

Families First: Program Evaluation Highlights

Healthy Child Manitoba recently combined the BabyFirst and Early Start programs into a new one called Families First. Making sure our youngest Manitobans get their best start in life is the goal of Families First. The program gives parents the information and practical support they need to help make their children's early years happy and healthy.

Healthy Child Manitoba and regional health authorities surveyed families participating in the BabyFirst program and compared their parenting experiences with non-participants. The information gathered will help us better serve the needs of Manitoba children and their families.



THANK YOU!

Healthy Child Manitoba is grateful for the help of families who participated in this evaluation. Parents know their children and families better than anyone else. We can all learn a great deal about children as they grow up by talking to Manitoba parents.

Who participated in the Families First Program and in the Program Evaluation?

Evaluation questionnaires were filled out by mothers in the BabyFirst program whose children were one year old. Of these children, 52 per cent were boys and 48 per cent were girls.

On average, mothers in the program were 24 years old with a Grade 10 education. Their ages ranged from 16 to 40 and their education levels ranged from no formal schooling to post-secondary education. Families in the program had been living at their current addresses for an average of 18 months.



About Program Evaluation

Every year, Healthy Child Manitoba (HCM) and the regional health authorities collect questionnaires from Manitoba families participating in the program evaluation. This information is combined for statistical purposes about groups of people and not about individuals. We compared the progress of 187 families in the program for one year with the progress of 63 families not in the program. Comparison families generally had more supports than the families in the program and this was considered in the analysis. Families in the evaluation each had a one-year-old child. Results in this report may not apply to everyone in the program, as only 20 per cent of BabyFirst families filled in the questionnaires.

Research Fact:

Did you know that talking, playing, imitating, making funny faces and paying attention to children is just what they need to learn as they grow.

“We have learned more in the last 30 years about what babies and young children know than we did in the preceding 2,500 years.” Babies brains are more active, more connected and more flexible than at any other time in their life. If being smart means being able to learn something new, then babies are just plain smarter than we adults are. Babies literally are geniuses.

Source: Alison Gopnik, Andrew N. Meltzoff and Patricia K. Kuhl. (1999). *The Scientist in the Crib: Minds, Brains, and How Children Learn*. New York: William Morrow & Company, Inc. p.22



What's Next?

As more evaluation information from the Families First program is gathered, we will find out how children and parents are doing after two years in the program. With your help, we can make Families First even better.

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After one year in Families First, you told us about:

Improving your parenting skills

- While in the Families First program, you praised your children and participated in special activities with them more often than if you had not been in the program.
- On average, you read to your children a few times per week. Your reading helped to strengthen parent-child bonds and build reading skills.

Feeling better about yourself and about your life

- You felt more in control of your lives.
- You also reported being more self-reliant and more self-confident.

Becoming more involved in your communities and more connected with community resources

- You were two and a half times more likely to be involved in local voluntary organizations than if you had not been in the program.
- You were three times more likely to use community, health or social services.

How will we use this program evaluation information?

The evaluation tells us that Families First is on the right track. Parents in the program found that they improved their parenting skills, helped their children develop and became more connected to their communities.

The evaluation also provides information to help make the program even better. Some parents in the program reported still feeling depressed and still feeling that they had little social support. Families First will continue to work with parents and other community resources to best meet the needs of participants.

