



# Connected to Practice

## Best practices—A Focus on What Works Stable Self-Sufficient Families March 2008

Family Connection Partnership is committed to improving the well-being of Georgia’s children, families, and communities. Family Connection Partnership works jointly with partners across the state to address the serious challenges facing Georgia's children and families.

Family Connection Partnership visions that all Georgia children will be healthy, ready to start and succeed in school, and have stable, economically self-sufficient families that live in strong communities.

Since 1995 Family Connection Partnership has measured the well-being of Georgia’s children using Georgia Kids Count indicators. In 2005 the indicators were revised and expanded. The fourth set of the revised Georgia Kids Count Indicators focuses on Stable Self-Sufficient Families.

Low-income and/or single parent families face extraordinary challenges in providing the basic necessities of life to their children. Children from families struggling with economic difficulties are at higher risk of living in poverty, child abuse and neglect, and are more likely to lack access to health care and benefits. Under-education of parents, unemployment, and the need for public assistance also are challenges that threaten the self-sufficiency of families.

A stable family structure is critical to the future success of children and the foundation of a strong community. For communities, long-term economic strength is dependent on families being stable and self-sufficient.

### Georgia Kids Count Indicators Stable Self-Sufficient Families

First birth to mothers age 20 or older with 12 years of education

Children living in single parent families

Substantiated incidence of child abuse and/or neglect (per 1,000)

Children leaving foster care who are reunified with their families or placed with a relative within 12 months of entering foster care

Eligible households, with children, receiving Food Stamps

TANF recipients who:

1. Are employed when they exit the program
2. Have earnings in all four quarters of the first year after leaving the program
3. Earn wages above the federal poverty threshold in first year after leaving the program

Children living in families where no parent is in the labor force

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## INDICATORS RELATED TO EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT OF MOTHERS:

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First birth to mothers age 20 or older with 12 years of education

### Why is this indicator important?

- Women who delay childbirth until they are age 20 or older are more likely to receive prenatal care and have children with fewer health problems.
- Educational attainment of mothers has been linked to the school readiness skills of young children, their educational attainment, and their enrollment in early learning programs.  
(<http://www.vakids.org/pubs/sri2004.pdf>)
- Mothers with less than 12 years of education are less likely to receive adequate prenatal care, and their children are at higher risk of infant mortality.  
(<http://www.rikidscount.org/matriarch/documents/indicator24%281%29.pdf>)

### What Works?

- **Offer family literacy programs through local school systems, community colleges, private nonprofit community-based organizations, correctional institutions, and other state institutions.** Because parents are their children's first and most important teachers, it is critical that they have the basic skills to support their children's development in the early years of school.  
(<http://www.aelweb.vcu.edu/pdfs/Report6.7.pdf>)
- **Promote home visitation programs that educate families and bring them current information about health, child development, and school readiness, and connect them to critical services.** Home visiting provides a bridge that links the resources of the community with the safety of the home environment, empowering even hard-to-reach parents to build a better future for themselves and their children.  
(<http://www.hippyusa.org/Model/OnePagecontact.pdf>)
- **Offer community-based parenting programs that provide parents with training, support, and strategies about effective child-rearing.** These may include programs for prospective parents, and for parents of infants, toddlers, preschoolers, school-age and teenage children. Programs should be diverse and cater to the needs of families of varying ethnic descent. Topics may include sibling rivalry, preventing drug abuse, the basics of communication, and effective discipline and supervision.  
[http://www.ciccparenting.org/cicc\\_effective.asp](http://www.ciccparenting.org/cicc_effective.asp)
- **Educate communities about the connection between early childbearing and poverty.**
- **Conduct a community needs assessment to address issues of access to prenatal care.** Specifically look at the population of women under age 20.
- **Offer community-based educational programs that teach parents about resources available to help them complete their education, earn a GED, and/or learn technical skills necessary for succeeding in the workforce.**
- **Increased support for training and education of childcare workers.** Children cared for by people with more education and training have been found to have stronger cognitive, memory, and language outcomes than those who are not (Child Trends, 2004).

### Resources

Best Practices for Increasing Early Prenatal Care in Colorado

<http://209.85.207.104/search?q=cache:uSDwbhaKSIEJ:www.colorado.gov/bestpractices/prenatalcare/+Best+Practices+for+Increasing+Early+Prenatal+Care+in+Colorado&hl=en&ct=clnk&cd=3&gl=us&client=firefox-a>

Early Childhood Development in Social Context: A Chartbook. Child Trends. September 2004.

