achievements, and strengths and areas in need of improvement, using the Even Start Client Questionnaire (Appendix B). The evaluators also interviewed three families at their homes in July 2001 as they were not able to attend the focus group at the Springfield Parent/Child Center. At both focus groups, families were consistent in their responses in the areas of program impact on family achievements and strengths and ways to improve the program. Three examples of family stories from the in-home interviews are provided at the end of this section. This questionnaire is an evaluation tool that serves to document participant outcome and provide feedback to program delivery. It is also a tool to help clients reflect on their year with SWCES. Major themes discussed by families are reviewed as follows.



Progress Towards Goals - Major Accomplishments of Families

Families were asked to identify major accomplishments they have made this past year. Families discussed goals in which they are working towards and have achieved.

- One woman whose family has just graduated from the program noted that in the past year she received her GED and had become employed full time. The next goal that she is working towards is to pass her drivers license exam.
- This single mother of a young son indicated that she has met most of the goals she established two years ago when she first enrolled in the program. She completed her GED through work with VAL and is working towards earning college credits. She also received her child care provider certification and took the necessary steps towards starting her successful in-home child care business. She recently purchased a car, which has helped with transportation issues.
- One mother has begun looking for employment and has worked with vocational rehabilitation services to help her identify skill areas.
- One mother commented that she also purchased a vehicle with assistance from her home visitor, who encouraged her to inspect the vehicle before purchase.
- One mother has been working on improving her parenting skills as she is working towards regaining custody of her children. This mother has also recently been married and purchased a home and is working on home renovations.
- Another mother who recently received her GED is working on writing her resume to prepare her for pursuing employment.



Program Impact on Family Achievements

Families also discussed several ways in which the program has impacted or supported their achievements. Families cited examples related to adult education, including the development or improvement of literacy and parenting skills, progress their children have made in their education, and the positive impact the program has had through connecting families to resources or services in the communities.

- **Adult education - literacy and parenting**

Several parents discussed how their participation in SWCES has had a positive impact on the development of their literacy and parenting skills. Working closely with home visitors and VAL educators several women have earned their GED and one has received her child

Several parents indicated that because of SWCES, their parenting skills have improved as they have learned more positive ways to interact with their children.

care certification. One of the women who received her GED is working with her VAL educator in potentially enrolling in a course at the Community College of Vermont. In working towards her GED, one woman's home visitor assisted her in preparing to return to the workforce. She commented that receiving her GED and becoming

employed has improved her self-esteem. Another mother noted that she has improved in her reading and math skills and is now more confident to read to her child and help her child with her homework.

- **Early childhood education**

Several respondents discussed the positive impact of their families involvement in SWCES on their children's education. A few of the women noted that their children had received scores that were above average on standardized tests because of the early childhood education provided by home visitors. All of the parents indicated that their children enjoy reading and that several children have improved in their attention span because of reading with both parents and the home visitor. Parents have also noticed an improvement in her child's reading skill and vocabulary. All parents appreciated the fact that home visitors bring educational tools, such as a lap top computer, games, books, and toys that benefit their children as well as other children who come over to play.

- **Connecting families to community resources**

Home visitors and VAL educators connect families with needed resources in the community so families may continue to make strides towards goals and further their learning. Several parents remarked that their home visitor connected them to their local library, so they can enjoy going to the library to read books and attend reading programs, outside of the program. One parent of a family who recently graduated noted that this connection was important to her to continue working with her children on their reading skills. Furthermore, home visitors

Families stressed the positive impact of SWCESs to connect them to needed resources or services in the community in order to attain their goals or work through a challenging situation.

have connected parents to necessary services to care for children with special needs. Another parent was connected to resources in the community to complete the application and registration process to establish a successful in-home child care business. Parents have also gotten involved in workshops and support groups, such as the Mom's Group, outside of the program, because of a home visitor's referral.



Strengths of South Windsor County Even Start

Families also identified several strengths of SWCES that have made this an enjoyable program and assisted families in working towards and achieving their goals. Strengths identified by the families correspond to the Family literacy Core Values and Quality Considerations, as discussed in the Revised Guide to Quality (RMC Research, 2001). These strengths are incorporated in the six major strengths of the program, as identified by the evaluation team (see Section IV).

● **Flexibility and commitment of home visitors**

All of the parents expressed deep appreciation and stressed the importance of home visitors' strong commitment to work with families, through both good and bad situations. One woman commented that she appreciates the flexibility of her home visitor in scheduling appointments and re-scheduling them on a moments notice to accommodate for unexpected events. All respondents further stressed that home visitors provide tremendous support to families in all situations. Home visitors have also provided support in the form of transportation to and from activities as well as important school meetings and doctor appointments.

● **Promoting parents to be advocates of their children**

All respondents noted that home visitors promote and encourage parent advocacy among families. Two parents noted that their home visitors attend parent-teacher conferences and meetings with teachers and counselors to address the needs of children at school. One mother discussed how her home visitor helped her find reliable transportation so her child may attend daycare on a regular basis. One mother who lost custody of her children noted that her home visitor has provided tremendous support through working with the court system to regain custody.

<p>Family identified strengths of SWCES:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➔ Flexibility and commitment of home visitors ➔ Promoting parents to be advocates of their children ➔ Connecting families with other families ➔ Activities and playgroups ➔ Promotion of family learning outside of the program ➔ Providing childcare services

● **Connecting families with other families**

Parents also commented on how their participation in SWCES has facilitated them to connect with other families in their communities. Activities and playgroups have offered parents an opportunity to leave their home, meet new people, and receive needed peer social interaction.

- **Activities and playgroups**

All of the families speak positively about activities and playgroups offered by SWCES. Favorite activities include: the reading program, apple picking, visiting the sheep farm, nutrition classes, visiting the Montshire Museum, visiting the Northfield Farmer's Market, parenting classes, the Teddy Bear Picnic, Mother Goose Meets Mother Nature series, nature activities.

- **Promotion of family learning outside of SWCES**

Through home visits and attending events such as book classes, families receive education materials to bring home. This encourages parents to work with their children in the development of literacy skills outside of the program. One woman commented that her involvement in SWCES has taught her the skill of how to problem solve and how to get things accomplished, that she has applied in every day life.

- **Providing child care services**

Many of the parents stressed how important it is that SWCES provides child care services at both the Parent/Child Center and home visits. Parents indicated that this service allows them to focus on their studies during home visits or activities at the center, instead of focusing on their child.



Areas for program improvement

As most of the comments about SWCES were positive, the majority of parents did not have suggestions for improvement of the program. However a few individual responses were given. One mother who lives in Windsor commented that SWCES should take into consideration location and time of activities to accommodate people who live in different parts of the service area, have transportation issues, and may have scheduling conflicts because of work. Further, one mother suggested that events be held in other areas so that she can continue to meet new people. Another parent asked that the program provide more activities involving arts and crafts. One person mentioned that she would like her family to take a basic safety course.



Examples of Family Stories

The evaluators held three in-depth interviews with families who were not able to attend the end of year focus group in July 2001. The following highlights the stories of these three families and the positive impact the program has had on their lives. Names have been withheld to protect the confidentiality of family members.

The mother of a family who recently graduated provided several examples of how working with her home visitor through Even Start has impacted her life. First, her home visitor connected her to the local library, which is within walking distance to her home. She and her family enjoy going to the library to read books and attend reading programs. As a graduate of SWCES, this connection was important to her to continue working with her children on their reading skills. Furthermore, her home visitor connected her to the necessary services to care for her son who was diagnosed with autism. Her home visitor also assisted her in preparing to return to the workforce. Receiving her GED and becoming employed has improved her self-esteem and she has taken the needed steps to seek out medical assistance for depression.

Working closely with her home visitor and VAL educator, one mother has earned her GED and child care certification. Her home visitor also connected her with resources in the community for the application and registration process of establishing an in-home child care facility. She is now running a successful in-home child care business. Her involvement in SWCES has taught her how to problem solve and how to get things accomplished. Her VAL educator has also provided her with material from the Community College of Vermont, as she is considering taking some college courses for further education in home child care. She noted that her son received high scores on his standardized tests because of the early childhood education provided by her home visitor. Furthermore, because she runs a child care program, the other children in her home benefit from educational materials, books, games, and toys that the home visitor brings.

This mother of five children noted that she feels all of her children have shown considerable progress in school because of SWCES. All of her children enjoy reading and have learned to use a computer because her home visitor brings her lap top on visits. Her home visitor has also linked her to community resources, as she is now taking a family strengthening course at the Windsor Hospital. Her home visitor also attends treatment team meetings as her child's school with counselors and teachers to assist her in advocating for her child.

