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Bright Futures; Teaching Parents the importance of well child checkups

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Author note

The final Report about the Capstone Project about teaching parents the importance of well child checkups and Reflection.

### **Abstract**

The Early Head Start has many children not following the schedule of the well-baby checkups. Out of a group of 30 children, 12 are missing components of the well-baby checkups. They are missing at least one of the requirements. Requirements include immunizations, dental exams, vision, or physical examination.

This report describes an educational project in Monterey County Office of Education at the Early Head Start, to inform parents the importance to follow the schedule of the well-baby checkups. There are many reasons why children are not following their well-baby checkups, and it was important to teach the parents what causes, consequences and benefits can result when children are not following their schedule. The purpose was that parents were assessed that they learned some of the different types of exams that their baby should follow in order to grow healthy and get ready for school, by having all the requirements from Head Start. The project was an educational intervention, which included creating a PowerPoint presentation, and a questionnaire to collect data from parents about their knowledge of baby's development and the importance of well child checkups. The project results showed how well the parents understood the importance of having the child healthy while growing. Needless to say, parents are in need of education, to learn more about their children's overall health, especially when they become first time parents.

*Keywords: Well-baby checkups, educational intervention, Parents, Educators and children.*

## **I. Agency and communities served**

Head Start and Early Head Start is a public agency that is federally funded social service program aimed at addressing the needs of low-income families with young children from ages 0-5 (MCOE, 2014). This program is available for all families that are eligible and meet the requirements to get their child into the program. The history of the agency is mostly about helping the communities of low-income children to get started with their education in preschool in order to have the skills they need to be successful in elementary school.

The agency mission is that, Monterey County Head Start & Early Head Start, in partnership with the community, is dedicated to providing the highest quality early childhood education for children 0-5 years and comprehensive child and family services (MCOE, 2014). Their mission is basically focused on children with low-income families to help them get the full services for their children health and their well-being. That is why Head Start program supports the mental, social and emotional development of children from birth to age five. The purpose of the program is that they want to provide the services that parents might need for their child, another purpose of this project is to have parents informed about the importance that their child needs to be in a good health condition while growing.

The primary population that the agency served is children of low-income families. According to the Annual Report, “For 2013-2014, a total of 1,216 children 0-5 years of age were served by Head Start and Early Head Start. Also, in the Early Head Start serve families that are identified as having the highest need in our community and can include foster children, children with disabilities, homeless children, families, and children/ families with low income (MCOE, 2014).

## **II. Problem, issue or need**

The Early Head Start has a high rate of children not following the schedule for well-baby checkups. There are different reasons why children are not getting their regular checkups on time, and there are few of them that don't complete the requirements that the Early Head Start suggest. For example, some of the missing components of the well-baby checkups include immunizations, dental exams, vision or physical examination. Some of the causes for this problem it is because the parent economic status, low level of health literacy, and education level. The parent economic status is that low-income parents struggle to miss a day of work, to take their child to their checkup appointments.

According to Rapaport states, "Many parents, regardless of their income, faced challenges getting babies to the pediatrician, particularly when they struggle to take time off work or arrange care for other children, which also poverty can make these obstacles more pronounced" (2015). Clearly, a cause of missing well-baby checks is because the parents don't like to miss a day from their work rather than lose half of the day to the care of their child.

The second cause is low levels of health literacy. Health literacy is understanding the basic information about health in order to make important health decisions. Health literacy is a barrier for the parents to follow the schedule of their child checkups. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics states "for these parents, it can be difficult to understand immunization schedules, growth charts or medical forms or to understand written instructions and recommendations for the children's preventive health care" (2016). Because most parents have low levels of health literacy they need someone to explain it in an understandable way. That is why it is very important to educate or inform parents with low health literacy.

For the education level, is because the lack of knowledge of the importance of having their child checkups regularly. As many parents that have their child in Early Head Start didn't finished high school, which is why it is a cause that many parents are not aware of the importance that it is to have their child checked by their doctor or pediatrician regularly.