Infant Mortality. 2005 Rhode Island KIDSCOUNT Fact Book.  
<http://www.rikidscount.org/matriarch/documents/indicator24%281%29.pdf>

National Effective Parenting Initiative (NEPI). Center for the Improvement of Child Caring.  
[http://www.ciccparenting.org/cicc\\_effective.asp](http://www.ciccparenting.org/cicc_effective.asp)

No Time to Waste: Indicators of School Readiness-Maternal Education. Voices for Virginia's Children.  
<http://www.vakids.org/pubs/sri2004.pdf>

Proven and Promising Programs to increase the percentage of babies born weighing 5.5 pounds or more  
<http://www.promisingpractices.net/program.asp?programid=118&benchmarkid=51>

Report of the Task Force on Adult Education and Literacy to the Virginia Board of Education and  
Recommendations for Improving Literacy Services in Virginia. June 2001.  
<http://www.aelweb.vcu.edu/pdfs/Report6.7.pdf>

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## INDICATORS RELATED TO FAMILY STATUS:

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Children living in single parent families

### Why is this indicator important?

- Children living in single parent families are at increased risk of low academic achievement, failure to complete high school, alcohol and drug use, teenage pregnancy, juvenile delinquency (Lerman, 2002).
- Children living in single parent families are at increased risk of poverty and lack of access to health care services. ([http://www.carnegie.org/starting\\_points/startpt1.html](http://www.carnegie.org/starting_points/startpt1.html))
- Single parents often work long hours and have less time to spend with their children. ([http://www.carnegie.org/starting\\_points/startpt1.html](http://www.carnegie.org/starting_points/startpt1.html))
- Single parents are more likely to be unemployed, undereducated, and on welfare (Kids Count, 2003).

### What Works?

- **Provide outreach to families in need of access to financial assistance programs.**
- **Offer parents community-based parenting programs that provide training, support, and strategies about effective child-rearing.** These program participants may include prospective parents, and parents of infants, toddlers, preschoolers, school-age and teenage children. Programs should be diverse and cater to the needs of families of varying ethnic descent. Topics may include sibling rivalry, preventing drug abuse, the basics of communication, and effective discipline and supervision.  
[http://www.ciccparenting.org/cicc\\_effective.asp](http://www.ciccparenting.org/cicc_effective.asp)
- **Offer community-based programs that teach parents about resources available to help them complete their education, earn a GED, and/or learn the technical skills required for succeeding in the workforce.**
- **Offer family literacy programs through local school systems, community colleges, private nonprofit community-based organizations, correctional institutions, and other state institutions.** Because parents are their children's first and most important teachers, it is critical that they have the basic skills to support their children's development in the early years of school.  
(<http://www.aelweb.vcu.edu/pdfs/Report6.7.pdf>)

- **Promote messages about what constitutes good settings for young children.** Encourage parents to be better consumers of services for their children through public service announcements, the development and dissemination of brochures and flyers that describe state/local standards, open workshops, and ongoing communication with organized parent groups to inform and educate them about how to make good childcare choices.
- **Implement consumer education initiatives designed to meet the needs of low-income families.** Help low-income families overcome barriers, including low literacy levels and a limited amount of time and income to spend searching for childcare.

## Resources

Consumer Education Efforts Promote Quality Childcare. National Childcare Information Center.  
<http://www.nccic.org/ccb/issue14.html#2>

Marriage and the Economic Well-Being of Families with Children. A Review of the Literature. Lerman, R. 2002. United States Department of Health and Human Services Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation. <http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/marriage%2Dwell%2Dbeing03/litreview.htm>

Meeting the Needs of Our Youngest Children: The Quiet Crisis. Starting Points. 1994. Carnegie Corporation of New York. [http://www.carnegie.org/starting\\_points/startpt1.html](http://www.carnegie.org/starting_points/startpt1.html)

National Effective Parenting Initiative (NEPI). Center for the Improvement of Child Caring  
[http://www.ciccparenting.org/cicc\\_effective.asp](http://www.ciccparenting.org/cicc_effective.asp)

Report of the Task Force on Adult Education and Literacy to the Virginia Board of Education and Recommendations for Improving Literacy Services in Virginia. June 2001.  
<http://www.aelweb.vcu.edu/pdfs/Report6.7.pdf>

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## INDICATORS RELATED TO CHILD WELFARE:

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Substantiated incidence of child abuse and/or neglect (per 1,000)
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Children leaving foster care who are reunified with their families or placed with a relative within 12 month of entering foster care
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### Why are these indicators important?