V. Equipped for the Future

The SWCES program has successfully begun to integrate the Equipped for the Future (EFF) standards into their work with families as a component of the outcome evaluation. In 1999, staff and the evaluators of the program attended two trainings on EFF theory, practice, and materials with Vermont Adult Learning teacher, Jim Carabell. EFF, an initiative of the National Institute for Literacy, recognizes knowledge and life skills of adults that will allow them to carry out their roles and responsibilities in society as workers, parents and family members, and citizens and community members. These standards are useful to the program because it recognizes that literacy instruction is present in all components of the program and can be used in a way that is meaningful and useful to families in their daily lives (Stein, 2000).

According to the National Institute for Literacy, the intention of EFF is that learners can set purposeful goals, which form the basis for instruction and assist learners to see the application of the instruction and learning in their every day lives (Curry, 2001). Last year, SWCES staff and evaluators initiated the development of an instrument to document family progress through the three Role Maps, including Parent/Family Role Map, Worker Role Map, and Citizen/Community Member Role Map (Appendix D). Evaluators from CRS developed the EFF Checklist (Appendix C), based on the needs identified by home visitors during a focus group last year. Home visitors identified that they needed a one page version of the Role Maps in the form of a checklist on the back of their home visitor record. They felt that using this form in conjunction with their home visit record would facilitate the use of the Checklist and the EFF Role Maps into their instruction.

The Equipped for the Future assessment shows how focus of home visit instruction and family skills, as identified by home visitors through the use of the EFF Checklist, have allowed them to work towards and achieve their goals.

The EFF Checklist (Appendix C) presents the three Role Maps, major categories under each Role Map, and sub-categories under the three or four main categories. The Checklist was designed to collect the number of times home visits work on the sub-categories over the course of a year. This data, used in conjunction with qualitative data from home visitors about families exemplifying the three Role Maps, shows how focus of home visit instruction and family skills have allowed families to work towards and achieve their goals.

SWCES home visitors piloted the use of the EFF Checklist beginning in July 2000 with one or several of their families during home visits (some home visitors started collecting this data later in the year). In May 2001, evaluators held a focus group with home visitors to follow up on the use of the tool over the past year (EFF Focus Group Guide Appendix F). The discussion covered the use of the tool (both successful and unsuccessful uses), how the tool helped families, and ways to improve the tool. Home visitors were asked to discuss, in general, the Role Map that was most frequently

exemplified by families. Further, they were asked to identify a family that exemplified each of the three Role Maps this past year, similar to the EFF focus group discussion presented in the SWCES Evaluation Report from FY 1999-2000. Home visitors also provided the evaluators with completed EFF checklists used this past year with these three families. The second half of this section of the report presents both a qualitative (focus groups) and quantitative (EFF Checklist) assessment of three families this past year, and how the skills they have developed have allowed them to achieve their goals.

Uses of the EFF Checklist

The evaluators objective behind the EFF Checklist was to develop a tool that home visitors could use with families, as a way of identifying their goals, tracking their progress, and reflecting upon learning that takes place in both formal and informal instruction. This data would be used in outcome evaluation to show how learning and skill building from home visit instruction assist families to work towards and achieve their goals. The following provides a discussion of how the EFF Checklist was used by home visitors during the pilot test of the instrument and suggestions for improvement of the tool.

❖ *Use with families*

All of the home visitors reported that they seldom used the EFF Checklist directly with families. Most of the home visitors reported trying to use the tool with their families during home visits, however most of these attempts were not successful for several reasons. Families provided mixed reviews of the Checklist as it presents a lot of print on one page, which can be intimidating for a person with poor literacy skills. One home visitor noted that she tried to introduce the Role Maps and categories within each Role Map, however the family quickly became confused and frustrated. Furthermore, home visitors stated that they try to limit the amount of paperwork they bring to visits. Home visitors prefer to focus this time on educational instruction, without the use of a lot of paperwork. Also, many times families are in a crisis situation when home visitors arrive and it is not be appropriate for them to press the use of the Checklist during that type of situation. As home visitors have not consistently used the EFF Checklist as a learning tool with families, they have not received any feedback about whether or not this tool has been helpful for families. All of the home visitors agreed that most of their families are not currently in the situation to use this tool as a reflection tool or in their goal setting. The recommendations provided at the end of this section discuss possible ways to introduce this tool to families in a less intimidating manner.

Although the EFF Checklist is not used directly with families, home visitors have identified several ways in which the tool has been successfully used to document families progress and movement through the different Role Maps of life.

❖ *Reflection tool for home visitors to document family progress and movement*

Home visitors stated that the EFF Checklist is most often used in conjunction with home visit record, which are completed after the home visit. The tool was used by checking off the appropriate sub-categories under each role map that were worked on during the instruction. This has been a useful reflection tool for home visitors, documenting

families movement through the three Role Maps, with different learning activities or life events over time. One home visitor stated that families are often “stuck” in one Role Map, typically the Parent/Family Role Map, because of situations that arise in their lives. However, this tool helps them to sort out exactly where families are in their learning and when they “break out” of certain roles, such as move from Parent/Family towards a Worker.

❖ ***Home visitors informally use EFF language with families***

Although home visitors do not directly use the checklist with families, they reported that they informally discuss with them how the visits lesson or activity can be applied to other types of learning or life situations through the use of *language* from the EFF Checklist. The Coordinator and home visitor of SWCES noted that use of EFF language during home visits has been a way to deliver a common message of learning to families: that learning occurs during all aspects of life. Home visitors also note that during certain moments at home visits, it is appropriate to use the words and possibly the EFF Checklist so parents are aware of how their learning may be applied to their larger picture of life (i.e. other roles such as worker or community member).

❖ ***Share tool with collaborators to build common ground***

The home visitors reported that they shared the EFF Checklist with their collaborators during a quarterly meeting this past year. The Coordinator of the program noted that this tool has helped collaborators better understand the services and spectrum of learning provided by SWCES. This tool has improved relationships with collaborators by providing a common ground of understanding about SWCES. Further, this tool helped collaborators to clarify the ways in which their services benefit families and deliver Even Start services. Representatives from mental health services (HCRS) asked if they could use the EFF Checklist as a part of their services, with both SWCES families and other clients.

Analysis of EFF Documentation

The following discussion provides an analysis of qualitative data provided by home visitors during the EFF focus group and quantitative data from completed EFF checklists for three families. The first part of the discussion provides a general picture of SWCES families through the EFF Role Maps. The second part of the discussion provides detailed information for three families whom home visitors have identified as exemplary of the Role Maps. Quantitative information and an EFF Chart is provided for the three families to show how they have moved through the role maps to achieve their goals or work through a challenging situation.

SWCES Families and use of the EFF Standards

Home visitors state that, in general, the learning and activities of many families consistently falls in the Parent/Family Role Map. Many families have the goal of improving parenting skills and many home visits focus on child rearing, child education, positive discipline and role modeling for children. However, many home visits, activities and events overlap in the Worker and Citizen/Community Member Role Maps. For example, in the nutrition/cooking classes parents are involved in the planning and

preparation of food and simultaneously are communicating with others and becoming informed. This past year, many parents have taken the great stride of assisting in planning activities and events, which involves all three of the Role Maps. Home visitors note that with upcoming reform in welfare and work requirements, they anticipate that families will be moving towards the Worker Role Map.

Detailed Look at Three Families and EFF Standards

The EFF Standards and Checklist document the skill building and learning process families go through in order to work towards and achieve identified goals and work through challenging life situations. Home visitors have highlighted three families that exemplify each of the Role Maps (names of families have been withheld to maintain strict confidentiality). For analytical purposes, the evaluators combined the number of checks for each sub-category to get a total number of times home visits worked on each of the main categories, under the three Role Maps. The following EFF Charts show the total number of checks received for the major categories under each Role Map (see EFF Checklist in Appendix C for further information on major and sub-categories). Specific details are provided in the text.

It is important to note that data from the EFF Checklist is subjective to the perspective of the home visitor, which differs among each individual. Thus, the following charts present a general picture of family progress through the year. Further, this tool should not be used to compare one family to another. This tool was not used in a consistent manner for the same number of times throughout the year for each family. Most families have two home visitors, one for adult and one early childhood education. Home visitors indicated that for the following three families, the EFF Checklist was used by only one of the home visitors (although total number of home visits was used to calculate the use rate of the Checklist). Second, this tool does not represent a beginning and an end but a continuum of learning based on families needs at the current time.

