

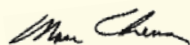
DHS
Making an
Impact

Over the next few years, you'll be receiving periodic updates from DHS that focus not on budget figures or service data but on the impact our services are having on real people.

Updates like this one will show how public dollars – and the dedicated workers they employ – are helping to change the lives of the nearly 250,000 people (and their families) touched by DHS every year.

This issue of **DHS: Making an Impact** focuses on the significant role that the Allegheny County/Pittsburgh Early Childhood Education Programs (ECEP) have had on four families.

If you have questions or would like more information on the ECEP services, please call 1-866-214-KIDS (5437).



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Early Childhood Education Programs

Nobody says it's easy to raise a child, and when you're a mother of six or a single father of five, it's even tougher, especially if you're balancing parenthood and a full-time job. But access to a quality early education program can make all the difference. Just ask Sharon Burkes or Nick Pashel.

A decade ago when her first child, John, was three, Sharon noticed that he was developing much more slowly than her friend's son, who was the same age but enrolled in a pre-school program. Her friend introduced her to one of the Early Childhood Education Programs offered in Allegheny County and the City of Pittsburgh. John, who was "hungry to learn," advanced by leaps and bounds. John is 13 now and doing well in school, in large part, she feels, because of the "head start" in education he received as a pre-schooler. Her sixth child, as his siblings did, is now attending pre-school at a Head Start center supported by the Allegheny County Department of Human Services, and Sharon considers the program "quite simply the best thing in my life."

The staff, she believes, "love what they do, they love children, and they care about the whole family." She has learned to handle discipline and behavior problems more effectively, and she is grateful for the health screenings, which revealed that John had a vision problem that had been overlooked by the family's optometrist. The center staff helped Sharon find professional help—and the money to pay for it.

Nick Pashel was a late comer to Head Start. A single dad, he has five children, and the three older ones were in middle and high school when a neighbor suggested the Early



Nick Pashel credits Head Start for helping his two youngest children blossom socially.



Sharon Burkes (center), with her family, calls ECEP "the best thing in my life."

Childhood Education Programs for three-year-old Ethan. Both Ethan and his younger sister, Nicole, now attend the Rochelle Street Center in Knoxville, and Nick sees a big difference in both of them. As the youngest of the five siblings, they grew up much like only children. In pre-school, "they've become so much more well-rounded socially," Nick says,



“and they’ve learned to share and compromise.” He’s grateful, too, for the health screenings that revealed Ethan’s need for speech therapy and Nicole’s need for further vision correction after surgery.

For Melissa Stutsman, enrolling her three-year-old in the Early Childhood Education Programs was a harder sell. She was determined to home-school her children so she hesitated to send her three-year-old to the Head Start pre-school program at McCleary School in Lawrenceville. It didn’t take long, however, for her to realize that the center provided new learning experiences, including a wealth of social interaction with other children and “a gateway to the arts” that led the child out of her shyness and into ballet and gymnastics.

Indeed, while Melissa—a former substitute teacher who plans to pursue a master’s degree in child psychology or behavioral health—hasn’t totally abandoned her plans for home schooling, she says that she and her husband have decided that their eight-month-old son will certainly follow his sister into the McCleary Center.

One might think that a mother with seven children ranging in age from 18 to two years would have little to learn from a childcare provider, but Chaunty Talley disagrees. Home visits from the Clairton Family Foundations Early Head Start staff have made two-year-old Omar more responsive and more excited about learning, and the “Parents’ Night Out” social events and trips have helped both mother and son make friends in their new community. (They moved to the Mon Valley last spring from Lawrenceville.)

Early Childhood Education Programs help parents Experienced as she is at child rearing, Chaunty finds the sharing sessions with other parents to be “therapeutic.”

“We share concerns, vent our frustrations, and learn from each other,” she says. And, as vice president of the Center’s Parent Council, she takes equal pleasure from the support she receives and the support she gives to other struggling parents.

Sharon also is grateful for the mutual encouragement that helps her “feel good” about herself. A financial advisor



Melissa Stutsman uses the ECEP to complement her home-schooling efforts for her two children.

for PNC Bank before becoming a full-time mother, she is recording secretary of the Policy Council and is convinced that the leadership training she is receiving there has helped her in her church work as well and will be helpful when she returns to the work force.

Nick’s initial reaction was that he didn’t have time to get involved as a volunteer—a full-time job and five children were already a full plate. But he relented and, as chair of the Knoxville Parent Council, he credits the experience with helping him see how the program works, why decisions are made, and the hard work behind the daily operation. “Too many parents send their children off to school,” he says, “and they function as ‘back-seat drivers’ with no real understanding of what goes on.”

Melissa, who became a classroom volunteer as soon as her daughter entered the program, is now chair of the citywide Policy Council that draws representatives from 106 centers. Her concern for her own child’s education has grown into a commitment to expand opportunities in early education to all children. Her involvement has become virtually a full-time commitment, with a full agenda, and she has found that attending national conferences on governance and performance standards has opened new doors for her, too, including facilitating a national Head Start conference.



Kindergarten Readiness Begins at Birth
1-866-214-KIDS (5437)