- Children who experience maltreatment are at increased risk as adults for adverse health effects and behaviors—including smoking, alcoholism, drug abuse, eating disorders, severe obesity, depression, suicide, sexual promiscuity, and certain chronic diseases. (<http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/dvp/CMP/CMP-conque.htm>)
- Maltreatment during infancy or early childhood may cause important regions of the brain to form improperly, leading to physical, mental, and emotional problems such as sleep disturbances, panic disorder, and attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder. (*Ibid.*)
- As many as one-third of parents who experienced maltreatment in childhood may victimize their own children. ([http://www.aboutourkids.org/articles/child\\_abuse\\_neglect\\_overview](http://www.aboutourkids.org/articles/child_abuse_neglect_overview))
- Direct costs (judicial, law enforcement, and health system responses to child maltreatment) are estimated at \$24 billion each year. Indirect costs (long-term economic consequences of child maltreatment) exceed an estimated \$69 billion annually. (Fromm, 2001)

- Placing a child in foster care can be a traumatic experience. When in the best interests of the child, timely reunification with families or relatives is crucial to their stability because a child's family provides a familiar refuge and foundation for them.  
(<http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcpp/downloads/newsletter/BPNPWinter04.pdf>)

## What Works?

- **Increase public awareness of the scope of child abuse and neglect, and long lasting impact on children.**
- **Teach children how to recognize and avoid potential abuse situations and/or to seek help.** Effective methods include brief school-based curricula using skits, puppet shows, songs, videos, and story or coloring books (<http://humanservices.vermont.gov/publications/reports-whatworks/ww-childabuse>).
- **Offer therapeutic care for victims of abuse.** Focus on a long-term prevention strategy to help break what could turn into an inter-generational cycle of abuse.
- **Focus programs on parents and families.** Work to improve parenting skills and access to a range of services and supports for families. Educate parents on effective communication, discipline, child development milestones, and stress-management techniques.
- **Home visitation programs.** These programs provide comprehensive in-home support to parents and children and may assist parents in locating community services available to them.
- **Parent support groups.** Parents have the opportunity to share common experiences and helpful parenting strategies with others.
- **Offer substance abuse treatment programs.** Research shows that children are at increased risk of child abuse and neglect when substance abuse occurs in the family. (<http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/pubs/CMFactsheet.pdf>).
- **Maintain family connections when children are in foster care.** This increases the likelihood of reunification and may ease the process of reintegrating a child back into a family ([http://www.futureofchildren.org/information3862/information\\_show.htm?doc\\_id=211286](http://www.futureofchildren.org/information3862/information_show.htm?doc_id=211286)).
- **Train social workers to recognize the age-specific needs of children and families waiting to be reunified.** This is especially important for babies and adolescents since they are the children most likely to enter foster care.
- **Aftercare services.** These are services designed to prepare out-of-home placed juveniles for re-entry into the community to ensure they receive necessary services and supervision. This important component of the service continuum is available to children and families and includes concrete services such as housing assistance or respite care, as well as "soft" services such as counseling.

## Resources

Best Practice Next Practice: Family-Centered Child Welfare. Winter 2004.

<http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcpp/downloads/newsletter/BPNPWinter04.pdf>

Child Abuse and Neglect: An Overview. NYU Child Study Center.

[http://www.aboutourkids.org/articles/child\\_abuse\\_neglect\\_overview](http://www.aboutourkids.org/articles/child_abuse_neglect_overview)

Family Reunification. The Future of Children.

[http://www.futureofchildren.org/information3862/information\\_show.htm?doc\\_id=211286](http://www.futureofchildren.org/information3862/information_show.htm?doc_id=211286)

How Georgia Can Better Prepare Foster Youth for Productive Lives. 2006. Georgia Budget and Policy Institute.

<http://www.gbpi.org/pubs/specialreport/20060612.pdf>

Total Estimated Cost of Child Abuse and Neglect In the United States. Fromm, S. 2001.

[http://member.preventchildabuse.org/site/DocServer/cost\\_analysis.pdf?docID=144](http://member.preventchildabuse.org/site/DocServer/cost_analysis.pdf?docID=144)

What Works: Preventing Child Abuse and Neglect in Your Community. Vermont Agency of Human Services Planning Division. April 2000. <http://www.ahs.state.vt.us/whtwks/wwChildAbuse.pdf>

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## INDICATORS RELATED TO FOOD SECURITY:

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Eligible households, with children, receiving Food Stamps