➔ *Parent/Family Role Map – Single mother advocates her child’s needs in school*

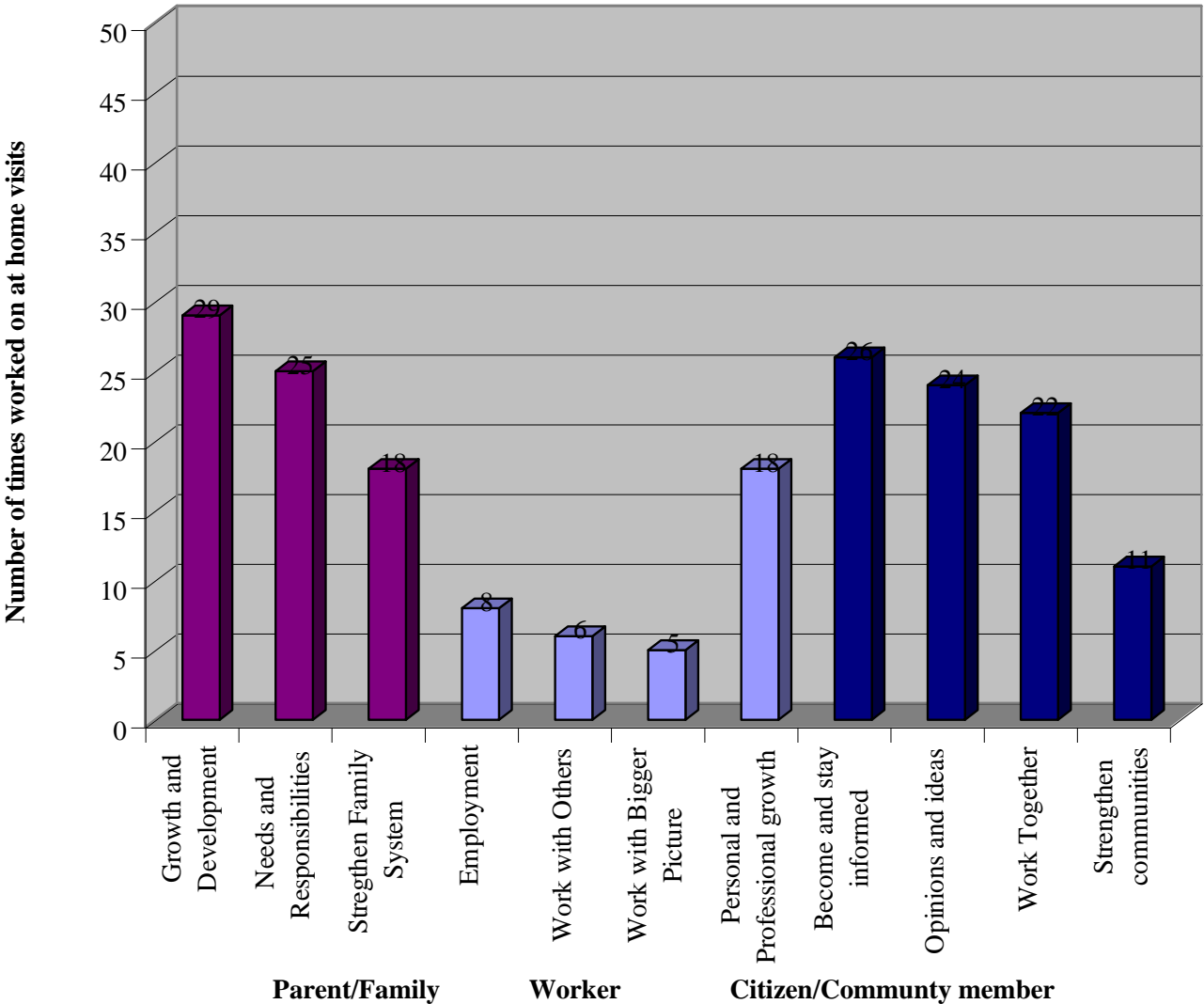
One of the home visitors identified one of her families to be exemplary of the Parent/Family Role Map. This family is also an example of a family that touches on several of the role maps in meeting her goals. This family is made up of a single mother with one child who has several special needs. This mother has worked on her parenting skills with her home visitor to provide better support for her child's needs. She has also struggled to advocate for him in school as her family has a poor history in the school system and town. Her home visitor commented that it has been a challenge for this mother to work with the school and understand the bureaucracy of the school system to ensure that her child’s needs are met. However she has worked through this challenge. She has also encouraged open communication with both immediate and extended family members to improve her support structure through this situation.

As indicated by their EFF Family Chart (Figure 7), results from a year of EFF documentation show that this family was strong in both the Parent/Family Role Map and the Citizen/Community Member Role Map through advocating for her child. The EFF Checklist was utilized by this home visitor for twenty-one of her thirty-two home visits

(66% utilization rate) and received a total of 194 checks through the course of ten months (July 00 through May 01). Under the Parent/Family Role Map, many home visits focused on “promoting family members growth and development”, specifically the sub-categories of make and pursue plans for self-improvement (9 visits) and support children's formal education (11). She was also strong in the main category of "meet family needs and responsibilities", specifically the sub-categories of balance priorities to meet multiple needs and responsibilities (9) and give and receive support outside the immediate family (11). Further, this family was strong in the area of “strengthen the family system”, including the sub-categories of provide opportunities for each family member to experience success (6) and form and maintain supportive family relationships (4).

The home visitor of this family also identified that they were strong in the Role Map of Citizen/Community Member during home visits. Twenty-six home visits touched on "becoming and stay informed", specifically the sub-categories of identify, monitor and anticipate problems, community needs, strength and resources, for yourself and others (8) and figure out how the system that affects an issue works (7). Under the main area of “form and express opinions and ideas”, she was particularly strong in the sub-category of communicate so that others understand (9). Under the area of "work together", she was also specifically strong in participating in group processes and decision making (8) and managing and resolving conflict (5). Several of her family's home visits also focused on areas within the Worker Role Map. Thus, EFF specifically documents the areas in which this family focused on to advocate and meet the needs of the child.

**Figure 7. EFF Family Chart from 7/00-5/01
Parent/Family Role Map**



➔ ***Worker Role Map – Single mother establishes an in-home registered child care business***

One home visitor and a VAL adult educator discussed how another single mother with one child exemplified the Worker Role Map. This single mother was initially on TANF when she first enrolled in the program. During the first year of her participation in the program, she identified that she wanted to start a registered child care business in her home as she was already providing services for many neighborhood families. With the assistance of her home visitor and VAL educator, this woman went through several challenging steps to receive her child care certification and currently run a successful registered child care facility in her home. One important step was to write a business plan to prove to the State of Vermont that her business meets certain work requirements. To meet these requirements, she had to do several things including: have her house inspected for fire safety and other health hazards; complete forms to receive subsidies for food through the state and write up menus and a nutrition plans on a weekly basis; complete a CPR and first aid course; and develop enrollment forms for children in the program. She also took the steps needed to get her eyes checked and purchase glasses and purchase a vehicle to solve her transportation problems.