The consequences are poor health outcomes, not ready for school and risk of injuries & illness. Many children can have poor health outcomes without regular checkups. According to Seith and Isakson, poor health outcomes can include, asthma, emotional, and behavioral problems that interfere with learning and interfere with learning and unhealthy body weight (2011). Other conditions are problems with vision, hearing, speech, birth defects, or injuries. Head Start staff reported that there are many children with asthma and they have to make sure to be very watchful if something happens to the child. Asthma is one of the most common chronic health conditions in children that can take them to the hospital (Seith and Isakson, 2011). This is why it is important to have their child checkups regularly to prevent any signs of potential poor health outcomes.

The second consequence of low rates of well-baby checks is that there can be children that are not ready for school. Of all the reasons for being unprepared for primary school it's because of health issues. According to Issacs stated that "Many poor children start school at a disadvantage because of their health, behaviors, and skills that make them less prepared for kindergarten than children growing up under better economic conditions" (2012).

The third consequence is disease prevention, which it is important maintaining the child's overall good health, many preventive strategies are so simple, safe and effectiveness, allowing to guard against a variety of potentially serious illnesses, from food-borne diseases to infections

caused by ticks and animal bites. It is very important to be taking care of the child from any risk of injuries and illnesses because that can also affect the child health in the future.

### **III. Capstone project description and justification**

The project title is Bright Futures; teaching parents the importance of adhering to a schedule of well child checkups.

This project was educational for parents that have their child enrolled in the Early Head Start. The purpose for this project is that the EHS program wants to have children healthy and ready to learn in school, that is why it is very important to maintain all children active with their checkups regularly. The justification goal was to help parents to get informed on why it is important to have their baby checkups. This project can positively impact the agency by helping them to teach the important information to parents that need to get knowledge of the well-being of their baby and understand the importance of having regular checkups.

By improving knowledge of child development among all parents, not just those who are at highest risk, is an opportunity to enhance parent- child interaction and providing information and advices on difficult issues related to the well-being of the baby” (Dotinga, 2008). This is kind of similar to my project on giving the important information to the parents that needed to get knowledge of the well-being of the baby and the importance of attending to all the appointments for their baby checkups. The need for this project was determined because there were many parents that were missing appointments on their child checkups, and also because there is many children that have asthma or other health problem. According to the Child Plus system were all the child exams is located educators wrote by the comments about the health status for those that were at risk on getting sick, but many of the children were having asthma.

The implementation plan was an educational intervention, by creating a PowerPoint presentation. After the presentation, I provided a questionnaire to collect data from the parents about their knowledge of a baby's development and the importance of well child checkups. Using the questionnaire results, the agency will be able to see what other kind of information should be important to let know the parents. My responsibilities were two parts, one is educating parents on keeping the appointments for their well-baby checkups. My other responsibility is on going to home visits with each educator, and also made phone calls to identify barriers to attending to their child's well child appointments.

The activities that are in the scope of work are about health determination on observing on children schedule records and see their missing. There were some steps to this project. Another step is to collaborate with the early childhood educators, attend training and did several of home visits. The other steps were to research information for the presentation and create a questionnaire after the presentation had ended, which will measure the knowledge that parents gained. Lastly, at each home visits I invited all parents to attend to the presentation, and also asked them what days and times worked for them.

Activities	Deliverables	Estimated completion dates
<p>-Health determination, who are missing (look at records) baby check-ups. Going through children files and study records.</p> <p>-Went with educators to home visits (2-4 families per day).</p> <p>-Research information for the presentation (educating parents for well-baby checkups).</p> <p>-Get presentation approved, as well as date, time and place</p> <p>-Created a questionnaire about the presentation if they gained knowledge from the presentation.</p> <p>-Analyzed questionnaires prepared recommendations to Head Start.</p>	<p>PowerPoint</p> <p>Questionnaire</p>	<p>1st of September</p> <p>15 of September</p> <p>20 of September</p> <p>1<sup>st</sup> of October</p> <p>10 of October</p> <p>1<sup>st</sup> of November</p>

Some of the obstacles that had from the capstone project is that I should made an spreadsheet to write down the child's name that were having the most missing appointments, or checked who is not following their checkups regularly.