### Why is this indicator important?

- The mental and physical changes accompanying hunger and undernourishment can have harmful effects on learning, development, productivity, physical and psychological health, and family life. The Food Stamp Program is a temporary safety net for families experiencing short-term economic crises.  
([http://www.frac.org/html/federal\\_food\\_programs/programs/fsp\\_faq.html](http://www.frac.org/html/federal_food_programs/programs/fsp_faq.html))

### What Works?

#### 1. Administrative Solutions

- **Remove administrative barriers.** Simpler, more-effective enrollment procedures are necessary. Complex procedures deter families with eligible children from applying for food stamp coverage. Women enrolling their children should not be faced with the burdensome and time-consuming paperwork and office-visit requirements encountered so often. One solution is to allow families to submit application forms by mail. Eliminating face-to-face interview at a government office would make the process less intimidating and more convenient.
- **Adopt presumptive eligibility for children.** Qualified entities, including health care providers, schools, WIC agencies, Head Start programs, certain emergency and food shelter programs, and agencies that determine eligibility for public benefit programs can immediately enroll children for coverage for a temporary period while their families complete the application process. During this time the child can receive all covered services, and providers can be reimbursed for delivering needed care, even if the child is determined to be ineligible for ongoing coverage.

#### 2. Outreach efforts

- **Conduct community-based application assistance outreach to provide families with direct help in applying for coverage.** Many families are unlikely to apply for coverage on their own. Their only link to coverage may be schools, childcare providers, faith-based organizations, and health and human service providers.
- **Extend benefits to legal immigrant families.** Federal legislative changes as a result of welfare reform effectively denied federal food stamp benefits to certain legal immigrants, resulting in growing numbers of immigrant families living in hunger or experiencing food shortages.  
([http://www.cssp.org/uploadFiles/improving\\_economic.pdf](http://www.cssp.org/uploadFiles/improving_economic.pdf))
- **Use the media to inform and educate the public on the extent, causes, and solutions to hunger.**

### Resources

Best Practices to Promote Good Nutrition. Washington State Department of Health.

<http://www3.doh.wa.gov/here/howto/images/BPNutri.html>

Campaign to End Childhood Hunger. [http://www.frac.org/html/hunger\\_in\\_the\\_us/hunger\\_index.html](http://www.frac.org/html/hunger_in_the_us/hunger_index.html)

Federal Food Programs: Food Stamp Program.

[http://www.frac.org/html/federal\\_food\\_programs/programs/fsp.html](http://www.frac.org/html/federal_food_programs/programs/fsp.html)

GBPI Policy Brief: The Erosion of Food Stamp Benefits in Georgia. 2007. Georgia Budget and Policy Institute.

<http://www.gbpi.org/pubs/specialreport/20070508.pdf>

Georgia's Food Stamp Program: Feeding Georgians and Feeding the Economy. 2007. Georgia Budget and Policy Institute. <http://www.gbpi.org/pubs/specialreport/20070213.pdf>

Improving Access to Food Stamps in Georgia. 2005. Georgia Budget and Policy Institute. <http://www.gbpi.org/pubs/specialreport/20050103.pdf>

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## INDICATORS RELATED TO EMPLOYMENT:

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Children living in families where no parent is in the labor force

TANF recipients who:

1. Are employed when they exit the program
2. Have earnings in all four quarters of the first year after leaving the program
3. Earn wages above the federal poverty threshold in the first year after leaving the program

### Why are these indicators important?

- Economic pressures have a negative effect on adults as parents. Many studies have shown that exposure to parental conflict is hard on children, with negative effects in social, academic, and emotional development (<http://www.agls.uidaho.edu/cc/C%20Families/pdf/Conger%20and%20Elder.pdf>).
- Parents under economic pressure are likely to be distracted and minimally involved in the parenting role until their children get involved in serious misbehavior. Stress results in inconsistent parenting and vacillation between noninvolvement and hostile, overreaction (Ibid).
- Family stress and conflict associated with economic insecurity increase the likelihood of divorce or separation. Low-income parents separate twice as frequently compared to parents who are not struggling economically (Sherman, 1997).
- Research findings indicate that teens in families receiving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) are more likely than other youth or younger children in TANF families to engage in risky behaviors, have academic problems, and experience long-term dependency (Kaplan, 2004).
- How children observe their parents' work experiences can shape their views of their future economic opportunities and may affect their academic performance and attitudes. Children who witness a parent's job loss may be motivated to stay in school and thus, eventually secure a better or more stable job. Children's pessimistic perceptions of their parents' labor market experiences diminish their motivation and may lead to unhealthy behaviors such as disengagement from school ([http://www.iveybusinessjournal.com/view\\_article.asp?intArticle\\_ID=570](http://www.iveybusinessjournal.com/view_article.asp?intArticle_ID=570)).