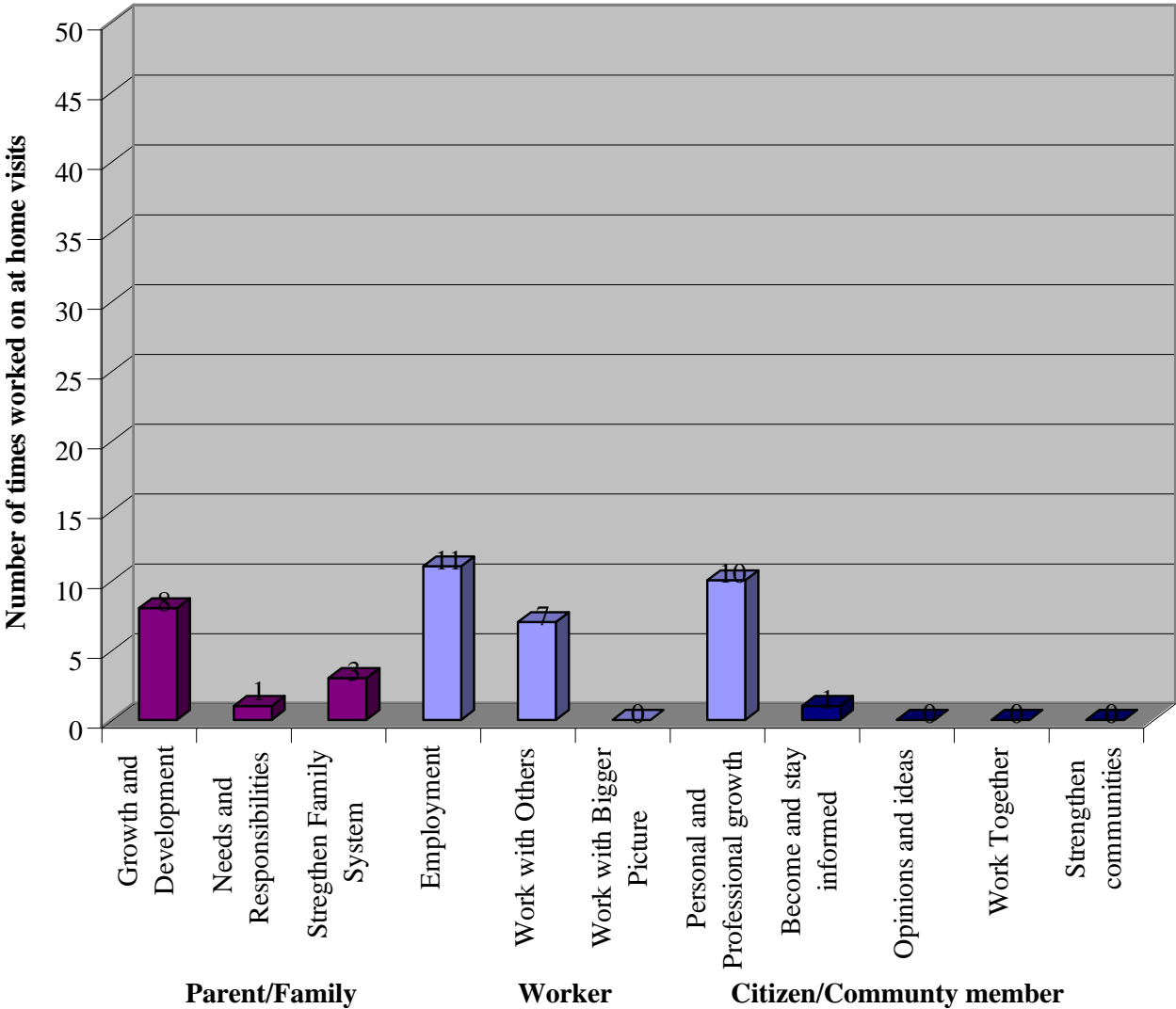
Through this past year, this woman has become more confident and organized in her life and is more confident in her writing skills (she is dyslexic and has purchased a computerized spell check to assist her). She is also more consistent in making and keeping her home visiting appointments. Furthermore, she has become very focused on her child's education. She has also focused on her own education as she has received her GED and is looking into taking some courses at the Community College of Vermont in child care.

Figure 8 indicates this progress through the EFF Checklist as she has become a better advocate for her son and has become self-employed. This figure indicates that the majority of her home visits in which this tool was used, focused on the Worker Role Map. The EFF Checklist was utilized by this home visitor for eight of her thirty-five home visits (23% utilization rate) and received a total of 41 checks through the course of four months (Jan 01 through May 01). This home visitor indicated that this mother was strong in the Worker Role Map during home visits, specifically in the main category of "do the work/employment". Under this main category, she was strong in the sub-category of organizing, planning and prioritizing work (5). She also touched on skills in the area of "work with others", specifically seeing and receiving assistance, support, motivation, and direction (5). Further, in the area of "plan and direct personal and professional growth", she was strong in learning new skills (6).

Their EFF Family Chart shows that this family was also strong in the Role Map of Parent/Family. Under the main category of "promote family members growth and development", this mother worked on making and pursuing plans for self-improvement (3) and fostering informal education of children (3). In the main area of "strengthening the family system", home visit instruction touched on providing opportunities for each family member to experience success (2). Although the EFF Checklist was not used as consistently as desired for this family, the chart still exemplifies the strides taken as a

parent and worker to achieve her goal of establishing a successful in-home registered child care facility.

**Figure 8. EFF Family Chart from 1/01-5/01
Worker Role Map**



➔ ***Citizen/Community Member Role Map – ESL family attains goal of U.S. Citizenship***

This two parent family with four children (two children eligible for SWCES services) enrolled in SWCES almost five months after moving to the United States from Poland in 1995. At that time, the parents and youngest daughter did not speak English. The family was seeking a better way of life and a more healthy environment for their children. Their long term goal with the program was to become U.S. Citizens with short term goals of finding full-time employment for the parents and child care services for their youngest son. The family has since met their short term goals and has worked very hard with their adult educator to recently become U.S. Citizens. The family completed the complicated process of naturalization applications, proper documentation and fulfilling all of the pieces necessary for citizenship, including studying American government and history. This was especially challenging because of the language barrier (through the past five years they have learned some English and are now working to improve their ability to speak and read English, having accomplished their long term goal). They also had to travel to other parts of the state in order to take the required tests.

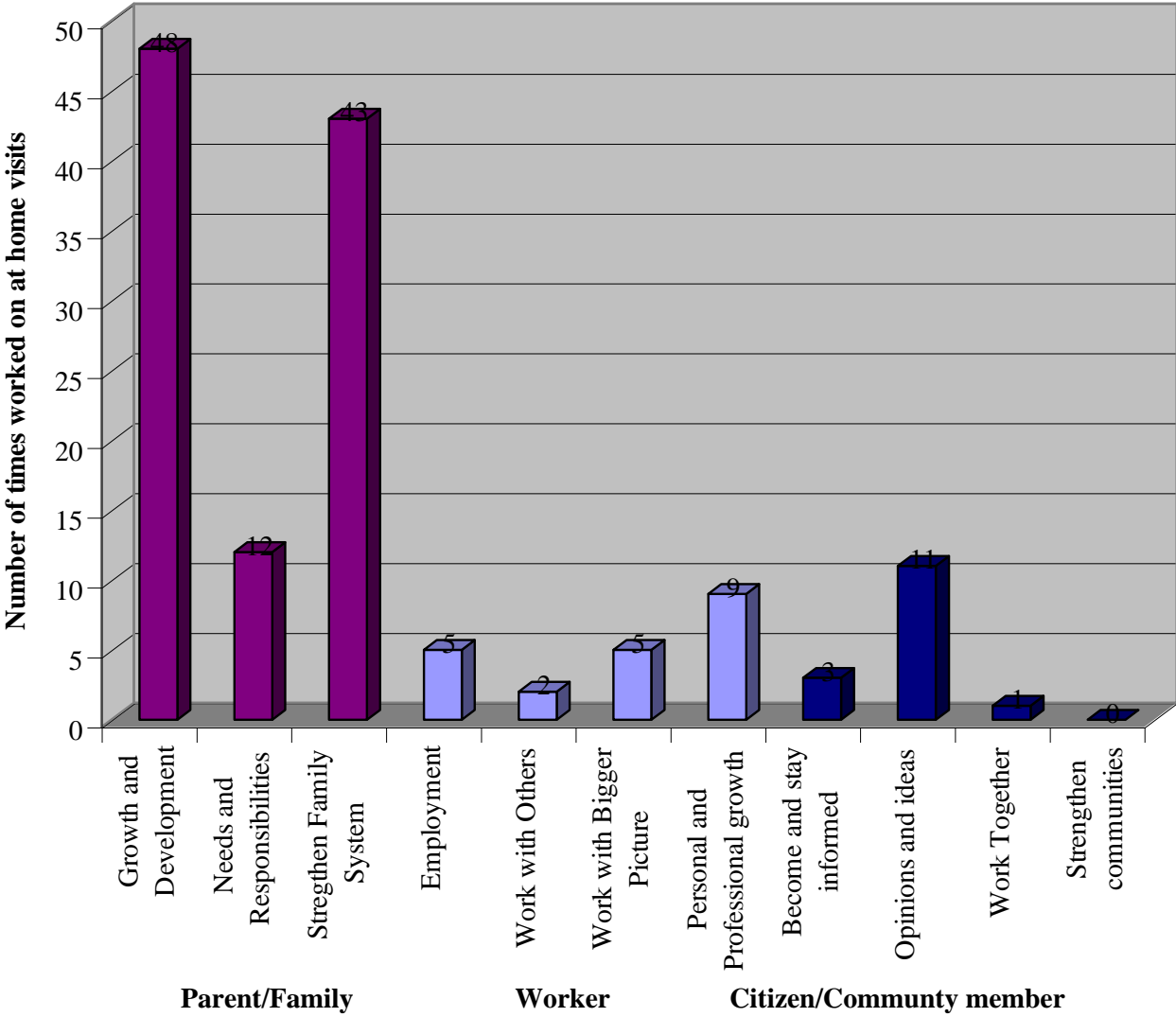
Figure 9 demonstrates that this family has concentrated their learning in all three of the Role Maps, specifically the Parent/Family and Citizen/Community Member Role Maps. The EFF Checklist was utilized by this home visitor for twenty-three of her fifty home visits (46% utilization rate) and received a total of 139 checks through the course of ten months (Aug 00 through May 01). In the Parent/Family Role Map, the home visitor noted that this family has been strong in the area of "promoting family members growth and development". Specifically in the sub-categories of support children's formal education (14), guiding and mentoring other family members (13), and fostering informal education of children (12). These skill areas were developed in working towards and meeting one of their short term goals to find child care services for their youngest daughter. They have also worked to "strengthen the family system" by providing opportunities for each family member to experience success (17) and create a vision for the family and work to achieve it (16). All of these areas have been strong because they have strongly worked together as a family towards their short and long term goals.