#### **IV. Project Results**

The project was an educational intervention, which included creating a PowerPoint presentation, and a questionnaire to collect data from parents about their knowledge of the baby's development and the importance of well child checkups. Also the educators' job is to have socialization groups with the parents two times per month to check how the baby was doing and if there is something that parents might need. So I was expecting to at least 10 parents could make it to my presentation but only two parents came, the questionnaire results would reveal how well the parents understood the importance of the well-baby checkups, and what they need to know in the future. The results indicated that 12 of children were not adhering to their well child schedule.

This project was made in the Monterey County Office of Education Head Start and was carried out by the coordinator of Health & Safety services named Alvaro Suarez, which he started to implement this project to the children and parents from the Early Head Start. There was data entry of hundreds of well-baby exam and dental exam forms and 4 Health Educators took me to home visits to complete the needs assessment and workshop promotion. Some of the methods he used were collecting information on recent medical and dental visits, reminding families about upcoming exams and overdue appointments, and evaluating each child's special medical concerns. By using those methods and checking on the records from the Child Plus that educators reported, it is how it was discovered that some of the general physical exams were having late exams checked and others were incomplete. Components of a well-child exam include vaccinations that are required for the child, physical examination, growth assessment, body mass index from 24 and 30 months, vision, hearing, Autism spectrum disorder screening, psychosocial/behavioral assessment and other assessments that the baby needs. Creating a

questionnaire it was a method to see if parents describe their reasons or needs on how this issue had happened recently.

The socialization is part of the Early Head Start which it focuses on socialization of infants and toddlers with the most important relationship at this age between children and their parents. Also, socialization gives parents a chance to be in a setting where they can interact with their child, other parents, and qualified staff in order to learn more about their child's development and develop more as a family. It is one way families can get support and education. That is how the presentation took place in their socialization group so together can get knowledge about the importance that the baby should be checked as normal.

An expected outcome of the project was that at least 10 parents could attend to the presentation. Another outcome was to get 100% parents informed about the importance of getting their child checkups on time, and following their schedule properly.

The outcome measure used to assess the effectiveness of my project was a questionnaire asking parents what they learned from the presentation, if any information mentioned or explained was new to them, or what things they still don't understand on why the baby should have their checkups on time. Nine questions related to the presentation, including a question where parents can add their thoughts about the information that was provided in the presentation, or if they had any questions that they might have that they are still unclear. Those kinds of questions were asked to see if parents were related to the presentation content, so the program of Early Head Start can take actions on what the parents need in order to have more knowledge on having their child checked with their pediatrician or doctor.

## **Finding/Results**

Two parents attended the workshop. Each Early Head Start educator has 10 children, and their families to support, so when only 2 showed up to the workshop, because later parents were calling educators that they would not be there because of personal issues. The result from the questionnaire is that parents understand the importance that the baby needs to follow their well-checkups schedule as it indicated on the physical exams. The two parents learned what to expect when they go to their pediatrician/doctor on what kind of preventive care they assess, like child's physical, behavioral, developmental, and emotional status. Also they learned the benefits of the well-child visits, which were the prevention that their child gets scheduled immunizations to prevent illness, and also that it is important to ask their pediatrician about nutrition and safety in the home and at school. Also about tracking growth and development to see how much does the child has grown in the time since the last visit, and check with the doctor about the child's development.

Another fact that parents learned was that when they do visits with their doctor, doctors make sure that the fontanel of the baby's head are closing properly, they will also check into the baby's eyes, ears, and mouth and listen to the heart and lungs. Also another thing that parents learned at the workshop was that children from the first three years, they are able to use one growth chart that looks at the head's circumference and the weight and length, which they also watch for changes in the size of head circumference in infancy because they want to know that the brain is growing.