### What Works?

#### 1. Connect Families to Resources

- **Offer community-based programs to teach parents about resources available to them to help them complete their education, earn a GED, and/or learn technical skills necessary to succeed in the workforce.**
- **Offer family literacy programs through local school systems, community colleges, private nonprofit community-based organizations, correctional institutions, and other state institutions.** Because parents are their children's first and most important teachers, it is critical that they have the basic skills to support their children's development in the early years of school. <http://www.aelweb.vcu.edu/pdfs/Report6.7.pdf>
- **Support education and job skills training.** Currently only 10 percent of TANF recipients are in job training, and less than one percent of TANF funds are allocated to education and training investments ([http://www.cssp.org/uploadFiles/improving\\_economic.pdf](http://www.cssp.org/uploadFiles/improving_economic.pdf)).

- **Increase access to childcare providers.** Newly employed welfare recipients have difficulty finding reliable providers. Unless there is an increase in the availability of subsidized childcare slots for children of different ages, it is likely that childcare will become a bottleneck and prevent some women from keeping their jobs.
- **Make transitional benefits more available and accessible.** Shortages of transitional childcare funds and lack of awareness of their availability (and availability of transitional Medicaid) prevented some clients from accessing these benefits in some states. Paperwork, bureaucratic snags, and ignorance of procedures discouraged some clients from accessing and using transitional benefits.

## 2. Policy and Services

- **Increase cash benefit levels.** State cash benefit levels should be set at a level that, when combined with other key benefits like food stamps and the earned income tax credit, raises family income at least to the federal poverty level ([http://www.cssp.org/uploadFiles/improving\\_economic.pdf](http://www.cssp.org/uploadFiles/improving_economic.pdf)).
- **Provide outreach and support to immigrant families.** Currently, legal immigrants who entered the United States after August 1996 are not eligible for TANF benefits for five years ([http://www.cssp.org/uploadFiles/improving\\_economic.pdf](http://www.cssp.org/uploadFiles/improving_economic.pdf)) therefore their families may struggle or face increased challenges to becoming self-sufficient.
- **Promote sustained employment and assist in finding rapid re-employment for those who lose jobs.** To date, most efforts to promote employment among welfare recipients have focused on obtaining jobs rather than sustaining them (<http://www.mathematica-mpr.com/publications/PDFs/PESD.PDF>).
- **Provide assistance beyond job placement.** TANF recipients need assistance to help them overcome barriers to long-term employment such as childcare, transportation, financial management, and time management.
- **Increase flexibility of the system to accommodate varying needs.** Transition experiences are diverse—and obstacles to job retention vary. Some TANF recipients may require temporary support only during the early months of the transition; while others require more sustained support to become self-reliant.

## Resources

Addressing the Challenges Faced by Teens in TANF Households. Kaplan, J. 2004. Welfare Information Network. <http://www.financeproject.org/Publications/TANFTeensIN.htm>

Hard Times on the Farm: Economic Stress and Family Life. <http://www.agls.uidaho.edu/ccs/CCC%20Families/pdf/Conger%20and%20Elder.pdf>

Improving Access to TANF for Teen Parents: Recommendations for Reauthorization. Center for Law and Social Policy. [http://www.clasp.org/publications/Teen\\_Parent\\_Recs.pdf](http://www.clasp.org/publications/Teen_Parent_Recs.pdf)

National Effective Parenting Initiative (NEPI). Center for the Improvement of Child Caring [http://www.ciccparenting.org/cicc\\_effective.asp](http://www.ciccparenting.org/cicc_effective.asp)

Report of the Task Force on Adult Education and Literacy to the Virginia Board of Education and Recommendations for Improving Literacy Services in Virginia. June 2001. <http://www.aelweb.vcu.edu/pdfs/Report6.7.pdf>

Strengthening the Foundation: Investments in the Adult Workforce Build a More Prosperous Georgia. 2008. Georgia Budget and Policy Institute. <http://www.gbpi.org/pubs/specialreport/20080109.pdf>

Taking the First Steps: Helping Welfare Recipients Who Get Jobs Keep Them. Rangarajan, A., 1996. Off Welfare and Into Work. <http://www.mathematica-mpr.com/publications/PDFs/PESD.PDF>

Unemployment and Job Displacement: The Impact on Families and Children. Kalil, A., 2005. Ivey Business Journal. [http://www.iveybusinessjournal.com/view\\_article.asp?intArticle\\_ID=570](http://www.iveybusinessjournal.com/view_article.asp?intArticle_ID=570)