In the Citizen/Community Member Role Map, through the process of becoming U.S. Citizens, they have had to "form and express opinions and ideas", specifically the sub category of communicate so others understand (8) and strengthen and express sense of self that reflects personal history, values, beliefs, and roles in the larger community (2). Further, they have worked to "become and stay informed", specifically the sub-category of recognize and understand human, legal and civic rights, and responsibilities for yourself and others (2).

In working towards one of their short term goal of full time employment, their home visits worked on skill areas in the Worker Role Map, specifically "plan and direct personal and professional growth", in the sub-category of learning new skills (5). Further they have "done the work/employment", by responding to and meeting new work challenges (3). They have also "worked within the bigger picture" by balancing individual role and needs with those of the organization (3) and working within

organizational norms (2). Although their EFF Family Chart does not portray this family to be extremely strong in the Citizen/Community Member Role Map, this home visitor selected this family because of their interaction with the community to become U.S. Citizens. The home visitor also noted that, in general, this family spends most of their time working towards both education and their full-time jobs, as they have a strong work ethic and desire to improve their English speaking skills and life situation. Thus, at this point in their lives, they are not yet fully involved in their community. They have, however, worked with community members by providing assistance to a local Polish woman who lost her husband.

**Figure 9. EFF Family Chart from 8/00 to 5/01
Citizen and Community Member Role Map**



Recommendations for continued use of EFF Standards and the EFF Checklist

As evident in the above discussion, although family learning may focus on one Role Map, based on their goals, both formal and informal learning crosses over into all of the Role Maps. The evaluators recommend that home visitors continue to use the EFF Checklist in conjunction with the home visiting record, specifically on a more consistent basis throughout the year during most or all of their home visits. Adult and early childhood educators who work together with one family should coordinate the use of the Checklist to ensure that home visits are covered. Home visitors should also continue to use the language of EFF in their instruction, to acknowledge as families work towards their goals or take a new stride towards another Role Map. Further, the evaluators recommend that, when appropriate, home visitors share with families their EFF charts. The objective of sharing this chart is to enhance family awareness of the progress they have made in different life roles through working towards their identified goals over the course of the year. Introducing the EFF Checklist and standards to families in this manner may present less confusion to families and provide positive feedback to families on their progress. Further, this tool may assist families in re-evaluating their goals or possibly identifying new goals to work towards in the program.

VI. South Windsor County Even Start Early Childhood Progress Survey

The SWCES staff piloted the Early Childhood Progress (ECP) survey this past year with teachers of SWCES students, to document the progress of these children in school in comparison to their peers who are not in Even Start. Teachers of SWCES students who are enrolled in preschool and compulsory education were asked to assess these students in the areas of school readiness and progress, social interactions, parent involvement and attendance, and special education eligibility. Fifteen teachers completed the survey of the sixteen asked to complete it, for a 94% response rate.

This documentation assists home visitors in improving the early childhood education portion of the program to meet specific needs of the children. Involving teachers in SWCES youth assessment also establishes a link between SWCES and the school systems. The high response rate of teachers is a positive indicator of a growing relationship between the program and the schools. The following data provides a baseline to assess students progress as individuals and to measure change over time for SWCES students in general.

Even Start Youth School Status

The first part of the survey asked teachers to respond with a yes or no answer regarding students school status, attendance, special education, IEP, and special services.

Full/Part Time question

Teachers reported that approximately three quarters of the youth were enrolled full time in a school program (77%;10). The other quarter were enrolled part time (23%;3). Two teachers did not respond to this question.

Attendance

The progress survey asked teachers to mark whether the child's attendance was at the same or better rate as the other children who are not in Even Start. Of the ten who responded to this question, 100% of them noted that the SWCES child had the same or better rate of attendance as other children. Five respondents did not answer this question.

Special Education

When asked if the child had been referred to special education, 70% (7) of the respondents stated the youth had not, while 30% (3) noted referrals. Five respondents did not answer this question.

IEP

Respondents also noted that 80% (8) of youth were not on Individualized Educational Programs (IEP) while 20% (2) of them were on IEP's. Again, five respondents did not answer this question.

Special Services

Teachers reported that half of the youth (5) were receiving special services while 50% (5) were not. Five of the respondents did not answer this question.

Even Start Students Compared to Non-Even Start Students

The last section of the ECP survey asked teachers to evaluate student performance in comparison with classmates using the following lichert scale from 1 to 5:

- 1= much below other children**
- 2= somewhat below other children**
- 3= about the same as other children**
- 4= somewhat above other children**
- 5= much above other children.**

The areas of focus included: academic performance, motivation to learn, parent involvement, relations with other students, classroom behavior, and self-confidence.

For analytical purposes, the evaluators grouped the five response categories of the ECP into two categories: 1 and 2 = “below other children” and 3 through 5 = “same or above other children”, as depicted in Table 5. Both the grouped analysis as well as the full range of responses are presented in the following discussion.

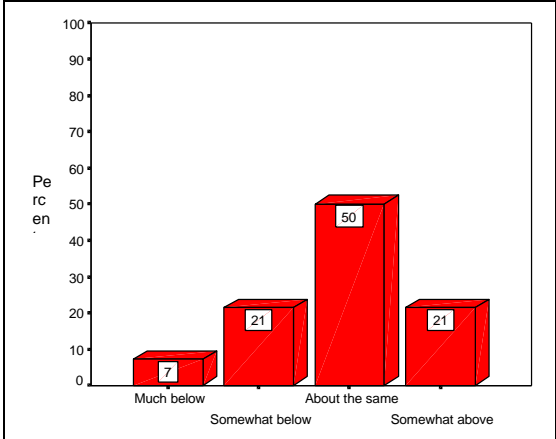
Table 5. Original and revised categories of responses

Original Five Categories	Revised two categories
1= much below other children 2= somewhat below other children	1 and 2= below other children
3= about the same as other children 4= somewhat above other children 5= much above other children.	3-5 = same or above other children

Academic Performance

Seventy-one percent (71%;10) of the teachers indicated the academic performance of SWCES youth to be about the same (50%; 7) or somewhat above (21%;3) other children. Another 28% (4) placed the youth somewhat below (21%;3) other children while 7% (1) placed the youth much below other children (Figure 10).

Figure 10. Academic performance of SWCES youth compared to other children*

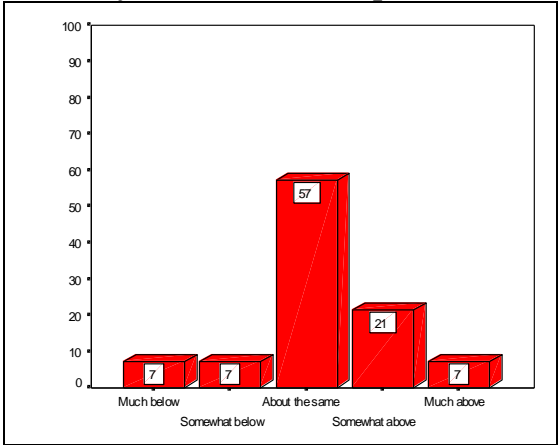


*There were no responses in the “Much Above” category

Motivation to learn

In evaluating SWCES youth’s motivation to learn compared to non-Even Start youth, 85% (12) of the respondents placed the youth at about the same (57%; 8), somewhat above (21%; 3), or much above (7%; 1) other children. While the remaining 14% (2) deemed their motivation levels somewhat or much below non-Even Start youth (Figure 11).

