

Enhancing Parenting Skills through Group Well-Child Visits

The Empowering Mothers Initiative offers an innovative approach to reaching and engaging immigrant and refugee mothers of young children. What began as a parent education and support group has evolved into group well-child care visits that include a deeper dive into parenting and child-development. The initiative aims to improve parenting skills, increase access to care, and build support networks for Burmese refugees and Mongolian and Chinese immigrants in three ways:

- 1) Facilitating cultural and linguistic adaptation of the [American Academy of Pediatrics \(AAP\) Bright Futures Guidelines](#) and the [Nurturing Parent Program](#)
- 2) Conducting Group well-child care visits rather than traditional one-on-one encounters
- 3) Using Community Health Workers to provide health education, interpretation and access support

The program began when staff at the Asian Health Services (AHS), a Federally Qualified Health Center in Oakland, CA, noted the influx of Mongolian immigrants and Burmese refugees into the community. These individuals faced enormous barriers to care including a limited linguistically and culturally competent health care

infrastructure. Faced with the reality that AHS had no staff or translator who spoke the indigenous languages, they began efforts to reach these families.

CULTURALLY AND LINGUISTICALLY COMPETENT CARE – ZERO TO THREE

The first three years of a child's life are a developmentally critical window for children's physical, social, emotional and cognitive development. A sensitive and nurturing parenting environment during this time has been shown to have lifelong positive effects on the child. Thus, the Empowering Mothers Initiative takes a two-generational approach by working simultaneously with children and their parents and caregivers.



At the onset of the program, AHS staff developed a parenting curriculum that was both linguistically and culturally relevant for participants. The curriculum uses a facilitative approach, focusing

on group discussions and asking participants to share their parenting knowledge and experiences. The Empowering Mothers Initiative is based on the Nurturing Parents Program, a family-centered program that fosters positive parenting skills with nurturing behaviors and teaches appropriate role and developmental expectations. Additional topics addressed in the initiative include infant/toddler nutrition, child safety, and extended family dynamics in Asian refugee and immigrant families. The final curriculum consisted of eight sessions, spanning fifteen to eighteen months. The developmental screening tool and the parent social support and self-efficacy surveys were translated into Karen (a language spoken by many Burmese refugees), Mongolian, Chinese, and Vietnamese.

EMPOWERING MOTHERS INITIATIVE



The initial structure was grant supported, so it focused on a non-revenue generating parenting education and parent support service. The goal of the program was to improve parenting skills and create peer support networks for parents of

young children ages 0-3 years, and to connect families to the resources they need to promote their children's health and development.

"In this group, my anxieties are relieved because I can talk about my concerns and shared experiences with other mothers and learn what to expect. We learn from each other and we all learn together. I can see other babies grow up at the same time and compare. You don't get that at a regular visit." – A Parent Participating in Group Well-Child Visits

After two years, the parenting program was integrated into AHS' pediatric service through the idea of group well-child visits. Instead of having children receive individual health care visits, the Initiative provided pediatric physical exams, health education, and peer support in an extended two-hour group visit. By including individual physical exams and patient assessments, AHS could bill the health insurance company and generate revenue, a necessary step towards making the program financially sustainable in the long term. The group structure not only permitted extended face time between parents and their pediatrician, it also allowed for a group of parents to support and learn from each other.

COMMUNITY HEALTH WORKERS AS EDUCATORS

One unique aspect of the Empowering Mothers Initiative was the critical role of Community Health Workers. They not only provided a

linguistic and cultural bridge between the community and the clinic, but also played an important role in program delivery. AHS hired and trained bilingual staff in Burmese/Karen, Mongolian and Chinese. The Community Health Workers were then trained to become qualified medical interpreters and community health care specialists. Their responsibilities included:

- Translating the program’s parenting curriculum and surveys
- Performing community outreach to identify potential patients
- Interpreting and serving as co-facilitator at parent group meetings
- Assisting with care coordination and family enrollment in ancillary health care programs

A SUSTAINABLE AND SCALABLE INITIATIVE



The initiative has served nearly 200 children and their parents. Parents reported and demonstrated improved capacity to provide nurturing and responsive caregiving for their children and reported overwhelming satisfaction with the program. For example, one parent

stated, “We are less likely to use force, more likely to use encouragement and praise. Instead of using hands, we use words. Our relationship with our kids is better than before. You can see that their behavior has changed, and they’re listening to us better than before.”

In addition, parents and community health workers reported much stronger peer-support networks in their communities. AHS staff see the program as both sustainable and scalable. Building group well-child visits into the program creates a consistent revenue stream. Employing staff who both speak the languages and are connected to the community ensures a steady stream of eligible and engaged families.

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