There were ten copies to give to the parents, which it was expected that those ten parents were able to attend. For the two parents that attended to the presentation had answered the questionnaire and only one parent left a question blank. Many parents wrote on the questionnaire that both of them were having their child in good condition, and that lately they haven't missed

any of their appointments of their child. What they also added to the questionnaire is that they would like to learn more about interested topics that related to the health of their children.

Another thing that they added to the questionnaire is that they did learn new things about the importance to have their child checked by their doctor regularly because it can get to any serious consequences.

### **Strengths/Successes**

The project achieved some of the expected outcomes. The results showed that the presentation taught parents about following the schedule of the well-baby checkups on time. Also the two parent that attended to the workshop they share their thoughts about the health of their child, that there are times they feel worried when their baby are getting sick and sometimes they don't understand why, or what to expect when they go to their doctors, because they feel afraid on what cause could be, like an unknown condition. The main strength of the project design what that it was simple, straight forward, and easy to engage for parents. Having this educational presentation it was helpful for the parents because they learned and understood the most basic information about following their baby checkups and schedule on time, and not skipping any exams that it's required for the baby for a better growth.

### **Limitations/Challenges**

The limitations of the project were mostly related to limited time and a limited number of parents who were able to go to the workshop. There can be more parents that are able to attend to the workshop to learn and get knowledge on following the baby well checkups on time. Another challenge was on HIPAA which was about personal health information.

### **Personal Reflection/final thoughts**

In conclusion the project that the agency gave me to implement was very interesting on learning about the importance of the well-baby checkups. Also, it was very interesting going with educators to the home visits to see parents how are they doing with their child. The home visits helped me carried this project because parents share their needs that they had so the program can help them. Some of their needs were that they needed transportation to take their child to their appointment, and educators helped them by giving a ride to their appointments, which for the program it is very important that no child needs to miss any of their checkups. The recommendations for the agency is that they should provide more workshops with interested educational topics because parents are very interested on learning and get to know new things that can help them and their child.

What I learned about the problem was the importance to have the child in good conditions while growing, and being checked by their pediatrician regularly. Also what I learned were the causes that happens when baby is not getting their regular checkups. Also the consequences were important to learn because there were serious consequences to prevent any kind of disease that the child can avoid on getting it in the future and that can affect their learning.

The school readiness has being an issue too at the agency, and it is related to my project because it has to do with children learning. In order the child can grow healthy and in good condition they will be ready to learn. For example, the school readiness has some of the dimensions which are physical well-being, motor development, social and emotional development, approaches to learning and language development. Those types of dimensions can help the child learn and feel ready for school.

What it should be done much better was that I should went to many of the socialization groups that educators had, so for the more I would went, the more that I will have more parents be part of the project. In that case I will have more parents learned from the presentation that I created from the well-baby checkups.

The advice that I think it would be beneficial for future capstone students working in the agency, is that anything that is related to their project to try be more part of it, if there are events going on by the agency they should go they have interested information to learn and added to their project. Head Start has good type of projects to choose from, I really learned many new things especially from my mentors they support through my project, and I also enjoy learning more about my project.

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## Appendices

### Por favor complete el cuestionario:

1. Que aprendio sobre esta presentacion?
2. Que podrian poner en practica sobre este tema?
3. Que tan dispuestos a hacer de su parte para tener los examenes fisicos y dentales a tiempo
4. Cuales son las razones por la que usted a perdido sus citas?
5. Que servicios deberian ofreser las agencias para que su hijo/a tengan sus chequeos regulares a tiempo?
6. Usted sabia lo importante y los detalles sobre el porque es necesario de tener los chequeos regulares a tiempo?
7. Su hijo/a esta en buen estado de salud? Si su respuesta es No, porfavor explique en una oracion el porque.
8. De que manera el programa les podria ayudar?
9. Que tema les gustaria de hablar para la proxima?

**\*The questionnaire that was provided for the Early Head Start parents.**