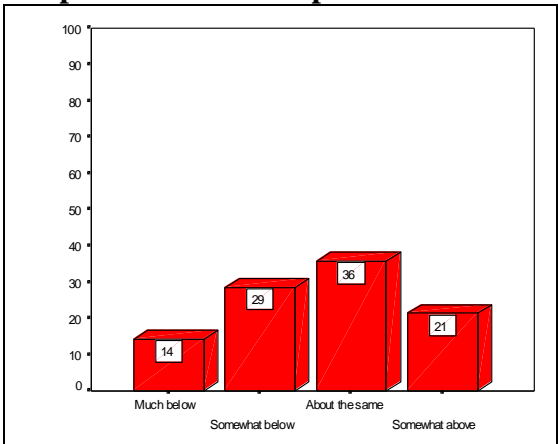
Figure 11. Motivation of youth to learn compared to non-Even Start youth



Peer Relations

Seventy-nine percent (79%;11) of the respondents considered peer relations of SWCES youth to be about the same (36%; 5) or below (43%;6) those of non-Even Start youth. A remaining 21% (3) of the teachers reported the youth relations to be somewhat above other children (Figure 12).

Figure 12. Youth peer relations compared to non-Even Start youth*

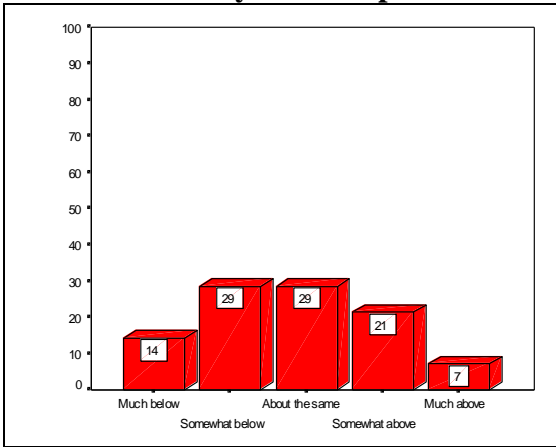


* There were no responses in the “Much Above” category

Classroom Behavior

Seventy-two percent (72%;10) of the teachers assessed SWCES youth classroom behavior at about the same (29%; 4), somewhat below (29%;4), and much below (14%;2) other children. Therefore, almost half of all the teachers that responded (43%; 6) rated the youth’s classroom behavior much or somewhat below that of other children. Only 28% (4) of the respondents placed the youth’s classroom behavior somewhat or much above other students in their classes (Figure 13).

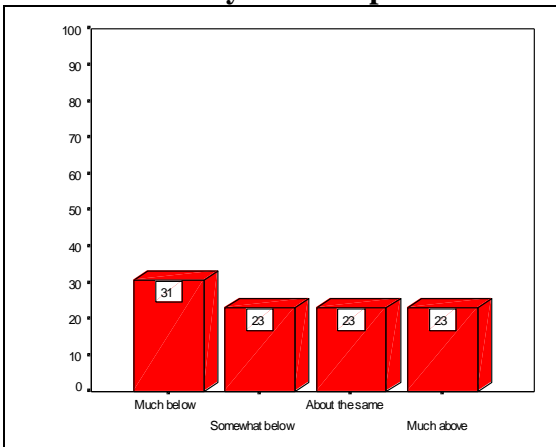
Figure 13. Classroom behavior of youth compared to non-Even Start youth



Parent Involvement

Of the thirteen respondents, seventy five percent (75%; 10) of them reported that parent involvement of SWCES youth is about the same (23%;3), somewhat below (23%;3), or much below (31%;5) that of other students. More than half (54%;7) of the teachers indicated parent involvement of SWCES youth to be either somewhat below or much below that of other children. Another 21% (3) placed the level of involvement much above other children (Figure 14).

Figure 14. Parent involvement of youth compared to non-Even Start youth*

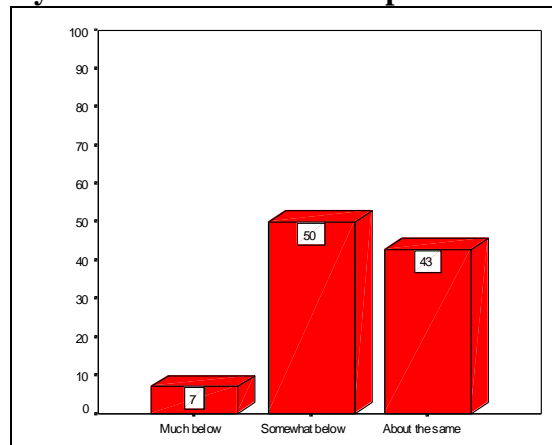


* There were no responses in the “Somewhat Above” category.

Self Confidence

One hundred percent (100%;14) of the teachers assessed SWCES youth self-confidence levels to be about the same (43%;6) or below other children their age. Over half (57%;8) of teachers reported the youths confidence levels to be somewhat below or much below other children. There were no responses indicating SWCES youth self-confidence levels somewhat above or much above their peers (Figure 15).

Figure 15. SWCES youth self confidence compared to non-Even Start youth*



*There were responses in neither the “Somewhat Above” nor the “Much Above” categories.

Examining teachers’ assessment of SWCES youth in the six major areas, several trends can be seen. The areas of academic performance and motivation to learn received high responses in the “same or above other children” category, suggesting that these are areas of strength in SWCES youth in comparison to their peers. In the areas of classroom behavior and student relations, although the majority of teachers responded in the “same or above” category, almost half were given to the “below other children” category. This suggests that this area is somewhat of a strength of SWCES youth, however it is an area that could use improvement. In the areas of parent involvement and self-confidence, the majority of the responses were received in the “below other children” category, with almost half of responses given to “same or above”. This suggests that SWCES youth and parents could improve in this area.

Based on the responses to the ECP survey, the evaluators recommend that home visitors continue to work with children towards more positive behavior, interpersonal skills, and self-confidence through early childhood education and PACT time. Likewise, SWCES staff should continue to integrate parent involvement in their child’s education into parenting and adult education and PACT time. Regarding the implementation of this survey, the evaluators plan to revise the instrument so that teachers may complete the form in more consistent manner. Staff should continue to work with teachers to emphasize the importance of the data and encourage its completion.

VII. Conclusions

The Center for Rural Studies at the University of Vermont has provided evaluation services for SWCES since the programs inception in 1994. This evaluation report (year six) focuses on process evaluation, emphasizing quality of program delivery, and the outcomes of family participation in the program. This evaluation report demonstrates that SWCES continues to provide quality program services, as indicated by positive client reviews, identification of program strengths and the progress many families have made in working towards and achieving goals, as well as working through challenging life situations.

Through the past six years of data collection from families, collaborators, and staff, the evaluation team has identified *six major strengths of the SWCES* program. These six strengths have provided for high quality of services and high success rate among families in working towards, reaching their goals, and graduating. These strengths include: home-based instruction, connecting families with available community resources, strong partnerships and collaboration, program activities and events, high retention rate of families, and long term enrollment of families. These areas of strengths are consistent with both Family Literacy Core Values and Quality Considerations as identified by RMC Research Corporation in the Revised *Guide to Quality* (2001). Through these strengths, SWCES continues to work towards their seven program goals.

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|--|
| <p style="text-align: center;"><u>Six Major Strengths of SWCES</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Home-based instruction 2. Connecting families with available community resources 3. Strong partnerships and collaboration 4. Program activities and events 5. High retention rate of families 6. Long term enrollment of families. |
|--|

The *client demographics* of the program show SWCES continues to be consistent in providing services to a population in demonstrable need of these services. This past year, the program provided services for twenty-three families enrolled in the program, with a total of 36 eligible children. Currently fourteen families, representing thirty-three adults and twenty-one "target children" (children from birth to age ten) have remained in the program.

- | |
|---|
| <p style="text-align: center;"><u>SWCES Family Successes</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ 62% retention rate of families ◆ Four GED completions ◆ One Bridge to College ◆ One child care certification and establishment of a registered in-home child care business ◆ Four U.S. Citzenships ◆ Several becoming employed in the community. |
|---|

Family successes this past year include: 62% retention rate of families, four GED completions, one Bridge to College, one child care certification and establishment of a successful registered in-home child care business, four becoming U.S. Citizens and several becoming employed in the community. Other siblings (not eligible) and extended family members living in the home

are indirectly impacted by the program. Families identify that their progress and success is related to quality program services and the major strengths of the program. The program also continues to improve the quality of its service delivery as well its as evaluation methods (such as the development of EFF Checklist and Early Childhood Progress survey) to meet both program and family needs.

