



Make Every Day a Healthy Day!: Sesame Workshop Distributes Nutrition and Physical Activity Kit to Child-Care Providers Serving Preschool Children

Informing family-run child-care providers how to integrate healthy nutrition and physical activity into their programs serving preschool children

SUMMARY

In 2009, Sesame Workshop, the non-profit organization behind *Sesame Street* and so much more, further disseminated the *Healthy Habits for Life Child Care Resource Kit (HHFL Resource Kit)*, a comprehensive tool to help home-based child care providers integrate nutrition and physical activity into daily routines in their programs serving preschool children. The kit was created previously, and this project enabled both its wider distribution and independent impact research.

Kidpoint, a research and evaluation firm located in Columbus, Ohio, conducted an evaluation under a subcontract from Sesame Workshop to assess the resource kit and found that providers, parents and children all had generally positive experiences.

Context

Each week, more than 1.7 million children under age 6 are in a home-based child-care setting, which is generally the most affordable option for low-income parents. Many family child-care homes lack sufficient high quality educational materials, including resources that can be used to teach children about healthy nutrition and exercise habits—a special concern since research shows that food habits and preferences are generally shaped by age two. The *HHFL Resource Kit* provides a unique and needed set of resources to support healthy eating and physical activity among this historically hard-to-reach population of children and families.

Sesame Workshop developed the *HHFL Resource Kit* in 2007, prior to the start of the grant reported here, in partnership with Nemours Health and Prevention Services (a division of a pediatric health system, based in Newark, Del.) and KidsHealth (an online resource for children's health, behavioral and developmental information). As part of this

initial phase of the project, 5,000 *HHFL Resource Kits* were distributed to child care providers in Florida and Delaware.

The *HHFL Resource Kit* is a bilingual (English and Spanish) multimedia resource that includes a 200-page handbook for caregivers, a storybook for children, a magazine and a DVD, all of which are designed to support teaching young children about nutrition and physical activity in engaging ways. The materials feature the familiar *Sesame Street* characters and include lessons and activities that are easy-to-use and fun. They also offer ideas to help child care providers establish a connection with families so that children continue to practice healthy habits at home.

Sesame Workshop also developed a related initiative in partnership with the National WIC (Women, Infants and Children) Association, which entailed distribution of a *Healthy Habits* bilingual educational outreach "mini kit" to 4 million low-income parents nationwide in 2009.

Under the grant described in this report, Sesame Workshop staff partnered with the National Association for Family Child Care, located in Salt Lake City, Utah, to expand distribution of the kit. The association works to strengthen the profession of family child care through accreditation programs, training and public education.

Key Results

Project staff reported to RWJF that in partnership with the National Association for Family Child Care they:

- Distributed more than 14,000 additional copies of the *HHFL Resource Kit*.
 - An initial 1,100 copies were distributed to attendees of the National Association for Family Child Care conference, held June 25-27, 2009 in Baltimore.
 - An additional 13,000 Resource Kits were distributed in Alabama, Georgia, Maryland, North Carolina, Ohio and Tennessee, states with a high concentration of home-based child care providers serving low-income children.
- Hosted and moderated a *Healthy Habits for Life* Webinar to train home-based child care providers to use the Resource Kit effectively. The webinar was offered in English and Spanish eight times from November 30 to December 8, 2009.

Key Findings

KidPoint conducted a two-phase, bilingual evaluation from July to October 2009. During the first phase, evaluators interviewed 100 home-based child-care providers and administered written surveys to parents. During the second phase, they conducted six focus groups, each with six to eight providers in Ohio.

The evaluators called the use of “familiar characters to engage children... a clear strength of the resource kit.” They also reported these findings in *The Healthy Habits for Life Child Care Resource Kit Evaluation Report*:

- Providers found the materials useful and indicated that they filled specific voids in available resources. They rated the nutrition-related resources as slightly more valuable than activity-related resources because they have had more limited ways to present that information.
- Parents reported their children talked about the content of the program when they came home and were excited to participate.
- Parents and providers reported that children were significantly more likely to discuss nutrition-related topics after participating in the program and embraced the two primary concepts of “eating your colors” and “sometimes/anytime food.”
- Children did not significantly change their interest and involvement in physical activity, and most providers indicated they were already active throughout the day.
- Providers were divided in the format they preferred for additional materials and training. “All had a clear preference, but some wanted online materials, while others preferred to receive the materials in hand,” said the project director.

Key Recommendations

In their report, the evaluators recommended that:

- Sesame Workshop should develop more nutritional resources with easy-to-reinforce messages and new activities.
- Materials should be available in both hard copy and electronic formats.
- The storybook and DVD should be distributed together, without the caregiver’s guide, to reach a wider audience in a cost-effective way.
- A more rigorous and controlled study should be undertaken to determine the program’s influence on children’s health status.

Funding

RWJF provided a grant of \$375,000 to support this project, which ran from February 2009 to December 2009.

Afterwards

Sesame Workshop has applied for funding from the Department of Health and Human Services to distribute the *HHFL Resource Kit* to 30,000 additional home-based child care providers.

Sesame Workshop is developing a new, related initiative with the working title of *Healthy Habits for Families on a Limited Income*. It is expected to launch in December 2010 and will address the needs of families confronting food insecurity. This project will include creation of multimedia resource kits to help adult caregivers and their children understand the value of maintaining healthy habits and choices despite limited resources. Sesame Workshop plans to distribute 400,000 of these kits through project partners UnitedHealth Care and Merck Foundation, the project's advisory board, and organizations working with families impacted by food insecurity. Additionally, all materials will be made available for free download at www.sesamestreet.org.

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BIBLIOGRAPHY

(Current as of date of the report; as provided by the grantee organization; not verified by RWJF; items not available from RWJF.)

Healthy Habits for Life Child Care Resource Kit. New York: Sesame Workshop, 2009.

All sections of the resource kit, a storybook, and the caregivers guide in English and Spanish can be downloaded from this page.

Healthy Habits for Life Child Care Resource Kit Evaluation Report. KidPoint, LLC, Columbus, OH. December 2009.