In responding to the *Even Start Client Questionnaire*, during both the October 2000 and July 2001 focus groups, several families discussed goals they have reached and continue to work towards this past year. Their participation in SWCES helped to specify and foster the achievement of these goals. Goals reached include the attainment of a GED, employment, earning a child care provider certification (subsequently starting a registered in-home child care business), purchasing a car or a home, and writing a resume to look for employment. Goals in progress include the development of vocational skills to become employed, improving parenting skills to regain custody of children, receiving a driver's license, and becoming employed. In order to work toward and meet these goals, participants identified several strengths of SWCES and areas in which the program has impacted their achievements. These strengths are: flexibility and commitment of home visitors; promoting parents to be advocates of their children; connecting families with other families; providing enjoyable activities and playgroups; promotion of family learning outside the program; and finding child care services so parents may focus on their education during instruction. Because of these strengths, families have made improvements in literacy skills of both adults and children. Moreover, parenting skills have been enhanced. Families stress the positive impact of SWCES program's ability to connect them to needed resources or services in the community. This connection enabled families to attain their goals or work through a challenging situation.

The SWCES program has successfully initiated the integration of the *Equipped for the Future* (EFF) standards into their work with families as a component of the outcome evaluation. This past year, home visiting staff of SWCES piloted the use of the EFF Checklist beginning in July 2000, for home visits with one or several of their families. Home visitors reported that they seldom used the Checklist directly with families, as the detailed amount of print is often intimidating and confusing to persons with poor literacy skills. Home visitors also stress that the focus of visits is typically on instruction or working through a family situation, thus they do not like to overwhelm families with a lot of paperwork. However, home visitors reported using the Checklist in conjunction with their current recording system *after* a visit is finished. This has been a helpful reflection tool to document family progress and movement towards their goals. Home visitors have also informally used EFF language with families during instruction to help families articulate their learning. Further, this tool has been shared with collaborators to build common ground for understanding SWCES services and, critically, how collaborators provide these services.

In a focus group with home visitors, the evaluators asked them to identify a family that exemplified one of the Role Maps this past year. Evaluators also collected completed EFF checklists for these three families. Both data sources were analyzed to provide a qualitative (focus groups) and quantitative (EFF Checklist) assessment for three families,

showing how skills and knowledge they have gained through home visit instruction assisted them in working towards and achieving their goals. As critical, they discussed the application of this knowledge to challenging life situations.

The *Early Childhood Progress survey* provided a teachers report concerning SWCES children who are enrolled in either preschool or compulsory education. Teachers reported on the children's school status and assessed the youth's performance in six general areas. Their classmates who are not in Even Start were used as a control group. Ninety-four percent of teachers completed this survey. Approximately three quarters of youth who were enrolled in school attend full time. Of teachers who responded, all reported that SWCES youth attend school at the same rate or better compared to non-Even Start youth. Thirty percent of youth had been referred to special education and 20% were on Individualized Educational Programs. Further, teachers noted that half of the children were receiving special services.

The six major areas in which teachers were asked to report include: academic performance, motivation to learn, parent involvement, relations with other students, classroom behavior, and self-confident. Three trends were seen in the data. The areas of *academic performance* and *motivation to learn* received high responses in the “same or above other children” category, suggesting that these are areas of strength in SWCES youth in comparison to their peers. In the areas of *classroom behavior* and *student relations*, although the majority of teachers responded in the “same or above” category, almost half were given to the “below other children” category. This area is a strength of SWCES youth. However it is an area that could use improvement. In the areas of *parent involvement* and *self-confidence*, the majority of the responses were received in the “below other children” category, with almost half of responses given to “same or above”. This suggests that SWCES could improve in this area.

This 2000-2001 evaluation report demonstrates that SWCES continues to serve the South Windsor County community with quality program services and activities, connecting families to needed resources and services in the community. Through the strengths of this program, SWCES continues to have a positive influence in participant’s lives, as families work towards and reach goals and work through life situations. The following recommendations are made for both program improvement as well as changes in evaluation strategies towards more outcome based methods.

In summary:

- ◆ The evaluation team has identified *six major strengths of the SWCES* program: home-based instruction, connecting families with available community resources, strong partnerships and collaboration, program activities and events, high retention rate of families, and long term enrollment of families.
- ◆ This past year, the program provided services for twenty-three families enrolled in the program, with a total of 36 eligible children.

- ◆ Family successes this past year include: 62% retention rate of families, four GED completions, one Bridge to College, one child care certification and establishment of a successful registered in-home child care business, four becoming U.S. Citizens and several becoming employed in the community.
- ◆ Family identified strengths of SWCES: flexibility and commitment of home visitors; promoting parents to be advocates of their children; connecting families with other families; providing enjoyable activities and playgroups; promotion of family learning outside the program; and finding child care services so parents may focus on their education during instruction.
- ◆ Home visitors use the EFF Checklist in conjunction with their current recording system *after* a visit is finished. This has been a helpful reflection tool to document family progress and movement towards their goals. Further, this tool has been shared with collaborators to build common ground for understanding SWCES services and, critically, how collaborators provide these services.
- ◆ The EFF Checklist and staff focus group discussion for three families, showed how skills and knowledge they have gained through home visit instruction assisted them in working towards and achieving their goals.
- ◆ The Early Childhood Progress Survey results show that *academic performance* and *motivation to learn* are areas of strength in SWCES youth in comparison to their peers.
- ◆ Although some positive results were seen, improvements could be made in the areas of youth *classroom behavior, student relations, parent involvement, and self-confidence*.

VIII. Recommendations

The following recommendations for program improvement and evaluation have been made for the seventh year of SWCES, based on this evaluation report and as well as changes in Even Start legislation. The program should continue to build on its six major strengths that provide the backbone of program quality. Staff, collaborators, and evaluators should also continue to examine areas in need of improvement and discuss strategies to make positive changes in these areas. The following presents eight focused recommendations in addition to suggestions for new outcome measurement strategies.

In the area of program improvement, our observations are based on the findings of the *Even Start Client Questionnaire*. The evaluators feel that SWCES should continue to build on program strengths that families have identified as having assisted them toward attaining their goals and working through life events. These strengths include: flexibility and commitment of home visitors, promoting parents to be advocates of their children; connecting families with other families; activities and playgroups; promotion of family learning outside of the program; and providing childcare services. The program should also continue to have parents assist in the planning of events, as many had opinions and ideas on activities in which they would like to be involved. Based on the strong response of at least one parent, the program should try to hold more activities and events in Windsor. The program should continue to grow on the path it is on, incorporating feedback from parents to best meet their needs.

Based on the responses to the *Early Childhood Progress survey*, the evaluators recommend that home visitors continue to work with children, specifically in the areas that point towards more positive behavior, interpersonal skills, and self-confidence through early childhood education and PACT time. Likewise, SWCES staff should continue to integrate parent involvement in their child's education into parenting and adult education and PACT time.

The following recommendations pertain to activities of program evaluation, based on the findings of this report. Changes in evaluation strategies, based on the needs of the program, are designed to improve current measures of program quality and participant outcomes. Further, they will enable the program to better meet the needs of its participants. Subsequently, it is anticipated that the recommendations will provide for appropriate changes to move the program towards sustainability.

→ Periodic Staff Focus Groups

The evaluators recommend holding periodic focus groups with SWCES staff, specifically at the beginning and the end of the year to plan and follow-up on program improvement and evaluation. One of the focus groups should be held during a quarterly meeting to include collaborators in planning and follow-up. The fall 2001 staff focus group (planned for mid-September) will discuss priority areas for the next FY evaluation, as influenced by current recommendations. The focus will include the revision of the Early Childhood Progress Survey, revision and use of the EFF Checklist, priority area(s) for program Self-

Assessment (considering Quality Consideration areas from the *Revised Guide to Quality*), protocol for documenting state program indicators of quality, new areas for evaluation (two different quantitative analyses as described below), and revision of evaluation questions and goals.

The end of year focus group (Spring, 2002) should follow up on the discussion from the September focus group (what changes were made, what worked or did not work); areas of success and need for improvement in program services, specifically referring to Quality Considerations and Family Literacy Core Values from the *Revised Guide to Quality*; and recommendations for future program improvement strategies and evaluation activities.

Other focus groups with staff will include the EFF Focus Group (May or June, 2002) and a possible a focus group to conduct a program self-assessment. Needs for other focus groups will be identified at the initial staff meeting and as the year unfolds.

→ Client Focus Groups and Interviews

The evaluators recommend to hold periodic focus groups with clients, specifically the *Even Start Client Questionnaire* focus group and interviews, to collect qualitative information on the impact of program services on achievements and areas of success and in need of improvement within SWCES. Need for other client focus groups will be determined at the Fall 2001 staff focus group.

→ Utilize State Program Indicators of Quality

In efforts to continuously evaluate and improve program quality, Congress amended section 1210 of the Even Start Law (see p. 7) in 1998, requiring that each State receiving funds under this law shall develop indicators of program quality. In January 2001, Vermont finalized its program indicators of quality (Appendix G), for both adults and children. These indicators will be implemented next year (July 2001 to June 2002) to monitor and evaluate program impact on participant outcomes, and improve Even Start programs in Vermont.

→ Track Even Start Student Development Through Early Childhood Progress Survey

The evaluators have planned to revise the Early Childhood Progress survey to make it easier for teachers to complete the form. The evaluators recommend that staff continue to work with teachers, ensuring that they understand the purpose of the ECP survey and the importance of its completion. Data collected next year will be compared to the baseline data reported in this evaluation report. This tool will quantitatively document SWCES children performance in school as compared to other classmates who are not in the program. Analysis will provide a generalization for the children in the program and may also be used on an individual basis by home visitors to meet specific needs of the children. This survey will further develop a link between SWCES and the school

systems. SWCES staff will take responsibility for accessing and coordinating use of this tool within the school system. CRS will provide the analysis of the data. The evaluators will discuss the revision of this tool with staff at the Fall, 2001 focus group.

→ Utilize the EFF Checklist and EFF Standards

As SWCES has adopted the standards of EFF, the evaluators recommend that home visitors continue to use the EFF Checklist in conjunction with the Home Visitor Record. Specifically, home visitors should use the Checklist on a more consistent basis throughout the year during most or all of their home visits. Home visitors should also continue to use the language of EFF in their instruction, to acknowledge as families work towards their goals or take new strides towards developing another Role Map.

The evaluators also recommend that, when appropriate, home visitors share with families their EFF Family Charts. The objective of sharing this chart is to enhance family awareness of the progress in different life roles through their work in the program over the course of the year. Introducing the EFF Checklist and standards to families in this manner may present less confusion to families and provide positive feedback on their progress (the evaluators are interested in staff feedback as to how this worked at the Spring 2002 focus group). Further, this tool may assist families in re-evaluating their goals and identifying new goals. As suggested, the evaluators plan to hold a focus group with staff at the end of the year (May or June) to follow-up on the use of the EFF Checklist and document three (or more) families who exemplify the Role Maps. The evaluators will provide similar qualitative and quantitative analysis, as presented in this evaluation report.

→ Self-Assessment of SWCES

The evaluators recommend that staff and collaborators determine one or two priority area(s) for program self-assessments. Focus could include the Family Literacy Core Values and Quality Considerations, as discussed in the *Guide to Quality for Even Start Family Literacy Programs Implementation and Continuous Improvement Volume I, Revised* (2001, RMC Research Corporation). Self-assessment tools are available in this guide for each area. This process evaluation tool offers both qualitative and quantitative analysis of SWCES in order to initiate conversation, assessment, and improvement of the components of the program. The evaluators will consult with staff to determine the focus area and make this evaluation process more formal and systematic at the Fall focus group.

→ Collection of Demographic Data

Great strides have been made this past year to document client demographic information. A database with the capacity to be accessed electronically by both Even Start service providers and the evaluators have been carefully constructed (steps have been taken to protect/guarantee client confidentiality). The evaluators recommend that staff continue to utilize this database and incorporate it into the Management Information System that is

being developed for the state-wide evaluation. The evaluators feel that this collaborative process of developing a database useful for both administrative and evaluative purposes is one unheralded achievement of this project. CRS welcomes the opportunity to share this process with other Even Start teams in Vermont. Based on our experience at CRS with other small public service organizations, this process might have a national impact on rural non-profit evaluation, where providers are stressed by scarce resources.

CRS recommends the addition of several variables to the database. First, staff should add a variable to describe “range of income” of families and specify employment status of families as part time, full time, or unemployed. In order to conduct a new data analysis (as described below), CRS also recommends that staff collect the following variables for each family: number of months participating in the program; total number of hours offered in the FY (including home visiting and activities); number of hours family participated in the program; number of support services families utilized in FY; number of PACT time hours in FY; level to which families met their goals on a scale from 1-10, with 1 being not at all and 10 being met goals; and improvement of home environment, as identified by home visitor observation. The evaluators will discuss this data collection at the beginning of the year staff focus group to plan priority areas for evaluation activities.

→ Continue to improve communication

CRS recommends that the program continue to improve communication between evaluators, staff, and collaborators. This is essential to ensure that all partners are aware of program activities. The evaluators will collaborate with staff this year in renewed efforts to continually re-examining the program process. Improved communication should help monitor how the grant goals are being met and facilitate program improvement. Moreover, the development of an action plan for the seventh and future years of funding will emerge.

This is also essential to enhance the discussion of strategies for program sustainability. CRS would like to re-emphasize our previous efforts to have more contact and discussion with other evaluation teams around the state of Vermont. Each Even Start program has its own team of local evaluators. It would be appropriate to collaborate with these evaluators in order to share evaluation strategies and program success stories. All Even Start teams would benefit from the meeting of local evaluators. This could occur on a quarterly or semi-annual basis.

As SWCES program has matured over the past five years, the recommendations discussed above coincide with changes in the grant goals and needs of the program as recognized over time. These methods will allow the program to more effectively track and monitor family literacy and education as they progress through the program and after graduation of the program. This will not only document and measure the effectiveness of the program but will enable the program to meet the needs of its participants and make appropriate changes for program sustainability.

New Strategies for Outcome Measurements

The following two recommendations are new strategies for collecting data on program outcome. The implementation of these methods are tentative as the evaluators will to continue to consult with staff and collaborators on their feasibility.

→ Pilot Pre and Post Family Self-Assessment

As a new outcome evaluation measurement, the evaluation team is interested in developing a pre and post self-assessment questionnaire for families to complete at the beginning and end of each year. Possible focus areas include: perceived level of goal attainment; perceived skill level in various areas; areas in which they would like to improve skills; self-esteem questions; and helpfulness of SWCES towards their goal attainment. This assessment tool will quantitative data to measure change in families perception and attitude towards their learning over time. The evaluators will discuss the feasibility of conducting a pre and post test at the beginning of the year focus group.

→ Comparative Analysis of Process and Outcome Relationships

Findings from three National Evaluations of Even Start, conducted by the U.S. Department of Education, indicate that there are direct connections between program quality (i.e. intensity of service and type of service, collaboration, family retention, etc.) and participation rates and success of families (U.S. Dept of Ed, 1998; U.S. Dept of Ed, 2001). RMC Research Corporation (2001) highlights three findings of the evaluation, which depict the relationship between program quality and outcomes:

Intensity of services affects participation - greater hours of services offered correlate with greater hours of participation;

Support services affects participation - a greater number of support services correlates with greater hours o participation;

Length of participation affects goal attainment - families that participate in Even Start for 12 months or more experience greater success in achieving their goals.

Based on the findings of this evaluation, the evaluators have identified four areas to conduct a comparative analysis between program services and outcomes. This type of analysis is appropriate at this time because of the maturity of the program. Further, this analysis will build upon current process and outcome data and provide further insight on areas of program quality. Collection of this data was discussed under the recommendation of *Collection of demographics in database* (most of this data is collected, but has not typically been used by the evaluators). The four areas for analysis include:

1. Intensity of service (number of hours offered) compared to the number of hours participated by families.
2. Length of time (months) in program compared to the level in which goals are met (as determined by home visitors and families).
3. Number of support services families receive compared to the number of participation hours.
4. Number of PACT time hours compared to improvement in home environment (as identified by home visitor via observation).

The evaluators hypothesize that there will be a positive relationship between each program quality and outcome area.

Appendix H shows a tentative timeline for evaluation activities for FY 2001-2002, as developed by staff and evaluators. This timeline serves as a guideline for activities and will be revised as needed.

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X. Appendices

- A. Even Start legislation
- B. Even Start Client Questionnaire
- C. Equipped for the Future Checklist
- D. Equipped for the Future Role Maps
- E. Early Childhood Progress Questionnaire
- F. Equipped for the Future focus group guide
- G. Vermont State Indicators of Quality Program
- H. Tentative Timeline of South Windsor County Even Start, 2001-2002